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An Interstitial Maya

The Life, Legacy, and Heresies of Padre Tomás García

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Abstract. – In this article I consider the intersection between ethnic politics and religion through an examination of the life history of Padre Tomás García, an important, if overlooked, voice in Maya activism and religious culture. Prior to his death in 2009, Padre Tomás pioneered the theology of inculturation in Guatemala, seeking to "Mayanise" Catholicism at both the level of community and, in certain respects, the hierarchy as well. From the early 1970s, he combined a culturalist outlook (novel at the time) with a more class-based critique of ethnic oppression in Guatemala (inspired by liberation theology), and was a sharp critic of the state's genocidal counter-insurgency. Since the 1990s, however, Padre Tomás found himself isolated from both his own increasingly conservative Church hierarchy and from some prominent Maya ethnic and religious leaders, who have found a "hybrid" Maya-Catholic identity difficult to reconcile with their vision of ethnicity and politics. His experience, especially when compared to that of some of his contemporaries, highlights the ambiguous place of religion, purity, and hybridity in projects of modernity and secularism, which I analyse drawing on models developed by Talal Asad. *[Guatemala, Maya, inculturation, ethnic politics, hybridity, modernity]*

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Padre Santos Gabino Tomás García died on the 19th of December in 2009. After close to 74 years of life, he met a violent end in a rather commonplace way: an automobile accident, on a return trip related to his ministry, which took him from his home parish on a journey of several hours through the twisting roads of the Guatemalan highlands. When I heard the news, my mind raced back to the last day I spent with him, a few weeks earlier: rumbling along in the back of what may have been the same pickup truck he was driving when he died, huddled under the canvas cover with my fellow passengers – Mexican nuns who had a small mission in the town of Almolonga. Jostling into my companions to the accompaniment of somewhat louder than normal tire squeals, as we rounded a sharp corner, one of them exclaimed "*Diosito*! Padre Tomás is a crazy driver!"[1] "Fearless," perhaps better stated; a useful trait, truth be told, when driving in that country, and a quality many in my fieldsite of San Andrés Xecul likewise ascribed to the Padre when describing how he dealt with issues ranging from state violence to the local growth of Pentecostal Christianity. The irony that something so mundane as a traffic accident would claim the life of a man whose career had been punctuated by dramatic and politically motivated threats on his life was not lost on

1 I have no real details on the nature of the accident, except what is reported in the press, which suggests simply that he lost control of his vehicle. Enrique Sam Colop (2009), in a column dedicated to Padre Tomás, reports that another priest suggested that the car he was driving was not apt for the sort of travel required of a priest who attends to rural populations. This may well be the case, though as I note here, much of Padre Tomás' travel was "extracurricular" and not related to the demands of his own parish, but rather those of the network of like-minded priests and laypeople who support "inculturation theology" across the highlands.

me. Indeed, there is another version of Padre Tomás' death, which, while patently false, seems somehow more appropriate. Years ago I came across a website for folklore class at Emory University, which included a transcription of the documentary "The Devil's Dream," by Mary Ellen Davis (1991) that treats violence, religion, expressive culture, ethnic, and class relations in Guatemala in the early 1990s. This film features an interview with the Padre, who, we are told in a grim note at the end of the transcript, was assassinated in 1994.[2] His actual death, while dramatic, does not immediately fit the martyrdom model, though as I suggest here, many of those who were influenced by him understandably chose to interpret his legacy in these terms. His life was not a commentary on twisting mountain roads, fearless drivers, and shoddy infrastructure, but a complicated struggle linking faith, power, ethnic identity, resistance, accommodation, and reform. That said, Padre Tomás never stopped moving – through hierarchies, towns, nation states, revolutionary struggles, and culture wars – so maybe that's what his death was about, if such things must mean something.

In this article I reflect on the legacy of Padre Tomás, and the sorts of things he represented to Maya and non-Maya in different contexts in Guatemala and beyond. Among other things, his experiences underscore the importance of religion as a key category in modernity, and its salience, especially in political struggles, which turn, in an important respect, upon issues of culture and cultural difference. Many of the struggles, which defined in different stages Padre Tomás' life and career as a priest, reflect broader tensions in Guatemalan society as competing and occasionally reconciled visions of culture and identity and have become enmeshed in relations of power which take on different forms depending, among other things, on the positions of the constituents in networks and hierarchies of different scales. While it is tempting to impose a linear narrative on these sorts of struggles, as histories of Maya interaction with the state have tended to do on occasion, an examination of the life of Padre Tomás shows how issues and tensions, which were apparently resolved or "overcome" with successive movements in ethnic and political relations among Maya and Ladinos, remain vibrant and unresolved for many, and thus require continued ethnographic attention.

I have described Padre Tomás as an "interstitial Maya." By this I mean that through his life he seemed to always be "Maya" *and* something else: a Catholic priest, most prominently, but even that identity was somewhat unstable, and it seems that his commitment to a Maya ethnicity was a major cause for his marginalization within his own religious hierarchy, while his commitment to Catholicism could alienate him from networks of anti-syncretic Maya religious specialists, generally known as Sacerdotes Mayas (Maya Priests), rationalising the practice of shamans (*ajq'ij*). While it can be argued that, depending on one's perspective, an interstitial status describes pretty much any actor in Guatemala (or elsewhere) who works through identity politics (especially when such identities are institutionalised in some way), for Padre Tomás this position seemed much more acute, at least from the perspective of some of his key interlocutors, if not always himself. After providing some background on the Padre and his projects, I consider how this experience compares with that of his contemporary, the late Antonio Pop Caal. While their lives diverged in many respects, Pop Caal shares with Padre Tomás a comparable background and trajectory. His influence on the growth of contemporary Maya spirituality and ethnic politics has been skilfully analyzed by Abigail Adams (2009), who also draws connections between projects of modernity and local and extralocal struggles when it comes to defining Maya culture and practice. In my concluding analysis, I consider some of the critical work on purity and translation/hybridity (which seemed to undergird the religious struggles of both these individuals), and Talal Asad's (2003) work on the relationship between religion and politics in the context of secularism and modernity. In addition to highlighting the complexity of the intersection of ethnicity and religion in political terms, the example of Padre Tomás has broader relevance in understanding the challenges facing attempts at pluralizing – through theologies such as inculturation – an erstwhile monolithic Catholicism in the context of an increasingly conservative Church hierarchy.

Maya Catholicism in a Transnational Field

Padre Tomás was born to a K'iche' Maya family in the canton of Xantun, Totonicapán in 1935, and completed his primary education in Totonicapán before entering the seminary of the Holy Spirit in that city. This seminary was run by Mexican missionaries – Padres Misioneros de la Espiritu Santo – and was later transferred to Quetzaltenango. It was there that he finished his secondary education followed by three additional years studying philosophy. In 1962, at the age of 27, he won a scholarship to study

2 See <http://classweb.gmu.edu/myocom/films/flmdevil.pdf> [07.11.2013].

theology at the Séminaire de Saint-Sulpice in Montreal. During an interview in November of 2011, Father Marcel Demers, whose time in that institution overlapped with that of Padre Tomás, described the influence of broader changes in Quebecois society, as well as nascent moves toward what would become the reforms of Vatican II, as shaping the atmosphere of the seminary. While in many respects, he noted, the lives of seminarians were sharply circumscribed, the effects of the Quiet Revolution on the institutional power of the Church, especially as concerns its role in education and health, were felt (cf. Seljak 1996). As concerns the actual training received in the seminary, he noted the importance of courses in anthropology, and suggested that Padre Tomás was most certainly influenced by the priest responsible for teaching the Social Doctrine of the Church, who was also an active supporter of Labour Unions in the province. While I never had a chance to speak with Padre Tomás in specific terms about his training, it seems plausible that his experience in Quebec resonated with ethnic and class sensibilities that he would further develop in Guatemala.

