UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Divination and Decision-Making:

Ritual Techniques of Distributed Cognition in the Guatemalan Highlands

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

Anthropology and Cognitive Science

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Divination and Decision-Making:

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by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology and Cognitive Science

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Professor Steven Parish, Chair

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In a highland Maya divination ritual called *pajooneem* (Tz'utujil, "weighing" or "balancing"), the bright red seeds of the *tz'ite'* tree (*Erythrina corallodendron*) are utilized in conjunction with the 260-day calendar known as the *Cholq'iij* in order to involve revered "other-than-human persons" (Hallowell 2002) in a decision-making activity. The *tz'ite'* seeds serve as "mediating artifacts" (Hutchins 1995:292) that help to coordinate various elements in an "ecology of mind" (Bateson 2000). In particular, the *tz'ite'* seeds serve as "material anchors" (Hutchins 2005) when, during the

divination, they are grouped into clusters to stand-in for the days of the *Cholq'iij* calendar. In this "conceptual blend" (Fauconnier and Turner 2002) the clusters of seeds come to embody the days of the *Cholq'iij*. Since there are twenty distinct days in this calendar, each of which pairs with the numbers one through thirteen in the course of the 260-day cycle, the combinatorial possibilities present a clear challenge to working memory. The use of material anchors facilitates the manipulation of representations in a complex "traffic of signs" (Peirce, et al. 1982) or "semiotic ecology" (Lang 1993).

The use of objects in this ritual also helps to make the decision-making activity public and visible; this public status, coupled with a "suppression of intention" typical of the divination process itself (Du Bois 1993), further distributes the agency of the decision among the interacting elements coordinated by the ritual. This distribution of agency lessens the "normative load" on the individuals involved and invests the decision with institutional authority.

Using interview transcripts, photos, and video analysis, I consider the ways that *tz'ite'* seeds mediate cognition with a spotlight on their role in decision-making practices. Ultimately, this represents a cultural practice that is far more typical than commonly appreciated: People involve themselves in each other's decision-making and judgment via an assemblage of intersubjective and interobjective structuration processes fostered by material objects. This investigation has relevance for discussions of materiality in anthropology, distributed cognition in cognitive science, active externalism in philosophy, and emphasizes the importance of studying ritual as a

dynamical system; that is, identifying the reciprocally causal relationships among the people, places, objects, and signs, an approach I have entitled “ritual ecology.”

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

How does a person's culture help one navigate the shoals of crisis and misfortune, to make decisions when we feel least capable of doing so? As the philosopher Kim Sterelny observed: "human life is one long decision tree" (2006:219). Faced with options, dilemmas, and awash in uncertainty, each culture offers techniques and institutions to help people decide a course of action in spite of limited information. Consulting diviners is one such decision-making practice found the world over. Using ritual language and techniques, the diviner seeks counsel with gods, ancestors, or simply with "the oracle" itself in order to gain information and guidance about the past, present, or future. What do one's gods and ancestors—through the medium of divination—have to say about moving forward in the face of uncertainty? I address these issues in this study of ritual and cognition, of divination and decision-making. The goals of the study include: (1) Determining why people seek out diviners for decision-making purposes; and (2) Determining how divination enacts decision-making.

It was among the Tz'utujils, primarily, as well as the K'iche's and Kaqchikels—Maya groups who live in Guatemala's western highlands—that I performed these investigations of ritualized decision-making. While divinatory practices rarely exist in isolation (once the underlying assumptions are operative, various means of implementing divination become possible), I have addressed one particular ritual—*tz'ite'* seed divination—at length. *Tz'ite'* seed divination, a central divinatory practice

among these groups, overflows with significance since it is, at once, a religious ritual and an intersubjective cognitive event.

Why did this form of divination become my focus? First, it remains popular among a variety of groups in the Guatemalan highlands. Second, *tz'ite'* seed divination has been studied by various ethnographers throughout the 20th century, providing a rich corpus of comparative data for consideration. I undertook my project with the aim of extending this prior work while seeking to produce a synthetic account of *tz'ite'* seed divination as a decision-making practice.

In addressing my research questions, I utilized two primary methodological orientations. The first, anchored in the methods of person-centered interviewing (Levy and Hollan 1998; Parish 2008), helped to clarify the reasons people seek out diviners for decision-making purposes. Second, a comparative approach in which I interviewed numerous diviners served to elucidate the mechanisms of these ritual decision-making practices.

Theoretical Background

By investigating a decision-making practice *in context* (Mesquita, et al. 2010) this ethnography aims to provide a naturalistic account of decision-making that highlights the contingencies of making decisions in real life situations, in "culturally constituted behavioral environments" (Hallowell 1955). In sum, this is an exploration of "cognition in the wild," to use Hutchins's term (1995), in contrast to a study of "domesticated cognition" which emerges, necessarily, from the highly constrained

environments of most experimental studies of decision-making. However, researchers too often forget that human action in those contexts is anything but "normal." Indeed, studying human decision-making in laboratory settings is like conducting ethological research at the zoo: useful and available, but potentially quite different from the sorts of behaviors enacted in the wild. Studying humans in labs or animals in zoos relies on a central assumption in the Western philosophical tradition; namely, the privileging of the individual organism over the group and other contextual features; this is an "inside-out" psychology in that cognition is presumed to take place only in the head. In contrast, this study grounds itself in recent theories about human cognition that support an "outside-in" psychology (e.g. Gibson 1979; Hutchins 1995; Stewart, et al. 2010). As such, the present study aspires to higher "ecological validity."

The term ecological validity refers to whether a psychological finding is representative of more *typical* settings and conditions (Cole, et al. 1994; Neisser 1976). Cole defines it as "the extent to which behavior indicative of cognitive functioning sampled in one environment can be taken as characteristic of an individual's cognitive processes in a range of other environments" (1999:257). By and large, ethnographic studies suffer from the opposite problem. Ethnographic studies can potentially reveal something of the "larger patterns of life" (Brunswik 1943:262) since one is studying human action with as much appreciation of context as possible; indeed, one is studying "the phenomenon itself," potentially with little or no intervention on the part of the researcher. But this leaves the analyst uncertain about generalizing claims from that cultural setting to a cross-cultural setting, a mainstay assumption, and potential downfall, of the particularistic approaches popular in anthropology. The present study

can make no claims of resolving this impasse, but by performing an interdisciplinary study of decision-making it aims to demonstrate the merit of aggregating more traditional psychological studies of decision-making with ethnographic ones in order to yield new insights of potential benefit to both psychology (or cognitive science) and anthropology. Additionally, by investigating decision-making with something more of an "outside-in" sensibility, this study hopes to show that decision-making may be as much about the setting or cultural practice as it is about "the individual mind." Indeed, Egon Brunswik's (1943:263) suggestion to perform psychological studies of "situations or tasks" seems to share this sensibility. By looking to particular cultural practices, such as divinatory decision-making, researchers may discern aspects of decision-making not revealed via other methods, especially those features of "cultural cognition" that experimentalists typically work hard to exclude from the experimental setting.

Though this research is informed by scientific theories, methods, and sensibilities throughout, it endeavors to study "cognition" as a theoretical and methodological facet of human action more generally. The reification of "decision-making" as an analytic unit of psychology, or perhaps a sort of psychological "natural kind" (see Hacking 2007) too often supports inferences about the *separation* of reason from emotion, or mind from body (e.g. Plato 1961). By more carefully looking at cultural decision-making practices, many of these former divisions recede since decision emerges from reason *and* emotion, mind *and* body, thus potentially weakening long entrenched dualisms.

Due to methodological assumptions, particularly "methodological individualism" (Weber 1922/1968), most psychological research has been pursued in

artificial settings. These studies tend to be highly constrained, brief, and isolated from the normal flow of life's events (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Moreover, they typically rely on subjects who may not represent the wider population (Henrich, et al. 2010). Utilizing methods that abstract the human being from context as much as possible, psychologists have sought to objectively study cognition by fragmenting it—like light through a prism—into its smallest coherent units (e.g. perception, cognition, emotion, memory, decision-making). By adopting a dependent-independent variable framework and implementing sophisticated technologies, experimental psychologists have sought to measure, control, and constrain cognition so as to investigate it analytically rather than holistically. In spite of these potential limitations, this approach remains a powerful and productive paradigm. Nevertheless, results of laboratory studies need to be examined more critically (e.g. Collaboration 2015), especially in light of the critiques offered regarding ecological validity. At the very least, anthropologically-grounded and cross-cultural studies need to be incorporated more centrally into basic psychological research (Cole 1996) in order better to "flesh out" laboratory findings, returning them to the real world of human bodies in action that they hope to inform. A new generation of cognitive scientists are developing research programs that aim for improved ecological validity, even while acknowledging the challenges of studying behavior in naturalistic settings (Bender and Beller 2011; Roepstorff and Frith 2012; Ross and Medin 2011; Xygalatas 2013).

Though these are contemporary debates, the idea of altering experimental methods to enhance ecological validity goes back many decades. As aforementioned, Brunswik (1943) proposed that situations or tasks, rather than individuals, ought to be

the basic analytic units for psychological research. Many later thinkers would agree with Brunswik's observations and argue that psychological research in naturalistic settings needs to be central, rather than peripheral, to the study of human cognition (e.g. Lave 1988). But even when researchers study things like decision-making in naturalistic settings, there tends to be an emphasis on the individual as the sole engine of cognition. Using Brunswik's insight—about the proper unit of analysis being the task rather than any single element required for the accomplishment of that task—researchers need to expand their purview to include the way that a wide variety of resources come to be coordinated for the accomplishment of cognition (see Hutchins 1995).

Many of the methods, models, and structures that limit contemporary approaches to human cognition relate to assumptions about the mind more generally. Eleanor Rosch discusses the kind of epistemological frameworks that inhibit present approaches:

> There is a standard classical portrait of the relation of mind to environment in much of modern psychology, cognitive science, biology, and common sense. It may be called the Cartesian vision. Inside the mind is the thinking, attending, perceiving, feeling, desiring, reasoning, choosing subject; outside is the rest of the world that acts both as stimulus for the mind and as the recipient of its eventual actions. The hallmark of this view is that the mind, with its basic mechanisms, and the world, with its information and its potential for the survival or destruction of that mind, are inherently different and separate entities and should be treated as such by theorist and experimenter. (1996:3)

To perform a coherent investigation of relevance to cognition, a researcher needs to align a theory of mind with a, typically pre-established, methodology. As Rosch explains: "If the mind (however that is operationally defined) is conceived as different

and separate from environmental context, then it makes sense to seek to study its basic mechanisms in as controlled and decontextualized a laboratory setting as possible" (1996:3). Given entrenched ideas about psychophysical dualism in European metaphysics (McGraw 2004; McGraw 2012), it is not surprising that a separation from context and setting would be the dominant approach to the study of mind. But a great deal of research indicates that traditional notions of mind (and thus of psychological methodology) may be fundamentally inaccurate (e.g. Kelso 1995; Neisser 1976; Stewart, et al. 2010; Varela, et al. 1992). As always, theory and practice reciprocally influence one another. Our practices *can* change when alternate theories supplant hegemonic ones (see Foucault 1972; Foucault 1973; Kuhn 1970). To improve ecological validity, then, it is necessary to do more than simply perform experiments in more naturalistic settings; in addition, a non-Cartesian approach to the "ecology of mind" (Bateson 1972) needs to be employed in the design of research, in the kinds of observations made, and in the review of data from those observations.

Clifford Geertz discussed the need for an "outdoor psychology" which would attend to the interaction of social structure and context for psychological processes (1983:153). Responding to this call, researchers like Jean Lave attempted to "move the investigation of 'cognition' outdoors in several senses: out of the laboratory, out of the head, out of a confusion with a rationalistic 'culture,' out of conflation with conventional 'knowledge structures,' and out of the role of order-producing, primary constraint on activity in the world" (1988:189). These are radical, and ambitious, innovations that promise to create as many new mysteries and problems as they hope

to solve. But as the field has developed, along with its theories and methods, it has been accompanied by noteworthy efforts to improve ecological validity.

The most reasonable approach in the present climate is to acknowledge the utility of multiple methodologies (i.e. interdisciplinary research) for the study of cognition, appreciating how a variety of theories and methods, when performed well, may reveal different aspects and features of human cognition. One might think of them as different sensory modalities; while each stream of information may come from the same stimulus (e.g. one's friend), one does not expect to learn visual information through one's ears or auditory information through one's tongue. There should be cooperation ("binding"), rather than competition or exclusion, among those disciplines that share topics of inquiry. In *Culture and Inference*, Hutchins suggests that some research problems have to do more with academic distinctions than anything else:

> Given the traditional boundaries of the academic disciplines, it is easy to see why anthropologists would like to study cultural beliefs without having to worry about psychological processes and why psychologists would like to study cognitive processes without reference to specific cultural beliefs. But to do either of these is to miss much of what cognition is about. The fact that the study of either representation or process really does require the study of the other is one of the best reasons I can think of for taking an interdisciplinary approach. (1980:11)

Modern technologies may help to bridge these academic divides. Greatly improved communication and information technologies make interacting with colleagues from different backgrounds and institutions easier, and less expensive, than ever. It is just such collaborations that will enable research programs of increasing scope and complexity to develop (e.g. Henrich, et al. 2001). Rather than competing for limited resources or opposing complementary methods, researchers ought to acknowledge that

"…cognitive psychologists examine trees and cognitive anthropologists contemplate forests" (Boster 2011:144). An improved knowledge of "cognitive ecology" (Hutchins 2010) cannot be had by studying one (the forest or the tree) to the exclusion of the other.

Decision-making has been studied chiefly through cognitive psychology which conceives decision-making to be an individual, and internal, procedure of discursive thought (see Edwards 1954; Gigerenzer 2007; Simon 1996). The person, as "information processor," gathers sufficient data to make an informed decision, deliberates using some calculus (e.g. cost-benefit analysis), and decides exclusively on that basis. In "The Role of Cultural Practices in the Evolution of Modern Human Intelligence," Hutchins observes that:

> …high-level cognitive outcomes emerge from the orchestration of the elements of distributed cognitive systems by cultural practices. This fact also implies that we must be careful when attributing cognitive processes to individuals who are engaged in cultural practices. There is a danger of attributing to the individual cognitive properties that belong to the larger distributed system. (2008:2011)

Taking this insight into account, it would seem that decision-making is always influenced by its context, its surround. Among other things, this means that cultural practices and the "mindshaping" accomplished through enculturation (Zawidzki 2013), should not be taken to reveal anything "essential" about human cognition that would apply to all people in all times and places, except that they are "cultural beings." Even when psychologists attempt to constrain context effects and reduce confounds, the "environment" (physical, social, historical, et cetera) always goes into the framing and enactment of decision-making as, indeed, there is no way to ultimately exclude such influences (see Roepstorff and Frith 2004).

Findings about decision-making that come from cognitive psychology convey assumptions and artifacts in spite of all intentions to reduce such effects. It is the environment, first and foremost, that enabled the human mind to emerge as a phylogenetic development of primate cognition and an ontogenetic development of human-environmental interactions (McGraw, et al. 2014). Consequently, human cognition must be investigated as particular *patterns of emergence* between and among human actors and the wide-variety of social and material influences continuously shaping and influencing those actors; to return to the beginning, cognition and context are inseparable. There is no principled distinction to be made between Descartes's *res cogitans* and *res extensa* (Theiner 2011), unless one stipulates such an assumption and builds from it axiomatically the way one might extrapolate an entire geometry from a few elemental assumptions, for instance (Euclid 1926). But the domination of deduction over induction has long since expired. If anything, science is built upon the reverse, typically constructed piecemeal from demonstrations and case-based reasoning over and against intricately balanced, and frequently updated, structures of deductive logic (see Dewey 1910:79-100). In sum, induction is the engine of science and the ground from which deduction may emerge. Subsequently, it is from studying varied instances of situated decision-making practices that a naturalistic science of decision-making may ensue.

By employing methodological individualism as a preliminary assumption in the construction of an experiment, cognitive psychology necessarily prejudices its research; such experiments will necessarily reveal aspects and features of individual decision-making in a sort of *behavioral vacuum* that rarely exists in real world situations. Given

this model, everything interesting occurs in the person's head. In reality, though, even when investigating individual decision-making, it becomes clear that decisions typically involve consultations with others and make use of a wide variety of culturally mediated decision-making techniques (e.g. buying the cheapest one, choosing the political candidate who expresses the most similar religious values, flipping a coin, et cetera). Though it would seem, at first glance, that such practices are eminently personal, in fact, they are taught and encouraged by the person's culture(s). The application of a cultural practice to a personal decision does not make that decision *more* personal than cultural: the sets of influences are irreducible once they are fused in action. Whatever agency is exercised by the person is framed, made sensible, and rendered optimal or suboptimal by culturally constituted practices, just as is every other structured human action (Bourdieu 1990; Giddens 1984; Parsons 1949).

In philosophical circles recently, a flurry of discussions around the topic of externalism (e.g. Menary 2010) challenge the assumption of bounded, individual minds that has been foregrounded at least since the Enlightenment (see Taylor 1989). Andy Clark has referred to the mind as "leaky," meaning that the boundaries between mind and world, once thought to be solid and fixed, are porous enough to let cognitive processes—here conveyed by a fluid metaphor—leak into and out of minds (or, bodies) (Clark and Chalmers 1998). Similarly, difficult decisions are not easily contained; they tend to rupture the thin seals that would keep them internal to the individual alone and leak out into the community of friends, family, and counselors, where they properly belong. The "work" of decision-making is typically distributed in systems rather than in individual minds. According to Clark's theories, even the term "individual mind"

would be a contradiction in terms. Resources, both internal and external to the individual, are coordinated in a way that diminishes, or should diminish, the importance of such distinctions as inside/outside and individual/society (Thompson 2007). Discussions about externalism indicate how mind is probably best understood as more than the activity of the brain alone (e.g. "mind is what brain does"). Rather, brains participate in cognitive ecosystems whose continuously interacting components produce mind. A brain is necessary for an individual to become "enminded," but a brain by itself is not a sufficient condition for mind (Fuchs 2011). A brain must develop in a body which must develop in a culture in order to enact thought, speak language, decide among options, and participate in society. The individual always coordinates her actions and thoughts with a variety of interactive agents or "actants" (Latour 2005). Just as an organism is a mere abstraction apart from its environment and the ecological relationships that produce and sustain it, so is deriving all, or even most, human cognition from the individual brain in separation from body and environment patently missing the mark.

Distributed Cognition

My interest in the study of cultural cognition derives from theories about "distributed cognition" (Cole and Engeström 1993; Hardy-Vallée and Payette 2008; Hutchins 1995; Sutton 2006). Throughout this dissertation, I argue that decision-making accomplished through divination can be better understood using the theoretical framework of distributed cognition and related methodologies, such as cognitive ethnography. Instead of the individual abstractly considering different possibilities and

using some form of subjective evaluation to choose between them, divination employs special techniques, tools, and expert knowledge to enact the decision. In the end, decisions are made by the "system" that emerges from the interacting clients, diviners, and ritual practices—the cognition is literally distributed among these components and even between them in the form of latent relationships (e.g. in "transactive memory systems" Wegner 1986).

Distributed cognition is, above all, a "systems approach" to the study of cognition. One of the forerunners of these stances, Gregory Bateson, addressed the need for just such an approach in a 1971 article when he wrote:

> The basic rule of systems theory is that, if you want to understand some phenomenon or appearance, you must consider that phenomenon within the context of all *completed* circuits which are relevant to it. The emphasis is on the concept of the completed communicational circuit and implicit in the theory is the expectation that all units containing completed circuits will show mental characteristics. The mind, in other words, is immanent in the circuitry. We are accustomed to thinking of the mind as somehow contained within the skin of an organism, but the circuitry is *not* contained within the skin. (242)

Observations like this are coming to be made by a growing number of thinkers (see Clark 2008). Those interested in distributed cognition are taking such theoretical pointers and operationalizing them in the study of cognitive ecology (Friedman and Carterette 1996; Hutchins 2010). By carefully tracking "what information goes where, when, and under what conditions" (Hutchins 2000), distributed cognition aims to enlarge the theoretical and experimental paradigm for studying mind. It is the functional relationships among different elements, rather than the nature of the elements themselves, that accomplishes cognition. This appreciation for systems theory leads to an altogether different notion of mind. Brian Hazlehurst asserts that three notions frame

the distributed cognition model of mind: "(1) cognition is built out of interactions among structures providing the building blocks for information-processing that supports organized behavior; (2) these interactions (instances of processes which employ and create structures) are not limited to events internal to agents, but distributed across diverse media, social space, and time; and (3) culture is itself such a process, generating many of the structures and processes constituting human cognition" (2011:472). A concise summary, this understanding of mind permits an appreciation of things that are often overlooked or judged extraneous to cognition. Distributed cognition permits an account of the way in which people, artifacts, and cultural practices interact in, and indeed emerge from, systems. The present study will attempt to demonstrate the merits of this approach.

One aspect of distributed cognition particularly relevant for the study of divination is the notion of "mediating structures," including "mediating artifacts" (Hutchins 1995). Mediating structures include a variety of resources (e.g. cultural practices, the cerebellum, a tradition of reading and writing) required for a cognitive task, while mediating artifacts more specifically include a variety of extrasomatic media including charts, calculators, notebooks, slide rules, and dice. When organized in a "decision ecosystem," mediating structures do not simply aid decision-making but are an integral part of the process. In most cases, mediating structures enable and direct the traffic of activity and information between people (e.g. conventionalized rules and codes), but they also perform essential, irreducible functions in the cognitive ecosystem (see Hutchins 1980:290).

Conceiving of divination as a form of distributed decision-making offers a new perspective on an important ritual practice. People routinely making decisions by being involved in, or constructing, distributed decision-making systems. Divination is one such system but there are many other such systems, including juries, councils, committees, battlefields, and workplaces, among others. When these kinds of systems are carefully described (e.g. Latour 1996a), they facilitate the breakdown of the structure/agency dichotomy (Giddens 1979). If basic aspects of cognition, like decision-making, typically occur as culturally constituted assemblages of people and things then agency and structure begin to fall away as rigid distinctions or "poles," supplanted instead by myriad underspecified processes of "structuration" (Giddens 1984) that require further study and characterization.

The Ecological Perspective

Throughout this dissertation I will make a strong analogy between the science of ecology and the study of cognition, ritual, and decision-making. Like the study of ecology, this perspective includes an appreciation for the way that the organic and the inorganic interact to sustain life itself: "Ecosystems are the results of physical, chemical, and biotic components of nature acting together in a structurally and functionally organized system. Ecology is the science of how these living and nonliving components function together in nature" (Mainzer 2007:112). Hutchins developed the notion of cognitive ecology as "the study of cognitive phenomena in context" and derivative of a set of approaches that "view organism-environment relations in terms of coupling, coordination, emergence, and self-organization rather

than the transduction of information across a barrier" (2010:705). The ecological perspective promoted here adopts an epistemology from "dynamical systems" in that *patterns of interactions* hold at least as much importance as the varied components in those interactions (Haken 1984; Kelso 1995; Stephen and Van Orden 2011). For example, cognition readily incorporates resources from within the organism as well as environmental structures outside of the organism (Hirose 2011; McGraw 2015; Tylén and McGraw 2014) which demonstrates the ability of a cognitive ecosystem to reconstruct itself, drawing from the contingent resources of the immediate environment, in order to optimally adapt to the setting. And whereas a mechanical system (e.g. a clock) requires precise parameters in order to work, and does not tolerate aberration well (i.e. it does not "adapt"), an ecosystem is a set of "complex adaptive systems" (Capra and Luisi 2014; Holland 1992); alteration of conditions, transformation of componentry, and reciprocal forms of causality lie at the center of ecological relations.

Variance and change must be appreciated as fundamental to cognition as modeled by the ecological perspective, since variation and change are inherent to complex adaptive systems. Modeling a cultural phenomenon too rigidly, denying or negating its dynamical aspects (its transformations over time and place), is likely to be inaccurate given the assumptions and entailments of the ecological perspective. As in studies of dynamical systems, it is imperative to avoid identifying the necessary as the sufficient. In dynamical systems, causes cannot be neatly isolated to one component decoupled from its interactive partners. In fact, the reciprocal causality of interactions assures that causality is distributed among systemic components and conditions in such a way that considering one thing to "cause" another ends up being explanatorily

inadequate (see Juarrero 1999). Rather, one must determine conditions of necessity and sufficiency in developing causal explanations.

The analytic method of fixing and studying a part, or a particular process, is only useful to the degree that one remembers to put that part back into the whole from which it was abstracted. If one mistakes the part for the whole then a grave, but all too common, error is repeated. Similarly, ritual is often investigated using a particularizing paradigm; one scholar will write of ritual as social transformation, another of ritual as symbol, yet another of ritual as performance (Bell 2009). While it is important to see each of these features of ritual when salient, it is more important to appreciate how ritual may enact numerous properties and functions dependent on timing and conditions. Ritual should be investigated foremost as a set of ecological relations between such phenomena (McGraw and Krátký in press) rather than through a particularizing paradigm, theory, or model; a process is relevant or irrelevant in relation to the processes which subsume it, which is to say that as conditions change, so may cultural forms, including rituals, change. For instance, divination is not *a* decision-making practice, as if it were exhaustible by that description, for though it *may be* a decision-making practice, given some conditions, it may accomplish a variety of other tasks and functions (e.g. demonstration or diagnosis) depending on the circumstances, from the emic perspective, or theoretical orientation, from the etic perspective. Moreover, if it enacts and performs decision-making, it does so only in relation to the sociocultural contexts in which that function is sensible and legitimate (e.g. the U.S. Congress is unlikely to return to the use of auguries which once played such an important role in Republican Rome).

The ecological paradigm utilizes analytic methods in characterizing parts of a system but pays special attention to the ways in which the whole system may alter itself, reconstruct itself with different components, and generally achieve a similar function without ever being assembled, or enacted, the same way twice. *Tz'ite'* seed divination provides an excellent case study for this approach as it can be studied as a religious ritual, an intersubjective event, a decision-making activity, a flow of signs, and a sequence of public actions. As with an ecosystem, this ritual is composed of a series of relationships. Sometimes these relationships rely on particular objects, sometimes on particular actions, but alterations may occur in which something that at first seemed essential may be replaced or ignored while the system continues to function much as before.

Fieldwork

Having been awarded a Summer Foreign Language and Area Studies (S-FLAS) fellowship in the spring of 2007, my investigations of Tz'utujil culture began that summer, July through August, when I studied the Tz'utujil language in San Pedro La Laguna, the second largest Tz'utujil community. Though I kept alert for a topic that would bring together my interests in religion and cognition, I did not have the idea of investigating divination until the end of that summer. This idea emerged gradually as my language teacher brought me into various situations in which divination was practiced. Surely, one measure of the importance of divination in any context is the variety of methods employed. During the summer of 2007, I noted four types of divination—and this without intentionally researching the topic. It was the diversity

and popularity of these practices which forced me to pay attention and wonder about their significance. By the end of that summer, I had observed a fire ceremony (which is often employed, as it was in this case, for divination), a divination by flowers, a *tz'ite* seed divination, and a "pulsing" divination in which the diviner gains information by palpating the client's forearms and hands. The following academic year I put together my research proposal and applied for additional funding. With the financial support of another S-FLAS fellowship and a departmental grant (F.G. Bailey Fellowship), I returned to San Pedro La Laguna in July 2008 to initiate thirteen months of fieldwork.

Having made important introductions the prior summer, it was not difficult to expand my network of contacts. I asked the people I met about their knowledge of and feelings about traditional ritual practices, many of which have undergone change since the rise of the Maya movement (Cook, et al. 2013; Fischer 1996). The Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala (ALMG), a state funded institution that promotes indigenous languages and cultures, was particularly helpful. Each ethnolinguistic community in Guatemala is allotted one ALMG office, typically in its largest community. But, instead of situating this office in Santiago Atitlán (pop. ~40,000), the Tz'utujil "capital," the Tz'utujil ALMG office is based in San Pedro La Laguna (pop. ~13,000).

Friends and informants that I had gotten to know the summer of 2007, many of whom were affiliated with ALMG in one way or another, began to invite me on a regular basis to fire ceremonies (the most common ritual I witnessed during my ethnographic studies) as well as to other meetings that introduced me to various aspects of local culture, politics, and history.



Figure 1.1: The northern entrance to San Pedro La Laguna

My most frequent interactions with Tz'utujil ritual specialists (sing. *ajq'iij*, pl. *ajq'ijaa'*)[1] took place in the adjacent community of San Juan La Laguna. Two *ajq'ijaa'* there were especially important for my studies. Unfortunately, neither was comfortable with me attending *tz'ite'* seed divinations performed for their clients, except in those cases when the clients were friends of mine and had given permission for me to attend. The Tz'utujil diviners were particularly wary of offending the occult powers and determined that filming any *tz'ite'* seed consultations ran such a risk, though they were

[1] Throughout this dissertation, I have adopted the orthography promoted by the Tz'utujil chapter of the Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala.

comfortable talking at length about this form of divination, as well as many other topics regarding ritual, religion, and Maya "*cosmovisión*," translatable, for the most part, as "world view" (Redfield and Villa Rojas 1962). The K'iche' ritual specialists whom I consulted did not have the same concerns regarding video, so I was able to film various divination sessions with them.

In addition to observing some of my friends' divination sessions, I also had numerous divinations performed for my own purposes to better appreciate this form of divination as a participant-observer. All the questions and concerns I took to diviners were authentic ones. I do not pretend my own case studies to be the same as those performed for locals, but I do believe the sessions I elicited had enough of a resemblance to typical consultations that they may serve as sources for review and comparison, particularly as they helped me to understand the details of these divinatory practices.

By the end of my thirteen month period of fieldwork in 2008-2009, I had consulted a variety of diviners, chiefly Tz'utujil, but also K'iche' and Kaqchikel (on the advice of the Tz'utujil *ajq'iij* that I consulted most frequently), about their beliefs and practices. I had also interviewed numerous people who frequented these ritual specialists. During that period, I filmed seven *tz'ite'* seed divination sessions and twenty three fire ceremonies. Additionally, I made audio recordings of fifty four interviews and wrote copious field notes. All of this provided me with a holistic sense (see Packer 2011) of the kinds of practices, concerns, and events that go into contemporary Maya spirituality, a term used by many of these practitioners for their rituals and beliefs, some of which are quite traditional, some of which are more recent

developments (see Cook, et al. 2013; Cuma Chávez 2005; Hart 2008; MacKenzie 2005; Molesky-Poz 2006).

Fieldsite

The word "Tz'utujil" refers to the tassel, or flower, of the adult maize plant (Orellana 1984). Though Tz'utujils once controlled the entire region around Lake Atitlán from their capital at Chuitinamit/Chiya' (near present-day Santiago Atitlán), the Kaqchikels competed with them to take over the eastern side of the lake (Quiacaín 2009). This division of the lake remains the same today.

The Tz'utujil have lived around Lake Atitlán for centuries, but the *Memorial de Sololá* suggests that they were pioneers to the area, perhaps establishing their highland kingdoms in the mid-13th century (Orellana 1984:36; Recinos 1988). Having originated in an area near the Gulf of Mexico under the auspices of a great kingdom on the "other side of the sea" called Tula, K'iche's, Kaqchikels, and Tz'utujils were given authority by Tulan leaders to establish kingdoms in these highland regions (Orellana 1984; Recinos 1988).

One after another, these groups paid tribute to the court at Tula and were given commissions, as well as idols and other symbols of authority, so that they could reign over these far off lands (see Christenson 2007:238-244). Departing from Tula, the Tz'utujils journeyed south and finally established their center at Chuitinamit/Chiya' (near present-day Santiago Atitlán), the K'iche's' capital was built at Q'umarkaj (near present-day Santa Cruz del Quiché, and the Kaqchikels' at Iximché (near present-day Tecpán). This establishment of Tz'utujil rule at Chuitinamit/Chiya' actually consisted

of two ruling lineages, the Tz'utujil and the Tziquinajay, who often competed for dominance (Orellana 1984:46-47). Such rifts were common in these highland kingdoms which led to an uneasy balance of truces between various factions and their supporters.

Chuitinamit/Chiya' was conquered by Pedro de Alvarado with the aid of Tlaxcalan and Kaqchikel warriors in 1524 (Orellana 1984; Recinos 1988:57-63). With the Spanish conquest of the indigenous kingdoms, everything rapidly changed. The Spanish reorganized social structures, disrupted traditional religious practices, concentrated populations around town centers, and began siphoning off tribute from these centers (Carmack, et al. 1982). The introduction of European pathogens to the area decimated local populations (Early 1970; Winkler, et al. 2013). In sum, the first century of Spanish colonialism in the Guatemalan highlands brought radical change to the indigenous ways of life (Aguirre 1972; Early 2006).

