Chuj Youth Organizing, Indigenous Education, and Decolonization Across Borders

By

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Dedication

To all those whose lives have been lost to colonial/modern processes and all their violent manifestations and to all those who continue to resist.

And to Juana, whose words, guidance, anger, and laughter flow throughout this project. From the space of *ni de aquí, ni de allá,* you navigated life at the borders with energy and love, searching for a place where you could be, thrive, and challenge all that sought to constrain you. Your brother said you were at the border "*entre la vida y la muerte"* and soon after, from the space of in between, you crossed over.

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Abstract

Coloniality is an operating force across the Americas and plays out in multiple ways through various policies and processes such as militarization, corporate extraction, colonial schooling, and privatization. This dissertation looks at the experiences, insights, and education and organizing work of indigenous young people who are the targets of these processes and policies and at the center of decolonial resistance efforts and (re)imaginings.

Drawing on decolonial feminist theories (Lugones, 2003, 2010) and based on 18-months of transnational, multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork, this dissertation explores the ways "modern/colonial" (Quijano, 2000; Mignolo, 2000; Lugones, 2010) policies and processes interact and shape the lives, educational trajectories, and organizing work of indigenous Maya Chuj youth and educators in Guatemala and the United States. Findings show the ways Chuj youth engaged in decolonial resistances and (re)imaginings in and out of schools by creating youth-led spaces; enacting structural, curricular, and pedagogical transformations in schools; and participating in direct forms of resistance within their community.

This dissertation demonstrates the insights Chuj youth's organizing, educational, and resistance efforts provide into the ways modern/colonial power structures interconnect and operate as well as the possibilities for and messiness of dismantling them. By placing Chuj youth and their resistances at the center, this study highlights indigenous youth's unique position in relation the colonial state and the interlocking modern/colonial processes of corporate capitalist extraction, formal schooling, militarization, and educational privatization. Using a decolonial feminist framework illuminates the ways the processes and systems under study were linked to colonial histories and structures as well as the ways that these current processes were not fixed, but rather in continuous and creative tension. Ultimately, I argue that Chuj youth's resistances expose the role of the modern/colonial state in creating and maintaining modern/colonial logics based on elimination,

through framings of development and education and the argument that indigenous people need to be brought into the modern present. This research shows that decolonization requires dismantling these systems simultaneously and that this work is continual, urgent, and messy.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I arrived in Guatemala to begin this research in 2015. 2015 marked the beginning of what appeared to be a period of change across Central America and in Guatemala in particular. The *Renuncia Ya* (Resign Already) movement in the capital city brought about some of the largest protests and mass mobilizations in Guatemala's recent memory—the largest since the 1940s, before the country's 36-year civil, known in Guatemala as the *Conflicto Armado Interno* (Internal Armed Conflict) (Reynolds, 2015). The protests brought people together from across various sectors of the country —poor and rich, rural and urban, Ladino[1], Maya, and Garífuna— in what appeared to be an unprecedented show of unity (Reynolds, 2015). People across the country called for the resignation of the president, vice-president, and top government officials over findings of rampant government corruption and a scandal connected to customs fraud, known as *La Línea* (the line) (e.g., Arellano, 2015; BBC Mundo, 2015). In addition to the resignation of government officials, the people called for greater accountability and the end to corrupt practices. Guatemalan youth, particularly students in the capital, were credited with starting the movement through social media and taking a central role in organizing the mass mobilizations that over the course of five months brought thousands of people into the capital, leading journalists to call it a "youth-led citizen movement" or "a Guatemalan Spring" (in reference to the youth-led political movements in the Middle East) (Reynolds, 2015; Goyette, 2015). Because of the pressure from the protests, vice-president Roxana Baldetti resigned in May and president Otto Pérez Molina was finally forced to resign in September. The movement seemed to unite people across Guatemala and facilitate a discourse of change.

Yet this appearance of change, unity, and the end to systemic corruption were brought into

[1] In Guatemala, the term Ladino is used rather than *mestizo* to refer to people who identify as non-indigenous and/or whose ancestry is mixed Spanish and indigenous, whose cultural practices are more Eurocentric, and whose first language is Spanish. They are the dominant of what are considered the four main cultures in Guatemala: Ladino, Maya, Garífuna, and Xinca.

question shortly after Pérez Molina's resignation with the election of Jimmy Morales as president later that same year. Morales was a famous comedian known for his racist portrayals of black and indigenous Guatemalans. His candidacy brought critique and concern from Maya activists and communities. Morales positioned himself as the outsider, anti-establishment candidate, particularly in relation to his run-off opponent, Sandra Torres, the former first lady with deep ties to her political party (*BBC News,* 2015). At the same time, reports showed that Morales was deeply connected to the army; the same army responsible for acts of genocide during the *Conflicto Armado* and which has long been a mainstay in national politics (Silva Ávalos & Dudley, 2018). Thus, Morales' election continued to solidify the military's role in politics and highlighted the ways entrenched political power structures and racism continue operate in Guatemala. Earlier that same year, despite being convicted on multiple accounts of genocide a few years earlier[2], the national courts determined that Rios Montt, dictator during the 'civil war' and genocide, could not be sentenced for his crimes. The courts claimed he was "mentally unfit" to defend himself during his trial due to dementia and old age, continuing a legacy of impunity and lack of justice for the murders of thousands of Guatemalan (mostly Maya) citizens during the country's *Conflicto Armado* (*Reuters*, 2015).

In 2015, Xantin[3], the Maya Chuj town centered in this study, saw continued conflicts over the imposition of a hydroelectric plant on their ancestral lands, which brought greater military intervention. The year before, 2014, the conflict between the people of Xantin and the hydroelectric company came to a head. Despite the results of a 2009 community referendum, which showed the people's overwhelming opposition to allowing the company to operate in Xantin, the national government authorized and provided permits for the hydroelectric project in Xantin in September 2013 and the company began operations a few months later. The people responded by destroying

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[2] This case was later overturned on a technicality.
[3] All names of people and places involved in this study are pseudonyms.

the machinery the company began to install on their lands. These actions were met with military intervention and the targeted violence against and repression of community leaders. Yet, the joint response and unified resistance of the recently formed Plurinational Q'anjob'al, Popti, Chuj, Akateko,[4] and Mestizo Government, strengthened the community's resolve and opposition. In a list of published demands the local leaders stated, "We demand the government immediately withdraw the armed forces from Mayan territory…[;] cancel the mining, hydroelectric and petrol licenses, imposed without prior consultation; and cease the on-going criminalization of the legitimate right to exercise resistance" (*Prensa Comunitaria*, 2013, translation mine). Despite the growing unity and resistance across the region, the 2015 elections saw the election of a "new" mayor[5] in Xantin, who received financial and political backing from the hydroelectric company, beating out the incumbent mayor who had supported the people's resistance and prevented the plant from becoming fully operational. The people of Xantin's municipal center expressed concerns about what his election would mean for their futures; despite identifying as Maya Chuj like the people of Xantin, the mayor was understood to be in the pockets of the hydroelectric company, and thus, not looking out for the best interests of the people of Xantin.

Guatemala and the people of Xantin were also affected by and concerned about changes in the global policy scape and 2015 was also marked by shifts in transnational policies. At the end of December 2015, the Obama administration declared that it would engage in a series of raids aimed at the recent influx of children and families from Central America. As word spread through Xantin, people began to worry about what the raids and deportations would mean for their families, friends, and loved ones residing across the borders. They also worried about what the raids would mean for

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[4] The Q'anjob'al, Popti, and Akateko are all Maya peoples whose territories can be found in the same area geographic region as the Chuj—the Northwest of Guatemala.

[5] I put new in quotes here because the mayor had served in this position a few years prior for a number of terms; thus, he was stepping back into his previous position.

the future of their community, specifically for young people and their educational futures. Their fears were realized when that January (2016) people began being deported back to Xantin.

Thus, this dissertation is situated in the midst of this shifting political landscape with Chuj young people from Xantin, Guatemala situated at the center to show how these young people came together and fought for a space for themselves and decolonial change for and with their community.

The Project

To understand this shifting social and political context and the resistances of Chuj youth, I draw on decolonial feminist theories. A decolonial feminist framework and epistemology (Lugones, 2003, 2010) makes visible the complex interlocking nature of gendered, economic, raced, and colonial systems that are a part of indigenous youth's lived experiences. It shows links between modernity and coloniality, which centers the interplay of racism and capitalism and recognizes the ways colonial power structures remain entrenched, and how they are mutually constituted and reinforced (Quijano, 2000); thus, many scholars refer to these as "modern/colonial" power structures (more discussion of this to follow). In addition, this framework reveals the ways resistant identities are forged from and in response to colonial divisions and highlights diverse models of decolonial agency (Lugones 1992, 2010; Anzaldúa, 1987).

Informed by this framework, the dissertation is centered around the following questions: What are the policies, processes, and modern/colonial power structures (local, regional, national, global, and historical) that shape Chuj youth's lives and resistances, and in what ways? How are Chuj young people making sense of these processes and how are they negotiating, engaging with, and/or resisting them? What do Chuj youth educators' and youths' resistances expose about the ways coloniality operates and the possibilities of decolonization? The work and experiences of Chuj young people provide insights into the ways modern/colonial gender power structures operate through current policies and processes and play out in indigenous youth's lives. At the same time, from Chuj

youth's place at the borders of the settler colonial state, aggressive imperialism and capitalist extraction, and military intervention and control, their resistances highlight the possibilities of something else, another future.

This project attempts to shift the focus onto the modern/colonial power structures and systems that undergird these policies and often remain hidden, while also centering the work and resistances of indigenous young people in exposing and challenging these systems. Using a decolonial feminist framework allows me to analyze the ways the current processes and systems under study are linked to colonial histories and structures as well as the ways that these current processes are not fixed, but rather in continuous and creative tension. This research is meant to make us think across borders and to contend with our own implicatedness in the maintenance of the borders and processes that affect indigenous youth's lives. In doing so, I hope to encourage the reader to take seriously the impact of these structures and policies on the lives and futures of indigenous young people across the Americas as well as recognize the ways these youth refuse to be victims and are engaging in creative decolonial resistances.

In this dissertation, I show the ways Chuj youth and educators engaged in decolonial resistances and (re)imaginings in and out of schools by creating youth-led spaces; enacting structural, curricular, and pedagogical transformations in schools; and participating in direct forms of resistance within their community. I argue that Chuj youth's organizing, educational, and resistance efforts provide insights into the ways modern/colonial power structures interconnect and operate as well as the possibilities for and messiness of dismantling them. The history of colonial state violence and the silence around it have contributed to anxieties and discourses about the problems with Maya youth and their communities, which have hidden the role of the state in creating the current structures of violence and facilitated the argument that the state will protect the "good citizens" from the threats presented by young people. Placing Chuj youth and their resistances at the center of

this study challenges these discourses and silences while also highlighting indigenous youth's unique position vis-à-vis the colonial state and interlocking modern/colonial processes of corporate capitalist extraction, formal schooling, militarization, and educational privatization. Ultimately, I argue that Chuj youth's resistances expose the role of the modern/colonial state in creating and maintaining modern/colonial logics based on elimination, through framings of development and education and the argument that indigenous people need to be brought into the modern present. This research shows that decolonization requires dismantling these systems simultaneously and that that work is constant, messy, and takes many forms. Chuj youth's resistances add insights into the fields of education, youth organizing, youth studies, and development studies and argue for scholars to center coloniality in their research and contend with the ways entrenched modern/colonial structures operate in multiple ways in youth's lives, educational experiences, and resistances.

A Decolonial Feminist Framework

To engage in this work, my dissertation is informed by decolonial feminism (Lugones, 2003, 2010). A decolonial feminist framework (Lugones, 2003, 2010) exposes the ways gendered, economic, raced, and colonial systems come together in indigenous youth's lived experiences and highlights the possibilities of resistances. Decolonial feminism brings together theories of coloniality of power (e.g., Quijano, 2000; Mignolo, 2007) with women of color (e.g., Anzalduá, 1987; Lorde, 1984) and third world feminisms (e.g., Mohanty, 1988, 2003).

Coloniality of power looks at how power is constituted through a system of economic and racial difference and the imposition of Eurocentric knowledge systems (Quijano, 2000) and shows the ways social structures in the Americas remain organized around colonial lines. Quijano (2000) defines "coloniality of power" as the world in which power is constituted through a system of racial difference and the power/knowledge of colonial racial hierarchies. Thus, coloniality of power takes up what indigenous scholars have long argued: settler colonialism "is a structure and not an event"

(Wolfe, 2006, p. 388); indigenous scholars in the Americas have challenged the language and framing of terms like neo- and post-colonialism, because indigenous peoples do not experience the structures of coloniality as something in the past. Instead, coloniality and modernity work in tandem and are constantly worked and reworked through racialized capitalist structures and processes (Martinez Salazar, 2012). Thus, coloniality is distinct from colonization, which describes the specific administrative system of colonial rule (Grosfoguel, 2007); 'coloniality' refers to the continuance of colonial power structures and is linked to modernity and is framed by Mignolo (2011) as modernity's dark underside. As Mignolo (2007) states, "The basic thesis is the following: 'modernity' is a European narrative that hides its darker side, 'coloniality'" (p. 39). He argues that "modernity/coloniality are two sides of the same coin. Coloniality is constitutive of modernity; there is no modernity, there cannot be, without coloniality." (Mignolo, 2011, p. 43). Responding to and expanding on Wallerstein's (2001) world-system theory, scholars of coloniality of power layout a framework for understanding our current social system as a "modern/colonial world system" (Mignolo, 2000; Quijano, 2000; Grosfoguel, 2007).

This framework pushes us to think about these processes not just as local exceptions, but embedded within in larger global colonial and racial logics. The work of scholars of coloniality of power centers the interconnectedness of racialization and colonization/coloniality in the Americas. Quijano (2000) argues that the two elements that developed out of the colonization of America were global capitalism and the idea of race. Wynter (2003) shows how this system of sorting people has been maintained through time and translated to the creation of the color line Du Bois (1903) argued would be the central issue of our time and continues to divide those deemed superior and those seen as inferior. For these theorists, knowledge is a central concern because the colonial axis of domination of non-Europeans by Europeans/European Americans is maintained not only through economic exploitation and domination, but through the creation of knowledge/power. Grosfoguel

(2007) argues that dominant paradigms, which have been mostly formulated in the West and maintain coloniality, need to be decolonized. Wynter (2003) argues that disproportionality in knowledge/power continues to reinforce the Man/subhuman distinction along constructed racial lines.

Because, decolonial scholars see knowledge and language as central to the construction and maintenance of colonial difference, they hold up subaltern knowledges and languages as having resistant possibilities for pushing back against the colonial and imperial projects (Wa Thiong'o, 1986; Mignolo, 2000). This has important implications for understandings of schools and curriculum. Critical scholars have shown the ways schools are sites of knowledge production and reproduction as well as spaces where history is constructed (Apple, 1995, 2004, 2006, 2013; Bellino, 2017). Indigenous and decolonial scholars build on this assertion to argue that coloniality shapes curriculum, definitions of knowledge, and research, all of which are used to maintain inequitable colonial social structures (Tuck & Yang, 2012; L.T. Smith, 1999), which has led to education being an important site of resistance.

Decolonial feminism adds to the work of scholars of coloniality of power by looking at the way gender was and continues to be constructed along of racial lines, because, as Lugones (2003, 2008, 2010) shows, gender was a colonial imposition. Lugones (2010) argues that theorists of coloniality of power, while offering an important framework, miss the centrality of gender and sexuality to colonial racial projects. Building further on the previous scholars as well as third world feminist scholarship, Lugones uses a "modern, colonial, gender system" lens to theorize "the oppressive logic of colonial modernity" (p. 742). She brings into question hierarchical binaries and categories, which are central to the current frameworks for thinking about race, gender, and sexuality. She complicates and troubles Quijones' (2000) analysis by centering gender beyond sexual exploitation through her framework. Lugones argues that through the coloniality of gender, the

social construction of "sex" was seen as singular and separate in colonial framings of the colonized—thus, they could be seen as male/female, and also non-human. She uses coloniality to not just look at classification systems, but also dehumanization processes that make people fit to be categorized and turn colonized people in non-humans. Lugones proposes a "feminist border thinking" to combat coloniality of gender. This feminist border thinking builds off Mignolo's (2010) notion of "border thinking" as proposed by Anzaldúa (1987), which, Lugones argues, is concretely negotiated from within.

Therefore, Lugones views dialogue and community as central for both understanding the current system and creating something different (Lugones, 2003, 2010). Decolonial feminism centers the possibility of coalition-building through multiplicity and decolonization processes and argues for the importance of centering coloniality and understanding colonial formations not as fixed but rather in continuous and creative tension, infiltrating every aspect of life through circuits of power at all levels (in bodies and institutions) (Lugones, 2003; Figueroa, 2015). For Lugones, decolonial feminist scholars must see and make visible these intersecting colonial differences to destabilize the structures that maintain them and the processes that work to hide them to then work to reject coloniality by highlighting the creative resistances of others. As Figueroa (2015) explains, "in order to see resistance, one must be able to see domination, which itself is a subversive act" (p. 643). Resistant possibility for decolonial feminist scholars lies in the ability to "(re)organize space," even momentarily, and to "challenge the way in which power is organized," (Méndez, 2016, p. 374).

Lugones' framework challenges frameworks inherent in dominant research paradigms, such as the binary of oppressed/ being oppressed, deficit framings, and the researcher as voyeur (Lugones, 2003; Cruz, 2011). Decolonial feminism calls on scholars to move from centering oppression as the sole reality of communities to understanding diverse models of decolonial agency and the fractured, continuous relationship and interplay of oppressing/being oppressed and resisting

(Lugones, 2003). This pushes scholars to work as "faithful witnesses" alongside marginalized and resistant communities and to center the logics of resistance to imagine decolonial possibilities (Lugones, 2003; Cruz, 2011; Figueroa, 2015). Keating (2005) describes "faithful witnessing" as the process of locating and validating resistances, which include those that are open and public, and thus more visible, as well as those that are subtly subversive, and thus less visible. Figueroa (2015) explains, "Faithful witnessing, as a decolonial feminist tool, makes visible the often unseen consequences of the coloniality of power, knowledge, and gender" (p. 643). Doing so, requires working "against the grain of power, on the side of resistance" (Lugones, 2003, p. 7) and "aligning oneself with oppressed people" (Figueroa, 2015, p. 641). This necessitates a collaborative research framework and process as we work to look for and make visible resistance and agency "in places where youth may have little room for maneuvering" (Cruz, 2011, p. 548). Thus, this framework involves a both and theoretical and methodological shift from singular notions of oppression and research that looks "at." Using this framework, calls on researchers to learning with and from and requires the researcher to take a different role from the traditional objective observer and to instead make a conscious decision to refuse to collaborate with power; this is not a neutral stance and can be dangerous (Cruz, 2011). Cruz (2011) argues that this danger is experienced both by the research subjects and the researcher. Research subjects face an element of risk by speaking up and pushing back against inter/national investments in capitalism, which presents a threat to those interested in maintaining modern/colonial power inequities in the current context where there are threats of retribution (Méndez, 2016; Cruz, 2011). And for the researcher, looking "for resistance is questioned and dismissed by others who are more invested in the role of the neutral, logico-scientific observer and the positivist reliability of data" (Cruz, 2011, p. 548).

I take up this call in my research by centering the complex work of young people in challenging the "colonial/modern gender system" and the ways Chuj youths' resistant logics show

their understandings of structures and systems of oppression as connected and overlapping. Using this framework takes seriously Tuck's (2009) call to move away from damage-centered research and focus on indigenous youth's desires and insights into the issues that affect their lives. This research takes up Lugones' (2003) call to center the resistant practices and their logics rather than constantly centering oppression and/or what is not working and to look at resistance in "tight spaces" (Cruz, 2011). I apply a decolonial feminist framework to explore what resistant practices look like in the context of the Chuj community in Guatemala and to center the insights this resistance can provide into global colonial/modern gender structures. This research works to understand the resistant logics and possibilities of Chuj youth's understandings, organizing, and educational imaginings. Doing so, makes visible both the oppressive colonial systems and the multifaceted resistant work of Chuj youth in a time of neoliberal imperialist corporate invasions that highlights decolonial possibilities of youth's work. Overall, this dissertation contributes to this small but growing work on decolonial feminism by extending the lens to the global south. Coloniality of power, which decolonial feminism draws on, is a theory of and from the global south, but decolonial feminist scholars have largely situated their work in the United States. Using this lens allows me to see the ways coloniality operates in and through gender in the lives of Chuj young people and shapes their work.

"It's the mountains": A history of a sacred place

Xantin is a semi-urban Chuj Maya town situated high in the Cuchumatanes mountains of Guatemala. It is the *cabecera municipal* (municipal center) of a municipality that is home to seventy smaller *aldeas* (villages) and *caserios* (hamlets) that span an area of 560 square kilometers on the Guatemala-Mexico border. This research focuses on the experiences and views of those living in the *cabecera,* which is home to an estimated 11,000 people, the majority of whom identify as Maya Chuj (98 to 99 percent). With a total of 68,000 speakers, the Chuj linguistic community is considered the

sixth largest indigenous group in Guatemala, which has a large (40-60%) proportion of the national population that identifies as indigenous. The town is a sacred place for the Chuj; it is the land of their ancestors and the place with deep history and meaning (Piedrasanta, 2009).

Because of Xantin's geographic position, the Chuj people have historically been shielded in many ways from colonial interventions and state policies. As Malxun, a Chuj youth organizer and school administrator, explained to me one day while we were sitting in her office, "it's the mountains… the mountains have protected us and made us strong, they didn't let the colonizers get to us or change us." Xantin has long been removed from the direct reach of colonial interventions, national policies, and regulations, as well as access to infrastructure and social services. Yet, Malxun went on to explain that this has changed in recent years; neoliberal and imperialist policies have had numerous economic, political, social, and educational effects on Maya communities across Guatemala, particularly in the lives of young people. Transnational corporations have identified Xantin as an area rich in natural resources, including water for hydroelectric power and precious metals for mining. A number of corporations have applied for and been granted extractive licenses to explore and/or exploit the area, despite the opposition of the Xantin people. At the same time, the municipality was identified by the national government, a target municipality for state-led interventions against malnutrition and poverty because of its high-incidence of child and infant malnutrition (one of the highest in the country). This shifting social and political context has been an impetus for youth organizing in and out of schools. As youth leader explained to me, "*tenemos que saber defendernos como jóvenes y nuestra comunidad."*/ "we have to know how to defend ourselves as young people and our community."

This section explores the historical context and recent shifts in relation to Chuj youth to point to the ways different processes and policies are coming together in their lives and the need for a decolonial feminist lens to understand these processes and youth's organizing work. Because of the

focus of this work on coloniality, education, and organizing, this chapter begins with a discussion of colonization and the imposition of formal schooling to draw connects to the present context. There are limitations in doing so, because the history of the Chuj people and their engagements with education extend well before the Spanish invasion, genocide, and imposition of formal schooling. Yet, these histories and frameworks are rich with Chuj knowledges, and as such are not for me to tell; and I believe academy might not need or deserve them. The historical sketch presented here is meant to provide the reader with a background understanding of the systems and structures that have persisted from colonialization and the shifting political and social context in which Chuj young people are organizing and engaging.

The Invasion

Ever since Spain invaded the Mayan Empire in 1524 and began the theft of indigenous lands, the Mayas have been confronted with genocidal violence and state-led attempts to eliminate their people, cultures, and knowledges. Between 1524 and 1540, more than 4 million indigenous people in Guatemala were killed by the Spanish invaders, either by direct violence or from the foreign diseases the invaders carried with them (Melville, 2005). With the imposition of colonial structures and policies, Maya people have been continuously treated as unwelcomed strangers in their own lands. Formal schooling was established in the colonized territory as a tool of colonization; schools aimed at bringing the Maya people under the control of the Spanish empire by imposing Christianity and Spanish language and culture on the Mayas, while undermining indigenous knowledges (Fischer & Brown, 1996). Xantin is home to one of the oldest remaining Catholic churches in the country. The church was built on part of the temple used by the Chuj people for scientific and astronomic studies in an effort to supplant Maya spirituality and scientific knowledges with Catholicism and Western ways of knowing.

"Independence" and Assimilationist Policies

Independence did not represent a change in power structures for Guatemala's indigenous peoples. After independence from Spain in 1821, powerful Guatemalan elites of Spanish decent (*Criollos*) seized political power and the Mayas continued face widespread oppression. As Batz (2017) states, "The colonial system that 'officially' ended in 1821 became the Guatemalan State and maintained a colonial logic of extraction, often with a violent mindset."

The post-colonial governments continued to propose *Castellanización* (Hispanicization) policies (Fischer & Brown, 1996). In 1875, the government made primary education mandatory and began to build schools in rural areas and train indigenous teachers, but it wasn't until around 1920 that the first primary schooling began operating in Xantin (according to internal administrative documents). The school began operating out of the Catholic church, until the government built Xantin's first public primary school building in 1952. The school was also built on top of part of the remaining structures of Mayan temple, physically imposing the formal schooling structure on the most important spiritual, cultural, educational, and historical site for the Chuj people (Piedrasanta, 2009). The school remains there today and continues to serve as a physical reminder of the imposition of Spanish knowledge and attempt to destroy Chuj ways of knowing. To solidify the imposition and supremacy of the Spanish language and knowledge, Spanish-speaking non-indigenous teachers were brought from other parts of Guatemala to teach in the school and often used corporal punishment to police students' use of Chuj.

Schooling was proposed as a solution to the "Indian problem," which established indigenous people's as backwards and in need of being brought into the nation state through assimilation and the destruction of their culture and knowledges. Miguel Angel Asturias, Guatemala's recipient of the Nobel Prize for literature, described the "Indian problem" in his 1923 thesis titled, "The Social Problem of the Indian,"

> The Indian represents a past civilization and the mestizo, or ladino as we call him, a future civilization. The Indian that makes up the majority…represents the mental, moral, and material dearth of the country, he is dirty, dressed in a distinct manner and suffers without flinching. The Ladino…lives in a different historic moment, with beginnings in romantic ambition, aspires, desires, and is, in the final analysis, the vital part of the Guatemalan nation; a valiant nation that has two thirds of its population that is dead to intelligent life! It is left to us to find a resolution to the indigenous problem, like an open road to build the foundations of the facts of our nationality (p. 65).

Asturias argued that indigenous peoples were an impediment to the modern nation state and argued for a process of eugenics and assimilation. These logics have continued to shape schooling in Guatemala to this day.

Furthermore, the early and mid- 20th century marked a period of intense U.S. government imperial intervention and domination. Guatemala's dictators prioritized U.S. interests and the government welcomed the U.S.-based United Fruit Company into Guatemala and provided them with tax exemptions and free labor from the Maya and peasant populations (Schlesinger & Kinzer, 2005). Under Jorge Ubico's dictatorship (1931 to 1944), the United Fruit Company gained ownership of the country's only railroad and communication system as well as a large portion of the country's land making it the single largest land owner in the country. At the same time, indigenous people continued to be used as forced labor and the national education system was neglected (Adams, 2001). Many people from Xantin were forced to travel to the Eastern coasts to work on coffee and banana plantations for large portions of the year because of the 1934 "Vagrancy Laws" that required indigenous people and Ladino *campesinos* to work on the plantations for 100 to 150 days a year (Lyon, 2011). By 1944, teachers, university students, and skilled workers began to mobilize the population against the Ubico, eventually forcing him to resign.

The years that followed, represented a national period of democracy, termed the "10 Years of Spring." The country's first democratically elected president, Juan José Arévalo, followed by his successor, president Jacobo Arbenz Guzman, began a process of land and social reforms. Arévalo extended the vote to the Mayan population (literate and illiterate men and literate women), who previously had been barred from voting (Melville, 2005). He also set out to reform Guatemala's educational system to meet the needs of the entire population and the government developed educational materials in several Mayan languages, though the goal was to facilitate literacy in Spanish rather than promote literacy in Maya languages (Heinze-Balcazar, 2009). However, the United Fruit company felt threatened by Arévalo and Arbenz's efforts to redistribute lands to the Guatemalan people and, in 1954, a CIA-backed military coup brought an end to the period of democracy and relative peace.

The Violence

The CIA overthrow of Arbenz marked the beginning of a long period of military repression and state terror and genocidal policies. From 1960 on, the government began a focused effort to eradicate "communist" groups across the country. And as many national schools and literacy projects were shut down, private organizations stepped in—though most of their educational programs for indigenous populations remained focused on assimilation (Heinze-Balcazar, 2009).

The period of violence reached its height from 1978 to 1983 under the dictatorships of Romeo Lucas García and Efrain Rios Montt. The army massacred towns and villages, and especially targeted indigenous communities, who they saw as natural supporters of the *guerilla.* The state viewed the Maya people as enemies of the state and ordered the army to employ a "scorched earth" policy, that involved both killing people and destroying the land. Soldiers targeted and assassinated children "as a form of elimination that destroyed all possibility of community reconstruction and justice on the part of the victims" (REMHI, 1998, p. 59). Because of this, education programs,

especially in rural areas, were targeted by the army and many parents withdrew their children from school to protect them from forced recruitment.

Xantin was one of the areas targeted by the army's violence, because as a geographically remote and majority Maya community, it was considered a likely center for guerrilla support. Chuj people's stories tell of how both the army and the guerrilla came through the town on various occasions in attempts to garner support. While there were a series of murders in the town, a 1981 massacre in one of Xantin's neighborhoods where 36 people were killed in their sleep was the largest single mass murder experienced by those in the town—though there were larger targeted massacres in nearby villages (Melville, 2005). After the massacre in the town, the majority of the small Ladino population living in the center of Xantin left, leaving the town what it is today, a majority (98%) Chuj community (Melville, 2005; Piedrasanta, 2009). During and after the war, many people also fled as refugees to Mexico and the United States, marking the beginning of a flow of people from Xantin to the United States, a process that has continued through today (Brown & Odem, 2011). By the end of the genocide, marked by the 1996 signing of the Peace Accords, it was estimated that 626 villages experienced massacres, 1.5 million people were displaced, 150,000 people fled to Mexico and the United States as refugees, and more than 200,000 people were killed or disappeared (REMHI, 1998).

Out of the fire: The Pan-Maya Movement

Yet, the story of Guatemala and the Maya people during this period is not complete without a discussion of Maya resistance and mass mobilization. Grandin et al. (2011) state, "What has called itself the Pan-Maya Movement arose from the ashes of fires lit by the state, to make claims based on a renewed and deepened sense of ethnic pride" (p. 501). Fischer and Benson (2006) argue that Maya leaders were able to use the state violence to mobilize an effective movement, while public and media framing of the atrocities solidified Mayas within a category of victimization on an international stage. Through their organizing, Maya leaders challenged victim framings and proved

they were more complex than victimization categories allowed (Fisher & Benson, 2006; Fisher & Brown, 1996).

In addition, much like other indigenous movements in Latin America, Pan-Maya activists worked to create a unifying Maya identity to bring people together across class and regional differences and to respond to dominant Ladino images of and racism towards Maya peoples (Warren, 1998; Montejo, 2002; Fisher & Benson, 2006; Fisher & Brown, 1996). The movement claimed Maya as a new, collective identity that challenged static anthropological framings of Maya people as located in a fictitious past (Esquit & Galvez, 1997). International events—such as Maya participation in the 500 Years of Indigenous, Black, and Popular Resistance, the signing to the ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous Peoples, and the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize going to Rigoberta Menchú—created space for the formation of the movement and claims to a Maya identity (Esquit & Galvez, 1997). Overall, Otzoy (1996) argues,

> The genocidal policies of the state have been unable to destroy the social and political consciousness of the Maya people, who are forging their own path to freedom and justice. Despite the contradictions that persist within the movement, each organization has played an important role in that struggle. The Maya organizations are coming to realize that pan-Maya unity will strengthen their call for fundamental changes in Guatemala's economic and political system.

Nonetheless, these identity claims were often met with hostility from both the right and the left in Guatemala (Nelson, 1999). Nelson (1999) shows the way Maya claims to indigeneity have been positioned as false; either a false consciousness (according to Marxists) or as claims to an identity that no longer exists, because there are no "pure" Maya (often employed by the right). Hale (2002) argues that *mestizaje* (racial mixing) discourses were used in the 1990s as a counterattack on the Pan-Maya movement, because they framed the Maya as a past culture and argued that the national

identity was *mestizo* (mixed) (Hale, 2002). These *Mestizaje* discourses were both raced and gendered, operating through the female body through constructions of purity and the social imaginary that women are responsible for the reproduction of the nation; in Guatemala's case, the non-indigenous *mestizo* nation (Nelson, 1999; see also, Yuval-Davis, 1997). *Mestizaje* discourses have been employed in different ways at different historical moments. Yet, the Pan-Maya intellectuals were able to shift the discourse to one of multiculturalism.

Nonetheless, many argue that this context of violence meant that the Pan-Maya Movement had to carefully frame their claims as "non-political" and focus on linguistic and cultural conservation and revitalization (Fisher & Benson, 2006; Brown, 1996). Fischer (1996) argues that the Pan Maya Movement avoided much of the repression experienced by other indigenous movements in the region, because Maya leaders strategically distanced themselves from the various political factions, had moderate aims, used diplomacy, and focused on language and culture as outside the political sphere. A central focus of the Pan-Maya Movement was incorporating Maya rights into the Peace Process that marked the end of the 36-year *Conflicto Armado Interno*. Mayanists succeeded in getting the Accord on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples signed in 1995 and some of their demands were included in the 1996 Peace Accords.

The Peace Process was important for Maya organizing and participation in the country's politics. In the Peace Accords, Guatemala was officially recognized as a multilingual and multiethnic state. While the Accords did not fulfill all demands, particularly the demands for economic rights that continue to be a source of conflict to this day (Otzoy, 1996), with the acceptance of cultural rights, the movement achieved national education reforms that promoted intercultural and bilingual education (Hale, 2002). Nelson (1999) shows how the Pan-Maya Movement challenged Ladinos' ability to define themselves as "modern" compared to Mayas; Maya activists exposed how these definitions were socially and historically constructed and positioned themselves as both indigenous

and modern as well as the past *and* future of the nation, thus, challenging the modern/colonial dichotomies and constructions created and sustained through coloniality. A number of scholars have acknowledged that the Pan-Maya movement has differed from other movements in the region because of its focus on scholarly work and education to bring about social transformation and nation-building (Warren, 1998; Esquit & Galvez, 1997). Overall, Warren (1998) suggests the Pan-Maya Movement opened possibilities for future movements and understandings of Guatemalan society in ways that challenged domination. The aims and definitions created by the Pan-Maya Movement are sites of ongoing struggles against the structures of power and domination that continue to be worked out by and through Maya young people in Guatemala today.

Social and Educational Reforms

The Pan Mayan Movement helped push for the inclusion of Mayan issues in the 1996 Peace Accords and the enactment of national intercultural and bilingual educational (IBE) policies (Heinze-Balcazar, 2009). The Accord on Identity and Rights of the Maya People established the framework for the inclusion of indigenous populations in national IBE reforms (Fischer & Brown, 1996), which culminated in a new national curriculum (CNB) that was put into effect in 2004. The new CNB quoted the Accord in its opening pages:

> [T]he educational system is one of the most important vehicles for the transmission and development of vehicles and cultural wisdom. It must respond to the cultural and linguistic diversity of Guatemala, acknowledging and strengthening indigenous cultural identity, values and Mayan and other indigenous educational systems. It must also provide access to formal and non-formal education and include their educational concepts (MINEDUC, DICADE, DIGEBI, 2005, translation mine).

The new educational goals included addressing the problems and inequalities that were inherent in the previous educational system, which excluded and prohibited all Mayan knowledge, languages and

cultural expression in schools. Yet, the new courses created to sustain these goals, such as Mayan Mathematics, Mayan Cosmovision, and First Language (Indigenous Language) courses, are not mandatory in all schools and generally no offered outside indigenous communities; schools can choose whether or not to include an IBE focus in their curriculum, and because of this flexibility and lack of institutional support, there is a great diversity in the ways the reforms have been taken up (e.g., Oglesby, 2007; Bellino, 2017; Allweiss, 2012). Furthermore, discussions of the Civil War/genocide are excluded from the formal curriculum and in practice the violence often presented in a way that downplays the impact and role of the state (Bellino, 2017; Rothenberg, 2012; Rubin, 2016). Bellino (2017) finds that this is because of the diverse ways in which the conflict was understood as well as opposition from those in power, who have pushed a narrative that genocide never happened and that both sides of the *Conflicto Armado* are to blame in an effort downplay the role of the state and the enduring consequences of the state-led violence.

Moreover, scholars and Maya activists have pointed out that the multicultural reforms have been put into practice by the state through "strategic essentialism" and in a way that emphasizes a certain way to "be Maya," excludes and silences the multiplicity of Maya voices and experiences (Sieder, 2008), ignores the intersectional identities at play for indigenous peoples (Dietz & Mateos Cortés, 2008), "disciplines" the indigenous population in order to hinder the promotion of self-determination and political awareness (Esquit, 2008), and solidifies the polarizing classifications of Ladino and Maya (Rodas, 2008). Thus, they argue that the Guatemalan state's model of multiculturalism fits within neoliberal political and economic policies and reinforces the status quo and colonial, racial, social hierarchies that remain entrenched across Guatemala's social, political and economic institutions (Hale, 2008; González Ponciano, 2008; Sieder, 2002). With Guatemala's national identity and culture historically framed as Ladino, neoliberal multiculturalism has been used to reinforce cultural hierarchies and entrench the majority culture as the norm against which other

cultures are identified and measured. Cojtí Cuxil (2007) argues that the dominant framing of "Ladino-centrism minimizes, hides, and disqualifies the presence, needs, and actions of indigenous nations." He argues that colonial legacies have impeded the implementation of multicultural policies and a true transformation of the Guatemalan state and in turn affect the possibilities of educational reforms (Cojtí Cuxil, 2007). Esquit (2018) further argues that the multicultural reforms have been used to bring Maya peoples in Guatemala into the nation-state and draw on deficit notions of rural, young people, and indigenous peoples, who "by being *underdeveloped, behind,* or far from the cities, must necessarily be brought to the center of the urban and modern Guatemalan world" (xix).

While the implementation of high school and professional education programs are relatively new in Xantin and have been brought from outside the directives of the Guatemalan state (through private, international, and local organizations and initiatives), when the town's first high school opened in 2005, it was started under the new curriculum as an intercultural and bilingual teacher preparatory high school. Findings from my previous research with educators and schools in Xantin showed that despite the stated goals of addressing historical inequities and creating opportunities for learning about and from Maya knowledges in the formal curriculum, the CNB was instead experienced by Chuj educators and students as a continuation of colonial educational histories and models (Allweiss, 2012, 2014). Similar to the scholarly critiques mentioned above, the majority of Chuj educators saw the curriculum within a continued history of colonial schooling models for indigenous students and within the context of entrenched colonial power structures. Thus, unlike how the reforms were positioned and promoted, Chuj educators did not see or experience the IBE reforms as a great rupture or equalizer.

At the time of this project, many educators and youth discussed how formal schooling continued to be structured in colonizing ways that were disconnected from the lived experiences and knowledges of students and their community. At the same time, formal schooling was seen as

valuable because it provided students with access to dominant knowledges, Spanish language, and credentials for formal employment. As one educator and community leader, Mikin, explained, articulating these tensions,

Sí, la educación es importante, porque uno analiza, reflexiona, "¿qué está pasando?" …porque a veces uno no sabe dónde está uno, en qué mundo está uno. Entonces, sí, la educación ha venido apoyando, pero también veo que el pensamiento occidental nos está llevando por otro lado; ya no estamos valorando estos principios de la cultura, de la cosmovisión, de la forma de ver… Ahorita la mayoría de la gente se interesa en buscar dinero, dónde conseguir dinero, no importa el mal que puede hacer al otro… mientras los abuelos, ellos buscan la vida, la harmonía con la naturaleza.	Yes, education [formal schooling] is important, because one analyzes, reflects, "what is happening?" …because sometimes you don't know where you are, what world you are in. So, yes, education has brought support, but I also see that Western thinking is taking us to another side; we are no longer valuing the principles from our cultural, from our world view, from our way of seeing… Now, most people are interested in getting money, where they can get money, it doesn't matter the harm that can be done to someone else… while the grandparents [elders], they look for life, harmony with nature.

