

# Contextualizing In/Security: The Political Identity 'Mayan-Woman' in Guatemala

Maria Stern-Pettersson

## Introduction

Many Mayan-women in Guatemala claim that they are insecure in multiple ways: as women, as members of an ethnic group, and as members of a socio-economic class which struggles to attain the basic requirements for survival. Many are also threatened in different and related manners in the variant spatio-temporal contexts which inform their lives, such as the family, society at large, their organizations, or the Guatemalan nation-state project. Similarly, those who threaten these persons may, in a different context, be their closest ally. Many Mayan-women's in/security is therefore contingent and multiple – even hybrid.

However, despite (and in the function of) their subaltern positions, many Mayan-women have begun to make their voices heard in protest of their self-defined<sup>1</sup> triple discrimination, both on a national level, and within their own communities and organizations. For the first time in Guatemala's history, Mayan-women are making claims for security and identity *as Màyán-women*. They are thus re-constructing both what this identity and what security means in the context of seemingly intractable conflicts between those who wield power in Guatemala, and those who are striving to empower themselves in the face of violence and marginalization. They are also making it increasingly clear that they too are subjects in the fashioning of the society in which they are living.

Mayan-women's claims must be seen in light of the current conjuncture in Guatemala. Although the bloody war no longer terrorizes the majority of people who live within (and were forced to flee) Guatemala's borders to the extent that it did in the late 70's and early 80's, most still suffer the heritage of over 30 years of armed conflict, counter-insurgency tactics, and unjust distributions of resources.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, hope can be found in recent advancements and in a quelling of the direct violence. Since 1986, a series of 'democratic' regimes has replaced a long line of military dictatorships.<sup>3</sup> After 7 years of negotiations, on December 4, 1996, the URNG and the government signed a peace agreement to put an end to the insurgency/counter-insurgency war. Furthermore

popular protest—more and more often articulated in terms of ethnic identity—has burgeoned<sup>4</sup>, although with trepidation. Recently<sup>5</sup>, the ‘Mayan *pueblo*’ has become an increasingly unifying political identity—an identity celebrated both as a source of pride and a basis for political rights for a growing movement which includes many sectors of the civil society. In 1995 an accord on the Rights and Identity of the Indigenous Population was signed by both the URNG and the government, as part of the peace process. This document, borne out of the work of the Mayan coalition in the Civil Assembly<sup>6</sup>, forges significant new paths in the history of Guatemala, and in Indigenous-*Ladino*<sup>7</sup> relations; it reflects the growing salience of the political identity of the Mayan *pueblo*. Even if the accord may be unrealistic and vague in its provisions, it achieves an undeniably monumental goal: It has named the indigenous peoples—and in particular, indigenous women—as citizens of Guatemala.

However, despite these vast advancements, the large majority of the population continue to live and work at the bottom of many interwoven systems of oppression, such as those that spur counterinsurgency tactics, sexual violence, unjust land distribution, and violence and discrimination on the basis of gender or (supposed) ‘racial’ or ethnic differences. Substantial and peaceful change in the fabric of the Guatemalan nation-state project and in the insecure positions of Guatemala’s majority—and perhaps in particular, Mayan-women—remain uncertain indeed.

It is this very focus on the security and insecurity of Mayan-women which I intend to address in this article.<sup>8</sup> How can one begin to understand what in/security<sup>9</sup> possibly can mean *to and for* them, given their particular locations in different systems of oppression and the specificity of their struggles? Exploring the specificity of Mayan-women’s in/security helps make the security talked about, written, and implemented in the fields of International Relations and politics more accountable to the actual experiences of in/security of real people in precarious situations.

### **Theoretical Motivation: In/security and Identity**

Can in/security as it is written about in (most) dominant and alternative texts in the fields of International Relations Theory and Peace and Development Research adequately address the hybrid and multiple experiences of insecurity and struggles for security of people who are making claims from a particular political identity?

In/security, as it is commonly understood, evokes notions of threat, danger, vulnerability, as well as (perhaps) a striving for well-being, safety, autonomy, etc. It is most often understood as relating to nation-states in military terms. Dominant understandings of security posit political subjectivity at the level of the state or the individual (man-citizen). The state does not pose a threat to ‘its’ people, but, instead is their protector. The ‘state’ (also a fixed category) therefore enjoys a monopoly over the use of ‘legitimate’ violence in both the ‘domestic’ and the international environment. National security is paramount be-

cause, as the principle of state sovereignty dictates, states compete in a hostile international system characterized by belligerent 'others'. Danger resides 'outside' the borders of the state in aggressive ambitions of similar, yet significantly different, political bodies, that is, in other states. *The nation-state is therefore the target and the agent of security.*

The mechanisms of state sovereignty also locate danger 'inside' the community, in challenges to the 'internal' universality of the political identity of the state. It can be found in ulterior expressions and interpretations of political subjectivity (such as claims to class, ethnic, gender, race, sexual identity). These are seen as undermining of the necessary monopoly over identity held by state nationalism (Campbell 1992: 71). Hence despite what might be a 'weak' or failing' project (such as is arguably the case in Guatemala), the need to create a homogenous and overriding national political identity supersedes all other claims to political identity.