As the sixth largest Maya community in Guatemala, Tz'utujils have received less attention from social scientists than other Maya groups in Guatemala and Mexico. The Tz'utujils (~100,000) make up about two percent of the indigenous Mayas (~4,400,000) of Guatemala, a country of 14,400,000 people; the largest Maya ethnolinguistic group, the K'iche', has around 1,260,000 members, in comparison (CIA 2013; Estadística 2013).

The Guatemalan highlands experienced unprecedented population growth in the latter half of the twentieth century. The total population around Lake Atitlán, for instance, is approximately 200,000 people now. This population figure has more than sextupled since the 1930s (Tax 1937) and was probably much lower before that time.

Guatemala has had one of the consistently highest birth rates in the western hemisphere throughout the twentieth century, in spite of rampant poverty, significant emigration, a variety of natural disasters, and the decades-long civil war that ended in 1996 (CIA 2013).

There are seven predominantly Tz'utujil communities in the departments of Sololá and Suchitepéquez: Santiago Atitlán (Tz'utujil name, *Tz'ikin Jaay*), San Pedro La Laguna (*Tz'unun Ya'*), San Juan La Laguna (*Xe' Kuku' Aab'aj*), San Pablo La Laguna (*Tok'or Juyu'*), Santa María Visitación (*Tz'ujki Ya' Juyu'*), San Miguel Panán (*Ponom*), and Chicacao (*Chi' Kokow*) (see Tz'utujil 2007:18-19). Santiago Atitlán is the largest Tz'utujil town with around 40,000 inhabitants. It is also closest to the pre-colonial capital of this group at Chuitinamit/Chiya'. San Pedro La Laguna has a population of 13,000 people. The other five towns have Tz'utujil populations ranging from two to ten thousand (see Quiacaín 2009).

San Pedro La Laguna

San Pedro La Laguna was founded in its present location by Fray Pedro de Betanzos in 1547 (Aguirre 1972:52). It lies on the western shore of Lake Atitlán which has shaped who the Tz'utujils are and what they do. The lake resulted from the collapse of an immense magma chamber. It is 5300 feet above sea level and approximately fifteen kilometers wide (Orellana 1984). The total watershed area of the lake is approximately 550 square kilometers, while the lake itself has an area of about 130 square kilometers, as well as an average depth of 190 meters. The lake has been an important source of fish and other aquatic life for peoples of the region but stocks of

fish are now much depleted as the populations around Lake Atitlán have grown well beyond the carrying capacity of the local ecology.

San Pedro is spread out at the base of an inactive volcano, also named San Pedro, which looms over it. Two other volcanoes, of even greater size, lie just behind Santiago Atitlán. Noting the configuration of these three volcanoes, Karen Bassie-Sweet (2008) believes the area may have held special significance to the ancient Maya as a terrestrial manifestation of the three stones that delimit the traditional Maya hearth; a key symbol of Mesoamerican identity for millennia. The climate of the area is subtropical and pleasant throughout the year though a long rainy season accentuates the risk of landslides in the area; these have gotten more numerous as a rapidly growing population denudes ever more of the steep slopes above them to meet their needs for maize and firewood. Roads are routinely washed out during this time of year (approximately May through October) leaving people isolated for days, and even weeks, at a time.

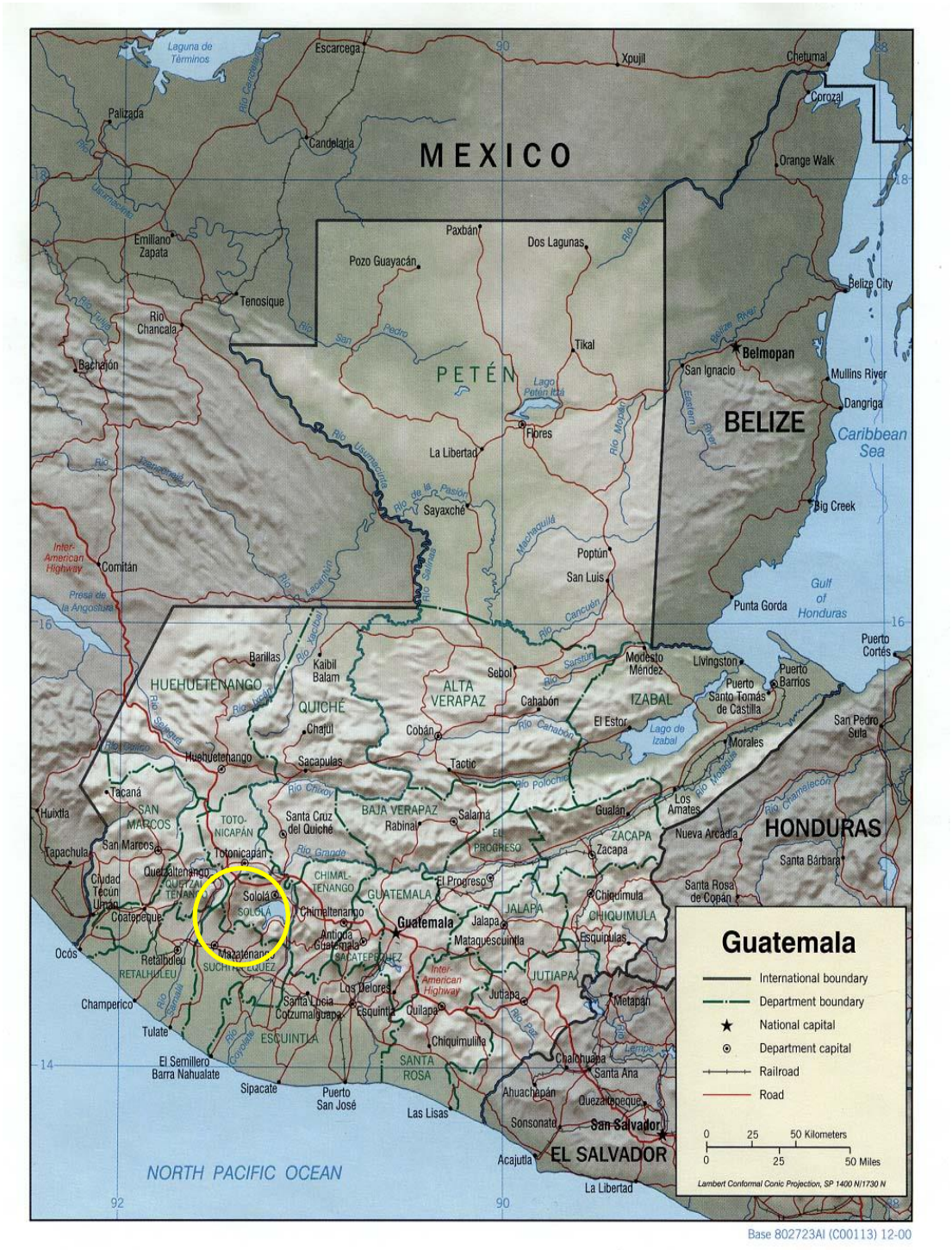
When the rain is not falling, the green ridges and volcanoes gradually turn brown. During this period, maize completes its growing cycle; people usually harvest it between December and January. Coffee, an important source of income since being introduced to the area in 1962 (Paul 1968:99), grows more rapidly; cultivators sometimes squeeze in two harvests during the year. But by May, just as the plants have become withered and brown and the soil bone dry, the rain begins to fall and continues to do so, almost every day (for a few hours a day), until October.

Shortly after I departed the area in August 2009, a terrible new challenge visited the lake and its inhabitants: an algal bloom proliferated as never before, ultimately

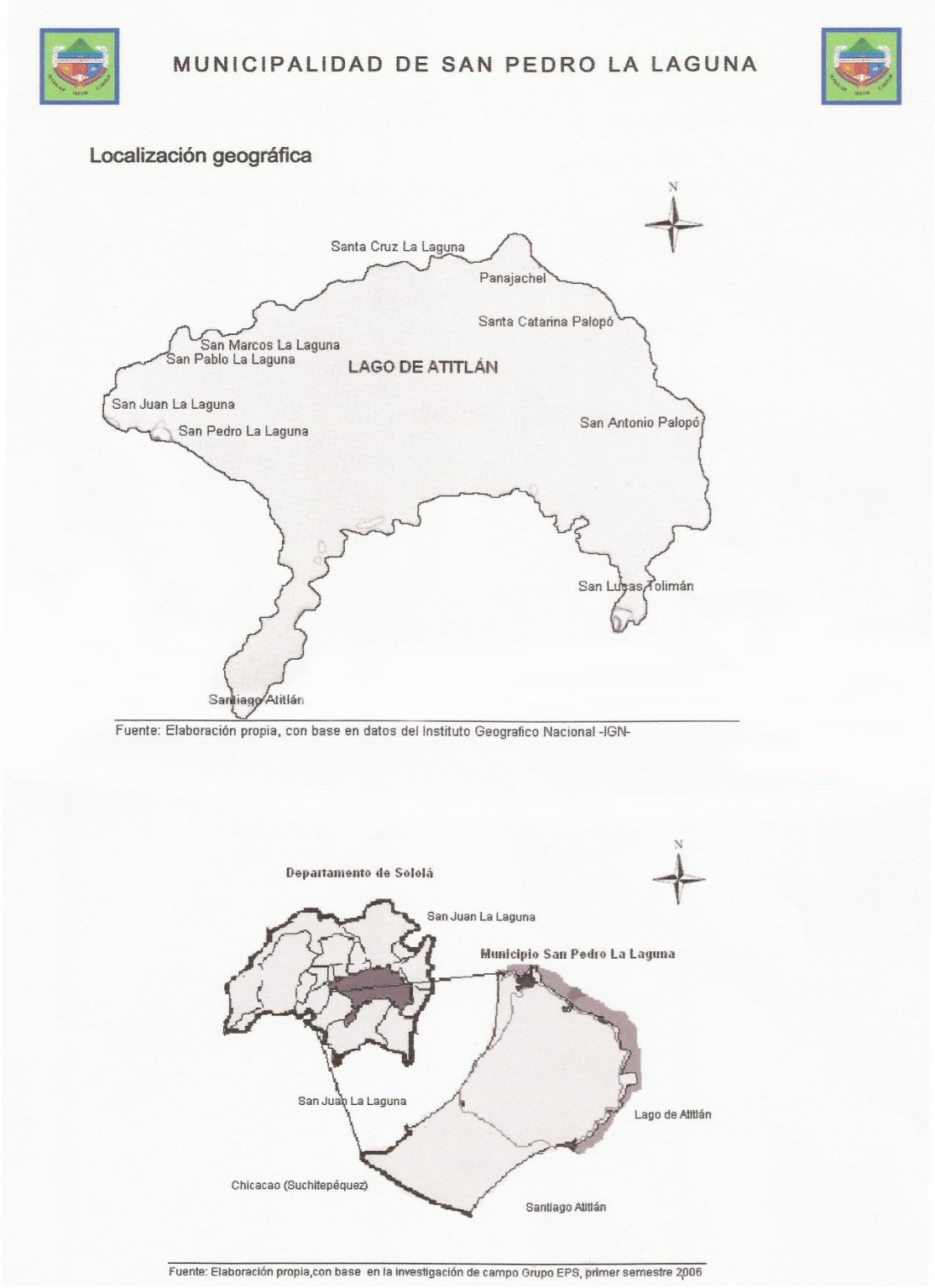
covering some forty percent of the lake's surface. Population pressures on the local ecology aggravated the situation. For example, San Pedro's current population of 13,000 people represents a 600% increase since 1941 when Benjamin and Lois Paul recorded it to be just 2400 (see Paul and Paul 1963). Years of artificial fertilizer runoff and the increase of organic contaminants in the lake caused by the population surge led to a shift in the local ecology which enabled pernicious cyanobacteria to flourish as never before. Foul odors and suggestions that the bacteria might be toxic to humans further worried everyone. While state and municipal clean up proposals were put into action, religious responses included fire ceremonies on special days of the 260-day ritual calendar, evangelical Christian prayer sessions along the lakeshore, and the floating of religious icons in boats by Catholics. Whether from the cleanup crews, the rituals, or a shift in seasonal weather conditions, the bloom disappeared about three months later. The signs are clear, though: the lake now takes in more contamination than it can process; these algal blooms will likely recur with increasing frequency in the years to come.

The rhythm of life in San Pedro is predictable and relatively calm in spite of such challenges. Each day, and especially on Saturday, the morning market bustles with activity as provisions are purchased. The center of town lies at the highest point between two steep roads heading down to the docks on either side of town, one dock heading towards the northern towns along the lake shore, including Panajachel, a large Kaqchikel town on the east side of the lake, the other dock for Santiago Atitlán, immediately to the south. The bulk of the population lives in the dense town center, within a kilometer from the Catholic church. Around the Panajachel dock one finds the

heaviest concentration of hotels, bars, restaurants, and other outfits catering to tourists. Around the Santiago dock are a handful of restaurants and hotels, but noticeably less than the other side of town. All of the facilities catering to tourism lie between the Panajachel dock and the Santiago dock, near the lakeshore. Walking more than three hundred yards up the hill from either dock takes one into the realm of establishments which are run by Tz'utujils, generally for Tz'utujils. In the town center, one finds the Catholic church, the marketplace, the municipal offices, as well as most stores and other retail establishments.



Map 1.1: Guatemala



Map 1.2: Lake Atitlán
(courtesy of Municipalidad de S.P.L.L.)

Table 1.1: Fact Sheet for San Pedro La Laguna
(data courtesy Municipalidad de SPLL)

San Pedro La Laguna	
Population:	13,000
Indigenous population:	96.4%
Languages:	Tz'utujil and Spanish
Territory:	24 square kilometers (9.3 square miles)
Altitude:	1610 meters above sea level (5282 feet)
Latitude:	14.6916
Longitude:	-91.2725
Annual Celebration:	June 29
Founded (as S.P.L.L.)	~1547 C.E.
Temperature Range:	~22.3 C (72 F) max. ~32 (~90 F) / min. ~4.4 (~40 F)
Annual Rainfall:	~1000-2000 mm. (~39-79 in.)
Religious Affiliation:	53% Catholic
	47% Evangelical
Divisions:	4 cantons
	Pacucha (zone 1)
	Chuacante (zone 2)
	Chuasanahi (zone 3)
	Tzanjay
Food Products:	Maize, coffee, beans, chili peppers, onions, fish, beef, pork, poultry

Methodology

Ethnographic investigations can scarcely proceed without prolonged participant observation, a method which not only requires the long term development of relationships, but also a disciplined patience to continually "watch and wait" for episodes that may yield pertinent insights (Bernard 1998; Packer 2011). The value of participant observation in the study of divinatory rituals has been demonstrated numerous times (Evans-Pritchard 1976; Jackson 1978; Nuckolls 1987; Peek 1991; Turner 1969), including studies of divination in the communities of the Guatemalan highlands (Bunzel 1959; Colby and Colby 1981; Hinz 2008; Oakes 1951; Schultze Jena 1933; Tedlock 1982; Wagley 1949).

Ultimately, each ethnographer must adapt participant observation to his or her own purposes. I found it necessary to participate in as many rituals as possible to better familiarize myself with their complicated patterns. During, or shortly after, I made notes and sketches of the setting which I would systematically update when I managed a repeat visit. I routinely brought questions to the ritual specialists and the other participants seeking clarification of what was done and what it meant. I also found it useful to periodically disengage, as it were, in order to scan the setting and those assembled to better observe the moods and other responses during the ritual. The set of audio and video recordings, as well as the interview notes and transcripts, required extensive review, though I quickly learned to devote my time to those episodes most relevant to my study as the sheer volume of material quickly exhausted available resources. The video recordings of divination sessions received my most intensive analysis and it was often after multiple viewings that I recognized something critical,

illustrating how video review permits observation in an unprecedented manner. Time-stamped notes of key audio and video recordings served as the central corpus for my analysis of *tz'ite'* seed divination. Due to my repeated visits, I was able to ask additional questions and even present video material to those originally involved in order to clarify key moments of interaction.

Cognitive Ethnography

Cognitive ethnography endeavors to study cognitive tasks in context (Hutchins 1995; Hutchins 2010). Distributed cognition emerges from the interactions of people, tools, and cultural practices over time. The proper unit of analysis in such a system is the process or task itself. Ecologically valid observations and insights, because they are additive to traditional psychological findings about memory, attention, and the rest, require the ethnographer's eye for detail as well as the analyst's interpretive capacities. Participant observation and interviewing are used to their fullest in cognitive ethnography though a particular focus on the interaction between people and tools in the accomplishment of a task comes into play. This approach rejects Cartesian dualism and favors "embodied and embedded" ideas about human cognition (Haugeland 1998; Packer 2011). As Jean Lave noted: "To focus on whole-person activity rather than on thinking as separate from doing implies a negation of the conventional division between mind and body. This negation is also reflected in the claim that 'cognition' is seamlessly distributed across persons, activity and setting. This in turn implies that thought (embodied and enacted) is situated in socially and culturally structured time and space" (1988:171). Attention to multiple interacting elements, as well as

endeavoring to study activity over time and with appreciation for its setting requires long-term participant observation as well as micro-analysis of specific events (see Alač and Hutchins 2004).

Cognitive ethnography employs a systems approach. In *General Systems Theory*, Lars Skyttner notes that the systems approach seeks "to understand man and his environment as part of interacting systems. The aim is to study this interaction from multiple perspectives, holistically" (2005:3). Adopting this holistic stance, the anthropological study of decision-making must consider the total cognitive ecosystem: "A successful strategy for writing productive ethnographies must tap the cognitive world of one's informants. It must discover those features of objects and events which they regard as significant for defining concepts, formulating propositions, and making decisions" (Frake 1962:54). For instance, one cannot make sense of decision-making in a Tz'utujil community without also learning about the way in which decisions are framed by indigenous values and norms. The methodology required by cognitive ethnography is ambitious to be sure but research into cultural cognition requires an appreciation of the entire cognitive ecosystem that structures activity, even as one studies a particular facet of that ecosystem.

Multimodal Interaction

An important means of revealing the details of cognitive activity is achieved through methods developed from the study of multimodal interaction. The phrase "multimodal interaction" refers to the numerous channels, or modes, of communication besides the verbal; these include gesture (Haviland 1999; Hoenes del Pinal 2011;

Kendon 2004), posture, pointing, orientation, and the use of space (Cooperrider 2011; Hanks 1990; Haviland 1993), "professional vision" and gaze (Goodwin 1981; 1994). The subtitle of Adam Kendon's comprehensive text on gesture conveys an appreciation for the many nonverbal modes of communication: "Visible Action as Utterance" (2004). The multimodal approach requires a conscious effort to code for and analyze communicative interaction as thoroughly as possible and, like distributed cognition, expands the unit of analysis, in this case looking at communication as more than discourse alone.

The study of multimodal interaction incorporates digital recording technologies to facilitate the analysis of multiple modes of communication. Like cognitive ethnography's assumption of distributed cognition, multimodal interaction hinges upon theory, namely that communication can be better understood when one considers as many nonverbal modes as possible. Research into multimodal interaction conveys a sensitivity and appreciation for aspects of expression that have always been present but have traditionally gone unnoticed or been considered nonessential (Hoenes del Pinal 2008).

Analysis of recordings permits an attendance to details that few ethnographers could accomplish without use of contemporary technologies. Because human interaction with objects and multimodal expression occur in real time—as layers upon layers of action—not even the finest ethnographer, with an exceptional memory, could consider everything as it occurs. Indeed, even the subject cannot consciously appreciate all the layers of meaning expressed in tone, prosody, gesture, posture, and orientation, though she emits them in synchrony and for her own communicative purposes. The

video camera, by recording real time social and contextual interactions, as well as the audio recorder, are used to capture these many details for later review.

With the informed consent of my consultants, I used a digital camera, camcorder, and an audio recorder whenever possible. In fact, I often had multiple devices working at the same time, the camcorder on a tripod out of the way, the audio recorder located unobtrusively in a central position, and my digital camera in my pocket ready for a quick snapshot as needed. Subsequent reviews of the recordings were essential to clarify aspects of divination and ritual that I would have missed without these devices.

Person-Centered Ethnography

In this dissertation, I present a case study of a Tz'utujil man who consulted a diviner for purposes of making an important decision. In addition to the other methods, I employed person-centered interviewing in this case study which was critical for uncovering some of the emotional and subjective aspects of the cognitive ecosystem.

A. Irving Hallowell (1955) was among the first to suggest person-centered approaches as a remedy to the data-gathering mindset that often leads to overly objective accounts of cultural phenomena:

> No matter how reliable such data are…of necessity the material is presented from the standpoint of an outside observer. Presented to us in this form, these cultural data do not easily permit us to apprehend, in an integral fashion, the most significant and meaningful aspect of the world of the individual as experienced by him and in terms of which he thinks, is motivated to act, and satisfies his needs. (88)

It was Robert LeVine who provided a name for this method in his 1982 book, *Culture, Behavior, and Personality.* The particular strength of this approach comes in its ability to highlight psychocultural dimensions of experience. This has been demonstrated in the work of numerous anthropologists (Csordas 1994; Hollan and Wellenkamp 1994; Levy 1973; Parish 1994; Parish 1996) and has been systematically developed over time (Hollan 2001; LeVine 1982; Levy and Hollan 1998). Douglas Hollan delivers a programmatic statement for the method:

> An effort is made to represent human behavior and subjective experience from the point of view of the acting, intending, and attentive subject, to actively explore the emotional saliency and motivational force of cultural beliefs and symbols (rather than to assume such saliency and force), and to avoid unnecessary reliance on overly abstract, experience-distant constructs. (2001:48)

Here Hollan is adapting Heinz Kohut's ideas about the "experience-near" and the "experience-distant" in psychology (1971) to the study of culture; by focusing on the subject, person-centered ethnography seeks to encounter the experience-near.

The person-centered approach is based on a series of structured interviews. The types of questions asked by the interviewer run the middle-ground between psychological assessment and a cultural inventory. In less personal approaches, the informant offers information about his knowledge of the culture but in the person-centered method questions about the individual's own life history and experience offers a window through which to view culture.

According to Jerome Bruner, it is ultimately meaning that flows through the individual and culture to create experience (1990). And while rigorous methodologies are required in order to ensure some measure of reliability and validity, no approach to

either psychology or culture may eschew individual experience without seriously denaturing the phenomenon at hand (Packer 2011). A focus on cultural meanings as experienced by the individual helps to break down false dichotomies about public and private. Because personhood is inherently cultural (Carrithers, et al. 1985), interviewing people is the preeminent means of gaining knowledge about cultural experience.

Summary of Goals and Outline of the Dissertation

This anthropological investigation of ritual and cognition aims to explain the enduring appeal of divination as a decision-making practice and to clarify, peering through the lens of distributed cognition, how divination enacts distributed forms of decision-making. In pursuit of a naturalistic study of cognition, this investigation would serve as a contextualized description of a decision-making practice that is representative of a real life situation studied over a long period of time in an indigenous setting. Implementing an ecological perspective, this study expands the typical unit of analysis from the individual to the intersubjective/interobjective (see Latour 1996b) event, delineating the processes of a cultural practice that coordinates a variety of personal, interpersonal, and environmental resources for purposes of decision-making.

In the following chapter, I review important literature on divination, particularly as it has been investigated as a decision-making practice. In Chapter 3, I describe the socio-religious context within which this form of divination is practiced. Chapter 4 is a detailed case study of a Tz'utujil man who decides an important matter with the aid of a diviner using this technique. In Chapter 5, I compare the various techniques

employed by different diviners and conclude the dissertation with an analysis of the forms and functions of *tz'ite'* seed divination as a distributed decision-making practice.

CHAPTER 2: DIVINATION AND DECISION-MAKING

Divination is the practice of seeking information from gods, ancestors, and oracular sources about the past, present, or future. A response from these sources is expressed through the medium of the cast shells, the shuffled cards, or the person in trance. Divination permits the mythological and the divine to blend with objects and agents in the present social space, grounding its epistemology in complex systems of signs. For thousands of years, people have sought diviners and consulted oracles as a key method for confronting uncertainty and navigating the vicissitudes of existence (Matthews 1992; Zuesse 1987).

Though prominent studies of divination have emerged from 150 years of anthropological work, less attention has been paid to this activity than might be expected given its universality, antiquity, and continued popularity even among citizens of the 'secular' modern world (e.g. astrology, Tarot cards, I Ching, Ifá). When divination has received attention from scholars, it is usually the diagnostic role it plays in healing practices that gets highlighted (e.g. Winkelman and Peek 2004). But a careful review of the anthropological data almost always relates examples of diviners and their clients engaged in critical decision-making activities as well.

Numerous typologies of divination have been offered by social scientists over the past century. In his *Encyclopedia of Religion* article, Evan Zuesse categorized these varied practices into intuitive, possession, and wisdom types (1987:376). The intuitive category includes spontaneous insights from religious masters; a guru looking into someone's eyes and coming up with particular knowledge is an example

of intuitive divination. Hunches and other presentiments are also part of this category. Possession divination is Zuesse's broadest category; it incorporates both the possession of objects as well as people. Mediumship (oracles), casting of lots (sortilege/cleromancy), and studying the flights of birds (augury/ornithomancy) are all instances of this type. Insight divination includes the study of patterns present in nature such as expressed in the stars (astrology), in the palm (palmistry/chiromancy), and in patterns in the terrain (geomancy). Diviners employ special techniques, tools, and knowledge to gain information that addresses an uncertainty. While one could quibble with Zuesse's classification, especially by noting the ways that these "types" overlap in many practices, it serves as a useful foundation for the study of divination as a whole.

Archaeologists have found evidence of divination far back into human history; for instance, its presence in the earliest stratum of Chinese civilization ("oracle bones") dates to 3500 BCE (Loewe, et al. 1981). And George Murdock notes the presence of divination "in every culture known to the history of ethnography" (1945:124). The worldwide prevalence of this phenomenon, since ancient times, has often drawn the attention of anthropologists, but Philip Peek expresses surprise and disapproval that divination has not led to more comprehensive studies. Peek sees divination as "articulating the epistemology of a people" (1991:2). As a result of "the Biblical polemic against divination" (Levy 2011), as well as the materialism and scientism of modernity, divination appears to be a paradigmatic case of irrationality from the perspective of European metaphysics (see Aveni 1996; Shermer 2011). The idea that a "random" pattern in the stars, in the flickering flames of a fire, or in the

creases of one's palm might have a relation to other patterns in one's life clashes with scientific models of reality. Nevertheless, divination's ubiquity and deep historical roots suggest that these practices possess a value not easily accounted for by modern rationalism.

That a practice exists in all cultures and has a deep history does not necessarily imply its presence to be a beneficial or functional one. But while not necessarily beneficial or functional, any tradition that exhibits cross-cultural popularity is likely to be stimulating species-typical responses that foster its preservation. Ideas come and go, each and all competing for limited resources in the way of attention and memory. Only the rare few are taken up and propagated while most others dissipate (see Sperber 1996). So whatever it is that divination does for people, it seems to do for people everywhere and throughout history. A study of the details of divination may give us more general insights into the reproduction of many other conventions, especially those of a ritual character.

A Brief History of the Anthropological Study of Divination

In "Divination as a Way of Knowing," Barbara Tedlock discusses the etymology of the word: "'divination' comes down to us from the Latin noun *divinationis* f. (divino) 'the gift of prophecy, divination'" (2001:190). Additionally, the word is related to the Latin *divines-a-um*, "belonging to a deity, divine" (ibid.). In *De Divinatione,* Cicero (2006:94) sees this Latin term as an improvement upon the Greek *mantikê* (related to mania, madness, or inspiration), for he believes that practices like Roman augury partake less in such irrationalities than do some of the

Greek types of prophecy and divination. This Greek root is present in the variety of constructions that employ *–mancy* (e.g. geomancy, chiromancy, scapulimancy).

In "Astrology as a Stochastic Art: Arrows, Aiming and Divination," Dorian Greenbaum highlights another evocative Greek root related to divination: "…in the Greek of the late Hellenistic period, a word for a diviner was not only *mantis*, but also *stochastēs*" (2007:3). This word derived from an archery metaphor: "to aim or shoot at" (ibid.). Our contemporary word "stochastic"—"involving or containing random variables"—relates to the archer's appreciation of numerous indeterminacies (esp. wind and motion of target) in the process of aiming (OED).

In her article, Greenbaum discusses classical writers who had categorized divination as a "stochastic art." James Allen discusses the practical mastery that goes into such types of art:

> …if they were to succeed at their art, stochastic artists needed to do more than acquire a mastery of the formal precepts of their art; they also needed to develop a sensitivity to the peculiar features of particular situations, a sense of the opportune moment which enabled them to undertake the right procedures, at the right time, in the right way (cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 272a). Since this ability cannot be incorporated into the formal precepts of an art, it has to be built up by practice and hands-on experience. (1994:88)

This idea, that a diviner must have a practical mastery of the techniques she employs, is important since it illustrates that technique alone, in most cases, is not the core of divinatory practices. Rather, the interaction of specialists, their training, their experience, and their sculpting of setting, context, and attention, all go into the power that any divination session may hold over its participants.

Divination is, at its core, based on expert intuition and the learned skill of identifying patterns and relating them to complex sign systems. It "aims" to select the best out of a field of options: "The stochastic art practitioner…creates a solution which takes into account both the unique circumstances of the situation and the creative application of the 'rules'" (Greenbaum 2007:8). Like the archer, the diviner takes into account manifold factors before offering guidance to his client. And in spite of numerous "rules of thumb" and systematic observations, ultimately the archer and the diviner rely on a carefully refined intuition, forms of embodied cognition that may not have recourse to language or discursive reasoning (see Shapiro 2011; Tschacher and Bergomi 2011). As a means to interact with an indeterminate reality, divination eschews simple determinism in its complex methods.

One of the earliest and most comprehensive accounts of divination came from the Roman statesman, Cicero. In *De Divinatione*, Cicero described and interpreted Roman divination which he defined as "a presentiment and knowledge of future things" (2006:45). In this work, he combined ethnology and philosophy in the study of divination, comparing Roman divination to the practices of the Assyrians, Egyptians, and the Greeks. He promotes skepticism at first, for he wishes to consider divination through reasoned philosophical reflections: "It [divination] is a noble and beneficial thing, if in fact it exists, and one by which human nature is able to come closest to the power of the gods" (ibid.). Cicero distinguishes between the "inspired" type of divination (e.g. dreams) and divination which requires skilled interpretation (e.g. ornithomancy). In the first volume, in the guise of his brother and interlocutor, Cicero reviews the Stoic understanding of divination, a generally favorable account of

these practices. But in the second volume, Cicero himself refutes these arguments. Though his intent was to show both sides of the argument, one hardly comes away with a balanced assessment. Cicero meant to disprove the validity of divination, though he still saw it as a useful means of influencing the masses (2006:2). Though Cicero's rejection of divination hardly conforms to the relativistic stance of modern anthropologists, in fact, many well-known anthropologists of the 19th and 20th century also derided divination as so much superstition.

In his foundational text, *Primitive Culture* (retitled *The Origins of Culture*), E.B. Tylor understood divination and games of chance to be the same act, both based in ignorance: "Arts of divination and games of chance are so similar in principle, that the very same instrument passes from one use to the other" (1871:80). Tylor considered divination to be a type of magic and "occult science" which, though misleading, does not intentionally seek to deceive: "Had occult science been simply framed for purposes of deception, mere nonsense would have answered the purpose, whereas, what we find is an elaborate and systematic pseudo-science. It is, in fact, a sincere but fallacious system of philosophy, evolved by the human intellect by processes still in great measure intelligible to our own minds, and it had thus an original standing-ground in the world" (1871:134). According to Tylor, then, divination is a primitive understanding, a pseudoscientific attempt to systematize certain types of knowledge production.

Tylor's well-known minimal definition of religion as "the belief in spiritual beings" relates to his notions of divination as well (1871:424). Tylor believed that primitive societies lack an understanding of chance as an impersonal process. For

"uncivilized man," chance occurrences are seen to involve spiritual beings: "The uncivilized man thinks that lots or dice are adjusted in their fall with reference to the meaning he may choose to attach to it, and especially he is apt to suppose spiritual beings standing over the diviner or gambler, shuffling the lots or turning up the dice to make them give their answers" (1871:79). But "to a modern educated man, drawing lots or tossing up a coin is an appeal to chance, that is, to ignorance…" (1871:78). Tylor appraises divination to have no practical value whatsoever; where it still exists it represents a vestigial set of beliefs that science has since corrected. The diviner is "at once dupe and cheat, he combines the energy of a believer with the cunning of a hypocrite" (1871:134). In sum, Tylor would not have been interested in seeking interpretations of divination that suggest any benefit or functional property. He firmly saw the practice of divination as the propagation of superstition and error.

