Introduction

Community and Modernity

I first visited San Andrés Xecul, a K'iche'-Maya town in the Western Highlands of Guatemala, in the fall of 1994, on a Thursday afternoon excursion organized by the Spanish language school I had been attending in nearby Quetzaltenango (the country's second largest city, more commonly known as Xela). The chief draw was the town's famous church, brilliantly painted in bright yellow with red, blue, green, and pink accents, and featuring a baroque cacophony of saints, jaguars, monkeys, and maize on its façade (figure 0.1). I didn't need to be told that this stuff was essentially "Maya," and perhaps secondarily, if at all, "Catholic." I had been interested in religious syncretism during my under-graduate training in anthropology, and I tended to gravitate toward this sort of thing—as did tourists in general, though as befits a neophyte specialist I strug-gled hard to maintain a boundary on that score. I never had much by way of contact with Xeculenses them-selves at that point, or in subsequent field trips with the school or friends. Indeed, the locals I saw never seemed overly interested in interacting with tourists or otherwise finding ways to capitalize on our presence—in sharp contrast to communities around Lake Atitlán, for example (see Carlsen 2011: 134–136). While only an hour or so away from Xela by bus, Xecul felt remote to me: the disinterest, or so I thought, of locals to my presence added to that feeling. I had the makings of a classic anthropological field site in mind, a place to uncover—as others had done so skillfully before—the

Figure o.i. *Church in San Andrés Xecul. Photo by author, May 2007.*

mysteries of the Maya, who, moreover, seemed appropriately coy about these matters. This was all well and good, until I began to talk to people.

I have come to understand that San Andrés Xecul is a challenging place to be Maya. Still, at first blush, it's an ideal setting, with "Mayanness" vouchsafed by a range of straightforward attributes. For example, it features a public altar where shamans from the town and beyond perform what are often called "Maya ceremonies," praying over fires that immolate a range of offerings—a ritual form that seems to bear little overt relationship to the various forms of Christianity that might offer competition for spiritual loyalties. Xeculenses also have a style of clothing—for women at least—that is unique to the town, worn by some daily and by many more on special occasions. Finally, and most straightforwardly, a solid majority of residents speak K'iche'-Maya and identify overwhelmingly as "indigenous" rather than the more straightforwardly non-Maya option in Guatemala, "Ladino." In external terms, Mayanness is also registered in the interest shown in the town by the most reliable consumer of these things (second only, perhaps, to the Anthropologist or New Age Spiritualist): the Tourist. In addition to the backpacker set, on any given

day, tour buses descend upon the town and eject their cargo into the main plaza: visitors locking their cameras on that amazing church, which seems to shout "Maya," or at the very least voice a stern argument between a Maya aesthetic and an invading Catholicism (there are, to be sure, a good number of saints bumping elbows with what appear to be more autochthonous features).

The average tourist leaves Xecul with little more than these pictures, and perhaps a sound bite from their guidebooks—generally focusing on the visual spectacle of the place, which is deemed interesting by way of its apparent incongruity. The 2010 edition of the *Lonely Planet* guide for Guatemala, for example, encourages the visitor to simply "feast your eyes and soul on the wild church" (Vidgen and Schechter 2010: 169), which is featured on the cover of that volume and is described as "the most bizarre, stunning church imaginable. Technicolored saints, angels, flowers, and climbing vines fight for space with whimsical tigers and frolicking monkeys on the shocking yellow façade. The red, blue and yellow cones on the bell tower are straight from the circus big top" (ibid., 172). Other guides attempt an explanation, comparing, say, the images on the façade with the animal motifs adorning the blouses (*chikop po't*) that form part of the local costume for women, or simply drawing attention to those aspects of the structure they define as "Maya" (see Fodor's 2010: 20, 150). For his part, the Guatemalan folklorist Carlos René García Escobar has taken a stab at mythologizing, and thereby stabilizing, this otherwise uneasy "Maya-Catholic" architectural encounter in Xecul, where even the "Catholic" comes off as rather Maya at root:

> The shamans of San Andrés Xecul say that in the earliest times, these lands were designated by the Holy World, or *Ajaw, kaj, ulew* [sic], as the place where all the *brujos* [witches—also used as a derogatory term for shamans in general] of the K'iche' people would live. Then one day, the Apostle San Andrés came to talk with the *brujos*, but as "they were stronger," San Andrés couldn't convert them. Later he went to talk with the Heart of Sky, or *Uk'u'x kaj*, to complain about the evil of these *brujos*. So, *Uk'u'x kaj* ordered the Chief *Brujos* to listen to San Andrés. They sat down to talk, and arrived at an agreement: they would build a church for San Andrés, and they would accept him as their Patron Saint, but they would control the front of the church "to paint their old history, so that no one would forget them" and San Andrés would be in charge of the inside of the temple. San Andrés accepted, they built the church, and that's how it is today: the *brujos* out front and Santiago [sic] at the altar.[1]

However, as any Xeculense knows—especially those tenacious "*brujos*," who are most certainly not forgotten—their colorful church was not painted in "the

earliest times," unless those times be the early 1980s. As I eventually discovered, the painting of the church façade in colors that were explicitly chosen for their Maya significance was part of a project of "evangelization from Maya-K'iche' culture" directed by Xecul's first resident parish priest, Padre Tomás García (1993). In other words, whatever else this church symbolizes, it carries the fading imprimatur of a particular moment in post-Vatican II Catholicism. Indeed, for many in Xecul, the very word *Maya* carries something of a religious overtone, which may or may not be accepted by indigenous townsfolk who on a range of other scores would seem to be ideal candidates for an ethnic identity that has witnessed what observers have aptly termed a florescence or renaissance since the early 1990s, if not earlier (Hale 2006; Montejo 2005; Konefal 2010).

I have realized, following over two years of fieldwork in the town since 1999, that Xecul's famous church represents one site among many where residents imagine and create a range of selves (Maya, Indigenous, Xeculense, and Guatemalan, for example, in addition to religious identities) which speak to contexts running from the local to the transnational. Still, all this imagining and construction has not resulted in (much less been directed toward) a postmodern collage signaling the end of such a supposedly solid and grounded place as "community." Rather, as I hope to show, Xecul is as solid and grounded a place as any, and is likely to remain so. Its solidity, however, is perhaps best understood as a *product* of the very sorts of tensions and conflicts that many scholars through the years have signaled as destructive of community, or the local, as a source of identity or straightforward culture-making.

In this book I investigate the way an increasingly plural religious landscape at the local level in Guatemala intersects with ethnic and other identities, and how religious ontologies—modern and nonmodern alike—articulate with ethnic politics and transnationalism. These themes and processes can be profitably queried through ethnographic attention to a single community (granted, one whose composition includes many members living and working in the United States). Of course, broad currents in anthropology and the social sciences in recent decades have recommended other approaches, especially when it comes to studying processes that seem to be in flux: more thoroughly multisited ethnographies, for example, or studies that trace metaphors and conflicts across social fields among a range of actors (Marcus 1995; Appadurai 1991; Hannerz 1992b). Indeed, some theorists have defined our current epoch— or at least the sorts of problems that interest social scientists these days—as thoroughly decentered and ungrounded in concrete, local places like towns, or even broader "imagined" constellations like nation-states, a scenario that, if accurate, would demand a revised set of methods for social and cultural

analysis, ethnographic or other (Castells 2000).[2] In this intellectual context, the traditional Malinowskian vision of the field has been thoughtfully critiqued as rooted in a specific disciplinary and Colonial history with troublesome nationalist, racist, and sexist roots. As Gupta and Ferguson suggest, in order to deal with this critique, fieldwork may profitably be reconstructed to downplay the local while privileging "locations": "We might emerge from such a move with less a sense of 'the field' (in the 'among the so-and-so' sense) and more a sense of a mode of study that cares about, and pays attention to, the interlocking of multiple social-political sites and locations" (Gupta and Ferguson 1996: 37). Arguably, this challenge has been taken up throughout the discipline—the unreconstructed single-site ethnography is something of a rare bird these days. In the context of Latin America, for example, Warren and Jackson (2002: 22) suggest that the end of the Cold War and the rise of indigenous politics have "caused anthropologists to move definitively past the community-studies tradition that had guided earlier research toward multi-sited considerations of social movements, state politics, and globalization."