It is therefore clearly not adequate to rely on an analysis of Guatemala's national security borne out of the mainstream security discourse to understand Mayan-women's in/security. Ironically, many of Guatemala's national security policies are the very mechanisms which continue to threaten the people who live within (or were forced to flee) its borders.

The mainstream security discourse, however, has recently been widened to encompass threats to the environment, the economy and society at large. An alternative discourse has arisen as a critique to the state-centered and 'negative' military emphasis on security found in mainstream analysis. However, it has not adequately addressed how in/security may differ depending upon one's gender or ethnic identity. Nor has it addressed what it means to be in/secure, or to seek security in different locations in varying matrices of power systems. Security continues to be treated as a fixed, gender neutral, and universal concept — a concept reliant upon a sovereign (masculine) subject.

Hence, although extremely important work has been done in the field of security studies in expanding the concept of security to encompass aspirations for equality, justice, and peace — and in effectively challenging the sovereignty of the nation-state — security (generally) remains the domain of those at the top of gender, class and racial hierarchies. A growing number of feminist theorists, for example, have rendered explicit how constructions of security in Western political theory and policy have been gendered and how gender is deeply implicated in the way in which particular bodies experience and execute threat and violence (see, for example, Tickner 1993; Peterson 1992; Sylvester 1987, 1994).

How then can one address Mayan-women's in/security? A common suggestion within the Alternative security discourse is to shift the focus from state security to human/individual security, drawing on the human rights discourse. However, focusing on 'individual' security also insufficiently addresses Mayan-women's hybrid or multiple insecurities. Mayan-women feel that they are triply discriminated against — triply insecure. Security for one person in one context may differ drastically in another context; what security means in the family, for example may differ from what it means in encounters with *Ladino*

society, or in the Guatemalan state in general. Moreover, security for one person may represent insecurity for someone else. Similarly, security depends upon where people are located on intersecting systems of oppression or ruling, such as sexism, classism, or racism. In order to understand a particular meaning of security it is helpful to address the different spatio-temporal contexts that inform her life. Furthermore, Mayan-women's struggles for security center around claims for identity. Consequently, in exploring Mayan-women's insecurity, one needs to pay close attention to who these person say they are – to their *political identity*.

Given the centrality of the significance of identity in the struggles for security articulated by Mayan-women, a central question concerns how identity politics (that is, politicized gender or ethnic identity) can become a means for *both securing and in-securing* people in respect to who they are as political subjects. As Peterson questions: "through what identity do we seek security"? (Peterson 1992: 53).

Identity is a social construct, an activity, an expression of multiple and constantly changing relationships, orders, discourses: it is a repository, a reflection, a product, as well as (re)creator of our surroundings (Ferguson, 1993:159). The politicization of social identity provides a momentary resting place for the formation of a political subject. The identity of this subject is continuously recreated, yet nevertheless more fixed and definable than the many different social identities she moves into and out of in the rhythms of everyday life. For example, when politicized, a particular representation of identity, such as that of "Mayan-woman", becomes a less fluid, more stable subject (although never static). A *politicized* subject refers to a person who, according to her self-definitions, actively engages in trying to affect her "place and fate in the political and socio-economic structures of (her) state and society" (Rothschild 1981, quoted in Lindholm 1993). In the capacity of her politicized identity, this person thinks and acts from a relatively stable place – *together with other like subjects* – in order to achieve certain aims.

Identity formation (both gender and ethnic-national) is contingent upon the meaning given to "markers" which can be *perceived* and deeply *experienced as given, fixed, natural – especially when much is at stake in identity claims* – but are constructed. Claiming that a political identity is constructed does not mean that all identities can change easily or quickly, or that they are not deeply imbedded in the histories of peoples lives. Particular contexts, however, determine the assignment of the social and political meaning of the identity markers. My emphasis on the political and socially constructed aspects of the 'Mayan' identity therefore is not intended to belittle the very 'real'-ness of cultural and spiritual traditions that have been handed down from generation to generation, nor the importance of these traditions – beyond the political ones – in the daily lives of the Mayan people. For instance, women's traditional dress, *traje*<sup>10</sup>, has been an important cultural tradition for centuries; focusing on *traje* as a symbol of subjugation, or resistance – and a boundary marking difference – simply says that women's dress, although perhaps a natural part of ancient daily cultural traditions, has taken on a specific political and contemporary meaning.