Padre Tomás was ordained as a deacon in Canada by the Cardinal and Archbishop of Montreal, Paul-Émile Léger, in August of 1966, and returned to Guatemala that same year to serve in the parish of San Juan Ostuncalco. His full ordination as a priest took place later that year, in his hometown of Totonicapán, by the bishop of Quetzaltenango, Monseñor Luis Formosa, S. J. (who also participated as a conciliar priest at the second Vatican Council). Padre Tomás was one of the first Maya to be ordained in Guatemala (cf. Cruz 2009: 11; Konefal 2005: 103, 105). He served in a number of parishes (San Carlos Sija and Columba) in a range of capacities, before his appointment in 1975 as the first resident parish priest of San Andrés Xecul. He spent over 10 years in that parish, before being moved for a few years to Momostenango (as a coadjutor) in 1986, followed by a stint in San Sebastian Martir, Retaluleu, and a year in Cabricán. When I first met him in 1996, Padre Tomás was stationed in Cantel, where he had been serving since 1993. His final posting, from 2000 until his death, was the Evangelical stronghold of Almolonga. When we last chatted, he noted that he had received a word from his bishop that he was to be moved again, and he worried about the effect this might have on his domestic staff, with whom he was extremely close.

While this sort of professional mobility is very much a feature of the priestly vocation in general – and can also be used as a form of hierarchical discipline for priests deemed in some way difficult to manage (MacKenzie 2009a; cf. Norget 2004) – Padre Tomás also took advantage of the transnational networks which were opened to him through his interest and experience in Maya spirituality and its intersection with Catholicism. Germany, specifically the Catholic University of Eichstätt and the German Catholic organization "Adveniat," was an important early node in his network, the latter funding the renovation of the parish hall in Xecul. Despite the support Padre Tomás received from this organization, it seems that it had a somewhat ambivalent relationship with other "activist" priests in Guatemala. As Konefal (2005: 120) notes, while "Adveniat" was a key in providing material support for nascent efforts in indigenous pastoral organised by Maryknoll priests, they were increasingly suspicious of connections between "cultural" Catholicism (as Padre Tomás characterised his evangelism) and more political versions associated with liberation theology: "According to Father Daniel Jensen, who was running the program at the time, an Adveniat representative came to the center with one question: 'Do you believe in liberation theology?' he asked. Jensen answered in the affirmative. '… [With] his pencil,' Jensen recalls, '[the Adveniat representative] drew a big X right across the funding request … He never even gave me a chance to answer.'"

Padre Tomás, as I note below, likewise never really saw a clear line between his work with "inculturation" and his more explicitly political efforts, though it seems such connections were not recognised or considered problematic by his German sponsors. The Maryknolls, as Konefal (2005: 91) makes clear, were perhaps more subject to this sort of scrutiny, given some high profile scandals concerning priests more or less openly supporting the guerrilla insurgency as early as the late 1960s. Nonetheless, Padre Tomás worked closely with key Maryknolls – including the Mission's head in Guatemala, Father Jim Curtin (Calder 2004: 105 f.). During an exile to Chiapas the early 1980s – prompted by death threats from the army – he also met and befriended Rigoberta Menchú (who invited him to Norway in 1992 to witness her receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize) and Monsignor Samuel Ruiz (later well known for his work on liberation theology and indigenous rights). His efforts were further memorialised in 1987 when he won the prestigious Shalom Prize from the Catholic University of Eichstätt, putting him in the company of Lech Walesa who won in 1983, and the Guatemalan Bishop Juan Gerardi (martyred in 1998) who won in 1984. All of these connections and networks of support were supplemented by his participation, from the 1970s onwards, in countless international, continental, and regional conferences and workshops (some

Church-sponsored, others more ecumenical affairs) which took him to Mexico, Venezuela, Brazil, Ecuador, Colombia, Chile, Germany, Spain, and Italy. Discussing his time Chile, he noted to me connections between his vision of Maya religion and that of the Mapuche, leading to some speculation about the potential for a "pan-indigenous" Catholicism. Still, most of his work in the final decade before his death was devoted to strengthening a more regional "Maya Catholicism," drawing on the resources of a network of other interested priests, especially Jesuits, active in Guatemala, Chiapas, El Salvador, and Honduras. Their collective efforts led to the establishment of a National Commission for Indigenous Pastoral in 1990, which renewed some earlier efforts in the mid-1970s, supported especially by Maryknoll missionaries.[3] This commission allowed an entry point into the hierarchy which, in certain contexts at least, has proven a useful support to priests involved in inculturation theology in contexts where their immediate superiors are less supportive of their efforts (MacKenzie 2009a: 330 f.).

As Padre Tomás would repeatedly stress, his most important formation as a "Maya" Catholic priest took place not in these transnational experiences or theological training, but as the resident priest of his first Parish, in San Andrés Xecul. It is worth noting that the decade that Padre Tomás spent there, from 1975 to 1986, bookended the years of peak conflict in Guatemala's genocidal civil war, a context which strongly informed his project. In terms of the ethnography of the Maya area, the late 1970s also witnessed research projects and publication of key ethnographies which detailed the changes wrought by renewed Catholic evangelism in Maya communities,[4] though some of the contours of this work were presaged by Mendelson's (1957, 1965) seminal studies on the nature of religious conflict in Santiago Atitlán in the 1950s. When he arrived in Xecul in 1975, Padre Tomás found himself dealing with a similar situation to that described in other Maya communities – a generational and confessional split between "traditionalists" or *costumbristas*, and those associated with movements such as Catholic Action. Unlike, however, most of his ladino and foreign-born colleagues serving in other parishes, he did not side with the catechists. As Watanabe (1992: 198 f.) describes in the context of Santiago Chimaltenago in the late 1970s, even those priests who were sympathetic to "indigenous theology" could find themselves nonetheless beholden to local catechists who served as brokers for their evangelism, and who could simply ignore that which they found went against their own ideas concerning orthodoxy. Even before he was assigned his own parish, Padre Tomás was voicing his suspicion concerning the paternalistic nature of nascent attempts at including "indigenous voices" in the church, when such voices, it turns out, were those of catechist converts. Konefal (2005: 105) describes the criticism he delivered following a meeting, the "Encuento Pastoral para Naturales de Quetzaltenango," held in 1973, which was framed as an opportunity for priests and religious, who constituted 20% of the hundred attendees, to "listen" – indeed, they participated as silent "observers" – to the concerns and experiences of the indigenous participants (mostly catechists from rural communities):

> For [Tomás] García, however, this hardly meant that priests were getting an "indigenous" point of view. Sharply criticizing the church's patriarchal positioning on *indígenas* and the acculturation he saw as fundamental to Catholic Action, he argued that catechists at the meeting simply supported the ideas of the non-indigenous priests. The conference did not address real indigenous issues, "*lo que es propio del indígena*," he wrote. "Many *indígenas* spoke," but not as *indígenas*. "Their language [as catechists] was already corrupted/contaminated [*viciado*] by the process of acculturation."

Padre Tomás, in his subsequent work with the hierarchy (which was in varying ways responding to the reforms of Vatican II), offered what he considered to be more thorough and authentic indigenous perspectives on Catholic liturgy and theology, including, for example, training on the theological implications of the "Popol Vuj" (the 16th Century K'iche' language chronicle of myth and history) which he provided to participants in the monthlong "Curso de antropología y teología para la actividad misionera en Guatemala" held in Guatemala City at the end of 1974 (Konefal 2005: 106 f.).