Peek believes this early disapproval persisted as a bias in British-trained anthropologists. He describes numerous instances of their contempt for divination: "Beattie informs us that the diviner was well aware that 'he was simply putting on an act'. Fortes characterizes divination as 'the game,' while Middleton refers to a spirit-possessed diviner's speech as 'gibberish'" (Peek 1991:9). French thinkers were more sympathetic to divination.

Durkheim and Mauss believed there to be great value in the study of divination: "Every divinatory rite, however simple it may be, rests on a pre-existing sympathy between certain beings, and on a traditionally admitted kinship between a certain sign and a certain future event. Further, a divinatory rite is generally not isolated; it is part of an organized whole. The science of the diviners, therefore, does

not form isolated groups of things, but binds these groups to each other. At the basis of a system of divination there is thus, at least implicitly, a system of classification" (1963:77). But in spite of their own appreciation for it, Durkheim and Mauss prompted few students to study divination. The Americans, who readily drew upon British, German, and French social theory, typically reproduced the British prejudice; as a topic, divination did not merit serious research. In spite of these more general prejudices, though, a handful of ethnographies about divination came out during the 20th century.

E.E. Evans-Pritchard wrote at length on the topic of divination. His important text, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande* (1976), sought to portray the complex themes of Zande religion. Witchcraft is a unifying thread in this study: "The concept of witchcraft nevertheless provides them with a natural philosophy by which the relations between men and unfortunate events are explained" (1976:63). The main use of divination in Zande society was to root out and expose witches. Virtually all unfortunate events were thought to have been caused by witches, so divination often followed on the heels of such events as a means to identify the culprits.

Evans-Pritchard offers tremendous ethnographic detail in relating the various divination techniques, especially the "poison oracle," in which a chicken is fed some poison and then carefully monitored as it goes through its final agonies. Whether the chicken lives or dies as well as the movements it makes in response to the poison carry divinatory significance (1976:281).

A social anthropologist, Evans-Pritchard believed religion to be derivative of social structure. As an ethnographic purist, he was always less interested in

theorizing than in carefully describing the events he witnessed. But he did venture the opinion that Zande divination was a means of adjusting social relationships, essentially the structural-functionalist approach (see Radcliffe-Brown 1952).

The American anthropologist, Victor Turner, renowned for his contribution to symbolic and interpretive anthropology, sought to understand the meaning of the symbols involved in the divination practices of the Ndembu. Turner believed that "ritual symbols…give a visible form to unknown things, they express in concrete and familiar terms what is hidden and unpredictable. They enable men to domesticate and manipulate wild and wayward forces" (1969:4). For the Ndembu, divination helps to tame the major causes of disorder and disruption in their life; like the Azande, those causes are typically attributed to witchcraft (1969:22). In Ndembu divination practices, Turner discerns a theme that pervades all of their ritual, that of "bringing into the open what is hidden or unknown" (1969:3).

Ndembu diviners have to employ special caution and discernment "for witches are credited with extraordinary powers of deception, and even great diviners fortify themselves with special medicines to combat the deceits and illusions sent by their secret antagonists to battle them" (1969:2). Turner describes the diviner as an important role "between that of a judge and of a ritual expert. But whereas a judge enquires into conscious motives, a diviner often seeks to discover unconscious impulsions behind anti-social behavior. To discover these he uses intuition as much as reason" (1969:16). The diviner teases out the stresses and sore points in relationships, using his configurations of symbolic objects to help him to concentrate on detecting the difficulties in configurations of real persons and relationships. The

Ndembu utilize numerous divination practices but their most important practice is "basket divination." A set of objects, each with a set of associations, get jumbled together in a closed basket. The arrangement of these objects after being shaken up—which ones are on top, which below—give the diviner insights into a larger field of relationships. Turner pays special attention to the symbolic meanings of the objects involved, believing them to represent a microcosm of the social relations of the community. While he depicts these practices sufficiently, Turner spends the greater part of his energies exploring the symbolic content which he sees as a means to redress social conflict.

William Bascom published extensively on Yoruba divination systems. His two major works, *Ifa Divination: Communication between Gods and Men in West Africa* (1969) and *Sixteen Cowries: Yoruba Divination from Africa to the New World* (1980), discuss, in great detail, the complexities of these West African divination systems whose influence stretches all the way from Nigeria and Benin to the Caribbean and Brazil. Ifa is the more complex of the two systems. Sixteen cowries, a simpler type of divination technique, has achieved more popularity in the New World (1980:3). Both the systems rely upon an enormous collection of verses and folktales.

Ifa is depicted as the interrelationship of the deity/Yoruba Orisa of knowledge, prophecy, and ethics (a.k.a. Orunmila), the system of this divination technique, and the body of verses referred to in the divination (1969:ix). The system is based on sixteen basic and 256 derivative figures. These figures are created by the patterns recorded by a diviner who exchanges/snatches up as many palm nuts as possible (out of 16), from one hand to the other, or by tossing a chain of eight half seed shells

(1969:3). Among the Yoruba, Ifa divination is considered the most important and reliable type of divination (1969:11).

The diviner is highly skilled since he must memorize hundreds of Ifa verses to serve as an effective diviner. As Bascom writes:

> The real core of Ifa divination lies in the thousands of memorized verses by means of which the 256 figures are interpreted, but their significance has not been fully appreciated. The verses form an important corpus of verbal art, including myths, folktales, praise names, incantations, songs, proverbs, and even riddles; but to the Yoruba their 'literary' or aesthetic merit is secondary to their religious significance. In effect these verses constitute their unwritten scriptures. (1969:11).

Bascom was reticent to theorize about the meaning of these systems or about divination more generally. Thus he did not articulate support for the structural-functionalist approach that so many other anthropologists of African divination favored. As an anthropologist who was especially interested in folklore, Bascom seemed perfectly content to preserve and record as many details of these traditions as he possibly could. But there is a clear overlap between the themes and techniques of these divination systems and many others. Like so many other types of divination, there is in Ifa and sixteen cowries a commingling of chance and cultural symbolism. The divination techniques rely on this element of chance to produce the signs which are then interpreted by the diviner who uses his knowledge of cultural narratives to decipher their meaning and relevance for the client's situation.

Divination and Stochastic Processes

Whereas the British school uniformly considered divination from a structural-functionalist perspective—the diviner and his art served to smooth over disrupted human relationships—as the study of divination continued, novel theories emerged. Omar Moore (1957) and Michael Dove (1993) discuss divination as a practice of random decision-making which promotes a balance between a group and their supporting ecology. This intriguing approach suggests the ways in which randomness, an aspect of life that people are only too eager to eschew, can be harnessed for our benefit.

Moore discusses a Labradorian group called the Naskapi who practice a type of scapulimancy (shoulder blade divination) to determine hunting locations for a given season (1957). In this practice, the shoulder blade of a caribou is boiled clean and then held over hot coals until a series of cracks occur on the surface of the bone. The cracks are then "read" in relation to the surrounding terrain. Moore asserts that this leads to a random selection of hunting grounds each year and that this has the consequence of preventing the overhunting of preferred areas. Through this strategy, caribou and humans maintain a harmonious ecological relationship. Moore suggests that, if overhunted, the caribou would respond by avoiding humans all the more which would lead from high degrees of hunting success to periodic crises. By employing a random decision-making technique, the Naskapi reach a more ideal equilibrium. The technique promotes a sort of diversification which helps to avoid boons and crises. This randomness also prevents people and their prey from settling into patterns. This interesting theory takes into account the role of pattern formation and predictability as

vital habits of numerous animals, humans foremost. Moore highlights the fact that habitual patterns, a mainstay of human ecological exploitation, cannot be practiced successfully when dealing with other intelligent animals, like caribou. The ritual breaks up this pattern through the intermediation of a stochastic process and facilitates a more adaptive human-ecology relationship. Ritual, in this case, provides for ecological resuscitation.

Dove shares an interpretation of divination very similar to that of Moore. In his study of the swidden cycles of the Kantu' (Borneo), Dove (1993) found that their divination system helped to randomize swidden behavior. Each season, divination is consulted to select what crop a given individual should grow. Why would anyone rely on chance to mediate such crucial decisions? Tried-and-true strategies that would be quite effective in a more predictable ecology ought to be avoided in the Kantu's domain, one in which climate and pests can decimate some cultivars while leaving others unscathed. In the tropical forest where they dwell, stochastic strategies promote a greater variety of farming approaches. The Kantu' divination system diversifies their food production so that a crisis in the ecological underpinnings of any one crop does not lead to a widespread famine. The principle they employ is the same that financial advisors encourage their clients to follow: diversification of one's portfolio. If a typhoon or drought chances upon the Kantu' then having a greater variety of crops lessens the catastrophe since each crop has a unique profile of strengths and vulnerabilities. In contrast, had all Kantu' chosen to focus on some preferred crop then a single blight would create a much worse impact. The Irish Potato Famines of the mid-nineteenth century are evidence of the disastrous effects

wrought by the overreliance on a single crop (due not to Irish choice, in this case, but to British avarice). Dove notes the always delicate balance the Kantu' must strike with their supporting ecology: "The difficulty of matching swidden type and location with annual environmental fluctuations is reflected in the fact that two out of three Kantu' households do not reap sufficient swidden rice for their needs" (1993:146). The random augury practices of the Kantu', based on the flight of certain bird species, promote greater stability in their food supply. The irony here is that in the face of uncertainty and danger the human predilection for pattern seeking and reliance on habitual practices is all the more aroused. But it is this very dependence of pattern which is most dangerous in a situation like that of the Kantu'. By sanctifying practices that have an adaptive effect, human communities avoid the hegemony of a "small rationality" which sates their hunger for order while putting them at even greater risk vis-à-vis the stochastic processes of nature. When people use principally deductive approaches, such as heuristics of ease or maximal productivity, to order their behavior in highly dynamic environments, they may gain ease or productivity at the cost of fragility; a single breakdown of favorable conditions may spell doom (see Taleb 2012). The employment of stochastic decision-making disables these attractive habits of thought. Where people prefer to reproduce past successes and where they mimic one another when unsure how to proceed, stochastic decision-making breaks down the human predilection for pattern. Moore and Dove have initiated an interesting theoretical approach, but much work remains in order to understand the ingenious ways that people domesticate randomness.

Cultural Decision-Making

In the many cultures where divination still plays an important role, it is often consulted for the diagnosis of illness. But just as frequently, divination is used to facilitate decision-making. The cases that Moore and Dove highlighted are ones in which the decision-making role of divination take precedence. Though anthropologists have studied divination's place in magic, religion, and diagnosis, relatively few have considered divination from the perspective of decision-making theory.

Now a basic topic of psychology, decision-making theory did not emerge until the mid-20th century; it received no special notice in such fundamental texts as William James's *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), for instance. The longstanding paradigm of the literature on decision-making is "rational choice theory." This theory assumes "rational actors" who make optimal decisions for their own best interests. As a theoretical approach, rational choice theory served an important role in the development of models of decision-making. The foundational text of this approach, *Theory of Games and Economic Behavior*, was written by John von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern in 1944. Their book used game theory to model human choice in the face of limited information and created mathematical formulas to study expected utility. While the idea of comparing human economic decisions to games may seem problematic, it permitted the development of elegant models. However, the limitations of these theories and their underlying assumptions were already apparent by the mid-1950s when Herbert Simon began his critiques of them.

Simon pointed out that rational choice theory could discuss maximum utility because rational actors had access to the time and information they required to make optimal decisions; they were able to do this, of course, because games were simplified universes in which specified rules greatly limited the scope of information and choice. Even the concept of an optimal decision only comes about in logics whose options are limited and comparable. Real world options, trapped in the flow of "time's arrow" (Prigogine and Stengers 1997), can only be analyzed in retrospect using counterfactuals, ideas which have their basis in imagination. The only uncertainties in the abstracted worlds of game theory are the decisions of the other actors. But given that most models dealt with just one actor (e.g. the Prisoner's dilemma), the few possibilities could be charted out and decisions optimized accordingly. The real world, in contrast, is a maelstrom of information, numerous actors, and countless indeterminacies. To integrate these challenges into theories of decision-making, Simon developed the theory of "bounded rationality" which assumed constraints on such key elements as time and cognition. Because of these influences, humans could never approach the sort of optimized decisions modeled in game theory. Simon suggested that psychology ought to play a greater role in the modeling of decision-making theories (1956; 1957; 1959). When the predominant decision-making models are coming from brilliant logicians and mathematicians (such as von Neumann), one is necessarily going to get a rarefied vision of how people typically make decisions. The key to Simon's approach was to discover the heuristics that people employed to make "satisficing" decisions, that is, choices that are just good enough to meet some practical criterion (1957).

A further critique of rational choice theory came from findings that the Bayesian models which had been favored did not actually match human estimates of probabilities. Bayes' theorem provides a statistical model for how people make inductive judgments; that is, how they combine new information with prior beliefs to update their probabilistic judgment. Whereas an earlier generation of decision-theorists had considered humans to be unreservedly Bayesian in their estimates, new studies provided evidence against this optimal Bayesian approach (Edwards 1968).

With Simon's ideas about bounded rationality and critiques against optimized Bayesian estimates as a new foundation, Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman were able to establish their framework in the mid-1970s. A school of thought also called the "heuristics and biases" approach, Tversky and Kahneman focused on the role of biases in perception and judgment as well as the "rules of thumb" people employed in decision-making (1974). The work of these psychologists helped to make decision-making theory more realistic by noting the cognitive constraints upon otherwise "rational actors," but contemporary theorists feel that this approach, like the ones that preceded it, does not properly account for real world settings. Craig McKenzie writes that "when studied independently of the environment, behavior can appear maladaptive and irrational. Often, though, seemingly irrational behavior makes normative sense when the usual environmental context is taken into account" (2005:333). Many psychologists and other social scientists have contributed to this growing field of heuristics and biases. While contemporary work acknowledges bounded rationality as the appropriate framework, the idea that people are Bayesian—at least normatively if not descriptively—still speaks to theorists (McKenzie and

Mikkelsen 2007). In updating beliefs in light of new information, people are quite good, and generally rational, in their estimates. They are not optimally Bayesian, crunching numbers according to a statistical theorem, but their predictions do generally cluster near Bayesian projections. In sum, rational actor theories continue to be useful as models but additionally need to integrate human proclivities for establishing biases and shortcuts in their decision-making strategies.

Another aspect of decision theory that deserves greater scrutiny is its reliance upon methodological individualism. In *Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*, Jon Elster writes that: "The elementary unit of social life is individual human action. To explain social institutions and social change is to show how they arise as the result of the action and interaction of individuals" (1989:13). Methodological individualism allows for the reduction of social phenomena to the aggregated decisions of individuals. In its extreme form, methodological individualism sees all large scale social movements as epiphenomenal; the real source of causation is to be found in individual decisions (see Von Mises 1949). Much of decision-making theory (and cognitive psychology, more generally) takes up this approach. Clifford Geertz sees these notions as caricatures which depict the person as "a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively against other such wholes and against its social and natural background" (1984:126). In contrast to such "billiard ball" ideas of the person, anthropologists note the fluid boundaries between people and culture, as well as between people themselves (e.g. Daniel 1984).

In *How Institutions Think*, Mary Douglas points towards the institutional basis of cognition and culture: "It is well said that individuals suffer from the bounding of their rationality, and it is true that by making organizations they extend the limits of their capacity for handling information" (1986:55). Such institutional approaches may aid in the process of overcoming the privileging of individual cognition and highlight their attendant limitations as research paradigms. By limiting itself to processes of individual psychology, cognitive psychology can be seen as predicating itself on the "fundamental attribution error" (Ross 1977). The fundamental attribution error is an often repeated mistake pointed out by social psychologists; it is the tendency to overemphasize behavior as dispositional and based on stable personality traits. Social psychologists, in contrast, highlight the situational character and context-dependency of behavior (ibid.). In short, humans may make very different decisions, and act in a variety of ways, depending on the roles they take up and the context in which they find themselves. Such roles, of course, are deeply influenced by the cultural schemas and expectations at play in a given context (Shore 1996). Phillip Zimbardo's (1971) notorious "Stanford Prison Experiment," in which he took undergraduates and randomly assigned them to play roles as mock prisoners or mock prison guards, demonstrates the protean nature of people vis-à-vis the characters they enact. To witness a mafia boss or brutal prison guard in the context of "work" would lead one to believe him a wicked, immoral person. But observing the same person's behavior as a doting parent would contradict their brutality or wickedness as a fixed character trait. People are more complex than can be assessed by any one role or context (Zimbardo 2007).

Decision-making theory, by choice or assumption, upholds the stereotype of the individual as sole arbiter of her destiny. In truth, as both agents and adept role-players, people get "tangled up in conflicting moral visions…and experience themselves and their worlds in shifting, often contradictory, ways, developing multiple consciousness of self and society" (Parish 1996:8). Investigating decision-making as a set of enculturated skills and cultural practices provides a needed complement to the emphasis on the individual in cognitive psychology.

To study decision-making from an anthropological perspective, one needs to assess both individual cognitive processes (appreciating the set of practices and assumptions learned in a cultural setting), group cognitive processes, and a set of processes which can be located neither in the individual nor the group since they incorporate other things besides; these are distributed cognitive processes.

Focusing on cultural practices of decision-making may help reveal the notions of personhood a culture assumes; indeed, cognitive psychology accomplishes that precisely, though unintentionally, by promoting the model of the person as a unified, stable, and bounded whole. The unacknowledged model of personhood inherent in the decision-making literature is an egocentric one. But, in fact, many cultures of the world (including numerous subcultures within Europe and the United States) are predicated on sociocentric models of the person (Shweder and Bourne 1984:190). This raises the question of how the decision-making literature can be applied in the study of cultural decision-making. How can decision-making theories based on Western notions of individualism be applied cross-culturally? Research into cultural practices of decision-making may provide important new insights for decision theory.

The appreciation of the role of heuristics in decision-making has helped to dethrone rational choice theory by illustrating the ways in which the mind's internal resources are not limitless (Gigerenzer and Selten 2001; Tversky and Kahneman 1974). But in the same way that a prior generation of theorists privileged rationality, so do many contemporary decision-making theorists overlook the deep and vital ways that culture shapes cognitive processes. Peek (1991:13) asks a poignant question: "What are the decision-making mechanisms available to each society and how do they differ in terms of sources and types of knowledge?" This question needs to be addressed in sophisticated ethnographic studies that are conversant with the psychology of decision-making as well as the power of enculturation to shape cognition.

The story of each of us is the personal history of a set of decisions; some made explicitly, many made tacitly, many others made by one's significant peers and superiors. Those theorists who have written at length about decision-making have done so from a distinctly Western ethos that privileges the individual and his internal resources. In this framework, information is acquired by the person, assessed in numerous ways, and acted upon once a decision has been made. But this framework needs to be seen as merely one interpretation, one version, of a decision-making schema promoted in Western culture rather than "the" scientific account of how people go about making choices.

Culture runs deep. Though all people possess a shared inheritance of human phylogenesis, the nervous system's plasticity enables culture to exert strong effects on ontogenesis (McGraw 2012; Wexler 2006). Bradd Shore discusses this in "Human

Diversity and Human Nature: The Life and Times of a False Dichotomy" (2000). The issue of cultural diversity in the face of the "psychic unity of mankind" remains one of anthropology's core themes. People are shaped by their social and environmental contexts, particularly through developmental processes during childhood and adolescence (see Reddy 2008; Rogoff 2003). Given this critical process, the underlying assumptions of decision-making as a fundamentally individual exercise may be particular to the contemporary Western world. The science of decision theory seems to depend on a peculiarly Western ethnopsychology. The greater part of humanity—both past and present—might be better understood utilizing a decision-making theory that privileges cultural practices over individual minds.

As a decision-making practice used in real world cultural contexts, divination combines the influences of time and place with the concerns and responses typical of human bodies developed across the *longue durée* of evolution. And divination, whose roots delve deep into human prehistory, continues to play the important role it does because it actually helps people respond to crises using robust cognitive and cultural resources. Game theory, which models decisions on the responses of subjects engaging in logic puzzles, is a poor substitute in comparison. Divination is an ingenious practice because it "brings many different forms of knowing, sources of information, and perspectives to bear on the problem. These include perspectives elicited from clients, family, friends, associates, and others" (Winkelman and Peek 2004:15). Divination is not a practice for the Cartesian self, isolated from others, but one for the embodied person who grows up in a particular time and place and is enmeshed in a network of friends and family.

Divination is frequently composed of: (1) a client with a problem, (2) a diviner with specialized knowledge of the tools and techniques required to access special sources of information, (3) those very tools, and (4) a rich symbolic interplay of cultural meanings and beliefs about what happens in these sessions. When all of this comes together successfully, the client may leave with a resolution to her problem, or knowledge of how to resolve the problem. Moreover, using divination to facilitate decision-making produces a richer set of possibilities. Forever lured into patterns and constrained by symbolic and normative schemas, the mind easily falls into a "path dependency" resulting in a state called "lock-in" in which suboptimal choices are perceived to be the only options available (Arthur 1989; Liebowitz and Margolis 1995). This all too common pattern hinders creative solutions to problem solving. In *Mind and Nature*, Gregory Bateson writes "…the genesis of new notions is almost totally dependent on reshuffling and recombining ideas that we already have" (1979:172). People who consult diviners have often exhausted their own capacities and find themselves faced with just two contrasting options (the dreaded dilemma). By using a divination technique that exploits chance the diviner creates novel possibilities, allowing the person to see his situation "through new eyes." Alternately, employing randomness in the decision-making process may help absolve the client and diviner of responsibility should the outcome of a given decision produce an unfavorable result. Furthermore, divinatory decision-making may endow the decision with a normative authority, essentially playing a "legitimating and certifying" function (see Jordan 1982; Park 1963).

Conclusion

As an anthropological topic, divination stands at the crossroads between esoteric religious ritual and practical decision-making, between individual and society. Philosophical and religious themes often run underground, serving in subtle ways to influence behavior. In contrast, divination is exceptional: here we have philosophy writ large and spoken out loud. Here thought is inscribed in the inherited tools, practices, and cultural models at play in the ritual. Peek has written that "divination systems do not simply reflect other aspects of culture; they are the means (as well as the premise) of knowing which underpin and validate all else," they are the "epistemology of a people" (1991:2).

CHAPTER 3: RELIGION AND RITUAL OF THE HIGHLAND MAYAS

Introduction

Religion and ritual lie near the center of "world view," the way a tradition of thought understands reality (see Goody 1995; Smart 2000). World view and culture are conjoined and need to be considered as a pair; the former emphasizes the perceptions and judgments that shape human behavior while the latter is the sum total of the behavioral environment. Culture is that whole within which human behavior is developed, orchestrated, and assessed; but it is much more than human behavior as it incorporates many other living beings and nonliving things into its ecology. Nor is it simply "whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members" (Goodenough 1957), for cultures, bodies, and things are also material phenomena (Csordas 1994; Miller 2005) that cannot be reduced to abstractions alone. Could there be a Greek culture without sheep? Is there a Bedouin culture without deserts? And what would American culture be without capitalism or the bountiful natural resources of North America? But if culture is the set of ecological relationships within which a group of human beings live, world view is the emic perspective they develop as members of that culture. It is a "view," or perspective; the way a person, and to generalize, a people, conceive and perceive.

Few aspects of culture are so tenuous and delicate as world view. Like delineating a vast series of spider webs, it is difficult to discern where one strand begins and another ends and sometimes, just as you think you have resolved a pattern, the diaphanous wisp disappears. Perhaps you accidently touched it, perhaps a draft broke

it up, or perhaps what you imagined you had been looking at was actually behind or within another set of webs and never where, or what, you thought it was. And then, once-in-a-while, you have no idea a web is there until you walk through it and feel it break across your nose. The following experience felt something like that.

It was October 2008 and I had been in San Pedro La Laguna about four months. As an ethnographer performing fieldwork, I often found myself struggling with the "culture concept." On the one hand, there are all the apparent differences that one encounters in a new place. It was some of these that had initially attracted me to the Guatemalan highlands and it is these same things that attract so many tourists to Guatemala. The textiles, in particular, are vivid, colorful reminders of the particularities of the place and visitors often remark on the beauty and complexity of their designs. Even to the locals, textiles remain powerful signs of identity since the patterns of dress and designs indicate one's status and community membership (Hendrickson 1995; Otzoy 1996). In addition to the textiles, the food, the sounds, and the primeval terrain of Lake Atitlán all make strong impressions on a person and lend an air of the exotic to a place like San Pedro La Laguna. The transformation is surprisingly quick, though; one week a tourist, the next something else, certainly not a local, but no longer a mere visitor. And so by October, four months into my fieldwork, the high tide of the exotic had begun to recede. I no longer saw *huipiles* so much as I saw Guillermo's cousin, Juan's mother, or Doña Maria. And the language, once an indecipherable code for hidden relays of meaning, was now familiar enough that I heard lots of "Good afternoons," "The eggs, how much?" and various snippets about husbands, banks, the price of coffee, and other such mundane concerns. The landscape, while always

stunning, was now my landscape. I saw it every day, in all shades of light, and instead of grand inchoate impressions, I now noticed the little things that might indicate change such as blocked roads, the depth of shadows, and the movement of wind on the surface of the lake. I observed children bustling in and out of internet cafes, many playing video games, others watching their friends playing video games. Buses were constantly racing between San Pedro and the capital, a city of millions. And scores of people walked in the streets chattering on their cell phones or peering into them as they patiently typed out long text messages. It was all just the same. Had global culture eclipsed the last glimmer of the local? In fact, I had begun to wonder whether this culture concept was a vestigial holdover from Victorian times, a last gasp of colonial "othering" in a post-colonial era.

The Tz'utujils I had come to know did not seem particularly different from the Americans I knew or other people I had known in other places. Settling in somewhere you come to see that most love their families, try to do the right thing, and struggle to get ahead, or at least remain where they are. Wherever one goes, people eat too much sugar, spend too much money, and draw from a similar repertoire of emotional expressions. For the most part, the people I knew in San Pedro La Laguna had the same interests, desires, and fears as my friends and family back home. All were busily interacting and exchanging in the same global community.

Dusk had settled in and only the last light of day remained as I sat on the stoop outside Chema's father's house. The house was on one of the main streets, a very steep street that headed down to one of the town's docks. It was a cobblestoned affair that always looked hazardous to me with its uneven surfaces and washed out mortar. The

street was hell on vehicles and anyone who came into town knew he had arrived by the particular pain in his back. Recently, I had marveled when the townspeople overwhelmingly supported a proposition by the mayor to renovate the streets in the same way, using large, irregular cobbles, rather than using *adoquín*, a geometrically regular concrete block that had the virtue of creating beautifully flat streets easy on the foot or wheel. The neighboring town, San Juan La Laguna, was a vision of order: its clean *adoquín* streets seemed the far superior option to me but not, apparently, to *sanpedranos*.

I had spoken to Chema by cell phone half an hour earlier. We had planned on meeting here to look over some videos I had shot and to watch a movie with his brother who still lived in their father's house. Chema had recently started a production company with his brother, aaTor. Passersby would never guess that within this traditional, two century old house there was a stockpile of high tech audio/visual equipment. These are the apparent discontinuities that are part of everyday life in a place like San Pedro La Laguna.

I could have knocked and gone in but I decided to wait outside as the temperate evening settled into place. I watched people pass by and occasionally looked down at my hands resting on my legs. It could be a false memory, but I think I was contemplating, with some despair, how absurd it was to be an anthropologist in a 21st century world. I wondered whether I was living and planning a career in "bad faith" (Sartre 1966); like a priest who has lost his faith in God, what is an anthropologist who no longer believes in Culture?

I heard a smack and looked up to see a mother carrying a baby, her young son splayed out on the ground in front of her. The boy, perhaps a four year old, had caught his foot on the edge of an uneven stone and had fallen onto the cobblestones. I glimpsed the disorientation and shock on his face, his hands stretched out on the ground before him, and I quickly looked away. I heard the young mother say something in Tz'utujil but I kept my eyes averted. Long ago, I learned that the worst response an adult could make to a child's accident was to give him a lot of attention while expressing surprise and shock. The child senses this stress, starts a loud, plaintive cry, and then tears begin to pour. Instead of making a situation better, too much care and concern can easily backfire. It is much better to act as if nothing happened, dust the child off, and keep on course. Kids will not make a big deal out of something if they are not given warrant. So I was looking away, ignoring the situation, hoping the boy would not cry and give his mother another load of trouble she did not need. But then something terrible happened. I heard a series of hard slaps. Before I could even look up I felt indignant. What kind of a person beats her child for taking a spill?

I prepared a look of maximal scorn and considered a verbal rebuke of the woman but instead my own face took on the signs of disorientation and shock that I had seen on the boy just a moment earlier. There in front of me, I saw the woman delicately balanced in a squat, her baby resting in her left arm, feet supported by the flat surface of her left thigh. The young boy who had fallen was standing beside her. He was silent as he used the back of his hand to brush away a tear. He watched his mother. With her right hand, she was sternly and purposefully slapping the ground in front of her. It was all so strange that I had to question what I was seeing. Was she picking something up?

Was she in the last set of slaps meant for the boy that had somehow ended up being misdirected toward the ground? No. She was slapping the ground intentionally and with all the care and attitude of someone slapping another person. Entranced, I continued watching even as she rose and lightly slapped the boy's knees while uttering something I could not hear. She did not express anger and he did not show any surprise at the light slaps she gave him. Then she took the boy's hand and they proceeded on their way down the hill.

A few minutes later Chema's father opened the door and insisted that I wait inside. I mentioned the episode to him and he said that this was a normal custom, a *secreto*[1]. In fact, he said that when his elderly mother had suffered a terrible fall two weeks earlier (and broke her arm), they had done the same. The idea is that when one suffers a sudden fright or pain he runs the risk of displacing part of his soul. In a state of fright (*susto*), this part will leave the body and may stay at the spot where it received the shock (see Crandon 1983). It is important for one to slap the spot, then the person, and then tell the soul to go home where it can reunite with the injured person later.

When Chema arrived I told him about what had happened. He showed no surprise and confirmed this to be a typical practice. Chema smiled and gave a sign of recognition for how this might seem odd to a gringo like me. But it was just how things were done. It was necessary. If the boy's mother had not done this, he might have become very sick. Though I had read something about *susto* before this, the experience had caught me unawares and made it seem as if I myself had been the little boy; it was as if I had felt the sudden shock break up something inside of me.

Having gone inside the family home, we watched a few segments of video I had shot. Chema gave me suggestions on how to edit it using an Adobe software program. Afterwards, we sat back and watched a new Hollywood release that had been bootlegged in a theater thousands of miles away just a few days earlier, sent out as an internet torrent, burned onto DVDs, and then sold for very little money in the town market between stands of locally grown vegetables, fried chicken, and aluminum pots from China.

While this experience was not dramatic, it was just the small epiphany I had needed. It reminded me that there are layers of meaning and understanding—an entire world view—that many Tz'utujils take for granted which is essentially different from my own relation to the world. The notions I have about things and the ones that they have, though they typically converge, remain a few degrees out of alignment. That slight, but genuine, difference permits a kaleidoscopic array of human experience to emerge from a species-typical physiology exploiting favorable niches on a temperate planet. If one lets creeping fears of similitude take over—if cell phones, avarice, *huipiles*, lust, and computers—become the beginning and end of cultural analysis then one may overlook the subtleties of world view. The ethnographer should not overemphasize or romanticize difference but must acknowledge it and develop a sensitivity to it. Through a patient collection of observations and testimonies, a culture and its world view comes into focus so that it may be genuinely appreciated for its particularities. In this era of climactic change, there is a threat that the significant and substantial realities of culture may drown in the flood of a neoliberal logic. But after

careful observation, I have developed the conviction that world view and tradition has the capacity to persist in spite of these inundations, at least among the highland Maya.

Syncretism and Hybridity

In the Guatemalan highlands, a variety of religious traditions have interacted for centuries. Three of these particularly stand out today: Maya spirituality (a set of ideas and practices derived mainly from indigenous traditions; sometimes referred to as *costumbre*), Roman Catholicism, and evangelical Christianity. Often, these religions coexist peacefully but at times they conflict. Christian traditions, in particular, have often accused Maya spirituality of demonic influences (see Hart 2008). In the case of Maya spirituality, there is a tendency towards inclusion so that many participants practice these customs while also continuing to attend church services and functions. Though there is definitely a strain within Maya spirituality that eschews Christianity as a religion of invaders and colonialists, many, if not most, consider themselves "good Christians" while also celebrating ancestral rituals.