Furthermore, in the process of politicization, elites and others making claims based on a collective identity (be it a 'nation-state', an ethnic group, or a group organized on the basis of gender) often assume some sense of 'unity', and coherence within the collectivity. This assumption discourages changes or variance within this identity category. Deviance may come to be interpreted as disloyal or even dangerous to the political goals of the collectivity (Butler 1990: 14-15). It may become necessary to employ, what G. M. Dillon calls, 'discourses of danger' to maintain internal homogeneity and sovereignty (as is clearly the case in Guatemala's national security policy). Although Dillon's explanation rests on the idea of the hegemony of state sovereignty, his point is also relevant in terms of a marginalized ethnic identity. Dillon draws our attention to how danger, fear and threat are employed in an 'in/security discourse' to secure sovereign identities and to imperil identities which challenge the sovereign subject's hegemony. (Dillon 1990-91: 108). He explains that this discourse is a self-securing process which constitutes legitimate political subjectivities. Through maintaining the exclusive rights to define the 'enemy', the principle of state sovereignty controls the definitions of, as well as the use of danger. Within the in/security discourse, norms of identity are created through the decision of who/what is excluded. *A particular community maintains its salience from the perpetual need to protect itself from different, challenging orders; notions of threat and survival can become the legitimizing reason for sustaining the order, and can even be seen as constructing the order* (see also Campbell 1992 for a discussion on 'discourses of danger').

### Contextualizing In/security? – the Use of Narratives

Given the limitations depicted above of any strict, predetermined definition of security which includes an assigned referent object and subject (e.g. 'nation-state, or 'individual'), I will not depend upon a fixed definition of in/security to understand Mayan women's in/security. Instead, I hope to better learn what in/security means to and for the persons I have interviewed. I have found the use of narratives to be an invaluable method for this task.

The narratives I will analyze in the following pages are stories of the development of these persons' political consciousness: how they make sense of their past and how they have come to be who they were at the time of the interview<sup>11</sup>. The narrative was decided (in part) by what the narrators included, excluded, as well as what they wanted *me* to know, what they wanted me to tell *other people*, who these other people are, as well as what they *did not* want me to know. Safety concerns, personal trust, as well as political aims were all significant factors in the construction of their stories. Because the text-story is created from the perspective of a politicized identity, the in/securities described are those remembered as significant from the explicit spatio-temporal site of the politicized identity, 'Mayan-woman'.

Although my intention is to explore the contingency of security in relation to the political site 'Mayan-woman', I must employ an analysis schema for interpreting Mayan-women's experiences and reflections as significant in terms of

in/security. This is especially the case since a direct question such as "What does security/insecurity mean for you?" was not possible, nor desirable in the research context. *I will therefore rely on the basic assumption that insecurity (may) involve the experiences of threat, danger and harm; security implies a striving for well-being, safety.*<sup>12</sup> The way in which the narrators talk (or do not talk) about their experiences as being ones of feeling threatened, harmed, or endangered is the basis for my assessment of their insecurity; similarly, my assessment of their security rests on their descriptions of their struggles for well-being, for safety. However, these categories are not exclusive; they often flow into each other, hence the term: in/security. For example, in the struggle to 'secure' someone or thing, to render it 'safe', 'well', one limits its possibilities, thus causing it 'harm' or 'endangering' it (for further exploration of this relation, see Campbell 1992; Connolly 1991).

Despite the need to – loosely – define in/security in order to explore the specificity of its meaning to and for Mayan-women, its content, and perhaps most importantly, its referent object and subject are dictated by the unfolding of the narrative: who/what is rendered in/secure from whom/what? Where do the threat and the promise of safety reside? In/security thus becomes a textual construction – a key trope in the construction of the political subjects in the narrative, (as well as those narrating). Indeed, in/security in these narratives can be seen as the foundation for 'terror-writing'<sup>13</sup> where experiences of violence and victimization are transvalued to become the skeletons of a political identity, and the legitimization for the making of certain political claims. Treating in/security as a construction site of political identities, whereby in writing in/security, the subjects write themselves, their histories, and their visions of a better future (a more 'secure' world), indicates the political nature of the assignment of threat and danger, as well as safety and well-being. In/security thus can be seen as an ontological yet contingent condition of identity<sup>14</sup>. This rings true not only for 'marginalized' in/securities, but also those perceived as given or 'objective' such as national security. Guatemala's national security policy has defined Mayan-woman as dangerous threats to national identity, constructing a hegemonic national subjectivity based, in part, on the exclusion and fear of contesting political identities; similarly, the political identity 'Mayan-women' is constructed in relation to the assignment of those who threaten, namely, the Guatemalan government/military, *Ladino* society, men, etc.

Nevertheless, such a textual treatment of in/security is not intended to preclude attention to, or to call into question, the very real terror and danger that Mayan-women experience.