Thus, when he arrived in Xecul in 1975, Padre Tomás was fully primed to begin a program he referred to as "*evangelización desde la cultura*", and as he notes in his memoir, his first meetings with catechists and the townsfolk in general continued the work he had just begun with his fellow religious, reflecting "on the Word of God, the Bible, on the one hand, and the Pop-Wuj, the sacred book of the Quichés, on the other. In these talks, I would always speak in my native tongue, and thereby I achieved a more direct communication with them" (Tomás García 1993: 11). While he reports that most seemed sympathetic to this new style of evangeliz-

3 Calder (2004: 105 f., 110); Garrard-Burnett (2004: 134); Konefal (2005: 103–107, 120 f.).

4 Cf. Warren (1978); Brintnall (1979); Falla (1978); Watanabe (1992).

ing, he also noted resistance from the get-go, especially among students and those who worked outside of Xecul, as well as from the president and vice-president of Catholic Action in the town, who soon stopped attending parish meetings and formed a separate, charismatic group called "The New Christian Community," which eventually separated from the Catholic fold entirely, forming an Evangelical Church called "The New Jerusalem." As he notes, he decided to move a lot more slowly after this initial resistance, especially when it came to themes related directly to the Popol Vuj or more academic interpretations of culture. In this period, and consonant with the post-Vatican II spirit of the times, he dedicated considerable efforts to fomenting a "ground-up" style of evangelization. In addition to adopting participatory styles of consciousness-raising and reflection in his meetings with lay leaders and parish organizations, Padre Tomás stressed to me how he aimed to emulate the lifestyle of his parishioners: he set up his home in the rather-run down priest's residence attached to the church, and was joined by his widowed sister and her children, who prepared meals traditionally, using hearthstones on the floor of the kitchen. While much of his work in Xecul, thus, involved a kind of "ground-up" approach – especially as concerns his support of extant religious authorities: *cofradías* and, eventually, shamans – he is also credited by locals with creating and innovating, bringing "new" things into the liturgy and community. I will consider two of these innovations briefly, before turning to the broader legacy of Padre Tomás.

Maya Spirituality and Expressive Culture: Singing and Dancing a Maya-Catholic Identity

Padre Tomás saw his work as invigorating and bringing to life the "history" of his people, a history defined by language, music, and dance, which together, he wrote, "constitute a 'base' for unity and participation in a given community" (1993: 117). Upon arriving in Xecul in 1975, there were two church choirs in the parish, with a ubiquitous competition between them. They used guitars, and sang hymns in Spanish with a *ranchera* style. Padre Tomás managed to unite the choirs, and eventually replaced guitars with the marimba, which was commissioned from builders in Santa Eulalia, Huehuetenango (a centre noted for its marimba makers, see Camposeco Mateo 1994: 76). The style of music for the new compositions was the *son*, the traditional rhythm for much indigenous music in Guatemala. Many of the melodies were adapted from indigenous music from Huehuetenango, particularly from Jakalteko communities. While Xecul has a degree of national fame for its musicians – especially Juan Alberto Tistoj, who was a founding member of the popular salsa band, "Rana," and is currently the director of "La Dulce Banda" (based in Totonicapán) both of which have toured internationally – most local musical groups are small brass bands, generally contracted for funerals, birthdays, and other celebrations. Thus, training for the marimba was provided by "Ixtia Jacalteca," a group from Jacaltenango that plays what is called *marimba pura*: the most traditional style, with a minimum of musicians (i.e., no brass, woodwinds, or keyboards) and little to no amplification. This group also played on the early recordings made by the *Coro*, and its founders – Antonio and Edmundo Mendoza – are credited with supplying the music for many of the local compositions, though much original music was composed by Padre Tomás and a number of local musicians and members of the choir – especially Manuel Américo Chuc Xum, who wed the sister of Padre Tomás, and Santos Tecum Sajche from neighbouring San Cristóbal. Lyrics were generally the work of these individuals, as well as some leaders of the Coro who were still active in the early 2000s: Maria Delfina Chan and Daniel Gabino Chan wrote a number of the more recent hymns. These masses and hymns are now sung throughout the highlands and have been translated into a number of Maya languages.

The "Coro San Andrés" (San Andrés Choir) was officially founded on the 23rd of October in 1975, and within a few years achieved regional and national fame, travelling to communities across the country – often into the heart of the counter-insurgency – later accompanied by the "Guadalupanas," a cultural youth dance troupe that Padre Tomás founded and trained. In his memoir, he wrote of his concern that the work of these groups may be seen as "mere folklore," worthy only for its entertainment value, and feared that many did indeed view their efforts this way. He was generally careful, however, to ensure that performances occurred within the context of liturgical celebrations, related directly and unambiguously to indigenous Catholic religiosity (1993: 56). This, for Padre Tomás, was where "meaning" resides; as with *costumbre* – a term which is used as a gloss for traditional religiosity as well as forms of sociability, centring around notions of "respect" – the sacred context is essential lest the practice be considered "just a toy." Through the course of tri-weekly practice sessions, he would direct discussions on the meaning and nature of their indigenous music, the importance of valuing "what is ours," and the attendant need to re-

ject cultural forms imposed from without – such as the guitar and *ranchera* style music.

While the first two masses composed locally simply reworked and translated the lyrics or themes of popular hymns and set them to indigenous music, later masses – especially the third, fifth, and sixth – feature lyrics which were penned to evoke more directly the reality (cultural, social, economic, and political) of the Maya during the 1980s. Other hymns, and especially those denominated as protest songs, were even more explicit. The third mass features hymns which stress the humility, poverty, and difficulty of *campesino* life, with calls for justice and divine succour. The hymn for the preparation of the gifts evokes the practice of *costumbre* in the sharing of sacred food and drink (*tamalitos* and *atol* in this reading) and decries the hunger of the poor and the universal right to food. The communion hymn clamours for liberation, *soltajem*, from suffering. The fifth mass, composed in 1983–1984 in commemoration of massive pilgrimages made to the Black Christ of Esquipulas, is much more direct in its calls for social justice and an end to violence. Some references to Maya cosmology appear in the hymn for the preparation of the gifts, where the path of the sun (*chub'e q'ij chub'e saq*) is evoked. The sixth mass, composed in honor of the return to a nominal civil democracy in 1986, is most explicit, not just with calls for justice and liberation but in explicit reference to Maya cosmology, history, and religious practice. The entrance hymn concludes with a line from the Popol Vuj, which Padre Tomás (among many others, including the Guerrilla for a time) had adopted as a motto: *Chuj wa' jil junam, chuj k'astajoq. Maj jun kateri' qanoq* (We arise together, we awaken. No one shall remain behind). More pointedly, in the preparation of the gifts, the blood of the Maya who died "in the mountains" is described as consecrated on Maya altars: *K'ama'b'a La Qajaw, ri ki kik'el ri e qachalal, xchikix chuwach tab'al, chikiwach ri e nimaq ch'uti'n* (Receive, Lord, the copious blood of our brothers who have been gutted on the face of the mountain altars, in front of adults and children). The theme is repeated in the Communion hymn, which speaks again of the blood of the disappeared, spilled on Mayan altars, with the added note that this act has awoken the conscience of the children of the martyrs.[5] This wedding of cultural motifs with a critical, liberative message defined much of the project of "singing the reality of a people," commenting on "marginalization, exploitation, and repression, and later death" with the caveat that these songs must also "plant hope that not all is lost: that the Lord sees and knows our reality" (Tomás García 1993: 57).