In this analysis, Mikin highlights the tensions with what access to formal schooling offers students as well as the ways it undermines Chuj knowledges and relationships built around unity with one another and the natural world. He also connects formal schooling with instilling Western capitalist ideals in students and the undermining of indigenous knowledges. He goes on to explain that this form of education is enacting harm onto Chuj students; it undermines relationships and students do not learn their own histories and are instead taught to think from and value dominant ideologies and histories. This affects how Chuj students are encouraged to see themselves and their community. He

explained the changes he saw as follows,

Sí, la educación está transformando, pero no está transformando de manera positive a todo, sino que creo que no nos ha enseñado bastante para hacer análisis para proyectarnos en el futuro o nos educan para trabajar y no para buscar nuestra autonomía, nuestra forma de seguir luchando.	Yes, education is bringing about change, but it's not all positive change, instead I think that it is not teaching us enough about how to analyze in order to propel ourselves into the future, or they are teaching us to work and not to search for our own autonomy, our own way of continuing to fight.

Here, Mikin shows the impact of colonial education models on students' experiences and futures and the ways they continue to affect students' learning and sense of self. This connects to the argument made by indigenous scholars that settler colonialism shapes curriculum and definitions of knowledge, all of which are used to maintain inequitable colonial social structures (Tuck & Yang, 2013; Smith, 1999). Mikin's insights were reflective of many educators' and youth's experiences with formal schooling.

While many young people and elders expressed concerns about the impact and roles of formal schooling, young people and their families also saw value in attending school because of the access it provided them to Spanish language, dominant knowledges, and opportunities for employment outside of agriculture. Because of the costs associated with school materials and the fact that most of the secondary schools charged tuition, youth's families invested much of their hard-earned resources and money into sending their young people to school. The promise of access to a "better" career has long served as a motivating factor for young people investing in secondary schooling. Yet, employment opportunities in Xantin remain limited. The first high schools in Xantin were teacher-training high schools that graduated students in three years with a teaching degree. These graduates then competed for a limited number of positions in schools in the town and nearby

villages. An influx of certified Chuj teachers brought a shift in the ethnic makeup of teachers in Xantin schools, but also created unemployment because there were more certified teachers than there were positions available. In addition, in 2012, the national government passed a law requiring a technical degree (three years of university education) for teachers. Two universities opened local weekend satellite courses to meet demands for higher education, but I found many Chuj youth struggled to pay the high cost of university tuition. For young people pursuing the promise of formal schooling meant investing more time and resources during a time where employment opportunities were visibly limited. Youth participants talked about paradox of needing money to get a university education, which meant needing a job, at the same time, many jobs required a university education. In my interview with Mikin, he went on to describe how young people "feel lost," because the education they receive focuses on preparing them for specific careers, despite the lack of employment opportunities in those careers. Thus, many young people look outside the realm of formal employment and schooling in search of their futures and turn to migration and organizing.

Xantin and the Maya Movement Today

The past ten years have brought about many changes in Xantin, at the same time the historical legacies of colonization, U.S. imperialism, and the *Conflicto Armado* and genocide have persisted in many complex and divergent ways. For example, Maya communities remain underrepresented in regional and national politics. In recent years, neoliberal policies have had numerous effects—economic, political, social, and educational—on communities across the country (e.g. Green, 2003; Benson et al., 2008; Offit & Cook, 2010). Transnational hydroelectric and mining corporations have pushed to gain access to Maya lands and thwart community resistance, thereby disrupting their well-being, safety, and environment and displacing many (Urkidi, 2011; Yagenova & Garcia, 2009; Willems, 2010). The national government has approved the opening of mines and hydroelectric plants throughout the country (Urkidi, 2011), despite overwhelming protest. The

recent struggles of the Maya people have centered on claims for territorial rights, and have been directed towards the effects of extractive corporate projects and megaprojects (Vogt, 2015). Their demands are aimed nationally at the state and transnationally towards the corporations and their allies. In 2009, I observed as Xantin voted 'no' in a community consultation against allowing a hydroelectric company access to operate on their lands. The vote was supposed to be legally binding, yet this has not been the case (see Chapter 5 for more discussion). As mentioned in the introduction, in 2016, with the support of the new mayor, the plant began operating in full force and has since re-routed rivers, displaced people, and threatened to destroy Chuj people's land and livelihoods. Protest against the company has led to a number of direct interactions between Chuj community members and state and security forces. With the hydroelectric plant beginning operations, there has been a recent increase in military presence in the area that has also coincided with the military's national mandate to focus on infrastructure and community development (López, 2016). During my research in Xantin, I would observe army personnel moving in and out of the local government offices, stationed in nearby villages, levelling roads, and building soccer fields. Despite the military's claims to be centered on community development, for members of the Chuj community, the military presence brought back memories of the violence and war and was read as connected to policies of surveillance and control.

In addition, while cultural and political rights remain an important part of their struggle, Maya people across the country have been engaged in more visible organizing forms, taking to the streets and engaging in protest actions to demand their rights to self-determination and engaging in political movements. Maya organizations are establishing new connections both across Maya *pueblos* (Vásquez, 2011)—of which the Pluri-national Government of the Q'anjob'al, Chuj, Akateko, Poptí y Mestiza Nations serves as powerful example—but also with indigenous movements engaged in resistances against similar processes in various national contexts (such as Ecuador, Bolivia, and the

United States) (Vogt, 2015). Doane (2005) argues that movements against megaprojects in Latin America look different than other movements and may not always be focused on challenging state structure, but work to "effect a transformation of the national/global economy by creating alternative spaces 'from below'" (p. 189). Bastos, Cumes, and Lemus (2011) further argue that the Maya movement continues to be strengthened at its margins, in the everyday lives of Maya people, even those who do not necessarily see themselves as part of the movement. Chuj youth's organizing work shows highlights the coming together of these movements through their resistances.

Yashar (2005) argues that youth generally make up the membership of second-generation movements that build off the path set by first-generation movements, but differ from them in their tactics and goals. Bastos et al. (2011) argue that Maya youth are adapting and changing Maya culture in ways that highlight its dynamic nature. In Xantin, this is particularly visible in the youth-led organizations (YLOs). Youth organizing is a relatively recent phenomenon in the Chuj community. Chuj youth started the first YLO, *Jóvenes Pácificos* (Peaceful Youth) in 2005, the same year the first high school in the Xantin opened its doors. This marked the first time Chuj young people were identifying themselves and engaging around the category of youth. One of the initial members and leaders of the group, Félix Eduardo, explained that *Jóvenes Pácificos* was formed by a national initiative that recognized peaceful municipalities across Guatemala, which were identified as those that had not had any murders or lynchings in the prior year. The group focused on a number of different issues, but their primary goal was bringing young people together and promoting Chuj histories and culture through theater. During this time *grupitos de mara*, or local youth "gangs" that would fight over neighborhoods, were a concern for the community. Félix Eduardo explained that the *grupitos* made it hard to bring many young people together, because they refused to be in the same place with members of other groups, but that once some group members got involved in *Jóvenes Pácificos,* they "forgot about their groups." *Jóvenes Pácificos* also emerged at a time when the discourse around

rights, particularly women's rights, became an important topic of conversation in the community. The organization won national and international prizes for their work with work around these issues and their theatrical performances and later movies they made about Chuj history and culture. Félix Eduardo explains that theater caught the attention of and motivated young people in the community and community leaders and elders also valued and recognized the importance of their work. While *Jóvenes Pácificos* dissolved in 2010 after many of the founders and leaders left Xantin for the United States or high education opportunities, it created a foundation for subsequent Chuj YLOs.

The emigration of youth leaders from *Jóvenes Pácificos* was connected to the large number of young people from Xantin who have emigrated to the United States, particularly in recent years. Most recently, this migration coincided with the recent (2014) increase in unaccompanied child migrants from Central America and regressive U.S. immigration policies (e.g., Partlow, 2014; Tuckman, 2014). Maya migration from Guatemala to the United States has its historic roots in the *Conflicto Armado* and genocide and has continued to the present day for sociopolitical and economic factors. Estimates suggest there are as many as 500,000 Maya immigrants living in the United States, mostly from the western highlands of Guatemala—the geographic region where Xantin is located (Brown & Odem, 2011). Anthropological studies of Maya transmigrant communities in the U.S. have explored how Maya foster transnational community identities, create spaces for cultural transformation and revitalization, and are connected to and affected by policies in all/both their 'home' communities (e.g. Fink, 2003; Popkin, 1999, 2005; LeBaron, 2012). A number of scholars have shown how Maya organizing has continued in migrant communities in the United States (Bastos et al., 2011; Fink, 2003; Popkin, 1999, 2005; Steigenga & Williams, 2009; Burns, 1993). Many Chuj youth and certified teachers have emigrated to the United States in search of economic opportunities, because they could not find formal employment in Xantin and/or to support theirs and their family's economic needs. This has led to many political, economic and social changes

within the community.

In 2010, the start of *Juventud Xantineca* marked the beginning of a new round of YLO formations that included the opening of the municipal youth office (MYO) in 2013 that brought together a number of different YLOs. As Chuj youth have become increasing involved in organizing work, they are engaging with the legacies of the Pan-Maya movement while creating their own pathways and spaces. Bringing together this increase in youth organizing together with recent issues with the current education policies explored in the section above, Chuj youth leaders developed a complex understanding of the current policies and processes as interconnected and based in the structures and histories of coloniality. Understanding the impact of these histories and processes requires a framework that centers the embedded nature of colonial power structures and their continued impact and shaping of the present. At the same time, Chuj young people are demanding the recognition of their visions of change. Decolonial feminist theories provide a framework for understanding how these come together.

Who are 'youth'?

Using a decolonial feminist framework, this research also builds on Youth Studies scholars who have studied the emergence and construction of youth[6] as a social category. These scholars argue that youth as a category is historically, culturally, and contextually specific and contingent (e.g., Popkewitz, 2012; Tait, 2012; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2015; Moran, 2000; Lesko, 2001; Lesko & Talburt, 2012). I draw on these arguments as well as the ways scholars have historicized and discussed the emergence and transformations of the category of youth to understand the unique ways Maya Chuj young people are making sense of and taking up the category of youth for themselves.

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[6] While there are arguably differences (see Kwon, 2013; Tait, 2012), I use the terms youth, young people, and adolescents interchangeably to reflect the overlapping ways scholars and participants use these terms. When citing people, I use the term(s) they do.

Historically, youth is a Western age construct that emerged as a social category at a time of increasing age-segregation in schools through the establishment of age-graded education systems, lower ages of puberty, and longer schooling periods for men, which delayed marriage (Moran, 2000). Hall (1904) is often credited with first developing a theory about the stage of adolescence that created the universal category of the adolescent (Moran, 2000). Hall (1904) situated adolescence as a period of transition within a linear development framework that closely mirrored evolutionary science models of development; he saw people as progressing through concrete phases connected to different biological traits and processes. Hall constructed the idea of adolescence as a transitional age category and a period "storm and stress" based on assumptions of biological changes in the adolescent body that have continued to shape dominant understandings and studies of adolescence to this day (Seaton, 2012; Moran, 2000; Lesko, 2001). This framework fixed adolescence as a transitional period between childhood and adulthood; young people were no longer seen as adults and able to do adult jobs, instead they were placed into an in-between phase of "continual becoming" (Lesko, 2001).

This construction of the universal adolescent was based on race, class, gender, geography, class, ability, etc. categories (e.g., Lesko, 2011; Meiners, 2012; Talbut & Lesko, 2012; Moran, 2000; Kwon, 2013). Lesko (2001) explains that, "Adolescence became the dividing line between rational, autonomous, and moral white bourgeois men, those civilized men who would continue the evolution of the race, and emotional, conforming, sentimental or mythical others, namely primitives, women and children" (p. 55). The stages of human development were built on notions of colonial time and modernization (Lesko, 2001). Processes of dividing up and othering people were connected to dominant theories of human development and evolution—which were connected through racialized assumptions and hierarchies. Lesko (2001) argues that childhood and adolescence need to be understood in the context of colonization, where the colonized were equated with

children and framed as "animal-like" and in need of evolutionary development. Lesko (2001) argues that the colonized, like youth, are fixed outside time and history, because they are both framed as lacking, "constantly becoming," and waiting for the future, for which they must develop to be included in it. Thus, the constructed primitivism of children and youth was important for "making the white, bourgeois self; that is, a mature, developed adult must become nonchildlike, nonprimitive" (Lesko, 2001, p. 34). In this way, adolescence became a site of anxiety about the embodied space between modernity and civilization and primitivism and degeneration.

While the categories of adolescence and youth were established through global notions of colonial difference (Lesko, 2001; Maira, 2012), they have been employed around the world as meaningful social and identity categories, particularly through the expansion of secondary education, global capitalism, and mass media (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2015; Rizvi, 2012). Maira (2012) argues that "youth" must be understood in connection to imperialism and global processes of domination, which continue to shape the lives and framings of youth globally. For example, around the world, youth has been made into a meaningful category for global capitalist expansion; youth are seen as a category of consumers to be targeted by corporations for products and marketing (Levenson, 2013a; Rizvi, 2012; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2015). Global youth culture and identities are shaped and imagined through the creation of a youth consumerist culture (Rizvi, 2012).

Youth are also connected to inter/national anxieties about citizenship-making; they are viewed as simultaneously out of control and vulnerable. Because of the biological assumptions about the bodily and behavioral changes attributed to youth, youth are viewed as in need of monitoring and management to ensure their development into "good" adults and citizens (Kwon, 2013). Many adult- and state-run programs for youth are meant to manage their behaviors and steer them away from risk and danger (Kwon, 2013). The framing of youth as constantly becoming translates into dominant citizenship frameworks viewing youth as citizens-in-the-making, and thus a meaningful

category for analyzing political processes and as targets for interventions to create "good" citizens (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2015). Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been central in promoting these efforts, especially in the context of neoliberal globalization and with states cutting programing and budgets (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2015). Because of framings of youth as potential dangers, youth are now targets of development initiatives, which are increasingly framed in terms of global and national security, particularly in the global South (Taft, 2011; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2015). International organizations, such as the World Bank and the United Nations, have increasingly developed programs and initiatives aimed at young people, whose development into "good" citizens is framed as important for national and international security (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2015; Sobe, 2012). Taft (2012) argues that these programs and frameworks, while claiming to focus on youth empowerment, imagine empowerment in ways that reinforce rather than challenge the status quo. A number of scholars have argued that these views of youth participation have been aimed at managing and containing youth and limiting more progressive and transformative forms of political engagement (e.g., Taft, 2012; Kwon, 2013). For example, Taft (2012) argues that programs for youth empowerment aimed at adolescent girls in the Global South are based notions about what empowerment rooted in dominant assumptions about the Third World woman as victim of her culture and localized patriarchies (see also, Mohanty, 1988; Moeller, 2014). Social movement and activist engagements are generally not included in these images of the empowered girl (Taft, 2012). These initiatives have helped solidify the framing of youth as both "at risk" and "the risk" (Burde, 2012, p. 300). These framings are particular apparent in the ways indigenous youth are depicted. Dhillon argues that scholars have "spilled much ink…reciting the crisis of disengagement and despair confronting indigenous youth" (2017, p. 39).

Dhillon (2017) calls for decolonizing Youth Studies by centering the insights of indigenous youth to expose the ways various colonial structures operate and intersect, which she argues would

lead to different questions about youth organizing. She states,

> While there is no shortage of government reports charting the challenges facing Indigenous youth within colonial state institutions, youth studies scholars and social policy makers have paid little attention to the ways the distinct political and material formation of settle colonialism has mediated the scope and frames through which we understand Indigenous youth…How might knowledge about the linkages between Indigenous dispossession and extractive processes compel Indigenous youth to self-mobilize in different ways? (pp. 241-242)

She argues that this relationship is currently "grossly under-theorized and largely unexplored" (p. 242) and contends that centering indigenous youth would bring about new understandings of the connections between capitalist accumulation, state apparatuses, and indigenous youth mobilization, because indigenous youth will be and are leaders in these struggles. Castañeda (2013) similarly points out how academic texts on youth and youth organizations in Guatemala have not addressed the ways racism affect the lives and organizing work of Maya youth. This research with Chuj youth attempts to take up the call to decolonize youth studies and address this silence.

Youth in Guatemala

Furthermore, dominant theories of youth, while global, are also taken up in context-specific ways and shift alongside changes in political and economic contexts (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2015). Thus, I draw on these understandings of the framings of youth and programming aimed at them and consider their application to the Guatemalan context. Guatemala and Xantin represent specific national and community contexts. While I will considered the history of Guatemala, Xantin, and Maya youth in the above sections, here I will provide a brief overview of the different ways the category of youth has been taken up and theorized in the Guatemalan context, because it provides an important framing for the work that follows. Levenson (2013a, 2013b) argues that the category of

La Juventud (Youth) in Guatemala was constructed through racialized colonial notions modernity. *La Juventud* in Guatemala was seen as important to the construction of the nation-state following independence and was constructed through race and class exclusions as "non-Maya, urban middle- and upper-class students;" rural and indigenous Maya children were not part of this category (p. 13). Levenson (2013a) explains that youth were seen as a future far from savagery and tied to modernity. With racialized constructions of indigenous peoples as fixed in the past, Maya young people were not seen as part of this youth-led national future. Throughout the 19th Century, *La Juventud* was positioned as both the key to modernity and the "solution to the so-called Indian Problem" (p. 13).

Today, current popular discourses position Guatemalan young people as a source of violence and danger. As Levenson (2013a) states, "for two hundred years a symbol of beautiful tomorrows, *La Juventud* has been turned upside down to signify the radically dangerous present, chaos and death, an obstacle to the future instead of its herald" (p. 2). The history of state violence and the silence around it have contributed to these anxieties and discourses, hiding the role of the state in creating the current structures of violence, and facilitating the argument that the state will protect the "good citizens" from the threats presented by young people. Levenson, Castañeda, Lemus, and Orantes (2013) argue that current youth in Guatemala have grown up in the shadows of war and political violence, which means that they are marked with a series of tensions and contradictions between change and entrenched social structures and opportunities and limits to the them. They state, "today, the dominant images of young people are ones of vulnerable, incomplete, not formed, risks, and at risk and as a result, they are defined as objects of intervention… Their time is always located in the future and they depend on others (the nation, work, the market, etc.)" (author's translation, Levenson et al, 2013, pp. x-xi). These framings are occurring simultaneously with an increased focus on interventions and programing (in and out of schools) on youth. They contend that it is important to understand the ways youth are making sense of and navigating both educational and

social/political spaces. In her exploration of the ways the *Conflicto Armado* is taught in schools, Bellino (2017) finds that, "Downplaying long-term consequences of the Conflicto Armado evokes a hierarchy of suffering between past and present, while transferring accountability from the state onto criminal youth" (Bellino, 2017, p. 6). Thus, the silences and institutional erasures of the memory of the violence has furthered a narrow framing of Guatemalan youth as a risk.

These research builds on this literate of youth studies and the ways the construction of youth as a category applies to the national context in Guatemala to understand the ways Chuj youth are making sense of, navigating, and (re)framing these constructions. While in the United States much of the literature on youth refers to young people in middle school and high school, globally youth is a much more age-expansive and fluid category. The United Nations defines youth as young people between the ages of 15 to 24, while the African Youth Charter defines youth as anyone between the ages of 15 and 35. This suggests that while youth as a category is a connected to age-time, it is also a flexible and leaves space for (re)negotiation. Youth was not traditionally part of Chuj understandings of age and time; the words for youth are often juxtaposed with the words for elders and in the Chuj language people transition from youth into elders; there is no separate category for adult. This means that Chuj young people are taking up the category and ascribing their own meanings to it drawing on both dominant framings and Chuj knowledges and notions of time. In this research, youth organizers ranged in age from 14 to 30, with most falling into the higher age ranges (young people in their 20s). Sometimes participants juxtaposed *jóvenes* (youth) with *adolecentes* (adolescents), who were seen as part of the younger age range for youth and used to refer to those who were still in middle school or high school (generally 12 to 16). Furthermore, most of those who self-identified as youth were also certified teachers. In taking up these categories and terms, this research also works to break down the borders between categories and challenge prevailing assumptions about what it means to engage and identity as youth.

Break Down of Chapters

Chapter Two, *A Border-Crossing Methodology*, lays out the border-crossing methodology developed through and used in this research. This chapter shows how border theories and decolonial feminism informed the research methodology and the movements of this research across national and social borders as I worked to lay bare the colonial/modern power structures Chuj youth were confronting and their various resistant (re)imaginings. The chapter includes a discussion of the different methods used, spaces where research was conducted, and the researcher positionality.

Chapter Three, *"We are youth. We have knowledge": The role of Chuj youth-led organizations,* moves to an analysis of Chuj youth-led organizations (YLOs). This chapter focuses on spaces Chuj youth created for and with themselves outside the realm of formal schooling to highlight the importance of these spaces for Chuj youth—specifically in fostering a sense of community, supporting youth's understanding of themselves as leaders, and engaging in learning that mattered to youth and their community. These values supported Chuj youth in advancing an understanding of coloniality from which they developed and engaged in a decolonial critique and resistance based in survivance[7] (Vizenor, 1999, 2008). I argue that through YLOs, Chuj youth engaged in decolonial resistance that was both overt and more subtle and aimed to disrupt the grounds on which colonial policies and processes stood. I show how the more subtle forms of resistance illuminated Lugones' (2003) and Cruz's (2011, 2016) concept of "resistance in tight spaces" and were central to Chuj youth's visions of change and informed their more direct resistant practices. Findings reveal that decolonial possibilities lie in these tight spaces at the same time the experiences of Chuj YLOs expose the messiness of engaging in decolonial resistance within a modern/colonial system.

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[7] Vizenor (2008) defines survivance as "an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name…renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry."

Chapter Four, *"We have gotten people to believe that youth should be the change": From YLOs to formal schooling,* extends the discussion from Chapter Three into formal schooling spaces to explore the possibilities of applying YLO frameworks and practices to formal schooling. This chapter centers the case of *B'eyb'al Komam Kicham* (The Path of Our Ancestors) Secondary School and the direct influence of youth organizing models on the school's organization, curriculum, and pedagogy. Drawing on the framework of decolonial feminism (Lugones, 2003, 2010), this chapter highlights the creativity of Chuj educators and youth in challenging the colonial histories and structures of formal schooling and developing possibilities for a more community- and indigenous youth-based model. At the same time, it exposes the challenges and tensions of working towards decolonial challenge within schools. This chapter argues that schools are central institutions in which coloniality is maintained, and as such the possibilities for decolonial change through formal schooling is limited. At the same time, it is important to disrupt the ways schools work to maintain and are structured through coloniality. The work of Chuj administrators, educators, and students shows the possibilities and urgency of engaging in creative disruptions of modern/colonial processes in schools.

Chapter Five, *"We are facing a great monster": Privatization of education, (re)militarization, and corporate extraction*, simultaneously centers school, community, and youth organizing spaces to examine how the histories and processes of (re)militarization and corporate extraction interact and shape education, migration processes, and youth's lives. Ultimately, I argue that Chuj youth were in many ways at the epicenter of these intersecting processes and structures that came together in their lives, threatened their futures, and informed their resistances. At the same time, Chuj youth both refused to be limited by these processes and histories in their imaginings of and efforts towards a future for themselves and their community. The findings presented in this chapter add important insights into the contours of modern colonial systems and processes as well as the possibilities for decoloniality and Chuj survivance.

The concluding chapter, brings together the findings from Chuj youths' organizing, educational, and resistant work to offer insights into the current moment. This chapter specifically engages the question, "What does it mean to work towards a decolonial future?"

Chapter 2: A Border-Crossing Methodology

Doing Research at the Borders

The methodologies centered in this research are informed by decolonial feminism and border theories. Borders hold an important theoretical and epistemological space in decolonial and Chicana feminist theories as sites of decolonial resistance and imaginings. Borders are not just physical, but also social, cultural, and epistemological.

Much of the decolonial theorizing on borders builds on Gloria Anzaldúa's work. For Anzaldúa (1987), borderland identities facilitate powerful ways of knowing and engaging with the world. The border is not just a place of "unnatural boundary," but also a place where different worlds merge to create something new. Anzaldúa (re)imagines the border as simultaneously a site of violence, contradiction, identity formation, and possibility. Anzaldúa (1993) explains, "The border is the locus of resistance, of rupture, of implosion and explosion, and of putting together the fragments and creating a new assemblage." Lugones (1992) argues that Anzaldúa's work shows the ways border space can be understood as "a theoretical space for resistance" (p. 31) and "the creation of a new value system through an uprooting of 'dualistic thinking'" (p. 35). Anzaldúa (1993) defines the borderlands as "the one spot on earth which contains all other places in it. All persons in it… are persons *del lugar*, local people—all of whom relate to the border and to *nepantla* in different ways." With all people coming together, the border space holds possibilities for solidarity, joint resistances, and the transformation of space and power relations.

The borderlands inform Anzaldúa's conceptualization of "*nepantla*," which is a term that comes from Nahuatl that refers to an "in between state" or a liminal physical and epistemological space where one is neither here nor there and pulled in different directions (Anzaldúa, 1987, 1994; Keating, 2006). It offers a space to see and critique dominant structures as well as engage in decolonial self-reflection that extends beyond dominant frameworks of marginality and inferiority

(Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2006). Thus, the *nepantla* space resembles a site of Du Bois' (1903) double consciousness, which makes visible power relations and the fictions of dominant epistemologies. Anzaldúa (2002) describes,

> Living between cultures results in 'seeing' double, first from the perspective of one culture, then from the perspective of another. Seeing from two or more perspectives simultaneously renders those cultures transparent… From the in between place of nepantla you see through the fiction of the monoculture (p. 548).

Anzaldúa explains that the *nepantla* space renders visible the historical and geographic context of racialization processes and is thus a space of transformative possibility and an important theoretical space (Keating, 2006).

Decolonial scholars argue that border thinking, or the knowledge that is produced at the intersections and borders of coloniality by subaltern peoples, holds the potential for decolonization. Mignolo (2000) discusses "border thinking" as a response to "colonial difference," the violence of colonial boundaries, and constructions of modernity (see also Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2006). This knowledge provides a critical reflection on our current system and holds the possibilities of decoloniality (Mignolo, 2000; Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2006). Mignolo sees border thinking as located at the intersection of "local histories" (unique sites of difference and resistance) and "global designs" (which seek "sameness" and the creation of hegemony) (p. 310). Mignolo and Tlostanova (2006) highlight the importance of border thinking as offering insights into how people resist and "deal with Western economic, political and epistemic expansion if they do not want to assimilate but choose to imagine a future that is their own invention and not the invention of the empires, hegemonic or subaltern" (p. 209). Thus, the possibilities of resistance and reimaginings at the borders are seen as important and powerful and provide a space for understanding and imagining another future. Because of this important theoretical space, I situated my own research at and across

various borders to make visible the structures and myths that sustain coloniality and to center the possibilities, knowledges, and resistances created and in and through border spaces.

At the same time, it is important to recognize the inherent contradictions and tensions within these border theories stemming from Chicana feminism. In Chicana feminism, *mestizaje,* or racial/cultural mixing, represents a site of possibility for Chicanxs living in the United States. The *mestiza* identity presents a constant crossing and navigating of borders that facilitates what Anzaldúa (1987) proposes as a "new mestiza consciousness," whose work it is "to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her prisoner and to show…how duality is transcended" (p. 102). For Anzaldúa, a *mestiza* consciousness (which Mignolo builds on in his definition of "border thinking") can facilitate powerful ways of knowing and engaging with the world and offers possibilities for critical solidarity among groups that challenge state frameworks and fixed borders. Thus, the concepts of *la mestiza* and *mestizaje* are framed as sources of empowerment and possibility for Chicanx communities and have often been taken up by Chicanx scholars as radical political tool of liberation. Yet, for indigenous peoples of the Americans, *mestizaje* is not part of their collective identity; and moreover, *mestizaje* has historically been a tool of delegitimation, domination, and genocide for indigenous communities across Latin America (Forte, 2013; Lawrence, 2013; Nelson, 1999; Hale, 2002, 2008). In recognizing the importance of border spaces, I find that it is necessary to consider these tensions and understand the roots of the theories I center here. In my research and methodology, I work to explore these border spaces as sites of critical possibility for indigenous transnational youth in a way that moves away from the centering of *mestizaje* and its genocidal history. In response to this, I developed my research methodologies in such a way that would situate them within and across borders and to center the border thinking of indigenous Maya Chuj youth.

Lugones (2010) argues that dialogue and communality are central for imagining something different and transcending the current system. Lugones (2010), posits a feminist border thinking that

challenges coloniality of gender frameworks and is not fractured, but rather concretely negotiated from within marginalized and colonized groups. To engage in this work, decolonial feminist scholars assert the importance of faithful witnessing as a framework for making visible coloniality of power and gender as well as decolonial resistances (Lugones, 2003; Figueroa, 2015; Smith, 1999; Cruz, 2011). Decolonial scholars see indigenous communities and spaces as important sites for border thinking and decolonial possibilities. These theoretical assumptions are the basis for my research design and methodologies and the ways I imagined engaging with research at/along/across borders. In addition, I feel like this points to the need for researchers employing these theories to center border spaces both in the research frameworks as well as the methodologies.

A decolonial and border-crossing framework is particularly relevant to the lives of Chuj youth, because Xantin is an indigenous Maya town and experienced as a border space. Geographically, Xantin is located on the Guatemala-Mexico border. Nationally, Xantin is seen a *lugar fronterizo* (a border place), both in terms of its proximity to the Mexican border and its geographic and political isolation and remoteness from the capital. Socially and spatially, many Xantinecos are living or have lived in the United States or Mexico. Chuj young people in particular are seen border crossers in the ways they move across national borders via migration and are connected across borders via social media. In addition, young people are learning to navigate dominant cultural, social, and political spaces as well as Chuj knowledges and cultural practices through formal schooling and technology. Thus, this research was situated at and across the borders where different spaces overlap, with young people who both cross and are situated at the borders on a daily basis. This border crossing methodology was conceived as a way to follow Chuj young people across the spaces and borders, both physical and conceptual, they cross on a daily basis and throughout their lives and explore the knowledge created in and through these spaces and movements. Most importantly, this framework helped illuminate the decolonial possibilities and resistances of indigenous youth.

Positionality: From the "Light Side" of the Modern/Colonial Gender System

In the conducting, analyzing, and writing of research, there is always an implicit "I." Who I am, where I am from, and my own personal commitments and understandings, shaped this research. This research stems out of and is made possible by a decade-long relationship with the Chuj community that includes a total of 4 years living in Xantin. This relationship began in 2008, when I taught at a joint middle school and teacher preparatory high school. Over the years, I have developed close relationships with teachers and students, lived with Chuj families, and have come to learn about and appreciate the depth of knowledges possessed by the community and young people in it.

These experiences and relationships inform my research process and commitments (see Allweiss, 2014); yet, as a white Jewish American woman and researcher connected to a university, I am from what Lugones (2003) calls the "light side of the colonial/modern gender system." As someone who has both benefitted from and been affected by the multiplicity of oppressive relations, I worked to engage in what Lugones (2003) terms "faithful witnessing," which seeks to disrupt the "grain of power." As Lugones (2003) explains, this type of "trespassing is very difficult... since there are a great many ways to entice one back to the road of collusion with power." To combat these enticements, I centered my relationships with youth, engaged in methods workshops with youth leaders to open the research process and space for them to have a say in the framework and questions asked in my research, and continued to engage in regular check-ins with youth leaders throughout the analysis processes.

Yet, these processes are always incomplete and power and colonial/imperialist histories and presents are embedded in and flow throughout this research process. For example, while part of my acceptance was based on my long-term relationships with the community, my access was deeply shaped by larger colonial power structures that privilege whiteness and Western knowledge. Youth

would talk about how my presence helped them look more "legitimate" when they would travel or go to meetings. And I observed how they would leverage and frame my position in different ways to support their work. For example, during a meeting with the new mayor, youth used my research as a reason for continuing the MYO; they told him that if he closed the youth office, I would not have anywhere to work. I stayed quiet, neither negating or affirming their argument. Later when I asked them about why they said that, they explained that it would be harder for the mayor to say no to me as a *gringa* researcher than it would be for him to say no to them as Chuj youth, who he regularly referred to as *patojos* (children).

Nelson (1999) discusses the way *gringa* researchers' position is created through and is contingent on border-crossing. Nelson (1999) states, "the term *gringo* necessitates a relationship with Latin America—a North American is not a gringo until she crosses a border… 'Gringo' is a category produced through interactions, and as such, it works on a variety of borders…" (p. 41). Because of this, she argues for a position of "fluidarity" that highlights and makes room for the shifting and relational nature of solidarity research by *gringa* researchers with Maya communities in Guatemala. I take up Nelson's call for fluidarity through Lugones' (1987) notion of "world-travelling." Lugones (1987), in imagining a decolonial solidarity, encourages women to be "world-travelers" to understand other people, women in particular, through their own eyes and the multiple worlds in which they move. She juxtaposes this position with "agonistic travelers," who come from colonial, white male constructions of travel that attempt to conquer rather than understand and embrace others' worlds (p. 16). Lugones explains that through the process of world-travelling one can understand the multiplicity of people's subjectivities and experiences,

> Through travelling to other people's 'worlds' we discover that there are 'worlds' in which those who are the victims of arrogant perception are really subjects, lively beings, resistors, constructors of visions even though in the mainstream construction they are animated only

> by the arrogant perceiver and are pliable, foldable, file-awayable, classifiable… [I]n recommending 'world'-travelling and identification through 'world'-travelling… I am suggesting disloyalty to arrogant perceivers, including the arrogant perceiver in ourselves, and to their constructions (2003, p. 18).

This process opens spaces to recognize the multiplicity of experiences with oppression and coloniality that extend beyond singular victim narratives to complex understandings of the multiplicity of "oppressing/being oppressed ←→resisting." This also means that as a researcher, I worked to pay attention to the ways in which my identity shifted in different spaces and resist dominant narratives and the lure of power.

I have written previously about my experiences with and views of relationship-centered research (Allweiss, 2014), but in centering the borders and decolonial feminism, I also developed an understanding my researcher position through Anzaldúa's concept of *"nos/otras"* (a play on the Spanish words for us and others) that seeks to challenge the boundaries and borders between constructions of us and them in creating unities that do not try to create sameness (Keating, 2006). Anzaldúa (1987) and Keating (2006) argue that challenging these borders disrupts artificial white-centered notions of gender solidarity often promoted in Western feminism and opens new spaces for loving and seeing with others. Youth expressed feeling a sense of genuine trust, care, and friendship with me that was deeply reciprocated. One day, as we stood outside on a balcony watching and waiting for the other members of the YLO to join us for a meeting and celebration, one of the youth participants turned to me and said, *"no sé como te agarré tanta confianza"*/ "I don't know how I came to trust you so much." I laughed and said probably through *bromas* (jokes) and we laughed, but he got serious and said that he really does trust and feel comfortable with me. Again, he repeated, "I don't know how…" Other youth expressed similar feelings. For some, it was about our years of friendship or what they had observed about the relationships I had in the community

and/or with other people they knew that shaped their trust with me. The leader of the Church group said that the youth felt comfortable with me because I knew how to laugh with them. For others, as a colleague explained to me, people felt comfortable because they knew I could understand and cared about the town, because I "always come back." He told me that people were proud because I understand "*el lenguaje de aquí*"/ "The language of here." When I responded that I am still working on my Chuj, he explained that it's not just the Chuj language, but the way I understand what people mean and how things work in Xantin.

Engaging in this type of work and maintaining trusting and caring relationships in the context of research, requires a commitment to challenging and pushing back against the false notion of the neutral researcher and observer. For me, engaging in this way, meant bringing my whole self into my research. Because of my longstanding relationships with members of the community, there were a number of ways I was enveloped into community life. I lived with a family, made the fire and breakfast each morning, was charged with watching the two-year-old on a number of occasions, sent on errands, welcomed to community events, invited to visit friends and their families, and pulled into the rhythm of life in Xantin. My research process and the narrative I weave here, reflect these theoretical and personal commitments to participants/friends/colleagues, going "against the grain of power," and being on the side of resistance (Lugones, 2003, p. 13). For me this has meant centering decolonial possibilities instead of continued stories of "damage" that flatten youth's and communities' diverse experiences and resistances. Keating (2006) writes of the notion of the *nepantlera,* who moves across different, and at times conflicting, worlds and ways of knowing with the goal of connecting different groups of people to "make possible new forms of community and new types of social action" to find change within the cracks (p. 6). My research seeks to align with this commitment to a fluid solidarity with the aims of understanding the possibilities for change that would disrupt the current flows of power, even and especially when that work is occurring in tight,

constrained spaces (Lugones, 2003; Cruz, 2011).

Research Design and Methods

I expanded on the border theories mentioned above by drawing on Hart's (2002) methodology of "relational comparison" to look at how the processes, policies, and categories under study were "formed in relation to one another and to a larger whole." Hart presents this framework as an alternative to comparative methodologies and to look at how various processes are mutually constituted (2002, 2018). Hart explains,

> Instead of comparing pre-existing objects, events, places, or identities...the focus of relational comparison is on how key processes are constituted in relation to one another through power-laden practices in the multiple, interconnected arenas of everyday life; and that 'clarifying these connections and mutual processes of constitution – as well as slippages, openings, and contradictions – helps to generate new understandings of the possibilities for social change' (2018, pp. 374-375).

With this framework, I explored "multiple trajectories" relationally (Hart, 2002, p. 14) through and across multiple spaces and borders. Bringing these frameworks together, I developed this study to look at Chuj young people move within and across multiple spaces and to analyze the multiple, interlocking modern/colonial processes that affect their lives.

Thus, I followed Chuj youth across different education and community spaces, including YLOs, schools, churches, NGOs, government offices, and migration spaces at local (Xantin), national (Guatemala), regional (Central America), and transnational (United States) levels. This border-crossing and "relational" methodology allowed me to follow Chuj young people across the spaces they traverse and better understand their lives and connections with various institutions, people, and policies. I conducted 18 months of full-time ethnographic fieldwork with Chuj youth and educators from October 2015 to April 2017 and drew on ethnographic and participatory

methods and epistemologies. Primary research methods for this project included participant observation, individual interviews, focus group discussions, document analysis (Willis & Trondman, 2000), and participatory methodological workshopping.

In Xantin, I engaged in participant observations of YLO meetings, activities, and events with six different YLOs, each with different social and institutional connections and political aims. The YLOs in which I engaged in participant observations included the Municipal Youth Office (MYO); *Juventud Xantineca* (Xantin Youth), a youth organization created in 2013 through young people's participation in a citizenship and political leadership program run by a national NGO that later solicited and started the MYO and was then pushed out of the MYO with the change of mayor in 2016 and continued to meet in an autonomous space; *Mujeres Jóvenes Chujes Organizadas* (Organized Chuj Young Women), a Chuj girls' group that was led by an adult ally and began as part of a grant through a Central American foundation focused on girls and women in the region; *Jóvenes Unidos* (Youth United), a youth organization that was started through meetings organized by ancestral Maya leaders that brought together youth from across the region; *Jóvenes Caminando con Dios* (Youth Walking with God) an Evangelical church youth group; and *Jóvenes Líderes de Xantin* (Xantin's Young Leaders), an autonomous youth organization that began through a collective of youth organizers and friends and became the first nationally recognized youth NGO in the community in 2016. The table below provides background information for each of these groups:

YLOs included	Description
MYO (Municipal Youth Office)	Youth office in local government. Started in 2013 by youth in *Juventud Xantineca.* Youth's advocacy convinced the mayor started the office as a project and the two youth coordinators elected by YLO participants shared a salary. While started by *Juventud Xantineca,* the office welcomed the integration of other YLOs and formed its own leadership board with representatives of the various YLOs. After the MYO's initial success, the youth were granted two official positions and salaries as a Youth Coordinator and a Youth Promoter. With the change of government 2016, the new mayor appointed his own Coordinator and Promotor and YLOs no longer had say in the personnel and running of the youth office.