In their texts, the narrators speak of the different contexts in their lives as both sites of security and insecurity. They draw a map of many of the power relations which informed their experiences and who they were. They also talk of these contexts as spaces where they began to develop (construct) identities in relation to systems of oppression and ruling, perhaps rejecting or modifying those inherited identities<sup>15</sup> that harmed them, or rendered them insecure. These contexts are sites of subjugation, but also of resistance for the textualized subjects in their stories. In order to address Mayan-women's hybrid in/securities,

I have structured my analysis of the narrators' words in terms of the crucial spatio-temporal contexts in their texts.

In the following pages, I will briefly explore one of these contexts: Organization/Political Movement. I have analyzed three narratives (of 18) as a pilot study<sup>16</sup> because they reflect the richness and diversity of the different narratives, as well as indicate the commonality of certain contexts and themes. One of the persons interviewed works in a Mayan cultural organization ("Rosa"), one in the women's movement ("Manuela"), and one in a human rights organization ("Andrea").

### Organization/Political Movement

All three narrators are making claims (to differing degrees) as Mayan-women and are active in some form of organization and political movement. The meaning of this collective identity, however, is somewhat contested. The Mayan movement includes many different interpretations of the problems facing the 'Mayan *pueblo*', as well as divergent strategies and goals for the transformation of Guatemalan society.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Mayan-women's interpretation of their roles within this movement, as well as their positions in their communities and organizations, are far from united. Nevertheless, all three of the narrators (as well as the rest of the 18 participants in my study) agree in naming their 'triple' oppression and in explicitly struggling for some sort of security for themselves and for the majority of the population in Guatemala. It is therefore possible to draw useful conclusions from talking about the aggregate political identity, 'Mayan-woman'.

Through their engagement with their organizations and larger movements (such as the Mayan, Campesino, or Women's movement, or the generalized term for the many groups which protest the violence and injustices in Guatemala: the popular movement) they are constructing an increasingly forceful political identity as Mayan-women – both within these movements, and in the Guatemalan society at large.

Organizing or belonging to a political movement that can be considered critical of the state is still often treated as a subversive act in contemporary Guatemala. Being an explicitly politically active person (perhaps especially a woman<sup>18</sup>) in Guatemala is therefore dangerous. For instance, many of the people whom I interviewed explained that they were under constant surveillance; several told me that they had received death threats, as recently as a few weeks before our conversation. Rosa fears leaving the organization at night, walking alone during the day, and even attending social gatherings, because "the enemy might be there". Organizing openly therefore implies committing oneself to live life in a state (both literally and figuratively) of constant insecurity.

Yet, despite the often dramatic insecurity which openly protesting the state (and others in power, such as the plantation owners) entails, Andrea, Manuela, and Rosa express that they feel better organizing than remaining quiet; organizing provides them with a community in which they feel secure. Rosa explained: "If you organize you are considered bad, if you don't, the same – [its]

better to organize.” Their organization and movement provides comradeship, a collective counter-force to the brutality of the hegemonic forces of those in power. Rosa tells of how, once in the context of her organization, she did not allow the military to intimidate her. Together they fought back with tools soldered in the experience of collective marginality and resistance:

when I received death threats, I did not go backwards. On the contrary, I said I'll have to find a way to solve this, and I counted on the organization and the *Compañeros*. [I asked them] ‘What ideas do you give me, because if I continue with my struggles, I will always be persecuted, if not the enemies will always bother me...so its better to keep struggling.

Manuela talks of the safety she found in her first experience with a church-based organization at a time when the military's counter-insurgency tactics had led to what many call a ‘culture of silence’ and a ‘culture of fear’: “the message was to not confide in anyone, because you never know.... [it gave me] much security to be in a group of people where no one would say what you said to anyone else.” Hence, according to Andrea's, Manuela's, and Rosa's experiences, belonging to an organization offers a united front against the oppressor, and a forum for the sharing of confidences – assurances that the narrators described as offering security and safety in the midst of an insecure existence.

Additionally, the narrators demonstrated that belonging to an organization and a larger political movement can also provide security through the very feeling of belonging to a collective identity. All three relay that they belong to a larger project, a collective with a particular history. They locate themselves and their trials in this history, thus finding solace and inspiration for struggling to change the situation of their people. If they die in this process, there will be many more to carry on the work, hence their immortality is in some sense guaranteed. Andrea declares that she is not afraid for herself: “I am not afraid because the struggle is just.”

Furthermore, they all talk about the context of their organizations and political movements primarily as spaces for the canalization of their struggles. In this sense, this context offers a place where they can fashion who they are and who they want to be – individually and collectively. They thus create for themselves an identity which offers security. In this process, they also define this identity as the referent object for their struggles for security: they are working to ‘secure’ the identity: ‘Mayan-woman’ from the various threats which endanger them.