Although I am sympathetic to the revisioning of fieldwork suggested above, and have incorporated many of these insights into my own field practice, I am less comfortable with the epochal tone that often accompanies and, directly or not, serves to legitimate the attendant arguments. Whether it be the tides of history, technological advancement, or greater intellectual or moral sensitivity that prompts us periodically to renew our practice and lay the axe (gently or not) to our intellectual and fieldworking ancestors (Wolf 1990), in each case I am left with the feeling that this impulse for perpetual renewal is, perhaps, more diagnostic of modernity itself than a straightforward description of contemporary social reality ("ours" or "theirs"). Without denying the relevance, and often brilliance, of studies that emphasize the blurring of boundaries, the decentering of place, and attendant discourses of hybridity and movement, following Garrett Cook and Thomas Offit (2013, xviii) and Jennifer Burrell (2013: 4, 7–8), I wish to make a case here for the local, more or less in the "among the so-and-so" sense. As Raelene Wilding (2007: 345–346) has cautioned, although an uncritical adoption of a local village as the favored site for the production of anthropological knowledge is problematic, a straightforward move to "the transnational" or "mobility" among ethnographers—a community of researchers whose professional lives are defined (and rewarded) by transnational competence—does not solve the conundrum, rather, it

potentially creates a tendency to assume that a transcendence of nation-states is the preferred means of everyday life, which in turn assumes that the nation

state is the most significant social structure in everyday life. This connection to particular, multiple nations may be useful for pursuing an academic and ethnographic career, but it does not necessarily apply to other life-paths or careers. While "transnational" provides a strong emic for many anthropologists and ethnographers more generally, it does not necessarily serve the same purpose for the people who are studied in transnational ethnographies.[3]

This book is my attempt to interpret the lives of people who call themselves—among other things—Xeculenses, and to engage productively and respectfully with the Mesoamerican community-studies tradition that, I suggest, has for a great many decades been remarkably sensitive to the role of extralocal and global historical, national, economic, and political forces in helping shape the possibilities for indigenous people in specific places. Community studies have also, of course, contributed much to the ethnographic record in general, interpreting "Otherness"—especially in terms of the nature of indigenous religion and cosmology—however that is defined. If my experience in Xecul is any measure, there is still a good deal to learn from our indigenous Others on that score. What needs to be examined more thoroughly, however, especially in light of the sorts of tensions and challenges highlighted by much contemporary anthropology, is the nature of community itself, especially as an operational concept that might still be relevant to guide or ground ethnographic research. It is ironic that as the death knell is sounded for local or community-based ethnography, "community" has reemerged as an ideal site for fieldwork in transnational, cyber, environmental, antiglobalization, and other guises. What, exactly, do we mean by this term?

QUERYING COMMUNITY

Upon examining how community has been framed in social scientific discourse in the West, it becomes clear that talk of the community on the wane or the community as anachronistic, or, indeed, the community reborn has been a key motif in Western modernity for centuries. In a broad survey of community as a concept in social theory, Gerard Delanty (2010) reviews these various transformations, and notes that despite critiques, the concept remains vital—especially, it would seem, the farther it is removed from face-to-face places like neighborhoods and towns, and the closer it becomes peer-to-peer: arising, phoenix-like, in a virtual guise as any of sundry emergent "Internet communities." Given the breadth of usage through time and across disciplines, it is obviously difficult to find a common thread uniting all these concepts of community, though Delanty (2010: 115) opts for "belonging, solidarity

and sociality"—or specifically the quest for this in a fractured (or fracturing) modernity—as key characteristics, even while it is noted that fragility, contingency, conflict, and competition underwrite even these nods to stability. A key challenge for social scientists interested in community studies is dealing with the fact that even (or perhaps especially) face-to-face communities are not, and in all likelihood never have been, the bastions of stability, sociability, and harmony that community as a theoretical concept seems to have demanded—if only to emphasize the destruction of this harmony through encounters with a marauding modernity, alienating state, or regulating society (Delanty 2010: 28, 30; Cohen 1985).

Responding to this assessment, when community is rescued and recast as postmodern or cosmopolitan or communicative, conflict and disjuncture may be highlighted, though the degree to which this is reconciled with overriding notions of belonging and solidarity seems to vary. In his seminal work, Anthony Cohen (1985) argues that as a symbolic construct, community is derived from the actions, experience, and communicative behavior of its members who, while not necessarily sharing concrete meanings, do share symbols themselves: a fact that is enough to guarantee a kind of harmony behind or above the more essential conflict. Stanley Barrett (2010, 118), however, points out that Cohen's efforts merely project and privilege the ideals of consensus and solidarity on another more abstract level, where links to behavior are not clearly specified: "Consider the assertion that symbols of community mask underlying complexity and disorder. Are the latter thereby neutralized, or is the symbolic community merely a flimsy conceptual background, a pleasant diversion from the hard struggles of everyday existence?"[4]

Still, Barrett notes that anthropologists have not tended to consider community a conceptual vehicle worthy of much theoretical elaboration: as Clifford Geertz (1973, 22) famously declared (making, granted, a somewhat different point), "anthropologists don't study villages . . . ; they study *in* villages." On the other hand, sociologists in the Community Studies tradition, conducting fieldwork in the West (in urban neighborhoods, or rural towns) did look to community as an important conceptual tool—akin to culture and society, and ultimately, suffering from the same problems of definition as these and related concepts (Barrett 2010, 116). Despite these disciplinary differences, Barrett identifies an underlying symmetry to the approaches: although anthropologists did not tend to use community as a critical concept, they stressed culture, which nonetheless could become equated, uncritically, with an all-encompassing otherness. Similarly, community, for sociologists conducting ethnographic work in the West, could become a placeholder to contain authentic social

beings who are themselves "Other" to the researcher, undefiled by urbanism and related transformations that define modernity.[5]

That said, returning to Geertz's assessment, the chief value of community for many anthropologists is not conceptual, but methodological; geographically defined communities, at least until relatively recently, have been deemed ideal sites to study the complexities of social and cultural life at close range (Barrett 2010: 119–120). Both Barrett and Delanty, however, note that the rise of the Internet and sundry forms of electronic mediation have quickened the move toward interest or personal communities—"community without propinquity" in Webber's (1963) terms—that represent renewed attempts to capture and promote the kind of solidarity and support that, it is imagined, formerly accrued to the face-to-face community. Nonetheless, for Delanty (2010, 158) at least, after establishing the vitality and perhaps epoch-making nature of the new forms of community (including most prominently the virtual), a key question remains as to how these interact with "place"—geographically specifiable locations, an attribute formerly evoked strongly by the very term *community*—lest they remain "imagined."[6]

In addition to attention to its relationship to place, community as a site of generative conflict, perhaps as much or more than a site of solidarity and consensus, needs to be theorized more thoroughly if we are to understand the continued relevance these places hold for many indigenous Guatemalans. Vered Amit (2010: 358; Amit and Rapport 2012) offers perhaps the most sophisticated recent anthropological model for understanding community, urging scholars to move away from classificatory and categorical models (which inevitably stress, in some way or other, common and shared elements as constitutive) toward an approach that focuses "on the uncertainties arising in the intersection between the idea [of community] and actualization of sociation." She considers three points of intersection—joint commitment, affect/belonging, and specific forms of association—as worthy of attention in this project. It is her elaboration of the concept of joint commitment in particular that interests me here.[7] This idea does not imply solidarity in the usual sense, but rather an admission that interdependence is at the base of any meaningful form of sociality, and that conflict and tension, rather than consensus, may be a better marker of the strength of community. In her words,

> You can politely ignore disagreements over issues or with people on whom you
> do not depend, but it is much harder to be equally blasé about such differences
> with collaborators . . . That is why ethnic or neighbourhood associations, university departments, political parties, recreational groups or religious congregations

so often give rise to more or less heated organizational politics, factions or even ruptures. In short, joint commitments do not necessarily, or even often, generate consensus or even collegiality . . . Placing the emphasis on joint commitment shifts the emphasis away from sameness, whether actual or imagined, as the basis for community and puts the onus more squarely on interdependence as the basis for this class of sociation. (Amit 2010: 359–360)

What counts, precisely, as a "joint commitment," of course, can vary considerably: interdependence takes a range of forms, from the instrumental through the moral and affective. Thus, as Amit (2010: 360) notes, there is not a specific type of association that signals joint commitment. Rather, this imperative will be expressed and resolved in a range of ways depending on the position of given agents toward the goal in question and the nature of the goal itself.