Syncretism has long been the word by which scholars have described Maya religion and ritual. That is to say, virtually all those who have studied these practices come to see in them a combination of elements from different traditions. For instance, a traditional Maya prayer, one that an *ajq'iij* might utter, may reference Jesus and an indigenous deity in the same breath. Consider this excerpt from a prayer recorded by a Catholic priest working in Santa Catarina Ixtahuacán, a K'iche' community, in the mid-19th century:

> Oh! Jesus Christ my God: you, the son of God, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, you are but one God. Today, on this day, at this hour on this day Tijax; I implore the holy ones that accompany the first light of dawn and the last light of dusk; by the Holy Ones' souls I invoke you! Oh! Prince of the spirits that inhabits this mountain of Sija-Raxquim. Come you holy souls, Juan Vachiac, of Don Domingo Vachiac, of Juan Yxquiaptap; holy souls of Grancisco Ecoquij, of Diego Soom, of Juan Tay, of Alonso Tzep; holy souls, I repeat, of Diego Tziquin and of Don Pedro Noj; all of you! Oh priests, to you whom everything is apparent; and you Prince of the spirits; you Gods of the mountains, Gods of the plain Don Purupeto Martin, come, receive this incense, receive this candle now[2].
> (Hernández Spina 1854)

In this prayer, the *ajq'iij* calls upon ancestors and deities, easily mixing Christian and indigenous labels. In *Maya Saints and Souls in a Changing World*, John Watanabe refers to a similar invocation that "served to embrace all mortal participants as well as the Catholic saints in the local church, the spirit guardians of the sacred *Mundo* ('World') and nearby mountains, and the twenty sacred days of the traditional Maya calendar" (1992). But besides prayers, one finds this kind of give-and-take principle in the theology, the rituals, and the special objects of Maya spirituality.

To the extent that syncretism denotes that a religious tradition is the outcome of a mixing of different traditions (such as indigenous elements with Roman Catholic elements), then it serves as a quick, relatively harmless shorthand for the complex aspects of cultural mixing that always occur when distinct groups interact. But as the notion of syncretism is pushed and prodded it begins to wobble and fall apart as an explanatory device. Indeed, how can any tradition, itself the product of countless encounters and blends over centuries, meet any other cultural tradition and expect some kind of uncorrupted "transmission" of their ways of life and belief? For that would be the underlying comparison: that a syncretic practice can be juxtaposed with a non-

syncretic one; in other words, that a "pure Catholicism" might be found somewhere in the Americas where syncretic processes did not occur and the adherence to a "foreigner's faith" was taken on without any local understandings influencing the adoption of the new religion.

Surely one of the most important discourses in the discussion of syncretism is the role that power plays in negotiating identity. In the literature on highland Maya religion, it is commonly asserted that a given practice represents a mere Christian lamination over indigenous practices and beliefs. The subtext is that at least some Mayas are not "actually" Christian at all but merely adhere to surface forms in order to navigate a world in which colonial powers still dominate. There is a degree of believability to such a hypothesis. After all, Christianity did not come to the Americas with glad tidings and gentle ways. It was part and parcel of a violent conquest and often the conversion to this religion was spurred on by fear. But that fear might inspire the adoption of some idea or practice is hardly unique to conquest. Indeed, fear is not an especially good criterion to determine whether or not a practice or belief is "authentic" since it is such a common motivation across human endeavors. Out of fear, people have adopted the trappings and language of religions, both within and outside of syncretic contexts. And that people might play a variety of roles depending on the context; that they might, indeed, use different languages and profess divergent beliefs to better respond to the exigencies of a situation: this is typical psychology, rather than a sign of colonial hybridity. Indeed, in social psychology there is a vast literature on the power of context to alter personality (see Ross 1977). But if syncretism can be defined as a term with a few different emphases, then surely one of those is the importance of power

relations and hierarchy in cultural interaction. And, no doubt, there are cases in which people have retained indigenous aspects of beliefs and practice within the sanctioned forms, either because this was the only means of preserving the tradition or because outside beliefs are always integrated in terms of local patterns and understandings. Clearly, then, syncretism and hybridity presents a range of complex concerns.

Assumptions about "purity" loom behind many discussions of syncretism. In fact, the term often carries a polemical tone when pundits recommend anti-syncretic revisions in a set of practices or beliefs, purging their tradition of "outside" influences. Kurt Rudolph, for instance, has written about the ways that syncretism has been used as a "theological invective" by some (2004). And C. James MacKenzie noted that syncretism "…was (and often still is) considered entirely negative, representative of a failure to properly communicate the gospel message, resulting in an impure hybrid which is in many ways worse and infinitely more problematic than the original 'untouched' culture" (2005). The term is rarely used as the judgment-free descriptive shorthand some would prefer. More often, it serves to indicate a failure of the reliable transmission of a tradition; it suggests the bastardization of a tradition by what are perceived to be "outside" elements.

To ponder these questions is strangely similar to charting a family tree and wondering how the processes of inheritance describe or predict aspects of oneself (cf. Leopold 2004). In reviewing one's genealogy there are often moments of surprise: coming across an old photo of an ancestor many generations removed, one might notice the very nose that one encounters each morning in the mirror. Reading the letter or journal of a great-grandparent one may find that this person possessed the same

idiosyncrasy or tic that bedevils you. In short, fascinating affinities and resemblances will be discovered whenever reviewing one's ancestry. But besides some quaint moments of recognition what can be taken from these investigations? What knowledge is gained by finding out that ancestry is real, that one comes from something rather than nothing? If no clear patterns can be discovered about the processes of inheritance—how did I end up with this particular nose or that strange idiosyncrasy—then what can be taken from the recognition of inheritance with its seemingly haphazard conservations, deletions, and blends?

This analogy is suggestive but imperfect when considered vis-à-vis syncretism. On the surface, many parallels hold: blending is a necessary, inevitable phenomenon—just as each person must have a genealogy—but its underlying processes are always vague. In contrast to one's biological inheritance, though, the combination of two or more traditions can undergo a purposeful revision at times: aspects of practice can be rejected, theological fusions can be disentangled and authoritatively restated.

Perhaps the most important parallel to be found in this analogy of history and identity is that the present can, and often does, reframe the meaning of the past. In a peculiar context, like a plague, the entirety of one's organism and its survival may hinge on an inherited mechanism of immunology or behavior. Every other aspect of the person, from her appearance to her social ties, may be rendered irrelevant as a rogue virus invades. With a particular inherited defense he will survive, without it he will cease to be. Such are the relentless mechanisms of natural selection. Similarly, in a particular cultural configuration—say Spain circa 1492—it may become necessary to conveniently forget or intentionally expunge the entirety of one's Jewish heritage and

embrace Christian practices, forever altering one's past and predicting a new future for one's descendants.

Just as the past can at times wholly determine the present, sometimes the present can radically revise the past, selectively emphasizing one past while suppressing another. The desire to trace one's genealogy can be inspired by an innocent curiosity, but it is just as often motivated by the need to confirm one's identity, as a prerequisite to receive the benefits of some program, or by the wish to join an exclusive club. In short, present concerns often elicit the need to study the past and to highlight some aspect of it, usually to the exclusion of other aspects. The power of the past to influence the present, and vice-versa, is an important aspect of syncretism; to understand how cultures mix, one must not only look to history but to contemporary forces as well.

Five centuries have passed since Christianity was introduced to the highland Maya. To discuss syncretism in the Guatemalan case is almost always to discuss the interactions of indigenous Maya beliefs with imported Christian beliefs. Over the last century, the rise of Protestantism in Guatemala has been impressive (Garrard-Burnett 1998; Samson 2007; Stoll 1990) and has altered the relationship that had existed between Roman Catholicism and indigenous traditions. Since Protestantism includes a wide variety of churches, each with its own attitudes and approaches to indigenous practices, the complexities of these new interactions go beyond the scope of this treatment. While the last few decades of interaction between Protestant forms of Christianity and Maya spirituality have been important, they are less relevant than the much longer history between Catholicism and Maya spirituality.

Catholic *cofradías* once played a central role in community politics and religious practices (Aguirre 1972; Batz 1981; Batz 1991; Falla 2001). While these developed over a long period of time, and might even derive in part from Pre-Columbian antecedents, one of the chief reasons colonial authorities supported them was to facilitate the adoption of Catholicism in the Maya communities in which priests were not stationed. Ultimately, the "cargo system," those shared and distributed duties for the celebration of the saints' cults, came to represent fundamental aspects of identity for the highland Maya way of life (Chance and Taylor 1985; Orellana 1984; Rojas Lima 1988; Tedlock 1983). But the relative independence that the Maya communities had from church officials also meant that religious forms could adapt to local customs.

In her history of the Tz'utujils, Sandra Orellana noted how the *cofradía* "allowed both maintenance of continuity with the aboriginal past and incorporation of some of the fundamentals of the Spanish Catholic tradition. Because it was mainly an Indian-documented institution with little or no outside participation or interference, the *cofradía* gradually became shaped in form and function primarily along native lines" (1984). In fact, the esoteric practices that developed within many of the *cofradías* could, at times, appear to have far more to do with indigenous deities than with the Catholic saints they were meant to venerate.

In the largest Tz'utujil community, Santiago Atitlán, the *cofradía* of San Juan includes the care and adoration of a "sacred bundle" (that of San Martín) that is handled only by a celibate religious specialist (Carlsen 1997; Mendelson 1958; Stanzione 2003). This type of bundle worship represents a tradition that goes back many centuries in Mesoamerica (cf. Christenson 2007; Miller and Taube 1993; cf. Tedlock 1996). As the

focus of its efforts, this *cofradía* worships and performs ritual for Martín, a *Dueño del Cerro* (see below). While it also celebrates the feast days of two Catholic saints (San Juan and San Martín), it is so thoroughly involved with the performance of rituals for indigenous beings that simply calling it a *cofradía*, and thus making it comparable to any other *cofradía* (as one might find in Spain, for instance) is specious. Indeed, one of the ceremonies that *cofradía* San Juan performs is a ritual dance (the deer-jaguar dance) in which the dancers don animal skins and seem to be performing a kind of hunting magic (Carlsen 1997; Mendelson 1958; Stanzione 2003).

Some scholars have used the term "folk Catholicism" to describe the religion they have observed in the Guatemalan highlands (e.g. Sexton 1978). Manning Nash defined folk Catholicism as:

> …those aspects of religious belief and practice which have grown up around the core of Catholic rite and dogma, as the people of Cantel have for more than four centuries adapted parts of the formal workings of the Catholic Church to their local needs and understandings. It is the spontaneous growth of the interaction of a small Indian society with an aspect of a civilized tradition. As such, many of its elements are of Catholic origin, some are of pagan derivation, and many are an outgrowth of the dynamics of these two systems working upon each other. But as a contemporary social entity or cultural complex, it is a new thing, not resolvable into the strains which gave it birth. (1958)

Folk Catholicism is a problematic category. On the one hand, it conveys the independence and relative freedom with which many communities were permitted to adapt Catholicism to their situations, but it is still too imprecise a term. Sometimes it refers to the activities of the *cofradías*, sometimes to the rituals that are better classed as *costumbre* or Maya spirituality, and sometimes it refers to a range of visible forms of Catholic worship, such as the fabrication of colorful *alfombras* in the streets of Antigua

during Easter processions. It would seem better to reserve the term Catholicism for that religion, however it manifests locally, and *costumbre* or Maya spirituality for those rituals that more clearly belong to that tradition and are performed outside of the church. In "Maya Knowledge and Wisdom," Ajpub' Pablo García Ixmatá, a Tz'utujil linguist and *ajq'iij*, emphasizes that it is important not to "reduce" Maya concepts to versions of Catholicism: "The knowledge of the Maya people has been left to the side as a historical past. Mayan beliefs, philosophy, and epistemology have been subordinated, constrained, or reduced to a type of folklore" (2010). Wherever the two traditions meet and share space (such as the ritual burning of *copal* on the steps of *Iglesia Santo Tomás* in Chichicastenango), it would be wise to describe and explore these intersections specifically rather than to clumsily label them using a single term like "folk Catholicism."

The interactions between the Catholicism and Maya spirituality that are expressed by the institution of the *cofradías* and the tolerance of indigenous ritual activity even inside of the church (e.g. Bunzel 1959) suggest a remarkable accommodation of these traditions over the centuries. Sadly, the 1940s brought a time of confrontation that split many communities apart. The Catholic Action movement trained a generation of community leaders as *catequistas*. These people had undertaken special training so that they could espouse a more clearly orthodox form of Catholicism in their communities. This included a challenging of the traditional powers and practices of the *cofradías* and a profound skepticism of *costumbre* and particularly of ritual specialists like the *ajq'ijaa'* (Carlsen 1997; Hart 2008; Sexton 1978; Tarn and

Prechtel 1997). In his history of San Pedro La Laguna, *La Cruz de Nimajuyú,* Father Gerardo Aguirre champions the cause of the *catequistas* and credits them with reducing the influence of the *cofradías* in San Pedro, claiming they had done "incalculable harm" over the centuries[3] (2005). While Catholic Action represents the height of acrimony between Catholicism and Maya spirituality in the 20th century, a new tolerance of cultural traditions can be found in the Catholic doctrine of "inculturation" (Irarrázaval 2000).

The adaptation of the Christian teachings to local realities is nothing new. In fact, such accommodating tendencies were present from the beginning. The apostle Paul was particularly adept at addressing his audiences with the sensitivity of a diplomat or an anthropologist. As I have noted elsewhere (2004), Paul molded his language and ideas to the respective cultures wherever he taught the new faith of Christianity. To the Corinthians he was a logician, to the Hebrews a Rabbinical scholar. Paul tried his best to make the Christian beliefs 'fit-in.' Christianity diverged from being another type of Judaism and was able to reach outside of this community to a larger world mainly because of the efforts of Paul and his supporters (Lüdemann 2002). The history of the Catholic Church ever since has tacked back and forth between easy integration with local ways of life and a hard line that sought to purge what were considered to be heresies or diabolic influences from the Church.

The Second Vatican Council and the papacy of John Paul II were high points in the modern development of the inculturation doctrine. The use of vernacular languages in Catholic services, one of the Second Vatican Council's most radical changes, signaled a new message of pluralism rather than the uncompromising universalism represented

by the use of Latin. And the many mission trips of John Paul II, especially to impoverished parts of the world (often post-colonial settings) demonstrated that the Catholic Church recognized its role in tending to underrepresented groups and appreciated the struggles of the poor.

Inculturation is far more than this, though; it includes a willingness to set aside traditional forms if they draw more from European *doxa* than from Catholic dogma. For instance, in his study of Catholicism in Latin American, Diego Irarrázaval observed how "…God is presented as one of the white race, bearing the signs of power of wealthy minority groups. These ideas come from schooling and from the European type of religiosity that has spread everywhere" (2000). What message is Catholicism sending the masses if it portrays Jesus, Mary, and the saints as wealthy Spaniards? And how meaningful is an expression such as "the bread of life" to a people whose dietary foundation is not wheat, but maize? Considering how Christianity got tied up with the colonial project more generally, Irarrázaval noted that "monocultural patterns are dehumanizing" (2000). Inculturation conveys a fundamental appreciation of the human condition as it is inflected by the particularities of history and context.

But attempts to develop a culturally sensitive Catholicism also run the risk of heterodoxy. In his dissertation, *Maya Bodies and Minds,* C. James MacKenzie wrote:

> Inculturation, in its various forms, is an increasingly popular evangelizing strategy across Christian denominations. The challenges to the theologian or missiologist in conceiving and implementing an inculturation strategy are, however, potentially enormous. The basic threat that lurks behind endeavours to merge potentially distinct religious traditions is the possible heresy of the end product. (2005)

The balance between preserving a universalistic religion, with an orthodox hierarchy and theology, and adapting to local realities is an uneasy one. It would seem that allowing the local priest to mediate many of the finer points would be in the best interest of the Church. Trying to determine everything in Rome and sending out endless protocols is surely a doomed policy.

In *Art and Society in a Highland Maya Community*, Allen J. Christenson provides an illustrative case for this kind of inculturation. Stanley Rother, a Catholic priest who worked for many years in Santiago Atitlán, commissioned two local sculptors, Diego Chávez Petzey and his brother Nicolás Chávez Sojuel, to renovate the broken and deteriorated altarpiece. He encouraged them to draw from local traditions and symbols in their reconstruction. The result was masterful; an artistic fusion of Catholicism and highland Maya culture that does justice to both traditions.



Figure 3.1: The altarpiece of Santiago Atitlán

The altarpiece features a host of Catholic saints ensconced in their niches but throughout the sculpture are a variety of symbols and panels depicting such things as divination, local flora and fauna, and even Maximón. Diego Chávez discussed some of his motivations in selecting the images he did:

> I wanted to show the continued power of the past. You cannot destroy the past, only add new things to it. I took what is good of Christianity and the Maya religion. My ancestors in ancient times knew the truth of all things, but much has been lost since their day. But still my people, the Maya, remember the old customs and ceremonies and the great things that our ancestors have left to us. I tried to create something that would show what I could of the beliefs of my people and show that they are just as alive as those of the Christians. (Christenson 2001)

Moreover, the entirety of the altarpiece is in the form of a "flowering mountain" (Carlsen and Prechtel 1991; Taube 2004). Its placement in the front of the church, directly facing the looming San Pedro volcano that one sees upon turning around, is meaningful. Highland Maya cosmology reveres mountains and volcanoes which play central roles in religion and mythology.

Father Rother lauded the patient efforts of the brothers as they refined the altarpiece over a period of years. He thought the sculpture to be an important reflection of the community as a whole. Sadly, he was unable to see the finished altarpiece as he was assassinated in 1981, shortly before the altarpiece was completed. As an outsider to the community who appreciated the Tz'utujil heritage and as a Catholic priest who tried to peacefully mend cultural rifts, Father Rother provided a hopeful example of the way that an inculturated Catholicism might proceed in an indigenous community.

What becomes clear in reflecting on inculturation in specific contexts is that notions of syncretism that forever base identity and agency in the past, in documented

or imaginary histories, overlook the more important ways that people, as cultural *bricoleurs,* select from available resources to create present identities (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1966). Similarly, Garrett Cook and Tom Offit argue that it is important "to emphasize that syncretisms are created through active agents motivated by local political objectives and individual psychological drives and cognitive schemas, operating with limited numbers of potential cognitive models" (Cook, et al. 2013). In sum, people everywhere, and particularly in complicated colonial settings, are required to create their identities from a jumble of available cultural elements. While this may at times include seemingly contradictory or out-of-context features, there is no reason to privilege one tradition or feature because it fits some simpler, more elegant notion of how authenticity should work. Nevertheless, some scholars employ a "hermeneutics of suspicion" (see Ricœur 1970) and deny the apparent fusions of cultural forms as so much dissimulation or, perhaps, as "false consciousness." Professing ideas about "crypto-religion," these theorists argue that subaltern groups, using classic "weapons of the weak" (Scott 1985) manage to dress their authentic, traditional religion with just enough colonial trappings to appease the authorities. In fact, though, it is really just "traditional religion tricked up in new clothes" (Robbins 2004). Rather than seek essence and authenticity in the past, a more useful framework would acknowledge the genuine blends of the present not as bastardized versions of one or the other tradition, but as emblematic of processes and logics that are predominantly local[4] (Bunzel 1959; Early 2006; Hart 2008).

In his study of Christianity among the Urapmin of Papua New Guinea, Joel Robbins concluded that "hybridities in which cultures are brought together but not reconciled are marked by a permanent openness to change: they put in play processes

in which it is clear that things are not at rest" (2004). This "openness to change" is vivid among the highland Maya and permits an array of cultural configurations, none of which can be defined as "more pure" or "less pure" than the others. As the Tz'utujil sculptor, Diego Chávez, observed: "you cannot destroy the past, only add new things to it" (Christenson 2001). This is a poignant rendition of an indigenous world view that bases itself more in aggregation, accumulation, and analogical resemblance than it does in analytical division. To understand the intricacies of syncretism and hybridity among the highland Maya is to appreciate the emic world view of accumulation and accommodation (see Gossen 1986). This move necessitates the rejection of etic interpretations based on logical contradiction and the kinds of debates that establish orthodoxy over and against heterodoxy based on subtle, abstract distinctions.

In his introduction to an important volume on Mesoamerican religion, Gary Gossen argues that:

> "Religious syncretism" is a much-used, though long-exhausted concept that needs renovation. In its most commonly accepted usage, it signifies the process of mingling of two or more established traditions to produce new forms that are neither one nor the other transformed, but rather "new species," as it were. This concept is flawed because homogeneous and internally consistent systems of belief have probably never existed on the face of the earth, except perhaps in formal theological treatises that seek the "canon," as in St. Thomas Aquinas and his followers, the scholastic theologians. Surely, no parish priest in sixteenth-century Honduras carried such a belief system in a "pure" form in his heart and mind. Thus, the notion of essential and pure "components" that enter into the crucible of syncretism is dubious at best. (1993)

It is a poor theory of culture which does not admit constant interaction and the commingling of beliefs, practices, and things. So what work does a word like syncretism ultimately do? Is something new learned by observing that a religion has

signs and traces of multiple root systems? Perhaps. It is worthwhile to note such details as they come up in particular contexts but surely the greater part of the utility of a word like syncretism or hybridity is to acknowledge that social institutions and individuals are anything but monolithic. However, this is an example of an error attempting to correct an error. One of the key ideas that anthropology has brought attention to is that any notion of cultural or social "purity" is pure fiction. More likely, these debates of identity and pluralism, of difference and repetition, refer not to actual things-in-themselves but are merely cognitive artifacts of an essentializing human psychology. "Essentialism is the view that categories have an underlying reality or true nature that one cannot observe directly but that gives an object its identity," writes Susan Gelman, a developmental psychologist who has studied category formation and essentialism in children (2003). But as this dissertation will address throughout, it is high time to swerve past these kinds of intellectual obstacles, to the extent it is possible, and focus on process and relation rather than on things and essences. This is more easily said than done given the deep groove of an intellectual path dependency that has very much favored the former rather than the latter. But in what follows, terms and ideas that favor pure essences will be dropped and substitutes that emphasize functional relationality will be employed. Hopefully, this will enable the avoidance of obstacles that have troubled so many discussions of religious pluralism.

Key Themes in Maya Spirituality

In what follows, a thematic approach for representing Maya spirituality will be employed. That is, rather than attempting to present a systematic theology or detailing

a full catalog of ritual practices, a set of highly salient themes that show up in nearly all instantiations of Maya spirituality (especially as it exists in the Guatemalan highlands) will be presented. While some historical and archaeological data will be employed, an essentially synchronic "snapshot" of the present is the primary goal.

Two recent books—Thomas Hart's *The Ancient Spirituality of the Modern Maya* and Jean Molesky-Poz's *Contemporary Maya Spirituality*—do a fine job of discussing the array of "Maya spiritualities" that exist in Guatemala and both draw from many years of firsthand experiences among local populations. Besides these, a number of academic works—edited volumes and particular ethnographies—represent the range of local traditions and practices that compose this religious tradition. But aside from Hart's and Molesky-Poz's accounts, few have had the temerity to generalize about the topic as a whole.

So what is the "heart" of Maya spirituality? What are the core themes that give life to the tradition? Before addressing these, it would be wise to indicate what Maya spirituality is not. Molesky-Poz, echoing some of the sentiments from the previous section, offers this: "I have come to understand that Maya spirituality is not a conservative, static survival of the past nor a syncretic Catholic development. I understand it as theologically distinct, with its own logic and processes" (2006). It is critical to acknowledge the fact that Maya spirituality is a living tradition. It is not a revitalization of the past as it has never broken with the past; it is a flowing stream of meaningful symbols and embodied practices. Moreover, to render it as an offshoot of Catholicism—a set of "folk" practices that basically indicate how the conversion process has failed—does a great injustice. If anything, the success of Catholicism

among the highland Maya is attributable to the fact that so much within the Christian tradition sounded a harmony with local metaphysics and values. The institutional violence behind Catholicism in Guatemala is met, or exceeded, by the affinities between Catholic Christianity and the Maya world view (Early 2006).

Because it is a genuinely indigenous tradition, Maya spirituality possesses just enough alterity—just enough incomprehensibility vis-à-vis a European world view—that the differences that make it what it is are the same differences used by critics to argue that there is, in fact, no Maya spirituality. In *The Maya World of Communicating Objects*, Miguel Astor-Aguilera addresses this as a common problem in Maya studies:

> Cultural philosophies are affected by both environment and specific sociohistorical evolution. Therefore, rather than relying on general and universalistic concepts of religion that homogenize, distort, and ultimately fail as tools for understanding, we should allow that non-Western societies often have philosophical concepts we may consider scientifically illogical as well as very different world views from our own. (2010)

Due to the lack systematicity and orthodoxy in Maya spirituality, there is no predictive regularity to its manifestations. Traveling from one town to another in the Guatemalan highlands leads to an appreciation of the proximity of divine powers in these indigenous communities. Each town has its own mountains, myths, and mysteries concerning the holy world (*Mundo*). Indeed, there is sometimes so much resemblance between these features that there seems to be a fluid continuity. In fact, though, what continuity exists does so because of the underlying assumptions, inferences, and logics that structure the indigenous world view rather than from the details. The details, if one pays attention, are always different. The names are always multiple, changing even from story to story,

from prayer to prayer, but the way one addresses these special beings and how one appeases them and finds a satisfying equilibrium with them is exceedingly similar.

It must be emphasized that Maya spirituality is based in an oral-aural culture. So many European religions revolve around sacred texts that it is easy to forget how different the underlying processes and outcomes are when compared to traditions that have very little basis in the written word. Munro Edmonson noted that "...Mayan beliefs were never codified in an authoritative scripture but were rather embodied in a living and changing oral tradition" (1993). Perhaps the dearth of an orthodox theology or prescribed set of rituals owes a great deal to this absence of writing. But it should not be assumed that Maya spirituality has no written material. Classic Period Maya adorned their structures and belongings with an impressive hieroglyphic script; it would seem that writing once played an essential role, especially in the cities. Additionally, codices and divinatory almanacs were important tools of Mesoamerican religious specialists in the past and even, to an extent, throughout the colonial period (Boone 2006; Knowlton 2010; Weeks, et al. 2009). More recently, over the last few decades, as translations have improved and copies have become inexpensive, the *Popol Vuh*, a text transcribed by a Catholic priest from oral accounts, has served as a rallying point for pan-Maya ideologies. Phrases from the *Popol Vuh* are now routinely heard in prayers and during rituals (Christenson 2007; Tedlock 1996). Even acknowledging these exceptions, though, Maya spirituality must be understood foremost as an oral tradition.

The lack of books over the past few centuries has selected for Maya religious specialists who are masters of the spoken word. In some religions, in Rabbinic Judaism, for instance, the fame and authority of a religious specialist derives from his

comprehensive knowledge of scripture. Reciting long passages, ad verbatim, from sacred texts and relating features of these stories to present concerns is paramount in the tradition (Levy 2012). But without this modality of expression available, Maya religious specialists refined an entirely different set of skills.

In the practice of ritual, Maya religious specialists demonstrate graceful, sure movements that belie an artistry of form and function. The manner with which rituals are performed—the orchestration of sight, sound, smell, touch, and the artful sculpting of attention—produce a "sensory pageantry" that is immediately rewarding for participants (see McCauley and Lawson 2002). The structure of prayer, including the classic parallel couplet form so common throughout the Maya world (Bricker 2007; Tedlock 1983), produces an acoustic rhythm that is soothing while also inviting sustained attention and reflection on the utterances. But so much is left to the specialist and to his authority (as granted through divine election through dreams, divination, and other revelations) that variety dominates. This variety, the Protean way that Maya spirituality changes over time, presents a moving target to scholars of religion who are used to consulting a mountain of texts when analyzing a religious tradition.

Maya spirituality (and indigenous religious traditions more generally) require ethnography as well as a tolerance of variety and ambiguity. When employing frameworks developed for very different kinds of religions – especially religions with elaborate institutional structures, hierarchies of authority, and canonical writings – one finds that the square peg that is Maya spirituality does not fit through the round hole of a world religion. But rather than toss the square peg aside, and act as if it did not exist,

scholars need to retool their frameworks to be able to study this very different kind of cultural phenomenon.

A presentation of key features, the thematic approach described above, is a reasonable way to start in the identification and comprehension of Maya spirituality. In his introduction to *Symbol and Meaning Beyond the Closed Community*, Gary Gossen describes five themes that relate to "deep structural principles" which serve to unify a variety of cultural forms: the importance of cyclical time as a foundation of life, the multilayered cosmos and the necessity to successfully mediate between these different realms, conflict as a creative and life-sustaining force, complementary dualism, and the extraordinary power of language (1986). Whether or not this is an exact list of the synthesizing themes of the Maya world view, they do represent core features often found behind and within many practices and beliefs. It would seem, too, that this list could be deceptive if these were considered to be isolated principles rather than "interactive nodes." One will *not* find, say complementary dualism, outside of a blend with the multilayered cosmos, the extraordinary power of language, or some other theme; none of these features of the tradition "stand alone." While Gossen has identified a heuristically useful set of structuring principles, they should not be reified.

One of the essential features of Maya spirituality which sharply distinguishes it from European traditions is its "relational" ontology: beings exist by virtue of their relatability to other beings rather than by their independent substance (see Bird-David 1999; Hallowell 2002). One could infer a sort of "field theory" approach to ontology in this world view; that is, a thing or event may exist mainly as a relation or residue of recurrence or invariance. A relational ontology might be usefully considered along with

the so-called "Thomas Theorem": "If men define situations as real, then they are real in their consequences" (Merton 1995; Thomas and Thomas 1928). While a fuller discussion of social ontology will come later in this manuscript, suffice it to say for present purposes that living in an "enchanted world" is still very much the norm in the highlands of Guatemala (see Hart 2008; Weber 1946). Some would discuss this and related notions as "animism" (Bolle 2005; Thompson 1970). But as with so many useful but dated terms, animism carries along with it associations that are best left behind. For instance, when hearing the term "animism" and "anthropomorphism," people often understand this to mean that an animal, place, or thing is "personified." But as A. Irving Hallowell observed: "...it would be an error to say that the Ojibwa 'personify' natural objects. This would imply that, at some point, the sun was first perceived as an inanimate, material thing" (2002). However labeled, personal agency and consciousness are attributed to many things besides human beings (Astor-Aguilera 2010). The earnest investigator must be willing to set aside her own cultural contrivances and attempt to adopt the local's point-of-view. Observing and recording experiences according to presupposed ontological commitments is a mistake in many indigenous settings: "An ethnographer, then, cannot be satisfied with a mere cataloguing of the components of a cultural ecosystem according to the categories of Western science" (Frake 1962). The relational ontology that operates in Tz'utujil culture necessitates a kind of "suspension of disbelief" in the ethnographer so that these beings may be presumed to exist; this is, in essence, phenomenological "bracketing" (Husserl 1980) which permits the exercise of *participant*-observation (Packer 2011).

The "life force" (Tz'utujil, *chojq'aaq'/q'aaq'aal*) or "heart" (Tz'utujil, *k'u'x*) of each being makes it deserving of care and respect. García Ixmatá expresses this sentiment:

> Our grandfathers and grandmothers taught that it is not only humans who exist upon the face of the earth. Plants, animals, mountains, wind, water, and fire are also alive. They have their heart. Therefore, we should respect them; and if we do not, then problems will come to us. Those elements are also part of us and they have their spiritual protector. Therefore we should care for them so that they give us good life. In sum, everything that exists on the earth and in the sky has life, even the stars and planets. The sense of this teaching is to emphasize that human beings are not special beings, above the other beings such that we can have all else under our dominion. It explains that everything has its existence on earth, that each being is valuable to another, and that if something does not fulfill its role, serious problems may arise. Harmony may be broken. (2010)

To live well, then, is to live in equilibrium with the many other beings in one's environment. This can be especially challenging since one is not always aware of the invisible beings that populate the same space (cf. Astor-Aguilera 2010). To further complicate many of the simpler notions of animism, it is not necessarily the case that "everything is alive." Hallowell describes how he "once asked an old man: 'Are *all* the stones we see about us here alive? He reflected a long while and then replied, 'No! But *some* are'" (2002). Along the same lines as this, Astor-Aguilera describes how Yucatec Maya religious specialists venerate certain crosses and bundles not because these physical things are alive but because they have become "tethered" to incorporeal beings that are alive. And just as such beings can become tethered to objects, they can also detach from them. This means that such objects can revert to a more mundane existence (Astor-Aguilera 2010).

Revelation, through such channels as dreams and divination, is crucial because it provides information from and communication with the invisible beings that live among and affect people (see Groark 2009; Tedlock 1981). But in addition to revelation, communication with such beings takes on a variety of forms:

> Native Americans tend to view their place in the world as relational to other beings, visible and invisible, with which they are in frequent communication. These communications are not always in verbal form and can take the shape of decorations, requests, song, dance, and offerings that are often focused upon what we would classify as inanimate objects. (Astor-Aguilera 2010)

One important function of ritual, then, is its communicative function vis-à-vis these other beings. Just as communication is essential among human beings in order to facilitate interaction and prevent conflict, so is communication between human beings and these other beings of great importance in Maya spirituality.