Rosa remarks that in the beginning of her work in her organization, she did not navigate her own life: “I didn't know anything...I was totally confused...I didn't know what I was saying [when she went out and lectured on the work of the organization.]” I read this as an inability to see herself and act as a political subject – as a recognition of her marginality even from her own political struggle – a struggle dominated by men. Rosa then describes her process of “consciousness”, where she becomes increasingly aware of her self as a political subject. She explains, for example, that she has come to realize “that an aware woman can interpret and manage any term.” Refuting the negative meanings

given to the identity 'Mayan woman', Rosa politicizes this identity and imbues it with new meanings that offer her more security.

Through her work with the organization Rosa thus also learns to co-direct (together with the collective) the construction of her political identity. "Little by little I was developing. Now I have clarity about why I am struggling: How, for whom and against whom. I see the reality...If we don't know why we are organizing, we are lost..." From her position of clarity she can place her and others experiences in a relational and historical context. She defines her struggle, enemy, allies, goals. She thus also determines who she – the textualized subject and narrator – is in all of these relations, in the narrative moment, and in the historical moment of the telling. In this process, I propose, she (re)constructs her political identity as a Mayan-woman.

Andrea, as well, talks about her process of politicization as a turning point, a gaining of "clarity", and a connecting of her experiences to those of the collective. Andrea describes in detail the injustices against Mayan-women, as well as the reasons why Mayan-women should be re-vindicated, drawing upon the myths surrounding the history of the Mayan *pueblo*. She (re)interprets her experiences and places them in the context of Mayan-women throughout history, as ever sacrificing and resisting. In so doing she also defines who she is in relation to those who threaten her today, such as the military, the state, and men, as well as her enemies of the past, the Spanish (who become easily interchanged with their descendants: the *Ladinos*.)

So, my consciousness was born there [in the jungle and the Communities of Resistance] and its not correct when they tell us today that we are not worth anything that we don't have any participation in the society, in the development of Guatemala...the same situation that I have experienced since I was a child up until today has made me have this consciousness to rise up as women to guard our heritage, to guard our sacrifices, these pains that we have had and that I have had.... Always the female elders said that...when the Spanish came here to Guatemala, when they came to invade, our grandparents were tortured, were burned alive...in this sense...I understood the situation which they talked about when I had to live it. So I came to appreciate the elders because it is they who know more of the culture, how we have been for 500 years...for me its painful that we have not [only] been suffering for 10, 15 years, but we have resisted for 500 years.

Andrea thus establishes her political identity, places it in the context of her past and experiences of insecurity throughout history, and fixes it as a timeless given. She thereby establishes for herself a stable base for resistance – an identity to be secured – which rests upon the heritage of over 500 years.

Andrea's need to maintain cohesion in the face of external threat seems to have led to a certain circumscribing of the identity categories upon which claims for change are being made – in relation to her re-collections of the past: "how we have been for 500 years". Security/safety may then necessarily involve cautiously defining, reinforcing, and limiting who she is in the many different power relations which affect her life, as well as carefully weaving a direct life-line to a certain and linear history to which she belongs. It may also involve a system for knowing who belongs and who does not. For example, when I asked Rosa what the difference was between Mayans and *Ladinas*, she

described an elaborate system whereby, based on the use (or non-use) of *traje*, she could tell who was Mayan, who was not, who was denying that they were Mayan, who had lost their identity, and who hadn't lost their identity although they did not wear *traje*. She thus stipulated rather explicit criterion to determine who belonged in the identity category, Mayan-woman, and who did not. Similarly, Andrea explained that she was very happy that "women [were] taking their place in the struggle... [that] Mayan-women [were] demanding their own voice." She also explained that "*Ladinas* come to manipulate our struggles, [but] we have to [struggle] as Mayan-women." In this statement, she is making an important distinction between those who are allowed into the struggle of Mayan-women, and those who should remain outside. It is crucial to her that the category is closed and protected – secure.

Yet Manuela's reaction to experiences when she felt herself being forced into a stereotype or excluded from an identity category indicates that delimiting identity categories – for security – and establishing strict criterion for who belongs and who doesn't runs the risk of erecting exclusionary – and harmful – boundaries that homogenize and control the inside while excluding those outside. People might be rendered insecure as result of this process. Manuela, for example, expresses the frustration and pain she feels as a victim of such boundary construction and maintenance.

I assume the triple identity [Mayan, woman, poor], even if I don't look like one thing or another for a lot of people. They even question me about it, because there have been people who have questioned my Kaqchikel<sup>19</sup> identity. They say: 'your not Kaqchikel, you speak like a *Ladina*, you think like a *Ladina*. So I said: 'we are making stereotypes amongst our own selves, so if I don't appear [to be Kaqchikel], I'm not?... So what does it mean to be indigenous?