Amit (2010: 360–361) further problematizes the notion of belonging, and the affective aspect of community, which, as noted above, has been central to much theorizing on the concept. As she suggests, a surfeit of stress on this notion—from theorists ranging from Victor Turner to Anthony Cohen to Benedict Anderson—has been justified in general through positing rather extreme cases and contexts as definitive of community,[8] downplaying the more quotidian experience of the same, thus limiting rather than opening the field of inquiry. Just as she sees joint commitment as variously expressed and distributed, the more affective aspects the concept evokes are themselves plural. In elaborating this concept, she draws upon the insights of Fredrik Barth (1987) and Ulf Hannerz (1992a) who have, in different ways, proposed distributed models of culture that, beyond acknowledging individual diversity, highlight the fact that members of a culture must deal with and respond to each other's differences, including differences in key meanings for given practices, which have to be addressed in some way by those with a stake in the process.

In applying these insights beyond meaning to questions of affect and emotion, it becomes clear that not all putative members of a community will experience such sentiments, or experience them regularly and in the same way. Nor is it necessary that expressions of affect/belonging accompany each joint commitment, or vice versa—not all social actors will feel equally strongly about projects requiring interdependence, and it is perfectly possibly to feel a strong sense of "belonging" without concrete attendant joint commitments: "Affect may also be charged by personal memories that not shared in their entirety with anyone. Nostalgia may be a powerful source of romanticized belonging without requiring any form of joint commitment" (Amit 2010: 360).

A final note to consider regarding Amit's model is the stress she places upon considering the actual forms of association that community, so conceived,

involves. As with the concepts of joint commitment and affect/belonging, she does not choose to define the sort of social relationships and encounters that constitute community (and by extension, those that do not). Rather, she suggests that we investigate the extent to which the three points intersect, specifying the nature of the relationships involved (in terms of, among other possibilities, their scale, duration, mediation, comprehensiveness, and degree of formalization) and from there trace the productive ambiguities that this concept of community aims to trace. "Positioned in this way, community in all its proliferating invocation is not a cover for more crucial aspects of sociality. Rather, it speaks to the relentless uncertainties entailed in many different forms of plural subjecthood" (Amit 2010: 362). Examining indigenous communities in Guatemala through this sort of lens can, perhaps, offer a fresh perspective on the continued relevance of these places for the people who live there, despite (or perhaps due to) the many transformations they have both witnessed and courted.

CONCEPTUALIZING INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES IN MESOAMERICA

For Mesoamericanists, unlike other anthropologists who, following Geertz, consider villages little more than convenient sites to work their ethnographic method, "community"—specifically the *municipio* or township—has also been important in conceptual terms, comprising physical, social, and cultural units in Sol Tax's (1937) classic formulation (Barrett 2010, 123n2). Scholars have long characterized these communities as insular, but the history, nature, and degree of indigenous commitment to place has been subject to much debate through close to a century of ethnography in Mesoamerica. Carol Smith's (1990b) groundbreaking edited volume set the stage for recent critical considerations of this theme, even as subsequent developments in the 1990s appeared to challenge some of the fundamental conclusions of that study. In a critical assessment of Eric Wolf's (1957) seminal Closed Corporate Peasant Community model (which itself responded to earlier models that he criticized as ahistorical or relying overmuch on naïve assumptions about inherent indigenous conservatism), Smith (1990c: 19–21) argues that indigenous relations with the state through time have been much more open (and in many cases, less peasant) than the model demands, though she does suggest that the corporate community has nonetheless remained the key site for struggle and interaction with the state, with local identities sedimented partially at least out of this interaction. This dialectic between integration with and insulation

from the nation-state was, however, thought by Wolf (1956: 1073) to produce conflict ultimately destructive of community as a source of common identity. Here, as with other classic statements on community, the chief difficulty lies in conceptualizing conflict itself as *constituting* these places rather than perpetually threatening them. Indeed, most scholarly attention in this context was directed toward examining how these threats were mitigated through various mechanisms (e.g., "wealth-leveling" features of the Cargo system) that produce solidarity: a concept, of course, closely allied to many classic and contemporary notions of community discussed above.

The last half of the twentieth century saw the publication of countless studies of Mesoamerican communities that have indeed stressed conflict in various, often overlapping, modes—political, economic, generational, and especially religious—without offering conclusive evidence of the demise of communal identity (Mendelson 1965; Brintnall 1979; Warren 1989; Annis 1987; Watanabe 1992; Carmack 1995; Carlsen 2011; Cook 2000). For some, however, the intensification of local conflict—often occasioned by the influence of modernity in various guises—produces critical pressures on individuals, encouraging them to give up on community altogether. These sorts of pressure have been framed, for example, in terms of the possibilities for ethnic passing, urbanization, and class mobility: options that linger at the margins of studies, or foreshadow a likely future, especially as capitalist modes of production and consumption became increasingly localized (Warren 1989: 176–177; Annis 1987: 140–141; Carlsen 2011: 123–149, 171–187). When we add to this the toxic effects of a genocidal civil war, the transnational migration it helped prompt, together with the rise of a national-level alternative to localized identities by way of the much studied "pan-Maya" movement, the community—as framed by Tax, Wolf, and others as an operational concept to guide Mesoamerican ethnography, and as a key source for indigenous identity for actual Mesoamericans—would seem to be on the wane, for good or ill (Fonseca 2004).

For their part, Peter Hervik and Hilary Kahn suggest that the preponderance of attention to community among Mesoamericanists reflects a faulty assumption that ethnic authenticity is welded to geography. Further, they consider attempts to compare communities across space and through time as betraying a belief in a hidden "Mayanness" that is imagined to form a unitary and timeless substrate.[9] Instead, they suggest, fragmentation and difference are the order of the day, even if many self-identifying Maya at either the community level or, more commonly, at the level of national ethnic politics, deny this and work instead to develop and perform more "essentialized" identities. Inspired by Salvador Dali, they call for a "surrealistic scholarship" that sees "community,

ethnicity and the Maya as processes of be-ing made cohesive within realms of power, not through some essential link to the past or an internal cosmic state" (Hervik and Kahn 2006: 227). Consonant with scholarship inspired in part by the English-speaking academy's reception and interpretation of Foucault, if there is any solidity or cohesion here, it is in "realms of power": the new hidden force shaping social action, effectively replacing tradition, structure, symbol, culture, society, or whatever other placeholder for social explanation to which we have made recourse through the years.[10] I would argue, rather, that attention to community is warranted along a range of lines, and that ethnographers have long been sensitive to the complexities of these places.