A key orientation within Maya spirituality is that the world is full of "persons" besides human beings (what Hallowell has termed "other-than-human" persons in his study of Ojibwa world views (2002)). In what follows, some of the most important of these "other-than-human" persons within the highland Maya world view are considered in greater detail[5]. If there is a general sense in which many things all around people are alive and capable of agency then there are also some of these that are far more powerful than others. Understanding who these special beings are and how to appease them is a critical task for all humans.

Special Beings: The Maya Pantheon

To live well as a Maya, to find equilibrium in life, to avoid danger and illness, requires acknowledging and venerating a host of powerful beings. In contrast to a strict monotheistic faith, which in principle requires the worship of a single god (though in practice usually means worship of many divine beings, e.g. Catholicism), Maya spirituality incorporates a range of divinities into its pantheon but making any simple distinction between monotheism and polytheism for the Maya world view would not be wise (Fischer, et al. 1999). Moreover, aspects of these beings often seem to blend, one into another, so that the celebrant is often left unsure whether a prayer or offering was received by the appropriate being. The conclusion that Demarest comes to in relation to the Ancient Maya continues to ring true in contemporary practice even if some of the individual elements are different:

> ...the Maya concept of the sacred was so all-encompassing that it is somewhat misleading to describe distinct deities with specific referents and functions. The Maya deified numbers, periods in the various calendars, geographic features, their deceased ancestors, and rulers, in addition to the specific 'deities' identified by the Spanish chroniclers. The Maya sacralized their universe, which they conceptualized in specific structural terms tied to the calendar, astronomy, and physical models of the cosmos. The gods were nodes in this cosmic map, and their character, associations, malevolence or benevolence, changed according to the days in the Maya calendar or the positions of the sun, moon, Venus, and the stars in the heavens. For this very reason, the shaman, priest, and early priest-ruler, using their codices and their astrological knowledge, guided the people through the tricky cosmic and calendric map. They advised on which supernaturals to propitiate, how, and when. (2004)

The beings detailed below retain this mercurial character so treating these descriptions as in some way "fixed" would be a mistake. As with so much else in the Maya world view, there is an indefinite nature—a persistent openness—to categories and definitions.

While reviewing the varieties of beings mentioned here, it would be best to consider all these as participating in a "fuzzy set" that includes many of these features without necessarily retaining the same labels.

Ahaaw

In discussing Maya "gods" this is the most unitary and ultimate of them. It is likely that notions attributed to *Ahaaw* have borrowed much from Christian ideas about God. Though more properly translated as "lord," *Ahaaw* refers to a kind of care-giving creator god with final power over everything. Molesky-Poz depicts *Ahaaw* as an "owner" god (like the *Dueños del Cerro* mentioned below) which may be accurate traditionally or may be the typical understanding the communities she knows best (2006). Among the people I consulted, *Ahaaw* was the most common term for a "high god" and certainly represented more than a *Dueño del Cerro* like *Martín*. In fact, many of my consultants would use *Ahaaw* as if it were translatable to the Christian *Dios*.

El Mundo

Though it simply translates from Spanish to English as "the World," the term *Mundo* refers to an important set of divine beings in highland Maya cosmology. Garrett Cook has noted that "the *mundos* are a complex group. They are strongly associated with nature, and especially with wild or inaccessible places. There seems to be considerable overlap between the categories of the *mundos* and the souls in that certain remembered and mythologized *primeros* or ancestors can be called *dueños*, *mundos*, *difuntos*, or *antepasados*, and the personified manifestations of any altar can be called

mundos or *naguales*" (1986). This captures the fluid meanings of special beings in Maya cosmology. As Cook mentioned, altars—particularly in and around Momostenango—are often referred to as *Mundos* (e.g. *Mayor Mundo*). This may further specify how the term is meant to be used: as the powerful being of a special place. There is a rootedness to the Earth implied by *Mundo* and the implication that *Mundo* holds special authority over things of the Earth, again something like a *Dueño del Cerro*. As will be discussed in the context of *nawales*, this latter term has come to take on some of the meanings that *Mundo* may have had in the past.

Dueño del Cerro

Most of the stories regarding a *Dueño del Cerro* depict a wealthy Ladino (usually on horseback) who possesses marvelous wealth, land, and animals inside the hill or volcano where he lives (Cook 1986; Hart 2008). These figures have the capacity to give great wealth and power to people but usually at the cost of a Faustian bargain that includes their enslavement as workers on one of the *Dueno's fincas* after death (see Saler 1965). *Dueños de los Cerros* ("owners of the hills") represent local Earth deities (also known as *rawal* or *rajawal* (Carlsen and Prechtel 1994; Cuma Chávez 2008)), sources of the flora and fauna that sustain people. However the forms have changed over the centuries, the underlying assumption is that *Dueños de los Cerros* are the primary sources of a place's fertility.

In discussing Santiago Atitlán, Mendelson asserts that the saints venerated in the *cofradías* there are also *Dueños de los Cerros*, in control of various aspects of nature. Certainly, *Martín*, center of the bundle worship mentioned in Santiago Atitlán,

possesses many associations with this kind of power (cf. Bunzel 1959; Carlsen 1997; Stanzione 2003). Nathaniel Tarn (a.k.a. E. Michael Mendelson) describes the role of *Martín* in Atiteco cosmology: "The deeper one pries, the more *dueño*ships are found to drift from the control of ordinary *cofradía* saints into the hands of *Martín*, until one finds him as the head of all the *dueños* who act as subservient "angels" at his royal command" (Tarn and Prechtel 1997). It is important to make ritual offerings to the *Dueños de los Cerros* whenever disturbing the Earth—say planting a field of maize—or whenever one hopes to gain something from the natural world.

While working with the Mam (especially of Santiago Chimaltenango), John Watanabe learned about the power that the *witz* hold in these areas. In his descriptions, it becomes clear that *witz* are the same as *Dueños de los Cerros* elsewhere:

> …in the tales that Chimaltecos tell, *witz* still walk abroad in the world. Unlike the saints, who are fused to their images in the church, *witz* can appear anywhere and can change their appearance at will (cf. Wagley 1949:57n). Most often they appear as *tii moos*, 'imposing Ladinos,' clad in European clothes and speaking Spanish… *witz* possess large plantations and huge herds of animals, along with chests of gold coins and sumptuous clothes. There the souls of dead Chimaltecos toil for them. (1992)

The Mam consider *witz* to be dangerous characters who must be placated from time to time. The association of *witz* with wealthy Ladinos (a common theme throughout the highlands for the *Dueños de los Cerros*) suggests both their authority over worldly affairs as well as the lack of trust that people have in regards to these beings. They are duplicitous, dangerous, and, overall, possessive of great power. While Mendelson's identification of *Dueños de los Cerros* with the saints housed in Atiteco *cofradías* seems accurate, it would be a mistake to casually assert that Catholic saints

and *Dueños de los Cerros* have become fused in highland Maya thought. The attitudes and conceptions conveyed about the *Dueños de los Cerros* indicate an essentially Maya notion about special beings: in contrast to Christian teachings that espouse God to be the source of goodness and love, a purely "virtuous" deity, many of the divinities that the Maya interact with are not morally valenced (see Bunzel 1959). These beings are often scary and more often ambiguous, to be understood as neither good nor bad, but above all as *powerful*.

Maximón (Rilaj Mam)

While he has a great deal in common with the *Dueños de los Cerros*, the being known as *Maximón* (or more typically among the Tz'utujil as *Rilaj Mam*) has become very complicated over the last century or so; he now represents considerably more than just a *Dueño del Cerro*. Like one of these, though, he is often depicted as a Ladino in possession of great wealth and authority. Also like a *Dueño del Cerro*, he is duplicitous, neither good nor evil, and must be respected as he is very *delicado*.

Maximón serves as a patron to Maya religious specialists and one almost always finds an effigy of him on the altar that an *ajq'iij* keeps (Cuma Chávez 2005). *Maximón* images have become exceedingly popular and often serve to represent Maya spirituality as a whole. In fact, he can be seen on a variety of products including t-shirts, spiritual lotions, spiritual powders, soaps, aromatic sprays, candles, firecrackers, and colored sugar intended for use in the *ceremonia Maya*.



Figure 3.2: A sample of *Maximón* products

Having spread all over Guatemala, and even beyond its borders, *Maximón* is a popular figure for people who need special favors or healing. Cults of *Maximón*, including chapels devoted to him, have long been celebrated in Santiago Atitlán, San Jorge La Laguna, Zunil, and San Andrés Itzapa. People often go to these places in order to make special requests of *Maximón* and to give him an offering (according to tradition, he prefers strong alcohol and tobacco). Every kind of person is welcomed by *Maximón*, so he is very popular among down-and-outers, prostitutes, homosexuals, and many other marginalized groups who feel they are not welcomed by the Christian saints.

Because he is dangerous, most people treat him with care and respect, but some feel that he needs to be coaxed, tricked, or threatened in order to really get to work in granting a request. Hart discusses the behavior one witnesses in the *Maximón cofradía* in Zunil: "People come in and whisper in his ear; others come up and tap his cane on the floor to get his attention, then berate him, harangue him to come to their assistance. He's a friend, confidante, an ally, a recalcitrant partner, a master to be obeyed, or a servant to do one's bidding" (2008). It would be a mistake to simply call *Maximón* a Maya saint for even though he may have *cofradías* and is sometimes treated in the same way that one would treat a saint, at other times people relate to him much more casually. And, unlike a saint, he is capable and willing to heal or kill depending on one's request and the generosity of one's offerings.



Figure 3.3: Offerings to *Maximón* in Zunil

There are many names associated with this being, *Maximón* simply being the most common. He is also known as San Simón, Judas Iscariot, Hermano Simón, Pedro de Alvarado, Rilaj Mam ("venerable grandfather/grandson"), Mam ("grandfather"), and Rilaj Acha ("venerable man"), among others. The inclusion of such names as Judas Iscariot and Pedro de Alvarado (the chief conquistador of Guatemala) indicates the ambiguity and resistance embodied in *Maximón*. In *Rituals of Sacrifice*, Vincent Stanzione considers *Maximón* a "shape-shifting sorcerer," the incarnation of the "trickster style of Atiteco curers and signers, merchants and weavers, diviners, matchmakers, and midwives" (2003). He walks tall in his Stetson, puffing on a thick cigar, wheeling and dealing as a powerful *Dueño* in an unstable world.

The most common etymology of *Maximón* is "he who is bound/knotted" which may refer to the way he is traditionally made (particularly in Santiago Atitlán); a bundle of pieces carved from the *tz'ite'* (in Santiago Atitlán, *Tz'ajtel*) tree, *Maximón* is held together by ropes and bindings. Some legends have it that *Maximón* was fashioned by the ancient *nawales* to enforce sexual covenants between husbands and wives which is a fairly complicated proposition since *Maximón* has a reputation for promiscuity. In fact, there are a number of legends about his creation and what powers he was invested with by the creator beings (Carlsen 1997; Stanzione 2003; Tarn and Prechtel 1997; Vallejo Reyna 2001).

A lightning rod for controversy, *Maximón* is as reviled by some as he is adored by others. To *ajq'ijaa'* he is a patron and protector. The Kaqchikel *ajq'iij*, Baldomero Cuma Chávez, observes that:

> …the one certainty is that *Maximón* lives with those of us who believe in him, and each time that we mention his name he is manifested through different channels, through different means, including in the friend we have with us, in the movement of the water (if we have a glass of water, or if we are on the shoreline of a lake, river, or sea), in the forest, or in places closer to us where we connect spiritually[6]. (2005)

But if he is a ready friend to those who call on him, he is the archenemy of those who see him as a pagan idol that the Catholic Church has too casually accommodated. Countless Catholic priests have made it a personal mission to expunge this figure from some local community only to find that he inevitably returns in one form or another. The title of a recent book by Father Abelardo Pérez, *Me llaman Maximón: Satanás con corbata y sombrero*, expresses a strong sentiment: "They call me *Maximón*: Satan in a hat and tie" (2009). Pérez, originally from Spain, has lived and worked in Sololá (just above Lake Atitlán) for many years. He was never comfortable with the idea of *Maximón*, a figure who enjoyed great popularity all around the lake, but it was through his work as an exorcist that he became convinced that *Maximón* was truly a demonic entity that facilitated the possession of many local people and served as a rallying point for witchcraft (2009). But Pérez is only the latest in a tradition of Catholic priests who see *Maximón* as an incarnation of diabolic influences.

In *Los Escándalos de Maximón* (1965) and later in *Scandals in the House of Birds* (1997), Mendelson/Tarn and Prechtel recount a particularly dramatic episode of this kind. According to a Tz'utujil informant, a priest had been invited to *Santiago Atitlán* to say mass on Holy Wednesday, 1950 (during the first strong wave of the Catholic Action movement). He had heard about *Maximón* before arriving and intended to rid the community of him. When the priest entered the Catholic church he noticed

people adoring the effigy right there in the church. Furious, he attacked *Maximón* and threw some of his accouterments off the church porch. The informant noted that "people got extremely angry and were ready to set about killing the priest so someone fetched the literate boys and told them to tell the priest to leave the *Maximón* alone, for he was their god, and that the priest would go mad and die if he should persist" (in Tarn and Prechtel 1997). Unfazed, the priest retreated to the convent and retrieved a pistol from his luggage. Returning to see *Maximón* righted with a new set of offerings he kicked over the incense burners and candles. Since he was armed, the people did not attack him. Shortly thereafter he left and there was some attempt at reconciliation upon his departure though many people were deeply offended and sure the priest would be stricken with madness by *Maximón* (Tarn and Prechtel 1997). But this, sadly, was mere prelude to the more dramatic action.

The priest, Father Recinos, contacted the archbishop suggesting that something be done about the *Maximón* idolatry in Santiago Atitlán. A short time later (June 6, 1950 by one account), Father Recinos, accompanied by two other priests, arrived to burn *Maximón* in the market place. They entered *cofradía* Santa Cruz, where *Maximón* is typically housed, and began an exorcism of the place. Then they confiscated much of *Maximón's* paraphernalia, including some antique masks carved to serve as his face. By some accounts, the priests were accompanied by policemen, but thankfully no one was harmed during the quarrel (Carlsen 1997; Tarn and Prechtel 1997). In spite of these strident efforts to rid the community of *Maximón*, the truth is that very little changed. In fact, the adoration of *Maximón* is as popular as ever. *Maximón* draws a great deal of tourism to Santiago Atitlan and tourists are welcomed to visit him in the *cofradía*.



Figure 3.4: Procession of *Maximón* during Holy Week in Santiago Atitlán

Nawales

Talking to any contemporary practitioner of Maya spirituality will inevitably lead to the mention of *nawales*. They come up in all discussions of the ritual calendar since "*nawal*" is the generic title for any of the twenty days that compose the *Cholq'iij*. Each *nawal* of the *Cholq'iij* is also thought to associate particular "companion animals" or "co-essences" to humans born on that day in the calendar. These co-essences are referred to as *nawales* as well.

Discussions of *nawales* have related them to such terms as "alter ego," "companion animal," "guardian spirit," or "transforming witch"; these ideas have been

linked to such Nahuatl words as *tonal* (plural, *tonalli*) and other transcribed spellings (from spoken Mayan languages) like *nagual*, *nahual*, and *naual*. John Monaghan prefers the term "co-essence" which he feels does a better job indicating that a person may be linked to any number of things besides animals, such as lightning, comets, rain, and plants. He also notes that limiting co-essences to people is a mistake since the underlying concept, that various phenomena possess a relationship because of time, applies to virtually all natural phenomena. Being and destiny are tied up with the time-specific creation of things (Monaghan 1998).

One hears the term *nawal* used in a variety of ways. *Encantos*, *altares*, and other special places are often mentioned as having one or more *nawales*. *Kabawiil*, *iq'*, and other stones are discussed as having *nawales*. Once a Tz'utujil *ajq'iij* interrupted a ceremony we were having shortly after it had begun telling me that something was awry. He then pointed to a silver ring I was wearing and asked me about it. It had a small insignia representing the *Cholq'iij*. With relief, he asked me to take it off and then daintily placed it in a gourd bowl on a nearby altar. He told me that the ring had a *nawal* and that it was disrupting the ceremony[7]. Besides these meanings, *nawal* may also refer to those people who are knowingly or unknowingly "shapeshifters" and go about in the night in some other animal form to do good, or usually, ill. And there is a K'iche' town not far from Lake Atitlán named Nahualá which people explained to me was an old name referring to the fact that the town had been thought to be home to many sorcerers (from *Nahual Ja'* or *Ya'*; K'iche' for "waters of the sorcerers").

So just what is a *nawal*? I ended up asking a lot of questions about *nawales* to better understand just how they are conceived by people; they are not "gods," they are

not any one single thing (such as a day in the *Cholq'iij*), they are many things, they are "conscious" or "agentive," and they are apparently everywhere. In many ways, the relational ontology ("animism") that highland Maya peoples employ could be referred to more specifically as "nawalism." According to many consultants, a *nawal* is basically a spirit-like being or energy that is related to time, places, objects, and persons[8]. But before discussing how people further qualified the meaning and importance of *nawales*, it is worth looking into this ancient term at some length to get a sense of the various ideas attributed to *nawal* in the Mesoamerican *cosmovisión*.

Ideas about animal companion spirits and co-essences, besides being ubiquitous throughout Mesoamerica, go back at least as far as the Classic Period. Stephen Houston and David Stuart confirm that "Maya hieroglyphs and art do indeed document the notion of a companion spirit as far back as the Classic Period…these beings appear to have been central to much of Classic Maya art and religion" (1). By Houston and Stuart's account, the Classic Maya term *way* indicates a kind of co-essence related to notions of 'sleep,' 'dream,' 'witchcraft,' 'nagual,' 'animal transformation,' and 'other spirit' (1989). Reflecting on the importance of the *way* glyph on Classic Maya structures and artifacts, Houston and Stuart conclude that "many of the supernaturals described as 'gods,' 'underworld denizens,' or 'deities,' are instead co-essences of supernaturals or humans. More than ever, then, Classic Maya beliefs would seem to coincide with general patterns of Mesoamerican thought" (1989). In other words, the underlying idea behind a co-essence may be of profound importance in the indigenous world views of the Maya and related peoples.

Mentioned in numerous colonial Spanish sources, usually as a term to arouse fear of witchcraft, the first scholarly discussion of *nagual* was taken up by Brasseur de Bourbourg in his work, *Histoire des nations civilisées du Mexique et de l'Amérique-Centrale* (1859). It was Brasseur de Bourbourg who first suggested the notion that nagualism implied a widespread conspiratorial group of indigenous sorcerers bent on opposing European colonialism and the Christian religion. Some scholars have supposed that this bold interpretation derived from Brasseur de Bourbourg's credulity in some of the most ideologically presumptuous writings of early Christian missionaries who perceived any support of indigenous religious practices as inspired by the devil (see Musgrave-Portilla 1982).

The first English discussion of the term, in fact a lengthy paper devoted to the subject, was Daniel Garrison Brinton's 1894 piece, "Nagualism: A Study in Native American Folk-Lore and History." In his paper, Brinton, a Mesoamericanist scholar at the University of Pennsylvania, further developed Brassuer de Bourbourg's notions about nagualism as a "secret sodality," and "this Eleusinian Mystery of America." Brinton conceived it to be a secret society "no less powerful than mysterious, which united many and diverse tribes of Mexico and Central America into organized opposition against the government and the religion which had been introduced from Europe; whose members had acquired learning, which placed them on a par with the famed thaumaturists and theodidacts of the Old World; and which preserved even into our own days the thoughts and forms of a long suppressed ritual" (1894). Brinton seems to be drawing more from Freemason conspiracy theory than from Mesoamerican studies here but if not as unified and oppositional as Brinton suggests, there is no doubt that

Mesoamerican religious specialists, many of whom had impressive knowledge of traditional beliefs and practices, managed to thrive in spite of official persecution. And Brinton, as Brasseur de Bourbourg before him, believed nagualism to be the sort of secret society he did because of those early colonial writers (usually Catholic clerics) who presented it in just this way. The stubborn resilience and ongoing transmission of ancestral forms of authority and ritual among indigenous Mesoamericans always threatened Catholic missionaries who, in accord with their own assumptions, interpreted these legacies as diabolical and outside the Church, if not directly in opposition to it (see Núñez de la Vega, et al. 1988).

Brinton drew on an impressive range of colonial sources to render a picture of nagualism throughout this early period. Many of the details he noted continue to be prominent in contemporary ideas about *nawales* that a person enjoys by favor of her particular day of birth. For instance, Brinton discussed the work of a colonial Spanish historian, Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas who, drawing from 16th century sources, described an indigenous group in Honduras: "The devil used to deceive them, and appeared as a lion, tiger, coyote, and in the form of a lizard, snake, or bird, because there were many such animals, and also birds of prey, in this province. And they called these *naguales*, which is to say, guardians or companions; and when the bird died, so also died the Indian to whom it was pledged…and so it seemed to them that he who didn't have a *nagual*, couldn't be rich" (1601)[9]. Herrera y Tordesillas is almost certainly writing about a Maya group in this passage but early missionaries working with the Aztec in Mexico also recorded various usages of a similar term, *naoalli* or *nahualli*.

Fray Bernardino de Sahagún translated the Nahuatl term *naoalli* as "sorcerer" and noted that such a person could be known for doing good or ill much in the same way that a modern *ajq'iij* is contrasted with an *aj'iitz* (see 1961). And in a passage just after this, Sahagún discussed "the possessed one," using the related word *naole*, as a shapeshifter: "The possessed [is] one who transforms himself, who assumes the guise of an animal" (1961). In these contrasting passages, he who possesses esoteric knowledge is often capable of transforming into other (usually animal) forms.

Brinton derived a number of related terms from the root "na" which means "to know" or "knowledge" in Nahuatl (1894). This appears to be the case in many Mayan languages as well. "*Na'oj*" means "thought, knowledge, wisdom" in Tz'utujil, for instance (García Ixmatá 2010; Pérez Mendoza, et al. 2001). And to corroborate this root and its related terminology, consulting Fray Thomas de Coto's 17th century Kaqchikel dictionary is useful. In his entry on Magic he noted: "*puz*, or *naual*. So the magicians or sorcerers used to call it. It was a kind of magic that they used, transforming themselves into eagles, lions, tigers, etc. …And they used to call some trees or crags or other inanimate things and places where the devil spoke to them, or the idols that they had…they would call them such things believing they were alive" (1983)[10]. It is also suggestive that de Coto's entry on "power" makes use of the term *naual*: "The power that priests have for the forgiveness of sins and for giving sacraments, they call, or have called: *puz, naval*; vg. 'make your confession to the priest, sick one, because to him was given by our lord Jesus Christ, the virtue, the power; because the forgiveness of sins, the capacity to work wonders, his power is placed in the hands of the priests'" (Coto and Acuña 1983)[11]. De Coto has captured a sense of the meaning of *naual* for 17th

century Kaqchikeles which includes the shapeshifting abilities of "magicians" as well as an amorphous, numinous power that has the capacity to be located in certain places and things. This power is also related to the miracle-working and healing abilities of Jesus Christ.

Already in the earliest colonial sources, then, there appeared to be some radically different meanings about *nawales*. They were the spiritual co-essences related to the person because of his day of birth in the 260-day calendar but they were also a type of "sorcerer" or more objectively, someone who possessed esoteric knowledge and could transform into one or more animals. And finally, *nawal* referred to a kind of spiritual power that might be associated with particular places, idols, and other ritual objects. The interesting thing about the polysemous nature of *nawales* is that the same constellation of meanings is present in 20th and 21st century usages of the term as in those colonial sources from centuries earlier though it seems to be changing of late, essentially dropping some of the connotations it has with animal transformation.

In a 1944 article, "Nagualism in Mexico and Guatemala," George Foster opposed Brinton's grand conspiracy theory of nagualism. He emphasized the point: "As a trait or complex, there is no such thing as nagualism" (1944). Foster went on to discuss *nagual* and the related Nahuatl word, *tonal*. The meaning of *tonal*, which he derived from *tonalamatl*, the Nahuatl term for the 260-day calendar, he claims to have become established sometime between 1650 and the mid-nineteenth century, as meaning, specifically, the animal co-essence one has due to his given day of birth in the *tonalamatl* (1944). This association translates well to the contemporary Maya use of

nawal to mean one's birthday in the *Cholq'iij*; in this sense, to ask a person's *nawal* is to ask her "day."

In her 1956 article, Lucille Kaplan accepted Foster's specification of *tonal*, claiming that was the typical usage of the word in the area where she worked, coastal Oaxaca, while also asserting that the term *nagual* specifically referred to a "transforming witch" in that region.

Benson Saler substantially documented the use of the term *nagual* among 20th century Maya populations (in this case, K'iche') in Guatemala (1964). He begins his article with a flourish, emphasizing just how significant, and unwily, the term had become by the time he decided to write about it: "One of the oldest war horses in the Middle Americanist's stable is a semantically skittish creature named *Nagual*" (1964). Agreeing with Foster's assessment of Brinton, Saler thinks it unreasonable to suggest the continuity of some unified organization of nagualists. Additionally, he thinks much of the confusion regarding the term is a logical consequence of its varied usage by different groups over time. Saler reviewed a number of key 20th century ethnographies to illustrate the previously noted set of meanings: one's calendrically linked co-essence or alter ego, shapeshifting sorcerers, and a type of spiritual power associated with special places and objects. In his review, Saler related an interesting statement by Manning Nash who had worked in the K'iche' community of Cantel: "The mythical names of the mountains and volcanoes that surround the *municipio* and the names of their owners, the spirits who inhabit them, are part and parcel of everyone's geographic knowledge. All know why four crosses mark the entrances and exits of the *municipio*—that with this symbol a *nawal* or guardian spirit keeps evil from entering the village"

(Nash 1958). So the idea of guardianship, or spiritual protection, emerges as an increasingly dominant theme in highland Maya culture.

While colonial Spanish sources often highlighted and emphasized the transforming witch aspect of *nawal* and minimized the tutelary spirit meaning of the word, one sees these two meanings up end, as if on a balance. In fact, reviewing the literature on Maya custom and belief, the closer the publication comes to the present, the more positive *nawal* seems to get and the less mention is made of transforming witch concepts. In contemporary Maya spirituality, *nawales* form the sturdy backbone of an entire body of belief and practice based the meanings of days of the *Cholq'iij* and a generalized sense of the "spiritual essence" of places and things (see Azurdia Bravo, et al. 2008). *Nawales* are a popular topic of discussion and every manner of book and calendar is now available to learn more about them (e.g. Barrios 2004). Again, one rarely hears talk of *nawales* as transforming witches anymore. In the current climate, it is asserted that one's destiny in life as well as the day-to-day aspects of living that life can be better managed by understanding the meaning of the *nawales* and making an accord with them through ritual.

Michael Silverstein's discussion of the Guardian "Spirit Power" Quest in the American Northwest (Silverstein 2009) presents some parallels with notions of *nawales* among the highland Maya. Drawing from his fieldwork among Northwest Coast indigenous societies (speakers of Chinookan languages in particular), as well as published accounts by Edward Sapir and others, Silverstein discusses the ways that young people in these societies may go about seeking patronage from -*iułmaχ* (Kiksht, "spirit powers"). Among these groups, there used to be various quests and challenges

that the youth might take up on spring evenings. Silverstein describes it this way: "It was on these solitary vigils that one's -*iułmaχ* might come to one, telling the young person in a state of altered, van Gennepian removal-from-society that he or she would be protected by this power and be licensed to behave in ways that indexically revealed the power one had" (2009). Whereas in this framework a person's spirit powers came to be associated with him through the realization of a quest, in highland Maya culture it is understood that one typically inherits such powers because of his day of birth (and related *nawales*) in the *Cholq'iij* (Rupflin-Alvarado 1995). One's *nawales* protect the person and endow her with a given personality and specific "energies" (Tedlock 1982). Indeed, one of my associates explained to me that most homosexuals were born on the day *Tz'ikin*[12]. Another person told me that one could better understand the *Cholq'iij* by determining what a person's *nawal* was and then observing his behavior or, vice-versa, discerning his *nawal* through the type of behavior he enacts[13]. Silverstein explains -*iułmaχ* in a related way: "Powers endowed one with strengths and abilities of various sorts. They also formed one's personality, constituting in effect a kind of ethnopsychodynamic explanatory framework for understanding people's characteristic ways of responding to the empirical circumstances of life. These characteristics are the realized, lived indexical consequences of having encountered specific spirit powers, and endow people differently" (2009). Again, the youth in these groups seems to come upon her spiritual powers through special encounters. While such encounters also play a role in the highland Maya world view (Hart 2008; Tedlock 1982), the complement of *nawales* received at birth remain the primary source of one's destiny and abilities. Depending on how the person lives his life, particularly whether he attends to ritual

offerings to the *nawales*, he may gain greater strengths from the positive side of those *nawales* or suffer the susceptibilities and wicked aspects of the negative side of them. So the powers of one's *nawales* are dependent on some aspects of the person's behavior but not in the same ways as among the questing societies mentioned by Silverstein.

Consider this excerpt from Edward Sapir regarding the *–iułmaχ* spirit powers: "Those who had sturgeon spirits were exceptionally brave; no matter what wounds they might have received they would not succumb, just as a sturgeon's vitality is great. It may be deeply cut without being killed. War chiefs almost always had for spirits, sturgeons, rocks, or trees" (in Silverstein 2009). Among highland Maya groups, a similar way of thinking regarding a person's characteristics is common. For instance, one of my associates explained to me that long ago the town elders would help to determine necessary roles in the community by considering candidates and their respective *nawales*[14]. In contrast to the focus on secrecy that Silverstein mentions, that is, to speak of one's *-iułmaχ* could lead to its loss, my associate stated that the town elders were aware of each person's *nawal* in former times since the main calendar in use had been the *Cholq'iij*. Thus, if a baby was born, it was known that that the child would possess the qualities of that particular day in the *Cholq'iij*[15]. What remains strongly parallel in both accounts are that tutelary spirits dictated the greater part of one's personality and abilities.

In a 2005 publication, Cuma Chávez conveys the guardianship meaning of *nawal*. Relating *nawal* to the term *jawal* (usually translated as 'owner'; compare with related terms *rawal/rajawal* and *dueño*): "In the Kaqchikel language it is defined as *Jawal*, which is a synonym of *Nawal*; meaning *encanto*, owner, guardian, caretaker,

protector, that's to say, that these terms have to be considered in context, if one is speaking of a place, or a hill, refer to it as a *nawal,* the guardian of an *encanto*, hill, or place[16]" (2008). Additionally, he notes that "in the context of a human being, we can define it as the guardian of the person, a spirit of protection[17]" (2008). A common trope in discussions of this type, Cuma Chávez discusses the important role that *nawales* play in helping each person find "equilibrium" (2008).

Molesky-Poz confirms this notion of "guardian" as an essential aspect of the term: "…*nawalism* signifies that a guardian spirit assists the individual maintain ecological equilibrium; the *nawal* helps one discover, through feeling and goodness, the depth and intensity of relations with nature as well as activating the awareness of one's specific identity; and the principles of *equilibrium*, *balance*, and *harmony* are established and maintained by observance of the 260-day sacred calendar" (2006). A person's *nawales* ideally help the person harmonize with the larger patterns within this world view, including deeply embedded notions of equilibrium with all other beings.

These positive accounts of *nawales* seem to drop the associations of shapeshifting altogether. And, originally, the capacity to transform oneself into an animal was not necessarily negative (e.g. Durán 1994); no doubt, European traditions about werewolves and other shapeshifters aided in the malevolent and demonic associations with this ability. What appears to have occurred (and is probably still occurring) over the last few centuries is an increased ramification of terms; *nawal* is stabilizing to mean the essentially good aspects that have been associated with the term since early colonial accounts while a variety of other, usually local, words more specifically denote a shapeshifter, thus absorbing the semantic content of the prior

negative senses of *nawal* (cf. Quiacain Coché and Cholotío García 1998; cf. Warren 1998).

Kay Warren recounts a tale she heard in San Andrés Semetabaj which she has entitled "Peel Off, Flesh, Come Back On" (1998). Similar types of stories are known throughout the highlands; they detail people who undergo transformations and become roaming animals at night. Among the Kaqchikel of this area, a shapeshifter of this kind was known as a *rajaw a'q'a* (in Spanish, *dueño de la noche* or "lord of the night"). In contrast to many of the colonial tales which marked this as an ability of witches and warlocks, the more recent tales often depict such people in pitiable terms. They often do not know of their nighttime proclivities and sometimes suffer greatly because of their presumed destiny (Warren 1998).