She further explains that in a discussion she had with a Mayan-woman who questioned whether or not she is or isn't indigenous, she argued "you are pushing me out of a space, without any right, out of a space that I consider mine as well ..." She explicitly talks about this exclusion as something which frightens her: "It [the criterion of wearing *traje* and *corte*<sup>20</sup> as necessary in order to be a Mayan-woman] makes me afraid ... because it has to do with how we are making claims for ourselves and in front of others."

For Manuela, the Mayan movement's tendency to intransigently define Mayan identity de-limits what for her is a highly personal and fluid identity. She explains that constructing a unifying identity as 'Mayan' (instead of the more local identities for the 22 different folk groups) may be necessary as a political strategy. She fears that by fulfilling the need to create a political identity in resistance – in response to threat –, the Mayan movement may reproduce some of the injurious – unsafe – mechanisms of homogenization, control and exclusion which the nation-state exercises to the harm of the indigenous and poor people in Guatemala.

If you go and ask any woman in any community what she is, she'll tell you: 'I am Mam, Pocomam, Tzutuil, I am Canjobal' whatever it is. I believe that in many circles they use the word, the name, or the denomination of 'Maya-Kaqchikel, Maya-Pocomchi, Maya-Quiche, Maya-I-don't-know-what. It has to do with po-

litical questions, that is to say with the necessity to construct themselves as a nation, as a *pueblo* with the necessity to take a stand as social subjects with sufficient force and sufficient thrust to really obtain some change, some benefits. In this meaning, I am in accordance that this denomination is used, but now the question is that we can not generalize...there is a tendency to homogenize to say 'we are all Mayas'...and if I am not in agreement [with the definition]?...There are different visions from the different Mayan pueblos in Guatemala...[The movement's definition] is converted into a dogma, like the religious dogmas.

The need to protect the cohesiveness of an identity, however, may also preclude the developing of other—challenging—loyalty bands. Manuela explains, for example, the conflicts that arise when Mayan-women locate sexism within their own communities and organizations.

We talked before about the necessity to present a common front, cohesive, before a situation of discrimination and exploitation of more than 500 years. But I personally believe that it is a risk not to recognize the differences and it is a risk not to take a stand as Mayan-women, because at least in my daily life and in the processes which I have had, seen, and lived, discrimination {occurs} even by Mayan men towards Mayan-women. And I believe that it is almost taboo to talk about these things...but its like moving the floor because its a delicate theme. On one occasion a woman said that she felt that she was betraying her ethnic identity by the fact of taking a stand and saying, 'I also feel discriminated as a woman in my own organization.'

Similarly Rosa explains (after I asked her about conflicts in her struggles as Mayan and as a woman)

there are conflicts between groups. The oppression comes from the same system. There is paternalism, homogenization. Some *compañeros* did not want me to (organize for women). The organization is mostly for men—it was difficult for me to work for the participation of women.

Although Rosa mentions sexism in the context of her organization, both she and Andrea seemingly resolve the conflicts of divided loyalties by explaining sexism as really an external influence and threat. As Rosa explains, the oppression of sexism comes from the invasion and colonialism: it's not 'their' men's fault.

The narrators have re-created a story about their struggles as Mayan-women. How they re-collect their experiences of insecurity and their struggles for security in this context reflects what is significant for themselves at the time of the interview in their position of leaders, and from the perspective of their politicized identity in a specific organization and member of a popular political movement. In their organizations/political movements the narrators and their textualized subjects contend with an existence filled with multiple insecurities. Yet they choose to risk their lives in order to struggle for the security of a larger collective—a collective with which they identify. The textualized subjects in the narratives reject a perhaps lonesome site in which they are threatened and join together with other persons who have experienced similar insecurities, even if this means placing their individual lives in greater danger. Within this context, they construct a political identity in relation to: their experiences of

insecurity; the others in their collective throughout history; and to those (or that) which threatens them.

Hence, that Andrea told me of how she believed that Mayan-women needed to struggle on their own without the intervention of *Ladinas*; or that she related her integration into the Mayan movement to the violence she experienced in flight from the army and her increasing respect for the female elders, allows me entry into both how she makes sense of her integration into this context and her political project. I can then infer that for Andrea (the narrator), insecurity in the context of the organization/political movement may mean continued threat from the military, as well as threats from 'outsider's who intend to control the struggle which belongs to Mayan-women. Security may mean identifying herself with a collective, connecting her (and other's) struggle to a long history of struggle and sacrifice, and maintaining the power of definition over this struggle. Similarly, Manuela re-counts her experiences of marginalization from the Mayan movement and identifies the threat of homogenization and exclusion as her primary insecurity in this context; security may therefore imply (among other things) the freedom to struggle for transformation without limiting herself and others within strictly defined identity categories.

### Theoretical Implications?

By taking seriously Mayan-women's claims that they are triply oppressed and by listening to the stories of their struggles, one can explore how in/security can be a multiple or hybrid site—a site which is sculpted out of both subjugation and resistance.