Juventud Xantineca (Xantin Youth)	Started through a youth political leadership program run by a national organization starting in 2011. After the diploma program, youth continued to organize, formed this organization, and then worked to start the MYO. Members of this organization proposed, planned, and were granted the MYO. Later, in 2016, they were the group of youth that were pushed out of the MYO and continued to meet in an autonomous space along with *Jóvenes Unidos*. They stopped meeting in the middle of 2016, but members continued to talk about re-organizing to take-back the youth office in 2020.
Jóvenes Unidos (United Youth)	This YLO was created in partnership with Maya ancestral leaders and youth from the region in 2012. The group was formed after the founder, Lexo, participated in a youth meeting with Maya ancestral leaders. They later joined the MYO and were pushed out with *Juventud Xantineca*. By the middle of 2016, they had stopped meeting, but members talked about re-starting the group.
Mujeres Jóvenes Chujes Organizadas (Organized Chuj Young Women)	Chuj girls' group that received funding through a Central American foundation. The group was started by a youth ally and group leader, Ana, and her family. Her brothers saw a call for proposals for women's rights organizations through the Central American Foundation and helped Ana and the other young women write the proposal. They received funding from the Central American Foundation starting in 2012. The group focused on workshops around women's rights; for the first two years they received funding for workshops and trainings for themselves and in 2013 they started leading workshops for women in the town and villages. Representatives have also been invited to feminist camps in another Central American country. This is the only group included that is led by an adult ally.
Jóvenes Líderes de Xantin (Xantin's Young Leaders)	This YLO was started by a group of friends, some of whom had participated in other YLOs. They started in 2014 by organizing a Holy Week event and then continued to organizing different workshops and trainings. In 2015, they decided to organize more formally and in 2016 they applied for and were granted national recognition as an NGO. They met regularly two to three times a week on the evenings and weekends. All of their group members were professionals—teachers, lawyers, accountants—in various fields. During the time I was in Xantin, this group was the most active in anti-mining and -hydroelectric organizing and community leadership positions.
Jóvenes Caminando con Dios (Youth Walking with God)	An Evangelical church youth group. At first, the group was led by an adult church member, but now it is led and run by youth. The church itself is divided into four leadership committees: children, youth, men, and women. Each of these groups has a separate space and are in charge of organizing and preparing services on a rotating basis. This group is the youth contingent of the church. They met once-a-week for a youth service and also came together for special events, home visits, and activities.
* Jóvenes Pacíficos[8] (Peaceful Youth)	This YLO was the often mentioned as the first YLO in Xantin. It was started through a national Peaceful Communities initiative in 2005. This group was no longer active at the time of the research, but its members played roles in different active organizations and its history is important for understanding the genesis of the other organizations.

[8] Not included in observations.

Engaging with and moving across a diversity of YLOs with various social locations and relationships to formal education, religious, government, and development institutions allowed me to explore how Chuj youth's social and political positioning influenced the ways various policies affected them. I moved among YLOs with different access and proximity to power and social institutions to observe the diverse ways youth understood their organizing work and futures in relation to various institutions and policies. Observing different organizations' relationships to larger institutions and the various ways they imagined and engaged in resistance work from their diverse social and political locations, let me to focus on the complexity of the relationships between oppression and resistance outlined by Lugones (2003).

The number of hours spent with each organization depended on the times the organizations met. For example, as part of the municipal government, the MYO coordinators worked 7.5 hours a day every weekday, while other organizations met once or twice a week for a couple hours, and others met even less frequently. Some of these organizations had events that lasted full days or retreats that ran over multiple days, but normally they met fewer hours a week than the MYO. From October 2015 to February 2016 and April to December 2016, I spent about four to eight hours a day with MYO coordinators in the youth office. The other YLOs normally met on evenings and weekends; for example, *Jóvenes Líderes* met Tuesday and Thursday nights for two to four hours and some Sundays, *Jovenes Caminando con Dios* met every Saturday for two hours, while the other YLOs, *Jóvenes Unidos*, *Juventud Xantineca,* and *Mujeres Jóvenes Chujes Organizadas,* met more sporadically. Working with multiple YLOs meant that I was able to observe a diversity of organizational models and Chuj youth imaginaries. At the same time, it meant that there were times when I was unable to observe important events for one YLO when they conflicted with those of another. On these occasions when there were overlapping YLO events, I had to make decisions about which event to attend, which was not always easy and sometimes meant missing key moments for an organization;

however, even though I did not observe them firsthand, I generally learned about what happened during the events I missed through later conversations with YLO members.

My own position varied across the different organizations. I had initial discussions about the project and conversations about the form and content of the research with the youth of the *MYO, Juventud Xantineca,* and *Jóvenes Unidos*. These youth asked me to join them as an ally and group member. Youth in these organizations helped shape the initial research project through joint discussions and later participatory methods workshopping, where we had conversations about and explored different research methods and questions. My position in these organizations shifted regularly, similar to the ways Green (2014) discussions with Double Dutch Methodologies that centers the multiple and shifting nature of ethnographic work, especially participant observation, and calls for a careful and fluid consideration of the researcher's positionality at all points in the research process while recognizing that this is shifting, multiple, and situational.

I was situated in different ways within YLOs depending on the context and situation and across different YLOs. For example, with *Mujeres Jóvenes Chujes Organizadas* and *Jóvenes Caminiando con Dios,* with whom I was invited to participate in meetings and events, I was often more clearly positioned as an outsider and researcher. However, with the other organizations, there were times when I was asked to participate as a member of the organization in decision-making processes and other moments where I was asked to simply observe and listen. This became clear when, Roberta, a researcher from a Guatemalan university working on a thesis on community projects, joined *Jóvenes Líderes* as a researcher. Youth and I talked explicitly about the researcher position, they discussed their frustrations and concerns about her process in front of me, and at times consulted me about what research can and should be, simultaneously positioning me as part of the group and also outside the group as a researcher. Thus, as researchers who are working with communities, we are often moving back and forth simultaneously between and among different positions, which Green

(2014) compares to a game of double dutch requiring constant negotiations, renegotiations, and awareness.

At the same time, as Tuck and Yang (2014) point out, "observation itself is making an epistemological claim, rooted in the dynamics of gaze, space, and power" that relies on the researcher's knowledge and makes implicit claims about who has the knowledge to share (p. 815). Similarly, Smith (1999) raises important questions about the framing of research in indigenous communities and calls for researchers to seriously consider where and from/for whom the research questions arise. Participatory research epistemologies and methodologies have worked to challenge these assumptions about expert knowledge and researcher/subject dichotomies (Fine, 2008). Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) frameworks see youth's knowledge as legitimate and takes the epistemological stance that youth have knowledge about the contexts and issues that directly affect them (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009). Thus, throughout my research I centered YPAR epistemologies and drew on participatory methodologies in an effort to challenge traditional dichotomies and power dynamics in research. My research is based on the assumption that youth have valuable knowledge about the world around them. Methodologically, I engaged in participatory methods workshopping with the 2015 MYO*, Juventud Xantineca,* and *Jóvenes Unidos* as well as *Jóvenes Líderes*. During these workshops, youth and I discussed the possibilities of participatory research and worked on developing different research questions and shifting my initial questions. While we were moving towards a participatory design, the change in the local government left this process unfinished as youth struggled to find a stable place to meet and work. Through a series of conversations, we decided that ethnographic methods were the best for the given situation.

I also engaged in similar conversations with *Jóvenes Líderes*, who invited me into their organization as a temporary member. This meant having an active and participatory role in their meetings and in developing founding documents and project planning. With *Jóvenes Líderes*, I

facilitated conversations about the colonial histories of ethnographic research and we jointly explored both the tools used in ethnographic research and the questions that can and are asked, as well as ethnography's fraught roots and histories with indigenous communities (Smith, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Fine, 1994; Rosaldo, 1989). I discussed the tools of ethnography and explained how ethnographic studies were and are often used for imperialist aims of domination and economic expansion and attempts to bring the Other into the empire, while also solidifying the social and cultural distance between the colonizer and the Other (Said, 1978; Fanon, 1968). "Traditional" or "classic" ethnography has aimed for scientific "objectivity" in descriptions of the field (place of research) and the Other (the object of study) who was framed as "alien, foreign, and strange" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Such research starts with a problem and focuses on mining for knowledge and are deficit orientations that seek to pathologize, exotify and name the Other (Smith, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2012; Paris & Winn, 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2014b). I explained that I was working to approach this research in a different way that did not start from a problem, but rather a place of possibility or what Tuck (2009) calls desire-centered research. Afterwards, we talked about what it meant for me to engage in this type of research with them and the ways I could challenge these histories. Throughout my months with this organization, we engaged in regular discussions about the research process and questions. Youth leaders concluded that critical ethnographic tools were best suited for this project at the time of the research as they did not want to commit to engaging in a joint research project while they were still working to start their organization. Throughout our time together, we continued to have numerous discussions about the research process as well as different ways they could also employ the tools of ethnography to explore various questions that arose our meetings.

While partial in a number of ways, these workshops and conversations challenged the borders created through the traditionally fixed nature of the research process, where the researcher

develops questions that they explore in the ways they see fit. Engaging in these joint negotiations was challenging at times and required me to place my relationships with and commitments to these YLOs above my academic and research interests. At one point, MYO youth asked me to put the research on hold as we jointly considered where the research process would go. After the change in the local government, *Juventud Xantineca* was meeting less frequently; at times every other week. I proposed that I continue to observe and engage with the MYO to see the changes taking place there, but wanted the youth's approval, since my initial commitments were with them. Youth were not sure whether they were comfortable with me moving between both places, which they saw as at odds. At the same time, they were not sure if they were going to continue to meet and organize, because they felt disillusioned with the ways their voices were dismissed by the current mayor after all the hard work they put into creating and maintaining the MYO. For a month, from the end of April to the end of May 2016, I waited while youth made a decision and only attended their once-a-week meetings. As a researcher, this was a hard place to be, because I wanted to continue doing research and I felt like I was not being "productive;" I had a fellowship and felt like I was not doing what I had promised I would do. However, I drew on a framework of refusals (Tuck & Yang, 2014) to center the desires, insights, and demands of the youth with whom I was working. While these processes did not shift all the power inequities inherent in conducting this research as a white Jewish American middle class Ph.D. candidate, they did open spaces for multiple voices, including those of my participants to be included in the design and implementation of this research.

The understandings I gained during participant observations informed the questions I asked during interviews with youth and adult allies, which were also designed as spaces of joint meaning-making. Initial interview participants were chosen based on their involvement (leadership positions and/or consistent involvement) with YLOs. Snowball sampling and observations were used to identify subsequent interview participants, including those with various degrees of involvement with

YLOs and YLO members who were no longer active. The 84 interviews I conducted were all ethnographic in nature and semi-structured. Interviews lasted anywhere between 20 minutes to 2.5 hours depending on the amount of time the person had available and the nature of his/her responses. Interviews focused on how youth and allies described and imagined youth spaces; their individual experiences with the YLOs, the community, and education; and their articulations of individual visions for Chuj youth and their communities. I started each interview by asking a "grand tour" question about each participant's YLO experiences. These questions were followed up with "mini-tour" questions or "probes" (Spradley, 1979) (see Appendix for interview protocols). Interviews generally concluded with questions about participants' visions for Chuj youth and their community. The interviews were semi-structured, which allowed the interviewee and me to jointly navigate the questions and mirrored the flow of a normal conversation. Interviewees had space to respond to questions uninterrupted and seek clarifications. Across interviews, many participants pointed to *Jóvenes Pacíficos* as the starting point for all other YLOs in the region; thus, I also included interviews with youth from *Jóvenes Pacíficos* to better understand the history of youth organizing in Xantin and the ways Chuj young people were making sense of their identity and organizing work.

I also engaged in focus group discussions with YLO members during meetings to foster joint discussions amongst youth organizers about their organizations' visions, structures, and practices to hear how youth collectively imagined their work. Some of these discussions were more formal, while others were more informal. I also systematically tracked and collected news articles and organizing and policy documents (written by local, regional, and international organizations, and local and national government entities) related to youth and education. I used these documents to explore policies, official and popular discourses, youth's connections to current policies and processes, and youth's responses to and engagements with current events and policies.

In October 2016, I expanded my research to include three secondary school sites that were

creating youth spaces within the schools. Across YLOs, many of the youth organizers were also certified teachers and/or studying for their teacher certification. Because of this, the majority of the YLOs had explicit pedagogical focuses and thought a lot about the connections between their YLO and formal schooling. Youth participants often compared their experiences in the YLOs with their experiences in schools. Extending the research into schools allowed me to explore the connections and relationships between these spaces. In addition, I saw a number of youth organizers move from YLO work to formal employment in schools. This opened an even bigger opportunity for me to explore the borders between in-school and out-of-school spaces for youth and the connections between them. Schools also added an important dimension for more fully understanding the ways current policies and processes play out in the lives of youth, Chuj youth's resistances and visions for themselves and their community, and the educational possibilities of YLO work. The three schools in this study represented the three different types of secondary schools available in Xantin—public, semi-private/cooperative, and private religious.

In the dissertation, I center one school, *B'eyb'al Komam Kicham* (The Path of Our Ancestors) Secondary School, which was a semi-private middle school and high school where an administrator was using her prior experiences as a youth organizer to facilitate student involvement in the administration of the school, through the student government, and the community, through a project based curriculum. The second school, Xantin National Secondary School, was a public middle school, where teachers joined national protests against proposed national education cuts that would place the burden of paying for education on local parent boards. The third school, *Madre María de Jesús* (Mother Mary of Jesus) Parochial School was a private Catholic middle school in its first year of operation, so I was able to observe discussions between parents and teachers about the current needs of Chuj young people and the role of education in meeting those needs. See table below for an overview of the three schools:

Schools	Description
B'eyb'al Komam Kicham (The Path of our Ancestors) Cooperative Secondary School	Cooperative secondary school that included both middle school and high school, with various career tracks. In Guatemala, cooperative school means it is jointly financed by the local government, the national government, and student tuition. This school was one of the first high schools in the town and was started in 2004 in partnership with a U.S.-based NGO that continued to be involved in the school. The school was working on a project-based curriculum and promoting the voice of the student government. Classes met in the mornings.
Xantin National Secondary School	The only public middle school in Xantin. The school started in 2009 and received all its funding from the national governments, so students did not pay tuition. Classes met in the afternoons.
Madre María de Jesús (Mother Mary of Jesus) Parochial School	A Catholic middle school that began as an educational initiative of the priest in 2017. Teachers received a small stipend from students' tuition, but not a full salary. Classes met in the afternoon.

In all three schools, I observed meetings and classes and conducted interviews with student government leaders, teachers, parents, and administrators, which helped me understand how different school actors viewed the effects of various policies and processes on youth's lives and their struggles and visions for the future. Expanding to schools allowed me cross between the "borders" between so-called "formal" and "informal" educational spaces for youth and see the ways these boundaries can and are blurred through youth's lives and work. In much of the academic and educational literature, these spaces are considered separately, but moving across these spaces allowed me to see their overlaps as sites of possibility. At the same time, schools are a Western settler colonial tool and Bang (2018) argues that researchers engage in violence by centering schools in conversations of inclusion. By starting with YLOs, moving to schools, and centering the borders between these spaces, this research also works to decenter schools as the loci of change, while also recognizing for the possibility of disrupting colonial power dynamics maintained and supported through formal schooling.

Furthermore, from March to April 2016, I expanded to the transnational level with Chuj

migrant communities across the southern United States (Kentucky, Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia). I used the concepts of social networks and meshworks to move this research across national borders and center hybridized and diverse interconnections among people and groups to account for the centrality of place *and* translocal connections in the construction of community and youth organizing spaces (Escobar, 2004, 2008). Doing so allowed me to engage with Chuj young people in the many spaces in which they move and interact. As many young people emigrate to the United States and not only youth's bodies, but also conversations and ideas flow between these national borders. I used purposive sampling to select interview participants, who were certified teachers and/or youth organizers. I met with individuals in various communities across the Southern United States and interviewed 15 participants about their experiences with education, organizing, and migration. The findings from these discussions, raised provocative questions about education, development, and organizing in transnational indigenous contexts (Hannerz, 1996). The findings from this portion of the research are not centered in the analysis presented here, but offer important background information and insights into the Chuj transnational community and the movement of knowledge and organizing across physical borders.

By centering and moving across borders, this research project differs from traditional educational ethnographies that are bounded by a singular physical cite (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). In addition, it views borders beyond the ways transnational ethnography has seen borders as nationally based or within the juxtaposition of local and global (Hannerz, 1996), which often doesn't account for indigenous people's experiences of the nation-state and struggles for sovereignty beyond the nation-state. This research also challenges the borders placed within traditional educational ethnographies that are either based in one or more school site or, more recently, in one or more out of school contexts; rarely does research move between in- and out-of-school educational spaces (cf. Ventura, 2018), unless it centers individuals rather than spaces (e.g. Cammarota, 2008).

Centering the Tensions: Research, Analysis, and Representation

My personal and research commitments carry through to the stories that fill these pages and the stories that I leave out. Centering borders and drawing on decolonial feminist frameworks calls for a research, analysis, and writing process that is aware of and works to challenge colonial power relations; in particular those perpetuated through academic and school knowledge structures. Here, I attempt to highlight some of the ways these systems created tensions in and permeate this text from the research to the analysis and writing.

Despite my efforts to engage in a fluidarity research process based on genuine relationships of care, colonial imperialist difference remained embedded in my position vis-à-vis the community and played out in a number of ways. While conducting research, these tensions were very apparent in the *chismes* (gossip) that ran through the town. Like many small towns, *chisme*, is an important part of community life. Youth were constantly worried about and navigating rumors about themselves and their organizations. Rumors and truth were often blurred with rumors often having power to shape the ways people interacted with one another and were perceived. As a visible outsider, but also someone known in the community, I was often caught up in the gossip connected with my identities as a white woman, my relationship with the YLOs, and my lack of clear employment that would help people make sense of my continued presence in the town. Unlike many other Maya communities in Guatemala, Xantin has not had a long history of outside researchers studying and mining the Chuj for information. Most of the foreigners (of whom there were not many), who came to Xantin were either connected to schools as teachers (as I had been initially) or engaged in volunteer or non-profit work. Thus, people had a lot of questions about my job. When I would respond that I was doing research as part of my studies, they would ask who was paying me. I would generally explain that I had a fellowship that supported my work, but this did not often provide a clear enough answer for where to place me. There were rumors that I was working for the municipal

government and some, who didn't know me, worried that I was working for the mining company. Otherwise, as a white American adult, I was often understood to be "helping" or supervising the YLOs. When the youth office changed, there was confusion about different office supplies that the youth had and those that had been registered in the official documents. This became an issue as the youth handed over the MYO and everything in it. As he was walking out, one of the new municipal leaders asked me why I didn't supervise them better and that if I was really working with the youth, I should have guided them better. I tried explaining that that was not what I was there to do, nor was that my role, but I was often understood and positioned in such a way by outside adults. As my research moved into schools and I helped with school events and classes as part of my research process, this move seemed to ease people's questions about my place in the community.

Furthermore, working in the mayor's office brought up tensions around other aspects of my identity, particularly as a white American woman. These parts of my identity both facilitated access in raced and gendered ways and were also centered deeply uncomfortable situations. For example, after youth gave presentation at a town meeting, I went up with the youth to thank the municipal leaders for their time. After the youth said their thank-you's and as we were turning to leave, a male town leader grabbed my hand, kissed it loudly, and shouted "*yulwalyos t'ay hach canche!*"/ "Thank you, *canche* (term for white/pale person)." People in the room burst out laughing and I left embarrassed and uncomfortable. To reassure me, one of the youth whispered under her breathe, "*mujeriego*"/ "womanizer." At another point, early in the research process, I was accused of being another leader's *amante* (mistress), because I spent so much time in the municipal office. The leader's wife told people that she knew I had to be his *amante*, because American women are easy like that. Female youth colleagues empathized with my experience, as many had had similar experiences; yet, the rumors became a central concern in how I navigated social spaces. Rumors shifted and took different shapes. Months after the rumors began about my relationship with the town leader, I was

sitting around the *poyo* over dinner at a friend's house, when a friend of her father-in-law came in and started asking questions about me, stating matter-of-factly that he had heard that I was not in town for research like I said, but rather to find a husband. While my friend's family explained to the man that this was not true, these rumors permeated the research process.

Chismes tied to my perceived identities had multiple effects on my work as I had to be conscious of them when I navigated different spaces and engaged in conversations with different people. After a dear friend of mine traveled to the United States on a tourist visa, a rumor circulated that I worked for immigration and could get people visas to the United States. People began to say that was the only reason the family I was living with wanted me there, which made the family I was living with uncomfortable and they felt concerned about how that made them look. One of the women in the house took me aside and told me I needed to fix it. On another occasion, new MYO leaders claimed that that I was a spy for the original MYO youth and that was why I wanted to work with them. These *chismes* were tied to my identities and had clear implications for my work and access, but I was not always aware of how and what stories circulated often until they were brought up in other contexts. These experiences highlight how the research self is enmeshed in the research process and the ways that reflexivity is important in maintaining research commitments and challenging the ways power operates, as well as the ways that that process is messy and incomplete.

In addition, youth found creative ways to frame and make sense of my research. Malxun, a youth coordinator and educator, told her colleagues proudly that I was her *practicante* (intern), which framed me as working for her. On another occasion, a youth referred to my note-taking as a researcher, when he called me to bring me tamales for Christmas. When I told him that I loved tamales and that I was hoping to learn how to make them by memorizing the steps, he responded, "It's better if you take notes in your notebook, since you like to take notes." For him, I was always writing in my journal, because that is what I loved to do. These framings helped me understand the

diverse ways youth were making sense of my position. However, there were times when youth's understandings of my work conflicted with my own understandings research and consent. When I first met with the *Jóvenes Caminando con Dios* and requested permission to observe their group as part of my research process, the youth leader quickly responded that it was not for him or anyone else there to say, because God had clearly brought me to them and they were in no position to go against God. As a non-religious person, this made me a little uncomfortable, but I did not contradict this understanding and instead made sure to continuously ask for individual consent.

In the schools, my position was more widely accepted. In two of the schools, I helped with English classes as part of the reciprocal research process, while another school had a history of white American and European teachers working with the school. In addition, many of the teachers and administrators had engaged in research for their thesis projects and thus had an understanding of the research and writing process. This opened spaces for us to have in-depth discussions about the research process and findings. At the same time, all of the research teachers had engaged in for their university classes were problem-based (i.e. it required identifying a "problem" in their school and/or community, exploring it, and engaging in work to combat it); thus, they often understood my work in the same way and would ask questions about the problems I was seeing. I worked to explain that my research framing was different, but there was still some anxiety about the problems I might uncover and write about.

Youth and educators also saw an advantage in me filtering their work through my lens and presenting it to English-speaking audiences. They often would say, "tell them we said this…" or "tell them we are doing that." There are tensions with this being filtered through my voice that highlight the way colonial power structures continue to operate. At the same time, I also hope that honor the desires of the Maya young people with whom I worked in adding their voices to spaces that have historically marginalized, ignored, and silenced their contributions. To do so honestly, requires a

serious consideration of the space of borders and the flows of power within and across them. There are real tensions with me engaging in and writing about the decolonial work of Chuj youth as a white American woman who has benefited from the various structures I am setting about here to critique. There are also a number of concerns about the writing and portrayal of this work from my position, like being sure not creating an othering distance while also not creating a false sense of solidarity that does not acknowledges my implicatedness.

In a partial effort to combat these tensions, have made decisions alongside youth coulleagues about what stories to tell and what stories are not for a Western academic audience throughout the analysis and writing. Tuck and Yang (2014a, 2014b) call for communities and researchers to use a framework of refusal within their research and analysis. They explain,

> [A]nalytic practices of refusal provide ways to negotiate how we as social science researchers can learn from experiences of dispossessed peoples—often painful, but also wise, full of desire and dissent—without serving up pain stories on a silver platter for the settler colonial academy, which hungers so ravenously for them. Analytic practices of refusal involve an active resistance to trading pain and humiliation… (2014b, p. 812).

Their notion of refusals map onto the decolonial feminist focus on resistances and the recognition that oppression is not a singular experience. Thus, embedded in my analysis and the stories shared within this dissertation are a great number of refusals. These refusals are based on Tuck and Yang's (2014b) assertions that "'objectivity' is code for power" (p. 812) and "there are some forms of knowledge that the academy doesn't deserve… There are stories and experiences that already have their own place, and placing them in the academy is removal, not respect" (p. 813). Thus, there are stories that are not told, because they do not need to be told in this space. While there are a number of questions about whether or not the academy deserves insight into the knowledges and resistances of Chuj youth and tensions with my ability to tell these stories, I believe Chuj youth's resistant

insights serve to destabilize the assumptions and colonial power structures that affect Chuj and other indigenous communities and their perpetuation through academic knowledge. Thus, I see this is as an important decolonial intervention.

Another issue I found throughout the research, analysis, and writing was the use of language. As decolonial scholars have argued, language is laden with power and ways of seeing the world (Mignolo, 2000; Wa Thiong'o, 1986). The language of meetings and conversations often varied. Depending on the audience and participants, meetings were conducted in Spanish, Chuj, or a combination of both. At first many of the YLOs were conscience of my presence and would suggest conducting their meetings in Spanish, but as soon as they saw my understanding of Chuj and grew accustom to my presence, they would conduct their meetings mostly in Chuj. Having a working understanding of both languages helped me understand youth's conversations as they switched fluidly between both languages. Questions emerging from these observations were explored during interviews. However, the predominant language used in the interviews was Spanish, the language imposed on the Chuj by the colonizers and one that continues to represent domination and power in Guatemalan society, because my proficiency in Chuj limited my ability to engage in complex discussions with youth about their visions and experiences. This is one of my greatest regrets and created a source of tension between my commitments to engaging in decolonial research and my use of a colonizing language in our research discussions. These issues were further complicated with my own epistemological and language base in English and through the process of translation into English for the purpose of this writing. It is important to consider the multiple voices and interpretations that take place through these translations between and among languages. The retelling and interpretation of these stories in English risks distorting, re-appropriating and reconfiguring individual and historical accounts in a way that separates them from their cultural historical locations and knowledges. However, I believe that the voices presented here offer

important insights into decolonial possibilities and resistance. I attempt to keep the integrity of individuals' voices and make visible the interpretive process and multiple voices involved in translation by writing direct quotes both in the original language and including my English interpretation side-by-side. I do this to make visible the interpretation process and allow space for the reader to raise questions about the analysis through language.

Overall, drawing on decolonial feminist frameworks and border theories, the methodology used in this research moved across spaces through a multisited and movement-based framework to illuminate the knowledges created by indigenous Chuj youth as they moved within and across borders. This framework supported the centering of youth's desires, resistances, and decolonial knowledges to push the discussion presented in this dissertation away from damage-centered frameworks (Tuck, 2009) to one of possibilities, change, and the challenging of entrenched colonial power structures. I believe that such a process exposes entrenched power structures and relations as well as the possibilities of decolonial change that are often remain hidden in other forms of research. As discussed in this chapter, this research and analysis process requires a political stance and is necessarily not neutral; it sides with resistance and challenges to "the grain of power" (Lugones, 2003). These movements and stances will be apparent throughout the discussion that follows.

Chapter 3: "We are Youth. We have Knowledge": The Roles of Chuj Youth-Led Organizations

During my first few months of research, I asked Antonia, a youth organizer with more than a decade of experience with youth-led organizations (YLOs), how she would answer the question "Why Chuj youth?" Her response has stayed with me and captures the complexity of Chuj youth's position and organizing work.

[N]osotros, los jóvenes, estamos en un lugar important para poder apoyar a la comunidad… Porque muchas veces también las instituciones siempre quieren aprovechar de nuestra adulta. ¿De por qué? Porque no saben leer, ni escribir. O del porque, por ejemplo, muchas veces hay personas que no saben ni hablar el español o no entienden, pero cuando los jóvenes ya estudiamos y preparamos, ya entendemos la mayor parte, como es que nosotros nos vamos a preparar para enfrentar esa situación y como hay que darle a conocer a nuestra gente esa información. Ya no sólo me tengo que organizar por cuestiones o problemas del instituto, del establecimiento sino hay problemas mas grandes que están sucediendo en el municipio. Por ejemplo … estuvimos insistiendo en el problema de la hidroelectrica,	[W]e, the youth, are in an important position to be able to support the community…Because many times institutions have always wanted to take advantage of our adults. Why? Because they don't know how to read or write. Or because, for example, many times there are people that don't know how to speak Spanish or don't understand, but when youth study and prepare ourselves, we understand most of what is going on, how we are going to prepare to confront that situation and how to make our people understand the information. I do not only need to organize around questions or problems of my school, but rather there are bigger problems that are happening in our municipality. For example… we were organizing around the problem of the hydroelectric plant, and of mining; they had a

> *de la minería; se hizo una consulta comunitaria… y no respetaron esas consultas… Porque muchas veces las instituciones de la población… Entonces hay que ver eso y como nosotros los jóvenes podemos enfrentar esa situación…Al preparanos, en este caso, prácticamente tenemos que tener pasos legales donde sostentarnos como resolverlo y a que instituciones hay que ir a hacer las denuncias…*

> community referendum… and they didn't respect the community's decision… Because many times institutions take advantage of our people…So, we have to look at that and see how we as youth can confront that situation… To prepare ourselves, in this case, practically, we have to have legal steps where we can base ourselves in to resolve this problem and the institutions we can go to in order to make our complaints…

Antonia's words highlight the ways many Chuj YLOs saw the importance of their work in bringing about decolonial change on multiple fronts for and with their community. As Antonia stresses, Chuj youth could not afford to focus on a single issue, but rather had to be ready to confront multiple issues at once and on multiple fronts, because of their important social location and their ability to navigate dominant power structures and knowledges. Chuj youth organizers developed a vision of themselves as agents of change. By bringing together the knowledges and commitments they developed through their organizations, they worked to repurpose the colonial knowledges they received through formal schooling to support their community's calls for decolonial resistance and change by learning to understand and navigate state institutions and policies. As Dhillon (2017) reminds us, indigenous youth are confronted with the constant struggle against occupation and "efforts to keep colonization alive" (p. 50). Because such efforts take many forms, youth felt that they had to be in a constant state of readiness. This readiness translated into multiple forms of resistance or "refusals," not all of which "make for flashy headlines" (Dhillon, 2017, p. 50), but all of which exposed the modern/colonial gender systems and possibilities for rupturing them.

This chapter centers Chuj youth-led organizations (YLOs) to highlight the importance of YLO spaces for Chuj youth and their community as well as their insights into the possibilities of decolonial resistance and transformation. First, I describe the importance of these spaces for Chuj youth—specifically in creating a community, supporting youth's understanding of themselves as leaders, and providing learning opportunities on issues that mattered to youth and their community. All of these aspects supported Chuj youth in advancing an understanding of coloniality from which they developed and engaged in a decolonial critique and resistance based in survivance (Vizenor, 1999). I ultimately argue that for Chuj youth, decolonial resistance took overt as well as more subtle forms that aimed to disrupt the grounds on which colonial policies and processes stood—this can be seen Antonia's notion of always being ready. I contend that the more subtle forms of resistance illuminate Lugones' (2003) and Cruz's (2011, 2016) concept of "resistance in tight spaces" and were central to youth's overall vision of change and intersected with their more direct resistant practices. Chuj youth's efforts within the YLOs reveal that decolonial possibilities lie in these tight spaces at the same time their experiences expose the messiness of engaging in decolonial resistance within a modern/colonial system. The insights presented in this chapter contribute to the fields of youth studies and youth organizing by showing the importance and urgency of centering coloniality in understandings of resistance and organizing efforts.

Community-Based Education and Youth Organizing

The findings presented in this chapter are informed by and build on the literature on positive youth development, youth organizing, and community-based educational spaces, which are three overlapping fields in education and youth studies.

Positive youth development serves a foundation for the literature on youth organizing and community-based education. Emerging in 1980s and 1990s, positive youth development frameworks shifted dominant understandings of youth as in need of "fixing" and "reform" and passive receptors

of policies and interventions to recognizing youth as agentic and as assets, who can make contributions to their communities as actors and leaders (e.g., Hosang, 2003; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; O'Donoghue, Kirshner & McLaughlin, 2002; Villarruel, Perkins, Borden & Keith, 2003). Instead of focusing on the shortcomings and problems of youth and adolescents, positive youth development models attempted to shift the focus to the strengths and assets of youth (Pittman & Fleming, 1991; Kwon, 2013). Positive youth development frameworks opened space for youth's political engagements and recognition and influenced policies and programs for youth around the world (Delgado & Staples, 2008). However, a primary critique of positive youth development is that the model itself does not challenge the social structures and inequalities that affect the lives of young people (Ginwright and Cammarota, 2002).

Youth organizing frameworks attempt to address this issue by linking positive youth development frameworks with larger structural critiques and social action. Since the field finds its roots in youth engagements in social movements and community organizing (HoSang, 2003; Delgado & Staples, 2008), youth organizing scholars stress the importance of a social justice focus and the goal of social transformation in youth organizing work (e.g., Ginwright & James, 2002). At the same time, because much of the scholarship on youth organizing is situated in education, scholars draw on positive youth development frameworks to argue that youth organizing contributes to youth's learning, sense of self, feelings of belonging, civic identities and participation, leadership development, and sociopolitical consciousness (e.g., Ginwright, 2003; Warren, Mira & Nikundiwe, 2008; Ginwright & James, 2002). Delgado and Staples (2008) define the goals of youth organizing as the transformation of "youth and their communities through an emphasis on knowledge and awareness, community and collective identity, and a creation of a shared vision" (p.18). And according to Youth Action (1998), youth organizing entails "direct action" against issues important to youth and their communities and "seeks to alter power relations, creates meaningful institutional

change, and develops leaders" (p. 13).

Community-based education[9] spaces are often framed as the sites where youth can engage in critical learning outside the deeply regulated spaces of formal schooling. Scholars recognize that schools can be oppressive spaces, particularly for marginalized youth, and argue that organizing spaces can provide youth with more identity-affirming spaces and opportunities to learn about and critically engage with the structures and institutions that affect their lives (e.g., Torre & Fine, 2008; Tuck, 2009; Kirshner, 2009; Warren et al., 2008; Baldridge et al, 2017). Scholars argue that community-based educational spaces are important because they de-center schooling and often have much more flexibility and freedom from state surveillance and interventions than schools (Baldridge, 2014; Kwon, 2013; Kirshner, 2015). In their review of the literature on community-based educational spaces, Baldridge, Beck, Medina, and Reeves (2017) show that community-based educational spaces have been able to create opportunities for young people to interrogate and challenge inequities in their communities, push back against deficit-based discourses about themselves and their communities, and offer more humanizing and healing spaces for youth, at the same time they can also be implicated in reinforcing and reproducing inequalities. Highlighting both the tensions and possibilities of these spaces, the authors state, community-based educational spaces "are situated in a dialectical space, responding to the ravages of neoliberalism on youth and schools while also being structured and influenced by neoliberalism" (p. 385). Thus, it is important to understand the ways that community-based educational spaces are both creating spaces of possibility for, with, and by marginalized youth, while operating within an oppressive system. I extended Baldridge et al's (2017) argument of the dialectical space to focus the lens on the role of coloniality in and through these spaces. Much of the research on youth organizing and community based

[9] The literature generally defines community-based educational spaces as afterschool programs, youth-based organizations, out-of-school education programs, and community-based youth programs.

education have not centered a critique of coloniality or the visions and experiences of indigenous youth (Dhillon, 2017); therefore, this research seeks to fill this void.

Drawing on the scholarship of youth organizing and community-based educational spaces (e.g., Brown & Rodriguez, 2009; Fine, 2008, Baldridge et al, 2017), this chapter is based on the belief that Chuj youth have important knowledge and insights into policies and practices that affect their lives and the possibilities for bringing about decolonial change. Taft (2011) argues that youth organizing in Latin America must be understood within the region's legacy of social movements. Similarly, Chuj young people saw themselves as responding to the needs of their community, while also connecting to larger indigenous social and organizing networks, particularly the legacy of the Maya Movement and centuries of Chuj resistance to coloniality. Bastos, Cumes, and Lemus (2007) that most recently the Maya movement in Guatemala has been strengthened at its margins, in the everyday lives of Maya people; the efforts and insights of Chuj YLOs show how Maya youth are moving to the center of this organizing and resistance work.

One of the challenges that many youth and community-based organizations face is the way youth are framed in popular and political discourses, where they are seen as either a risk or at risk (Burde, 2012). Because of these discourses, some youth and communities are framed by those in power as "dangerous" and/or "out of control" and are responded to with restrictive policies and frameworks of control; these responses are generally based on race, gender, class, geography, language, etc. (Kwon, 2013). These framings are particularly apparent in the ways indigenous youth are framed and work to hide the continued role of the colonial state in indigenous youth's lives (Dhillon, 2017). Indigenous organizations find themselves in a particularly liminal space in the context of the colonial government. Building on this scholarship, this chapter shows the ways Chuj YLOs were confronted by and contended with these competing visions and discourses and "honor[s] the complexity and contradictions of these spaces" (Baldridge et al, 2017, p. 385) as Chuj

youth seek to disrupt colonial power structures, while also working within them.

Chuj YLOs as Spaces of Community, Leadership, and Change

I begin by laying out the important space YLOs provided for Chuj youth. Across interviews with Chuj youth participants, young people focused on three main aspects of their experiences and work with the YLOs that they found most valuable: the sense of community, their own personal growth and leadership development, and their meaningful learning and education experiences. In this section, I present each of these aspects of YLO youth's experiences to then show the types of understandings and work these spaces made possible.

"We are free, we are a team": Building community

Across interviews, youth stressed the importance of the sense of community fostered through all of the YLOs centered in this research. Ventura (2017) shows how the sense of community fostered through youth organizations serves as the foundation for youth organizing work. She argues that this foundational community-building deserves greater attention in order to understand how youth organizations are framed and understood by youth themselves. She also argues that youth-led, as opposed to adult-led, spaces create greater possibilities for a deep sense of community to be fostered. This section builds on Ventura's (2017) findings to show the ways Chuj youth discussed the value they saw in creating a strong community within their YLOs and how that community contributed to their understandings of themselves as youth, educators, and community leaders as well as their organizing work.

The sense of community was both a factor for why Chuj youth joined the YLOs and why they continued to participate. In interviews, many youth talked about how they joined the organizations because they were looking for the sense of friendship and community the YLOs offered. Alonza, a youth leader and educator, explained that one of the reasons she began participating in the youth organizations was *"sobre todo conocer a varias personas. Tener amigos. Y eso fue lo*

que me motivó." / "above everything, to get to know various people. To make friends. That was what motivated me." Once in the organizations, many talked about how they became like family or a community. Youth talked about feeling respected by other members of the YLOs and that made them feel safer and more welcomed in the YLOs than in schools or other spaces in their town. Alonza regularly talked about how she saw many youth, who had difficulties in their personal lives, turned to the youth organizations in a similar way they would turn to family, because it was a space where they felt supported and valued.

Similarly, Pascual, one of the youth leaders in the church group, *Jóvenes Caminando con Dios* (JCD, Youth Walking with God), explained that relationships in the YLOs were more humanizing than others, "*Es diferente que un grupo en la calle... ahí los amigos me llaman como animal, como no valíamos para nada. Y cuando llego con el grupo [JCD] siempre dicen, '¿cómo estás hermano?'"*/ "It's different from any other group on the street... there, friends treat me like an animal, like we aren't worth anything. And when I go to the group [JCD] they always tell me, 'how are you brother?'" Another member of JCD talked about how it was a space for youth to come together and talk about their problems, share their concerns, and learn how to resolve them. At the end of meetings, youth group members would always walk one another home, particularly those who lived far away to make sure they got there safely and would feel supported and welcomed.

