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Tiempo, cosmos y religión del pueblo Ayuuk (México)

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English Summary

TIME, COSMOS AND RELIGION OF THE AYUUK PEOPLE (MEXICO), PHD THESIS OF JUAN CARLOS REYES GÓMEZ

This thesis focuses on three research themes – time, cosmos and religion– from the perspective of the *Ayuuk* people.

In *Ayuuk* worldview time is generated by the movement of stars and sun, which make their way through the sky and the underworld. Thanks to this movement, both light and darkness as well as heat and cold are distributed over the surface of the earth. Here the intervention of other divine beings plays an important role, such as water, rain, wind, thunder and lightning, which lead to different climatic and meteorological conditions. From this perspective the world, the sun, moon and stars are seen as animated beings with a sacred character. Also, the time that they generate, and the space in which this occurs, are considered sacred. The relationship between time and space is conceived within the *Ayuuk* culture on a vertical line with a direction of movement that goes from top to bottom, in which the events that have already occurred remain below and what is still to come is above. The cultural perception of the course of time can be represented as a spiral, which starts from the center of the world and moves from right to left (counter clockwise in) continuously rotating through the four major directions of the universe (east, north, west and south).

The dichotomy of light and darkness –day and night– determines both the course of time and the time measurement. This dissertation identifies the *Ayuuk* terms for different times of the day and the night. Time is divided into larger segments, such as periods of thirteen days, periods of twenty days and the period of one year. The *Ayuuk* calendar has both the 260-day cycle (generally known as the “ritual year”) and the cycle of 365 days (generally known as the “agricultural year”). The dissertation discusses in detail the shape, structure and function of these

cycles and the manner in which the integration of these cycles generates a longer cycle of 52 years.

There are special persons who to count the days and interpret the symbolism associated with the calendar. These people, the *Ayuuk* priests and priestesses, specializing in the calendar, are called *xëëmaapyë* (those who count the days) or *kooxëëw* (the owners or keepers of time and fate). These people are chosen by the gods themselves, and authorized to help their fellow man and the community to find balance and harmony. As such, these religious specialists have an important role in structuring the social and spiritual life both inside and outside the community.

The universe is divided into three levels: the upper world (heaven), the surface of the earth and the underworld. Each level of the cosmos is occupied by divine beings, and is a place where a constant, continuous interaction takes place between divine energies. The surface of the earth coincides with the surface of the sky so that a space is created which is known under the combined term *Näaxwiiny-Tsajpwiiny* (“face of the earth-face of the sky”); this is the place where we live.

Heaven is divided into four levels. 1) *Tsajpwinkëjxy* is a space in the sky, not so far removed, where the sun and stars travel through and where the Father God Kontoy is located. From there he takes action through his various manifestations as Rain, Wind and Thunder. 2) *Tsajpooty* is in heaven or the heart of the sky. This place is inhabited by the gods *Taay* and *Jëkëëny*, creators and builders. 3) *Tsajpni'kx* is the roof of the sky, which protects the big house we live in (the world). 4) *Tsajpnikëjxm* far beyond the sky: this is an unknown place.

The underworld is divided into four main areas: 1) *Näaxwinkëjxy*, a place in the earth but still just under the surface. This is where the seeds, which will generate new life, are stored and where the Mother *Tajëëw*, the great serpent with the head of a deer lives.

It manifests its presence by means of Lightning, Rain and Wind. This is also the place where the bodies of the dead are buried. And it is the entrance to the second place of the underworld. 2) *Näaxooty*, inside the earth or the heart of the earth. This is the abode of *Mējku'u*, the lord of the underworld, whose job is to receive and judge the souls of the dead. He must finally send them to *Ja tuk it*, the other world, where the souls of the dead will begin a new life. 3) *Näax'ējx*, the foundation of the earth. This site supports the cosmos. 4) *Näaxpatke'py*, a place far beyond the earth: an unknown place.

There are two worlds: *Tuk it*, this world, and *Ja tuk it*, the afterlife, where the souls of the deceased live in. The body is perishable, but its warm energy, the soul or spirit (*anmajä'äwën*), preserves itself, is immortal and has to return to the presence of gods, where its journey to this world has been determined. There is a continuous cyclical process of life-death-life, in which death is not conceived as the ultimate end of our existence. Instead, it is conceived as part of a process, in which renunciation of the body becomes a condition for new life.

The passing of time is different between this world and the afterlife. When here it is day, in the afterlife it is night. Also when in this world years have passed, there only a few days have passed. There, time is at a standstill, it does not pass by, that is to say, there is an eternal present.

Regarding religion, the promordial gods are *Tääy-Jëkëëny*, who are the end and the beginning of all there is in the world. At the beginning of religious celebrations they are mentioned first. There exist also other sacred beings, who live together with us and who can influence our ordinary life in a god or bad way. *Kontoy* and *Tajëëw* Father and Mother, play an important role in the sacred narratives, which tell about their birth, experiences (here in this world, beside us), about their names, their immortal and omnipresent essence, and the way in which they are conceived.

The dissertation clarifies that the gods and other sacred entities, such as *Mējku'u*, the Lord of the Underworld, or the mountains, have a dual essence: masculine and feminine. Most of the time they are

conceived as a couple (husband-wife) conforming families. In other cases, they don't have a specific gender. They are not strictly good or strictly bad, that is, they are not characterized for only one aspect. Good gods may turn angry and punish us, if we fail to show them respect, but also sacred beings considered harmful (such as *Mējku'u*, who causes problems, misfortune, sickness and death) may help us to solve a problem, heal a sickness or liberate the spirit from a curse. Here, everything depends on the existing relationships, the types of rituals celebrated, and of course on our behavior in relation to sacred entities and our fellow men.

Through cultural synergy two different cultural expressions, in this case the *Ayuuk* religion and the Christian religion, can be connected and form one large spiritual expression. The result is a different type of religion, not only *Ayuuk* and not only Christian, but a different one, in which the two components reinforce each other through mutual complementarity and enrichment.

This dissertation presents and analyses a series of ten ancient *Ayuuk* narratives, as an example of the literary richness and cultural heritage of this people. These narratives have a sacred character and their main objective is the transmission of morals and the teaching of *Ayuuk* religious thought. Here a glossary is added of the religious terms, frequently used by priests and priestesses when pronouncing prayers, petitions or ceremonial speeches during offerings to the gods and other religious celebrations.

This dissertation shows that the knowledge and worldview that are present in *Ayuuk* communities up to the present day, reflect a cultural and linguistic continuity from the time of the ancestors, and therefore is an important part of our (*Ayuuk*) cultural heritage. The protection and preservation of this heritage is urgently needed. Ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity is to be considered as a source of enjoyment and richness, and not as a problem that is to be eradicated (as it is often seen by official institutions in Mexico). A multicultural and multilingual nation with support and acknowledge from the State will be able to strengthen intercultural relationships, which allow to built a more respectful

and inclusive society, in which indigenous peoples would see their rights respected and would enjoy social justice and more dignified conditions of life.