Contrary to how in/security is largely written about in both the conventional and alternative security texts, Mayan-women's narratives attest that in/security—experiences of insecurity and struggles for security—is not a thing which can be uniformly procured for different bodies in different places and different times or that *we* attain through a certain method—its content determined and its character defined. These narratives have led me to conclude that meanings of in/security are crafted in the different spatio-temporal contexts in the narrator's lives and in relation to a matrix of intersecting power relations, such as classism, nationalism, racism, and sexism. Additionally, they have indicated that what in/security means to and for the narrators and their textualized subjects also relates to their political identity and depends upon who is threatening them (such as 'man', 'military officer', '*Ladino*', or '*Compañero*'). Their struggles for security relate to who they say they are and inform the claims they make on each other, the men in their communities, the *Ladino* society at large, and the state. For example, both Andrea and Rosa explain that their security depends on (among other things) the space to express their cultural rights through the use of their language and traditional dress. Their struggles for security and for identity involve making claims on the state for the protection of these rights.

Hence, extrapolating from the experiences described in these narratives, one can surmise that in addition to threats to the most basic survival needs, such as

food, water, shelter, affection, and lack of critical bodily injury, how human beings experience in/security has much to do with who they are. The threat of ethnocide, for instance, would not be a threat if the people affected felt that their ethnic identity were not crucial to their subjectivity, and a critical condition for their security.

Yet, also learning from the narratives, it becomes clear that political identity, like in/security, is not static. Mayan-women's (textualized subjects') political identity is constantly re-formed in relation to experiences of threat and insecurity. Their experiences of threat and insecurity changed in relation to the re-formation of their political identity. For instance, from her insecure position in exile, Andrea's "consciousness was born", she formed the political identity, 'Mayan women' which was tied to a specific and grand heritage. Andrea then began to experience the threat that the female elders' knowledge and traditions would die out; she consequently directed her struggles for security to include re-redeeming their status. I therefore propose that there exists therefore a dynamic relationship between in/security and subjectivity.

However, the narratives also indicate that struggles for security do not necessarily avoid causing harm and re-constituting 'discourses of danger' in order to maintain internal homogeneity and sovereignty—discourses that re-produce injurious practices of exclusion and inclusion. As Christine Sylvester has pointed out (citing Germaine Greer), security is a chimera (Sylvester 1994:183). Struggles for security which are intended to provide safety and well-being may involve limiting what it means to belong to the threatened group in need of protection. The more threatened members of a group—be it ethnic, gender-defined, or a nation—may feel, the more important it may become to define what needs to be protected and to maintain the boundaries between those who belong to the group and the (dangerous) Others. In Andrea's and Rosa's narratives, for example, indisputable boundaries are constructed between the Mayan *pueblo* and *Ladinos* to secure the Mayan *pueblo*. Markers for these boundaries such as Mayan-women's *traje*, as symbols of the culture under siege, become representations of loyalty and belonging or, if they were not borne, of apostasy. As a 'Mayan' identity becomes more politicized, myths of common origin and history—a grand and noble history worth protecting and dying for—bind the people closer together and to the dominating and gendered definitions of what it means to be Mayan. Struggles around a gender identity, for instance, which challenges the loyalties demanded by the ethnic identity may then be considered a threat to the ethnic group and its struggles. Mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion may become more stringent, in essence in/securing those who do not fit into the rigid confines of the identity.

The narratives thus illustrate an inherent conundrum in in/security. However, they also indicate possible strategies for constructively dealing with (although not fully resolving) it: the (silent) hyphen point between 'Mayan' and 'woman' in their self-identification.

The hyphen point<sup>21</sup> in the identity, Mayan-women indicates how the narrators' ethnic and gender identities are fused, inseparable, and continually inform each other. Much feminist literature, as well as literature on identity in

general, have convincingly argued that social divisions, such as gendered and ethnic divisions, compose fluid and porous social identities which flow into and inform each other. These identities are suffused with an endless combination of mobile<sup>22</sup> hyphen points, such as in 'Mayan-woman-campesina-heterosexual'. When politicized, a section of this feasibly endless chain of identifications becomes more fixed (although never static). I propose that the hyphen sets different yet intimately intertwined and interfused subject positions in relation to each other, yet it also implies a conflict<sup>23</sup> between these subject positions. The hyphen point is a site of negotiation, as can be seen when the security demands of one identity (or subject position) such as 'Woman' comes into conflict with that of 'ethnic'. How the narrators handle these conflicts sheds light on the immediacy of their perceived insecurity, and the extent to which their security demands prioritizing "one struggle over another"; or fixing these subjectivities in one position in relation to each other (such as strictly defining that being a Mayan-woman requires that she wear *traje*). Although all of the narrators deal with such conflicts in different ways, their attention to these very negotiations promises powerful disruptions of existing relations of ruling and discourses of danger and in/security. The transformative power of this identity perhaps lies, then, in these very hyphen points. This involves addressing both Mayan-women as women, as Mayan, and the hyphen point in between these subjectivities. It also demands attention to what they articulate as threats and harm as well as conditions for their safety and well-being.