In addition to viewing music as a local expression of Maya culture, the cultural dance troupe, the "Associación de Señoritas Guadalupanas," is remembered by many Xeculenses as defining aspects of Padre Tomás' project. In his vindication of Maya dance, citing a source on Guatemalan fine arts from 1934, he reconstructs what he sees as the prehispanic and colonial history of this form and its relation to music:

> In Guatemala, before the foreign invasion, dance was used in "exercises" of "peace" and of "war": it consisted of leaps and movements with the arms and hands; the young women danced the *son*, representing episodes from the life of the ancestors. The Kaqchikeles danced the *tun* [slit drum] and the serpent dance, with the *chirimía* [shawm], among others. The indigenous, following "conquest" never wanted to "imitate" the dances that the Spanish were accustomed to in their religious festivals … The indigenous danced the *son* in their saint festivals. Some say that the Jota Aragonesa, the Sevillana, and Navarra are the origins of the Guatemalan *son*, but this isn't the case. Rather, the *son*, prior to conquest, was the dance of "peace," which was performed in front of the enemy by three or four women and an equal number of men (Tomás García 1988: 122 f.).

This interpretation of dance, together with music and language, as essential to an authentic Maya identity underwrote the performances of the Guadalupanas, which included a range of choreographed presentations depicting themes including "The Maya Creation" (which was performed by nine young women, based on the story in the Popol Vuj); "The Dance of the Four Ajaws [Lords]" (depicting the four sovereigns of the Maya world); and a more "folkloric" offering, "The Dance of the Lovers" (representing what he framed as a traditional courtship). Padre Tomás also worked with these youth to develop a presentation on behalf of the parish for one of the *veladas* (cultural evenings) which take place during the week of the town's fiesta. Here were included dances and dramatisations which depicted the initiation of a shaman, betrothal rituals, biblical events, and myths from the Popol Vuj (including "The Myth of Ixkik'"). He likewise was a strong promoter of the "Mayanisation" of the *veladas*, seeking to replace the positions of "Queen"

5 This image of the consecration of the blood of indigenous victims of the counterinsurgency is also used, in a somewhat different manner, by one of Fischer's (2001: 244 f.) consultants in the Kaqchikel town of Tecpán, as evidence of the cosmological victory of the Maya (an interpretation which he further read into his own relative economic success, and as a kind of mandate to seek further prosperity).

and *donecellas* (maids) and related titles of Spanish pageantry with more culturally appropriate alternatives – *Uk'ux Ranima' Tinimit* (The Heart and Soul of the Town); or *Ukotz'ijal Tinimit* (The Flower of the Town), for example – and would likewise eschew "imported" crowns, capes and gloves for "Maya" alternatives.[6] The capstone of his efforts in representing a "Maya" Catholic expressive culture was the Papal visit in March 1983, where Pope John Paul II delivered his "message to the indigenous peoples" during an outdoor Mass at the Quetzaltenango airport. Padre Tomás was a co-officiant and the "Coro San Andrés" provided music while the Guadalupanas performed their dances. A veteran of the Coro remembered to me the Pope's reflections on this event: "They say that he who sings prays twice. Just think how much more you're praying when you dance as well"![7]

This gives something of the flavour of Padre Tomás' project in Xecul, and how he conceived of Maya spirituality or religiosity more broadly, especially in its more "expressive" forms of song and dance. He maintained an interest, however, in more theological aspects of a "Maya-Catholic" dialogue, reflecting, for example, on the symbolism of the Maya cross and its relation to directional symbolism and cosmography. These symmetries (and differences) with the Christian cross led to the foundation of the "Society of the Holy Cross" in 1977, which erected a Maya-inspired pyramid topped with a equilateral cross in front of the town's Calvary chapel and public Mayan Altar to complement three other crosses on the north, east, and south sides of the town, which are the focus of successive celebrations during the month of May. When his own sister died, in August 1978, he had her tomb constructed as a miniature Maya temple as well, indeed without featuring any crosses at all. Padre Tomás' interpretation of directional symbolism, that he associated with crosses and pyramids (including colours and representations of the path of the sun, as well as notions of death and rebirth), led him to posit a confluence between the Christian promise of life through death and autochthonous Maya theology. In his words: "Could it be that our ancestors, the Mayas, had intuited, or glimpsed the content of the Great Pascal message? It is possible that this is so, after all, God, the Father is true to all people of all cultures; why would he have made an exception with the Mayas?" (Tomás García 1993: 89). He continued encouraging monumental expression of Maya colour symbolism through perhaps the most famous of his local projects – the painting of the church façade itself in traditional colours, primarily yellow, which Padre Tomás associated with fecundity and growth. This project was undertaken together with the Cofradía (Brotherhood) of San Andrés, which was also headed by a prominent local businessman and member of the Society of the Holy Cross, Francisco Sajche. Finally, as concerns the actual ceremonial practice of Maya spirituality, Padre Tomás on a number of occasions managed to celebrate outdoor Masses at mountainside shrines, which included Maya ceremonies – featuring prayers over a sacred fire, addressing tellurian deities – performed following the celebration of the Eucharist.

When talking to Padre Tomás, years later, about the legacy of his program, he noted that despite some local success and enthusiasm, old divisions remain or have returned with a more conservative hierarchy, persistent Pentecostalism, and the rise of an explicitly anti-syncretic Maya spirituality, promoted by those who now most commonly call themselves *sacerdotes mayas* (Maya priests), whose religion resembles in form that of more "shamanic" *ajq'ijab'* ("Daykeepers," calendrical specialists and diviners), but who have been developing a more officially organised and systematised practice (MacKenzie 2009b; Cook and Offit 2008). In his words, from an interview on October 10, 2002:

> Returning to our Mother Church, you know our Holy Mother Church is Holy, but she's a prostitute too. There's the two things. She gives herself to those who pay the most, and she's sold her own children this way … They [the Church] never wanted to look seriously at how God was manifesting here in this mountain, or rock, or ceremony. Instead they start criticising and condemning. If there was a dialogue, we would have taken part. With [Maya] ceremonies, and the focus on nature especially, it would be part of the formation of priests in the seminary. But each priest who leaves the seminary is girded to fight. It's an error. It's sad, but the priest leaves his stamp and image in the town. He forms the people according to his image, right? This can be damaging. We aren't just preachers of justice and truth and love … Well in theory we are, but in practice we're *huisacheros* [shysters].
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> … The other posture, where I feel more comfortable, is to accept the other religion without imposing anything else. How else will I be able to discover the presence of the sacred here? What I call in Spanish God, Justice, Love, Honesty, Humanism, these are the positive things. It is not the Devil's work. So what I say is just respect it. I present what we have of the truth of the Church, but I'm not going

6 Tomás García (1988: 94 f.); cf. Hendrickson (1995: 93 f., 116 passim); Fischer (2001: 191–201).

7 I was assured that the Pope was referring to the "cultural" dances of the Guadalupanas specifically, and not just any dance – and certainly not the "dancing" that characterises charismatic prayer: a form of religiosity generally criticised by members of the Coro.

to fight. Not even with the Evangelicals. I greet them on my little television broadcasts, and I invite them to pray. The religious wars are over. For me they're over. But it's been many years of fighting before I realised this. I used to present Christ as the only truth and demand acceptance. Now I still present Him, but not so forcefully. People will accept what they will. We have to be respectful …

So there are *sacerdotes mayas* who reject Catholicism. Maybe they are rightfully upset at the Church for all the awful things, certainly. But at the same time they probably haven't analysed what the Church really is. For example, a Mam [Maya] brother from San Sebastian is a good friend of mine. He's a really fine man, one of the refugees from Mexico: he went along helping his countrymen in Ayutla, during the various exiles. We were talking one day and he said "One thing I don't like is all this 'Jesus' stuff. Why do we stick Him in? This has nothing to do with the Mayas." I just said, "Listen, do you want to keep being my friend? Don't talk bad about Jesus. Study it first; if you knew what Jesus is you wouldn't talk this way." So this is our work, if we make Jesus the centre of all humanity – no matter what religion or form we're talking about … It's love of God. Like Jesus said to Philip "I've been with you so long and you still don't know me." This is really what religion is. So for my brothers there, well, I say fine – you can find bad things in Catholicism, so can I. But to reject everything isn't necessary. If you're worshipping a God, what God is it? Is it really different from mine? It can't be. There are different names, that is all. There's a common centre.