Among Tz'utujils, their term for this kind of shapeshifters is *q'iisoom* and, in Spanish, *characotel* (Pérez Mendoza, et al. 2001; Quiacain Coché and Cholotío García 1998). I recall having a conversation on this topic, in an early phase of my fieldwork, with a respected *sanpedrano* whom I had come to know well. Don Temo is in his early sixties, financially successful, a strict teetotaler, and the beloved paterfamilias of two generations of descendants who live with him in the family compound. He had fulfilled numerous roles in the echelons of local *cofradías*. Don Temo had experienced a difficult childhood and had been raised, for the most part, by his grandparents. In his late teens and early twenties, he had lived outside of San Pedro for a few years, serving in the army. This experience had enabled him to learn good Spanish and he demonstrated a sophisticated, worldly appreciation of national politics.

Don Temo eschewed Maya spirituality without strongly opposing it, as some other members of Catholic Action had done. He regarded many of the traditional rituals and beliefs as mere superstitions. During this particular conversation, I mentioned that the night before I had been awakened by the sound of loud scratching and thuds upon the roof just above me. It had worried me for a moment, but then I heard the familiar squawk of a crow and went back to sleep. He mentioned that his younger daughter had recently heard similar sounds in the night and proceeded to tell me about the meaning of the word *q'iisoom*, which I soon recognized to be similar to what I had previously read about the *nawal*. With jest and occasional laughter, he explained that it was a person who had the capacity to transform into an animal and often did so on certain nights. Sometimes such people willingly made these transformations and other times they had no knowledge of their nocturnal lives as these creatures.

Q'isomaa' often frightened those who tried to sleep and could at times cause genuine harm to people. I chuckled with him as he explained all of this, sure that he did not take any of it seriously because of his laughter. After explaining the meaning of the term to me there was a pause and we sat quietly. Then Don Temo turned to me, now completely serious, and told me that I should be especially careful if I found myself out late at night because some of these *q'isomaa'* were very dangerous. As a dutiful ethnographer I mirrored his seriousness and told him that I would follow his advice. The incongruity of Don Temo's prior comportment and the recognition that he managed some uneasy balance in his attitudes towards things he considered to be mere superstitions, but which were also part of the behavioral environment of most locals, has often caused me to ruminate on the episode.

The word *nawal* has meant a variety of things over the centuries and, even now, is debated. The range of meanings it has refer to a cloud of associations. Some of these associations, especially ideas about shapeshifting, have started to dissipate and cluster anew under a different set of labels. But the ancient meanings of nawal as knowledge and as co-essence remain strong, giving a deep root to contemporary manifestations of Maya spirituality.

In coining the term "Mesoamerica" to refer to a geographic and cultural area, the archaeologist Paul Kirchoff listed a suite of characteristics, of both material and ideological kinds, which he felt to identify the limits of this multi-ethnic region and additionally provide a useful separation of it from adjacent culture areas (1943). Among these characteristics, Kirchoff included the use of the 365-day as well as the 260-day calendars. But he did not mention *nawales*. After a review of the deep history of the term *nawal* and its overlapping meanings, referring at once to the co-essences that a person has by favor of his day of birth in the 260-day calendar, shapeshifting religious specialists in possession of esoteric knowledge, and a less definable knowledge and power that may be associated with special objects, places, and units of time, I would assert that this term be added to the list of those things that meaningfully identify Mesoamerica.

Sustaining the Gods: Reciprocity and Ritual

Virtually all religions include the performance of ritual. But while some religions base a great deal of their identity in writings, the recitation of creeds, and institutions, other religions revolve around ritual performance grounded in material

culture (McGraw 2015). Maya religious traditions are noteworthy for this kind of emphasis. Molesky-Poz addresses the importance of rituals by calling them "cornerstones of Maya spirituality, the visible activity of the reciprocal relation in which persons maintain connection and harmony" (2006). Reciprocity is a term that shows up time and again when scholars or participants reflect on Maya ritual. The give-and-take aspect of human beings' relationships with the other beings around them and with the special beings of the Maya pantheon expresses a fundamental appreciation for reciprocal interaction. In his article "Cultural Logic and Maya Identity," Edward Fischer observes that, according to the Maya world view, "Humans act to maintain cosmic harmony through ritualized reciprocity, part of the covenant between humans and cosmic vitalistic forces" (1999). This notion of a covenant between humans and cosmic forces is a perennial theme, evident in the *Popol Vuh*, for instance. The creator gods produced multiple races of beings before finally becoming satisfied with humans. The beings they had created just before humans were made of wood and had many characteristics of human beings but the gods were dissatisfied with them because they did not give thanks and perform ritual for their creators (Christenson 2007; Tedlock 1996). In fact, the *Popol Vuh* refers to this absence of ritual and offerings to the Maya deities as a basic lack of understanding about the world.

Cook offers insights about Maya ritual, illustrating the transactional model that informs this world view:

> Religious practice is complex indeed, but it revolves around the making of offerings to supernaturals. Such offerings are always made into or in the presence of fire and so religious practice is referred to as 'burning.' The patterns of relating to the supernaturals are the same as those of relating to worldly authorities. Fines and bribes are paid to

> end misfortune or to ask for favors or protection, and the land and its resources are rented from *mundos* 'worlds', powerful beings who live inside the earth. Saints and angels bring the rain, and may withhold it if there is wrongdoing among the communities leaders, or if the proper offerings have not been made on behalf of the community.
> (1986)

The reciprocity employed in these conceptions of ritual applies equally well in daily life as in ritual (see Douglas 1969), one more reason that the sacred/profane distinction is not particularly apt in describing Maya spirituality.

In *Más Allá de la Costumbre: Cosmos, Orden y Equilibrio*, Marcela Tovar and colleagues articulate the reciprocity that lies behind all aspects of Maya life: "Indigenous societies have as their foundation the establishment of relationships of reciprocity: that's to say, the relationships between people, and between them and the cosmos is fundamentally 'the obligation of giving, that of receiving, and that of giving again.' The foundation of social regulations arise from the delicate equilibrium between what's given—and there's an obligation of receiving; that which is received must be returned in kind[18]" (Tovar, et al. 2000). If one wants or needs something, then he has to be prepared to offer something in return (see Hinz 2008). Nothing comes from nothing in this model; everything consists in transaction and in the transformation of some "energy" into another kind of "energy" or action. But this sounds needlessly complex, the best metaphor—and one used often in these kinds of discussions—is the notion that one "feeds" the gods in order to be "fed" by the gods. Food is the prototype of taking something foreign and though a mysterious alchemy transforming it into the very basis of human existence and activity. Maya ritual, then, is most simply thought of as sharing food and sustenance (cf. Astor-Aguilera 2010; Wagley 1949).

As Edmonson notes, rituals are not so simple as making an offering. One has to know precisely when, to whom, and with what to make the offering: "Mayas do not pray empty-handed. They offer the gift of a sacrifice to god in return for specified favors. Normally the request is for the suspension of all the malevolent powers of the calendric gods in favor of life, health, and prosperity. One may expect the favor to be granted if the request is made at the right time and accompanied by the appropriate sacrifice" (1993). Maya spirituality requires a great deal of knowledge and, usually, the assistance of a specialist in order to properly perform ritual. And even then, things can go wrong.

Equilibrium, Disequilibrium, and Disease

If ritual teaches something about the Maya world view, it is this: everyone and everything exists in a web of relationships and those relationships exist only by virtue of transaction. If there is an absence of transaction then the fabric begins to break down and fall apart. This is why the notion of harmony and equilibrium is so important in a cosmos dependent upon reciprocity (see Fischer, et al. 1999). Tovar and colleagues describe the essence of *eudaimonia* for the Maya: "In order to have a good life (*utz kaslemal* in K'iche') it is necessary to establish regulations that structure social relations, exchange with nature and with the divine. The central principle of this set of regulations is the maintenance of equilibrium: giving, receiving and giving again are the fixed axes by which equilibrium is achieved between people, between them and nature, and between the human and the divine" (2000). Whether implied or apparent, ritual

expresses foundational cultural values and exercises those values, embodying them and reproducing them in practice.

Equilibrium is a synonym for lack of conflict, for an orderly and balanced set of commitments. This social aspect of equilibrium is mirrored in ritual and cosmology. Molesky-Poz discusses the values that support this balance: "…elders identify principles of familial and communal relations which center on the communal good, on unity, harmony, respect, responsibility, and consensus between parties in decisions. Daily practices reinforce interconnectedness, responsibility, and participation of each member. Further, elders explain that this world view cultivates a culture of reciprocity. 'If one takes care for the earth, the earth cares for us' is often heard" (2006). But as equilibrium is a dynamical balance, a host of challenges constantly threaten to disrupt it. People lie, people steal, people do not pay their debts. Theodicy, the problem of evil, is explained in Maya cosmology as a result of the same kinds of failed commitments in ritual that bring disorder in the social world (Douglas 1969). Hunger, disease, disaster, and illness are the points of disequilibria that exist because of broken covenants.

The sick typically assume that someone has either sent a curse their way or they themselves have somehow transgressed and are suffering the consequences. Sickness usually leads to a careful inventory of one's behavior. But Maya ideas about the person include a shared moral fate so, in fact, an illness might not even be one's own fault but an inherited debt. Wagley details the kind of intergenerational malfeasance that brings illness:

> Most sickness is a punishment of God. Common colds and fevers are thought to result from the sin of breaking a *costumbre* by having sexual relations on the same day. Sore eyes are thought to be sent by God because one's grandparents once laughed at a blind man. If one's parents or grandparents ever stole cattle or pigs, then one stands a good chance of contracting dysentery. A quarrel between a man and his wife may bring the punishment of a stomach ache; and if the couple quarrels during the last twenty days before a birth, then the child will suffer from stomach aches during its entire life. (1949)

As this excerpt demonstrates, illness, ritual, and behavior are inextricably tied together. If ritual is a necessary part of attending to the needs and desires of special beings, it is not different in kind from living well with others. Life as a whole becomes ritual when behavior is carefully circumscribed by a set of regulations that are essentially the same for all interactions, no matter the type of being. Wagley echoes this sentiment: "God punishes those who do not 'pay their debts,' who 'treat the old badly,' who are aggressive and quarrelsome (*gente mala y brava*) and who are sexually loose" (1949). Adhering to the morals of the community which, generally speaking means living with a constant appreciation of reciprocity, cause-and-effect, and relationship, keeps one well in a state of equilibrium. When one has made a misstep, failed to make appropriate offerings, or has inherited such moral failings then suffering ensues. But there are always ritual means of restoring balance.

Ceremonia Maya (Xukuleem, Mejeleem)

I have sometimes made the vague comparison that if *tz'ite'* seed divination serves as the "confession" for Maya spirituality, then the *ceremonia Maya* serves as its Mass (for a specific instance of this ritual, see the discussion about Don Francisco in chapter 4). A mainstay of all ritual activity in the highlands today, the *ceremonia Maya*,

called simply "*ceremonia*" or, in Tz'utujil, *xukuleem* or *mejeleem* (synonyms for "to kneel"), is performed routinely by *ajq'ijaa'* to cure, to bless, and to give praise to and communicate with special beings of the Maya *cosmovisión*. The central element in this ritual is fire.

Fire has served as a prominent medium of ritual throughout world cultures but it is particularly significant in Maya practices. The colonial priest, Nicolas de Leon, describes the importance of fire among the Mexica (see also Limón Olvera 2001):

> If any of their old superstitions has remained more deeply rooted than another in the hearts of these Indians, both men and women, it is this about fire and its worship, and about making new fire and preserving it for a year in secret places. We should be on watch for this, and when in their confessions they speak of what the Fire said and how the Fire wept, expressions which we are apt to pass by as unintelligible, we must lay our hands on them for reprehension. We should also be on the watch for their baptism by Fire, a ceremony called the *yiahuiltoca*, shortly after the birth of a child when they bestow on it the surnames nor must the lying-in women and their assistants be permitted to speak of Fire as the father and mother of all things and the author of nature; because it is a common saying with them that Fire is present at the birth and death of every creature. (in Brinton 1894)

These kinds of sentiments were common among the Classic Maya as well (see Miller and Taube 1993; Sharer and Morley 1994). Fire serves as a means to transform offerings into sweet-smelling smoke, the basic sustenance of the Maya divinities. The burning of *pom* (*copal*), a routine ritual practice in many highland Maya households, is the smaller version of a full-blown *ceremonia Maya* and resembles it in the basic aspect of feeding the gods with aromatic smoke.

The *ceremonia Maya* requires a variety of special ingredients; *candelarias* make a steady business selling these locally-produced materials. The first step in preparing the fire is to pour sugar (in a counter-clockwise motion) to form a large circle. This

circle is then bisected with two perpendicular lines of sugar to form a *cruz Maya*. After this, four points are made in each quadrant to additionally confirm the four cardinal points.

The base of the fire, typically made from *ensartes* (briquettes), and the token payments fed into the fire during the ceremony, called *cuilco*, are made from resinous pine materials. By themselves, these disks offer a subtly pleasant aroma. Atop this base is added any number of ingredients, the components of which are specific to that day of the *Cholq'iij* and the reasons that the ceremony is being performed. Commonly, sweet things—chocolate, candies, *pan dulce*, honey, fruit—are offered but any number of additional materials may be important. In celebrating my *nawal*, *Tijax*, the *ajq'iij* I typically consult has me bring a pound of beef which is cut into four parts and placed equilaterally upon the *ensartes*. Other common materials used in the fire are *copal* incense, herbs such as rue and rosemary, small pegs of pine (called *estoraque*), and quick-burn wood kindling called *ocote*. Besides these, huge mounds of colored (each of which signifies something particular) candles are spread upon the base and offered into the fire during the ceremony.

What is the symbolism and significance of the *ceremonia Maya*? Quintessentially, the *ceremonia Maya* is a reconstruction of the world and a feeding of the source of existence and the cycle of time that orders reality (see Maxwell and García Ixmatá 2008). It is also an important channel of communication for humans and Maya divinities (Molesky-Poz 2006). The configuration of the four quadrants, and the four cardinal points, within a circle is the construction of space and its centering in that place. The fire itself has so many associations with the sun that it would seem that lighting the

fire is giving motion to the sun and thus life to the ritual, and to the world. Feeding the sun (or through the sun) the many offerings adds energy, effort, and conscious intention to the source of life. And counting the days, addressing each one by name it its proper sequence, is reproducing the ordered cycle of time that defines and encloses all activity.



Figure 3.5: Preparation of materials for a typical *ceremonia Maya*

There is often a casual atmosphere while the ceremony is prepared (and I am usually permitted to take photos or shoot video), but once the *ajq'iij* opens the ceremony with the invocation, kneels, and puts flame to the fire, it is understood that special beings are present and everything becomes *delicado*. While I have often been permitted to take photos and film a ceremony, many times (either because of the particular *nawal* of the

day, the purpose of the ceremony, or other concerns) I need to desist such activity and simply participate in the ritual. But even though the *ceremonia Maya* involves communicating with special beings and making them offerings, there is no stipulated etiquette or protocol for the participants. This is especially interesting since the kind of behavior I am familiar with from Catholic Masses, which requires a somber and silent comportment, is also typical for the Guatemalan Masses I attended. People do not seem to be employing the same assumptions or drawing from their experiences in Catholic Masses when performing *costumbre*. When attending my first fire ceremonies, I was sometimes surprised by the lack of solemnity. People might chat, point out things and talk about them, attend to a quick call on their cell phones, or step away for a moment. After more exposure, I came to recognize the quotidian aspect of Maya ritual; like so many other "transactions," ritual is often accompanied with a mundane sense of cause-and-effect or payment and receipt. It is not necessarily this way; sometimes people will peer intensely into the fire, kneel and beg for an important favor, or quietly weep. Moreover, the *ajq'iij* is usually deep in concentration as he attends to the fire and considers its movements. In general, there is less gravitas to Maya ritual performance than one might encounter in something like a Catholic Mass. This likely represents a mitigation of the sacred/profane dichotomy so strongly emphasized in Western traditions (see Astor-Aguilera 2010).

Working with the Yucatec Maya, Astor-Aguilera noticed similar ritual behavior. Growing up as a Catholic, Astor-Aguilera was surprised by behavior which, from his point of view, seemed "sacrilegious" (2010). Such moments of surprise or confusion are often sign posts for the kinds of realizations that make ethnography an important

endeavor. Astor-Aguilera ultimately came to understand how different Maya ritual is from Catholic ritual and was able to more finely appreciate the world view that informed it, noting that ritual "is simply practical behavior and action" in the behavioral environment of many Maya peoples (2010).

The *ceremonia Maya* is often a brief ritual cycle, sometimes consisting of just a single person and the *ajq'iij* who prepares the fire, makes the offerings, and interprets the oracular signals of the flames. The majority of fire ceremonies I have attended last about an hour. But the *ceremonia Maya* also serves as the focal point of an important communal celebration, such as the Maya New Year (February 22). In such cases, the fire may be tended to by four or more *ajq'ijaa'*, include dozens of attendees, and consume mounds of offerings. The larger ceremonies may last three or more hours and are often accompanied by live music. Sometimes a ceremonial dance is part of the celebration. The photo below was taken on 8 *B'aatz'* (05/22/09) in the *Cholq'iij* calendar, a particularly important day on which many *ajq'ijaa'* are initiated.



Figure 3.6: Tz'utujil *ajq'ijaa'* conducting a *ceremonia Maya* on 8 *B'aatz'*

Cruz Maya, Cardinal Points, Colors

The image of the cross was a well-established symbol long before Christianity came to Mesoamerica. In contemporary Maya spirituality, it continues to play a central role in ritual, particularly since it is reproduced as the first step of the fire ceremony. Maya midwives have observed that this circled cross shows up on the exposed bellies of pregnant women (García Ixmatá, et al. 2009). Investigators have suggested that the *cruz Maya* was an important tool of ancient astronomers for locating and tracking celestial bodies as they moved across the night sky (ibid.).

One aspect of the creation of quadrants of symbolic importance to Maya cosmology is the construction of a "dual-duality." One bisects the circle thus creating a balanced pair. Bisecting perpendicularly repeats the same process but this additionally cuts the previously split halves into another balanced pair. In the process, then, one affirms and enacts the balanced repetition of a complementary dualism, a dualism that is not genuinely dichotomous but bounded by a circle and thus representative of different aspects of a single thing; it partakes of the original whole which is not actually reduced by the bisections.

The creation of the cross, especially as it bisects a circle to create quadrants, is a centering of space and a division of it into four parts on the horizontal plane. Centering is a key symbol, and practice, in Maya spirituality as it represents balance and reciprocity (Fischer, et al. 1999). To center and properly align things in space is part of a larger "ordering complex" that is central to *tz'ite'* seed divination among other rituals. There is something psychological compelling about this circled cross symbol because it has shown up all over the place. Even in European cartography, in the notion of cardinal directions, this same schema is at work. Why should that be? Why are there four cardinal directions rather than two, six, eight, or more?

There may be an analogy to the visual system in this diagram as well. A panoramic view of an open horizon produces the circle; if one imagines vision extending from a central point as a ray then by the time that ray returns to its starting coordinate on the horizon it has described a circle. If one were to represent this, it could be done with the circle, thus signifying the notion of an entire field of vision, but it could also be done by facing one direction, then facing the opposite direction, then turning ninety

degrees and repeating the process. One could also look directly ahead, look to either side, and then turn around. A perpendicular doubling of the Janus face offers the "minimal process" of achieving an entire field of vision. If one were inside a typically rectangular structure, for instance, the minimum number of windows required to achieve something close to a full field of vision from inside the structure would be four, one on each side. What is accomplished by a full field of vision? This could be a representation through the dominant sensory modality of humans, sight, of the experience of completeness or holism. In scanning the entire horizon, one "sees all" as it were.

The *cruz Maya* is typically associated with the cardinal directions as well as a color for each direction. The idea of color-related world quarters is a widespread Mesoamerican theme with a great deal of archaeological data to support its antiquity (see Marcus, et al. 1983). Traditionally, East (red) is "up" (i.e. North on European compasses) and represents the sun, energy, wisdom, love, equilibrium, discipline, grace, and heat. North (white) is associated with wind, conscience, loyalty, humility, hospitality. West (black) is associated with night, rest, happiness, strength. South (yellow) is associated with sustenance, spirituality, faith, forgiveness and reconciliation. The full complement of points for the *cruz Maya* is actually six rather than four. The fifth point is the center where the two lines bisect one another and directly above this, in the third dimension, a sixth point in the sky produces a pyramid by connecting each of the points. This is often represented in the *ceremonia Maya* with a green and blue candle standing in the middle of the prepared materials. Heart of Sky (blue) is associated with knowledge of the creator. Heart of Earth (green) is associated with nature, mountains, and destiny (Cuma Chávez 2005).

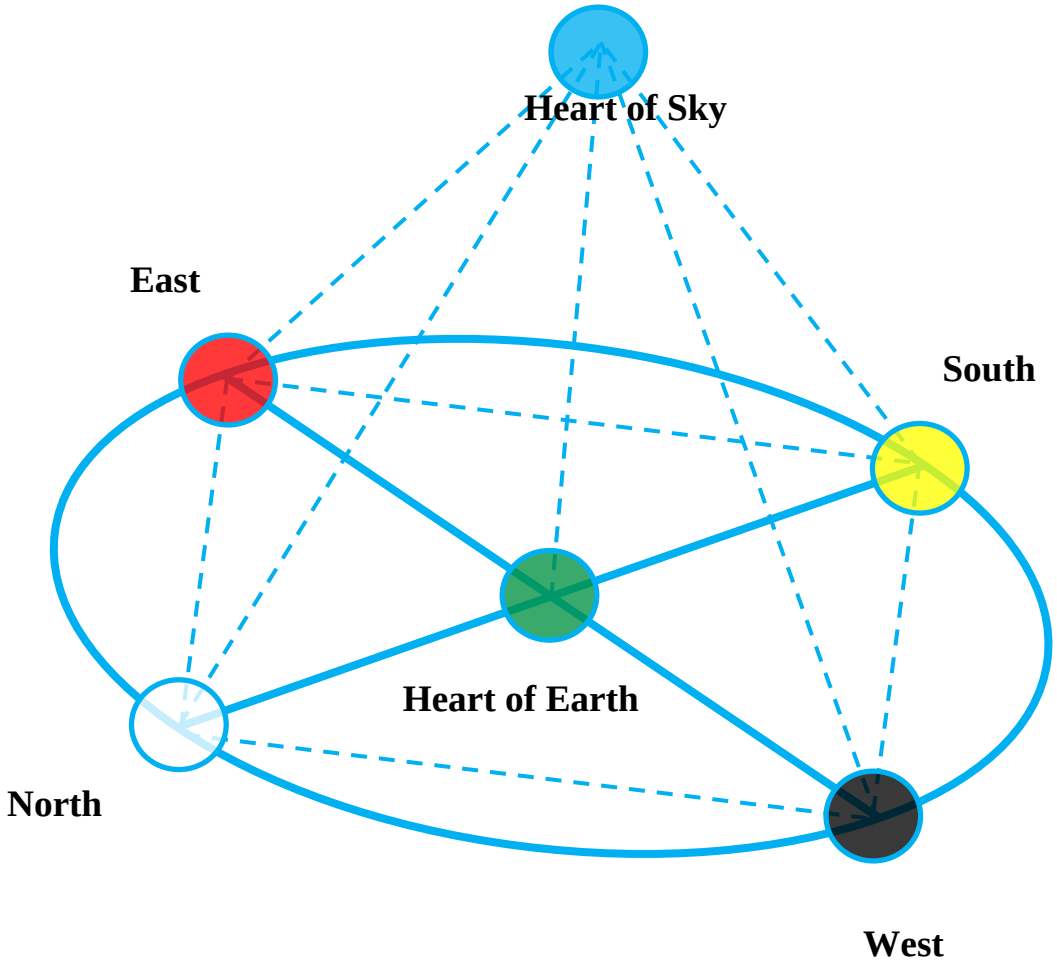


Figure 3.7: *Cruz Maya*, Cardinal Points, Colors

Special Places, Special Things

Maya cosmology emphasizes the importance of space as well as time. There exists a vast network of altars (both public and private) and other special places where ritual is preferentially performed. Such sites, because of their associations with particular *nawales*, are utilized for their special characteristics. It is usually best to go to a ritual site that corresponds to one's needs. Often these places are in dramatic locales, atop hills, on the sides of cliffs, under overhanging rocks, at the mouths of caves, or next to springs or lakes. The effort it requires to visit a ritual site is considered part of the offering, or sacrifice, that one makes to it.

There are also more convenient sites like the altar Pa Cucha in front of the Catholic church in Momostenango. Located in the marketplace, the offerings that one burns in Pa Cucha are both visible to all as well as directly in front of the entrance to the church. In fact, it is not uncommon to have ritual sites near, and even in, churches since many churches were built on top of special places where pre-colonial Maya had long performed ritual. There is a beautiful ceremonial site in front of a Catholic church in Sololá and an important site (*r'muxux ruchiliew*, "navel of the face of the earth") near the altar of the church in Santiago Atitlán (see Christenson 2001).

Recently, Judith Maxwell and Ajpub' Pablo García Ixmatá undertook an extensive project to document more than fifty ritual sites near Iximche'; they subsequently published a report, "Power in Places" (2008). After considering oral accounts, ethnohistorical documents, archaeological site reports, and after talking with local *ajq'ijaa'*, they were able to discern many of the long term patterns of use for these sites.

Maxwell and García Ixmatá observed that each of the towns they surveyed had at least four border-defining landmarks, generally aligned with the cardinal points. A fifth site often centered the community. They noted that "Spanish priests were assiduous in siting their first churches over these central altars" (2008). The perseverance of Maya ritual performed near and within Catholic churches is evidence of a kind of community memory of these pre-Catholic sites.

Virtually all the sites they surveyed were associated with at least one *nawal* of the *Cholq'iij* (Maxwell and García Ixmatá 2008). In fact, the name of the site often referred to the primary *nawal* linked to it; an altar might be named *Jun No'j*, for instance. People will visit a particular site because of a pressing concern: visit to a *Tz'ikin* site would favor money and business purposes while a visit to a *Tijax* site would be especially good for one's health or to request healing.

Tz'ite' and *La Vara*

In addition to special places, Maya ritual employs a great deal of special objects, including tress, stones, statues, feathers, quartz crystals, *tz'ite'* seeds, bundles, and archaeological pieces. Astor-Aguilera notes that material objects "are the foci by which Mesoamerican ritual specialists concentrate their actions while communicating with nonhumans" (2010). Such objects are treated like persons in the sense that they must be cared for, fed, and given drink or tobacco (Hart 2008).

Ja chee' tz'ite', known in English as the coral tree (*Erythrina corallodendron*) and sometimes referred to as the 'flame tree' or the 'whistle tree' is a squat, sturdy tree with bright red flowers and seeds. *Tz'ite'* has many magical connotations for highland

Maya groups (see Stanzione 2003). It has been associated with the earth's fertility and with the diviner-ancestor, Xpiyacoc (Carmack 1981). Its wood is soft and not especially useful, either for construction or combustion, but the tree grows fast in almost any terrain and is often planted between fields to demarcate ownership. As a threshold-crossing symbol of authority, *tz'ite'* signals important boundaries.

The *tz'ite'* tree shows up in numerous legends and plays an important role in the *Popol Vuh*. According to that text, the gods consulted the husband and wife diviners Xpiyacoc and Xmucane to determine how to proceed with the creation of men. The couple used their *tz'ite'* seeds to divine just as contemporary practitioners do (Christenson 2007; Tedlock 1996). Moreover, the third creation of men (contemporary people belong to the fourth creation) had them fashioned out of *tz'ite'* wood. The enigmatic deity known as *Maximón*, or *Rilaj Mam*, sometimes considered the patron of diviners, is typically carved from *tz'ite'* wood (Cuma Chávez 2005; Mendelson 1959; Stanzione 2003).

The divining bundle (*la vara*) which serves as the badge of office for a spiritual guide (*Ajq'iij*), is composed of *tz'ite'* seeds (which look like bright red pinto beans) mixed with small crystals and other significant objects that the *ajq'iij* has come across (Brown 2000; Hart 2008). Indeed, *varas* have a tendency to grow with time. That is, an *ajq'iij* tends to add more and more stones, relics, and other amulets of power to the *vara* as time passes. These things gave more and more "energy" to the *vara*. Duncan Earle, an American anthropologist and *ajq'iij*, said that one of the essential aspects of these items is that they index the place and circumstances where they were encountered[19]. One *ajq'iij* told me that *la vara* is like a diploma. The ritual specialist

receives her bundle on the day she is initiated as an *ajq'iij*; it serves as an important ritual object and an index of authority. The *vara* is much more than a symbol; among other things it is the "spiritual spouse" of the *ajq'iij* (Molesky-Poz 2006). A Tz'utujil *ajq'iij* told me that his *vara* "goes with me every place because this is my woman, this is my wife."[20]



Figure 3.8: Contents of a Tz'utujil diviner's bundle

Quartz Crystals

Quartz crystals have been used in Maya ritual apparently since the Classic Period (Brady and Prufer 1999). In "Caves and Crystalmancy," James Brady and Keith Prufer performed a useful survey of the literature and made the following list (which I have expanded) of the ritual use of quartz crystal among modern Maya groups: Ch'orti'

(Wisdom 1940), Ixil (Colby and Colby 1981), Jakaltek (La Farge and Byers 1931), Kaqchikel (Cuma Chávez 2005; Maxwell and Hill 2006; Tax 1946; Tax and Hinshaw 1969), K'ekchi' (Goubaud Carrera 1949), K'iche' (Bunzel 1959; Freidel, et al. 1993; Hart 2008; Itzep Chanchavac 2010; Schultze Jena 1947; Tedlock 1992; Tedlock 1993; Tzoc Chanchavac, et al. 2008), Mam (Oakes 1951a; Oakes 1951b; Wagley 1949), Mopan (Arvigo, et al. 1994), Q'anjob'al (Grollig 1959; La Farge 1947), Tz'utujil (Carlsen and Prechtel 1994; Christenson 2001; Douglas 1969), Yucatec (Astor-Aguilera 2010; Brinton 1883; Freidel, et al. 1993; Hanks 1990; Hanks 2000; Love 2004; Redfield and Villa Rojas 1962).

Among my informants, divinatory crystals were called by three terms: *ilb'al* (K'iche', "tool for seeing"), *tz'atab'al* (Tz'utujil, "tool for observing or visualizing"), and *saq aab'aj* (Tz'utujil, "white or clear stone"). I often noticed quartz crystals when visiting *ajq'ijaa'*. Crystals adorn their altars and their divining tables, nestled in among the other ritual objects; commonly statues of saints, Maya deities, and archaeological pieces. More essentially, though, crystals are basic components of the *la vara*. Mixed in with the mass of seeds one almost always encounters a collection of quartz crystals. Sometimes these crystals play a direct role in the sortilege technique, other times they are placed to the side while the seeds are randomized and arranged during the ritual. Duncan Earle stated that they serve as "witnesses" to the divination when placed to the side like this[21].

One young woman I spoke with, who was training to become an *ajq'iij*, described crystals as conductors and transmitters. I asked her how they worked and she

responded that they worked through the invocation of *Ahaaw*. She told me that the little crystals could show you the problem and its solution. I asked her what one could see in the crystals and she described them as "little mirrors."[22]

A Tz'utujil *ajq'iij* explained to me that the crystals, which he called *saq aab'aj*, brought particular energies to *la vara*. He also said that depending on the innate capacities of the diviner (as determined by one's day of birth in the 260-day ritual calendar), he or she may be able to look into the crystal and perceive divinatory signs.

Another Tz'utujil *ajq'iij* possessed many crystals but said that he did not possess the capacity to look into them for divining purposes. He described that capacity as something that *ajq'ijaa'* possessed in the past (he claims there were more powerful ones back then) but which has been lost over time.

Similarly, a high-ranking K'iche' *ajq'iij* was telling me of the various kinds of divination he knew of and mentioned that the highest type of diviner used quartz crystals but then qualified this by saying that such people are mentioned in old stories but are no longer around. Thus, two ritual specialists, from different ethnolinguistic groups, consider the use of crystals for divination to be a powerful means that has essentially been lost to time. In spite of these statements, I did manage to encounter others who still use quartz crystals as scrying instruments.

One of the people I interviewed is not an *ajq'iij*. He is a young Tz'utujil man, just twenty-two years old, who has become a respected healer. He possesses three crystals (or more probably, glass), including two crystal spheres, that he uses in

diagnosis. He claimed to have come across these objects while working in the hills. Like so many ritual specialists, then, these tools were set out for him to find by extraordinary or supernatural beings (cf. Brown 2000; Paul and Paul 1975).