One can hope that in more closely listening to persons whose voices have been marginalized in the discourses of International Relations and Peace and Development Studies, as well as in the circles of power where security policies are directly crafted, we can better enable a transvaluation of in/security which would provide for more safety and less harm.

## Notes

1. Mayan-women's "triple oppression": "as women, Mayan, and poor" is a common description made by members of popular/cultural movements.

2. Since 1960, an insurgency-counter insurgency 'civil' war has been officially taking place in Guatemala. The most recent, and perhaps, most directly violent attack on the indigenous people occurred during the late 70's and early 80's when the Guatemalan state conducted a major counter-insurgency campaign. This campaign was aimed at destroying the Guerrilla's popular base. In actuality, this meant killing the peasantry—the large majority of which was indigenous — and destroying both their cultural and economic resources.

3. It remains to be seen whether or not the Arzú government, elected in January 1996, will (be able to) implement significant transformative strategies.

4. Previously, any sign of 'deviance' or subversion' was quickly attacked through the workings of, for example, death squads.

5. The recent Mayan movement is understood by many as anchored in the celebration of 500 Years of Resistance, and Rigoberta Menchú's winning of the Nobel Peace Prize (Interviews, and Bastos and Camus 1993, 1995.)

6. After President Serrano's auto-coup in 1993, a Civil Assembly was formed with the aim of arriving at demands to be presented at the peace negotiations.

7. According to most accounts of the demographics of Guatemala, there are three main folk groups: Indigenous peoples (of Mayan descent); *Ladinos* referring “to people of mixed blood and western culture...and also...to Indians(*sic*) who have adopted western costume and culture.” (Handy 1984:14) and *Criollos*, the descendants of (white) Spanish settlers who make up the elite aristocracy of the ruling coalition. The superior positions of the *Ladino* populations *vis a vis* the indigenous reflects the racism that reigns in Guatemala.

8. This article can be read as a pilot study for my larger dissertation work. It is based on fieldwork in Guatemala (June-October, 1995). During this period, I conducted partial life stories with 18 leaders of different organizations.

9. Security can not be divorced from insecurity, for the very need for security implies a lack of security: insecurity. And, the very recognition of insecurity implies a struggle for security. This discussion is treated in more depth elsewhere (Stern-Pettersson 1995).

10. In Spanish *traje* means “suit, clothes”; however, in the context of Guatemala it has come to also mean the traditional dress worn by indigenous women (and sometimes men). Women’s *traje* has certainly changed over history with the introduction of new materials and styles.

11. The narratives consist of c.40-60 pgs. The interviews were conducted in Spanish; I bear full responsibility for all translations from Spanish to English.

12. This broad working definition arises out of reflection inspired from numerous texts on the nature of security—documented elsewhere (Stern-Pettersson 1995).

13. I am indebted to Henrik Rønsbo and Finn Stepputat (Centre for Developing Studies, Copenhagen, Denmark) for this point. See Rigoberta Menchú for the most widely read example of such ‘terror writing’.

14. I am grateful to David Campbell for this point.

15. An ‘inherited identity’, as I am using the term here, refers to specific, and often dominant, understandings of identity categories and their content, such as ‘woman’, ‘May-

an’, or ‘Guatemalan’. These categories can be received from the dominant group (ascribed) or from within the politicized ethnic community. They can also be received through the codes of daily relations.

16. I interviewed each of the narrators twice and shared the transcribed texts with them after each of our meetings. Each narrator has authorized the text and given me permission to cite her in the context of my work. For precautionary reasons, I do not refer to the specific date of the interviews when I cite them.

17. It is difficult to talk about the different Mayan organizations as one movement. I have chosen to do so here for the purposes of clarity. In my dissertation work, I will discuss the different factions, groups, and negotiations/conflicts over meaning within this larger ‘movement’.

18. R. explains, for example, that when she began working for human rights she received threats because “woman didn’t have the right to organize men.”

19. Kaqchikel is one of the 22 folk groups that belong to the wider category, ‘Mayan’.

20. Spanish for a ‘piece of material’. It has come to mean the specific skirt worn by Mayan women.

21. I have placed this hyphen point between ‘Mayan’ and ‘women’. The narrators use (in Spanish) ‘Mayan women’.

22. I am inspired to use this term by Ferguson, 1993.

23. I am indebted to both Lester Edwin J. Ruiz (ICU, Japan) and Amy Kaminsky (University of Göteborg) for this insight.

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