In terms of understanding Mesoamerican indigenous communities as sites of conflict connected intimately with broader social and political contexts, rather than places where identities, essentialized or constructed, find their exclusive home, Smith (1990a: 281) offered a subtle interpretation of internal divisions as a continued and shifting response to forms of state coercion, protecting local political autonomy rather than (*pace* Wolf) the land base of a peasantry. She considered community (through a kind of "divided we stand" logic) a more likely source of future strength and resistance against hegemonic state power than broad collective action on ethnic lines (C. Smith 1990a: 282). More generally, in a sophisticated reading of community in the Mesoamerican context, John Watanabe (1992: 11), inspired by Robert Redfield, notes "that the characteristics of so-called folk societies owe more to the inherent qualities of small-scale village life than to their specific culture content or historical origins." For Watanabe, community—and certainly the conflict anthropologists have extensively documented at this level—is not simply a product of either primordial cultural conservatism or external forces that are resisted or accommodated, but rather, and consonant with Amit's theorization, "a problematic social nexus within which people constantly negotiate the immediate existential concerns and possibilities of their lives, conditioned by the wider economic, political, and natural ecology of which they are a part" (Watanabe 1990: 132).[11] Burrell (2013: 165) adopts a comparable, dynamic model of community—privileging the importance of conflict as productive of social relations—while noting that

> the commonplace regularity of conflict and its relevance for following pathways of power also definitively problematizes "the community," especially "the local community," as a space of homogeneity and unity. To convey the impression of cohesiveness is itself the outcome of internal dispute and political process: who gets to perform this and what do they earn from it? Why are some performers

chosen over others? What are the stakes in presenting a public veneer of unity, and how do people arrive at a consensus for achieving this? This is not to say that communities cannot choose the idea of collectivity or cohesiveness to promote themselves and their projects, but when they do so, it is simply one strategy that won over competing possibilities.

The biggest recent challenge, however, to anthropological studies of community in this part of the world has been framed in the literature in terms of the rise of an alternative, explicitly extralocal form of identity and commitment that, contrary to Smith's initial predictions, has taken on a strong ethnonational character.

As noted by Warren and Jackson above, a trend with Mayanist scholarship beginning in the 1990s has seen the relevance of community as the key site for ethnographic attention diminish remarkably. For her part, Smith (1991) was soon commenting on the rise of "Maya nationalism," expressing some reservations regarding the overall potential of this pan-ethnic identity should it fail to draw upon local culture, harden into a cultural orthodoxy, or suffer state cooptation. A comparable point was made by Watanabe (1995: 39), who—while sympathetic, like Smith, to the possibilities of extralocal Maya activism—expressed his worry that the use and definition of culture by Maya activists, should it promote a "singular, exoticised Maya identity," might provoke negative local reactions. The foundational literature on Maya activism, however, in the few places where it treats relationships with indigenous communities in detail, has not tended to detect or ascribe much import to such negative reactions.[12] Thus, when describing or defending the so-called strategic essentialism[13] of some pan-Mayanists (where something like a singular identity is arguably promoted), scholars have concentrated more on the debates this has engendered with critical Ladino intellectuals (or contrarian Maya activists) at the national level, rather than its local resonance or lack thereof (Warren 1998: 41–47; Nelson 1999: 249). In general, and in keeping with some broader anthropological trends described above, the impetus has been to move "beyond community" in academic terms, but also—in at least some contexts—in the hopeful postbellum construction of a democratic Guatemala itself, where the community may, once more, be viewed as an obstacle to that end (Fonseca 2004). Thus, rather than offering a sustained focus on the reception of Maya organizing in given towns, North American and European scholars of the Maya Movement have by and large adopted a multisited—or often more straightforwardly urban—ethnographic approach.[14] While offering occasional vignettes of community life, taken as a whole, the literature concentrates on both the histories of individual urban

leaders and intellectuals through their encounters with the Guatemalan state, North American anthropologists, UN bureaucracies, NGOs, and erstwhile allies from popular and class-based movements, while documenting the development of specific organizations and networks of activists in different periods. Histories of pan-Maya activism have been developed, with considerable stress placed upon moments of unity and compromise. Through this, much has been made of the divide between those indigenous activists who advocate popular concerns—especially as connected to land reform and traditional issues of the left, often in solidarity with class-based organizations—and the culturalists, or pan-Mayanists proper, who seek reform on the basis of the recognition of cultural rights, concerning such matters as language, education, dress, and religion. On balance, culturalists have received the lion's share of academic attention (Warren 1998; Fischer 2004; Fischer and McKenna Brown 1996; Nelson 1999; Montejo 2005). Communities—and also non-culturalist or popular forms of indigenous activism, as Santiago Bastos (2006: 227; 2012) and Charles Hale (2006: 18, 237n15) have noted—faded from the academic vanguard when it came to discussions of political action and identity, as pan-Mayanism (itself routinely described as a heterogeneous, adaptive, and multifaceted movement) was increasingly envisioned as the key mode for indigenous political agency in Guatemala.

The last decade, however, has seen considerable challenges to pan-Mayanism, beyond the success the movement has enjoyed, summarized by Edward Fischer (2004: 92) as consisting in "legislative reforms that favor Mayan languages; [the meeting of] a large number of demands recognized in the Peace Accords; and a burgeoning body of linguistic, cultural, and political research and analysis." Some of these challenges were presaged by Smith: cooptation of the Maya movement by the state—a process identified rather ominously by one Maya organization as "ethnophagia" (Asociación Maya Uk'u'x B'e 2005: 105–106)—is clearly a concern for many activists, as a number of leaders and intellectuals have accepted high-level positions in successive governments, spanning the political spectrum (Warren 2002; Fischer 2004). Perhaps more problematically, as Hale (2006) notes—in terms of the positioning of the Maya movement vis-à-vis the Ladino community in general, and potential allies (*ladinos solidarios*) in particular—a complex form of "racial ambivalence" among many Ladinos has worked to place tacit limits on Maya gains. This is a stance that allows members of the dominant racial group to distance themselves from the classic racism that undergirded genocidal interethnic relations in previous decades and to declare a new era of enlightened and general equality, without, however, ceding racial privilege or their position in an enduring racial hierarchy.[15]

Hale (2002, 2006) also documents the influence of what he calls "neoliberal multiculturalism" as severely limiting the potential for progressive ethnic reform (Burrell 2013: 12–15, 89–90). As he notes, key aspects of the discourse of indigenous rights—especially as it draws on notions of formal equality, as rights talk at a basic level (even that promoting collective rights) must (Ignatieff 2000)—have been absorbed into this model as the ascendant form of nationalism in Guatemala (Hale 2006: 219–220). The question of cooptation or ethnophagia is therefore much more complicated than suggested by the overt participation of specific leaders and intellectuals in formal political positions. If Hale is correct, even the work of non-coopted but still "authorized" (Hale 2004; Schirmer 1998: 116) pan-Mayanists may contribute to broader neoliberal agendas, to the extent that matters of culture have not seemed to challenge in any fundamental way the material inequalities that continue to map onto racial divisions in Guatemala, even if, with the rise of an indigenous middle class, no longer so exclusively (Metz 2006: 299).[16] In short, the extralocal community, or communities, created by pan-Maya activism have encountered conflicts and divisions not unlike those that define life in local communities. There are, however, important differences in terms of how these conflicts are framed and how they motivate action—especially when it comes to the means by which power is organized in each of these contexts (MacKenzie 2010). Moreover, as Cook and Offit (2013: xviii–xix) suggest, these different visions and uses of community and the local increasingly overlap in particular village contexts.

This book seeks to address some of these issues through the specific lens of religion, but with reference to issues of ethnicity, politics, and transnational experiences, especially as they speak to possibilities associated with modernity. As noted above, the concept of modernity has long articulated with that of community and its various trajectories, often representing the opposite and dynamic side of the relationship: community highlights the collective, modernity the individual; community is a repository for the past, modernity the future; community aims for harmony and stability, modernity produces disjuncture, progress, and change. Although Amit's model (and comparable insights that have emerged from ethnographic attention to Mesoamerican towns) offers a more complex and subtle treatment of community as something more than modernity's opposite, modernity itself needs to be theorized more thoroughly to avoid immediate recourse to these sorts of dichotomies.