Youth were intentional about creating this familial community space and making it different from formal schooling spaces. The literature shows that when community-based spaces are structured differently from schools and engage in more humanizing practices, these spaces are seen positively by youth (Baldridge et al, 2017). One of the youth participating in the MYO, Javier, explained how he saw this difference,

Javier: *En la organización hay jóvenes de diferentes instituciones y ahí se juntan y*	**Javier:** In the organization, there are youth from different schools and they come together

comparten y se conocen, porque desde un principio estamos inseguros, no nos conocemos, pero después nos conocimos…En los centros educativos, son antisociales tal vez. Cuando sale al receso… en cada salón solo hay como dos amigos y son los únicos que salen… Ahora en las organizaciones, ellos tienen la valentía de hablar con los jóvenes, de compartir lo que realmente quieren.	and share and they get to know each other, because in the beginning we are all insecure, we don't know each other, but afterwards we got to know each other...In schools, people are antisocial. When you go out for recess... in each class there are maybe two friends and they are the only ones that go out with you... But in the organizations, they are brave enough to talk to other youth and share what they really want.
Alex: *¿Por qué pasa así en las organizaciones y no en las clases?*	**Alex:** Why is this the case in the organizations and not in the classes?
Javier: *Tal vez porque las organizaciones están con diferentes jóvenes de diferentes lugares y porque somos corazones distintos, entonces tenemos la oportunidad compartir eso porque somos como un salón de clase pero un salón de clase que quiere conocerse….En las organizaciones somos libres, somos un equipo y nos permiten compartir las ideas.*	**Javier:** Maybe because in the organizations there are youth from different places and because we are distinct hearts, so we have the chance to share that, because we are like a classroom, but like a classroom where people want to get to know one another…In the organizations we are free, we are a team, and we are permitted to share our ideas.

Here, Javier, highlighted the ways the practices YLOs engaged in differed from those used in formal schooling spaces and worked to create what felt to him like a team. This discussion illustrates the sense of support and care many youth felt in the community created through the YLOs and the ways that sense of community provided them with a space where they felt comfortable bringing their true selves and engaging in challenging issues. Malxun, a youth leader and school administrator

explained that because the youth participants wanted to be in the YLOs and were not obligated to attend, youth who participated were invested in getting to know one another and creating a developing strong relationships.

Jóvenes Líderes was different than the other YLOs, because the sense of community was not created after youth became involved in the organization, instead the organization was created through community and friendship. A group of friends started the YLO as a formal space to engage in their shared visions for their community and often discussed when hanging out. Youth joked that *Jóvenes Líderes* was created over drinks at a bar. At the same time, they regularly talked about how *Jóvenes Líderes*' roots in their years of friendship was a strength and asset for their organization, because all of the members knew they could trust and rely on one another and hold one another accountable. In this sense, community was the very foundation on which the organization was built.

Yet, across YLOs the sense of community built by and strengthened through youth's participation was not always neat and there were times when tensions arose among group members; sometimes personal conflicts and disagreements affected their interactions in organization meetings. These tensions at times also affected youth's participation in the organizations; sometimes youth would stop attending meetings to avoid conflict or the conflicts would shape the trajectory of the meetings. For example, *Jóvenes Líderes,* had disagreements about which local and regional organizations they should partner with in the struggle against the hydroelectric company. This created tensions within meetings as sometimes they would cite a group member's involvement with a certain organization as a reason to question their suggestions and/or commitments to the group. There were also different moments when members of the YLO would not come to meetings and when I later asked them about it, they pointed to a disagreement they had with another member of the YLO. Yet, generally the commitment to community also meant that YLO members were willing and able to address and confront these tensions. *Jóvenes Líderes* had regular discussions about what

they saw as issues of member involvement and participation in meetings; they talked about whose voices were heard and whose were not and worked to address these issues both through their practices within the group and through official organizing documents. Other groups had regular check-ins with their members to ask for their input on the work of their YLOs.

Because of the sense of community fostered by the YLOs, many youth felt more comfortable participating and actively engaging in the YLOs than in their schools. Similar to what Ventura (2017) found with a Latinx youth organization in the Midwest, Chuj youth participants talked about the importance of the community they created and what is possible when "youth are not simply consulted, but are actually given the opportunity to lead and create their own space" (p. 36). This sense of support encouraged youth's individual growth and learning as well as their community work. Across interviews, youth talked about how this sense of community made all the other work possible. In addition, while many youth joined a YLO because they wanted to meet and get to know other young people, they then became committed to the mission of the various organizations and were able to engage in transformative work because of the trust and support they had from one another.

"We have knowledge now": Becoming leaders

Another important aspect of the YLOs that youth participants spoke about was the way YLOs supported their individual growth and their vision of themselves as leaders in their community. All youth participants talked about starting to see themselves as leaders with a voice and valuable knowledges. For example, Xuwan, a participant in the girls' group and MYO, described how she saw herself grow through her participation,

Antes yo era muy miedosa, no quería hablar, como que no me van a entender, no me van a	Before I was very fearful, I didn't want to talk, like they aren't going to understand me, they

escuchar. Cuando escuché unas temas de cómo es un derecho de una mujer, de cómo es vivir una mujer, de ahí, empecé a sentir que tienen razón… es cuando tuve ese valor de ya no sufrir…Yo, salió un poco de miedo, [antes] cuando hablaba frente de las personas, me ponía roja, salían aguas… cuando participé la primera vez, sentí muy avergonzada y no me gustaba, cuando participé dos veces, tres veces, se me salió un poco [el miedo], y eso es lo que quería, y tener la experiencia… es como que ya tenemos un conocimiento.

aren't going to listen to me. When I heard some of the topics like what are women's rights, what it's like to live as a woman, from that point, I started to feel like they were right…that's when I felt brave enough to not suffer anymore… Some of my fear went away, [before] when I would speak in front of people, I turned red, I would sweat… when I participated for the first time, I felt embarrassed and I didn't like it, after I participated two times, three times, [my fear] went away a little, and that's what I wanted, and to have the experience…it's like we have knowledge now.

For Xuwan, two important aspects of her growth were developing a sense of self-confidence and learning to see herself as someone who holds knowledge. In doing so, she began to see herself as a leader and agent of change who could stand up for herself and bring about change at home and in the community; and she began to see herself as valuable. Xuwan was one of the few participants who had not had sustained access to formal schooling; her father withdrew her from school before she finished middle school. She explained to me that part of her prior lack of confidence was tied to what she saw as her lack educational attainment. Yet, she learned that the YLOs were spaces where her voice and her experiences were valued. In this way, Xuwan had learned to see knowledge as more expansive than how it was framed through formal schooling and as de-linked from Western and colonial knowledge structures; this recognition allowed her to see herself as capable of engaging in informed critique and facilitating change in her community.

Similarly, Axpel, another participant in the girls' group and MYO, saw the importance of learning her self-worth and gaining confidence in her own abilities. She described how her experiences participating with and speaking to people from other communities in Guatemala helped her see the power her voice and know that it mattered. She discussed about how one event—a workshop of 500 young people from across Guatemala held in Guatemala City—was especially formative for her. It was her first time going to the capital and being around young people from all over the country. When the representatives from each municipality were asked to introduce themselves and their work in front of the group; Axpel was nominated to speak for her group. She described how after speaking in front of such a large group of people, she felt that she could speak to anyone. Since then, she had spoken to groups of women across the municipality and interviewed politicians and political candidates, which provided her with the experience of speaking to people in power. Much of her work centered on challenging modern/colonial gender structures by supporting other Chuj women in analyzing the ways gender operated in their community and country and as a Chuj woman in a position of leadership, she hoped to lead by example.

Axpel's understanding of herself as a leader coincided with a deeper understanding of the world around her. This was true for other young women, who found a space from which to analyze and challenge the modern/colonial gender systems that they saw negatively impacting, shaping, and limiting their lives. Ana, the leader of the girls' group explained that many of the youth of *Mujeres Jóvenes Chujes* have stood up for themselves in their homes and in the community. During the interview, she stated, "*ahora pueden decir, 'tengo valor.'"*/ "now, they can say, 'I am valuable.'" Thus, by seeing themselves as valuable, Chuj youth learned to question and challenge modern/colonial gender structures and discourses that tried to frame them as backwards and not having valuable knowledge.

Youth in other YLOs similarly began to see themselves as leaders in anti-colonial struggles for and with their community. Chuj youth viewed their leadership through an indigenous and

decolonial lens, which extended the ways leadership and critical knowledge development has been stressed within the youth organizing literature (e.g., Ginwright, 2003; Warren, Mira & Nikundiwe, 2008; Ginwright & James, 2002). Dhillon (2017) argues, we must push ourselves to understand possibilities of decolonial and "alternative possibilities of social and political existence that advance Indigenous resurgence and freedom" (p. 238). In seeing themselves as indigenous leaders, Chuj youth developed political identities that challenged dominant discourses of Maya and Chuj youth rooted in deficit and colonial frameworks and were instead focused on decoloniality and the future for themselves and their community.

"So they don't keep deceiving us": Meaningful learning rooted in community

Education was important for the development of these decolonial critiques and understandings and thus was a central component of all of the Chuj YLOs' work. Across interviews, Chuj youth talked about how much they learned through their participation in the YLOs and how this learning was more meaningful than what they learned in schools. When I asked Alonza to explain to me why she described the learning in the YLOs as special and how it differed from other learning spaces, she stated,

> *El otro espacio que existe podría decir es como estar en un centro educativo; y es muy diferente. Yo creo que a esto se llama la educación no formal en este caso, porque ahí uno puede existir en cualquier momento. Y considero que ahí aprendo más, porque ahí utilicen varias estrategias que un centro educativo; yo así lo veo. Inclusive ahí en la universidad, siento que*

> The other space where I could say [this learning] exists is being in a school; and that is very different. I think in this case, this is called informal education, because one can exist at any moment. And I feel like I learn more there, because they use various strategies, more than in a school; that's how I see it. Even in the university, I feel like I learn less than when I am

> *aprendo menos que al estar en una organización juvenil…. Veo que aprendo mejor estando en una organización que estar en un centro educative o en una universidad, porque ahí se utilizan varias estrategias.*

> in a youth organization... I see that I learn better being in an organization compared to being in a school or in a university, because there they use various strategies.

Alonza's words make a clear comparison between formal schooling and the type of education imparted through the YLOs. In particular, she focused on the critical and creative pedagogies centered in the organizations, such as conversation, workshops, theater, activism, and more. In addition, she talked about how YLO spaces provided a chance for Chuj youth to develop a critical understanding of their world and their community. She described how the focus on community and the centering of Chuj histories made the content of this learning even more meaningful.

Axpel similarly juxtaposed the learning and pedagogies of schools and the YLOs to show the ways the construction of a sense of community within the organizations made possible different pedagogies and learning. She described the differences as follows,

> *Todos tenemos opiniones diferentes y ahí [en las organizaciones] es más consiente de opinar. No importa si decimos bien o mal. Pero en la educación hay una facilitadora o un facilitador que nos está orientando como estar pensando que es el más sabio que todos… Pero en la organización no, porque asi lo llevamos. Por ejemplo, yo opino o las otras opinan. Y si no digo bien no es que vas a decir que "no, que eso no esta bien," porque a veces sacamos cada*

> We all have different opinions and there [in the organizations] it's easier to voice your opinion. It doesn't matter if we say it well or not. But in [formal] education, there is a facilitator that is orienting us to think that he is more knowledgeable than anyone else…But in the organization, no, because that's how we run it. For example, I speak and the others speak. If I don't say it right, you aren't going to say, "no that's not okay," because sometimes we each

parte donde decimos y se unifica entonces prácticamente asi se formula esa pregunta que queremos hacer, pero ya en la clase, es diferente...	say a different part and then we bring it together and we arrive at the question we were trying to make, but in the class, it's different…

Here, Axpel pointed out the power hierarchies within schools and the way knowledge is framed within schools as something the teachers possess and students do not. Because of this, she argued that young people in schools are made to feel like they do not know anything or that their voice does not matter. She compared this with the communal and joint learning she described within the organizations where everyone's voice was heard and where every member was seen as having valuable knowledge, including members like Xuwan in the previous section, who had been excluded from formal schooling opportunities. Thus, they were developing educational models through the YLOs that challenged the value placed on colonial knowledges.

Across interviews, youth talked about how much they learned through the youth organization and how they engaged in joint learning, explored issues that mattered to them and those around them, and worked to fill in holes in the formal curriculum by learning about ideas and histories silenced within it, such as the *Conflicto Armado*. As one youth participant explained during a meeting when I asked youth why they participated in the YLOs, "we learn things that really matter." Alonza expanded on this to argue, "*Porque me he dado cuenta que estar en un espacio juvenil aprendemos bastante. Y no sólo se aprende, sino también uno lo aplica en su vida real.*"/"I have realized that being in a youth space, we learn a lot. And not only do you learn, but you can apply it to your real life."

Across YLOs, youth critically considered the purposes and possibilities of education. I observed youth participate in difficult conversations, share knowledge, and engage in research around international, national, and community issues, as they supported and pushed one another in their learning. For example, Xuwan stressed the importance of an education that was focused on the

community and developing a critical understanding of one's history and the current context when she explained, *"en las organización, nos generan análisis como nos vemos nuestro panorama, como nosotros estamos dentro de eso. Es algo muy importante."*/ "in the organizations, we create analyses for how we see the world around us, and how we are located in it. It's something really important." Like many YLO participants, Xuwan connected the educational experience with youth understanding and realizing their power. She argued that the type of curriculum and pedagogical practices employed in the YLOs helped prepare young people for actively understanding and engaging their community and the world around them and worked to disrupt the ways colonial of power operates through schools and knowledge construction.

This disruption was apparent in the ways the youth of *Jóvenes Líderes* discussed bringing together their knowledges with those of the elders in their community to challenge the imposition of the hydroelectric company and the military in their community. During meetings, they would often talk about how much they learned through that process. One of the YLO leaders, Domingo, talked about how participating in these joint meetings "opened my mind more" and made him realize how important it was to understand the issues taking place in the community. He stated,

[M]e he formado bastante porque sin la asociación no me importaría estar ahí parado luchando o quizás que haya alguien quien me informa, pero no me interesa, pero no tengo esta ideología de estar con ellos. Pero a través de la aso si… uno pone interés porque tiene que dar su informe a la aso… Más me abrió la mente.	I have learned a lot, because without the organization, I wouldn't care to be there fighting or maybe someone would tell me about it, but I wouldn't care, but I wouldn't have the ideology of being there with them. But through the organization, yes... That has really opened my mind more.

Youth's involvement in such intergenerational learning spaces, reminded them that Chuj models of education prevailed long before Europeans' invasion of the Americas (Allweiss, 2012; Dhillon,

2017). This recognition and these experiences helped youth challenge the notion that education is necessarily a Western invention and critically consider possibilities of education as a decolonial and liberatory tool. Many youth saw the education they engaged in through the YLOs as central to their efforts to challenge colonial systems of power. For Domingo, like many YLO youth, their experiences with the YLOs shaped their understandings of and outlook on the world and education that extended beyond the limits of formal schooling. The knowledge they developed through their involvements in the YLOs also supported youth's understanding and analyses of the contours and manifestations of coloniality.

Decolonial Visions of Change

Now, I turn to look how the community building, leadership development, and learning fostered through the YLOs supported young people in developing a decolonial vision of change based in their understandings of coloniality and their desires for the future. Youth often talked about their understandings of the ways current systems and structures operate and intersect and their roots in colonial histories. As Antonia's statement in the beginning of this chapter attests, youth understood how the current policies and processes affecting their lives were interconnected and based in histories of domination. Time and time again, I heard youth talk about their visions for the future of their community and the dismantling of current systems. Their visions for and awareness of the present and the future that were firmly rooted in understandings of the past. Their insights speak to Dhillon's argument that "When we position Indigenous youth at the center of our work we seen an entirely different way of engaging; we have an entirely new perspective on what it means to move forward while looking back" (2017, p. 241).

Chuj youth's expansive visions exemplified what Vizenor (1999, 2008, 2014) calls 'survivance.' Vizenor (1994) explains that survivance entails "moving beyond our basic survival in the face of overwhelming cultural genocide to create spaces of synthesis and renewal" (p. 53).

Vizenor describes survivance as a combination of survival and resistance. He states,

> There is no way to know the outcome of survivance. It is a spirited resistance, a life force, not just anger, negative or destructive… it has to be expressed and imagined to create a sense of presence. Survivance stands in contrast to concepts of absence and victimry that are frequently applied to Native communities… Native young people have been hard pressed to find a referent for themselves… outside of victimry. Survivance is that new reference of resistance and an active sense of presence (Vizenor, Tuck & Yang, 2014, p. 113).

Chuj youth pushed back against dominant narratives of lack and victimry. Instead they created a new sense of themselves that refused to be erased, despite the ways their lives were "circumscribed and constrained by efforts to keep colonization alive" (Dhillon, p. 50). Survivance for Chuj youth was refusing the modern/colonial discourses that sought to constrain indigenous lives and working instead towards freedom from them for themselves and their community (LeBeau, 2007).

Across organizations, youth centered the importance of bringing about change and organizing against the modern/colonial processes their community was facing. They saw their role in bringing about change as both supporting Xantin as a whole as well as the specific needs of Chuj young people. A number of the organizations were particularly concerned with how alcoholism affected Chuj young people. Often adults and outsiders located the problem with alcoholism in indigenous youth. However, youth in *Jóvenes Líderes* learned to reframe this narrative. They studied how alcoholism had historically affected their community and its roots in coloniality. They learned how the Spanish condemned the use of alcohol in Maya ceremonies and actively disrupted Chuj people's relationship with the sacred beverage. They then learned how landowners used alcohol to recruit Maya workers for their plantations; at the beginning of their contract, Maya workers were offered free alcohol until they developed a reliance on the beverage, then the plantation owners began to charge them for the drinks. A local religious leader explained, "they came home broke and

with an addiction." They critically considered how these practices continued into the present in different forms and were able to resituate the locus of the problem from Chuj youth themselves to the colonial system of exploitation. By turning the lens of analysis onto the system itself and critically considering the histories, Chuj youth challenged decontextualized and ahistorical narratives of the "despair confronting indigenous youth" (Dhillon, 2017, p. 39). This provided them with a larger framework for understanding how to support their community, combat colonial systems, and project themselves into the future.

In talking about their visions for change and the future of their community, youth often used the term "developed." They would say that they wanted to see themselves and their community as developed. Dominant logics of development draw on colonial frameworks and are shaped by neoliberal notions of modernity, progress, and economic growth, where development is used to bring indigenous peoples into the present and the modern colonial state (Quijano, 2000; Mignolo, 2000; Harvey, 2005; Dhillon, 2017). Mining and hydroelectric companies were firmly situated within notions of development that have deep roots in colonial power structures and Lockean labor theory, which has been used by settler colonial states to justify the seizure of indigenous lands by framing indigenous economies as nonexistent (Mills, 1997, p. 67). This framing solidified the grounds on which notions of economic "progress" and modernity only recognized European settlers' way of engaging the world (Harris, 1993); all other relationships between land and people and the people living through them were seen as "backward" and "premodern" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 5). Chuj youth combatted these frameworks and viewed themselves and their community as capable of projecting themselves into a future based on their own desires and knowledges; I came to understand this was their vision of development. While using the term development, they worked to reframe the modern/colonial frameworks inherent in dominant development logics.

Youth explicitly discussed their visions for development during a meeting with *Jóvenes Líderes*

and one of the leaders of the anti-hydroelectric resistance. During the meeting, youth talked about how development needed to come from them—the people—and not from the government or anyone outside the community. In addition, they talked about how the government's framing of development was focused on changing indigenous people. After hearing this, one leader stood up and explained that they all had to be united and strong to fight for their own visions of development. The group talked about how for them, development should be understood as coming from the community and based in Chuj knowledges and ways of being in the world. Chuj youth's vision of development challenged the modern/colonial system through their focus on a decolonial future that was self-determined and sustaining. For example, when I asked Antonia to clarify what youth meant when they spoke about development as a goal, she talked about community control of resources and land and Chuj self-determination. Through these visions, Chuj youth challenged modern/colonial framings of indigenous peoples that fix them in the past and as a "past-tense people" (Povinelli, 2002, p. 178). This reframing of development allowed Chuj youth to pushback against the contours of coloniality and develop a vision of and for themselves and their community in the future based outside these logics.

Across organizations, youth saw themselves as playing an active role in bringing about their visions for decolonial change. During a meeting, when an elder and village leader asked *Jóvenes Líderes* why they had so much success garnering community support for their work and political organizing, Gregorio, one of the group leaders, replied matter-of-factly, "*Porque Somos jóvenes. Tenemos fuerza. Tenemos conocimiento."*/ "Because we are youth. We have strength. We have knowledge." His words highlight the ways Chuj young people asserted their value as fundamental for their visions of the future. Furthermore, their visions of change were based in complex critiques of coloniality that saw the multifaceted and interconnected ways modern/colonial systems and processes operate.

"Vamos Todos Unidos": Forms of Decolonial Resistance in Chuj YLOS

Drawing on their understandings of coloniality, Chuj youth engaged in various forms of decolonial resistance through the YLOs. This resistance was at times overt and at other times it was more subtle. As Cruz (2016) explains, resistance in "the form of traditional politics" such as direct action and protests are not always possible, so it is important to recognize the smaller "deliberate practices of youth…[that] refuse the logics of domination…[and] suggest new kinds of socialities… in the face of tremendous odds" (pp. 131-132). She refers to this as "resistance in tight spaces" (Cruz, 2016). While restricting, these "tight spaces" are not neither fixed nor impermeable and, thus, there is always to challenge and push back against them, no matter how constricting (Cruz, 2016; Lugones, 2003). In this section, I highlight the complex ways Chuj youth asserted their humanity and challenged modern/colonial power structures. I argue that the spaces Chuj youth created for themselves through YLOs made these resistances possible and that these resistances point to highlight multiple ways the logics of coloniality can be challenged, even in the face of enormous repression.

The story of *Jóvenes Líderes de Xantin's* organizing around the release of ancestral leaders points to the ways the tight spaces created by the contours of modern/colonial policies and processes led to shifting forms of decolonial resistance—in this case, ranging from explicitly overt to covert and more subtle. At the end of July 2016, news reached us that seven Maya ancestral leaders and human rights defenders from the area had been released from prison. The leaders had been detained for defending their lands against the large extractive corporations bent on exploiting the area and were considered political prisoners. After more than a year in prison, all seven were acquitted and began the long journey from the capital to their hometowns. While none were from Xantin, as leaders from neighboring communities, they saw their struggles as connected to those of the Chuj people, and shortly after their release, the Maya leaders took a Caravan of Freedom

through all the towns in the area to celebrate their freedom and the continued struggle against coloniality, capitalist extraction, and the invasion of Maya territories. In preparation for the Caravan's arrival to Xantin, community leaders and elders asked the youth of *Jóvenes Líderes* to help welcome the ancestral leaders. The youth were excited to take part in celebrating the leaders' resistance, particularly since a number of the youth leaders told me later they aspired to be like the ancestral leaders and work for their community even if it meant risking imprisonment.

The day before the caravan came through Xantin, *Jóvenes Líderes* were busy making *mantas* (large clothe signs) to hang up in the town square. Before daybreak on the morning of the caravan, they went to the center of the town square to hang up their largest *manta* across an arc. The sign, which could be seen by anyone entering the town and the entire crowd that would soon gather, declared, *"Sólo cuando el ultimo árbol esté muerto y el rio envenenado te darás cuenta que el dinero no se come"*/ "Only when the last tree is dead and the river poisoned, will you realize that you can't eat money." They told me they hoped the message would make people reflect on the fact that their resistance was a matter of life and death and push the municipal leaders to think about the implications of their investments in the hydroelectric company. Later that morning, along with the elders and other community leaders, the youth of *Jóvenes Líderes* returned to the town square. When the caravan arrived, the youth greeted the ancestral leaders alongside other leaders from their community. They helped escorted the ancestral leaders into the park where they spoke to the crowd and encouraged them to continue their resistance against the hydroelectric company.

A few days later, during a regular meeting, members of *Jóvenes Líderes* discussed their plans moving forward and who they considered their allies in the community. When a group member brought up the municipal government, Fernando, one of the organizations' leaders, shook his head and said, "the mayor has his eye on us. He saw our *mantas* and he knows what we are about." He stated that the mayor's people had been watching the Caravan's arrival from the government offices.

Because they were committed to challenging the company's occupation of their community's lands, the youth determined they would not be able to turn to local government leaders for support, since those leaders had ties to and endorsed the company's operations (more on this in Chapter 5). Later, *Jóvenes Líderes* decided that they would have to engage in their efforts to combat the invasion of the hydroelectric company more clandestinely to avoid repercussions. While individual members of the YLO engaged in direct resistances, as an organization, they focused their efforts on community building, cultural revitalization, and environmental preservation, through the (re)implementation of the Chuj/Maya ceremony, educational programing from a Maya perspective, and teaching and learning about the effects of environmental degradation. While none these efforts appeared to explicitly center the company, the youth understood that through by creating greater unity, retaking of Maya knowledges, and strengthening relationships to the land and environment, they were intentionally working to undermine the systems that provided the basis for the company's invasion of their lands. This story is illustrative of the complex ways Chuj YLOs' work often ran up against the contours of the modern/colonial system that at times limited their decolonial resistances as well as the ways Chuj youth responded creatively to the tight spaces in which they were engaged.

Other organizations engaged in similarly complex decolonial resistance work that moved between overt and more subtle forms, but all of which focused on undermining coloniality and supporting Chuj survivance and futurity. Because of their access to formal schooling, which many of their elders had not had, Chuj youth were in a unique position to engage with resistance both within systems and institutions of power and outside of them. Chuj youth repurposed the dominant knowledges gained through formal schooling to engage in resistance for and with their community. To do so, youth brought together the colonial knowledges and Spanish language skills they learned in schools with the critical understandings they developed through the YLOs. Their ability to bring together these different knowledges put youth in important position to support the resistant efforts

of their elders and to act as what Patel (2013) calls "language and cultural brokers" for their elders. Elders called on youth to support their direct resistances by helping them navigate complex bureaucratic policies and legal processes. One youth leader, who was elected president of his neighborhood organization, explained the elders told him his knowledge and experience as an educator would be needed to navigate the legal system as they fought to remove the company from their lands.

Furthermore, YLOs were acknowledged by elders as having organizing experience and knowledge. *Jóvenes Líderes* members felt that they were included in community leadership positions, because of their experiences organizing and their knowledge of the issues affecting their community. These leadership spaces had previously been reserved for elders in the community. Yet, now, when members of the community came together around an issue, such as the hydroelectric plant or the closing of the local government, adults and elders regularly called on youth representatives to join them. As one Yakin, a member of *Jóvenes Líderes,* explained, *"Ahora sí [ellos dicen], 'mira muchá, porqué no metémoslo al joven, ya que tiene experiencia, metámoslo.' …Y conocen que ya sabemos organizar. Ya sabemos enfrentar."*/"Now [they say], 'Look, why don't we bring in the young person since he has experience, let's bring him in.' … they know that we know how to organize. We know how confront [situations]." Here youth's organizing knowledges and experiences were valued by elders in their efforts to challenging the corporate invasion of their lands.

A major component of Chuj YLOs' resistance work centered on efforts to unite their community and challenge colonial dichotomies and frameworks that had historically divided them (Lugones, 2010). During meetings and interviews, youth involved in political and social YLOs spoke about how capitalist business leaders and politicians wanted them divided to better control and take advantage of them and how they needed to fight for unity in order to have the strength to fight for their survivance. This work was sometimes the less obvious work, such as youth working with and

alongside elders or voting women into leadership positions within the organizations and in the community. While less over, their efforts aimed to chip away at the very modern/colonial structures on which the current policies and threats the community was facing were able to stand. Addressing divisions sought to bring the community and different knowledges together to confront issues and policies as they arose as well as entrenched colonial systems of oppression. As Fernando of *Jóvenes Líderes* explained, *"Yo veo que es trabajar en grupo conjuntamente con ellos [los ancianos]. Tanto ver qué necesidad vean* ***ellos*** *que son del pueblo y que necesidades vemos* ***nosotros*** *que son del pueblo también. Sería como intercambio de ideas."*/ "I see that this is work we need to do with them [the elders]. It's as much about seeing what needs **they** see in our community and what needs **we** see in the community. It's like an exchange of ideas." He saw that the elders and youth could work together for their community, because they would each see different issues, solutions, and possibilities and that bringing these knowledges together could create a more complete vision for their community.

Furthermore, each of the organizations I followed made an explicit commitment to challenging gender divisions and promoting *"equidad de genero"*/ "gender equity" within their organizations, both in terms of participation and leadership. Young people talked about the importance of having both male and female-identified leaders to create a balance of voice and knowledge in their organizations; an idea which points to the ways Maya understood gender as different energies that needed to balance one another (e.g., Joyce, 2010; Menchú, 1984). It is important to note that although youth discussed gender in binary terms, prior to colonization Maya notions of gender were not necessarily understood along the colonial binary or as pre-determined by birth (Joyce, 1996, 2001; Klein, 2001; personal conversations). While these discussions and commitments often mirrored the women's rights language and the colonial notion of gender binaries, they also worked to create greater equity and unity and combined these ideas with Chuj understandings of gender. YLO youth explicitly aimed to vote women and men into leadership

positions, so that there would be a gender balance in their organizational leadership. For example, the MYO was first staffed by a young man and a young woman, who were elected by the youth organizations and served as the first youth coordinators. Later, the organizations elected two women coordinators, while the leadership board was led by a young man. YLO youth were intentional about doing so to challenge colonial patriarchal relations. Other YLOs (other than *Jóvenes Líderes* who struggled to recruit women) also had women in leadership positions within their organizations and all were explicit about their goals of challenging colonial gender hierarchies.

Mujeres Jóvenes Chujes, in particular, worked to create a vision of gender equity based in Chuj culture and practices; they talked about this as re-taking the notion of balance that once informed Maya notions of gender. This was a particular challenge as they were also influenced and supported by outside organizations that aimed at addressing what they saw as severe gender inequities in Maya communities, while drawing on Western/colonial notions of gender equality and without recognizing the colonial history of the construction of gender in indigenous communities (Méndez, 2014; Lugones, 2010). For example, youth recalled attending a regional conference with other girls' and women's organizations, where each group was asked to share their story of gender repression. Yet, Chuj youth understood their experiences and resistances beyond binary victim narratives.

These goals of challenging gender oppression also extended to the church youth group, who during youth group meetings and events shared responsibility for any activities they engaged in, including those that were seen as gendered, such as engaging in sports, cooking, or cleaning. As one JCD member explained, recounting a field trip in which the girls played basketball and soccer while the men cooked and served the food,

Siempre dicen como son mujeres, tienen que cocinar, tienen que hacer todo esto y si hay una mujer tiene que hacerlo. Pero con nosotros, no	They always say since you are women, you have to cook, you have to do everything and if there is a woman, she has to do it. But with us, it's

es así. Como por ejemplo en el paseo organizamos y nunca dijimos que los hombres van a cocinar, solo dijimos vamos a cocinar hasta ahí… y nunca dijimos que los hombres tienen que cocinar, pero cuando nos dimos cuenta ellos si estaban cocinando… y para nosotras eso fue excelente porque los hombres tienen las mismas manos que las mujeres… Entonces las mujeres estaban jugando y los hombres cocinando… Y cada vez que nos toca la limpieza en la casa de dios, vamos todos, las mujeres son los que barren y los hombres son los que trapean… así surgió la diferencia, porque vamos todos unidos.

not like that. For example, on the trip we organized it and we never said that the men are going to cook, we only said that we would cook once we got there… and we never said that the men had to cook, but then at some point we realized they [the men] were cooking… and for us [women], that was excellent, because men have the same hands as women… So the women were playing and the men cooking… And every time it is our turn to clean God's house, we all go, the women are the ones who sweep and the men are the ones who mop… and that is where the difference came from, because we are united.

Church youth, like the other YLOs, worked to create unity in their group by challenging modern/colonial gender roles, such as the ones that dictated that women were the ones to cook and clean. They saw this as an effort to create unity and not gendering the work each were asked to do in the space. This provided a space for participants to talk about being free to be themselves. During their fieldtrips, girls could play sports freely, without being judged for being "bad women" who have "nothing to do," which often limited the activities in which young women felt they could engage. While the evangelical church has a fraught history with its ties to genocide and its rootedness within a patriarchal structure, young people found ways to creatively engage with and challenge these structures and histories even from within. Still, I found that overall, the church youth group faced a number of constraints and contradictions working within the auspices of the Evangelical church.

This meant that much of youth's critiques of patriarchy and other issues remained aimed at individuals rather than structures. At the same time, I argue it is important to highlight what young people could and did work to reimagine within such a historically constrained institutional space.

Across YLOS, youth talked about how (re)creating unity, or balance, would strengthen their organization's and community's ability to engage in their community-building and resistance work. Domingo explained that the division between the people in the town and the people in the villages allowed the hydroelectic company to keep the people divided and weaken their resistance; thus, he saw an urgency in the need to unite all the people of Xantin. He explained that Chuj people across the town and villages needed to work together to confront the various processes and policies that threatened their lives. I asked him what would change if they were able to bring about this unity. He responded, *"[Hoy] hay muchos peleando, matando, quitándose la vida, y si vamos a detener eso, algún dia ya no se va a suceder eso"*/ "Today, many people are fighting, killing, taking their lives, and if we can stop that, one day, all this will no longer take place." Challenging these community divisions were central to youth's work as they saw the ways divisions were created to maintain colonial power structures and used by politicians and transnational corporations to divide and weaken them. Thus, the youths' work of challenging these divisions was seen by participants as a way for young people to develop a strong foundation for resisting and fighting against these processes.

In addition, all of the youth organizations worked to extend their visions of unity from beyond the Chuj community to organizations and communities outside of the municipality across geographic, ethnic, linguistic, and racial lines. For many of the youth organizations, this was through partnerships with other youth organizations in Guatemala. The church group regularly organized prayer meetings with youth groups in the region, the MYO participated in workshops and meetings with youth organizations from across the country, the girls' group regularly participated in feminist meetings and trainings in Guatemala and across Central America, *Jóvenes Unidos* was created in

partnership with Maya ancestral leaders and youth from the region, and *Jóvenes Líderes* members joined forces and were granted leadership positions in the regional pluri-national government, a national organization aimed at promoting Maya rights, and a regional Chuj organization that united the different linguistic communities to fight for the interests of the Chuj people collectively. These were spaces where youth discussed having their eyes opened and being able to understand and see the strength and possibility of the struggles in which they were engaged. Youth also saw this unity as important for creating the solidarity across communities in a common struggle in order to challenge the larger social and political forces and structures they were working to combat.

The Messiness of Decolonial Resistance: Challenges and Tensions

While the above sections have focused on the Chuj youth's efforts to create meaningful change and the possibilities of this work, it is also important to recognize that their work had its challenges to understand what it means to engage in decolonial change from within a system of coloniality. In their efforts, youth sometimes ran up against what Lugones (2007) describes as, "hard barriers that are both conceptual and political" (p.187). Lugones argues that these are the very barriers that need to be exposed and dismantled; they can be understood as the permeable structures that create the tight spaces of youth's resistance. YLOs not only ran up against these barriers, there were also times the YLOs themselves reinforced or perpetuated the same modern/colonial power structures they were working to undo. The tensions discussed here both expose the entrenched nature of colonial/modern power structures and speak to the challenges with community-based educational spaces working to challenge inequities, while also operating within inequitable systems (Baldridge et al, 2017; Kwon, 2013).

'Hard Barriers': Running up against modern/colonial power structures

The struggles over the MYO point to the barriers youth ran up against in their efforts to access power and space within a state institution—in this case the local government. Prior to this

research, youth excitedly told me about how they achieved what many youth around the country were struggling to do: a space focused on youth in the municipal government. They hoped by claiming space within the government, they could access government resources and institutional power to advocate for other Chuj youth and make changes in and for their community. Xuwan, one of the youth leaders throughout the process, discussed their vision,

Como jóvenes, soñábamos llegar muy lejos…y nuestra ideología es si vamos a tener una oficina municipal, ya tenemos un derecho de exigir un espacio en las reuniones municipales y también teníamos derecho a exigir presupuesto para llevar a cabo actividades que benefician a los jóvenes. Fue eso lo que siempre quisimos.	As young people, we dreamed of going very far… and our ideology was that if we have a municipal office, we have the right to demand space in municipal meetings and also to demand funding to be able to carry out activities that benefit youth. That is what we always wanted.

Once the MYO was approved, the youth began working to engage in educational activities for other youth and community members to explore the issues affecting them and to foster the creation of more YLOs to amplify Chuj youth's voices. The success of the office was highly celebrated, not just by youth in Xantin, but in other young people in the region. Xuwan explained that Xantin was one of the first municipalities to open a youth office as a result of the youth organizing efforts and youth from across the region held up their MYO as an example of how young people could make changes within the local government.

However, much of this had changed when I arrived to work with the MYO in October of 2015; the office was in a struggle for its survival. That year, a new mayor had been elected, who did not share the youth's vision. Youth leaders were still committed to fighting for the space and took risks in meeting with the newly elected leaders, who often chastised them for working for the former mayor, talked down to them because of their age, and made lewd comments to many of the women.

Here, youth were confronted with the tensions of working from within, while also trying to challenge state institutions, as well as the precariousness of creating spaces and navigating spaces of power. Youth's space in the municipal government was contingent on the approval of government leaders and, so when the government changed and the new leaders did not share the youths' vision for the office, youth lost their space. While the youth fought to be able to maintain their autonomous space within the MYO and elect their own representatives, the new municipal government leaders decided to appoint their own coordinators to the position and to use the office to organize youth for political reasons. This suggested that youth's hold within spaces of power was somewhat unstable and contingent.

This tenuous hold was also apparent in the gender discrimination faced by female youth leaders in the municipal government, who were met with patriarchal power hierarchies within the government and a system of favors that limited their voice within the government, despite youth's own commitments to gender equity. As two young women coordinators of the MYO discussed, "the government is a very difficult place for women to work." Their experiences highlight the tensions youth faced in challenging state power structures from within. While Turner (2006) argues that indigenous peoples need to create decolonial change through the mechanisms of the state, other scholars have pointed out how in doing so indigenous people risk being subsumed by or absorbed into them (e.g., Dhillon, 2007; Coulthard, 2014). For Chuj youth, in trying to enact change through the municipal government, which was connected to the state, they were also confronted with the modern/colonial systems and structures on which the government was built.

At the same time, youth who worked outside official government structures were also challenged and threatened by these structures, because their resistance and organizing work were seen as directly threatening the current system. This can be seen in the story presented earlier about how after the youth of *Jóvenes Líderes* received threats for their organizing work, they decided to shift

their organizing strategies. Thus, while youth were often optimistic about their ability to create change, they were not only challenged in navigating these entrenched colonial power structures when they tried to make change from within state institutions, but also when they engaged in direct resistance from outside of them.

Another barrier youth came up against were those based on their age. While many elders discussed the value of youth's social and political participation and insights, youth leaders also talked about being closed out of spaces or undermined because of their age. As Malxun, a youth leader and educator, explained, *"Nos dicen que sólo somos patojos y lo que dicimos no es válido."*/ "They say we are just kids and that what we have to say isn't valid." Levenson (2013) points out how words like "*patojo*"/ "child" are more than just caring terms and have historically been linked to histories of colonization, where indigenous men and women were referred to as children to make them feel less than. I observed this trend various times from November 2015 through February 2016, when MYO youth representatives were meeting with newly elected municipal government officials to encourage the new government to continue the work of the youth office and respect the YLOs' right to elect their representatives to the MYO coordinator positions. During each of their meetings with the elected officials, youth leaders were called *"unin," "patojos,"* or *"niños"* by various local leaders. This frustrated youth, who felt that this was a way to degrade them and undermine their claims. Chuj youth experienced similar issues when accessing other leadership spaces, such as the neighborhood leadership organizations, where they were sometimes welcomed and other times told to be quiet and listen, because they were "just kids."