Thus, towards the end of his life, Padre Tomás found himself alienated on a range of fronts when it came to questions of religion and ethnicity. I consider elsewhere how the hierarchy has increasingly rejected inculturation theology, and the response of priests including Padre Tomás to this situation (MacKenzie 2009a). Perhaps an even more difficult position, however, has been the situation he describes here, concerning the rejection of Christianity in any form by anti-syncretic Maya priests. An interesting, relatively early example of this sort of conflict is recorded in the proceedings from the first and second "Encounter of Indian Theology of the Mayan Region" in 1991 and 1992, held in San Cristobal de las Casas (Chiapas) and Chichicastenango (Guatemala) respectively (CENAMI 1993). One session featured an invited panel of Maya priests, members of a number of relatively new Maya organisations, who were invited to reflect on the nature of "dialog" with the Christian religion. The responses of the Maya priests were fairly uniform in condemning what they saw as an attempt to usurp their own authority. For example, one participant, Apolinario Chile Pixtun (Kaqchikel), after complaining about the appropriation of the marimba by Catholics, explicitly compared his own office and those of other Maya priests as the equivalent of the Catholic hierarchy: "I am similar to what you call a bishop or archbishop. Because we also have a hierarchy amongst ourselves. We've guarded this hierarchy for 500 years" (CENAMI 1993: 145) He ended by refusing to grant the "forgiveness" that the Church was asking from the Maya – noting simply that there would have to be greater consensus among all the Maya for something like that to be meaningful, and suggesting that along with the army and Americans, his grandparents had always warned him against collaborating with Christians. Padre Tomás, who participated in these meetings, found himself in the unusual position of defending the integrity of a program of inculturation by calling into question the authenticity of the assertions of some of his fellow Maya, suggesting that they too may have been subject to some syncretism:

We can note the influence of ideological currents, which we might also have, given that we've been formed in different schools with their own content and epochs, of which there are many. The brother "Maya Priests" are also victims of such influences and they have presented expressions which are not from the Maya world. I don't think it is right to accept what they say without any discernment. This is why we need dialog, listening and respect amongst ourselves. Political and economic manipulation is very dangerous when it comes to the constitution of an Indian Theology (CENAMI 1993: 187 f.).

While the growing anthropological literature on contemporary Maya spirituality has emphasised the diversity of this movement and the nature of internal conflicts (in terms of concrete practice and theology, as well as the nature of its relationship to specific communities and the Guatemalan state), if there is one aspect that unites it, it concerns the demand for some degree of autonomy from other religions; a desire to be treated as a religion among others, and thus not a key source for the development of a more appropriate or "local" Christianity.[8] This anti-syncretic option, while certainly strengthened in recent years, is something Padre Tomás has nonetheless been familiar with from the very start of his career in the priesthood. Indeed, it is perhaps best reflected in the life and career of his contemporary, Antonio Pop Caal. I turn now to a brief examination of his experience, before concluding with some thoughts on how the legacy of both these men reflects some key tensions when it comes to the politicisation of ethnicity in modernity, and specifically the role of religion in these projects.

8 Cf. Chiappari (2002); MacKenzie (2009b); Cook and Offit (2008).

Maya Spirituality off the Hyphen

Abigail Adams (2009) provides an insightful analysis of the life of Antonio Pop Caal, a prominent Q'eqchi' Maya leader, and the sorts of struggles he faced as one of the earliest and most vocal of the first generation of contemporary Maya activists from the 1960s and 1970s, focussing on the role of Maya spirituality in his life and career. Pop Caal was six years younger than Padre Tomás, but in many respects his life, education, and opportunities paralleled those available to the latter, though his choices differed in important respects. While I never had the opportunity to speak with Padre Tomás about Pop Caal, it seems certain that they knew each other, given some of the similarities of their early lives in terms of theological training, and especially Pop Caal's relationship to San Andrés Xecul, where he found an important spiritual guide who helped define his own religious practice. Pop Caal was laid to rest on the 19th of December 2002 – the same date of Padre Tomás' death seven years later – the victim of a kidnapping and murder (Adams 2009: 31).

For present purposes, I will simply outline some of the parallels and divergences between the lives of Pop Caal and Padre Tomás, and their relationship to Maya communities, culture, and spirituality. Like Padre Tomás, Pop Caal received the support of missionary priests to study first at home (he too attended the "Seminario del Espíritu Santo" in Quetzaltenango) and then abroad. Unlike the former, however, his experience in foreign universities and training in theology did not cement his commitment to Catholicism. Rather, as Adams (2009: 35; cf. Konefal 2005: 100 f.) notes, he renounced Christianity upon his return from Spain in 1969. I suspect that life as a seminarian during Franco's Spain, in the complicated context of an aging but still potent national Catholicism (cf. Linz 1991), was qualitatively different from that of Padre Tomás in Montreal; it is certainly plausible that such an experience could contribute to a more pessimistic vision of the possibilities of reform and pluralism within the Church. Indeed, Pop Caal sought his religious formation elsewhere, eventually studying with a spiritual guide from San Andrés Xecul, Esuebio Saquic Chan, a man credited by many as the most important elder for the revitalisation of Maya spirituality in this period, founding what came to be referred to as the "Maya university" which consisted of a number of young apprentice *ajq'ijab'* whom he trained (Sam Colop 2009; Pacay 2001).

Pop Caal entered Law School at the University of San Carlos in Guatemala City in 1972, and at this same time began publishing pioneering anticolonial analyses of interethnic relations in Guatemala (Konefal 2005: 101). His "Replica del indio a una disertación ladina," published in 1972, treated themes similar to those Padre Tomás was broaching within the context of the Catholic hierarchy – namely, the perpetual silencing of indigenous voices and claims by nonethnic others to "know" the Maya. Konefal (2005: 118) also notes Pop Caal's early efforts at teasing out "culturalist" from "class" concerns in the context of indigenous organising and his support for serious consideration of the former.[9] Despite his rejection of Catholicism, Pop Caal maintained some links with progressive "culturalist" Catholic voices – including the Belgian priest and anthropologist Esteban Haeserijn, who helped produce a Q'eqchi' dictionary in the late 70s, and who, as Adams (2009: 35) notes, was unlike other Catholic priests in the Verapaces to the extent that he actively supported the recovery of traditional Q'eqchi' spirituality. Haeserijn also participated early on in what were to become the yearly "Seminarios Indígenas," organised by Maya students and activists from across the country, but including a broad representation of progressive religious, class, and community-based activists (Konefal 2005: 107–109).

Pop Caal was active in many of these "pan-Maya" or extra-local efforts, but he was also concerned directly with the revitalisation of Maya spiritual practices in Cobán, the city in Alta Verapaz where he lived. Adams (2009: 32–37) discusses the history of these efforts, which were strengthened in 1976 with the establishment of the sacred site of Chajxucub' near Cobán, a location revealed in a dream from a relative of one of Haeserijn's catechists, and later sanctified and formalised with the help of Eusebio Saquic. The group of spiritual activists, involved in what they referred to as a "reencounter" with Maya religious practices, while mostly urban, educated, middle class, and influential in lobbying efforts at the national level, were nonetheless concerned with specific, localised sites for worship, seeing strong connections with tellurian aspects of their faith. Pop Caal especially was active in developing the site of Chajxucub', building a chapel there in 1986 but moving the original Maya cross, erected by his Xeculense mentor when the site was first consecrated, to his own personal shrine. Conflict over control of the space continued, with Pop Caal – who later began erecting a model of

9 Konefal (2005: 100) also discusses the group of indigenous activists, named Cabrican, which Pop Caal led in Guatemala City in the 1970s, and notes some links among the members and some efforts of Maryknoll priests to create a "Centro Indígena" in the city, as well as work on the Maryknoll-supported culturalist magazine *Ixim*.