Another person, an elderly K'iche' woman in Quetzaltenango, also uses crystals as divining tools. I asked her about her crystals and she told me that she had obtained them in "holy places." She said she had visited some Maya altars, one near Cobán and another near Puerto Barrios, where she had found them. She said that not everyone has such luck, that she found them because of her particular gifts. I asked her what she saw inside the crystals and she tapped on her head and told me that she sees in her mind. I asked her if she saw visions. She responded that what she sees are not visions, but that God has given her a light, a mental image that shows what is going on. She told me she could perceive if something was dead, in danger, or just about anything.



Figure 3.9: K'iche' diviner utilizing a quartz crystal

Crystals seem to be crucial components of the ritual assemblages my informants rely on for their work. Many of the *ajq'ijab'* I consulted describe their *varas* as bundles of power, of "energy." Clearly, the *tz'ite'* seeds impart this power as do the quartz crystals. In similar fashion, collecting these stones and keeping them on altars or divining tables add to the ritual power conveyed by the effigies, the archaeological pieces, the obsidian cores, and the Maya crosses. Though relatively few of the practitioners I have met use crystals for scrying, many kept crystals with their other ritual objects. Virtually all the specialists I spoke with believe crystals to have special powers; they are capable of some kind of transference of "energy." A statement made

by the Tedlocks' chief informant probably expresses this notion best; he compared the crystal to a radio capable of pulling in messages from far away (Tedlock 1992; Tedlock 1993). I encountered this radio metaphor myself. Of course, using a radio as a model for understanding the relationship of crystals to far off powers is necessarily a modern one. Whatever analogy is used, quartz crystals play a functional role for communicating with the special beings of Maya cosmology.

Stones

A noteworthy part of ritual and ritual assemblages, special stones loom large in Maya spirituality. Going by such names as *k'abawiil*, *iiq'*, or simply *aab'aj* (Tz'utujil for "stone"), these items are often handed down from ancestor to descendant or from *ajq'iij* to *ajq'iij*. I have never seen the personal altar (*mebil*) of an *ajq'iij* that did not include an array of stones. Many such stones have incised features, faces or designs, but sometimes they are old grinding stones (*kaa'*) or other stone tools that have been dug up in peoples' *milpas*. They may also look fairly nondescript, essentially like any other stone. Many times seemingly unremarkable stones call out to religious specialists and are taken in by them. At times a special stone may have a hole or a fissure which is treated like a mouth. The religious specialist routinely pours liquor or smears the blood of a sacrificed pigeon on this mouth (e.g. Tedlock 1993). The stones collected on an altar often have thick black grease on them, the soot from countless tallow candles burned onto them.

By far the most impressive collection of special stones that I have ever seen was at a place called Union Maya outside Chichicastenango. A friend of mine in Chichicastenango, a Maxeño *ajq'iij*, took me to the place after we had celebrated a *ceremonia Maya* at the famous altar of Pascual Abaj, just above the town. As we approached Union Maya, it appeared to be like any other family compound and included four or so small houses. My friend called out and we were welcomed into the compound. I noticed a clearing just inside that featured an altar with the residue of former fire ceremonies. Not far from it was a large collection of beautiful old stone crosses, they all appeared to be hewn by hand. A small corrugated tin roof perched on short supports hung over the crosses, protecting them from rain and sun. Our host, a middle-aged man, took us into a shack that contained hundreds upon hundreds of special stones, buckets of flowers, and a life-sized Maximón statue. Candles burned around the room, offerings from visitors, and flower petals and lumps of wax dotted the low stone corral that enclosed the special stones. The central area was thick with a carpet of aromatic pine needles that offered a pungent, clean scent. I marveled at the collection and asked our host how he had come upon so many stones. He indicated that he had inherited some but that the majority had been brought here by people who had found them or who had inherited them. He mentioned that sometimes people become Christians (by which he meant evangelical Christians) and no longer want to the stones around. Other times, people do not feel they can properly care for the stones and are afraid of the repercussions if they do not perform the correct ritual for them. As with so much else in the Maya *cosmovisión*, these things are *delicado*. If one is not an *ajq'iij* or otherwise does not know the proper *costumbre*, then it is wise to take such things to

people who do. This is one of the means by which many *ajq'ijaa'* end up with their impressive collections of stones and artifacts.



Figure 3.10: Massive collection of ritual stones (*iiq'*) in Chichicastenango

Religious Specialists

Maya spirituality entails a variety of religious specialists. Two of these specialists, the *ajq'iij* and the *iyoom*, will be discussed in some detail but many additional specialists exist and deserve further study. In Maya cosmology, each person comes into life invested with a particular set of skills, or *dones* (Spanish, "gifts") in order to accomplish her *samaaj* (Tz'utujil, "work"). In particular, religious specialists are born with the responsibility of serving their communities.

Ajq'iij

In a variety of Mayan languages, *ajq'iij* (or slight deviations from this spelling) refers to a specialist who attends to time, the day, or the sun. English translations of the term include "Daykeeper," "Maya priest," or even "Priest of the sun." These esoteric specialists possess extensive knowledge of ritual, myth, and the calendars, particularly the 260-day calendar known in the Guatemalan highlands as the *Cholq'iij*. People consult *ajq'ijaa'* to perform ritual, seek healing, or get advice. Divination plays an important role in such consultations and each specialist has one or more divinatory techniques at his disposal.

Maya peoples have always had need of religious specialists. The 16th century Bishop of Yucatán, Diego de Landa, discussed the role of the High Priest "*Ahkin May*" in earlier times: "In him lay the key to their sciences, to which they most devoted themselves, giving counsel to the chiefs and answering their inquiries" (Landa 1978). The notion presented here is of the religious specialist as an essential counselor to political authorities.

Sahagún's discussion of colonial Mexica religious specialists emphasizes a similar importance that this Mesoamerican group placed on the divinatory skills and specialized knowledge of the 260-day calendar: "This count only the soothsayers and those who had the skill to learn it, knew; because it containeth many difficulties and obscurities. Those who knew this count they called *tonalpouhque*; they esteemed and honored them very greatly. They considered them to be prophets and knowers of future things. Hence they depended upon them for many things, as in days of old the sons of Israel depended on the prophets" (1957). As in de Landa's account, these religious

specialists helped guide the society and gave counsel to the authorities. Nearly all such colonial documents as well as many of the later ethnographic accounts that pepper the span of time between then and the 20th century, associate these specialists with specialized knowledge of calendrics.

An *ajq'iij* may take on his role as a religious specialist for a number of reasons. Sometimes he may be offered this instruction from childhood by virtue of belonging to a family already known for this work. Other times (and in line with the "classic model"), the potential *ajq'iij* becomes ill or undergoes a series of tragedies and, upon consulting an *ajq'iij*, is informed that his troubles derive from this unfulfilled vocation (Molesky-Poz 2006). He must answer the call or he will face more troubles and he, or close relatives, may even die (Mendelson 1956; Wagley 1949). One of the Tz'utujil *ajq'ijaa'* that I most frequently consult mentioned a similar story and claims that many of his family's tragedies would have been lessened had he taken up his call earlier. In other words, an *ajq'iij* is born with this vocation or otherwise deemed fit for it by *Ahaaw* who will begin to send dreams, offer portents, or may even inflict the person with disease or serious troubles in order to gain the candidate's attention.

Recently, it has become more common to *choose* this path. Sometimes this is driven by a wholesome desire or deep interest in Maya spirituality, other times for base motives, such as to make money or gain social status. This is not the way people went about this in the past. In fact, this work was often avoided: it is hazardous and takes away time and resources that a person would rather allocate to family and personal endeavors.[23] But for those who are brought up in this world view, there are often no options besides taking this burden up (Spanish, *cargo*) since much of one's life is

considered to be determined by these sorts of greater forces. Numerous scholars and many of my own consultants indicate that certain people can become *ajq'ijaa'* because of their *nawales* while other people are not so designated. In short, one's birthdate in the *Cholq'iij* commonly determines whether one *can* play this role (Molesky-Poz 2006; Tedlock 1982).[24]

The training process of an *ajq'iij* involves an extensive education about history, lore, ritual practices, meanings of the *nawales*, and culminates with the acceptance of *la vara*, often on the day 8 *B'aatz'*. In spite of the patent learning process, many *ajq'ijaa'* claim to have learned some particular knowledge, or even the majority of their skills, through dreams or other private revelations.

In *Santa Eulalia*, Oliver La Farge challenges such claims, noting that "the unanimity of individuals, even of different tribes, on many fine points shows without question that much of the soothsayer's knowledge is the result of careful instruction" (1947). Certainly, any *ajq'iij* worth the title must possess robust intuition but there is no doubt that being an effective *ajq'iij* also requires a tremendous amount of implicit or explicit learning usually through a long-term exposure to cultural institutions of various kinds. Typically, the *ajq'iij* learns what she must through a master/apprentice relationship.

Wagley witnessed a process in which the mentor would introduce the student *ajq'iij* to various altars, prayers, divinatory techniques, and other aspects of *costumbre* during a specified training period (1949). Barbara Tedlock relates a similar model of instruction (1982). It is common to organize aspects of training according to the cycles of the *Cholq'iij*. When visits to shrines are scheduled according to their associations

with specific *nawales* and a "circuit" is undertaken in its proper calendrical sequence, an embodied knowledge of time, place, and meaning is accomplished (e.g. Molesky-Poz 2006).

In performing ritual, the *ajq'iij* may wear special garb and other signs of his office. Many *ajq'ijaa'* elect to wear the traditional *traje* of their communities to demonstrate a continuity with the past. I have observed *ajq'ijaa'* change into *traje* just before performing a ritual and change back to Ladino clothing afterwards. It is standard for an *ajq'iij* to wrap a thick handkerchief (Tz'utujil, *suut*), usually red, around the head. I have been told that this conserves energy and protects the *ajq'iij*. He or she may wear a red cloth belt (Tz'utujil, *paas*) as well. Often one can observe the *ajq'iij's vara* bulging or hanging from this belt. In some communities (e.g. Chichicastenango), the association of the *ajq'iij* as "priest of the sun" was even more explicit than all this red cloth imagery. Many old photos exhibit a standard tunic emblazoned with a sun and its rays worn by *ajq'ijaa'* from this area. The *ajq'iij* may wear one or more necklaces of jade, quartz, obsidian, or other stones while performing ritual. In one of the larger ceremonies I attended, for the initiation of an *ajq'iij*, the mentor *ajq'iij* wore a stunning necklace composed of large quartz crystal points. The fully costumed *ajq'iij* exhibits numerous symbols of authority and other signs related to Maya *cosmovisión* all of which enhance the performative aspects of ritual.



Figure 3.11: *Ajq'ijaa'* performing a *ceremonia Maya* in Sololá

People consult *ajq'ijaa'* for various reasons, but determining the causes and prognosis of an illness is among the most common: "When a native of this pueblo becomes ill he sends for a *chimán*, who says whether it is God's illness or a sickness cast upon him [spell]. The *chimán* casts his *mixes* [*tz'ite'*] and these tell him to who the sickness can be attributed" (Oakes 1951b). As always, the explanatory framework of cause-and-effect due to an omission of *costumbre* or commission of witchcraft by an enemy lies behind disease and crisis:

> Even the epidemic of measles which wiped out almost two hundred people in Chimaltenango in 1918 was a punishment from God, according to Diego Martín. In May of that year, an eclipse of the moon had occurred, and only a few people had waked up to beat metal pans together and to ring the church bells as they should have done. A *chimán*, Pedro Martin, warned them that they had neglected an

> important *costumbre*. In November of that year the measles came, and those who had stayed in bed that night died. Often one is never able to identify the fault which is responsible for an illness. The *chimán* divines, and patients must look back over their own lives and the lives of their parents to discover the sin or misstep which might have brought on the punishment. (Wagley 1949)

Effective responses to such problems are mediated through the *ajq'iij* and her ritual. Divination, usually the *tz'ite'* seed technique, diagnoses cause and sometimes suggests remedy. But divination is rarely sufficient as a full response to such problems; another ritual, usually offerings through fire, smoke, and prayer, must be undertaken. In the case of witchcraft, the *ajq'iij* needs to enact a protective measure for his client or undo the curse. I have talked to *ajq'ijaa'* who explain that their training includes knowledge of witchcraft since one must understand how harm works in order to effect a cure.

Though the client is expected to offer some remuneration for the *ajq'iij*'s time and expenses, it is very bad form for an *ajq'iij* to charge the client. Juan Tzoc, an *ajq'iij* from Nahualá, expressed it this way: "If I were to charge for my work or services that I offer only at the expense of a meal, my work would begin to lose its primary value, which is helping people. Say I charged a certain amount for a consultation: when people came to me, they would not put up with it and our work would be lost. We work for the men and women of our town. In this way we are following the *Cholq'iij*, in order to know how to proceed from one day to the next.[25]" Tzoc is referring to some long established cultural models regarding the work of ritual specialists: to charge is to raise suspicion and to potentially undermine the sanctity and importance of ritual. Moreover, because this work is a responsibility from higher powers, abuse of one's role can lead to grave consequences. I have been told stories of *ajq'ijaa'* who have exploited their

office and were consequently afflicted with trouble or suffered a violent death. Linda Schele explains that there is an exception to this scheme: "According to traditional values, diviners cannot become rich from their work. The fees they charge the supplicant covers only the cost of their time and the materials used in the prayers. To be a diviner, especially a very powerful one, is a heavy responsibility and one that does not bring wealth to the practitioner, unless he enters into the practice of witchcraft" (Freidel, et al. 1993). Indeed, when someone, particularly an *ajq'iij*, enjoys a windfall it is assumed that he has become an *aj'iitz*, or "witch/warlock." Though I never spoke with anyone who admitted to performing witchcraft, I was told that there were plenty such people around and that they charged shameless fees to bring harm to one's enemies, bewitch a desired mate, or exploit a shortcut to wealth and authority (see DeVore 1968). So again, the cultural model of the *ajq'iij*, which includes a non-fee based set of services, is reiterated through this dualistic scheme which suggests that making money from such work is the business of witchcraft.

Iyoom

Like the *ajq'iij*, the *iyoom* receives a special call and undertakes training in order to accomplish her midwifery. Always a woman, the *iyoom* may engage in this practice for many decades, constantly improving her skills through years of experience, but also sacrificing great amounts of time, especially in those communities where there are relatively few midwives (Rogoff, et al. 2011).

The role of the *iyoom* brings with it many costs and few benefits. Rogoff describes how the *iyoom* "runs the risk of being blamed for unfortunate outcomes of a

pregnancy, although many aspects are out of her control. Sometimes a baby is positioned sideways and dies during the birth process, and the *iyoom* can only hope to save the mother. Nonetheless, the blame can result in damaging gossip and legal charges against the *iyoom* in the town court" (2011). It is little wonder, then, that even when destined to become an *iyoom*, many women avoid the charge (ibid.). In "Recruitment to a Ritual Role: The Midwife in a Maya Community," Lois Paul discussed the challenges of taking up the duties of midwife: "The woman who becomes a midwife must cross a bigger status gap and adjust to a greater role change than the man who becomes a shaman in San Pedro, and her transition is marked by an even greater suffering. To become a successful midwife in San Pedro a woman must overcome her own timidity and fear, her husband's strenuous objections, and the skepticism of her neighbors" (1975). But in some of the communities where *iyomaa'* work, including San Pedro, they hold high status as skilled specialists in charge of delicate matters (Paul and Paul 1975). At least this prestige serves as a small reward for their efforts.

The *iyoom* must be scrupulous in her dealings and in ritual. Like the diviner who does not consult his *tz'ite'* on days when he has enjoyed sexual intercourse, the *iyoom* must not attend to childbirth or obstetrics except when she has been abstinent (Paul 1975). Envy, bad feelings, or the malfeasance of special beings who feel unattended to may lead to poor consequences not only for the *iyoom* but for her clients as well. But if a woman has a powerful calling to take up the role of *iyoom* then, just as with the *ajq'iij*, she must concede or face grave consequences, including death (see Rogoff, et al. 2011).

Iyomaa' possess a set of divinatory practices which are particularly important since they are the first to welcome the newborn into the world, identifying the child with a particular *nawal*. Many *iyomaa'* have extensive knowledge of the *Cholq'iij* and are the first to advise the family about the child's skills and characteristics, though it is understood that consultation with an *ajq'iij* brings a more refined understanding of such matters. A common practice is the careful observation of the placenta: if the child "wears" the placenta, if it drapes over part of baby's head, then this is a sure sign of a future religious specialist (e.g. Paul 1975). Some babies are born appearing to hold things, these little objects are considered to be representative of the kinds of tools the child will wield as a religious specialist. An *aj'iitz* may be born holding small worms in one of his hands (Rogoff, et al. 2011). Another divinatory practice involves the inspection of the umbilical cord. Spots that appear on the cord do not relate directly to the newborn but to its mother and may indicate how many additional sons or daughters she can expect and at what intervals (Rogoff, et al. 2011).

Besides these divinatory skills, the *iyoom* is charged with care of the placenta and umbilical cord, a ritually important task with special proscriptions. One of my friends was disturbed to find out that the hospital that had delivered his first daughter (the mother had worked with an *iyoom* but ultimately required a Caesarean section) threw out the placenta before he could even ask for it. Traditionally, this material was kept and "planted," either in the ground inside the house or underneath the sweat bath (Tz'utujil, *Tuuj*). But since neither dirt floors nor sweat baths are as common as they used to be, it is simply instructed that the cord and placenta be buried in the ground near the family home.

Having briefly reviewed the innate roles of such people as *q'isomaa'*, *ajq'ijaa'*, and *iyomaa'*, it is clear that a pattern ties them all together: one is born with a destiny and evades it only at great risk to herself and her loved ones (see Gómez 2001). As García Ixmatá observes: "Nature gives to each being his or her *Uwach Q'ij* (*u*: third person, *wach*: fruit, *q'ij*: sun, day time), which may be understood as her or his gift, mission, vocation, or innate quality that comes along from the moment of conception for the purpose of being used in service to others. That is, accepting one's mission permits one to enter into a compatible relationship with the universe" (2010). In short, understanding who one is depends, in part, on understanding "when" one came to be. The timing of the person's entrance into the world spells out essential details about that person's capacities and suggests which roles he may, or must, fulfill in the community.

Time, Destiny, and Maya Calendrics

In comparison to many contemporary cultures and societies, time played a role for the Classic Maya that is practically ineffable from an outside perspective. Time and calendrics shaped fundamental metaphysical notions, may have helped to structure political organization and regime change, and, to put it simply, was held in awe (see Rice 2004).

For highland Maya groups, calendrics structured quotidian functions as well as conveyed important ritual ideas and commitments. A variety of documents from the colonial period in Guatemala, for instance, demonstrate that people's names (and even some deities' names) were commonly determined by their birthdate in the 260-day calendar (e.g. Recinos 1988; Tedlock 1996). In fact, this naming practice is beginning

to re-emerge among activists involved in the *Moviemiento Maya* (see Fischer, et al. 1999). Imagine if, instead of Bill, Nancy, Ernesto, or Sharon, one's name was 2 March, 19 October, or 22 May. Because of the deep-seated associations of time with qualities, these titles would be less like dates than like such ascriptions as: "skilled doctor," "money maker," or "adulterer." If my *Cholq'iij* date, 3 *Tijax*, served as my public name, then friends and family might expect certain things of me while guarding against aspects of my character that could bring harm. Just as one's physical appearance plays a prominent role in the way one's life goes, so with this typological framework in place one's *nawal* would make some things more readily available than others. It is not the case, for instance, that an unattractive man cannot find a beautiful woman to be his mate if he so desires—after all he may have redeeming characteristics, behaviors, or possessions to counteract his appearance—it is just that his appearance gives him affordances and challenges he will exploit or work around but cannot deny. So with the ancient and eminently important Mesoamerican calendars, one's birthdate shapes the kinds of possibilities she will encounter in life.

Suerte

The attribution to each person of one or more of the *nawales* of the *Cholq'iij* supports a deep-seated tolerance in these communities (see Molesky-Poz 2006). I often heard people bring up someone's proclivities and idiosyncrasies, be they deviant or sinister, as due to the person's *nawal*. Few of my consultants expressed indignation over such people or their habits. It is understood that one's destiny, sometimes referred

to as one's *suerte*, is an inevitable part of life over which the person's volition only has limited control.

Mendelson, who specifically investigated world view in Santiago Atitlán, made important observations about *suerte*. Noting its importance in Atiteco culture, he wrote: "No theme was more persistently, one might say obsessively, present to my mind during my stay in Atitlan than the theme of 'Suerte.' Hardly a conversation, hardly a comment or opinion was made or held that did not contain some mention of this word" (1956). And though ideas about one's *suerte* are clearly metaphysical notions about personhood, they are anything but abstract. These are embodied, lived, normatively mediated realities: "Suerte is not so much an abstract, general notion, as something which is held to cling to each particular person; indeed in some way to *be* that person when he or she is seen as passing through the universe: coming into the world, performing its offices and then leaving it behind" (1956). And just as I noted in so many interactions with Tz'utujils in San Pedro, Mendelson attests to something like an amoral judgment about others and their behavior. He thinks that Christianity may lie behind some of the apparent contrasts between those who believe in *suerte* and those who would basically hold the person responsible for each and every action:

> The theme of suerte gives us a clue to the Native attitude to good and evil and the reasons why this gets mixed up with the attitudes recognized as Christian. The essential thing about suerte is, not so much that some suertes are good and others bad as that each man has a suerte and that his life is thereby determined. Whether one is good or bad depends on the suerte one is born with: if one is born a brujo one has to be a brujo, if an aXkun [*ajq'iij*], one has to be an axKun: sooner or later all will out. Thus man is not basically felt to be responsible for his life, nor for his qualities: there is not even the danger of the beginning of a moral stigma being attached to ugliness or poverty: the Indian, or—here—the ideal typical traditional Indian, is satisfied to recognize the existence of a

> particular quality, negative or positive. Nor for that matter is he inclined to think too much about the morals of the originator of good and evil qualities and, if pressed, he will accept the idea that God does will evil people to be born. Our knowledge of the moral ambiguity of the ancient Maya divinities helps us here. (1956)

Though he performed research in Santiago Atitlán more than fifteen years later and was not intentionally studying world view, Bill Douglas's observations mirror some of Mendelson's: "…*suerte* is a pervasive concept which can be used to account for all manner of events and occurrences ranging from personal injury to homosexual behavior. It is a sufficient explanation in itself, in many instances, to cite *su suerte* (your luck) to account for a variety of personal experiences" (1969). As well-attested as this concept is for Santiago Atitlán it is, in fact, a much more general aspect of highland Maya culture.

Sol Tax noticed a similar fatalism and pluralism on the collective level as well as the individual level: "The average Indian could no doubt write large fragments of ethnography of half-a-dozen towns other than his own. Although occasionally scornful of the customs of other communities, he more frequently does not evaluate them. 'That is their custom; it is all right for them,' appears to be the most general attitude. To the Indians cultural differences between themselves and outsiders are as much to be expected as differences in kinds of trees" (1941). In highland Maya culture, there is a tolerance of pluralism quite unlike many other societies. In describing the K'iche' of Santiago El Palmar, where Saler did his fieldwork, he noted that "it is a cardinal premise in their metaphysics that one does not escape one's ontological status except under special and extreme circumstances. Hence, in their thinking, they must be what they are" (1964). Instead of attributing the majority of agency to the deliberative individual,

ideas about the influence of time and its qualities on people structures the kinds of differences apparent in any community. Monaghan notes that "destiny provides an interpretive framework for the past and future of particular persons. It explains why one has been lucky or unlucky, why one holds a certain position in society, and why someone acts the way they do. It provides a self with continuity and stability" (1998). In sum, Mesoamerican calendrics and ideas about destiny produce a typology or characterology that affirms innate difference and, to some extent, decouples the person and his behavior. To use Silverstein's phrase, the *Cholq'iij* and its attendant notion of *suerte* produces an "ethnopsychodynamic explanatory framework" (2009). The utility of this framework needs to be assessed in light of the social and historical patterns of life that have shaped highland Guatemala over many centuries.

Addressing the "closed corporate community" that seems to have shaped things, Eric Wolf concludes that the "need to keep social relationships in equilibrium in order to maintain the steady state of the corporate community is internalized in the individual as strong conscious efforts to adhere to the traditional roles, roles which were successful in maintaining the steady state in the past. ... Such a psychological emphasis would tend to act against overt expressions of individual autonomy, and set up in individuals strong fears against being thrown out of equilibrium" (1955). By affirming a calendrical system that had already held great cultural significance, the highland Mayas used it as an "ethnopsychodynamic explanatory framework" that fostered tolerance and the smoothing over of conflicts. The poverty, relative powerlessness, and density of these closed corporate communities necessitated as many cultural institutions and tools as

possible to reduce social strife while faithfully reproducing the sorts of institutions that these communities require from one generation to the next.

Cholq'iij

For the purposes of this dissertation, only the *Cholq'iij* will be discussed though, in fact, it is just one of many important Maya calendars. For almost every type of calendrically-related ritual practice, though, the *Cholq'iij* is paramount. Part of its importance relates to the fact that it was never lost in contrast to many other counts of time. In fact, it seems that the *Cholq'iij* has been tracked, without interruption, for thousands of years (Pool 2007; Rice 2007; Weeks, et al. 2009).

One colonial document after another attests to the universality and importance of the 260-day calendar. Speaking of the Mexica, for instance, Sahagún wrote:

> But the count of the soothsaying art, which he wrongly calleth a calendar, is a particular kind of count, because its purpose was established to foretell circumstances and events to befall those born under each sign or character. This count only the soothsayers and those who had the skill to learn it, knew; because it containeth many difficulties and obscurities. Those who knew this count they called *tonalpouhque*; they esteemed and honored them very greatly. They considered them to be prophets and knowers of future things. Hence they depended upon them for many things, as in days of old the sons of Israel depended on the prophets. (1957)

And while Mayas have kept many additional calendars besides the 260-day divinatory count, it may be the case that many of these other calendars were meant to corroborate or specify revelations available through the *Cholq'iij*:

> …the astronomical tables and astronomically related almanacs in the codices suggest that Maya astronomers were using celestial events for the sake of making astrological predictions. Their writings embody one vast divinatory scheme and seem directed toward a single goal: to

> establish an order to human existence by bringing the naturally occurring astronomical cycles into accord with the 260-day calendar. Again and again we have seen that this fundamental unit of time lies at the foundation of every almanac in the codices. (Aveni 2001)

Aveni's idea of "establishing an order to human existence" is a promising thread to pursue. Order and ordering lie at the heart of the *Cholq'iij* and its related divinatory practices. In fact, *Cholq'iij* is a the union of a verb meaning "to order, arrange, put in sequence" and the noun for day or time (Pérez Mendoza, et al. 2001). So "the ordering of time" is perhaps the best way to translate this term.

The calendar is much more than a means of tracking time, it is the primary ordering device of social existence for the Mayas who follow it. Conceiving of the *Cholq'iij* as the divinatory calendar or even the ritual calendar is too small. Speaking of the Maya calendars, Monaghan thinks it would be "closer to the mark to view them as social charters" (1998). Hinz offers a synthetic appraisal of the Cholq'iij's meaning: "…the 260-day calendar and the system of divinations attached to it constitute a 'pre-scientific theory of the order of life and the world.' As a mental systematization, this theory is one of the great accomplishments of the early complex societies or horizons of civilization. The contents of this theory are comprised of 'naïve' behavior and ethics, decision-making, and existence as a view of destiny, individual development and future" (2008). Indeed, for centuries if not millennia, the *Cholq'iij* has provided a means of facing reality and organizing one's efforts according to the schematized meanings and associations embedded in the calendar. Molesky-Poz calls it a "referential field" for interpreting why things are the way they are (2006). Interpreting how things have become as they are and, more importantly, shaping one's response to present concerns

can all be mediated through interpretation of the calendar. Using the divinatory techniques associated with it, one can determine whether or when to take a journey, whom to marry, what one should do about an illness, and how best to provide for and educate one's children (Brinton 1894). Indeed, the promise and power of such an oracle for living a more orderly existence is fundamental to *cosmovisión Maya*.

Systems of Destiny

The twenty days, or *nawales*, that make up the *Cholq'iij* each have a complex set of associations that relate to basic aspects of life in the highlands. The numbers, which range from 1 to 13, also have a range of meanings and associations. Most generally, they designate the "power" or "grade" of the *nawal's* influence. 13 of any *nawal* is the maximum manifestion of its qualities. This is not necessarily to be interpreted as "the best" of these qualities, though, since just about all the *nawales* have aspects that are favorable and aspects that are unfavorable depending on the context.

There are a set of debates related to the calendar that I have decided to reserve for the Appendix: Comparative Compendium of the *Nawales* of the *Cholq'iij*. These debates include: 1) What is the beginning day of the calendar? 2) Do the *nawales* have a reliable set of meanings? 3) What other kinds of things are associated with each *nawal*? And 4) Are some *nawals* good and others bad? I use the space in the appendix to review and compare numerous published accounts about the qualities of each *nawal*. It is perhaps meaningless to attempt to "define" each *nawal* but I do provide some of the more common statements regarding each of them and suggest how a comparative

approach towards their study may yield new insights. For the purposes of this dissertation, each *nawal* will be defined as relevant to the example.



Figure 3.12: *Nawales* of the *Cholq'iij*

System 1-Three Nawales

One of the important tools that *ajq'ijaa'* have at their disposal is a means of more precisely assessing the characterology/typology of a client. If the client does not know the *nawal* associated with her birthdate, the *ajq'iij* usually has access to a book that lists each date of the last century and correlates it to the *Cholq'iij*. There are also many computer programs available for this now. But one must find the date of the *Cholq'iij* that corresponds to one's birthdate in the Gregorian calendar. With this information, the *ajq'iij* may count from the *nawal* of the birthdate nine *nawales* backwards and forwards (nine is the number of levels of the "underworld" in Maya mythology). Counting backwards reveals the *nawal* of conception and counting forward reveals the *nawal* of the future or "star." The three *nawales* indicate a sort of "life journey" for the person: the day of conception indicates the kinds of influences that shaped the origination of the person, the day of birth determines the dominant influence over the person's life, and the day of the future suggests the person's fundamental "work" or "mission" (K'iche, *Chak Patan*; Tz'utujil, *Samaaj*) if his life is lived well. All three influences interact but considering each *nawal* from left to right gives a narrative identity to these interactions.

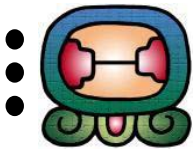
There are many reasons to believe that these kinds of systems represent an old divinatory technique. **Figure 3.14** comes from a 16th century Tolteca-Chichimeca codex. Obviously it uses a different system but there seems to be the same schema of three related *nawales* (called *tonalli* in this tradition).

