

# The Elders and the Hills

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Animism and Cosmological Re-Creation among the Q'eqchi' Maya in Chisec,  
Guatemala

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# Abstract

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This thesis is based on fieldwork conducted in the municipality of Chisec in the department of Alta Verapaz in Guatemala. Within the context of post-war Maya cultural emergence and the recent introduction of non-indigenous elements this study examines the cosmological notions and ritual practices among a group of elderly Q'eqchi' men and women. The main motive for this endeavor is the expressed concern of the elders that the younger generations of today are diverting from what the elders consider to be the traditional ways of life that are inherited from their ancestors. The elders fear that if traditional cosmological notions are lost it may eventually wreak havoc in the world. Therefore, these elders have come together not only to narrate and share their vital knowledge amongst themselves but also to transmit it to future generations.

Theoretically, the thesis is inspired by the recent re-definition of the concept of animism within anthropological theory. Stripping the concept of earlier evolutionary notions that debunks it as only irrational understandings of the world, the cosmological notions and ritual practices of the Q'eqchi' elders are taken at face value and approached as ways of being-in-the-world. While this 'new' animism has been deployed in studies among indigenous peoples from Amazonia to South East Asia it has been conspicuously absent in Mesoamerica. By applying the new perspectives on animism to the cosmology of the Q'eqchi' elders this study contributes not only to the general body of anthropological studies of animism and indigenous societies but expands it to include the Maya region.

Since culture is neither static nor homogeneous the work and ambition of the elders to preserve and transmit their inherited knowledge inevitably gives fuel to a process of rediscovering and re-creating their cosmological roots and ritual practices: a cosmology the elders assert is crucial not only for human and non-human wellbeing but also for a sustainable ecology and cosmic equilibrium.

**Keywords:** Animism, Cosmology, Rituals, Environment, Q'eqchi', Maya, Guatemala, Latin America.