MODERNITY, RELIGION, AND THE NONMODERN

Modernity is a notoriously difficult concept to operationalize or easily summarize. In this book I consider it a worldview that, while arguably increasingly plural, responds to and is shaped by a number of key assumptions as well as historical developments that can be specified to a degree. Although many of the most important of these concern the rise and spread of capitalism in different forms and contexts (Sahlins 2005: 495; Sayer 1990), there is reason to consider, as Bruce Knauft (2002: 14) suggests, the relative autonomy of what he calls cultural or subjective dimensions of modernity. Rather than viewing modernity in categorical terms—a checklist of traits either present or absent—I approach it in manner comparable to Amit's model of community. Drawing on the ideas of Kenneth Burke, she notes that the sort of concepts he characterizes as "titular" in philosophical investigations (and for present purposes, "modernity" certainly qualifies), are best approached not through watertight definitions, but through what he calls "terms that clearly reveal the strategic spots at which ambiguities necessarily arise" (quoted in Amit 2010: 358). Such "strategic ambiguity," far from limiting understanding, is arguably the most productive way to approach complex ideas, especially when such are tested empirically.

The first such strategic spot relevant to what follows is also one of the most immediate, concerning what Peter Pels (2003: 30) calls "consciousness of radical temporal rupture" as an ideological effect of modernity. Charles Turner (1992b: 9) characterizes this as modernity's caesural need, its epochal quality. Importantly, as many have noted, tradition is born alongside modernity in this view: it is its defining Other, and to that extent, just as "new" as the modern (Williams 1977: 115; Berman 1982: 15; Habermas 1985: 3; Trouillot 2002). Needless to say, the actual views or beliefs of putative traditionalists are acknowledged here only to the degree that they can better describe the modern—as a source of either nostalgic longing, or a benchmark to measure the progress that modernity charts (Bauman and Briggs 2003: 11). As a worldview, this aspect of modernity comprises its etiology, and while the specific character of the relationship between the "traditional" and the "modern" may vary in given modern projects and experiences of modernity (and therein lies the ambiguity), the distinction itself is foundational. This distinction is also agonistic, as the word *modern* is "always being thrown into the middle of a fight, in a quarrel where there are winners and losers, Ancients and Moderns" (Latour 1993, 10).

Explanations offered for the presumed decisiveness of these victories tend to reference modernity's hallmark practices, which constitute a second spot of

strategic ambiguity that informs arguments made in this book. In this context, Bruno Latour (1993) asserts that modernity promotes a more or less clear telos, with practices generally oriented toward the achievement of freedom and the domestication of fate. Regardless of the specific type of, or orientation toward, modernity (e.g., modern, antimodern, or postmodern), he argues that a related set of practices is involved. On the one hand, would-be moderns concern themselves with the "purification" of spheres constituted in terms of "nature"—constructed as the proper domain of science—and "culture"—the realm of the human, and raw material for rational political and social projects (1993: 10–11). On the other hand, moderns engage in the work of "translation," constantly identifying (and, it would seem, creating) hybrids and networks between these erstwhile separate realms. As Latour has argued, the products of science—from the air pump to automobiles to aerosol cans—have always been freighted with social significance, transforming relationships and modes of behavior, which are then subject to continued purification. Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs (2003: 4) expand on Latour's ideas in this context, noting his key assertion concerning modernity's unattainability: "if communities must rigorously separate society from science and nature to truly be modern, the proliferation of hybrids excludes everyone from fully deserving this designation."

While Latour is, for the most part, concerned with querying modernity in terms of the role of science in producing and (often unconsciously) threatening the division between the realms of nature and culture, the purifying drive of modern practices are, of course, strongly refracted in social life and culture itself. Centuries of classic social theory have served—through the sustained application of techniques of reason—to separate, naturalize, or help establish outright an unstable set of modern social domains that have become knowable as they have been subjected to purifying practices. As Alan Macfarlane (2005: 124) notes in a review of Ernest Gellner's thoughts on modernity, a "separation of spheres, where politics, economics, religion and kinship are artificially held apart is the central feature of modern civilization." These observations, echoed and expanded in a range of ways by Habermas (1985) and others, engage with Weber's classic statements on rationalization, and specific processes such as secularization and the differentiation and institutionalization of an ever-expanding list of personal, social, and cultural categories, which tend to accrue authorized experts (Tambiah 1990: 150; Rose 1990). While Latour stresses the Sisyphean nature of the work of purification, given the constant interpenetration of hybrid networks, Weber was likewise interested in the connections ("elective affinities") between, and often the fateful subversions of,

aspects of erstwhile autonomous social spheres (economics and religion most famously) (Swedberg 2005: 83–84). These insights remind us that modernity is not simply given, but is constituted in practices that are repeatedly challenged and renewed.

This brings me to a final, and closely related, strategic point of ambiguity in modernity, which I draw upon in the following chapters. Of interest here is the relationship between the universal and the particular in modernity, where universality and immutability are assigned to the natural sphere, with human difference seen as constructed and various, amounting to a recognition of human subjectivity (Pels 2003: 31; Viveiros de Castro 2004). In this context, modern projects nonetheless maintain a faith that at least a few fibers of the tangle of subjective human values may be unraveled and reconciled (as, for example, with the problematic universalism of multiculturalism and discourses of rights) through the tools of reason and the work of purification just described (C. Turner 1992b: 101; Tambiah 1990: 129). At least since Descartes's *cogito*, this focus on reason, the intellect, and matters of the mind in general as the locus of subjectivity and meaningful human action in any of the myriad differentiated spheres of life has been one of the most enduring—if ambiguous and contested—aspects of modernity. If the stress on temporal rupture provides an etiology for modernity, and the work of purification a theory of action, the stress on human subjectivity, vouchsafed through reason, is key to its ontology. It is also a perspective, despite what seems to be an implicit secularism and humanistic triumphalism, with strong religious roots.

Religion, in particular Christianity and the Judeo-Christian tradition more generally, has had a particularly complex relationship to modernity as understood by social theorists from at least the nineteenth century onwards. In classic theories of modernity that highlight processes of secularization and disenchantment, religion stands in to mark, in caesural terms, the past with which one must break to be modern. As Fenella Cannell (2006: 1–2, 20–22, 31) notes, while versions of this thesis emerge in Hegel, Durkheim, Mauss, and most notably Weber, their analyses were often less teleological than assumed by their interpreters. Further, as many have suggested, the sorts of themes that signal modern tensions and ambiguities (including those considered above) did not emerge from whole cloth, but have long, often recognizably Christian, pedigrees (Asad 1993). In particular, the importance of transcendence to Christianity (and so-called axial religions more generally), combined with the epoch-making centrality of the Christ-Event, provides a template for both practices of purification and the caesural break modernity requires (Robbins 2009: 58–59; Ruel 1982). This radical cosmological break produces

a hierarchical ontology where ideals of purity, in various and complex ways, are elaborated through specific human practices, generally through attention to either the mind (spirit) or body (flesh) in specific contexts. Christianity is too often simply read as an ideology and practice that glorifies the former and rejects the latter, but as Cannell (2006, 7) points out, the Christian message is more paradoxical than this: the body is both something to be transcended, and the very vehicle of redemptive salvation. Rather than a singular and water-tight ideology, Christianity—like modernity—is eminently plural, embodying a series of paradoxes and tensions that are worked out or elaborated in distinct ways in different times and places. It is a plurality, however, that responds to a shared set of tensions and arguments; this is what makes it possible to speak of "Christianity," and indeed "modernity," in more general terms.

As I hope to demonstrate in this book, religion and modernity combine in complex ways in Xecul. As many have come to appreciate, "disenchantment" is far from an inevitable byproduct of modernity. Such a state of affairs, as Peter Berger (1999: 2) wryly admits, might only have held in general terms for the Western professoriate, rather than the masses whose lives they have puzzled over. But "modern" religions and practitioners still engage with (and indeed, help constitute) the sorts of tensions defined above, and are transformed in the process. In what follows I consider how they also exist, cheek by jowl, in the complex context of community, where the terms of modernity, belief, and practice become the stuff of conflictive joint commitments. In examining the nature of this conflict in the chapters that follow, I consider each of the key religious options Xeculenses have cultivated in terms of their position on temporality; the relative value of, and distinction between, the traditional and the modern; the nature of their practice in terms of purification or translation; the more general relation to human subjectivity; the place of minds and bodies; and the particular and the universal.