Tikal on the site to educate visitors (Adams 2009: 37) – alienated from those who, informed by sacred dreams, opted for conservation, and who successfully appealed to the Ministry of Culture and Sports to have the site recognised as national patrimony in 2001. Concerning the nature of this conflict, Adams (2009: 37) observes that

> it is no news that many Mayas involved in the spiritual recovery movement experience intolerance form other Mayas and differences among themselves … But first, it is important to highlight how much both groups share in their common history and the status they enjoy in the region. Many are respected educators, businesspeople, rising epigraphers, government agency officials, and Maya Movement bureaucrats … Each faction has some three generations of activists invested in moving these explorations forward.

As she further notes, a key area on which the conflict turned concerned an age-old struggle over the relative importance of "revelation" – the possibility for embodied and direct access to sacred knowledge through the application of Maya bodily techniques (especially those associated with rural areas of western highlands) – versus the more academic, textual, and "rational" approach favoured by Pop Caal's group (Adams 2009: 37–39).

I will simply note here that these tensions were reflected as well in the efforts of Padre Tomás, which in substance paralleled the "rational" and past-oriented efforts of Pop Caal when it came to both the articulation of Maya theology – often justified through appeal to the Popol Vuj, anthropological and archaeological texts, as well as the testimonies of elders who were well versed in *costumbre* – and the expression of the same. Padre Tomás oversaw his share of construction of miniature Maya temples on Catholic space. They even had similar humbling experiences when it came to what they saw as their role in "educating" local indigenous people on their Maya roots. As Adams (2009: 38) notes,

> [W]hile their little model of Tikal deteriorated on Chajxucub', its thwarted builders initiated another educational mission. They pursued their *re-encuentro* by conducting interviews with rural elders. "We were all wrong before, when we would go to the rural communities and 'teach' them in workshops," exclaimed one leader, Esteban Pop Caal, Antonio Pop Caal's brother and, in his own right, a renowned Verapaz teacher and bilingual education pioneer. "We should have been listening!"

As with Padre Tomás' experience in bringing the Popol Vuj to Xeculenses in the 1970s, the focus changed to finding ways – through "listening" – to express the "autochthonous" spirituality of the Maya, extant but hidden until discovered and reexpressed by ethnically conscious spiritual and cultural leaders. For this faction of activists, their efforts – though not consistently rewarded by the state, just as Padre Tomás' efforts in inculturation were increasingly rejected by the Catholic hierarchy – are recognisably modern and connected to classic ideas of nation building, which involve, as Adams (2009: 40) puts it: "promoting the universalizing qualities of rationalism, formal education, history, science, and moral guidance, which will create a narrative thread that is particularly Q'eqchi', another strand to weave into a rich united national history." I conclude with some further thoughts on this vein, reflecting directly on the complicated legacy of Padre Tomás and noting how the domain of religion is particularly fraught in the context of modernity, and especially its relationship to "the secular."

The Legacy of an Interstitial Maya

In obituaries and memorials, published in the major daily papers, some prominent Maya activists and intellectuals recognised Padre Tomás as an important leader in ethnic and religious struggles. For her part, Irmalicia Velásquez Nimatuj (2009) stressed his efforts especially in critiquing Guatemala's structural violence and oppression, in protests, and meetings with other Maya, as well as the "folklorisation" of Maya women. In terms of his religious life, she has less to say in concrete terms, but notes that his time in Almolonga must have been difficult, given its status as an individualistic, neoliberal evangelical stronghold, in her reading. In his memorial, the late Enrique Sam Colop (2009), while no friend of the Catholic Church (cf. Sam Colop 2005), did focus more on the religious dimension of Padre Tomás' life. He recalls meeting the Padre at the end of the 1970s in San Andrés Xecul, where he was invited to a Maya ceremony with Eusebio Saquic and some of his students. Sam Colop noted his surprise at the fact that Don Eusebio brought candles for the ceremony to the church to receive Padre Tomás' blessing (which appeared to him to be a contradiction), and more so later on at the actual presence of the Padre as a fellow participant in the ceremony.[10] He concludes noting that this project, and the ecumenism of Padre Tomás in general, was thoroughly laudable, though also the exception rather than the rule

10 Sam Colop (2009) speculates that the programme of Padre Tomás probably was not well-accepted by his hierarchy in the 1970s, though from the latter's own accounts it seems that he was more readily supported in these years than he was towards the end of his life (MacKenzie 2009a).

when it comes to the relationship between Catholicism and Maya religion.

Both of these memorials provide touching commentaries on the life of Padre Tomás, though in these contexts it is either his activism or his relationship to Maya spirituality which get the laurels. What of his Catholicism? In emails and telephone calls with friends in Xecul following the death of the Padre, his relationship to the Church hierarchy was often highlighted. A number of friends lamented the fact that he had never been named a bishop; they had anticipated the day that one of Guatemala's first indigenous priests would receive this honour. Others talked about starting investigations into a possible canonisation. One friend, a young man who is much closer than others to national intellectual and policy struggles which deal with Maya rights, chose to echo the sorts of sentiments expressed by Sam Colop and especially Velásquez Nimatuj, when it came to Padre Tomás' efforts at critiquing racist state structures. In a heartfelt email, he memorialised him in these terms, concluding "James, we're sad here. This is in all the pueblos, whether they're Catholic, Evangelical and even me who's not very Christian. This shows what Tomás García transcended."

What about, then, the specifics of Padre Tomás' legacy, when it comes to the prospects of a "Mayanised" Catholic religion in Guatemala? As I note elsewhere, and consonant with observations of others in different contexts in Latin America where "inculturation theology" flourished for a time (the hopeful heir to a maligned and suspect liberation theology), under the papacy of Benedict XVI these projects have languished (MacKenzie 2009a; Norget 2004). But what about the legacy of his work in Xecul itself? As I have noted above, Padre Tomás is much more closely identified as a "Catholic" priest rather than a Maya religious leader when people talk about him in Xecul. He is occasionally quoted or otherwise used to justify what a good number of local Catholics understand to be "orthodoxy" – a mainline style of faith that includes the marimba and K'iche' hymns as a strong part of the liturgy, and which rejects the enthusiastic praise of charismatics as both "evangelical" and "foreign" in origin. But when members of the "Coro San Andrés" would talk specifically about Maya culture and language, they were often, surprisingly perhaps – especially considering what seems to be a rather clear position on the matter from their founder and champion – more ambivalent.