Malxun explained that for young Chuj women, these issues were compounded by gender. After explaining how their organizing was undermined because they were "only kids," she stated,

También tuve una experiencia hace desde el año pasado y cuando me metí con el	I also had this experience last year when I joined the COMUDE [local leadership

COMUDE; no fue fácil hubo también discriminación porque soy mujer y porque no puedo formar parte de ese grupo. El otro es que era yo la única mujer. Si también he vivido momentos de la discriminación… uno de las principales dificultades es cuando los hombres tienen una ideología muy racista y siempre quieren tener la razón en todo, no es fácil ser mujer meterse en eso no es fácil. Porque hay tener seguridad de que algunas veces sí nos van a escuchar, otras veces no nos quieren escuchar. Entonces sí, es duro.

committee]; it wasn't easy, there was also discrimination because I am a woman and because I cannot be a part of that group. The other thing is that I was the only woman. I have experienced many moments of discrimination… one of the main challenges is when the men have a racist ideology and they want to be right about everything, it's not easy being a woman and being involved in that, it's not easy. Because you can be sure that sometimes they are going to listen to us, and other times they don't want to listen. So, yeah, it's hard.

Malxun highlighted the ways Chuj women's organizing experiences were shaped by "modern/colonial gender systems," particularly when accessing local leadership spaces. Using the term "racist," Malxun pointed to the ways she understood her experiences to be both a result of her Chuj identity and her identity as a woman, highlighting the ways race and gender systems overlap and intersect in the lives of indigenous women in ways that are not always able to be separated out. Across interviews, young women organizers described similar experiences of being closed out of leadership spaces that were historically male dominated.

Furthermore, young women organizers talked about being ridiculed for their participation in the YLOs in general. They regularly talked about how adults would make comments about them not having anything better to do or not working in the house. In addition, many of the young women were not permitted to leave the house to go to meetings and were punished when they did. Xuwan

discussed how during the creation of the MYO, young women leaders, like herself, risked being reprimanded for leaving the house and not returning home until late. *Jóvenes Líderes* also struggled to encourage women to join their organization for a similar reason. During my first meeting with them, one of the members explained that they wanted women to be involved in their group, but they only met at night, because the majority of them worked during the day. By the time I concluded my fieldwork, *Jóvenes Líderes* still only had one woman member. As Xuwan explained, "*acá, no nos dejan salir mucho tiempo … dicen que es una pérdida de tiempo, acaso no tengo trabajo. Entonces en mi caso, yo viví eso.*"/ "here, they don't let us leave for a long time… they say that it is a waste of time, don't I have work to do. That is something I lived through." Youth participants challenged these barriers and continued to paritipate in the YLOs; however they were regularly met with modern/colonial gender power structures that challenged and at times limited their efforts to support their community and work towards their vision of change. The ways YLO youth ran up against these entrenched power structures, highlight the challenges Chuj youth faced in their efforts to pushback against the modern/colonial system when working and living within it.

Reinforcing Modern/Colonial Power Structures

In addition to running up against the modern/colonial power structures, there were times when YLO youth also reinforced the modern/colonial structures they wanted to dismantle within their organizations and meetings. This highlighted the difficult nature of the work in which Chuj young people were engaged. For example, within many of the YLOs, who had an explicit commitment to challenging colonial gender roles, I observed a number of meetings or celebrations that included refreshments where only the young women were called on to serve the food (the only exceptions for this was the Church youth group). For example, during a workshop led by one of the YLOs, five youth leaders return with snacks as we were wrapping up an activity. The young men paused at the front of the room, and standing next to the table where they just placed the food,

called the names of two young women, who had been invited to participate in the workshop, and told them to come up and serve everyone the food. I asked the men why they couldn't serve the food, and Xuwan leaned over to me and explained that she didn't participate in this YLO, for this reason; because the leaders were "*muy machista*."

In similar ways, many organizations left gender roles unchallenged despite their explicit claims of wanting to dismantle them. These moments ranged from subtle to more overt gender discrimination. Lugones (2003) points to the ways these gendered systems become ingrained and at times appear fixed. These moments of reinforcement frustrated and were hurtful for young women organizers. They also worked to reinforce colonial gender relationships within the organizations that perpetuated patriarchal colonial gender structures that left women feeling devalued and in a vulnerable position even in the YLOs that aimed to be sites of joint resistance and equity.

Furthermore, the structure of the YLOs mirrored the hierarchical nature of political power structures. All YLOs I observed implemented a leadership structure that included a president and a leadership council that made the majority of the decisions. This meant that there was a reliance on one or two leaders for decision-making and the continuance of the YLOs. This limited the voices and participation of organizers not on the leadership committee and on a number of occasions left organizations vulnerable to disintegration when leaders left Xantin or had other commitments that limited their continued engagement in the organizations. For example, when the former MYO youth tried to organize outside of the youth office after the change in government, they struggled because the former coordinators, Alonza and Malxum, had found new jobs in school administration positions and could no longer dedicate time to organizing and attending all the meetings with the youth, who still relied on them for leadership. Similarly, *Jóvenes Unidos*' organizing activities and membership dwindled after the YLO president emigrated to the United States. When leaders were not present, other members often struggled to make decisions and continue their organization's

work. *Jóvenes Líderes* would often cancel meetings when their president was out of town, because they said they could not make big decisions without him. Thus, the hierarchal structures of the colonial state were taken up by youth within their organizations and placed certain limits on the work in which they were able to engage and their efforts to create greater equity and unity.

Overall, these tensions and challenges faced by Chuj youth highlight the messy nature of the decolonial work in which they were engaged. These challenges show the ways these "modern/colonial gender systems" appear to at times be "hard barriers." By unveiling them and bringing them into conversation with how youth organizers talked about the importance and success of their YLOs, I hope to make visible the entrenched nature of modern/colonial systems while also showing that Chuj youth's resistances and (re)imaginings show the holes and fluidity of these systems and thus point to decolonial possibilities.

Discussion

The voices of Chuj youth presented in this chapter highlighted the value they placed on their YLOs, the ways they envisioned their organizing work, and the challenges with which they were confronted. Their stories and experiences show the important role these youth-centered and youth-led spaces have played in their lives and the lives of those in their community. Through the YLOs, youth created a sense of community and support, grew personally and professionally, and engaged in meaningful work for and with their community. The spaces created for and by Chuj youth challenge the dominant framings of the deficits and dangers of Central American youth (e.g., Washington Office on Latin America, 2006; World Bank Group, 2015; Cardenas et al., 2015) and show instead the strength and creativity of Chuj youth. Chuj YLO's work provides an important example for what it looks like to engage in decolonial resistance in "tight spaces" (Lugones, 2003), where many times direct organizing was met with serious threats and even more subtle forms of organizing had to contend with modern/colonial systems. At the same time, these spaces provide insights into the

potentialities, struggles, and contributions of youth to better understand the decolonial possibilities of Chuj youth-led resistances.

The story of the Chuj YLOs is not about broad-sweeping social change and the dismantling of colonial power structures and policies all at once, nor is it about small-scale organizing effort or infrapolitics (Scott, 1990). Instead, this is a story about slow challenge and possibility and Chuj youths' vision for their communities and efforts to dismantle modern/colonial structures. As youth leaders explained, "this isn't something that will happen from today to tomorrow; it will happen step by step." To focus on the challenges Chuj YLOs are facing or to singularly focus on the tangible results, would discount the power of their resistance work and decolonial (re)imaginings. Bringing a decolonial feminist framework (Lugones, 2003) to indigenous youth organizing spaces makes visible the complex resistant work in which Chuj young people were engaged and the important insights Chuj YLOs offer for imagining decolonial change for and with their community, rooted in local knowledges.

In centering critiques of coloniality and the possibilities of decolonial resistance, Chuj youth's work provides important insights for the fields of education and youth organizing. As Dhillon (2017) argues, "finding ways to support Indigenous youth who are part of this frontline resistance work should be foundational to the way we think about decolonization and indigenous resurgence" (p. 247) and I would argue youth organizing. This chapter shows how placing coloniality at the center of youth organizing highlights the ways modern/colonial systems and processes operate in youths' lives and through their resistance work and thus offers valuable insights into what is necessary and possible.

At the same time, these insights should not be confined to out-of-school spaces; they also provide important insights into the possibilities of formal schooling. Their experiences with the YLOs prepared Chuj youth organizers to see themselves as community leaders and critical

educators. Their experiences also pushed them to critically consider and (re)imagine the possibilities and purposes of education. The next chapter builds on the findings presented in this chapter to explore the ways the knowledges and values Chuj youth received from engaging with the YLOs and thinking about education for and with other youth were brought into formal schooling spaces by Chuj youth/educators.

Chapter 4: "We Have Gotten People to Believe that Youth Should be the Change": From YLOs to Formal Schooling

One afternoon in September as I was leaving a community event, I made the walk up the steep slope to Malxun's in-laws' store. It was a nice day and the sun was out, so it was easy to trek up the steep road, which often flooded during rain. When I arrived, Malxun was there working at the counter. It had been some time since Malxun and I had last met. She was now working as a co-principal at one of the community's secondary schools, which had classes in the morning, and then tending to her in-laws' store in the afternoon. With the new mayor taking over and appointing new personnel to the Municipal Youth Office, Malxun and the other youth, who had fought so hard for the space, no longer felt that the MYO and the municipal government were theirs. While the YLOs had continued to meet informally for a few months, the youth quickly became frustrated with the lack of funds available to easily organize meetings (via text messages), engage in organizing activities, and travel to participate in youth-related events with partner organizations across the country.

After our initial greetings, we started talking about her job at the school and reminiscing about her work with youth and our shared time at the MYO. After a few minutes, she paused and told me she wondered about my work. I asked her what she meant by that, thinking perhaps I had made some sort of misstep in my research process that she was hoping to point out, but she responded that she was worried *for* my research, because from her point of view, the current MYO was not doing the work that she understood had brought me here in the first place. I didn't respond and waited for her to continue. She then asked if I had thought about coming to her school to observe the work they were doing, because they were also focused on youth and it was similar to the work they had done with the YLOs given the school's focus on multiculturalism and project-based learning and the implementation of the student government. She invited me to come to *Jakan Pat,* the school's open house, where each grade presented the community project they worked on

throughout the school year. Parents, community leaders, and funders would all be in attendance.

While I had intentionally framed my research around community-based spaces, because of the history of formal schooling in Xantin (and other indigenous communities) as a tool of the colonial state, I was struck by Malxun's use of YLO frameworks to transform education for and with youth within the constraints of formal schooling. Malxun, her co-principal, Mauricio Andrés, and I decided that I would officially start my research with them in the beginning of the next school year, in January.

Over the next few months, I observed the ways the school, B'eyb'al Komam Kicham (The Path of Our Ancestors) Cooperative Secondary School, worked to create a youth-centered space within the context of formal schooling as Malxun brought her experiences with youth organizing to her administrative role. I also began to see other secondary schools in Xantin take up similar efforts upon seeing the successes of B'eyb'al Komam Kicham and based on their concerns for Chuj youth. While they are not centered in this chapter, I also observed the efforts of the newly established Madre María de Jesús Parochial Middle School and the public middle school, Xantin National Secondary School.

For students, educators, and community members, schools were both sites of concern and possibility; while schools remain spaces of violence and colonial imposition, they were also spaces through which Chuj young people were working imagine a future for themselves and their community. The changes in the schools and the conversations they inspired were motivated both by the examples of the YLOs and their visibility in the community, as well as through youth leaders moving into positions in formal schools and students who were motivated by their own and others' participation in YLO spaces. The efforts towards transformation were also a reaction to students', teachers', parents', and administrators' concerns about the colonial curriculum (Allweiss, 2014) and current threats to the community and young people. When I asked Malxun to reflect on her work in

the school and its connection to her experiences and leadership with in the YLOs, she told me, "*Creo que con todo, se logró meter que el joven debe ser el cambio en su sociedad*"/ "I think that with all this, we have gotten people to believe that the youth should be the change in their society." She went on to explain that they promoted this idea through their student government and a project-based methodology.

This chapter centers the work of Malxun and B'eyb'al Komam Kicham, while also drawing on the examples of Madre María de Jesús Parochial School and Xantin National Secondary School, to (re)imagine education from an indigenous youth-centered perspective informed by the models and lessons learned from Chuj YLOs. This chapter takes schools as a central organizing feature of Chuj youths' lives in Xantin, at the same time it recognizes the tensions and anxieties created by formal schooling in the Chuj community. In doing so, it asks the reader to consider what it means to imagine and work towards decolonial challenge within an entrenched apparatus of colonial control. Drawing on the framework of decolonial feminism (Lugones, 2003, 2010), it highlights the creativity of Chuj educators and youth in challenging the colonial histories and structures of formal schooling and the possibilities of a more community- and indigenous youth-based model. Chuj educators' and youths' experiences and efforts point to the possibilities and challenges of imagining schools as sites of decolonial change. Overall, I argue that schools are central institutions in which coloniality is maintained and that because of this, the possibilities for decolonial change through formal schooling are limited. At the same time, because of schools' histories as tools of the colonial state and the amount of time young people spend in them, it is important to disrupt the ways schools are structured through and hold up coloniality. The work of Chuj administrators, educators, and students shows the possibilities and urgency of engaging in creative disruptions of modern/colonial processes in schools.

This chapter starts with an exploration of how Malxun and her school, B'eyb'al Komam

Kicham Community Secondary School, drew on experiences with YLOs to make changes in the administrative structure and curriculum by centering students voices and community knowledges and with the vision of supporting their students in becoming leaders in and for their community. I also look at the ways the transformations at B'eyb'al Komam Kicham motivated similar community- and youth-based transformation efforts at the Madre María de Jesús Parochial School and Xantin National Secondary School. While the initial sections center the possibilities of these decolonial efforts, I conclude with a discussion of the continued challenges, tensions, and implications for formal schooling and education.

Youth Organizing and Schools

This chapter draws on the scholarship on youth organizing to understand its relationship with schools. While scholars recognize that schools can be oppressive spaces for youth, they also recognize that schools play an important role in youths' lives. Youth around the world are spending larger periods of time in schools; this is especially true in the global South, which has seen the expansion of universal schooling alongside decreasing employment and economic opportunities (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2015). With this increase in time spent in schools, educational issues and policies are a particular concern to young people and have been central to the efforts of many youth organizing and youth-serving community-based organizations (e.g., Baldridge et al, 2017; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2015; Warren et al., 2008; Watson, 2012). Case studies of youth organizing for education show how youth have organized and pushed for policy changes in their schools and communities (e.g., Akom, Scott & Shah, 2014; Connor and Zaino, 2014; Kirshner, 2009; Torre & Fine, 2008; Tuck et al, 2008; Warren et al, 2008). Conner and Zaino (2014) suggest the need for a theoretical framework for understanding the work of student organizing for educational justice that centers youth as experts, because of their position and experiences in schools.

At the same time, there is often a divide between community-based organizations and

schools both within academic scholarship and in practice (Watson, 2012). McLaughlin (2000) argues that community-based educators feel that schools do not fully value their youth, while teachers often see community-based organizations as 'just-for-fun' and separate from the work being done in schools and view "learning and teaching... [as] the sole purview of teachers" (pp. 34-35). Watson (2012) argues that because of this separation, the pedagogical contributions of community-based organizations remain understudied. Furthermore, Pacheco (2012) argues that young people's everyday resistances provide insights, knowledges, and "cultural resources researchers and educators could utilize in teaching, learning, and developing curricula" (p.126). She points to the ways schools can and should value and draw on young people's experiences with resistances. This chapter seeks to build on and contribute to the literature that works to bridge the gap between in and out of school spaces and knowledges (e.g., Baldridge et al, 2017, Watson, 2012) by showing what was possible in a school that recognized and drew on the experiences, frameworks, and commitments of community-based organizations—in particular, indigenous youth-based organizations—and youth to create more youth- and community-centered and decolonizing curricula and practices.

Schooling and Indigenous Youth/Communities

Centering schools as institutions and sites of decolonial possibility presents a set of tensions. In Guatemala, formal schools were established and maintained as sites of physical and epistemic colonial violence for Maya people (Batz, 2019). Around the world, schools have long been seen as an effective tool of colonial power and oppression (Adams, 1995; Lomawaima and McCarty, 2006). As discussed in Chapter 1, formal schools were imposed on indigenous communities as part of the colonial, imperial project aimed at undermining local knowledges, privileging colonial ways of knowing and being, and solidifying colonial global power and positioning (Grande, 2004; Mignolo, 2010; Montejo, 2005). Grande (2004) states, "Indian education was never simply about the desire to 'civilize' or even deculturalize a people, but rather, from its very inception, it was a project designed

to colonize Indian minds as a means of gaining access to Indian labor, land, and resources" (p. 19). Batz (2019) discusses how Maya communities in Guatemala recount stories of *abuelos* hiding children in the *temazcal* from Ladino teachers, so they wouldn't be forced to go to school. And many older youth and educators still recount experiences with corporal punishment being meted out for speaking a Maya language in school. Because schooling has remained an important tool of Western/colonial power and supremacy, centering schools in critical research on equity, decolonization, and resistance can mean (re)inforcing and engaging in colonial violence. Thus, schools represent a fraught site from which to work towards rebuilding and decolonizing community relationships (Bang, 2018).

At the same time, like youth around the world, schools play a central role in indigenous youth's lives. Around the world, youth spend the majority of their waking hours in school and engaging in school activities (sports, clubs, homework, etc.); thus, it is important to think about what this means and the resistances and change that might be possible within these fraught space (Watson, 2012). In Xantin, where schooling is half-day, young people spend about a third of their waking in hours in the classroom.

Furthermore, as was discussed in the first chapter, the histories of schools and education have been a site of resistance and struggle for indigenous communities around the world. Grande (2004) argues that educational change must take place alongside other revolutionary and decolonial efforts. The educational reforms in Guatemala were the result of the organizing of the Pan-Maya Movement and its focus on the educational and linguistic rights of the Maya people and continue to be a site of struggle (Yashar, 2005). Tuck and Yang (2019) argue that indigenous struggles for education differ from other critical education reform efforts, because of the focus on decolonization and indigenous sovereignty. In seeking to challenge these systems and processes, indigenous peoples are often challenging the very structure and aim of formal schooling. Yet, indigenous scholars and

activists have continued to question whether or not this type of decolonial change is even possible in the context of schools. While focusing what is possible, this chapter similarly highlights the constraints of engaging in decolonial work within a colonial institution.

Multicultural Reforms: Promises and Tensions

The Intercultural and Bilingual curricular reforms, which have become an important feature of schools in Guatemala's indigenous communities, were born out of the struggle of the Pan Maya Movement (this history was discussed more in-depth in Chapter 1). In their efforts to institutionalize Intercultural Education, the Pan-Maya Movement drew on other movements across the globe that have sought to align school curricula with histories and knowledges of various peoples and challenge systemic and structural inequalities (Grant & Sleeter, 1998/2008; Banks, 1997; McLaren & Sleeter, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2004). Movement leaders hoped that the education reforms would go beyond recognition to support Maya communities' efforts toward self-determination. The inclusion of Multicultural Education reforms in the Peace Accords and the subsequent changes to the national curricula were seen as large victories for the Movement and Maya people; some argued that the reforms promised to rupture colonial curricula and schooling models. Yet, like in many places across the globe, Multicultural Education reforms in Guatemala were taken up through the neoliberal multicultural frameworks discussed in Chapter 1, which have limited their ability for transformation that Maya activists had imagined (Esquit, 2008; Hale, 2002; Sieder, 2008).

In addition, because Multicultural and Intercultural Education models seek to be "all inclusive," Indigenous Education frameworks tend to be incorporated within these models of education, viewed as "added" components to a general curriculum, or subsumed under the umbrella of Multicultural Education (Cojtí Cuxil, 2005; Smith, Tuck, and Yang, 2019). At the same time, what is considered "core" content and "core knowledge" seldom changes, due in large part to continued standards- and test-based models of education that privilege Western scientific Knowledge.

Furthermore, there are tensions around who the reforms seek to serve; Intercultural and Bilingual Education programs are generally offered in majority Maya communities and seen as "for Maya" rather than for the entire Guatemalan population (Allweiss, 2012). Additionally, while some representatives from Maya communities were included in the creation of the reforms, the Intercultural and Bilingual Education curricular reforms drew heavily from models and experts from other countries—such as the U.S., Mexico, and Brazil (Seider, 2008). This speaks to the trend of indigenous education programs being constructed by non-indigenous political leaders as "what indigenous people should know" to function and/or assimilate in non-indigenous states (Pineda & Landorf, 2011).

Sleeter (1996) argues that Multicultural Education is itself a global social movement that needs to be connected to other social movements. Through these connections, she argues that the goal of multicultural education would necessarily be to bring about more equitable changes in power dynamics and have deep implications for how teachers engage in their work. This opens the possibility for schools to be sites of movement building that disrupt the oppressive histories and structures generally perpetuated through them (Anyon, 2005; Sleeter, 1996; Apple, 2004, 2010, 2013). Apple (2010) highlights the important role critical educators and scholars can play in creating spaces of possible action. And Anyon (2005) argues that connecting schooling with social movements opens spaces for "radical possibilities" and transformation. Thus, opportunities for social transformation do not simply exist, they can also be created through educators, students and schools (Sleeter, 1996; Binder, 2002; Anyon 2005; Apple, 2006, 2010).

In my previous research, Chuj educators spoke with me about their experiences with the national curriculum. The majority of the educators I interviewed did not talk about the reforms in the curriculum as this great rupture, but rather within the context of a history of colonial curricular models. Educators complained that the curriculum remained disconnected from the reality of Chuj

youth and their community. They spoke of the need for schools and educators to develop new models and ways of centering Chuj students and their community's knowledge and needs (Allweiss, 2012, 2014). Educators spoke of their desire to provide their students with a meaningful education that connected what they were learning in school with Chuj knowledges, histories, and current struggles. In the Chuj community, I observed the ways multicultural education policies, curricula, and practices continue to be sites of resistance for indigenous communities who are fighting for their rights to self-governance, self-determination, and decolonization. While Chuj educators saw value in all forms of knowledge, "the Western system was designed under an extractivist colonial logic that marginalizes, appropriates, destroys, and attempts to delegitimize all other knowledge" (Batz, 2019, p. 105).

This chapter recognizes Multicultural Education as a movement and an on-going site of resistance by connecting transformations in formal schooling with youth organizing efforts. At the same time, it recognizes the need for educational transformations to engage in questions of decolonization and community knowledges and futurities (Smith, Tuck, and Yang, 2019; Grande 2004). Chuj educators struggled with tensions between their recognition that schools and the national curriculum are colonial and oppressive with their belief in education supporting the future of their students and their community (Allweiss, 2014). Batz (2019) highlights the importance of not just theorizing about the possibilities of decolonial and transformative pedagogies, but centering and recognizing the practices and "efforts from Indigenous communities and marginalized groups to create their own forms and spaces of knowledge production and education" (p. 103). Many educators saw that the curriculum and educational models needed to be changed to support the future of Xantin and Chuj youth in ways that were explicitly indigenous, Chuj, and decolonizing. Because YLOs were seen as spaces for the critical youth- and community- centered learning and decolonial change that educators and students desired in schools, they drew on examples and

models of the YLOs to work towards their vision for education and community change within the institution of schools.

Arriving at B'eyb'al Komam Kicham Community Secondary School

My initial visit to B'eyb'al Komam Kicham illustrated the ways the school's community-based commitments were made visible throughout the school's décor and every day interactions. I first made my way down to the B'eyb'al Komam Kicham Community Secondary School on a cold rainy day in January to meet with the co-principals, Mauricio Andrés and Malxun, and discuss my research plans with the school. The school was bustling with activity as I walked around to the back where the administrative offices were located. The decorations around the school at B'eyb'al Komam Kicham reflected the school's ideology and approaches to education. The walls of the school were painted with motivational quotes about education and Maya glyphs and calendar symbols that reflected the school's commitments to Maya knowledges. The name of the school, which was in Chuj[10], was emblazoned on the front of the building and could be seen by cars and buses coming into town from villages across the valley. Behind the school, were the student-built *chozas,* or outdoor huts for classes to work and study outside. Next to the huts, were student built replicas of the town's sacred archeological site. While the inside of classrooms were bare, grey cinderblock walls, at the beginning of the year, each class was given time to decorate their classroom to turn it into a space where they would want to learn and in an effort to make the space feel like a home or community.

When I got to the offices, Malxun was finishing meeting with a group of students, so I took a seat on one of the couches made of *corte* (fabric worn by Maya women as a skirt) and looked around the offices as I waited to meet with her and Mauricio Andrés. The school's mission and

[10] All other schools had Spanish names.

vision were featured prominently on the wall between Mauricio Andrés' office and the teacher's lounge. They spoke of the school's promise to provide students with an "excellent education" and "to prepare flourishing youth with leadership capabilities for the social, cultural, political, and economic development of their community." Hanging next to the mission and vision was a quote attributed to Albus Dumbledore and written in English, Spanish, and Chuj, "Differences of habit and language are nothing at all if our aims are identical and our hearts are open." After a few minutes of waiting on the couch and talking to the secretary, I was called into the Mauricio Andrés' office and Malxun joined us to discuss my plans and their work at the school. They talked about their goals of not just preparing students for formal employment, but rather to become leaders in and for their community. To do so, they aimed at basing their curriculum in community knowledges, histories, and concerns and providing students with a more active role in the school. As we were wrapping up our conversation, Mauricio Andrés told me he wished I had joined them sooner, because he was very excited about the work they were doing and wanted others to see it. I walked away motivated by our conversation and the prospect of observing change in a school setting.

Malxun: From Youth Organizer to School Principal

I begin the story of the transformative efforts at B'eyb'al Komam Kicham and their connection to the YLOs with co-principal Malxun, because she was central to the transformations taking place within the school. Malxun drew on her personal history and leadership experiences in the YLOs to facilitate change in the school. I do not include this discussion of Malxun's background to focus on her as an individual, nor should this discussion be taken up to argue that the work at B'eyb'al Komam Kicham is *only* possible because of unique individual traits. Instead, I center Malxun to map the origin of the changes taking place in the school and to show what it might look like to value community organizing experience in school leadership and education. In addition, Malxun did not come to her ideas individually and it is important to recognize that this is also the story of a

collective and a community. A number of other teachers in the school and Malxun's co-principal, Mauricio Andrés, also had backgrounds in youth organizing and shared many of Malxun's believes and ideas; yet, Malxun's story is centered because she developed two key programs in the school that put YLO frameworks and methods into practice: the student government and project-based curriculum. Throughout my months in the school, I observed Malxun as she drew on her organizing experiences to develop models and support school-wide efforts to expand the role of students in the school's everyday practices and administration. I saw how teachers and students took up the new frameworks and models and spoke of feeling empowered by them.

Malxun was a certified teacher, whose organizing work began in 2010, when she and a group of other youth came together to bring the national university to Xantin, because of the promise of free tuition. The private university already operating in Xantin charged fees that many aspiring teachers could not afford and Malxun explained that the financial constraints were the reason she got involved with organizing for the national university in the first place;

Mi meta era ir a estudiar a una universidad privada, pero por falta de recursos económicos_ pero la misma sociedad te exige para formarte para conseguir un trabajo.	My goal was to attend a private university, but because of a lack of economic resources [voice trails off], but society also pushes you to educate yourself to get a job.

Like many of the youth organizers I spoke with, she came to organizing for a specific reason—the goal of obtaining formal employment; however, that soon expanded. In addition, her words highlight the historic barriers to access to formal schooling that affect many Maya communities, and Maya women in particular, throughout Guatemala (e.g., Batz, 2019; Hallman et al, 2007). As a tool of the colonial state, access to education has been based in colonial racial gender hierarchies; Maya communities have historically had limited access to formal schooling and, when available, opportunities for formal education have generally privileged men (e.g., Hallman et al, 2007; Allweiss,

2012). Malxun's recognition of and experiences with these barriers informed her commitments to improving education access and experiences for and with young people in her community.

In our discussions, Malxun went on to describe how the group that started organizing for the university also brought organizations to Xantin for trainings directed at youth, so they could continue educating themselves and gain certifications that would later help them find employment. By 2011, as they were working to bring the national university to their town, they started participating in the series workshops organized by a national organization focused on youth and democracy. The group initially viewed the program as simply a way to gain a certification, yet number of the youth, including Malxun, were inspired by what they learned. They continued meeting and formed the YLO, *Juventud Xantineca*, and later created and fought for the MYO. Malxun quickly became a leader in the group and was voted president in 2012, the same year the group of young aspiring teachers succeeded in getting the national university to open its satellite campus in town.

As she developed as an organizer, Malxun used her position and the trust and support of her youth colleagues to challenge colonial assumptions of Chuj women. Cervantes-Soon argues that colonial constructions of women, "render women as in need of protection and incapable of social awareness and critique, of transformative action, or of politicized identities—hence not fully human" (Cervantes-Soon, 2017, p. 6). Malxun worked to undermine these assumptions, but was clear about not framing her accomplishments as singular or exceptional; she was committed to taking up space and leadership positions with and for other Chuj women, so more Chuj women would also be able to access these spaces and have leadership opportunities. These commitments often meant putting herself in positions where she was the first Chuj woman to participate and/or hold the position. For example, Malxun was the first Chuj woman to enter a number of community leadership spaces. She explained,

También en 2012 fui parte del CODEDE, del COMUDE, y también del COCODE. Fui la única mujer que me fue a meter ahí primero con los del CODEDE y del COMUDE. Fui un poco difícil (jajaja) porque había mucha discriminación; o sea no me querían ver. Pero éramos dos, uno de mis compañeros y yo fuimos a meternos en el COMUDE para que nos tomaran en cuenta como jóvenes estábamos pidiendo voz y voto.	Also in 2012, I was part of the departmental, municipal, and neighborhood leadership committees. I was the only women that participated and the first with the departmental and municipal leadership committees. It was a bit difficult (laughs), because there was a lot of discrimination; in other words, they didn't want to see me there. But there were two of us, one of my male colleagues and I were the first to get involved with the municipal leadership committee, so that they would take us youth into account, since as youth we were asking for the right to be heard and vote.

While she often experienced dual discrimination in these spaces as a young person and as a woman, she continued to speak up so youth's voices and needs were represented in local decision-making. She was explicit about working to challenge colonial gender hierarchies and she carried these commitments to the other spaces in which she was engaged, such as her school and university.

When the satellite branch of the national university opened in Xantin, Malxun quickly enrolled and continued her education pursuing a technical and then a Bachelor's degree in Maya Education. She often found ways to bridge the YLO work with her focus on education and formal schooling. For example, after the youth office opened, she led the YLOs in conducting workshops in schools to educate youth about their political power and rights as citizens and indigenous young people. Malxun talked about wanting to reframe education for and with youth and her community.

Malxun continued as a leader of the organization as they fought for the youth office. She

served on the leadership board for a number years, even as she worked as a teacher at B'eyb'al Komam Kicham. Then, in 2015, she left the school to take up a coordinator position in the MYO. When the new mayor took over, Malxun went back to B'eyb'al Komam Kicham, this time in an administrative role to promote and support the school's efforts to implement a project-based learning model. The recognition of the value of her youth leadership experiences solidified Malxun as the ideal person for her administrative position in the school, because she was seen as adept at connecting with young people and she had experiences applying for and leading projects. In addition, Delia, who was one of the former representatives of the organization that had started the initial workshops on democratic participation for young people and later served as advisor for *Juventud Xantineca* and the MYO, was then working for the foundation that helped support the project-based learning initiative in B'eyb'al Komam Kicham. Malxun explained that her relationship and experiences in organizing with Delia supported her transition into her new role in the school and helped her develop the project-based learning model alongside Delia. She stated,

> *[R]egresé a la escuela con esa idea de trabajar ABP. Pues yo vengo a la escuela, me orienté con Delia, trabajamos juntas, construíamos planes y no fue muy difícil porque hemos trabajado juntas proyectos desde hace 4 años. Entonces ya empezamos, planteamos, construimos todo y terminamos la propuesta desde el año pasado. … tenemos esta idea de que un joven debe ser él que hace esta transformación, debe ser él que crea cosas en su sociedad. Entonces el hecho de hacer un*

> I returned to the school with the idea of working on project-based learning. Well, I came to the school, I received an orientation with Delia, we worked together, we made plans, and it was not difficult, because we have worked together on projects for the past 4 years. So, we began, we made proposals, we built everything, and we ended last year with the proposal... we had this idea that the youth should be the one to make this transformation, he [sic] should be the one that creates things in his society. So, in

proyecto, creemos que ese mismo joven puede plantearlo.	doing a project, we believe that the same young person should be the one to propose it.

She spoke of how along with her relationship with Delia, her prior organizing experiences and connections made her work easier and allowed her to develop and put into place an educational model in the school that viewed young people as capable and agents on change.

Malxun was clear about how she saw her work centering young people and connecting to the community. She saw this as particularly necessary in the town's current moment and for the future of Xantin. When I talked to Malxun about the school's efforts and the work in which she was engaged, she explained,

Tenemos el objetivo de educarles con el propósito de enfrentar los problemas... que aprenden ser sujetos, capaces de ser líderes positivos… No hay empleo ahora, entonces tenemos que preparar a los jóvenes para autosostenerse… y como preguntan los ancianos," ¿Quién más va a velar por el pueblo?"	We have the goal of educating them to confront problems… that they learn how to be subjects, capable of being positive leaders… There is no employment now, so we have to prepare youth to be self-reliant… and as the elders say, "Who else will look out for our town?"

For Malxun, there was a sense of urgency in transforming formal schooling and challenging oppressive colonial structures, policies, and practices, which she imagined as necessary for the future of the Chuj people. This can be seen in Malxun's reference to Chuj elders' concern, "who else will look out for the town/people?" This sentiment was echoed by educators across interviews who viewed their roles not just as preparing students for careers[11], but for the future survivance (Vizenor,

[11] Historically, Chuj educators and students talked about secondary schooling in utilitarian terms; as necessary for obtaining careers outside of agriculture (Allweiss, 2012), but current educators and young people are challenging this framing as jobs become scarcer and as the community continues to struggle against

1999) of their people. They saw schools as being a necessary space for this transformation, because the colonial history of formal schooling contributed to undermining Chuj language, knowledges, and ways of being and was thus seen as a threat to this future. In addition, with more Chuj young people accessing secondary education, Malxun and other educators saw that these institutions were also spaces of possibility in challenging these same colonial histories and reconnecting students with their community and knowledges. As they worked to develop and put into practice a community- and youth- centered curriculum, I observed educators at B'eyb'al Komam Kicham dealing with questions around the purpose of schooling and whose knowledge (Apple, 1993) was centered in their classrooms.

Malxun's words also point to a shift in how educators saw their work; it was no longer just about preparing young people for jobs, but rather preparing their students to be "leaders." They regularly explained that as leaders, their graduates would not only be prepared for formal employment in their area (accounting, education, etc.), but they could also create their own opportunities and, most importantly, look out for the future of their town and community. Some of their definitions of leadership centered leadership and economic entrepreneurship (Cervantes-Soon, 2017); a number of teachers and students talked about leadership as students having the skills and knowledge to opening their own businesses if there were no jobs available in their area. And other times, the definition of leadership took a more counterhegemonic and Chuj-based framing that focused on students having the knowledge and commitments to their community to challenge the modern/colonial processes and policies that were threatening their people. This community-based framing of leadership centered the goals of students getting involved in local leadership organizations and taking up the local unpaid community leadership positions or *cargos* (see Batz,

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modern/colonial processes (see Chapter 5). This mirrors the critiques of the state-based schooling and the lack of jobs of graduates that led to the creation of the Ixil University (Batz, 2019).

2019). Educators and administrators held these competing definitions of leadership as they structured the school around preparing students to recognize and analyze problems and develop solutions for their community. These definitions both created and limited decolonial possibilities, but overall challenged what schooling looked like at B'yeb'al Komam Kicham and illustrated the possibilities and challenges of decolonizing and indigenous youth-based educational models in schools.

Overall, this section looks at the ways B'eyb'al Komam Kicham drew on YLO frameworks and understandings of leadership to work towards school-based transformation in two main ways: through a curriculum that was based on community knowledge and projects and through a student government that reimagined the hierarchical structures of schooling. It is important to note that these changes were taking place during a time of much turmoil in the community and increasing concerns over the future of young people as high rates of youth alcoholism and deaths threatened youth's futures and the invasion of megaprojects threatened the community's way of life. These concerns reinforced the importance of critically transforming spaces for Chuj youth in ways that supported their futures and (re)connected them with their community.

"It's Not Just About Educating": Centering Youth and Community in Curriculum

All three schools I observed in Xantin were concerned with how to connect the national curriculum to the community's and youth's needs, knowledges, and desires. In doing so, they wanted to disrupt the colonial curriculum and the undermining of Chuj knowledges and ways of knowing. People I spoke with at B'eyb'al Komam Kicham talked about how the school's solution centered around their own version of project-based learning. Project-based learning had long been part of the school's curriculum and pedagogy on paper. Various teachers mentioned how a former educator had tried to start the curricular model a few years ago; others discussed a training they received from a group of Mexican educators; and others talked about the push from a U.S.-based foundation that

had started the school; however, all agreed that the model was not fully put into practice until Malxun became co-principal and took the lead on supporting its application. Malxun brought the project-based learning model together with her experiences with the YLOs to develop a curriculum that had students at the center and connected classroom and community knowledges to support students in vision of community leadership development.

Malxun saw the project-based learning model as a way to encourage students to explore issues in their community and develop ways to respond to them. Through these experiences, she hoped to prepare them to be leaders and support the future of Xantin. Throughout the year, each grade worked to develop a project in their community based on themes identified from the national curriculum; examples included community health, the environment, sustainable development, multiculturalism, teaching from a Maya world view, a contextualized quality education, and the local economy. In order to maintain their certification, schools were expected to follow the national curriculum, so this model allowed B'eyb'al Komam Kicham to meet the demands of the national curriculum and provide their students access to dominant knowledges, while also valuing community knowledges and making education relevant and Chuj-centered.

Like Batz (2019) found at the Ixil University, Chuj teachers were not opposed to Western education, because they saw all forms of knowledge as valuable; they were just working to reconfigure its role in the school and disrupt its dominant hold on the curriculum. Teachers at B'eyb'al Komam Kicham wanted students to have access to dominant knowledges so they would have the necessary knowledges to access university and employment opportunities and so they could use that knowledge to advocate for their community in the face of corporate extraction, political corruption, and other processes against which the Chuj people were in a constant struggle. Guided by the class theme and supported by their teachers, students then developed joint projects in their community. Across subject areas, teachers were expected to tailor their classes to support students in

connecting the content in the curriculum with the goals of their project. With the support of a teacher advisor (*asesor*), students worked on their project throughout the year. There were special times in the schedule dedicated to the project-based curriculum processes, during which classes were suspended for a couple hours in the morning, so the advisors of each grade could work with their students on their project and walk them through the process. At the end of the year, students presented their projects at *Jakan Pat* or the community open house.

The community was at the center of the school's curriculum and students' projects. As Matin, a student leader, explained, "*aprendizaje basado en proyectos es como una meta… es como algo para asociarnos más entre la sociedad…para podernos ir más con la sociedad.*"/ "Project-based learning is like a goal… it's like something to help us connect more with society… to get closer to the society." German, who helped oversee the process the year before as a member of the 2016 student government, described how the projects connected to community knowledge, history, and culture using the example of the project carried out by the seventh-grade class.

> *En el caso de por ejemplo, [primero] básico, estuvieron trabajando en salud. Muchas de la cosas también asi relacionando con lo que es la cultura que están olvidando. Tenemos por ejemplo plantas medicinales y algunos ya olvidaron de eso, ya solo necesitan medicinas artificiales y a pesar de lo que ya tenemos aquí, entonces es algo que muchas de las personas están olvidando.*

> In the case of, for example, [the seventh grade], they were working on health. Many of the things were also related to the culture, which is being forgotten. We have, for example, medicinal plants and some are forgetting about these, and they only use artificial medicines, despite what we have here, so it is something that the people are forgetting.