This is not to say, of course, that modernity is the only game in town, or that "modern" individuals accept and elaborate each of these tensions in equal measure and consistently in all spheres of their lives. Nor, of course, is it suffi-cient to simply represent and privilege ethnographic subjects in terms of their distance from what is too often assumed to be a homogenizing Christianity or modernity (Cannell 2006: 11–12; Robbins 2011; Sahlins 2005: 494). In what follows, I attempt to recognize the diversity of modern and Christian projects, including how some of the tensions of modernity are assimilated in different ways in Xecul, but I also wish to leave space for more thoroughly nonmodern sensibilities. While anthropologists especially have helped define and flesh out the nature of non-Western or "alternative" modernities, this should not

be done at the expense of at least considering the possibility of more radical difference: the anthropologist's classic, if much critiqued, métier (Hage 2012). As Philippe Descola (2009) has noted, for more than a century various strains and trajectories of anthropological theorizing of human difference tend to resolve into an agonistic binary of "culturalist" versus "naturalist" approaches, which in their different ways are nonetheless undergirded by a common modern assumption concerning the monistic dualism (and stable ontological status) of nature and culture, an ontology he refers to as "modern naturalism." Taking seriously the possibility that nonmodern ways of being human not only exist but may critically inform our science beyond constructivist assertions of relativism or recourse to naturalist universals, has inspired a lively and wide-ranging discussion in anthropology, occasionally dubbed "the ontological turn" (Blaser 2013)

In this line of inquiry, theorizing the nonmodern does not simply come down to a relativist affirmation of potentially infinite cultural variation combined with a trenchant rejection of positions that attempt to explore universals of any sort, as recommended by Geertz (1984). For his part, and important to what follows, Descola (2009: 150–151; 2013) limits the possibilities for combining experiences of "interiority" (subjectivity, consciousness, mind—what we tend to associate with culture) and "physicality" (forms, substances, matter—what we tend to associate with nature) to four basic types of ontologies: "when confronted with an *alter*, whether human or non-human, I can either surmise that this object possesses elements of physicality and interiority analogous to mine; or that his interiority and his physicality are entirely distinct from mine; or that we have similar interiorities and different physical embodiments; or that our interiorities are discontinuous and our physicalities continuous." This last type of ontology describes, in a basic way, modern naturalism, while the penultimate set of distinctions describes animism as retheorized by Descola and others (Descola 2013; Viveiros de Castro 1998; Bird-David 1999).

In Xecul, and in other Mesoamerican communities, many individuals who define themselves as *costumbristas* have long elaborated such an animistic cosmology, which shares much with what Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1998, 2004) has called "multinatural perspectivism." In this context, considerable attention is paid to bodies, appearances, and forms, which are both more mutable and more expansive than what typically circumscribes the "human" as a subject in modernity. As Descola (2009: 151) suggests, in this ontology, "humans and non-humans are conceived as possessing the same type of interiority and it is because of this common internal disposition that non-humans are said to possess social characteristics . . . However, the reference shared by most beings

in the world is humanity as a general condition, not *Homo sapiens*, as a species." With this starting point, as I note in chapter 2, considerable diversity in animist or perspectivist cosmologies has been described across the Americas and beyond. Still, these ontologies share a heightened attention to bodies and substances as the site of differentiation and constructive mutability when compared to modern cosmologies. In general, in what follows I suggest that attention to the various perspectives—modern and nonmodern—Xeculenses have adopted in these contexts provides important insight into the nature of religious pluralism in Mesoamerican communities.

METHODS AND CONVENTIONS

This book is based primarily upon fieldwork conducted in Xecul from March of 2001 until December of 2002, with additional research conducted in one- and two-month trips in 2007 and 2009. I likewise made a brief visit to the town and region for a month in July of 2000, and spent approximately two months in Xecul through April and May of 1999 conducting some preliminary research. Prior to investigations in the town itself, I spent approximately 20 months in Guatemala since 1994, engaged in Spanish and later K'iche' language study, as well as five months of research for my masters degree, which focused upon the popular saint San Simón. As noted above, it was during these first experiences in Guatemala that I became acquainted with Xecul and came to understand something of its unique religious history. Research with Xeculense migrants in San Diego County, California, was conducted over five weeks in the summer of 2010, with additional shorter trips in 2003 and 2008.

My methods have combined qualitative and some quantitative approaches, with the bulk of my work ethnographic: sharing daily life with Xeculenses, attending large and small special events in the town and in San Diego, and engaging people formally and informally so they might explain to me aspects of their lives and concerns. The most official conduit for participation in Xecul itself since 2001 has been my membership in the Coro San Andrés, a marimba-playing choir in the local Catholic Church (described in chapter 4). Much insight into local community history and contemporary concerns emerged from long informal conversations with members of the Coro, who have become good friends. I have also employed a number of local research assistants over the years (in Xecul and San Diego County) whose help has been invaluable: Alejandro Chan, Cruz Estéban Chiroy, César Baldomero Chuc, and Juan Martín Sajche all contributed much to my understanding of their community.

In addition to ethnographic research, I spent considerable time in Xecul examining and organizing the local archives, a project I began in June of 2001 and which lasted until December 2002. The *alcalde* at the time, Juan Celestino Chuc Paxtor, gave me full access to the town's records, which were in a considerable state of disarray. While some previous efforts at ordering the towns documents were attempted many decades prior, this work proved extremely challenging, and occupied most of my mornings especially in 2002. I was able to sort and file the loose materials into 27 cardboard archive storage boxes, covering the years from 1842 to 1971, and developed an inventory in the fall of 2014. I managed to analyze the majority of documents from the nineteenth century, information from which is included in chapter 1. This research was supplemented by a few weeks of investigation in the national archives in Guatemala City.

In the early phase of my fieldwork, I worked with Francisco Rubén Vásquez Hernández, who directed Xecul's Technical Municipal Planning Unit, a service funded by the Spanish government through their NGO, Cooperación Española. Francisco became a good friend, and helped me with my survey, which was administered between July and mid-October of 2002. This survey was based on a universe Francisco was able to provide from a census he had directed. I drew a large random sample from the total of 697 households, selecting about 35%, or 242 potential respondents. Of this sample, there was a mortality of seven individuals who simply could not be found from the information provided in the universe, and a further 29 who either declined to participate or with whom it proved impossible to schedule an interview. The final sample size was 206 respondents, still quite high at about 29.6% of the universe. I trained and employed a team of nine local survey takers, and offered remuneration for each respondent. The survey included 205 questions—open-ended and closed—and each interview could take an hour and a half or more. It covered a wide range of themes, including basic demographics, religious identity and experience, education, domestic economy and employment history, land ownership, migration experience, politics, and ethnic identity, among other issues.[17] My survey takers selected the individuals they wished to interview from a list of the sample, generally picking individuals whom they knew.

I also received considerable help in the field from five visiting students, whose research I facilitated or supervised in some manner. Three of these—Deimy Ventura, Ana Lucía Robles Camey, and Andrea Terrón Gómez—spent approximately six weeks in Xecul, doing fieldwork for degrees in anthropology from the Universidad del Valle in Guatemala City. I directed a field school

for these students with the help of Professor Didier Boremanse, then chair of anthropology at that institution, and they developed a range of research projects that in various ways have informed my understanding of the town and its culture. I also facilitated the fieldwork of two students, Marguun Indreboe and Carron Beaumont, who were attending Oxford University in England. They were in Xecul for a little over month, from July through August 2001, and concentrated on issues of development and community organizing, work which has likewise expanded my understanding of key themes I explore in this book.