In its latter years, the Coro has travelled a good deal less than when Padre Tomás was in charge, though from time to time it is invited to other parishes, and daytrips were occasionally organised for special events. At one such visit, celebrating a novena for a fiesta in an aldea of San Cristobal, one of the leaders of the Coro defined his vision of *costumbre* and a Maya identity during his talk to the assembled parishioners. He sought to separate a Maya identity from the *brujos* (witches) as he called those who practice Maya spirituality. He noted the criticism levelled by another priest, Padre Justo (deemed responsible for introducing the Charismatic Renewal into the town, as well as founding competing "modern" choirs) on shamanic use of incense. "True" incense, he suggested, is not a Maya substance, as it comes from different lands. The Maya do have *pom* (a pine resin incense), but care must be exercised in using this, as the same substance is used for witchcraft – real incense (Catholic and foreign) can never be used in that way, he suggested. Echoing what seems to be a theme strongly accented by traditionalists in the town, however, he insisted that a Maya identity is one which manifests "respect" – broadly conceived in terms of deference to elders, helping those in need, taking off your hat, and performing obsequies to neighbours in the street, and picking up every kernel of dropped maize in recognition of one's source of life. Beyond this, attention to the K'iche' language is central. He decried the loss of pure K'iche', as children freely mix Spanish into their speech, emphasising that through this process their Spanish is likewise tainted – he criticised the redundancy that he felt characterised indigenous use of Spanish: "*Vamos a subir arriba*" was offered as a particular peevish example. He lamented that many simply do not want to sing in K'iche', as this is not thought to be "modern" enough, nor is the marimba which is further disparaged as "the ribs of the Devil." But he stressed that the Maya or indigenous soul appreciates these things; Maya are considered more likely to "exhibit their pain," to be less brusque and more willing to engage in pleasantries than Ladinos – including Ladino priests – who are more concerned with "getting down to business." Losing these values and characteristics for whatever reasons was thought to be a matter of regret. He also sounded a very common refrain regarding what are supposed to be the decreased culinary skills of young Maya women who spend too much time studying. Likewise blamed was the process of anglicisation which he feels accompanies migration to the United States. As was often the case in these situations, I was cited as an exemplar of the fact that "even the Gringos" value Maya culture, going so far in this case to learn K'iche' and join the Coro.

I should stress that this package of values, morality, and behaviours, together with a rejection of

encroaching values associated most commonly with the United States and Ladinos, seems to be shared in varying degrees by many Xeculenses, regardless of religious affiliation. Whether it is also linked to an active Maya identity is less certain. The Coro itself in recent years has come to embody these sorts of values, though they have been willing to accommodate change, especially by way of performing hymns in Spanish in the Mass. I would estimate that up to half of the hymns we performed over nearly two years I spent participating in the choir were from the standard Spanish-language hymnal "*Bendecid al Señor*," and the choir was likewise invited to perform the anthem (controversial locally, an exemplar of "enthusiastic praise") of the Cursillo Movement, "*De Colores*", during a large regional gathering of members of the movement in the town in November of 2001 – a service which was rendered, granted with some grumbling and the occasional snicker. More substantive is what appears to be a theological repositioning of the role of the Coro in the church, largely assuming the place left by the now defunct Catholic Action movement, in pursuing an evangelisation which seems more in tune with a mainline, rationalised Catholic identity, expressed through select local cultural and aesthetic forms. This is practically all that remains of the organisations founded by Padre Tomás: the "Guadalupanas" and related groups have long been disbanded and the gospels are now read in Spanish.

Padre Tomás' pioneering work with indigenous dance has not, however, disappeared entirely. One can still see these performances at special events which take on a more overtly "Maya" cast. Thus, in 2002 during one of the *veladas* organised by a local group, the "Club Sociocultural Xeculense" – which is supported by the Maya cultural and educational organisation TIMACH, headquartered in Quetzaltenango and led by a Xeculense, Juan Everardo Chuc Xum – a troupe performed "The Dance of the Lovers" among other selections. As we admired this performance, a veteran member of the "Coro San Andrés" leaned in and whispered approvingly: "These are the steps that Padre Tomás invented." In discussions with Chuc Xum, he would note his admiration of the work of Padre Tomás, but he also made no bones about "purifying" things, where such seemed appropriate. Thus, wishing to include an image of Xecul's "Maya" church on the cover of a children's edition of the "Pop Vuj" which he designed and published, he enlisted my Photoshop skills to remove the cross which tops the structure, focussing attention instead on the jaguars which paw at a pillar.

A final group I will consider here who has been affected by the legacy of Padre Tomás are members of a small and fractious association of Maya priests called "Wajaxaq'ib B'atz Pakotz'i'j." I consider elsewhere the ambiguous relationship between this group and the local Catholic Church (MacKenzie 2010), but will simply note here that a good number of its members view their efforts as a continuation of those of Padre Tomás, a fact which has led many to adopt something of a "bi-religious" identity rather than clearly choosing Catholicism or Maya spirituality. Such sensibilities are reflected in a handwritten declaration describing the group's founding.

> Attention. It is the end of the year 1997, also the end of the Maya Year [8 Batz], and we receive another Maya year and the year 1998. But the principle reason for our gathering is to celebrate one year since the signing of the Peace in our country, Guatemala, on the 29th of December of 1996. This is not a gift from the government, nor the URNG, rather it belongs to all the people of the nation of Guatemala. It is the work of yourselves, it is from Padre Tomás and many other priests and people, and *sacerdotes mayas*, including Don José Sik, Don Manuel Xum, Don Victor Renoj, Don Manuel Bucub, Don Mauricio Kixcam, and others. For this the Peace was signed.
>
> But we respect the identity of our people, as indigenous, our language, our costume, our Maya ceremony, our culture as indigenous, and also the indigenous woman *as* an indigenous woman, who does not just exist as a servant for the great Ladinos in the capital city. As well, our Maya altars, that they be respected, where we make our offerings in ceremonies such as that which we will perform today.

It is noteworthy that Eusebio Saquic – despite his national fame in these efforts – is not cited as one of the men who inspired the reclamation of Maya spirituality in Xecul, while Padre Tomás is indicated as a prime motivator. Moreover, the list of elder *sacerdotes mayas* offered here includes key individuals who worked with Padre Tomás in developing his pastoral program (particularly José Sik). This is an important fact, which colours the relationship between this local association of *sacerdotes mayas* (as well as a Maya identity in general) and the Catholic Church. While I never managed to get a comprehensive biography of Don Eusebio, it seemed clear that his renown was largely "extra-local." The one story that is repeated often about him locally concerns an accident which apparently led to the loss of a leg, a consequence of his "disrespecting" the tree which had been selected for installation in the church patio for the "Monkey Dance": he was injured when it fell on him.

Padre Tomás was, obviously, many things to many people. His legacy, however, points to a number of key tensions which animate Maya identity, politics, and religion to this day. Maya involved

in these projects continue to ask themselves what needs to be purified, and what should be "blended" and in what contexts (cf. Latour 1993). They are concerned with the role of actual communities, like Xecul, in this process: are these sites to be "worked on" to produce a more unified Maya voice, or are they sources of knowledge which needs to be recovered and interpreted, and which may inform contemporary Maya religiosity whatever form that takes, or is it a bit of both? In my concluding discussion, I consider religion specifically in this context and speculate as to why "blending" in this field presents such a difficulty for so many, who in other fields – such as education, the economy, and especially "politics" – have acted and spoken in terms of "Mayanising" existing structures rather than replacing them entirely.

Discussion: Modernity, Religion, and the Secular in Maya Identity Politics

In an important early interpretation of the relationship between Maya activism, modernity, and the nation-state, Diane Nelson (1996) considers the ways Maya in the early 1990s would appropriate and "reprogram" the technologies, occupations, knowledge, labels, and the generalised "modernity" of the Ladino Other, "while refusing to be appropriated *into* the ladino nation" (289). As the movement has matured and diversified, however, Maya relationship with different kinds of institutional structures, including those associated with the Guatemalan nation-state as well as NGOs, has become increasing complicated. Charles Hale (2006) has written about the difficulties in effectively challenging persistent racial and class hierarchies through state strategies which promote what he calls "neoliberal multiculturalism," incorporating what Schirmer (1998: 116) has dubbed the "authorised Indian" into its structures. In terms of politics especially, and the participation of high profile Maya activists in a range of government positions, some Maya organisations see this as collusion and irredeemably polluting – a process dubbed "ethnophagia" by one group (Zapeta et al. 2005: 105 f.).