For German, centering community knowledges was important for critically exploring the issues taking place in the Chuj community and developing solutions to the processes affecting their lives,

such as the imposition of Western medicine and pharmaceutical companies. As another student explained*, "B'eyb'al Komam Kicham está preparando jóvenes capaces de enfrentar la vida real que está pasando hoy en día"/* "B'eyb'al Komam Kicham is preparing young people who are capable of confronting real-life situations that are happening today." Thus, students understood the purpose of their education as not just about obtaining formal employment, but also supporting the future of their community; and the connection to the community was central to the way B'eyb'al Komam Kicham students, teachers, and administrators imagined meaningful learning.

An important part of the community-centered nature of the project-based curriculum was its focus on putting learning and knowledge into practice for the community. As Guadalupe, a teacher and former youth organizer, explained,

> *[Aprendizaje-basado en proyectos]hace que el estudiante también hace, practica; la práctica es lo que hacen acá y ellos ya van; salen en las comunidades y eso es bueno porque ahí aprenden ellos a compartir, a convivir con los demás, y no ser autoritario y sino democrático. Y también ahí aprenden a tomar decisiones.*
>
> [Project-based learning] makes it so the student also does or practices; putting into practice is what they do here and then they go; they go into the communities and that is good because there they learn how to share, live with others, and not to be authoritarian, but rather democratic. And there, they also learn to make decisions.

For Guadalupe, the students learned the most from engaging in projects in their community and not just memorizing content knowledges. She talked about the value, not in mastery of the core curriculum or test scores, but rather their development as democratic leaders and members of a collective. Many teachers and students talked about how this process helped them (re)connect with their community.

The curriculum also aimed to challenge colonial definitions of school knowledges as well as

the colonial borders between schools and the Chuj community. I observed community members and parents being invited into the school to share their experiences, and teachers telling students to talk to their parents or grandparents to learn about the different topics they were studying in their classes. Students were regularly asked to connect class discussions to issues and events they observed in the world around them. Not only were families understood as holders of valuable knowledge, but they were also included in the school's decision-making process; the school had regular meetings with students, teachers, and parents make joint decisions about their classrooms and learning processes.

The focus on local knowledges and preparing students to be the future of their community provided teachers with the space to engage in more creative and counterhegemonic pedagogies that were supported and celebrated by the administration and the school as a whole. One of my first days in the school, I was invited into Juana María's class. Juana María was a close friend of mine and had won teacher of the year the year prior, which was likely the reason the principals suggested I start my observations in her class. Since it was the beginning of the school year, Juana María was providing an overview of the project-based learning process, the mission and vision of the school, and the class' theme for the year. She introduced the mission and vision of the school and stressed the importance of students knowing it, because "this is our house and it is important to know our house well." She encouraged students to see the school as a family and, in doing so, to see themselves as valuable and active participants in the community. After reading the mission and vision aloud, she then asked the students to discuss their understandings of what they had heard. Students responded by talking about the importance of "understanding what is ours before others, so that we are not lost," "knowing how to do positive things," and "so we can become something in our community." Based on their responses, it was clear that they saw the purpose of their schooling beyond the goals of formal employment; instead, their response centered their role in their community and preparing

themselves to be leaders within it.

Juana María explained that it was important to create a community of learners in the classroom and for all members of the class to have a voice and actively participate. She went on to talk about the how, as educators, their pedagogy must be different and compare the project-based model to the punitive models used in what she and other teachers refer to as "traditional education." She talked about how students would be punished for what they got wrong and were not given space to participate; "only the teachers [often ladino] had the knowledge and the students would have to sit there with our mouths closed... the student was without light and unable to think for him/herself." She explained that B'eyb'al Komam Kicham was different, because "the student is at the center." She discussed how this difference could be seen even in the terms used in the school, "teachers, we are called facilitators because we are just a guide, we are only here to support your ideas... and we call ourselves a team, rather than a group, because if you think about a soccer team, everyone supports one another. If someone gets hurt, we are all there to help." Because of this, she said that the students must be ready to work and prepare themselves and most importantly "we all have to support one another." Throughout her discussion, she engaged students in the conversation and opened space for questions and dialogue.

Since the project-based learning model focused on preparing students to be leaders in their community and develop confidence in their voice, this meant supporting students in thinking critically about the world around them. As Mario Felix, a teacher with a long history of youth organizing, described, *"La metodología está muy bien. No es tanto para educarlos, sino que es para concentizarlos."*/ "The methodology is great. It is not just about educating them, but rather about raising their consciousness." He talked about encouraging students to learn about the issues and policies affecting them, such as the push for a highway through the area, the closing of the municipal government, and the disputes over the hydroelectric company. I heard from more than one student

that the school was known for having active students and that when students came from one of the other schools in town, they would take a while to find their voice, because they had been so affected by the colonial curriculum.

Malxun wanted students in B'eyb'al Komam Kicham to develop confidence in themselves and find their learning meaningful and connected to their lives, in ways that were similar to how YLO youth described their experiences in the organizations. And many students talked about how their experiences with the curriculum helped them gain confidence in their understandings of the world around them and in speaking in front of people and voicing their ideas in ways that mirrored the experiences of YLO youth. Because students came up with their own projects and were encouraged to actively participate in their classes, they felt a great deal of ownership over their learning and played an active role in shaping their education. As one student explained,

Entonces, lo que veo en el B'eyb'al Komam Kicham es que a nosotros que nos dan el trabajo para desarrollarnos, es casi un 75% que nosotros tenemos que aportar ahí en la clase y a los facilitadores ya solo un 25% que nos ayudan ahí.	So, what I see at B'eyb'al Komam Kicham is that that they give us the work of developing ourselves, it's about 75% that which we have to provide in class and the facilitators then only help us 25%.

While the facilitators were there to guide students, students ultimately shaped their classes and their final project. Thus, students saw themselves as central to their school and learning, which represented a shift from colonial schooling models that position teachers as the ultimate authority and knowledge holders and students as passive recipients of the curricular content. Through this reframing, they mirrored the efforts of Chuj YLOs to (re)imagine relationships across the community.

Students were encouraged to ask questions and explore answers and solutions. As one

teacher, Patricia, explained to her class, "Don't just do what the teacher tells you... Before the teacher would just fill students' heads, but now you must go out and explore and ask, 'is what the teacher told me true?' Don't be conformist...you are the ones that must analyze the world so that you are not left with the same problems." Patricia's words to her students highlight the shift in the way teaching and learning were imagined at B'eyb'al Komam Kicham—away from a banking model of education (Freire, 1971) to a more student-centered and discussion-based pedagogy. As Patricia's words highlight, students were encouraged to question their teachers' authority and the curriculum, which represented an important change from colonial models of schooling.

Facilitators focused on supporting students or accompanying them on their education journey and were there to help the students explore issues in their community, develop their critical understandings, and look for solutions. Juana, a student representative discussed her transfer from another middle school in town and how her current experiences in school differed from her past experiences,

La diferencia … es que allá nos dan proyectos, nos motivan en que hay ir adelante, nos dan más ánimos de seguir estudiando. En cambio, donde estuve antes no nos motivaban; a ellos no les importaban si ganamos o no, sólo es cuestión de que ellos cumplieran en darnos clase y ya y sólo con eso. En cambio, ahí si nos motivan mucho, nos exigen para dar lo mejor de nosotros. Ahorita estamos haciendo lo del informe, nos motivan nos dicen qué es lo que tenemos que hacer, que tenemos que aprender

The difference… is that they give us projects, they motivate us to go forward, they encourage us to keep studying. On the other hand, where I was before, they didn't motivate us; they didn't care if we passed or not, the only thing they cared about was fulfilling their responsibility by coming to class and that's it, only that. But here they motivate us a lot, they push us to give our best. Now, we are doing the reports and they motivate us, they tell us how to do it and that we need to learn how to do

cómo hacer un informe, todo eso. Más alegre, nos motivan más.	these reports and all that. It's a lot happier, they motivate us more.

Here, Juana centered the supportive relationship between teachers and students, which was central to students seeing themselves as leaders and capable of creating positive change in their community. This model mirrored a form of learning that fit with Chuj educational models, where adults guided young people on their learning process through working alongside them (Allweiss, 2012), and what Sepúlveda (2011) calls a "pedagogy of *acompañamiento*," which he describes as the "practices of relationship and community building performed by borderland subjects at the interstices, or in-between spaces of cultural and institutional life" (p. 559). Thus, this model gave teachers space to reimagine their role from a community-based framework and shifted the teacher-student relationships from an authoritarian one to one of support and respect.

Overall, B'eyb'al Komam Kicham's approach to teaching and learning was seen as innovative and successful within the constraints and fraught histories of formal schooling. Students and educators talked about the success of B'eyb'al Komam Kicham in terms of its recognition within the community. They often talked about the school being "in first place" for education in town. They based this both on what people in the community were saying and on the fact that a greater number of students were enrolling each year, which meant that more young people and their families were choosing the school. While other schools worried about a decrease in their enrollment numbers, despite being semi-private and charging higher tuition than the other secondary schools, B'eyb'al Komam Kicham had more students than they could comfortably accommodate given the physical classroom spaces. To meet their increasing numbers, some of the classrooms were divided with temporary wooden walls to house two classes instead of one. Guadalupe, a teacher and former youth organizer, discussed the increase in students as follows,

Bueno viendo la cantidad de los estudiantes	Well, seeing the quantity of students now, this

ahora, que está generando una cantidad más elevada a los otros porque según dicen que es por la calidad de educación o por el ABP que se está implementando. Y despierta el interés del estudiante …

school is generating a greater quantity than others, because according to what they [the people] say, it's because of the quality of education or because of the project-based learning that the school is implementing. And that awakens the interest in the student…

Members of the community also talked positively about the students at B'eyb'al Komam Kicham, because they were able to see their projects and thus the learning in which they were engaged. This differed from other schools, whose learning remained within the confines of the school walls and thus seemed far removed from the rest of the community and led to elders' concerns about what schools were teaching and the undoing of Chuj knowledges.

In addition to the connection to the community, many teachers and students talked about how the process of engaging in project-based learning also prepared them well for formal employment as well higher education. Mario Felix explained that students could use the skills they acquired through the implementation of their projects, such as survey techniques, interviews, and writing and presenting reports not only to solve issues in their lives and communities, but also to gain valuable employment. Students similarly talked about how these same skills and experiences would help them conduct research for a thesis and meet the expectations of university classes.

In addition, many families and teachers saw the school's wrap-around approach that blurred the lines between school and the community as especially important for young people in the current moment with increasing concerns over alcoholism, neighborhood *grupitos*, and suicide among young people. A number of students talked about how they also appreciated attending a school that held students and teachers accountable for their actions in and outside of the classroom. For example, German stated,

Si un profesor nos ve andando en la calle de noche, entonces se tiene que llamar a la dirección y explicar el motivo de por qué o que está haciendo en la noche. Y también el reglamento del establecimiento está muy bonito porque nos tiene bajo su vigilancia en lo que hacemos diario. Porque según el reglamento dice dentro o fuera del establecimiento tenemos que cumplirlo no porque estamos fuera ya no formamos parte de B'eyb'al Komam Kicham, sino que somos un gran equipo aquí.	If a teacher sees us in the street at night, they have to call us to the office and ask us why or what we were doing at night. And also the school's rules are really beautiful, because they are watching us and what we are doing every day. Because the rules say that in or out of the school, we have to follow the rules, just because we are outside of the school does not mean that we are no longer part of B'eyb'al Komam Kicham, but rather we are a big team here.

Many students voiced similar appreciations for the school's expectations. They talked about the rules not as punitive or imposed, but as a shared commitment that related to ways students and teachers often talked about the members of the school as a family and a team. One expectation students discussed as particularly valuable was the school uniform, which for female students was the traditional red *corte* and woven *blusa* that were traditional to Xantin. As one of the student leaders explained, "*demostramos a los demás que sí la cultura está presente, nadie la había llevado."*/ "We show others that the culture is present here, nobody has taken it from us." Velásquez Nimatuj (2011) argues that the use of regional *traje* is an act of resistance, because it reminds those in power "of the failure of their efforts to make us disappear… from genocide to ideological coercion" and challenges racialized colonial structures that exist across institutions (p. 526). Through the uniform and expectations, B'eyb'al Komam Kicham challenged colonial models that sought to divide Maya communities and devalue their knowledges and ways of being.

The success of the project-based curriculum in B'eyb'al Komam Kicham motivated and

supported other schools in the community, who also worked to develop curricula that connected to the community and the lives of young people in similar ways. This was especially true as the community wrestled with concerns about young people's well-being and futures and often centered schools as sites of both harm and possible change; school principals from across the town were regularly brought together to discuss ways to address issues faced by young Chuj people. In this context, other school leaders also came to see the urgency, importance, and possibility of developing similar community-based educational models. For example, the principal at Xantin National worked to create what he called "*aprendizaje basado en compentencias*"/ "competence-based learning" that was modeled off B'eyb'al Komam Kicham's project-based learning model and similarly aimed to help students apply and put into practice the learning requirements of the national curricular. Furthermore, the principal of Madre María de Jesús worked to implement an educational model that created strong connections among the school, students, and their family. He encouraged parents to take an active role in their students' learning and for teaching to be connected to students' everyday lives and needs. Mikin, a community leader and educator, helped Madre María develop its curriculum and educational model in connection with community knowledges and in a way that challenged colonial schooling models. He described his concern about the colonial models of schooling, as "not really teaching us how to analyze to project ourselves into the future…we are being educated to work and not to push for our autonomy or continue our struggle." Because he had worked with the MYO previously, Mikin was inspired by the youth's commitment to learning about issues in the community and saw how that motivated youth leaders. He imagined the possibility for education in school to support young people in their struggle against colonial systems, and recognized that this model of schooling would fundamentally challenge the current model. While Mikin and the school's principal worked to create a more community-centered curriculum, the school struggled to find the funding and support to implement it; thus, because I was in the school

as it was just starting, these changes were not readily apparent during the time I was there. At the same time, the efforts pointed to a sense of urgency shared across schools of the need to reconsider to purpose, form, and content of formal schooling for Chuj young people that challenged the colonial histories and curricular models.

The Student Government: Teaching Democracy and Challenging Hierarchies

In addition to the curriculum, the student government at B'eyb'al Komam Kicham Cooperative Secondary School was central to the school's efforts to elevate the leadership of young people. The government was developed alongside and complementary to the goals of the project-based curriculum and opened space for students across the school to have a greater voice in the school's policies, activities, and curriculum and challenged traditional school hierarchies.

Malxun argued that the student government supported the idea that, "*el joven debe ser el cambio en su sociedad*"/ "idea that the young person should be the change in their society," and was central to parents and community members recognizing the power of young people. Malxun, explained,

> *Debe tener en su derecho involucrarse, debe conocer, y con el hecho de que lo que se haga aquí en la escuela es como lo hiciera en la sociedad, pero también va aprendiendo.*
>
> They should have the right to be involved, they should know, with the idea that what they do here in the school is like what they will do in society, but they are also learning in the process.

Malxun saw the government as a way to highlight youth's abilities to be leaders; by seeing youth leaders facilitate change within their school community, students would also see their ability to be leaders in the town. She framed student's involvement as a right and saw it as central to challenging the imposed hierarchies of colonial schooling.

While student governments existed in other schools and B'eyb'al Komam Kicham had a student government in the past, Malxun worked to give the government a larger role in the school

administration. She explained that while the student government existed previously, "it wasn't made a priority;" the student representatives were voted on by their peers, but afterwards the student representatives did not have much of a role in the school. Teachers and students discussed how the student government would maybe plan and lead one or two school-wide activities, such as a sports day for the school and maybe a talent show or teacher appreciation day, but that was it; their participation was seen as peripheral to the aims and everyday practices of the school. Malxun wanted to challenge traditional hierarchies by incorporating the student government in the administration of the school. Malxun included student government representatives in teacher development workshops and the student representatives were responsible for classroom supervision, writing reports, and holding their teachers accountable.

Students participated in workshops with the teachers about project-based learning and were then in charge of observing the sessions across the school to ensure all students were receiving the same preparation and the support they needed for their community projects. I often observed student government representatives walking from class to class observing how the teachers were engaging in project-based learning and supporting their students. The student representatives would often talk to the other students and ask them how they felt about their teachers and their classes. Following their observations and conversation, the representatives would submit reports and recommendations to the administrative office. Because their role was viewed as important to the overall success and learning of the school, these student observations were welcomed by the teachers and administrators. Malxun and Maricio Andrés used the students' recommendations to support the teachers in improving their pedagogies and relationship with the students. Thus, the student government supported the overall learning in the school.

At the end of January, B'eyb'al Komam Kicham held a professional development meeting for teachers at the school focused on the project-based learning curriculum. Two student

government representatives were present at the meeting. After opening words from the principals, the two students stood in front of the teachers and went over the *acuerdos de convivencia* (the rules of coexistence), which included active participation, no cellphones, no eating, professional attire, no coming and going, no speaking Chuj, teamwork, and gender equity. I had seen similar rules hanging in the different classrooms throughout the school and while I was uneasy with rules like "no speaking Chuj" (which I will discuss later), it was apparent that the student government provided the students with a mechanism for holding their teachers accountable to the same rules to which they were held. In this way, rather than a form of top-down surveillance, school rules were shared among students and teachers, which encouraged a more egalitarian approach to discipline within the school. In the meeting, co-principal Mauricio Andrés reminded the teachers that the student representatives were there to both participate and reinforce these rules. Throughout the workshop and meeting, the student representatives participated alongside the teachers and I was struck by how they were incorporated as part of the team.

German, an accounting student, who had been in the student government the year before, talked about the value of participating in the meetings with and alongside teachers when I asked him about participating in the professional development workshops. German explained,

Sí, siempre participamos… [S]e realizaron talleres durante los meses del año pasado. En septiembre, fue una de mis primeras participaciones. Entonces tuve que venir un día es aquí en el B'eyb'al Komam Kicham, no hubo clase…Ya a los finales año, el taller lo realizaron en Xela, entonces tuve que ir también… entonces ahí se llevó a cabo y se dio fin a todo. Entonces ahí se hizo la planificación de este	Yes, we always participate… Last year, they had workshops during every month of the year. September was one of my first times participating. I had to come here to B'eyb'al Komam Kicham one day when there were no classes.... And at the end of the year, with the workshop they had in Xela, I had to go there too... So there, everything was

ano, lo que están haciendo por ahora… Tenemos que brindarle nuestra participación para poder resolverlo todo.	brought to a close. And we did the planning for this year, which they working with now... We have to provide our participation to be able to resolve everything.

German talked about traveling with the teachers and planning the overall goals for the upcoming year with and alongside them. While German talked about what he learned from participating the workshops and how valuable he found it for himself, he also saw their role as providing valuable input and support for the school's curriculum. During the interview, he often talked about the importance of students learning from one another and supporting one another, because he argued that, as adults, teachers sometimes had different experiences and understandings from the young people they taught. Many teachers also shared this view, and saw the student government as providing important support for the students, because they could relate to them as peers.

Thus, the student government was important for students feeling like valuable members of the school community. Matin, a new student government representative explained,

[E]l GE es muy fundamental para los estudiantes, ya que son los que velan por los intereses de los estudiantes—qué quieren, qué no quieren, cuándo quieren una cosa. Digamos que es la voz de los estudiantes ante la dirección. Es la que ayuda a los estudiantes para resolver problemas.	[T]he student government is essential for the students, since they are the ones that look out for students' interests—what they want, what they don't want, when they want it. We could say that it is the voice of the students before the administration. It's what helps the students solve problems.

For Matin, like German, the student government provided an important support for students and amplified student voice in the school. The student government leaders helped students solve internal problems (issues between and among students) as well as concerns with teachers and thus helped

foster a positive learning environment and community atmosphere in the school. Because of this, the student government at B'eyb'al Komam Kicham challenged traditional hierarchies in formal schooling that positioned the administrators and teachers as the ultimate authority with students forced to abide by whatever rules they imposed. Instead B'eyb'al Komam Kicham worked to create a collective space through the student government that allowed students to raise questions and concerns about the school and hold their teachers accountable. This helped foster the shared sense of responsibility for learning that was discussed in the previous section.

In addition, the election process for the student government was also important for the school's vision of fostering students' development as leaders for the community and responding to issues they saw in the community—particularly around corruption. The elections were set up as a way to teach students about democracy, election campaigns, and voting through a participatory experience. Malxun and Mauricio Andrés set up the election process to mirror the local and national elections, because they wanted the students to see how elections worked and learn about making informed decisions. These national processes differed from the consensus decision-making process of the community and Malxun and Mauricio Andrés felt that it was important for students to understand how national elections worked, so they could make informed decisions in local and national elections.

For the student government elections, the principals and teachers encouraged a "clean" campaigning process without bribes or gifts and enlisted the support of the local election commissioner to oversee the process as he would an actual election and provide official materials for the voting process. The school-wide campaigning and voting process lasted over a month. The purpose was to teach students about democracy and amplify students' voices in the school. While this process provided a learning opportunity for all students, this was a particularly meaningful the students who participated in the campaigning and ran for the student government.

In February, Profe Pedro and Profe Fernando Luis, the teacher representatives for the school's election committee, brought together the presidents and secretaries of each grade in the school's outdoor common area under *chozas* and helped the students divide into four political parties. Each group then picked its party representative (their presidential candidate) and other party members—vice-president, treasurer, secretary, and chair people. Over the course of the next few weeks, the members of each of the four political parties went around to all the grades twice to present their proposals for the current year and encourage their peers to vote for them. The proposals centered on assisting students with their concerns, supporting the project-based curriculum, planning school-wide activities, and bettering the school infrastructure. The student government campaign process culminated at the end of the month with a big political forum. Classes ended early for the event and all the students and teachers brought desks and chairs down the hill to the town's indoor soccer field. Each candidate was given ten minutes to talk and discuss their plans and go over their proposals. After listening to each party's proposals, each grade was given an opportunity to ask a question of the candidates. The activity ended with words from the local election commissioner who talked about how he was so glad the school is doing this activity, because they were "constructing citizenship" and fostering a culture of "peace and democracy."

The elections, which took place the following Friday, were designed to mirror the national voting process and the local election commissioner even lent the school official voting tables, which had slots and a bag to hold the ballots. Desks were set up behind each of the voting tables to serve as voting stations. To vote, students presented their official election ID cards to the students sitting at the voting tables, who then crossed their name off their list of "registered voters." The students were then given a ballot with the logos of the four parties displayed across the page and directed to a voting booth with a crayon to put an 'X' over the logo of the political party for whom they intended to vote. After the students deposited their ballots in the collection slot, their fingers were dipped in

ink. Once all ballots had been cast, the students and teachers in charge of the election tables gathered up the bags with the ballots and brought them into an empty classroom to count the votes. The winning party's presidential and vice-presidential candidates assumed their leadership positions in the school government. Then, the teachers and principals added the other parties' representatives to fill out the rest of the school government positions, so all four of the political parties' proposals and goals would be represented in the final student government board.

This experience was another way in which traditional schooling practices were challenged; while the political parties had guidelines, instead of teachers telling students what to do or say and when to participate, the students developed their own proposals and plans without adult or teacher oversight. They were also given the time to leave their classes and participate in the campaign process. I was the only adult who accompanied the political parties as they went from grade to grade and as soon as they walked into the classrooms, the teachers would stop their lessons and the students would stop their work and the student representatives were given complete attention and space. That is not to say students were not aware of teachers' presence in the room, but that the students were given the space to make their own decisions, engage directly with one another, and experience a campaign process for themselves.

Many students in the school talked about how much they learned from the election process. Clara, a middle school student, explained,

He experimentado cosas y si aprendí algo de la política. No sabía porque nunca he votado y votamos pues. Hicimos nuestro voto, nuestro DPI estudiantil, todo eso, las huellas, como se hace. Aprendí algo de eso, como de las políticas.	I have experienced things and yes, I learned something about politics. I didn't know, because I had never voted, and well we voted. We made our vote, our student ID card, all of that, the fingerprints, how it's done. I learned something from that, like about politics.

For Clara, the event helped her understand the election process, which she had not experience yet as a young person under 18 (the legal voting age). A number of students also commented that the experience helped them understand what voting looked like and how to make informed decisions about different candidates.

In addition, students who participated in the campaigning talked about how it helped them develop confidence in themselves and see themselves as leaders. Many of the representatives told me that while they had initially felt nervous entering the classrooms and presenting themselves and their campaign, by the end of the process they felt much more confident speaking in front of a large group of people. Karina, who participated in the election process for her second year, described her experience as a learning and personally transformative experience,

[E]s bonito participar, aprender más cosas, nuevas experiencias y como dije anteriormente, antes tenía medio de hablar en público y cambié. Ya no tengo miedo de hablar en público ahora por el favor de los que realizaron esta actividad me he cambiado mucho...	[I]t is wonderful to participate, learn more things, new experiences, and as I said before, previously I was afraid to speak in public and I changed. I am no longer afraid to speak in public now, because thanks to those who carried out this activity, I have changed a lot...

She went on to talk about how the experience made her feel confident participating in other spaces. The other student representatives described their experiences in similar ways, which compared to how YLO youth spoke about their experiences and growth as youth leaders. Many also discussed taking these experiences back to their classrooms and into their communities. For Malxun, the voting process was connected to her experiences with leadership in the YLOs; she wanted to find a way for students to explore democratic processes and possibilities and find their voice as she had done through the YLOs. She saw this interactive process as playing a role in doing that.

While the voting process could also be seen to encourage Western definitions of democratic

citizenship (Kwon, 2013), because of its focus on "clean" elections, the student government at B'eyb'al Komam Kicham extended democratic learning and curricula beyond the classroom to the school wide event and structure of the school giving students greater voice in and ownership of their school. The role of the student government challenged the general structure of the school to align the transformative curriculum with the culture and administration of the school, which scholars of multicultural education have long pointed to as important (e.g., Banks, 1997)

Much like the curriculum, the success of the student government's position and the formal voting process in B'eyb'al Komam Kicham inspired others schools, who saw the value in this experience. Xantin National Middle School discussed creating a similar student government structure and, in 2017, decided to start by implementing a voting process for their student government modeled off B'eyb'al Komam Kicham. In Feburary, the students formed four political parties; created their party names, logos, and campaign proposals; presented their plans to the different grades; and then held a schoolwide forum. The school then facilitated a similar voting process, though they did not call on the support of the local election commissioner. However, unlike at B'eyb'al Komam Kicham, the winning party was the student government and the teachers and administrators did not change any of the members to include those from other campaigns. Additionally, each of the political parties at Xantin National had more adult oversight; teachers divided up the political parties and there were teacher advisors for each of the parties that helped the students come up with campaign proposals for the school and prepared them for their speeches. Some of the teacher advisors gave students space to come up with their own proposals, while others provided more guidance. Yet, students found the experience to be empowering and talked about learning a lot from the process. Katilla, the school president discussed how proud she was of herself and her *compañeros* after they won. She explained that she was nominated as president, because her believed in her ability to speak in front of a group a people, and that the students voted for her,

because they believed in her vision for continuing to support the school; so, that made her feel more confident in herself as a leader and in her school community. María, a student government representative, explained she learned a lot through the process; she and her team worked hard to develop their campaign proposals and plan their speeches, meeting to go over their proposals and practice outside of class.

An interesting difference I observed between the election process at Xantin National and B'eyb'al Komam Kicham was the focus on understanding corruption in politics rather than focusing on a "clean" version of democracy; Xantin National students were allowed to pass out "gifts," such as pens and candy, to their schoolmates to encourage them to vote for their political party. While many of the students' proposals centered around improving the school[12], one of the parties promised to implement a series of fun events such as a field trip every two months, regular dance parties, sports days, and excursions among their campaign promises. While some of the teachers were uneasy with these unrealistic promises, Ana, the teacher and organizer who was advising that group, argued that "the students have to promise, even if they don't do what they say they will, because that is how politics really is." This was meaningful in the context of national and local concerns about corrupt politicians; in particular, Ana discussed the rumors that the current mayor had paid bribes to people in the villages in exchange for votes (the rumor was that he paid Q.200 or roughly $28 per vote). Ana argued that this experience with voting in the school could help the students learn about how corruption operates and how to make informed political decisions in the face of bribes, corruption, and false promises.

In the end, the student government representatives at Xantin National were hopeful in their

[12] The winning party focused on the goals ridding of the garbage littering the outside the building, keeping the building clean by organizing students for regular school-wide cleanings, and fixing student desks that were in a state a of disrepair, all of which they argued inhibited students' ability to learn comfortably as well as the image of the school.

ability to facilitate change in their school (though unlike the students at B'eyb'al Komam Kicham, they did not discuss these transformations or their leadership experiences in connection to the greater community). Overall, the student government election process provided a unique experience for students and teachers to rethink colonial school hierarchies and reconsider the role of students in the decision-making processes of their school by providing space for students to share their visions for the school and work towards them.

The elections served as an important space in which teachers and students sought to expand the curriculum, foster students' leadership development and voice, and (re)imagine the role of students in the school. However, these elections processes centered around liberal framings of "good citizenship" (Kwon, 2013) and "empowered critical citizenry for greater participation and integration in the nation-state," rather than through frameworks of indigenous sovereignty and "self-determination from the colonizing state" (Smith, Tuck, and Yang, 2019, p. xv, see also Grande, 2004; Brayboy, 2005). The election processes simultaneously reinforced the centrality of the nation and challenged Guatemala's colonial histories of the exclusion indigenous peoples from the national politics and citizenship; students were encouraged to see themselves as active participants in decision-making processes and potential leaders rather than passive objects of political intervention. While simultaneously reinforcing these colonial nation state models, the electoral and government frameworks and processes also encouraged students to think about their political engagements critically and in ways that considered the best interests of their community. As schools in Xantin sought to provide students access to dominant knowledges alongside community knowledges, the ability to understand and participate in the political systems was seen as important for students.

Overall, the student government and election models created by B'eyb'al Komam Kicham challenged traditional colonial hierarchies in schools and sought to create a more collaborative learning atmosphere. This was coupled with the complimentary curricular efforts to connect school

learning with community knowledges and support students' development as leaders in and for their community. Batz (2019) discusses the Ixil community's concerns over young people not taking up local leadership positions, because they imagined their futures separate from the needs of their community—either through state-sanctioned universities, formal employment, or migration to the United States. Malxun and B'eyb'al Komam Kicham worked to resist the threats of these processes in the Chuj community; they supported students in seeing themselves leaders in the community by connecting school learning to community knowledges through the curriculum and supporting students in developing critical understandings of leadership through the student government. Thus, the transformative efforts of Malxun and the teachers and students at B'eyb'al Komam Kicham highlight the creative possibilities of transforming schooling.

"It's Really Nice in Theory": Challenges to Transformation

At the same time these school-based (re)imaginings and resistances point to decolonial possibilities, they also bring to light tensions with and challenges to these transformation efforts that highlight the entrenched colonial power structures that have shaped and continue to influence formal schooling spaces, curricula, and practices. Again, pointing out these challenges does not take away from the transformative visions of the school community, but rather illuminates the ways modern/colonial power structures and histories remain embedded in formal schooling. Chuj educators and students were engaging in resistance within the tight institutional spaces (Lugones, 2003) of formal schooling within which they were working to chip away and destabilize its colonial contours. I bring to light the challenges of this work in order to make visible the colonial structures, whose power often lies in their invisibility, and again highlight the messiness of engaging in decolonial resistance while operating within an institution built on colonial control, especially while larger modern/colonial structures remain unchanged.

First of all, despite efforts to challenge colonial pedagogies of authority and control, not all

teachers engaged in a student-centered teaching and not all students felt empowered by the project-based curriculum. Despite the school's efforts to challenge colonial teaching models, a number of teachers still engaged in banking models of teaching (Freire, 1971). I observed classes where teachers simply read from a book for students to copy or wrote problems on the board for students to copy and solve. While a number of teachers worked to build their classrooms into spaces where students asked questions and where knowledge was co-constructed, others felt constrained by the national curriculum and focused on student achievement in relation to standardized tests. While working within the formal curriculum as a guide, these teachers felt constrained and engaged in a normative and colonial pedagogy.

Additionally, even teachers who were committed to transformative pedagogies continued to feel restricted by the national curriculum and dominant expectations of formal schooling. Mauricio Andrés explained,

Es un poquito difícil. Más por algunas situaciones que tal vez no te permiten moverte con libertad en un espacio. Entonces lamentablemente hay nuestra política educativa nacional, es muy bueno en teoría, pero ya en la práctica se influyen muchas cosas… Y nosotros hemos luchado como contracorriente que queremos esto y al final puedes decir que a veces un no puede moverse con tanta libertad…

It's a little challenging. Mostly because of situations that maybe don't allow us to move freely in the space. So unfortunately, there is our national educational policy and it's really nice in theory, but in practice there are a lot of things that influence it...And we have fought to go against the current, that is what we want and in the end, you could say that sometimes we just can't move that freely.

He pointed to the ways the national education politics and normative expectations of formal schooling sometimes restricted their ability to bring about the changes they envisioned and desired. He eluded to the multicultural curriculum when he said it was "nice in theory," but his

acknowledgement of the underlying influences speaks to the how despite Maya people's recognition within curriculum, it continues to be shaped and restricted by settler colonial aspirations (Dhillon, 2017). Thus, he felt that their transformative efforts came up against colonial power structures and limited the change they were able to achieve. As a cooperative (semi-private) secondary school, B'eyb'al Komam Kicham needed to meet educational requirements created by the state and were overseen by a local educational official. Batz (2019) argues that the surveillance of the "state-based educational system continues to unapologetically privilege Western thinking, history, culture, and its agents" (p. 114); thus, B'eyb'al Komam Kicham, and the other schools who also faced similar oversight, were constrained by their efforts to both meet the guidelines set for by the state and engage in a transformative curricula and pedagogies for and with their students and community.

Furthermore, while the majority of the students I spoke with felt empowered by the curriculum and the results of an anonymous survey showed that a vast majority of the students enjoyed the curriculum, some students complained that project-based learning was a "*dolor de cabeza*"/ "headache." "*ABP sólo es un dolor de cabeza*"/ "project-based learning is a headache" became a popular refrain throughout the school as teachers and students grappled with what it meant that some students described the methodology to painful. These students expressed feeling overwhelmed by the amount of work expected of them and considered the work just another requirement instead of an empowering way to connect their learning to the community.

In addition, while Malxun worked to change the hierarchal models of formal schooling, the frameworks of formal schooling that positioned teachers and administrators as the ultimate authorities in knowledge were hard to unravel. This could be seen in the ways students referred to teachers/facilitators and administrators as those with the ultimate power and authority in the school. For example, I observed one class where students were asked to create a map of their school's organizational structure and all the students drew a hierarchical model with students at the bottom;

the student government did not even make it on their map. While Malxun's official map had the student government in a position that connected the administration, teachers, and students and, was thus in an equal position, many students still experienced their school in hierarchical ways and did not feel that their voices were heard in the ways the school administrators imagined. In addition, despite trying to promote and create a more egalitarian structure, teachers still had power over students in the form of grades, so students did not always feel like they could challenge their teachers in the ways Malxun had imagined.

Likewise, the student government itself was created using a hierarchical model that mirrored national government models that position the president as the ultimate authority. This meant that not all members of the government even felt they had power or voice in the school. When I asked one of the student government representatives, who had competed with a losing political party, what he would like to achieve this year as a member of the student government, he responded,

> *Siento que no tengo mucha influencia, más el presidente es él que tiene mucha influencia con el director y con el personal docente, es él que tiene más enfoque, ya los otros es como que están en su segundo plan, ya el que está en el primer plan es el presidente ya todos los demás estamos en el segundo plan. Sí, pero tratare de hablar de hablar con el presidente…*

> I feel like I don't have a lot of influence; the president is more the one that has a lot of influence with the principal and with the teaching personnel, he is the one that is the focus, and the others are more like a secondary plan, since the first plan is the president, the rest of us are in the secondary plan. But I will try to talk with the president...

Thus, even within the government, not all student representatives felt empowered or in a position to bring about their visions for change in the school.

Furthermore, the focus on identifying problems and finding solutions through the project-based curriculum encouraged students to see what was wrong with their community. They became

used to looking for problems rather than strengths, despite teachers' efforts to center community knowledges. This model also positioned students to understand themselves as the ones to solve problems, because of their formal schooling background, which contradicted the school's efforts to challenge colonial definitions of knowledge and experts. For example, the accounting students talked about their project "teaching" local business owners about the importance of paying taxes; as one student leader explained to me, "they don't know they are supposed to pay." The students were frustrated by business owners' subsequent refusal to attend their trainings.

Furthermore, the school's efforts to challenge the dominance of colonial languages and knowledges were troubled by the school's policy of "no Chuj." Co-principal, Mauricio Andrés, explained that Spanish was encouraged in the school as part of their effort to provide students with access to dominant knowledges—in this case, to support students' fluency and learning of Spanish as a second language. Proficiency in Spanish was framed as important for navigating social and political power structures and supporting their community as advocates. He explained that he and other teachers were concerned about students "lack of proficiency" in Spanish, so they wanted to push students to speak only in Spanish while they were in school to encourage them to practice expressing themselves in the language, since most students spoke Chuj in their homes and with their friends outside of school. However, this policy also had the effect of reinforcing the colonial idea that Spanish is the only language for formal schooling. I would often hear students policing one another's language. When someone was heard speaking Chuj, classmates would often yell *"¡Multa! ¡Está hablando Chuj!"* or "Fine! S/he is speaking Chuj!" While I never saw any students actually being fined for their use of Chuj, the purpose was to embarrass or shame the student using Chuj, which connected to a larger history of the use of indigenous languages being disciplined in schools (Speciale, forthcoming). Through thes disciplining practices, the no-Chuj policy functioned in a subtractive way (Valenzuela, 2010) and solidified the colonial notion that European languages were

the most valuable and that indigenous languages had no place in schools.

In addition, B'eyb'al Komam Kicham's identity as a cooperative or semi-private school with connections to a U.S.-based foundation created different possibilities and constraints for the work in which they were engaged. The cooperative structure of the school meant that most of their funding came from student tuition with some local government subsidies, so that while they had state oversight and support, they were mostly accountable to parents and students. At the same time, higher tuition fees meant that the school was not accessible to all students. While they had some scholarship opportunities, the school's higher fees were prohibitive for a number of Xantin families and raise questions about the possibilities for transformation in a private or semi-private space when not all young people have access. Furthermore, the support of the U.S.-based foundation greatly aided B'eyb'al Komam Kicham in implementing the project-based curriculum. The foundation provided the school with financial, material, and training support that gave the teachers and student government representatives the time, space, and resources to engage jointly in critically (re)imagining education in the school. The other schools in Xantin did not have access to this type of support to fully engage in these types of school-wide efforts, even though both of the other schools in which I conducted research saw the need to more deeply connect school learning with the lives of their students and the community; at Xantin National, teachers had full course loads with very little free time for planning during school hours, and teachers at Madre María were only paid a small stipend for their work, so most had commitments outside of the school.

Because of the colonial legacies of formal schooling, teachers and administrators drew on knowledges and models created outside of these constraints to destabilize their hold and open spaces for other possibilities. The challenges discussed here highlight the inherent tensions in trying to transform educational spaces while existing within colonial hierarchies and the legacies of formal schooling. This raises important questions about the possibilities of decolonizing schools given

formal schooling's historical role in the colonial project and continued role in maintaining social/colonial hierarchies.

Discussion: "Forming Students That Really Change the World"

Y en la escuela, en lo educativo, no es muy diferente, va encaminado a ese mismo, formar a estudiantes que realmente cambien al mundo; que con las herramientas que aprendieron puedan ir y cambiar las cosas…tenemos que hacer las cosas para mejorar al proceso.	In the school, or in the educational arena, it's not very different (from the YLOs), its on the same path to forming students that really change the world; who with the tools they learn can go and change things… we have to do things to improve the process.

These were Malxun's words when I asked her if and how she saw the connections between her with the YLOs and her work with B'eyb'al Komam Kicham. These words capture how Malxun imagined her work at B'eyb'al Komam Kicham alongside her co-principal, educators, students, and their families. Malxun's experiences and visions presented in this chapter represent a reminagining of the purpose and aims of formal schooling drawing on her experiences with youth organizing and desires of her committee.