Although it is common in much Mayanist academic writing to use the term *Indian* when referring in English to indigenous Mesoamerican cultures and communities, I find no compelling reason to continue with this convention, given the complex and intensely ambivalent meaning of this word. Further, given that contemporary scholars generally reject using the direct Spanish translation of this label in their publications—*indio* is fairly universally considered a derogatory term in the region—it seems reasonable to consider other options. Any ethnic label brings with it ambiguity and a raft of exceptions and qualifications, but in what follows I will use *indigenous* most commonly, and on occasion *Mesoamerican*, when referring broadly to culture and identity at the local level in terms that invite comparisons across the region. In some contexts, I rely on a linguistic marker—K'iche'—to delineate a group, and more specifically I use the term *Xeculense* when referring to the people who are the principal focus of my attention. I reserve use of the term *Maya* to refer on occasion to archaeological material, and more generally to those groups and individuals who actively promote and cultivate this identity at various levels. This is not, of course, to say that people whom I identify as indigenous or Xeculense might not consider themselves—in some if not all contexts—to be Maya as well. Rather, I will simply not assume such to be the default situation, and will try to preserve the complexity of usage of these sorts of labels in specific contexts. On the other hand, and with some regrets, my occasional use of the term *Ladino*, as a catchall to reference nonindigenous Guatemalans in general, follows Mayanist convention, though I will note here that this is not a label that is uniformly accepted or cultivated by its ostensible members (Hale 2006).

Another key issue concerns the choice of terms referring to religious practitioners in the area, especially those described in Mayanist literature as daykeepers, shamans (or shaman-priests), or diviners among other options. While there seems to be an emergent convention toward the use of *daykeeper*—one gloss of the K'iche' term *ajq'ij*—in what follows I use the term *shaman* when referring to this practice in a general sense, where I wish to invite comparison

with traditions also glossed as "shamanic" more broadly in the anthropological literature and in the context of the Americas especially. On occasion I also use the terms *ajq'ij* and *diviner* where such seems warranted. As I explain in more detail in chapter 2, I use the terms *costumbre* and *costumbrista* to refer in general to those who adopt—to some extent at least—a set of sensibilities that also animates shamanic work, whether or not they themselves are practicing shamans. I reserve the label *Sacerdote Maya* or Maya Priest to refer to those religious practitioners who explicitly and regularly identify in this manner. My capitalization of this label references the official status its users, described in chapter 5, often seek. I appreciate the ultimate inadequacy and liquid nature of these sorts of labels, obscuring as much or more than they reveal when it comes to either privileging a comparative angle or preserving local variation. I trust nonetheless that something of the complexity of these practices and identities is retained in what follows.

With a few exceptions, I have adopted common ethnographic convention and provide pseudonyms for the consultants who shared their ideas with me. This is particularly important in contexts where conflict is described, and especially when offering the perspectives of migrants, many of whom occupy a marginal and insecure position in the United States. The exceptions include interviews with individuals who occupy public and official positions, and in Xecul itself, with the late Xuan Chuc Chan who expressed to me his desire to be named in my work. For these individuals, I provide a full name, otherwise, I refer to my consultants using pseudonymous Spanish first names only, with a general preference for names that are not common in Xecul. Translation of all Spanish and K'iche' language materials referenced in this work is my own.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In chapter 1, I provide a general introduction to the community of Xecul, tracing something of its history with a focus on political, religious, and economic transformations. I also include a summary of the local economy, and basic detail on how the process of migration to the United States has transformed the town. In part one, which consists of two chapters, I consider how attention to bodies, substances, and forms animates religious identities in Xecul, and provides an important basis for the elaboration of community and for both modern and nonmodern ontologies that inform behavior and identities more broadly. Chapter 2 includes a summary of contemporary *costumbrista* ideas and practices, outlining something of their ontological basis, drawing in particular on the work of Viveiros de Castro (1998) on multinatural

perspectivism. I offer an extended discussion of a key term—*nawal*—which I argue references the workings of this nonmodern ontology, and consider some of the types of bodies and natures that are most salient in the local cosmology. I continue with a presentation of some local myths and stories that, while clearly undergirded by the sort of sensibility captured in Viveiros de Castro's model, also highlight the importance of hierarchy as a fundamental, if unstable, principle in this context. I conclude with a discussion of shamanic practice, noting how the work of local shamans can be compared to a kind of risk management in the context of an inherently mutable cosmos composed of a multitude of competing natures and interests. Chapter 3 continues the focus on bodies in a Christian context, detailing the perspectives of converts to what I refer to in the broadest terms as "Enthusiastic Christianity," which includes both Catholic and Protestant confessions, and which I define principally in terms of the stress placed on a range of corporeal spiritual gifts as central to religious experience and practice. After offering some background on this sort of religion in the region, I focus upon its specific history in Xecul, in particular its development in the Catholic Church by way of the Charismatic Renewal and the less-studied Cursillo Movement. I consider the contours of the ontology developed by Enthusiastic Christians, particularly its stress on the body as a key tool for transcendence, and then focus on their practice, noting their role in and response to a major religious conflict that took place in Xecul in the early 2000s.

In part two, which also includes two chapters, I examine how Xeculenses have adopted approaches that, in different ways and to different ends, stress the importance of the intellect and rationality in elaborating their religious and ethnic identities. I begin, in chapter 4, with a discussion of the project of Padre Tomás, introduced above. This is a local example of an evangelization strategy referred to more broadly as "inculturation": an attempt to "Mayanize" the Catholic liturgy, seeking a rapprochement and even synthesis between an erstwhile heterodox shamanic *costumbre* and Catholic dogma. This chapter focuses on the shifting relationship between a local pastoral experience and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, and considers the way culture and ethnic identity become modern projects with varied relationships to local communities. I consider the fate of inculturation in light of an increasingly conservative Church hierarchy (at least when it comes to issues of doctrine, which "indigenous theologies" inevitably touch) and in terms of an increasingly plural local religious landscape. One of the key challenges Padre Tomás faced in his final years came from other self-identifying Maya, who seek to fully decolonize themselves from centuries of Catholic hegemony (ambivalent as that has been).

These efforts are the focus of chapter 5, which traces the rise of an antisyncretic Maya Spirituality nationally, and in terms of its impact in Xecul. While starting from a similar point in terms of its valuation of *costumbre*, the project of Maya Priests is more thorough in its purification of these practices, and represents a sophisticated and intellectualized effort to define Maya religion as a distinct and modern tradition deserving autonomy alongside other faiths in a world and nation that is routinely understood to be "multicultural." I consider the impact of this project in Xecul, and note that as with inculturation, the plural local religious landscape presents obstacles to a broad acceptance of this particular option. While both inculturation and Maya Spirituality appeal to an ethnic identity that may, on the surface at least, be claimed by virtually all Xeculenses, *costumbristas* and especially Enthusiastic Christians continue in different ways to pursue and develop lives and problems that highlight bodies over minds, expressed in both nonmodern and modern terms.

In part three, which consists of one substantive chapter, I examine the effects of migration in comparable terms, considering how transnational forces continue to complicate ethnic, religious, and local attachments. In chapter 6, after reviewing the relevant literature, I focus on the perspectives of Xeculenses on migration, considering the ways *costumbristas*, Enthusiastic Christians, and mainline Catholics (including perspectives of proponents of inculturation) view this process. I note specifically the contexts in which religious practice can offer a kind of spiritual support for migrants, and focus on the ambivalent relationship between community identity and the specific goals of migrants. I then consider the perspectives of some Xeculenses living in Southern California, including discussions on the relevance of *costumbre*, enthusiastic Christianity, and a number of religious options that are inflected with a self-conscious Maya ethnic identity. This analysis highlights the transnational channels through which both modern and nonmodern sensibilities can travel, and underscores an enduring attachment to community, despite the difficulties brought on by distance and a lack of shared copresence in creating concrete bonds of association. In the conclusion, I offer a summary of the way in which modernity, religion, and community are articulated in Xecul, and offer some reflections on the effects of a recent rise in violence and delinquency in the town.