While noting these tensions, which seem to be reflected in the range of Maya engagements in, and transformations of, the state and its structures and forms of power organisation, I suggest here that the field of religion is especially fraught in this context, for a number of reasons. Simply put, it seems that while a Maya activist working, for example, with a foreign NGO on revising pedagogical materials to promote a more sensitive bicultural education for rural children, could face criticism of "being co-opted" if it can be shown that the process supports or undergirds "non-Maya" agendas, the same activist's own personal identity as "Maya" is not necessarily questioned. Priests like Padre Tomás, however, face just that sort of criticism, given how closely "religion" is wed to issues of interiority and "one's true self" especially under conditions of modernity. This, it seems, is a "hybrid" which stands out and is problematic for those engaged in being modern (Latour 1993)

Asad (2003: 8) offers a number of critical thoughts on this theme, including the observation that under modernity and the complicated and historically varied teasing out of "the secular" from "the religious" in different contexts, religion came to be seen to occupy the space of "private reason" rather than "public principle." Despite this, he notes – considering Casanova's (1994) reworking of the Weberian secularisation thesis – we still see "religion" in certain contexts "deprivatising" itself in order to engage in the public sphere in specific ways. For Asad (2003: 182), *pace* Casanova, this "deprivatisation" does not occur in a way that preserves other key aspects of secularisation (specifically the differentiation of social spaces and practices like "religion," "politics", "economy," etc; and a decline in the *social* import of belief), rather:

> When religion becomes an integral part of modern politics, it is not indifferent to debates about how the economy should be run, or which scientific projects should be publically funded, or what the broader aims of a national education system should be. The legitimate entry of religion into these debates results in the creation of modern "hybrids": the principle of structural differentiation … no longer holds. … Furthermore, given the entry of religion into political debates issuing in effective policies, and the passionate commitments these debates engender, it makes little sense to measure the social significance of religion only in terms of such indices as church attendance.

As I note elsewhere, in the context of Maya politics a number of organisations and leaders have considered conversion to Maya spirituality to be an important pre-requisite to the development of successful Maya politics, or political unity more generally (MacKenzie 2010: 40 f.; cf. Zapeta et al. 2005: 115–120). Here, the political-religious hybrid is deemed at the very least acceptable, perhaps even necessary; the value of "hybridising" religions which are otherwise structurally differentiated as "Maya" and "Catholic" is a different matter entirely.

This, it seems, comes down to the long and ambiguous history of the concept of "belief" and "religious identity" itself in modernity, as representing

our most "inward" selves, where even "unbelief" can be a seen as a kind of inwardly organising identity that defines your essence; an extension of post-Reformation developments Malcolm Ruel (2002) traces and critiques. Padre Tomás was both Maya and Catholic in his "essence," but when this identity enters the public space, as a deprivatised religion in Asad's terms, its hybridity becomes problematic for both Maya activists and the structures of the nation-state which they work on and through.

It is here, perhaps, where a very loose comparison may be drawn between struggles which defined Padre Tomás' program of inculturation and an anti-syncretic Maya spirituality, and what Asad sees as the difference between "Islamist" movements and different forms of Arab nationalism. He suggests that Islamists are not best considered "nationalists" but rather *statist* insofar as the reforms they promote challenge the incursion of the state into "all aspects of individual life – even the most intimate, such as birth and death – [where] no one, whether religious or otherwise, can avoid encountering its ambitious powers" (2003: 199). Nationalists, on the other hand, are more directly interested in controlling the secular – which, importantly, in modernity is thought to *contain* religion, not be defined by it. When Padre Tomás engaged with the Guatemalan state to critique its racist structures and brutal violence, this was done through his ethnic, religious, and political convictions, it was not with an aim to control the regulation and expression of the same (which, at the end of the day, were loyal instead to a universal, translocal – and for him especially – pan-Cultural Catholic Church). For proponents of Maya spirituality, state power has a different resonance, which can take on a clearer nationalist cast, especially when it comes to the definition and regulation of practices and sites – material and expressive culture – which are seen to undergird or represent in important respects Maya identities. The nation-state is likewise interested in this project, for as Asad (2003: 201) notes, it "requires clearly demarcated spaces that it can classify and regulate: religion, education, health, leisure, work, income, justice, and war. The space that religion may properly occupy in society has to be continually redefined by the law because the reproduction of secular life within and beyond the nation-state continually affects the discursive clarity of that space."

Thus, beyond the complicated questions of how (and sometimes "if") Maya should engage with these structures, the question remains as to *which* Maya are considered best suited for that task. Padre Tomás supported these struggles – this is his legacy, noted in different ways by leaders in the movement who have eulogised him – even if his full acceptance into some circles of Maya activism was inherently problematic. But so is the case for many other Maya (local, transnational, Catholic, Evangelical, etc.), whose identities continue to be hybrid in specific ways, which are hard to accommodate to nationalism and the nation-state, and who are working out different approaches to modernity, as a way of "living-in-the-world" (Asad 2003: 14).

Epilogue

During one of our last conversations, on October 30, 2009, over a home-cooked meal in his parish residence in Almolonga, Padre Tomás was characteristically good-humoured about all these sorts of complications and ambiguities. We joked about Mel Gibson's appropriation of Maya history in the film "Apocalypto." He was surprising tolerant there – noting with a smile that the film *had* to be gory and exotic looking, otherwise who would go see it? These things have to make money, after all. The Maya of peace and love, an image he held in his heart and expressed in his liturgical work, may be beautiful and intellectually stimulating, but cinematically they're probably a little boring, he figured. When the discussion turned, inevitably, to 2012, and possible appropriations of "the Maya apocalypse," he grew more pensive. "I don't know James, but I think something has to happen" he mused. He spoke candidly of his fear, describing the disorder, and the "new violence" (cf. Little 2009) that increasingly defines postwar Guatemala:

> *Santo Dios!* I've been a priest more than 40 years, and never have I seen a time like this … The war was more formal … Now it's all dirty. It's indigenous against indigenous and what's behind it? I feel like it's a big human collapse. It's terrible. They have no fear, nothing, they just assassinate. And it's not just that, they mutilate the corpse. It's a huge shame for me. And when you see the photos of the folks they capture, they're Maya. What's happening?

At this point Padre Tomás became rather direct, and more than a little millenarian, in his hopes for the fated year of 2012, getting nostalgic about the sharp corporeal discipline that his grandparents and ancestors used to mete out on disrespectful children and local criminals. He concluded with his predictions, or perhaps his hopes:

> Without doubt this is a stage in history. So, we need a good shake-up [*sacudimiento*]. Clearly when there are shake-ups, there are always victims, but the idea is this: if you adjust the lines, if the planets are all lined up – I don't know much about this, but it's not just random, and it's

not a game – it's because there's a good opportunity for us to reflect, and to make a new path. The interesting thing about this perspective is that is highlights how Humans are destructive, but have to return with humility and without pretention for riches or power. It's a dream that we have. It's also the Communist dream: that there's not exploitation from above. It's a dream. So for me, I think that something is going to happen, within two years. So it's important not to be caught with your mouth open, asking yourself: "What have I done."

As I left him that day, less than two months before he died, he pressed his own copies of popular Maya agendas into my hands – explaining that they have some interesting articles on Maya prophecies. He always did things like that. While I later regretted the fact that I was unable to join upwards of 5,000 mourners who saw this remarkable man to his grave, I am especially sorry that Padre Tomás will not be around to help us understand things Maya, and Catholic, and human, as Guatemalans and the rest of us work through our current shake-ups and those to come, fated or not.

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