Schools continue to be viewed as important and necessary for young people's social and economic advancement, at the same time they are a threat to indigenous communities as they push indigenous youth to be disconnected from their community and identities (Batz, 2019). The examples of schools presented here, in particular B'eyb'al Komam Kicham, show what bringing indigenous youth organizing practices into a formal schooling space looked in Xantin and the influence of these transformative imaginings on youth, educators, and other schools. The example of B'eyb'al Komam Kicham highlights the need to challenge neoliberal colonial models of schools and the possibilities of transforming formal schooling by drawing on indigenous youth organizing models and community knowledges. It illuminates the inherent challenges of working to decolonize

a fundamentally colonial system, while at the same time showing what is possible in such a tight space (Lugones, 2003). Again, this is not a neat story; there are a number of challenges that remain and the schools ran up against national standards and models that did not value Chuj knowledges and histories, but they found ways to challenge these histories and continued realities. By bringing to light the complex nature of these efforts, this chapter seeks to contribute to struggles to decolonize education and schooling.

This chapter makes clear the need to challenge the borders created between schools and communities. Malxun is an example of what is possible when community-based organizing and formal schooling come together to challenge modern/colonial institutions and the power of organzing experiences in transforming formal schooling for youth. Her efforts and experiences show what can happen when youth and community organizing backgrounds are valued and centered in schools and raise critical questions about what it might mean and look like to create and/or promote teachers who have similar backgrounds in organizing work for and with their communities. Her work suggests that this type of community organizing experience should be valued in school leadership and education. In addition, her and her team's success also argue for the importance of having teachers from the community, who are also invested in its future and see their students as a part of it, and work to connect schools with the community.

Overall, this chapter sheds light on the creative possibilities of creating educational models for and with indigenous youth and their communities and the possibilities of challenging neoliberal multiculturalism and colonial curricula through community-based and community-specific approaches. In doing so, it pushes back against colonial logics of inclusion within the purview of modern/colonial state that seeks to bring indigenous peoples under its control under the guise of recognition and shows instead what meaningful change might look like as well as the ways this change in complicated within a modern/colonial systems (Dhillon, 2017). In addition, this

challenges the discourses of lack and failure of Maya students and instead shows what is possible when Chuj young people are valued and supported in becoming leaders for and with their community. The next chapter builds on these findings to highlight the ways resistance for young people in Xantin is shaped by the town's history and geopolitical position as well as colonial/modern power structures and policies and the histories and struggles of Maya peoples in Guatemala.

Chapter 5: "We Are Facing a Great Monster": Privatization of Education, (Re)militarization, Corporate Extraction, and Migration

As I write this chapter, the Chuj people are well into their fourth year of direct resistance against a hydroelectric company that is seeking to install three hydroelectric plants in Chuj lands and redirect six rivers in the name of "sustainable development" (MEM, 2017; Navarro, 2018). In response to their resistance, the Chuj people have been labeled terrorists and faced direct repression and violence at the hands of the police, military, and corporate security, who are protecting the company (Navarro, 2018). Recently, the national police confronted protesters, who had been blocking the road for almost a month to prevent the company from bringing machinery and supplies into the area. According to reports, the police threw tear gas at the protesters and shot into the crowd; six people were injured, one critically so (personal communication). A community *acta*[13] explained that the violence happened as representatives from Xantin town were waiting for a group from the villages, who were walking to meet them as part of the peaceful resistance. The *acta* states,

> …but when they [the group from the villages] passed in front of the installations or company offices, the police began to throw tear gas, shoot at them, and hit them with the batons they were carrying. Some of the shell casings were recovered; others were not found… [The people] suffered injuries… for defending their rights, for defending their water, their land, their territory, because the company is redirecting rivers. The company is a murderous company, because it has already killed our *compañero*… and has been committing crimes of death. For this reason, the people demand the withdrawal of the company before more blood is spilled as well as the withdrawal of the national police and the military,

[13] *Actas* are legal documents used by community groups to document meetings, events, finances, etc. Batz (2017) explains that "*actas* are important documents that enjoy the legitimacy of the municipality" (p. 110).

> because we don't need them in our territory; they say they are here because of drugs, but we have seen that they use their weapons in support of the company. And they are violating international and national laws, the 1996 Peace Accords, ILO-convention 169, and the UN declaration [on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples] (translation mine).

Their words show the ways militarization and corporate extraction are interconnected and come together in violent ways in the Chuj community.

This chapter extends the analytic lens of the previous chapters to simultaneously encompass school, community, and youth organizing spaces to examine how the histories and processes of (re)militarization and corporate extraction interact and shape education, migration processes, and youth's lives. I explore these complex and troubling intersections and show how Chuj youth and schools were targets of national imaginings of progress, development discourses, and military efforts. Following the framework of decolonial feminism, I look to make visible the processes and policies that affected Chuj youth's lives and resistances by exposing their connections to and roots in "modern/colonial" power structures, because as Lugones (2003) argues, doing so is important for disruption. These interrelated processes in Xantin expose the way coloniality operates and speak to theories of coloniality, race, and power.

Ultimately, I argue that Chuj youth were in many ways at the epicenter of these intersecting processes and structures that came together in their lives, threatened their futures, and informed their organizing work. Chuj youth both resisted and refused to be limited by these processes and histories in their imaginings of and efforts towards a future for themselves and their community. Thus, their experiences and resistances add important insights into the contours of modern colonial systems and processes as well as the possibilities for decoloniality and Chuj survivance. I contend that scholars must not look at schools or development as separate from other forces and policies—such as militarization, corporate extraction, and migration—but instead through a shared history of

control and domination. Doing so makes apparent the ways current institutions, policies, and processes are rooted in and shaped by coloniality. Finally, this chapter shows how modern/colonial processes intersect and are mutually reinforcing, permeating multiple aspects of indigenous youth's lives, and argues that they must be understood through colonial logics of elimination and confronted simultaneously.

Thus, this chapter then builds on the findings and frameworks set forth in the previous chapters to highlight the complex ways Chuj young people and educators are responding to these processes through organizing and education. These efforts go beyond confrontation to critical (re)imaginings of community and their future; therefore, this chapter concludes with an exploration of Chuj youth and educators' visions for decolonial change in the face of these modern/colonial structures and processes to highlight the spaces of possibility and critical decolonial (re)imaginings. With these processes playing out in complex ways across Guatemala and in marginalized communities around the world, Chuj youths and educators' experiences and visions add insights and voice to these critical resistances that are a matter of life, death, survivance, and indigenous futures.

"Nuevamente la colonización": Privatization, Militarization, Education, and Resistance

2009 was the year of the *consulta comunitaria* (community referendum) on mining and hydroelectric projects in Xantin. I was teaching in one of the town's secondary schools when the students in my 11th grade class started asking me questions about mining and hydroelectric plants. They were concerned because they had heard about companies that were working to gain access to Chuj lands. They had heard that there would be a *consulta comunitaria* and wanted to better understand what this meant. For the next few weeks leading up the *consulta*, the 10th and 11th grade classes and I looked for more information about the mining and hydroelectric companies that were proposing operations in Xantin. In Guatemala, mining and hydroelectric projects are deeply linked –both are similarly granted access through the Ministry of Energy and Mines (MEM) and their plans are often

connected, with hydroelectric plants used to power mining projects in Maya lands. Thus, many community members use terms like *mineria* (mining) and *hidroeléctrica* (hydroelectric) interchangeably and understood the *consulta* to be about both mining and hydroelectric proposals. After finding out about mining and hydroelectric companies' histories of human rights abuses and destruction of community lands in Guatemala, the students made posters documenting and explaining the effects of mining, including a picture of a baby with a skin rash that was circulated globally and represented the threats of mining to communities in Guatemala (Fultz, 2016). Students took the images into their neighborhoods and villages and organized informational sessions about the effects of mining, large-scale megaprojects, and the companies' proposals to explain why people should vote against the companies in the *consulta*.

International law stipulates indigenous peoples' right to Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC). The UN General Assembly delineates, "indigenous peoples have a central role in the decision-making and implementation of lands and resources-related projects, [and] such projects shall not be implemented without [their] free, prior and informed consent" (article 28, UN General Assembly, 2007). Rombouts (2017) explains that FPIC, "is closely related to indigenous peoples' rights to participation, consultation and self-determination and as such is invaluable for effectively protecting indigenous peoples' rights to lands, resources and cultures." However, FPIC is not veto power; thus, communities can be consulted, vote no, and the company can be granted access through a government issued license (Batz, 2017). This is what happened in Xantin—though many believe that the mayor also falsified the results of a fake *consulta* to make it seem like the company had community support. In addition, while Maya people have the right to their land and territories, the Guatemalan government legally maintains subsurface rights and, thus, "the national government through MEM—can issue licenses for access to the subsurface without the express permission of the owners of the surface land, and with no guarantee of benefit—financial or otherwise to the

owner of the surface land" (Fultz, 2016, p. 73). Therefore, Guatemalan law undermines international mechanisms for indigenous self-determination and land rights.

Yet, in 2009, the people hoped that the community referendum would be binding and there was a tense feeling in the air as people worried about the results. The day before the *consulta*, international observers came to the town to oversee the vote process. The 10th grade students went to the park to ask a group of observers to join our class so they could ask them questions. The students were most concerned, "are you for us or against us?" For the students, the observers' neutral response that they were just there to observe and make sure the vote was carried out democratically was not an option. The students insisted that in the face of this capitalist, colonial threat, there could be no neutrality.

On the day of the *consulta,* I helped oversee the community vote in one of the neighborhoods along with students, teachers, community leaders, and international observers. I watched as all men, women, and children[14] in the neighborhood voted against the corporation. When I went to the municipal salon to observe the results, over 99 percent of the population had voted against any proposed mining and hydroelectric projects on their lands. The people had also agreed that no one would sell land to the company, because they knew that barring the vote, the company would likely try to divide the people and get them to sell the lands individually. Despite the community's consensus and steadfast resistance, two years later MEM granted licenses for three hydroelectric projects in the territory to a Guatemalan subsidiary of a transnational hydroelectric company that quickly began to start exploration and set up its machinery (Kandler, 2017). In response, the community engaged in active resistance; they organized marches and roadblocks as well as more direct actions, such as destroying company's machinery to prevent it from beginning

[14] The *consulta* followed Maya peoples' beliefs in the decision-making abilities of children seven years-old and above; though the votes of men, women, and children were counted and recorded separately.

the destruction of their land.

In October 2015, when I made the trip back to Xantin, I could tell things were different. Along the road leading to the town there were signs that declared "community in resistance," "yes to life, no to mining," and "Get out EnerGuate[15]." Despite MEM granting extractive licenses, the mayor from 2012- 2015 backed the community's call to prohibit the entrance of the hydroelectric company and was mostly able to stall the company's incursion into Chuj lands. However, in 2016, the new mayor was rumored to have received significant financial incentives from the company during his campaign and thus allowed the company to begin operations freely soon after he assumed his position. As a large megaproject, the company immediately began diverting rivers, drying up communal water supplies, and threatening people's way of life. The Chuj people continued their resistance to this corporate invasion and fought for their rights to their ancestral lands and livelihoods. Their resistances were often met with police violence and repression. Dhillon (2017) explains that police control and military interventions on seized indigenous lands "is a central feature of settler sovereignty" (p. 48).

Also in 2016, the military became a near constant presence in Xantin. During this research, I left Xantin for two months in February 2016 to engage in research with Chuj youth organizers and educators in the United States. When I returned to Xantin that April, I was concerned to see military troops in the town and villages daily. The troops claimed to be working in the name of community development as part of an initiative proposed by the president, Jimmy Morales. During his first 100 days as president, Morales declared a "war on the lack of education." He invested more of the country's resources into the military and told military leaders (1) to fix the national roads and (2) to move from making weapons to constructing desks and other school infrastructure (López, April

[15] Guatemalan energy company that provides electricity to the region. At the same time, it is important to note that many of these villages do not actually have access to the electricity for which their water is being taken.

2016). Ironically, as carrying out these projects required increasing funding for the military, Morales cut education funding. He threatened the country's already underfunded school system, explicitly connecting concerns over militarization with concerns over access to schooling.

Across the municipality of Xantin, the army could be seen leveling roads and building community infrastructure, such as soccer fields and schools. One day, the MYO coordinators invited me to go to one of the villages with them and the mayor to celebrate the planning a soccer field for the community. After walking around the area that would become the field and mapping out its parameters, the municipal government representatives took cases of Coca Cola out of their cars and passed them around to all of us present. As we were receiving the sodas, the captain thanked everyone for their presence, expressed his excitement for the project, and explained that he wanted to change the way people see the military - no longer as a threat, but as support for the people. He declared, "We want you all to know that the army is here to work for you the people. Yes, we recognize that the army has committed some mistakes in the past [alluding to the genocide of Maya people], but this is changing… the army is here to bring development." Batz (2017) describes the damaging psychological effect the presence of the army has on Maya communities who have experienced trauma during the internal armed conflict, where the army's lasting presence continues to feel "like the war" (p. 119). Juan Roberto, a youth ally explained that he understood the army's development work as a militarization strategy and that under the guise of development, the government and the army were trying to gain more control over the people by playing on their continued trauma from the war. He argued that the army's positioning in Xantin allowed them to be ready to respond to any resistance that threatened the state or state-backed corporations and that the government likely hoped that their mere presence would serve as a deterrent to such resistances. Thus, Juan Roberto argued that by being in the villages and engaging in "development" work, the military could be ever-ready to react to any opposition. His concerns over the possibility of violence

were tragically confirmed a few months later, when a community leader was killed by members of a security force that shot into a crowd of protesters, who had gathered in resistance to the hydroelectric company.

As a community leader and organizer explained to me, one day in the beginning of 2017, a group of peaceful protesters gathered around the land where the hydroelectric plant was being built to protest the re-routing of rivers and lack of respect for the *consulta* and to fight for the rights to self-determination and life of the Chuj people. At the end of the day, the protesters walked up to the security fence to hand their list of demands. As they walked away, the security forces began shooting into the crowd. The protesters ran as fast as they could, but an elderly community leader, Kaxin,[16] fell behind and was shot and critically injured. The protesters were too scared to stop running. When they were able to return for him, in addition to being shot, Kaxin had been attacked with machetes. The people tried to get him to a hospital, but Kaxin died *en route*. At some point during the escalated altercations, the community members burned the company's machinery.

The Chuj community's interactions with the military point to the effects—economic, political, social, and educational—neoliberal policies have had on communities across the country (e.g. Green, 2003; Benson et al., 2008; Offit & Cook, 2010) and their embeddedness in coloniality. Throughout Guatemala, transnational hydroelectric and mining corporations have gained access to Maya lands and thwarted community resistance, thereby disrupting communities' well-being, safety, and environment and displacing many (Urkidi, 2011; Yagenova & Garcia, 2009; Willems, 2010). Scholars have argued that extractive corporations represent a 'new' or third (Fultz, 2016) or fourth (Batz, 2017, 2019) invasion. Batz (2017, 2019) contends that like the Spanish invasion of

[16] Kaxin is a pseudonym, which I assigned to protect confidentiality. While all other pseudonyms used in this dissertation are for my participants, I chose to give don Kaxin a pseudonym because he was so frequently mentioned by name in news reporting and conversations and also to humanize him and his life and resistance.

colonization, the creation of plantations, and the Guatemalan 'Civil War,' "the arrival of megaprojects such as hydroelectric dams and mining… have created social divisions, violence, environmental degradation, and persecution of community leaders" (Batz, 2019, p. 103). Chuj organizers similarly understood these events as linked to colonial processes and were experienced as invasions. Organizer and educator, Mario Felix, voiced this sentiment when he described the current situation as, *"Nuevamente la colonización. Es igual"*/ "Once again colonization. It's the same." He explained,

Ver esa problemática [de la hidroeléctrica] y es cierto tenemos enfrente un gran monstruo que son las empresas extranjeras que nos han estado invadiendo sin nuestro consentimiento.	Looking at this problem [of the hydroelectric project] and, it's true, we have a great monster in front of us, which are the foreign companies that are invading us without our consent.

Here, Mario Felix's words clearly highlight the deep connection between modernity and colonial power structures and the ways neoliberal policies of capitalist expansion are predicated on colonial logics; racialized/colonial ideologies provide the grounds on which these companies have been able to operate in indigenous lands. As Batz (2017) argues, "the arrival of extractivist industries is a continuation of a colonial logic of extraction based on genocidal racist institutions" (p. xi). Quijano (2000) explains that the idea of America was constructed through the establishment of a "new model of power" based on the creation of the concept of race and the solidification of capitalism as global frameworks (p. 533). Based on these logics, America "became the first identity of modernity" through the control of indigenous labor and lands and racial frameworks that defined the *indio* as backwards and the European as modern (Quijano, 2000, p. 533). Colonization created social classifications through notions of race and gender that ranked peoples and framed colonized peoples as "disposable, and therefore not deserving of life" (Martínez Salazar, 2012, p. 5). The same logics continue to fuel the Guatemalan state's extractive desires and efforts to pull indigenous peoples into

the modern nation through corporate development and force (Batz, 2017). These logics also inform the military's ideology of repressive control over the "out of control" Maya communities, which is based on racial classifications that simultaneously frame some peoples as disposable and provide others, particularly those associated with the "modern" state, with both the "assurance of life" and "the right to kill" (Stoler, 1995; Nelson, 1999).

These frameworks and their implications for the Chuj community and its resistances can be seen through national discourses surrounding the Chuj protests and the people's fight for their lands and rights to self-determination. The day after the protests and Kaxin's death, headlines in national newspapers read as followed: "Protest against hydroelectric gets out of control" and "Protest against hydroelectric ends in disturbances." The bi-line of one of the papers read, "Authorities informed us that they have retaken control of the situation after a mob burned the machinery at a hydroelectric project in [Xantin] where the death one person has been reported." Violence in these national publications was framed as property damage and the focus was on the danger of the protesters and the justified actions of the security forces; the burning of the machinery was framed in a way that made the Chuj protesters appear deserving of the state violence. Kaxin's death was reported as an after-thought, a disturbance, a result of the protests rather than the organized and targeted violence of the project of capitalist corporate extraction. The ways that violence was framed placed a greater value on the property lost than the life that was lost, pointing to what Critical Race scholars have long critiqued as the racialized protection of property rights above human rights (e.g., Harris, 1993).

These discourses worked to both conceal and justify the violence of capitalist extraction and the settler colonial state and were representative of a pattern of similarly raced and damaging framings used by media outlets against indigenous communities in Guatemala. The Inter-American Council on Human Rights observed in their December 2017 report that Mayan activists and human rights defenders were repeatedly labeled as "troublemakers," "outlaws," "professional thugs," and

"former guerilla members/terrorists" by the media and other social networks in an effort to delegitimize their claims (p. 85). They also reported concerns over racist language and violent threats being leveraged against Maya leaders; because in Guatemala, don Kaxin was one of many Maya leaders and land defenders to pay with his life (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 2017).

In addition, for Xantin, these media framings drew on a series of three videos released in 2016 that showed supposed guerrilla fighters threatening the hydroelectric company. Following the release of the videos, a self-described independent news site characterized the region as "the end of the world… where no one wants to go, the land of the guerrilla" (Cabria, 2016, translation mine). These discourses have worked to fix Xantin and the Chuj people as disconnected from the nation both physically and temporarily and as a possible threat, unless they are brought back under control. Across Guatemala, the framing of "out of control" Maya communities and resistances have been used to justify military interventions and declarations of states of siege in various communities in resistance and Chuj community members understood these discourses put them at risk for increased violence. The day after Kaxin was killed, hundreds of military troupes were sent to the village to "maintain control" and protect the "nation" and the company from the risk of destruction of their property by the Chuj people. In response, the Chuj Council, prepared a statement in which they declared,

> we categorically reject the misrepresentation of information and the strategy of victimizations on the part of the paramilitary groups that support the company, who… requested the establishment of a state of siege in the region. We consider that the governmental authorities along with the company have also intended to use these measures to pave the path for the companies, however we remind them that the Peace Accords established that these lands would no longer be militarized, because Xantin was one of the

communities that was cruelly massacred on behalf of the scorched earth policy during the internal armed conflict (*Movimiento M4*, 2017, translation mine).

Here the leaders connected the media discourses with the genocidal policies of the government during the internal armed conflict. Their words further underscored the ways coloniality permeates the lives and histories of Maya people alongside the continued logics of elimination of Maya peoples and the "assurance of life" of the settler colonial state and companies. It is against these processes and structures that Maya communities continue to resist and claim their futures.

Chuj youth, educators, and community members faced opposition to their collective resistance efforts; thus, their claims to life were undermined by the power of the state and the modern/colonial system. As the community began to organize a collective response to Kaxin's death, neighborhood committees (COCODES) had regular meetings to discuss their analysis of the situation and develop a plan of action. During secret meetings, organizers discussed holding both the company and the municipal government responsible for Kaxin's death and the invasion of their lands. Many saw the mayor as connected to and responsible for Kaxin's murder, because of his involvement with the company, army, and security forces. Gregorio, a youth organizer active in the resistance efforts explained his analysis of the role of the mayor in what was happening in the community,

Acá el señor alcalde está haciendo mucho daño al pueblo ahorita. De verdad. No me ha hecho nada a mi pues frente a mí, pero de igual él chantajea a gente pues, gente trabajadora, gente que trabajar honestamente, pero como el mete cosas en las cabezas de ellos… acá el alcalde… lo que él hace pues es por la hidroeléctrica. Él	Here the mayor is doing a lot of harm to the town now. Truly. He hasn't done anything to me, well, in front of me, but either way, he coerces people, hardworking people, people who work honestly, but he puts things in their heads… here the mayor… all of what he does is for the hydroelectric company. He is doing a

> *está haciendo mucho daño, hasta incluso se han muerto gentes sin que fueran culpables en algo de que se murieran, pues gente inocente se mueran por sus ideas…*
>
> lot of harm, people have even died without being guilty of anything for which they should die, so innocent people die for his ideas.

Thus, the mayor was often described as the embodiment of these destructive policies and processes coming together. Many saw him as responsible for the death and destruction taking place. Gregorio went on to describe how the mayor bought votes and sold community land both to the hydroelectric company as well as to private interest groups looking to cut down Xantin's trees; he explained that all these processes have negative consequences for the future of Xantin. Understandings of how the mayor's bribes got him elected and their connection to the invasion of the hydroelectric company, were viewed as another example of how Chuj people's efforts toward self-determination were constantly undermined. These understandings also informed organizers' and community members' calls to end corporate and political corruption and served as the impetus behind B'eyb'al Komam Kicham's efforts to teach their students about democracy for their students' and community's future.

The local government saw the growing opposition as a threat and the mayor and other government officials closed the municipal government for weeks in response to what they claimed were threats to their lives. They also threatened to move their offices to one of the villages where many of them were from due to these same threats. They told national and regional government officials that they feared for their safety. The office remained closed for weeks, during which time no official documentation could be processed in Xantin—no birth certificates, death certificates, community event permissions or planning. The offices were all shut down, creating even deeper resentments and frustrations among the people of Xantin. Organizers felt their options were limited. As Mateo Felix explained,

La gente se está organizando, pero ¿cómo podemos organizarnos si el alcalde ha presentado justificación por la cual tiene que cerrar la municipalidad? Bueno, ¿cómo podemos justificarnos también como población que necesitamos que se reapertura y él que ha cometido esos hechos o esas faltas es el alcalde, no la comunidad?	The people are organizing themselves, but how can we organize ourselves if the mayor has presented justification for closing the municipal government? Well, how can we also justify ourselves as a population that needs it to be reopened and the person who has committed these acts or these faults is the mayor, not the community?

His words show how organizers struggled to combat the mayor's claims, particularly in the face of the national media discourses that had already framed them as a threat. Despite the challenges and risks, community meetings regularly brought many leaders together and represented the promise of collective action. In response to the growing tensions, there were calls for the various parties to meet in round-table discussions mediated by the Attorney General's Office of Human Rights.

At the same time, community members also feared the mayor because of his connections to the company, military, and politicians. While the mayor was Chuj Maya, people in Xantin[17] often talked about him in ways that connected him more with the State than with the community. Organizers expressed a collective fear of the *orejas* (ears) of the municipal government listening in on their conversations, because of the municipality's perceived power through its connection to the hydroelectric company, national government, and military. As Xunpil, a youth organizer and neighborhood representative explained, while people were committed to organizing against the companies and the military, they lived in constant fear,

Xunpil: *Debido a los problemas que se están*	**Xunpil:** Because of the problems happening

[17] I suspect this discourse was different for many people in the villages of Xantin, particularly the mayor's own village, who voted for him. While the majority of the people in the town opposed his election, the mayor enjoyed support from the villages, where he received the majority of the votes.

sucediendo a través de todo eso de la hidroeléctrica, la minería, todo eso, pues uno dice '¡ay que bárbaro! ¡Este no es mi municipio!' Porque eso sí afecta, influye a uno como que no puede andar tranquilo en las calles… Entonces si alguien dice algo… entonces ya te fichan a ti que sabes algo. Entonces como que traen amenazas sobre uno que conozca un poco de esto.

Alex: *¿Quiénes son los que amenazan?*

Xunpil: *Bueno el alcalde_ dicen que en cada cantón el alcalde tiene espía, y el espía solo observa quien está coordinando todas las actividades que están hacienda. Entonces_ son rumores_ o es una manera de intimidar a la gente para que no pueda hacer algo…esta es la cuestión de que manipulan a la genta… Como se murió el compañero …y ya vieron que se murió una persona…Es lo que le tiene miedo la gente.*

here with everything with the hydroelectric company, mining, all that, well one says, 'how terrible! This can't be my municipality!' Because it does have an effect, and it has an influence on you, because you can't walk freely through the streets… Because if someone says something… then they point to you and say that you know something. So, then it's like whoever knows even a little about this gets threatened.

Alex: Who are the ones engaging in threats?

Xunpil: Well the mayor_ they say that the mayor has a spy in every neighborhood and the spy just observes who is coordinating all the activities taking place. Well_ they are rumors_ or it's a way to intimidate people so they don't do anything… it's about them manipulating the people… Since the *compañero* died… and they saw that someone was killed… that is what the people are afraid of.

Thus, organizing was seen simultaneously as a matter of life and death and the future of the community, while also a risk to people's lives and futures. Additionally, the rumors of neighborhood spies threatened the strength of the resistance by playing on historic divisions and creating a sense of distrust within the organizing efforts. As Xunpil explains, whether or not the rumors were true, they

worked to distract and intimidate people, who were already afraid. Organizers became concerned with trying to find the spies in their midst; during meetings a number of people were accused of being spies or secretly working for the company or the mayor. Rumors also circulated about those leading the resistance that questioned their legitimacy and investments in the organizing; people had disagreements over which organizations and people were looking out for the community's best interests. I observed as youth organizers, who had aligned with different pluri-national organizations, disputed which one was the most legitimate; each one accusing the other of working for political and/or personal gains. Father Juan, a local priest, further explained that across the villages, support for and against the company (and mayor) fell along historic family and ethnic divisions. These increased divisions speak to Batz's (2017) argument that throughout Guatemala, megaprojects play on and exacerbate community divisions and shows the ways coloniality works to create and maintain these rifts to undermine the possibilities of resistance. This does not mean that Chuj people were deterred by these challenges, but rather had to navigate these processes in their interconnected, multiple iterations.

Chuj Youth at the Center: Modern/Colonial Convergence

I argue that the ways these processes played out, placed Chuj young people at the center of intersecting colonial logics of elimination, control, and domination. With their connections to formal schooling and as a focus of army development efforts, their lived experiences illustrate the complex interplay of the seemingly separate forces of colonial schooling, educational privatization, (re)militarization, corporate extraction, and migration and their bases in modern/colonial logics.

Every year, the day of the town's patron saint is marked with a parade led by the municipal leaders and the *reina* (queen), who is crowned in a competition the night before, followed by all town's schools and their marching bands. The parade is a chance for each of the schools to show off their students' musical talents and the entire town comes out to watch. During the 2016 parade, I

was asked to stand-in for a teacher who had recently had a baby and march with the students and teachers of Xantin National Middle School. As we lined-up and waited our turn to enter the parade (after the primary schools), we saw the mayor and his *consejales* (aldermen) holding their municipal staffs and taking their positions alongside the *reina* and the two runners-up, who were all wearing their large colorful hand-woven *huipiles* and red *corte*. The mayor, the lieutenant mayor, and the *reina* usually lead the parade, but this year the teachers and I were all surprised to see military troops dressed in fatigues and military boots walking before mayor and opening the parade. Many understood the army presence in the parade as signaling the municipality's support for the army and the army's support for the municipality and its ties to the hydroelectric company. Later in the parade, in an act of resistance, students from one of the elementary schools held signs declaring their support of the environment, water, and life. I was struck by how this one event clearly showed the convergence of militarization, schooling, corporate invasions, and Maya resistances. In this section, I lay out how these processes and structures interact and intersect in the lives of Chuj youth and can be understood through the lens of coloniality.

I begin here with a discussion of the role of schools and educational privatization, because of the central role schooling plays in many Chuj youth's lives. As I discussed in the previous chapter, like the Guatemalan state, military, and transnational corporate processes, schooling is rooted in modern/colonial gender structures. Schools are mechanisms of the colonial state and like the military and development projects, are framed as central to the creation of the modern nation and the project of bringing indigenous peoples from the past into the present. Because of this shared framework, these projects often go hand-in-hand in Maya communities and the intertwining logics are based in the notion of the "Indian problem." Batz (2017) points to ways schooling and development in Guatemala have been used as acculturating nation-building racialized tools for addressing this so-called "problem." In the past, these tools were connected to direct violence, but

he argues that the framings of "the Indian problem" persist and inform current underlying logics and effects of development and education.

While the previous chapter looked at how schools in Xantin were responding to and resisting these histories and processes, here I argue that they are exacerbated by the global push to privatize education through economic and education frameworks promoted by international organizations such as the World Bank (Hale, 2002, 2006; Robertson, 2005; World Bank, 2010). Scholars have shown that market-based approaches to education intensify inequalities, because they are inherently raced, classed, and gendered and disproportionately target marginalized populations (e.g., Apple, 2006; Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Lipman, 2011). In addition, these approaches are rooted in modern/colonial logics and threaten indigenous communities' rights and efforts for self-determination and have led to direct confrontations with the state.

In 2016, towards the end of the school year, teachers around the country participated in nation-wide strikes following threats to cut funding to schools and a national push to privatize the country's school's system. The strike culminated in August, 2016 after weeks of teachers refusing to come to work and engaging in sit-ins in the departmental government buildings, protests in the streets, and many calls for negotiations. In August, teachers took to blocking major roads and shutting down important tourism and trade centers across the country, such as the national airport in Petén, border entry points, and major ports. Teachers demanded the government strengthen public education instead of undermining it. They were responding to a government push to weaken public education by combatting what it called the problem of "underutilized" teachers, which referred to teachers serving small student populations, as well as efforts to privatize education, which were framed as giving parental boards more control over their schools, including fundraising. Teachers in Xantin participated in the work stoppages and dialogues; as a public school, Xantin National was particularly active in the resistance. One school leader, Carlos, explained the complex

situation with which teachers were confronted,

> *En el caso del país de Guatemala, es muy claro y conociendo un poco sobre su historia siempre al nivel de país, el estado de Guatemala ha sido controlado por un grupo de empresarios… han mantenido el poder durante casi 50 años… ellos realmente son los que decidan; son ellos que decidan por todos los sectores en el país. Entonces el año pasado salió esto porque…se hizo un convenio directamente con los padres de familia para recibir la refacción y los útiles escolares y eso prácticamente en el convenio hay palabras…que en cierta manera privatizan. Porque la lógica que manejan ellos no es que van directo y dicen, "vamos a privatizar," sino que hay una forma estratégica… [También,] ahora hay una organización que se llama Empresarios por la Educación, que son los mismos empresarios los que están organizando talleres, diplomados, pero hay un interés detrás de eso...*

> In the case of Guatemala, it's very clear and knowing a little about its history at the national, the Guatemalan state has been controlled by a group of businessmen… they have maintained their power for almost 50 years… they are the ones that really decide; they are the ones that make decisions for all the sectors of the country. There was an agreement made directly with parents to receive snacks and school supplies, and essentially in the agreement there was wording… that in one way or another privatized schools. Because the logic they use is that they are not going to go directly and say, "we are going to privatize," rather there is a strategic way of doing it… [Also,] now there is an organization that is called Businessmen for Education, which are the same businessmen, that are organizing workshops, trainings, but there is a certain interest behind that…

He went on to explain the role these business interests have taken up in crafting national education policies, including new tests for teachers to determine which teachers are allowed to continue working in schools. Carlos' explanation highlights the way the modern/colonial state continues to

operate in ways that privilege capitalist interests and, in particular, wealthy business owners and how that in turn impacts education across the country in ways that exacerbate national inequities. He showed the ways public education in Guatemala is an area of interest for wealthy elites, who want to intervene with what he called "certain interests behind" them. Carlos understood that if these efforts were successful, they would result in fewer public school teachers and fewer Maya teachers in general, because their knowledges would not be privileged in these tests. Thus, these policies were seen as another way of undermine Maya communities' calls for educational autonomy and would have a negative effect on students and the community.

To combat these efforts, teachers felt their only recourse was to engage in public protest. Many teachers expressed anxieties with their decision not to come to work for so long, leaving students without access to classes, but they also felt that it was their only option to ensure the future of their school and educational efforts. Carlos explained,

> *Entonces se empezó a analizar y decía no es adecuado y tenemos que buscar que la educación pública en Guatemala no se pierda... Entonces nosotros prácticamente como maestros nos organizamos para ver que esto no siguiera…En Guatemala se logra algo saliendo a las calles y de lo contrario, nada. El gobierno, el estado, y su equipo no va a venir, "bueno vamos a hacer esto o quiere esto." No. Tenemos que ver las cosas a nuestra manera, buscar las soluciones, pero es más salir a las calles. Entonces así es como se empezó una*

> So we started analyzing this [proposal] and said it's not okay and we have to make sure public education in Guatemala is not lost… So we, as teachers, organized to make sure that this would not continue…. In Guatemala you can only achieve something by going to the streets, otherwise, nothing. The government, the state, and their team is not going to come, "okay we are going to do this or we want that." No. We have to see things in our own way, look for solutions, but more than anything it's going into the streets. So, that is how a protest was

manifestación… started….

Carlos describes the limited avenues for direct resistance available to teachers in Guatemala, with protest being viewed as one of the only possibilities. At the same time, protest was also a risk. Teachers risked their livelihoods, employment, and safety by engaging in these strikes and protests. Throughout the beginning of August, teachers made repeated trips to the departmental capital to attempt to engage in dialogue and make their protest public. Teachers used their own resources to travel and they put their bodies on the line as they physically shutdown major roads across the country for days. Teachers talked about how they saw these efforts as part of a history of national attempts to control and limit Maya people's futures. They explained that young people's lives and futures were the focus of both these policies and their resistances.

Scholars argue that attempts to privatize education should not be understood as separate from militarization, as efforts to privatize education are often linked to increased militarization (e.g., Giroux, 2011; Saltman & Gabbard, 2003). As states move towards privatizing public goods, they often rely more heavily on military forces to control and "manage" their populations, particularly youth (e.g., Giroux, 2011; Saltman & Gabbard, 2003). In Xantin, I observed how youth and schools appeared to be central to the military's civil society programs. One day in 2016, after a meeting with local government officials, I walked down to the MYO office with one of the youth leaders. When we entered the room, we were surprised to see two men in military fatigues in the office talking to the coordinator. I listened as the two coordinators talked with the army officials about partnering for youth-centered programs. The army representatives told the coordinators that they were working on a program to "militarize the civil society" and because they saw youth as central to that project, they wanted to collaborate with the youth office.

A few weeks late, I spoke with, Alonza, the former youth coordinator, who at that point was a school administrator. As we were talking, we saw a truck with military troops drive by. I

commented on how it still startled me to see the military driving through town. She responded that she felt the same way and told me about how army representatives came to her school and asked for the names of all the students. She said that this alarmed her. The school's secretary started to comply and said she would "gladly do it." Alonza continued, "that made me so mad. What do they want with our students' information?" Thinking quickly, she told the army representatives that because it was private information, they would not be able to provide them with students' names without formal permission from their parents. She explained that the army's request reminded her of what she had learned about the *Conflicto Armado* and genocide through her YLO work; during the *Conflicto Armado,* Chuj young people were forcibly recruited by the army while they were in school. This is a memory and fear that permeates the community; adults and elders who survived the war still feel uneasy when there are events that bring too many young people into one place. Alonza shook her head again and said, "I just keep wondering what they want with us."

The military's focus on young people suggests that it viewed young people as central to their "development" work and changing the image of the army as "for the people." While not all young people perceived the military as a threat, others felt its presence contributed to a sense of insecurity for Chuj young people. The sense of insecurity and sustained occupations of their lands have continued to push young people in search of other futures. While for some this has meant active resistance in Xantin, others have looked to leave Xantin to escape the violence and threats. One former youth organizer cited the increased military presence as part of his reason for immigrating to the United States.

Similarly, Petul, a youth organizer, understood migration as connected to the oppression of the modern/colonial state. He eluded to the violent repression of protests and spoke directly of migrants when he stated, *"Por ejemplo, por culpa del gobierno, hay compañeros que se han quedado muertos, se han quedado secuestrados en el desierto, los gobiernos son los que culpamos"*/ "For example, because of the

government, there are *compañeros* who have been left dead, have been kidnapped in the desert, and the government are the ones we blame." Petul saw the state's role both in the direct killing of Chuj protesters, but also how it has made others die (e.g., Povinelli, 2002) through the violence of migration and border crossings. Chuj young people often saw themselves confronted with threats and possibilities of death wherever they turn—by staying in Xantin, they saw their futures were threatened by the companies and military, and by leaving, they were threatened by the dangers of migration.

Velásquez Nimatuj (2018) succinctly highlights the ways colonial structures, violence, militarization, and corporate extraction are tied with youth migration. In a 2018 news article, she asks, "Why do the children leave my country?" To which she answers, "The children of my country began to leave when the armed conflict intensified." She explains,

> With the signing of the peace agreements in 1996, an agreement that benefited the economic elite and the transnational corporations, the children of my country continued to migrate, because in the rural areas they felt the effects of the extractive industries that came to destroy their mountains, to penetrate the insides of their earth, the earth that had provided them with food. These industries came to take their rivers and generate electric energy for others, but not for the benefit of their communities… They leave because they want to break the curse that steals their dreams the moment they are born.

Her words eloquently capture the fears expressed by Chuj young people, who saw how these processes threatened their lives and futures. Velasquez Nimatuj's words, along with those of Chuj young people and educators, illustrate the ways modern/colonial structures and logics are embedded in and play out through the intertwined processes of corporate extraction, (re)militarization, school privatization, and migration as well as the particular ways these processes converge in the lives of Chuj young people who are uniquely targeted and affected by these processes and structures.

Youth Resistances and the State

Chuj youth used their unique positioning and drew from their complex experiences to engage in resistance to these processes.

Chico, a middle school student, spoke of his concerns for the future to Xantin and the threats he saw to his and his community's life, while also expressing his pride in the resistance as well as its urgency. When I asked Chico to tell me about some of the things in his community that he sees as positive and what he is worried about, he expressed his pride and fears in ways that were clearly connected to the invasion of the megaprojects and community resistances,

Chico: *Las cosas buenas son cuando las personas hablan de cosas buenas que vamos a hacer, como hoy en día el alcalde se va con las minerías y vamos a morir por eso.*	**Chico:** The good things are when people talk about good things that we are going to do, since today the mayor is on the side of the mining company and we are going to die because of that.
Alex: *¿Y eso es lo que te preocupa?*	**Alex:** And that is what worries you?
Chico: *Sí, eso me preocupa. Si ellos van a venir aquí, tal vez Xantin va a estar como desierto y eso me preocupa.*	**Chico:** Yes, that worries me. Because if they come here, then Xantin will be left as a desert and that worries me.
Alex: *¿Qué se puede hacer?*	**Alex:** And what can be done?
Chico: *Si nosotros no queremos tener las minerías aquí, tenemos que pelear con ellos que no queremos que nos hacen daño. Porque si hoy en día nos vamos decir que vienen y no pensamos en nuestros futuros o nuestras familias, nuestros futuros van a sufrir.*	**Chico:** If we don't want the mines here, we have to fight and show them that we don't want them and that they will harm us. Because if we tell them they can come here today and we don't think about our futures or our families, then our futures will suffer.