NOTES

1. From a special publication of the national daily newspaper, *Prensa Libre*, entitled *Tradiciones*. I have no date for this publication, but I believe it is from 2000. Accessed

by Internet on the May 16, 2005, http://www.prensalibre.com/especiales/ME/tradi-ciones/t07.htm (dead link). It is unclear to me what García Escobar used as his source for this story, as it is entirely unknown to the Xeculenses I have talked to, and, indeed, given the very recent history of the church's painted façade, such a rapid mythologiz-ing would be difficult to pull off locally. As to the construction of the church, local mythology (described in chapter 2) unambiguously considers this the work of a deity named Diego Achi', not a collective of shamans, or "*brujos*."

2. For Castells (2002), cities, it seems, tend to fare better than either smaller communities or larger constellations such as the nation state, as theoretical sites of meaningful (i.e., epoch-making) human action.

3. Creating a field, it seems, is a fraught business on any score. For his part, Ulf Hannerz (2006) candidly traces the increasing migrancy and transnationalism of his own field biography as rooted not entirely in the interests of more sophisticated pro-duction of anthropological knowledge, but in the more mundane realities of academic and family life, which tend to militate against extended fieldwork of a year or more in any location.

4. Unlike Barth's (1969) classic model of ethnic boundary construction—which speci-fied contexts and some mechanisms whereby ethnicity may emerge out of (and in the process be analytically distinguished from) a broader cultural background—Barrett (2010: 118) suggests that Cohen's model tends to conflate community and culture (as well as ethnic group) as expressive sites of solidarity and meaning. Although Cohen notes his debt to Weber, Barrett (2010: 118–119) points out that Weber never stressed the expres-sive dimension of community as its key feature, seeing it instead as a site of instrumental action with all the competition and conflict one might expect in such a context.

5. Thus, while Community Studies has declined in recent decades, Ethnic Stud-ies has flourished, where it seems nonetheless that ethnicity, culture, and community persist and intermingle as "counter-Enlightenment concepts bucking the trend, driven by capitalism, towards rationality, impersonality and universality" (Barrett 2010, 115).

6. Miller and Slater's (2000) early ethnography of the Internet in Trinidad remains an insightful theoretical and methodological primer on the persistent salience of place in constructions of virtuality, reminding us that virtuality is not a property inherent to these technologies, but rather an achievement possible only by social and cultural effort, which is far from stable.

7. Amit adapts this concept from Margaret Gilbert (1994), though does not weight it with the same stress on sameness and transcendence of difference that Gilbert feels constitutes sociality.

8. Cohen's work is explicitly focused on boundaries and the limits of community, which define the nature of those who do not belong in order to establish a sense of sameness internally; Turner's work on liminality as the site of a transformative and

leveling *communitas* is explicitly concerned with exceptional circumstances, defined precisely by their distance from the quotidian, which is equated to "structure"; Anderson's work on "imagined communities" explicitly relies upon a sense of affective belonging (absent of actual social relations), which he sees as particularly meaningful in the clearly extreme context of killing and dying for one's nation (Amit 2010, 360). Amit discusses this aspect of community in more detail elsewhere (Amit and Rapport 2012: 14–27)

9. The authors are particularly critical of Carlsen's (2011) work, though they offer no direct rebuttal of his specific argument or conclusions regarding a certain continuity in indigenous cosmology through time and in different parts of Mesoamerica. Rather, it seems, the problem is that these questions are asked at all, or perhaps asked in a way that does not sufficiently emphasize a fundamental fragmentation that they view as primordial. While I am sympathetic to Hervik and Kahn's (2006: 225) suggestion that "community, continuity and resistance do not necessarily imply unity, but conflict and debate," I am less convinced that their call for "surrealism" will result in anything more than a greater understanding of some of the intellectual and aesthetic preferences of a particular moment in a particular corner of Western scholarship, as opposed to insight about other—perhaps less surreal, possibly even less beholden to modernity—ways of being human.

10. Latour (2005) has written critically on this tendency to reify abstractions like power, often at the expense of what given agents are actually doing or saying, and he traces part of this problem to the way Foucault has been received by Anglo scholars: "No one was more precise in his analytical decomposition of the tiny ingredients from which power is made and no one was more critical of social explanations. And yet, as soon as Foucault was translated, he was immediately turned into the one who had "revealed" power relations *behind* every innocuous activity: madness, natural history, sex, administration, etc. This proves again with what energy the notion of social explanation should be fought: even the genius of Foucault could not prevent such a total inversion" (Latour 2005: 301) See also Sahlins (2002: 20–23, 40–41) and Graeber (2013: 120–121)

11. Cook and Offit (2013: xix, xxv–xxvi) frame their work on fiesta culture and religious pluralism in Momostenango through a consideration of Sherry Ortner's concept of "post-communities," a concept that resonates with some of the affective aspects of community in Amit's model.

12. Warren (1998: 177–193, 202) documents generational differences between Maya activists within a single family in the town of San Andrés Semetabaj, though the differences she uncovers are read as contributing largely to what she sees as the adaptive "ideological diversity" of pan-Mayanism, seeing (problematically, I suggest) a family similarity between local-level "intellectuals" such as shamans and community leaders,

and those diverse "public intellectuals" who define the movement. Edward Fischer (1999, 2001) has been more concerned with establishing positive linkages between local and pan-Maya levels of culture and identity, seeing in both a common and Maya-specific cognitive "cultural logic"—a position with its own problems, critiqued by Charles Hale (1999) and Johannes Fabian (1999). Richard Wilson's (1995) thorough analysis of the development of a "pan-Q'eqchi" identity in the Alta Verapaz department in Guatemala, which he credits to both experiences of war and counterinsurgency and specific forms of conversion to Catholicism, provides an interesting regional contrast to the broader forms of pan-Maya organizing considered here. Although he detects something of a progressive shift away from community as the prime site of identity in this region, towards ethnicity (Q'eqchi') and class, Jon Schackt (2006) has reported on the continued salience of local identities in the region, as well as a particularly malleable view of ethnicity that includes Q'eqchi'-speaking Ladinos and Maya as sharing a regional cultural identity. He considers the impact of pan-Mayanism in this context to be limited.

13. Hale (2006: 133) provides an excellent criticism of the limits—political and academic—of framing Maya essentialism in these terms. Nelson's (1999: 249, 263–266) discussion of Maya "ethnostalgia" and the Ladino responses it has provoked provides a critique along slightly different lines.

14. Brent Metz's (2006) discussion of the development of ethnic consciousness in the Ch'orti' region is an important exception to this trend, as is Walter Little's (2004) work with Maya artisans in Antigua, which likewise highlights the tensions and ambiguities of ethnonational politics in a local context. The definitive ethnographic work dealing with the relationship between contemporary Maya ethnic politics and specific indigenous communities is, however, the landmark three-volume collection *Mayanización y vida cotidiana: La ideología multicultural en la sociedad guatemalteca*, edited by Bastos and Cumes (2007), and compiling the work of twenty eight scholars from Maya and non-Maya ethnic groups, including three North Americans. See Bastos (2012) for an English-language summary of this project. A number of the essays collected in Little and Smith's (2009) edited volume likewise contribute to this line of research.

15. In short, as Hale notes, the ambivalence is rooted in a tension between strong expressions of support for equality and ideals of multiculturalism among contemporary Ladinos, with a desire to control the process by which indigenous subjects are deemed worthy of occupying a place in the public sphere. This sort of tension emerges in a number of contexts that he documents, including discourse of "reverse racism," which accompanies a number of Ladino assessments of the (limited) rise in Maya power (Hale 2006: 111–136)

16. See also Handy (2002) and Gabbert (2006: 187; 2004: 158–159) for critical discussions of the relationship between ethnic identity and community in the context of

Maya ethnic organizing. Other recent critical work in this vein includes Bastos (2012) and Vanthuyne (2009). In MacKenzie (2010), upon which some of this discussion is drawn, I provide more detail on the ambivalence surrounding local acceptance of Maya ethnic politics in Xecul.

17. Given the length of this survey, the full questionnaire cannot be included in the present volume. Please contact the author if you wish to receive a copy of this instrument.