Here, Chico captures the anxieties many young people felt under the threat of this current invasion and his words echoes fears of war. He described his future in Xantin as bounded by corporate extraction and the destruction of the land and water. The fears associated with privatization and the military presence affected youths' lives and concerns about the future. At the same time, for Chico, the resistances represented a source of pride and were born out of a sense of necessity—"if we don't want the mines here, we have to fight."

Because of the ways these various processes came together in Chuj youth's lives, youth were active in the organizing against the hydroelectric company, particularly in the legal struggle to get the company's title revoked. One youth organization aimed to get the Attorney General's Office of Human Rights involved in a training to help young organizers understand their rights and how to fight for them. Through an ally, youth invited a Human Rights representative to come to Xantin and lead the training. At first the representative agreed, but later they found out that representatives from the Attorney General's Office of Human Rights were not allowed to travel to the town, because it was considered too risky. The representative stated, "it is too dangerous… we might get attacked… or our car might be stolen… or destroyed." He cited the burning of the machinery and a hydroelectric company car as being the reason such travel was restricted and why the training would not be authorized. Youth protested amongst themselves; they argued that the burning of the machinery had to do with the company violating their rights, challenging the notions of blame that had been pushed by the media and company representatives. One group member declared that this was discrimination and that if the Human Rights Office should be anywhere, it was here, in Xantin. The organization's president exclaimed, "Apparently, they are afraid of the Xantin people." Another half-joked, "I suppose we are too dangerous to help." Their voices pointed to the ways the denial of their humanity in the eyes of the state was felt by Chuj youth; they were not seen as deserving of support from a national human rights group. Their question harkens back to DuBois' (1903)

question, what does it mean to be framed as a "problem?" and speaks to the way the logics of the "Indian problem" continue to permeate Guatemala and define who is viewed as in need of protection and who is seen as a threat.

The youth's experience also points to the feelings of distrust the community experienced with the Attorney General's Office of Human Rights and the frustration they felt with continual calls for a *mesa del diálogo* (round-table discussion) between the community members, company representatives, and the municipality. Many understood these efforts in connection to attempts by the colonial regime to "manage" indigenous peoples and to hide coloniality through the appearance of including Maya people in decision making processes. Dhillon (2017) argues that dialogue allows state to position self as transformed and responsive to indigenous communities while still maintaining sovereign control. Furthermore, Chuj organizers distrusted the state's investment in justice, because of its connection to a long history of impunity and the denial of justice for Maya people (Montejo, 2010; Velásquez Nimatuj, 2005). Maya people have continued to fight for justice following the internal armed conflict; however, despite the findings of the UN-sponsored *Comisión de Esclarecimiento Histórico (CEH)* report that the army's actions during the war constituted genocide, the country's elites continue to deny this finding and the army's leaders have enjoyed impunity (Fultz, 2016). Chuj people have historically experienced harm from the State and thus feel that the State will not protect them. Chuj people understood the Attorney General's Office of Human Rights as connected to the State and the round table discussions as a part of the State's effort to tamp down their protests. A recent publication shared amongst youth leaders showed a photo of a construction vehicle, assumingly belonging to the hydroelectric company, with a sign hanging from it that read, "One more success for the *mesa de diálogo* for the peace and development of Xantin." The sign vividly illustrated how people understood peace and development as defined by the state as antithetical to their futures.

Young people's resistances and urgency were based on complex understandings of the various structures and processes that were affecting their lives. Felipe, another youth organizer, explained his critique of the corporate understandings of capitalist development and greed.

> *Por más que uno tiene dinero… el agua y los bosques se van a desaparecer todo y el agua se va ir y al final esta persona se va a dar cuenta que el dinero no se va a comer, que… por ejemplo, sin agua se va a secar todo donde está el nacimiento, aunque uno tiene dinero, poco a poco se va a desaparecer todo—el maiz, el frijol, todo lo que un siembra—y uno se va a dar cuenta que el dinero no se come.*

> As much money as one might have… the water and the forests are going to dissappear, all of it, and the water is going to go away and in the end that person is going to realize that money can't be eaten, that… for example, without water, everything is going to dry up from the source, and even if one has money, little by little, everything will disappear—the corn, beans, everything that one cultivates—and they will realize that you can't eat money.

Here, Felipe critiqued capitalist framings of expansion and economic growth, eluding to youth's decolonial vision of development, which differed from the framings of development by the state and the company that often focused on economic factors. Across interviews, Chuj youth and educators expressed understandings of development that countered these dominant framings and instead connected to their lands and community knowledges. They also saw themselves as having an important educational role in the resistance efforts, drawing on their educational backgrounds to support the community's legal struggles and to help the ancestral leaders document their efforts and engage directly with state forces. In addition, many saw education (in and out of school) as important for informing community members about the realities of the issues and histories with which they continued to be confronted. Thus, schools were both seen as affected by these issues and also important sites of developing resistance against them as access points for dominant

knowledges and language and through the possibility of supporting young people's critical consciousness (as discussed in the previous chapter).

In a discussion about education reforms, Malin Lucin, a participant in multiple YLOs, connected education reform efforts with processes of elimination, to highlight the ways power continues to operate through coloniality. To do so, she brought up a previous 2013 reform mentioned in Chapter 1 that required aspiring educators to attend university in order to get a teaching certification, which up until that point was offered as a high school program (*Magisterio*) that facilitated the certification of Maya teachers throughout Guatemala. Because university programs were expensive and not readily available in many Maya communities, the reform had a profound effect on indigenous communities. Malin Lucin highlighted the way State educational reforms connect with modern/colonial projects and logics of elimination. She explained,

> *[E]s que el gobierno no nos quiere ver desarrollados porque somos indígenas, porque si algún dia tomaríamos al congreso, tal vez cambiaríamos los planes, entonces ellos no quieren eso. Por eso eliminaron a la carrera de Magisterio, solo queda Bachillerato porque Bachillerato solo tiene que estudiar 2 anos y no hay trabajo y tienes que ir directo a la universidad. Y nosotros para pagar una universidad es mucho. Entonces son estrategias que usan los gobiernos para eliminarnos, para hacernos menos delantes ellos, y ellos son los que se quedan con los*

> It's that the government doesn't want to see us as developed, because we are indigenous, because if we take the congress one day, maybe we would change their plans, so they don't want that. That is why they got rid of *Magisterio* (teacher prep high school programs), and there is only *Bachillerato* (general high school programs) where you only have to study for two years and there isn't work after and you have to go straight to the university. And for us, paying for the university is a lot. So these are strategies that those in government use to eliminate us, to make us seem less than them

puestos, los que quieren estar siempre ahí. … [E[llos nos quitan las herramientas, por eso quitaron esa carrera, para que no sigamos estudiando, porque la mayoría ya se está acercando a una carrera más grande… Miran como están desarrollando las indígenas y buscan como quitarnos las herramientas… quitan la carrera y metan la minería…	and they are the ones that keep their positions, they always want to be there… [T]hey take away our tools, that is why they took away that career path, so that we don't keep studying, because many of us are getting close to a higher degree… They see how indigenous peoples are developing and they look for ways to take way our tools… they take away educational opportunities and they put in mining…

Malin Lucin's analysis highlighted the contradictory way many Chuj young people saw schools as both important spaces of opportunity for Chuj young people as well as part of the modern colonial process. While Malin Lucin's words demonstrated the ways education reforms in Maya communities connected to colonial project and aimed to suppress indigenous communities, she understood this suppression as coming from a place of fear of the strength of indigenous resistances and the ways they could possibly change the current system and structures of power; this informed her belief in the power of Chuj resistances.

These complex understandings informed Chuj youth's participation in the resistances and their belief in and analyses of their futures. Chuj young people were particularly involved in two plurinational organizations that connected their resistances with those of other Maya communities in the region and oppressed groups across the country. Petul was actively involved in the regional organizing that brought together Chuj, Q'anjob'al, Akatek, Popti', and Mestizo peoples in collective resistance against the invasions of their lands. He explained his goals for participating in this organization connected to his hopes for Xantin's future; and he described how he drew strength from the joint resistance and the ways leaders worked to defend their communities' lands and

futures. Petul stated,

El plurinacional si más que todo es el que defiende el agua, la madre naturaleza… [R]ealmente, ellos defienden nuestro territorio digamos más que todo por ejemplo el hidro que está… ellos han peleado y luchado, por eso [un líder] ha caído en la cárcel por defender a su pueblo, su tierra, su territorio, su medioambiente. Entonces igual es uno de mis metas… que quiero apoyar pues como pueblo como te digo, soy de Xantin, quiero defender a mi pueblo, el medioambiente, el agua, porque igual pienso en mi futuro o del futuro de mi familia o mis hijos con el tiempo…	The pluri-national is more than anything the one that defends the water, the environment… [T]ruly, they defend our territories, more than anything, against the hydro that is there… They have fought and struggled, and that is why [a leader] was incarcerated for defending his town, their land, their territory, their environment. So, that is also one of my goals… I want to support the town, because like I tell you, I am from Xantin, I want to defend my town, the environment, the water, because likewise I think about my future or the future of my family, or my kids in time…

Petul, like other young people involved in the resistance, viewed his future in ways that were based in Maya solidarity and connected to the efforts of the ancestral leaders to protect their lands, water, and futures. As young people joined forces with their elders, they talked about working to rebuild the unity that corporations, the military, and the state aimed to destabilize. Part of this, was gaining a sense of pride in themselves and their elders that went beyond dominant discourses of success and leadership that were narrowly framed around schooling and instead drew pride from their community's knowledges and resistances; this is apparent in Petul's visions of becoming a community leader, who fights for the future of his town. Mario Felix also expressed a sense of pride in the work of elders in community when he stated, "*Hay unos líderes, y eso me llena de orgullo también de que no nos dejamos, señores que sólo tienen 6 primaria son los que están peleando por nosotros"*/ "there are some

leaders, and this fills me with pride that we don't let ourselves [be taken advantage of], elders who only have a 6th grade education are the ones that are fighting for us."

Thus, while these modern/colonial processes aimed to undo community relations and undermine Maya efforts toward unity (and were successful in a number of situations), it appears that they also had the effect of strengthening Chuj resistances and unity. In schools, this could be seen both in educators' involvement in the resistances, their fights for the future of the community, and the ways they were working to reimagining schooling in ways that connected to the community knowledges and resistances. In the community, this meant young people partnering with and supporting the work of the elders. Youth leaders often described their pride in working with elders and supporting them in pursuing legal justice against the company.

Furthermore, Chuj youth raised important questions about what decolonization looks like through their challenging of modern development logics. Gregorio's words captured many youth's sentiments, when he answered my question about his vision for Xantin by stating matter-of-factly, *"Mi visión para el pueblo es que ya no queremos que nos invadan ellos"*/ "My visions for the town is that we don't want them to invade us anymore." His words serve as an important reminder that decolonization is not just about knowledges, but "the repatriation of Indigenous land and life" (Tuck and Yang, 2012, see also Fanon, 1963). When I asked Gregorio what it would mean for him if Xantin was no longer invaded, he responded—"*Bueno ya estaríamos desarrollados"*/ "Well, then we would be developed"—pointing to an understanding of development based on community visions for a flourishing future and self-determination. For Gregorio, and other Chuj youth, Chuj development—which challenges rather than builds on colonial, racial, capitalist logics of Western development—cannot happen as long as coloniality persists; it will only happen through true decolonization. Thus, Chuj young people continue to engage in these complex resistances.

Discussion

This chapter highlights the ways (inter)national racialized and colonial logics of elimination and exclusion played out in material ways in the Chuj community and the lives of young people through corporate extraction, (re)militarization, and educational privatization efforts and policies. The examples and moments presented here illustrate the material consequences of these logics that permeated Chuj people's experiences and interactions with local, national, regional, and international institutions, particularly through schooling and development logics. It is important to highlight the ways these processes operate, because the silencing and denial of these structures and histories allows space for coloniality to function in violent ways in the lives of communities and young people, and only serves to benefit dominant groups (Lugones, 2003). This chapter shows the way colonization is as Wolfe (2006) argues "a structure, not an event," and as decolonial scholars have shown, is contingent on racialization processes and capitalism. While it may be productive to think of Maya people has having experienced three (Fultz, 2016) or four (Batz, 2017) invasions, with megaprojects representing the third or fourth, Chuj peoples' experiences also point to the ways coloniality is a constant structure, that leads to feelings of being perpetually invaded and occupied.

In addition, Chuj young people experienced the convergence of these processes in their lives and their voices, experiences, and resistances highlight their multifaceted understandings of the interconnected processes and policies playing out in their community and in their lives; the complex modern/colonial forces at play in Chuj youth's lives not only affected their community, life, and future, but also their resistances. Thus, the findings presented here show how the "great monster," Mario Felix described, must be understood not as a singular entity (just the hydroelectric company), but rather as the complex interplay of various histories, structures, and policies; as a monster, it is a multi-headed hydra. This understanding reinforces Chuj youth's arguements from Chapter 3 that they cannot afford to focus on a single issue, because there are so many issues that intersect and

affect their lives; thus young people must always be ready to confront multiple issues at once. If we understand the monster Mario Felix referred to as a hydra, we see how focusing on one head would not defeat the beast—it would only grow back and multiple at the same time the other heads would remain untouched. This pushes for scholars to no longer look at schools or development as separate from these other forces and policies—such as militarization, corporate extraction, and migration—but instead through a shared history of control and domination.

Thus, this chapter calls for a complex understanding of indigenous youth organizing and education that are connected to the various racialized, capitalist, colonial structures and processes affecting their lives. This chapter, in coversation with the previous chapters, shows that this decolonial resistance work is urgent and necessary and demands to be understood on its own terms. For Chuj young people, this is not a story of survival as is often flatly painted through the media and national discourses; they were working towards a future that is about thriving as Chuj people; Chuj youth's resistances extended beyond confrontation to critical (re)imaginings of community and their future. Montejo (2010) argues that "Maya leaders must extend themselves beyond their anticolonialist arguments and look forward in search of a better future for our people"—going beyond singular narative of oppression and working towards creative liberation. Chuj young people and educators have been doing just that; navigating and combatting the existing interlocking structures and systems that affect their lives and seek to eliminate their community and way of life, while also working towards a future, full of life, and based on their own ways of knowing, being, and thriving.

Chapter 6: Concluding Thoughts

Seven *Etznab'* fell on a cool evening in May. Just before sunset, I walked down to the cross in front of the sacred rock overlooking the valley at the base of the town's largest archeological site to meet the youth of *Jóvenes Líderes* and Juan Roberto, a youth ally and *ajq'ij* (Maya spiritual guide) from a nearby community. Juan Roberto explained that *Etznab'*, the day of the knife, marks the start of a journey, and on this day the youth were celebrating their organization's journey and praying for its future direction; it was a fight to get to where they were and they still had much work ahead. As Juan Roberto began to set up the fire for the Maya ceremony and spoke to the *pixan* of the sacred rock offering the *santo guaro*, we all huddled together in a semi-circle around the warmth of the fire. The sun was starting to set and the sky was beginning to turn a warm purple color, and from where we stood, we could see the green expanse of the valley and the many foot paths winding in and through it.

Juan Roberto began to talk to us about the fire. He explained that the fire connects the living world with the heavens and the ancestors, which is what makes it so powerful. As the fire burned, he began the ceremony and asked the spirits and the ancestors to guide the youth's work and those that come into contact with it. After a few hours, Juan Roberto ended the ceremony by asking the ancestors to support the youth in remaining united in their vision for the town and ensuring that they always work for and with their people and are guided by knowledge and understanding.

As I think back to that evening around the fire, watching the sunset and feeling the power of the land on which we stood, I am reminded of the feelings of hope and strength we carried with us as we walked away. On our walk home, the youth leaders all spoke about the power of the ceremony and reminded one another that calling on the ancestors for support was a commitment to remain united and always work for their community as Juan Roberto had said. The ceremony, and the youth's engagement with it, represented the ways they saw their work and the importance of it as

connected to their community's past, present, and future with youth playing a central role. As this dissertation has shown, such decolonial resistance work is a promise of survivance—for themselves, their futures, and their community.

In this dissertation, I highlighted the decolonial resistances and (re)imaginings of Chuj youth and educators to expose how modern/colonial power structures operate in interconnected and intersecting ways and take many forms. This research shows that decolonization requires dismantling these systems simultaneously, and that decolonial resistance work is constant and messy. Chuj young people's work demonstrates what is possible and what is constrained when engaging in decolonial resistance work within modern/colonial structures that remain entrenched across social and institutional spaces. Placing Chuj youth and their resistances at the center of this study illustrates indigenous youth's unique position vis-à-vis the colonial state and the interlocking modern/colonial processes of corporate capitalist extraction, formal schooling, militarization, and educational privatization. I have argued that Chuj youth's resistances expose how the modern/colonial state is created and maintained through modern/colonial framings of development and education based on logics of elimination.

By centering the ways youth and educators engaged in decolonial resistances and (re)imaginings through youth-led spaces (Chapter 3), within schools (Chapter 4), and in and with their community (Chapter 5), this research shows that modern/colonial systems need to be understood and confronted as interconnected. Chuj youth's experiences expose the life and death implications of these systems in the lives of indigenous young people and their communities and give voices to Dhillon's reminder that "these ongoing colonial assaults are lived, breathed, and fought against by Indigenous youth every single day" (2017, p. 236). Chuj youth engaged in creative, decolonial resistances from within the "tight spaces" created by coloniality that showed their refusal to be victims, their visions for survivance, and the possibilities of decolonial resistance. For example,

through subtle resistances such as the reframing of dominant discourses and efforts towards (re)creating greater unity within their community, Chuj youth challenged the modern/colonial structures on which current the processes and policies of militarization, corporate extraction and educational privatization were able to stand.

I started this chapter with the fire of the Maya ceremony to show the hope and possibility supported through decolonial unity. The fire and the ceremony call for centering multiple relationships outside the reach of coloniality; they aimed to establish unity within and across the Chuj community, those walking this world and those walking in worlds beyond, as well as across the lands and sacred spaces. The ceremony serves as a challenge to colonial relations and a way for Chuj young people to look back while looking forward.

Facing Outward

Throughout this project, I have centered the visions of Chuj youth to highlight the possibilities for a different future and their focus not just on survival, but survivance (Vizenor, 1999). I turn to these visions again to engage with the question, "What does it mean to work toward a decolonial future?" As discussed throughout this dissertation, Chuj youth's visions centered on addressing current issues, combatting modern/colonial structures and systems, and imagining something else; they refused dominant discourses and worked to develop new imaginings based in their community and knowledges. I draw on the words of Mario Felix, who so eloquently articulated what this change entailed,

> *Hagamos florecer lo nuestro, que es una cosa preciosa. Que como indígena, no cualquiera, muchos querrían ser como nosotros… la mentalidad y la ideología maya querámoslo…*
>
> Let's make that which is ours flourish, since it is a precious thing. As an indigenous person, not just anyone, many people want to be like us… our Maya mentality and ideology, let's love it…

tiene influencia en nuestra vida diario… Yo he visto gente aptos o aprovechándose de su nahual, de la influencia o la energía que tiene, hacer cambios y es la riqueza que tenemos que ninguna empresa nos lo va a quitar. Entonces es de aprovechar eso y también apreciar por ejemplo lo que tenemos, los templos, la mina de sal…es lo que más cualquier empresa extranjera persigue.

it influences our daily life… I have seen people who are capable or able to take advantage of their *nahual*, the influence or the energy that they have, to make changes and that is the richness that we have that no company can take away from us. So, it's about taking advantage of that and also appreciating for example that which we have, the temples, the salt mines… that's what most foreign companies are after.

Survivance and a Chuj future, for the youth in this research, meant seeing their own strength, centering their own knowledges in the face of coloniality, racialist capitalist extraction, and genocide, and knowing that what is theirs has the power to change these relationships and the world around them. Mario Felix further explained that he sees colonialism continue to play out in the ways those in power want to own and control that which is indigenous, while indigenous people are encouraged to desire that which is the colonizers. Mario Felix, like the many youth whose voices have filled these pages, saw that another world is possible and refused to conform to the definitions ascribed to indigenous young people by the modern/colonial state. This vision of another future and the refusal to be defined by colonial violence was succinctly captured in the words of a middle school student, whose response to my question about what he wanted to do with his life, was simply, "Enjoy my life."

Chuj Youth in our Current Moment

I have been asked time and time again, 'Why Chuj youth?' 'Why this small corner of Guatemala?' Embedded in these questions seems to be the assumption that Chuj young people's experiences and insights are far removed or separate from 'our' (defined differently depending on

the context) lives. Yet, while my commitments stem from my deep relationships in and with the community, I also continue to find that Chuj youth have insights into the ways current modern/colonial systems and processes operate, revealing how they are not restricted to the borders of Xantin, Guatemala, or Central America; these processes are global and how Chuj youth's experiences with and struggles against coloniality and modern/colonial processes are connected to those of indigenous peoples across Abya Yala[18], who have been engaged in over five centuries of resistance since the European invasion of their lands. Across Abya Yala, indigenous peoples are faced with constant assaults on their lands and threats to their ways of life at the hands of the modern/colonial state and corporations. And Indigenous young people have been at the frontlines in resisting these processes and envisioning decolonial change (Dhillon, 2018).

As we have seen in this dissertation, coloniality today takes many forms, from the militarization and policing of communities to forced migration, to corporate extraction to colonial schooling models to the dispossession of indigenous lands—all of which are built on colonial elimination logics that seek to contain, control, and get rid of all that is indigenous. Coloniality is a constant state of violence. And indigenous young people and their communities never stop resisting and refusing. Young people continue to make claims toward their future. The Chuj youth presented in this study worked towards projecting themselves and their communities into a future based on their own desires and knowledges and self-determination, combatting modern/colonial framings of indigenous peoples that fixed them in the past and in need of being brought into the modern nation

[18] Abya Yala is the Kuna word for American continents as whole and means "Land in its full maturity." Indigenous leaders and activists across the Americas, including Maya peoples, have taken up the term as "the first step toward epistemic decolonization and the establishment of indigenous peoples' autonomy and self-determination" (del Valle Escalante, 2014). As this conclusion faces outward and considers what it means to look towards a decolonial future, I take up this term as well to support indigenous peoples' efforts to disrupt the holds of colonial names.

state. Like Chuj youth, indigenous young people across Abya Yala are laying bare the processes of coloniality and their multiple and shifting manifestations and working to destabilize them (e.g., Dhillon, 2018). Chuj youth, who have found themselves at the center of so many of these processes, have important insights into the possibilities for these resistances, particularly as they exist in the tight spaces of the modern/colonial system.

And for those committed to decolonial resistances, the work of Chuj young people reminds us that we must be ever vigilant and that a commitment to decolonization means a continuous commitment to challenging multiple systems. Chuj young people help expose the modern/colonial structures in which we all live and beg for us to reckon with our own investments in them. In a time of a rise in authoritarian governments, rising militarization of states, increased migration, and a hyper-capitalist and –racialized political and social climate, these insights are especially important, because they remind us that we cannot afford to look at and combat these issues separately, but rather we must understand how they are all interconnected within a framework of coloniality. In these troubling times—as the U.S. military awaits a group of refugees at our Southern border, as president-elect Jair Bolsonaro promises genocidal violence against the Brazil's indigenous communities in the name of capitalism, and as Salvadorans actively resist national efforts to privatize water—decolonial commitments and critiques of coloniality are more important than ever, since they push us to understand how these processes are connected and provide insights into the work and resistances that are possible and necessary within ever tightening spaces.

Decolonizing Education and Youth Studies

Furthermore, the findings presented here provide insights into the fields of Education and Youth Studies. I started this research skeptical of the possibilities of schools as sites of decolonial and/or counterhegemonic transformation. I have spent a lot of time thinking about the findings presented here and what they tell us about field of education broadly and keep landing back on the

idea that decolonial change will not center schools, because of their foundation and roots in national colonial projects. This led me to think about Michael Apple's (2013) question, "Can education change society?" Apple (2013) has argued, schools not only can change society, they have. For indigenous peoples, this is apparent in the impacts of colonial curricula and colonial schooling models. Thus, while in some ways this research confirmed my skepticism in the possibilities of schools, it also pushed me to consider what schools can and should be doing and the powerful roles schools have held and continue to hold around the world in upholding coloniality; therefore, I remain convinced that these processes in schools must be disrupted. While this may entail dismantling schools entirely or imagining a different type of education in and through them, they need to be addressed.

Furthermore, Chuj youth show that dismantling systems of oppression requires more than schools, more than institutional reforms; it requires decolonization. Chapter 4 shows how Chuj youth's and educator's decolonial resistances in schools were constrained by schools' roots in the colonial project of nation building and efforts to eliminate indigenous knowledges. I walked away from my research in Xantin with the belief that while schools can be transformed, and that transformation is important for challenging colonial power relations and knowledge production, schools cannot be the starting point or the focus of decolonial efforts; Chuj youth based their resistances in the community and through YLOs and then extended those into schools. It is important that these efforts occurred with and alongside the transformative efforts of youth in YLOs and in their community. Thus, in order to disrupt power relations, change in schools must be part of larger decolonial efforts. As seen in Chapter 4, Multiculturalism and multicultural education, without a decolonial commitment, will not challenge power relations and will only work to maintain them through logics of inclusion. Thus, I argue that this requires scholars of education invested in decolonial change to extend their analyses beyond the confines of schools and break down the false

borders created between schools and youth organizing and community-based space to explore ways in which youth-centered models and insights can transform educational possibilities in schools.

Furthermore, the findings presented here highlight the argument that youth studies needs to be decolonized (e.g., Dhillon, 2017); the fields of youth organizing and youth studies, which offer important spaces to think about young people, their resistances, and their power to bring about change, need to think deeply about what it means to center coloniality. The future of youth studies and youth organizing necessitates a decolonial critique and taking seriously indigenous youth's resistances. While scholars in these fields have centered the resistances of marginalized youth, the fields are missing a sustained critique of coloniality and how it operates in youth's lives. By centering coloniality, Chapters 3 and 5 demonstrate the way various modern/colonial processes converged in their lives of indigenous youth and informed their multifaceted understandings of these processes as the complex interplay of various histories, structures, and policies that must be confronted and resisted simultaneously. Thus, Chuj youth argued that they could not afford to focus on a single issue and instead imagined their resistances confronting multiple issues at once in both overt and subtle ways and across community and institutional spaces; centering coloniality and the experiences of indigenous youth exposed the way interlocking systems of oppression and control operate and reveals how indigenous youth will be and are leaders in these struggles (see also Dhillon, 2017).

Final Reflections

Finally, I went into this research based on a belief in the power of Chuj youth and in many ways that was confirmed, but not in the ways I had thought. On reflection, I think I hoped to see broad-sweeping changes and present a story of Chuj youth dismantling oppressive policies and/or systems; something that would clearly show the "success" of their organizing. But this research taught me that I was thinking about change in the wrong ways and focusing on the wrong things. I learned that decolonial change is more expansive and not about individual policies; it is about

undermining the very structures on which our current system is built, and that will not be dismantled, as my participants often reminded me, "from today till tomorrow." Thus, for those of us committed to supporting decolonial change and working "against the grain of power" (Lugones, 2003), this requires a sustained promise and the ability to recognize and support the more subtle forms of resistance.

I also left Xantin in April 2017 troubled by the violence of modern/colonial policies and processes having seen so many people, particularly young people, lose their lives. And as I was privileged in my ability to walk away, I was reminded that this system is overwhelming and is a constant onslaught on the lives of colonized people. Yet, Chuj youth and educators taught me to refuse to be limited by these all-consuming processes at the same time we cannot afford to turn away. Thus, while this work is urgent, we also have to believe that another world, another future is possible. With the harm our current global system has wrecked around the world, I am encouraged by the possibilities of change based on the insights of Chuj youth people.

Overall, Chuj youth have shown that if we are to dismantle modern/colonial power structures, we must go deeper than multiculturalism, inclusion, and a single-axis critique of power. It is imperative to interrogate the contours of coloniality and its multiple manifestations to work to decolonial change. And, I am convinced now more than ever that indigenous youth will and must be at the center of these decolonial critiques and resistances.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A: Interview Protocols

Semi-structured interview protocol for Chuj youth-led organizations

These are the guiding questions for youth involved in youth-led organizations and represent the types of questions I will ask participants. Interview questions will be conducted in Spanish as it is the national language of Guatemala. Interviews will be semi-structured to allow for the researcher to respond to interviewees' responses.

1. Please, I'd like you to begin by telling me a little about yourself.
    a. Probe: How old are you?
    b. Probe: What do you do for work/studies?
    c. Probe: Tell me about your family
    d. Probe: Please, describe your educational history.
        i. Sub-probe: How many years of school have you received?
        ii. Sub-probe: What language did you receive your education?
        iii. Sub-probe: Was your own culture a part of your education?

2. Please talk about your community, .
    a. Probe: What do you see as the strengths of your community?
    b. Probe: What do you see as the challenges faced by your community?
    c. Probe: What are your opinions about youth in your community?
    d. Probe: What your hopes/visions for in the present/future?
    e. Probe: Tell me about migration from
        i. Sub-probe: What are your views of emigration?
        ii. Sub-probe: Why have so many youth emigrated?
        iii. Sub-probe: What are the effects of emigration on the community?/ How has it changed the community?

3. Please, tell me about the organization you are involved in
    a. Probe: How was your organization started?
    b. Probe: What are the goals of the organization?
    c. Probe: What activities have you and your organization been involved in?
    d. Probe: What is the role of your organization in the community?/ What is your organization's goal for the community?
    e. Probe: How do you make decisions?
    f. Probe: What is the relationship between members?
    g. Probe: How is membership decided?
    h. Probe: What is your relationship with other youth groups? And the *OMJ*?
    i. Probe: Are there allies or adults who support your work in ? In other parts of Guatemala? In the U.S.?
        i. Sub-probe: What is their role?
        ii. Sub-probe: How did they get involved?
    j. Probe: What is your connection to other organizations/movements current and/or historical?

   k. Probe: How do you see your work connected to regional, national, and international events?
   l. Probe: How has the organization changed over time?

4. Please, tell me about your own involvement in and experiences with the YLO
   a. Probe: How did you get involved and why?
   b. Probe: Why have you continued to be a part of the organization?
   c. Probe: What have you learned through your involvement?
   d. Probe: What is your role in the organization?
   e. Probe: What do you like/dislike about the group?
   f. Probe: What is the most memorable thing you have done with your YBO?
   g. Probe: Has your involvement changed/informed the way you think about yourself? Your community? How?

Semi-structured interview protocol for allies and community members

These are the guiding questions for allies of the Chuj youth-led organizations and their community members and represent the types of questions I will ask participants. Interview questions will be conducted in Spanish as it is the national language of Guatemala. Interviews will be semi-structured to allow for the researcher to respond to interviewees' responses.

1. Please, describe yourself.
    a. Probe: How old are you?
    b. Probe: What do you do for work/studies?
    c. Probe: Tell me about your family
    d. Probe: What is your role in the community?
        i. Sub-probe: What organizations are you involved in?
    e. Probe: Please, describe your educational history.
        i. Sub-probe: How many years of school have you received?

2. Please, talk about your community, [redacted]
    a. Probe: What do you see as the strengths of your community?
    b. Probe: What do you see as the challenges faced by your community?
    c. Probe: What are your opinions about youth in your community?
    d. Probe: What your hopes/visions for [redacted] in the present/future?
    e. Probe: Tell me about migration from [redacted]
        i. Sub-probe: What are your views of emigration?
        ii. Sub-probe: Why have so many youth emigrated?
        iii. Sub-probe: What are the effects of emigration on the community?/ How has it changed the community?
        iv. What connection (if any) have the YLOs here had with emigrants in the U.S.?

3. Please, tell me about the youth organizations in [redacted]
    a. Probe: What are your opinions about the organizations?
        i. Sub-probe: What are the strengths?
        ii. Sub-probe: What are the shortcomings?
        iii. Sub-probe: What is their role in the community?
    b. Probe: (What) do you see them contributing to the community?
    c. Probe: (How) are you involved with the youth organizations? Why?
        i. Sub-probe: What is your role?
        ii. Sub-probe: How did you get involved?
        iii. Sub-probe: What have your experiences been?
        iv. Sub-probe: What is your relationship with the youth in the organization (s)?
    d. Probe: What is your suggestions/hopes for the youth in the community and in the organizations?
    e. Probe: What changes have you seen in the youth/organizations?

Semi-structured interview protocol for allies and community members

These are the guiding questions for allies of the Chuj youth-led organizations and their community members located in the United States and represent the types of questions I will ask participants. Interview questions will be conducted in Spanish as it is the language spoken by most participants, since it is the national language of Guatemala. Interviews will be semi-structured to allow for the researcher to respond to interviewees' responses.

1. Please, I'd like you to begin by telling me a little about yourself.
    a. Probe: How old are you?
    b. Probe: What do you do for work/studies?
    c. Probe: Tell me about your family
    d. Probe: What is your role in the community?
        i. Sub-probe: What organizations are you involved in?
    e. Probe: Please, describe your educational history.
        i. Sub-probe: How many years of school have you received?

2. Please, talk about your community, [redacted].
    a. Probe: What do you see as the strengths of your community?
    b. Probe: What do you see as the challenges faced by your community?
    c. Probe: What are your opinions about youth in your community?
    d. Probe: What your hopes/visions for [redacted] in the present/future?

3. Please, tell me about migration from [redacted].
    a. Probe: What are your experiences with migration?
    b. Probe: How do you say connected to [redacted]?
    c. Probe: What are your views of migration?
    d. Probe: What pushes people to leave for the U.S.? Why have so many people immigrated, especially youth?
    e. Probe: What are the effects of emigration on the community?/ How has it changed the community?
    f. Probe: What connection (if any) do Chuj communities in the U.S. have with the YLOs in [redacted]?

4. Please, tell me about the youth organizations in [redacted].
    a. Probe: What are your opinions about the organizations?
        i. Sub-probe: What are the strengths?
        ii. Sub-probe: What are the shortcomings?
        iii. Sub-probe: What is their role in the community?
    b. Probe: (What) do you see them contributing to the community?
    c. Probe: What is your suggestions/hopes for the future of your community?
    d. Probe: How would you describe the current situation for Chuj youth?

APPENDIX B: Focus Group Protocol

These are the guiding focus group discussion questions for youth involved in youth-led organizations and represent the types of questions I will ask participants. Focus groups will be facilitated in Spanish as it is the national language of Guatemala and will be conversational in nature to allow members of the groups and the researcher to respond not only to the guiding questions, but also the responses of other group members.

1. Please, tell me about the history of the youth organization.
    a. How did you group get started?
2. What are the main projects and activities your group has been involved in?
    a. What have been your successes?
    b. What have been your challenges?
    c. What have you learned?
3. Please, tell me about the current work of the youth organization.
    a. What are goals/focus of the organization?
    b. How is your work facilitated/made possible?
    c. How are decisions made?
    d. How is the organization structured?
    e. What is the relationship between members of the group?
    f. (How) do you collaborate with other groups?
    g. (How) do you work with allies and/or adults?
    h. What are some of the challenges you face?
4. What are issues in the community that are important to you?
5. What is the value of the group to you?
6. Please, tell me about education in and out of your group.
    a. What have you learned from one another?
    b. What kind of educational space is your organization?
    c. How is the learning and teaching you do in this group the same and/or different than that of formal schooling?
7. Please tell me about how emigration has affected/influenced the community and your group.
    a. What are the effects of emigration on your community?
    b. Have you done work around emigration?
        i. What projects have you done?
    c. Do you have connections with people in the United States?
        i. What are they?
        ii. Please, tell me about them.

Appendix C: Research Site Descriptions

YLOs	Description
MYO (Municipal Youth Office)	Youth office in local government. Started in 2013 by youth in *Juventud Xantineca*. Mayor started the office as a project and the two youth coordinators elected by YLO participants shared a salary. While started by *Juventud Xantineca,* the office welcomed the integration of other YLOs and formed its own *junta directiva* with representatives of the various YLOs. After the MYO's initial success, the youth were granted two official positions and salaries as a Youth Coordinator and a Youth Promoter. With the change of government 2016, the new mayor appointed his own Coordinator and Promotor and YLOs no longer had say in the personnel and running of the youth office.
Juventud Xantineca (Xantin Youth)	Started through a youth political leadership program run by a national organization starting in 2011. After the diploma program, youth continued to organize, formed this organization, and then worked to organize for the MYO. Members of this organization proposed, planned, and were granted the MYO. Later, in 2016, they were the group of youth that were pushed out of the MYO and continued to meet in an autonomous space along with *Jóvenes Unidos*. They stopped meeting in the middle of 2016, but members continued to talk about re-organizing to take-back the youth office in 2020.
Jóvenes Unidos (United Youth)	This YLO was created in partnership with Maya ancestral leaders and youth from the region in 2012. The group was formed after the founder, Lexo, participated in a youth meeting with Maya ancestral leaders. They later joined the MYO and were pushed out with *Juventud Xantineca*. By the middle of 2016, they had stopped meeting, but members talked about starting up the group again.
Mujeres Jóvenes Chujes Organizadas (Organized Chuj Young Women)	Chuj girls' group that received funding through a Central American foundation. The group was started by a youth ally and group leader, Ana, and her family. Her brothers saw a call for proposals for women's rights organizations through the Central American Foundation and helped Ana and the other young women write the proposal. They received funding from the Central American Foundation starting in 2012. The group focuses on workshops around women's rights; for the first two years they received funding for workshops and trainings for themselves and in 2013 they started leading workshops for women in the town and villages. Representatives have also been invited to feminist camps in another Central American country. This is the only group included that is led by an adult ally.
Jóvenes Líderes de Xantin (Xantin's Young Leaders)	This YLO was started by a group of friends, some of whom had participated in other YLOs. They started in 2014 by organizing a Holy Week event and then continued to organizing different workshops and trainings. In 2015, they decided to organize more formally and in 2016 they applied for and were granted official national recognition as an NGO. They met regularly two to three times a week on the evenings and weekends. All of their group members were professionals in various fields, such as teachers, lawyers, accountants, etc. During the time I was in Xantin, this group was the most active in anti-mining and -hydroelectric organizing and community leadership positions.
Jóvenes	An Evangelical church youth group. At first the group was led by an adult

Caminando con Dios (Youth Walking with God)	church member, but now it is led and run by youth. The church itself is divided into four leadership committees: children, youth, men, and women. Each of these groups has a separate space and are in charge of organizing and preparing services on a rotating basis. This group is the youth contingent of the church. They met once-a-week for a youth service as well as other special events, home visits, and activities.
* Jóvenes Pacíficos[19] (Peaceful Youth)	This YLO was the often talked about as the first YLO in Xantin. It was started through a national Peaceful Communities initiative in 2005. This group was no longer active at the time of the research, but its members played roles in different active organizations and its history is important for understanding the genesis of the other organizations.

Schools	Description
B'eyb'al Komam Kicham (The Path of our Ancestors) Cooperative Secondary School	Cooperative secondary school that includes both middle school and high school, with various career tracks. In Guatemala, cooperative school means it is jointly financed by the local government, the national government, and student tuition. This school was one of the first high schools in the town and was started in 2004 in partnership with a US-based NGO that continues to be involved in the school. The school has been working on a project-based curriculum and promoting the voice of the student government. Classes meet in the mornings.
Xantin National Secondary School	The only public middle school in Xantin. The school started in 2009 and receives all its funding from the national governments, so students do not pay tuition. Classes meet in the afternoons.
Madre María de Jesús (Mother Mary of Jesus) Parochial School	A Catholic middle school that began as an educational initiative of the priest in 2017. Teachers receive a small stipend from students' tuition, but not a full salary. Classes meet in the afternoon.

[19] Not included in observations.