Conception



8 *Tz'i'*

Birth



3 *Tijax*

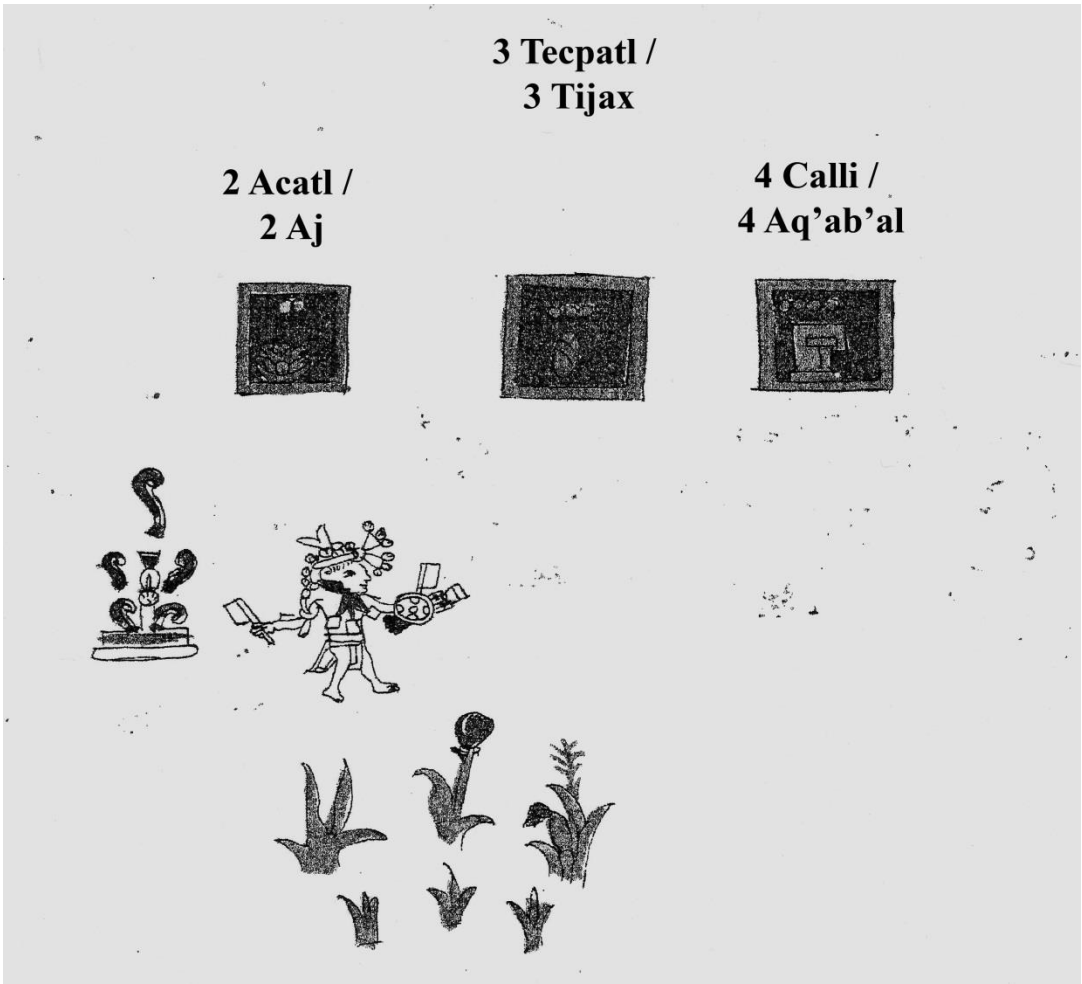
Future/Luck



11 *Kame*

Mathematics of *Three Nawales*				
8 *Tz'i'*	- 9 days	**3 *Tijax***	+ 9 days	**11 *Kame***
8 *Tz'i*	+17 days			**11 *Kame***

Figure 3.13: Three *Nawales*



Mathematics of *Three Tonalli*				
2 Aj	- 6 days	**3 *Tijax***	+ 6 days	**4 Aq'ab'al**
Aj	+11 days			**Aq'ab'al**

Figure 3.14: Three *Tonalli*[26]

System 2-La Serpiente Emplumada

In *Contemporary Maya Spirituality*, Jean Molesky-Poz describes her initial confusion when she asked her brother-in-law, the K'iche' *ajq'iij* Don Roberto Poz Pérez, where he got the information necessary for his *consultas*. He answered, "From the Plumed Serpent" (2006). Thinking he was speaking metaphorically and mythologically, referring to some invisible force or energy going by the evocative name of the Mesoamerican god *Quetzalcoatl*/*Kukulkan*/*Q'uq'umatz*—the famed "Feathered Serpent"—she was surprised when, instead, Don Roberto drew a sort of cartogram based on a set of nine *nawales*.

As Don Roberto went on to explain, when performing a *consulta*, he first gets the person's date of birth. Using an index, he correlates this date in the Gregorian calendar to its counterpart in the *Cholq'iij*. I will continue to use my own birthdate for this example, August 21, 1974, or 3 *Tijax* in the *Cholq'iij*. Don Roberto would place 3 *Tijax* in the center of his diagram and then counting back nine, he would note what he calls the day of conception as 8 *Tz'i'*. Returning to 3 *Tijax* he would count nine forward and record 11 *Kame* as the day of luck. With these three signs, Don Roberto has the standard information that most *ajq'ijaa'* consider useful and important, the "Three *Nawales*" of the prior example. But using another system, the Plumed Serpent, he learns of six additional *nawales* which additionally influence the person.

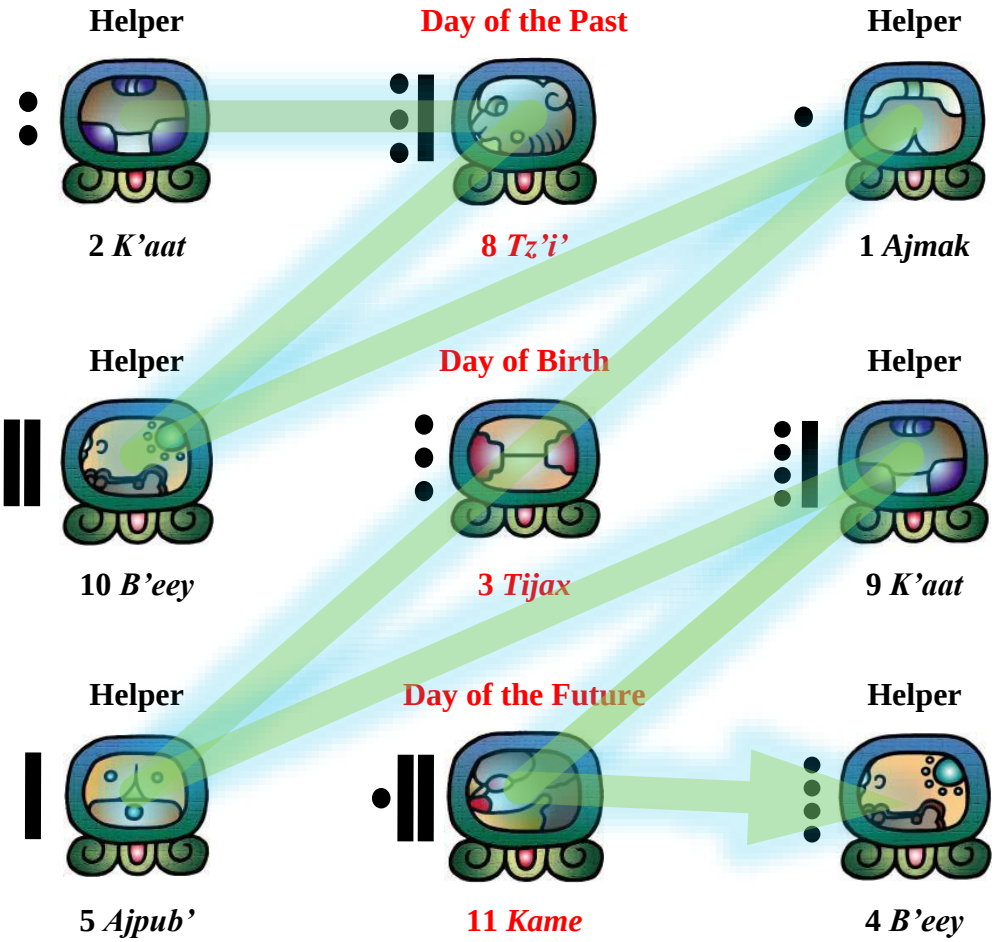
Going back to the day of conception, Don Roberto counts backward an additional seven *nawales* and makes note of the *nawal* 2 *K'aat*. Counting forward seven from the day of conception and records the *nawal* 1 *Ajmak*. He repeats this procedure for the day of birth and the day of luck, counting seven back from each of them,

recording the designated *nawal*, and then counting forward from each of them and making note of those *nawales*. When he has completed this procedure, the *ajq'iij* has a grid of nine *nawales* as represented in **Figure 3.15**.

Don Roberto says that in mapping out these nine *nawales*: "…we are giving the person a schema for his life. There is an order here for his life" (2006). He goes on to explain that knowledge of these nine *nawales* provides the person with a "blueprint" that is especially important in alerting him on which day to make offerings. By making offerings on these days the person's happiness is assured.

As with all these systems, the three central *nawales*—here 8 *Tz'i'*, 3 *Tijax*, and 11 *Kame*—are the most influential on the person. Don Roberto refers to the additional six *nawales* as "helpers." He notes that two *nawales* are repeated in this system—here *K'aat* and *B'eey*—which he refers to additionally as "guardians." The roles of guardians and helpers are not discussed but probably can be guessed at from their labels. Don Roberto goes on to explain that all these *nawales* influence the person and, perhaps holding back a bit, simply notes that there is information in this map about one's partner, one's vocation, and one's "social organization."

As Don Roberto points out, there are twenty-nine days between the first *nawal* indicated in the diagram and the last one, a lunar month. And as one counts through the *nawales* sequentially, drawing a line from the first to the last in order, a zigzag pattern is described. This is the "Plumed Serpent." Don Roberto says that the calendar is one of the "Plumed Serpent's" manifestations (2006).



Mathematics of *La Serpiente Emplumada*				
2 *K'aat*	+ 7 days	**8 *Tz'i'***		
8 *Tz'i'*	+ 3 days	**10 *B'eey***		
10 *B'eey*	+ 5 days	**1 *Ajmak***		
1 *Ajmak*	+ 3 days	**3 *Tijax***	+ 3 days	**5 *Ajpub'***
5 *Ajpub'*	+ 5 days	**9 *K'aat***		
9 *K'aat*	+ 3 days	**11 *Kame***		
11 *Kame*	+ 7 days	**4 *B'eey***		
(count from *Tijax*)				
2 *K'aat*	- 7 days	**8 *Tz'i'***	+ 7 days	**1 *Ajmak***
+ 9 days	- 15 days	- 9 days	-3 days	+ 9 days
10 *B'eey*	- 7 days	**3 *Tijax***	+ 7 days	**9 *K'aat***
+ 9 days	+ 3 days	+ 9 days	+ 15 days	+ 9 days
5 *Ajpub'*	- 7 days	**11 *Kame***	+ 7 days	**4 *B'eey***

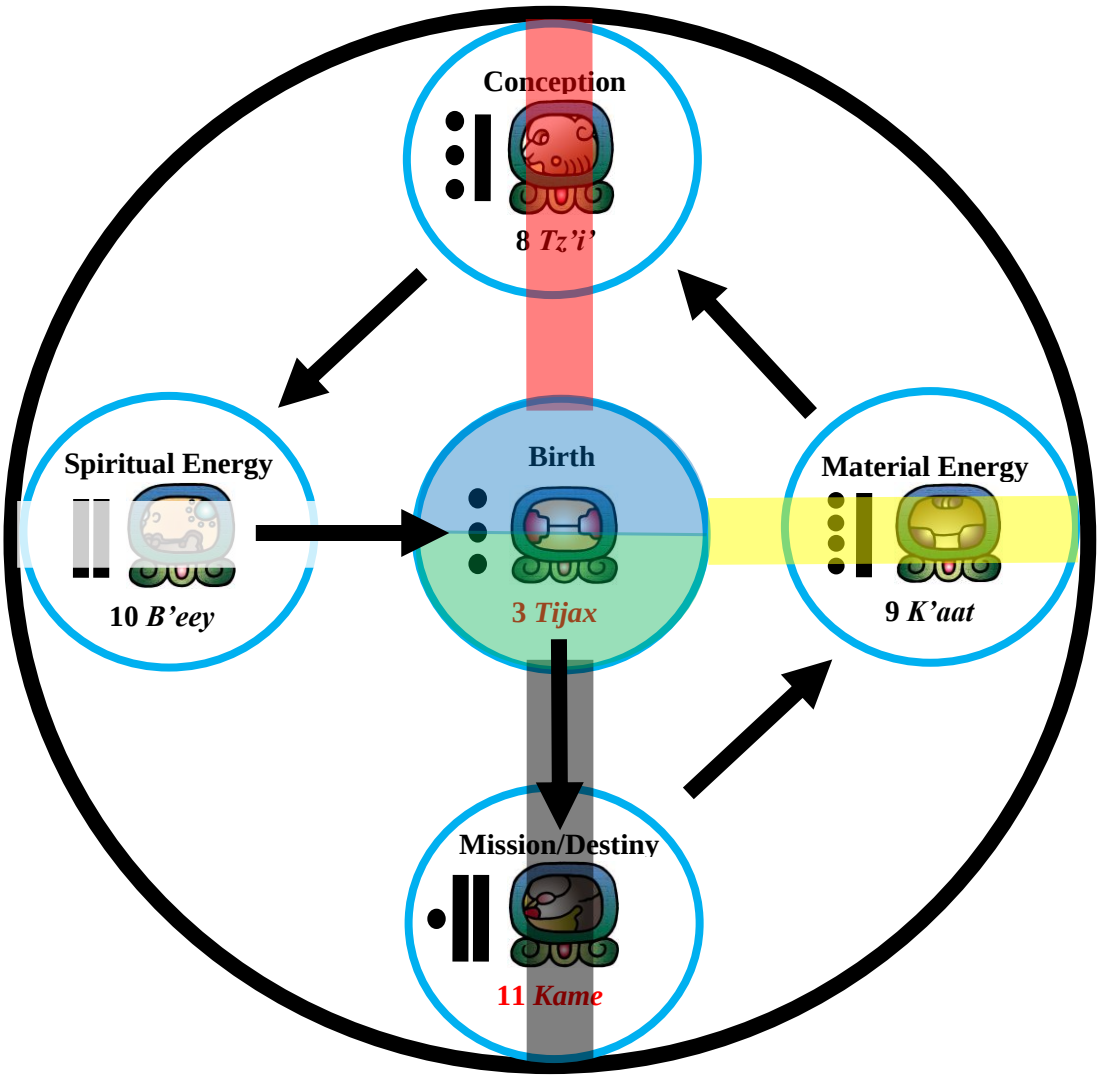
Figure 3.15: *La Serpiente Emplumada*
(based on Molesky-Poz 2006:148-153)

System 3-Ri Kajtz'uk/Cuadrante or *Cruz Maya*

The *Ri Kajtz'uk/Cuadrante* is from the book, *Raíz Espíritu del Conocimiento Maya*, edited by Ajpub' Pablo García Ixmatá, Germán Curruchiche Otzoy, and Simeón Taquirá. The book is composed from a series of investigations of Maya science and knowledge by the editors and a team of researchers affiliated with Universidad Rafael Landívar.

The editors write that *Kajtz'uk* refers to four *tz'uk* (sides, extensions, points) which references birth, initiation, origin, fertilization, and beginning; or, in sum, the four points of the beginning of the universe (2009:37). They describe the *Kajtz'uk* as an instrument that reveals the intensity of energies present in the person or being. It is "a tool for orienting the spiritual and material life of the person." But it also makes an important identification of the numbers that accompany the *nawales* of the person which indicates the type of ritual that ought to be done to establish equilibrium and harmony of the person vis-à-vis life's elements.

Figure 3.16 reveals the flow of energies/influences from one's conception to the spiritual dimension of existence, to one's birth, the accomplishment of one's destiny, and the elaboration of this destiny in the material world which leads back, ultimately, to the origin and "reason" of the person. This schema is derived from the same three *nawales* mentioned in system one with the addition of two "helper" *nawales* determined by counting forward and backward seven *nawales* from the birth *nawal*.



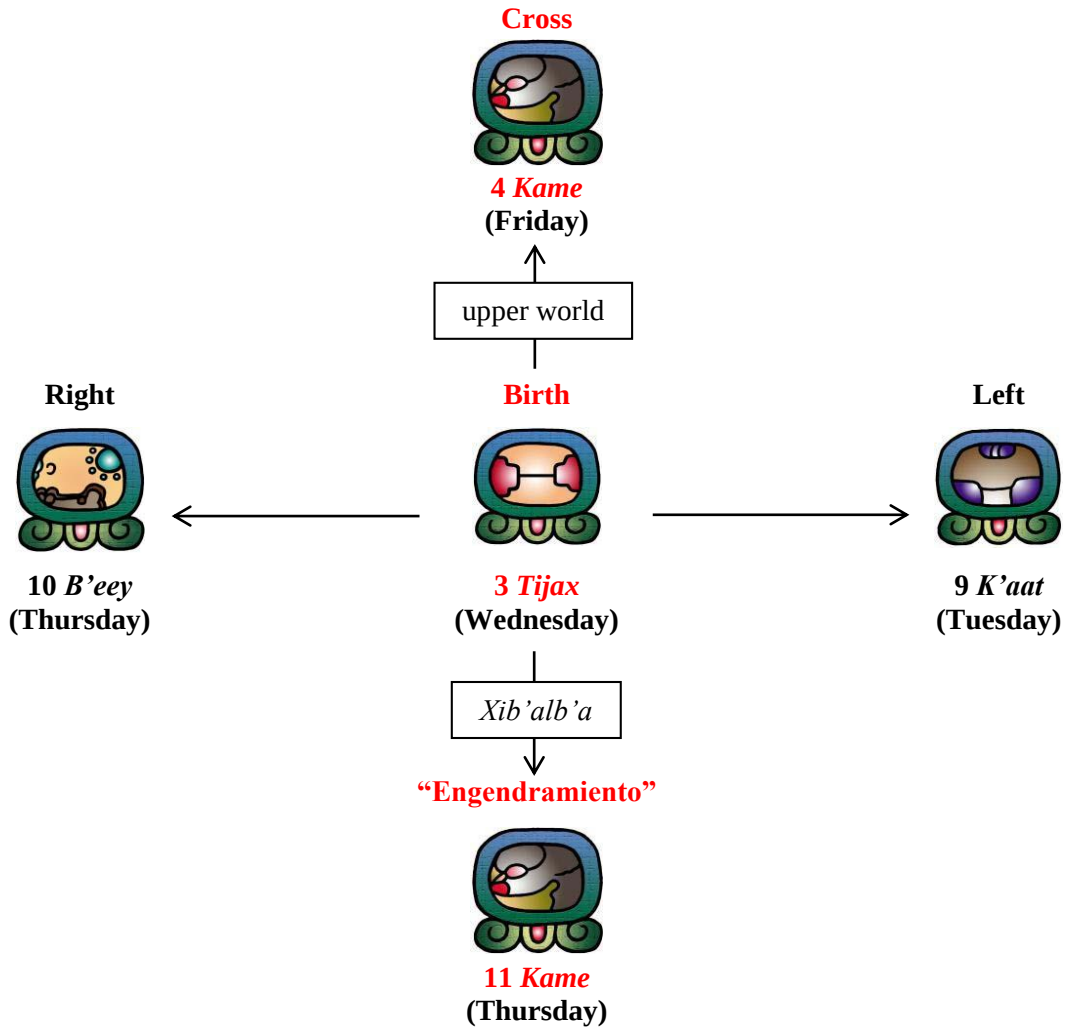
Mathematics of *La Cruz Maya* (count from arrows)				
+ 3 days		**8 *Tz'i'***	- 15 days	
		- 9 days		
10 *B'eey*	- 7 days	**3 *Tijax***	+ 7 days	**9 *K'aat***
		+ 9 days	- 3 days	
		11 *Kame*		
8 *Tz'i'*	+ 17 days			**11 *Kame***
10 *B'eey*	+ 13 days			**9 *K'aat***
10 *B'eey*	+ 15 days			**11 *Kame***

Figure 3.16: *Ri Kajtz'uk/Cuadrante* or *Cruz Maya*
(based on García Ixmatá et al. 2008:37-47)

System 4-La Cruz

C. James MacKenzie describes *La Cruz* in his dissertation, *Maya Bodies and Minds: Religion and Modernity in a K'iche' Town* (2005). MacKenzie had the process explained to him by a local *ajq'iij*, midwife, and community activist. The birthdate of the person is placed in the center of the cross and four additional nawales are placed in each terminus of the cross and represent the head, feet, and hands of the person. The *nawal* of the head is determined by counting back thirteen *nawales* from the birth *nawal*. Thirteen represents, among other things, the levels of the "upper world" in Maya cosmology. The *nawal* of the feet is achieved by counting forward nine *nawales* from the birth *nawal*. As mentioned earlier, nine corresponds to the levels of the "underworld" in Maya cosmology. The hands are determined in the same fashion as the "helper" *nawales* were in the prior system, by counting forward and backward seven *nawales* from the birth *nawal*. The numerical coefficients of all the *nawales* are added together to reveal how many total *nawales* influence the person.

A pattern that shows up in many of the systems, and is especially clear in this one, is the relationship of the "levels" or "energies" of the person to the upper world and the underworld (also known as *Xib'alb'a*). This correspondence of mythological/cosmological planes to the person represents a holism that unites the dual characteristics of reality and of human existence.



Mathematics of *La Cruz* (count from *Tijax*)				
		4 *Kame*		
		-13 days		
10 *B'eey*	- 7 days	**3 *Tijax***	+ 7 days	**9 *K'aat***
		+ 9 days		
		11 *Kame*		
Total nawales = 37				

Figure 3.17: *La Cruz*
(based on MacKenzie 2005:155)

System 5-Q'ijalxik

The *Q'ijalxik* is described in *¿Enfermedades o Consecuencias?* by Isabel Tzoc Chanchavac, Felipe Tamup Aguilar, and Elvira Morales Pantó (2008). The theme of the book is how many of the common illnesses that plague contemporary Maya communities derive from people's ignorance of the *Cholq'iij* and of their own *nawales*. As described earlier in the context of religious specialists, if one has a calling and does not respond to it, various kinds of problems arise as a consequence. While death can be the result if one has a powerful religious vocation and ignores it, each of us will lose well-being and equilibrium the farther we are from affirming the innate qualities and traits given to us through our *nawal* co-essences.

The *Q'ijalxik* system reveals one's most important *nawal* influences. By forming a circle of the twenty nawales, with one's own birth *nawal* at the top center, one can then describe a five pointed star that indicates one's conception and destiny *nawales* as well as one's two helper *nawales*.

In comparing these five systems a set of concordances and differences are easy to spot. For the most part, they all determine the same three nawales as most important to understanding the essential shape the person's life will take on. This is a refined manner of making sense of the calendrical influences on a person's life and destiny.

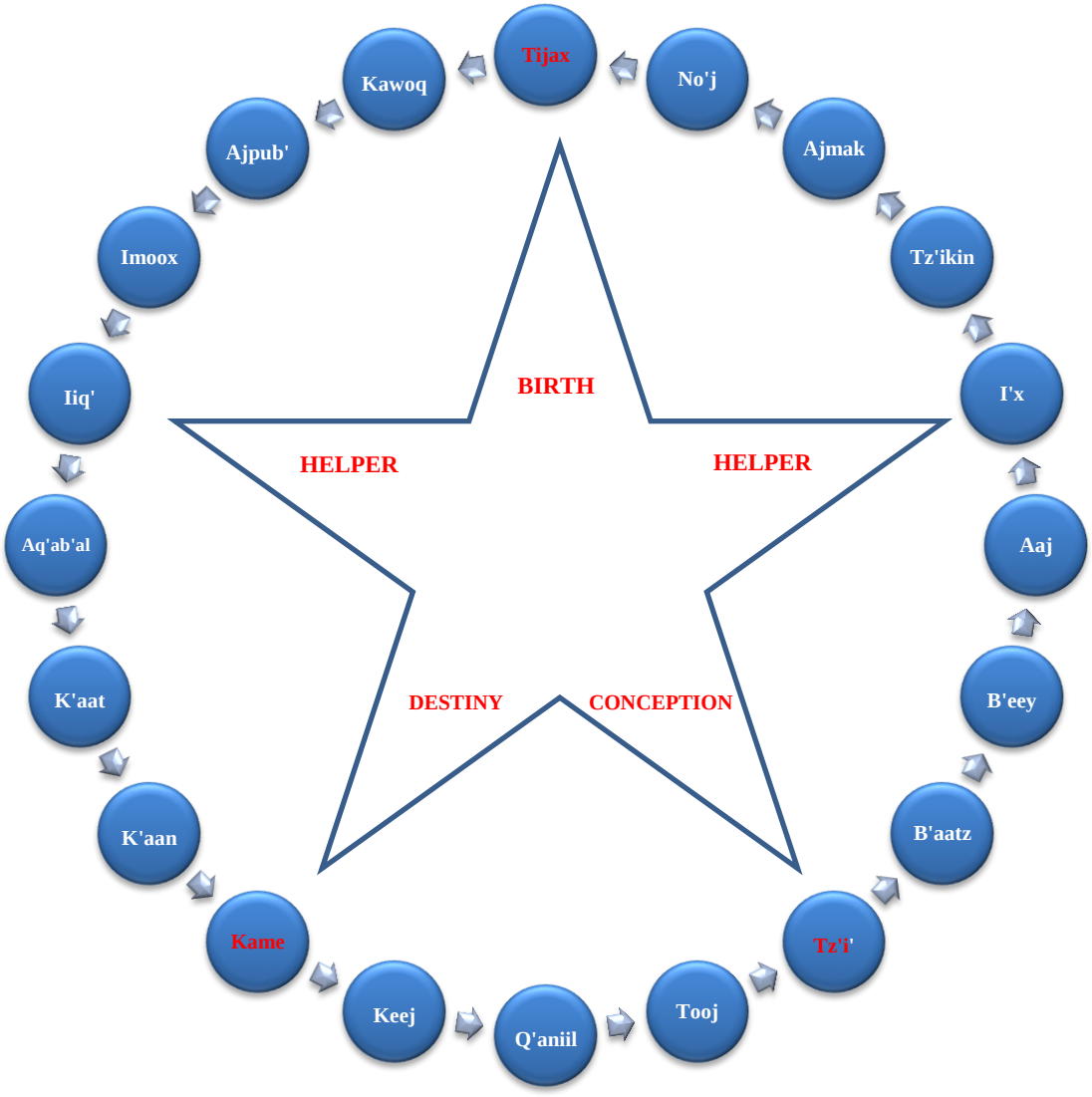


Figure 3.18: *Q'ijalxix*
(based on Tzoc Chanchavac, Tamup Aguilar, & Morales Pantó 2008:17)

Ritual Ecology

How does one define a religion that has no official hierarchy? No buildings? No creed or statement of faith? No published dogma? No rules about abjuring other faiths or practices? In fact, Maya spirituality, like many indigenous religious traditions, may gain a great deal by retaining this amorphous form of institutionality. Paradoxically, it may be that the absence of the canonical rigidity that defines so many European-derived religious traditions is Maya spirituality's greatest strength. By not setting up fixed, hierarchical institutions Maya spirituality has kept a flexibility that has permitted it to change and adapt as necessary while reproducing core sensibilities and values that have long served highland communities. It has successfully endured inside and aside of Catholicism, and while it affirms and embraces many aspects of Catholic practice and belief, Maya spirituality has genuinely made them its own.

Maya spirituality is a ritual ecosystem; its basic forms include religious specialists who serve reticently and for little material reward, the *Cholq'iij*—a calendar as well as a repository of symbols and values that provides a typology as well as a general purpose heuristical "engine," a network of geographic locales and ancestral altars that connect the practitioner to a special time and place, rituals that abound in "sensory pageantry" and enliven one's experience of the present, "magical" stones, trees, and other objects that provide a material basis for galvanizing feelings of connection to nature and attachment to the past, and stories of special beings that people the enchanted hills and can be bartered with or tricked into providing one with his heart's desire.

The cosmology of the highland Maya, and one of the core features of this religious tradition, is a relational ontology that posits a world peopled by all sorts of thinking, feeling beings in addition to humans. Munro Edmonson provides a panoramic statement about the interrelatedness of things in this world view: "The Mayan faith may be seen as the point of intersection, articulation, and integration of all other salient domains of Mayan experience. Environing geography, the human body, animals and plants, feelings, morals, aesthetics, meteorology, astronomy, social relations—the whole world of things seen and unseen provides a matrix of interlocking metaphors that link one domain to another in a highly redundant synthesis of all that exists" (1993). Though it is quickly becoming cosmopolitan—there are now Ladino *ajq'ijaa'*, American *ajq'ijaa'*, Swedish *ajq'ijaa'*, and at least one Irish born *ajq'iij*—Maya spirituality thrives by being "of a place." Its rituals and practices are connected to the lands where it has long flourished and draw from ancestral roots sunk deeply into the volcanic soil of the highlands. By reaffirming and recycling components tied to this place, Maya spirituality helps its people valorize a way of life that is distinctly their own.

In **Figure 3.19** I present some of the circulating cultural practices that compose Maya spirituality, they include: 1) People going to Special Places 2) Religious Specialists handling Special Objects; 3) Prayers to Special Beings; 3) And the relationship of Time (calendrics) to Values. The exercise of these relationships and the manner in which they overlap and accentuate each other give life to this ritual ecosystem.

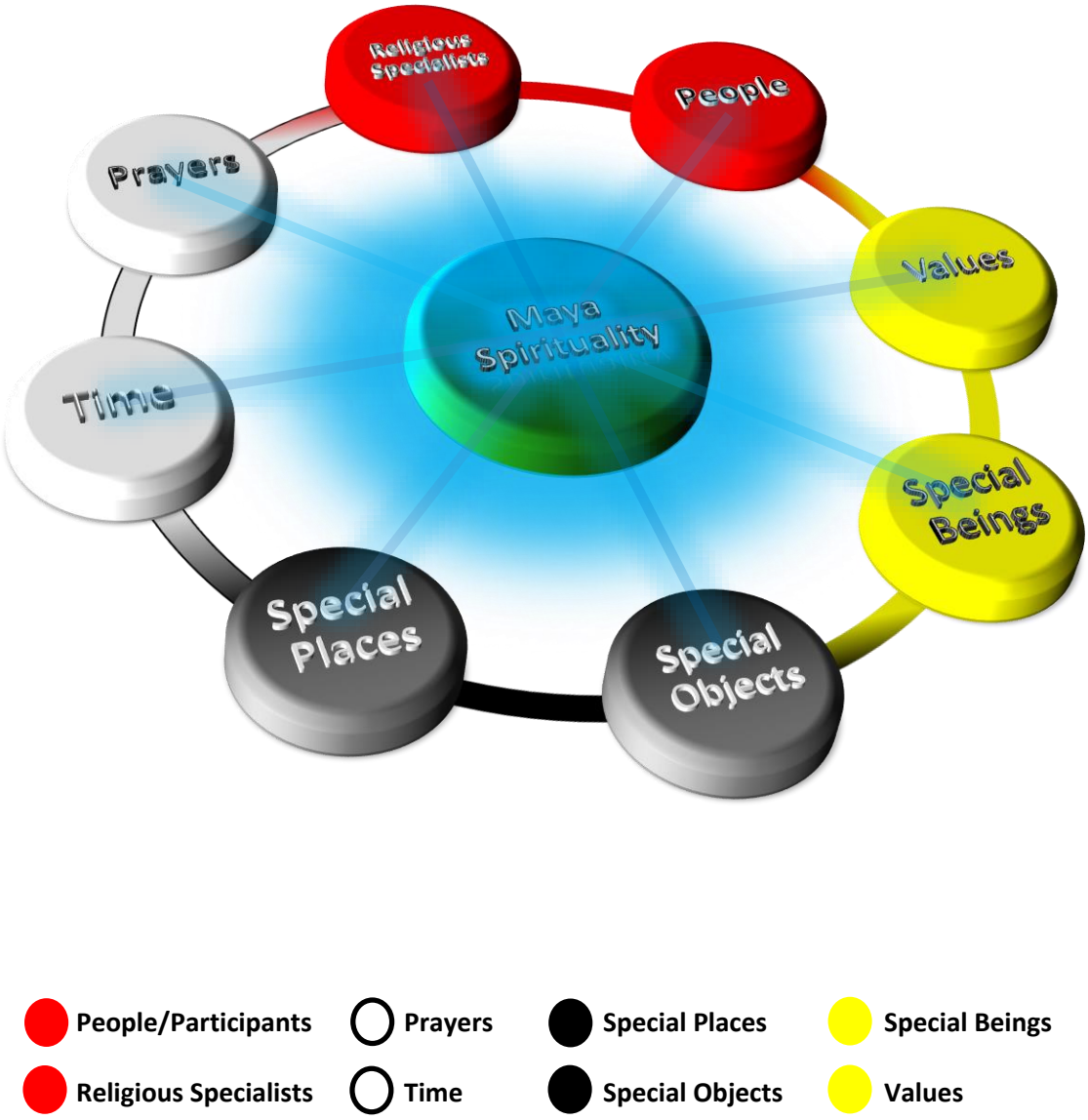


Figure 3.19: Ritual Ecology of Maya Spirituality

CHAPTER 4: CASE STUDY— *Jose's Job*

Solooneem, Pajooneem, and *Pixab'axik*

In a divination session (Tz'utujil, *pajooneem*; Spanish, *consulta*) three very important processes are brought together: *solooneem* (Tz'utujil, "to unbind, untangle"), *pajooneem* (Tz'utujil, "to weigh, balance"), and *pixab'axik* (Tz'utujil, "to give wisdom, advise"). Though I present these three dimensions of the *consulta* separately, they are difficult to disentangle in practice. These three processes are also brought together in many traditional legal and political settings (see García 2008).

The *solooneem* process, which includes the presentation of the problem or question to the *ajq'iij*, typically involves identifying the people involved, the nature of the problem/question, and an investigation of the associated causes; it is an unwrapping, untying, and untangling of the situation as a whole. The *solooneem* process often occurs at the beginning of a divination session but may continue throughout the period as the divination itself leads to further clarification of the situation.

The physical action of untangling, unknotting, and pulling-apart is a richly nuanced set of skills developed over a lifetime in the highlands. And just as the successful weaving of various strands into clothing and nets facilitates an entire way of life, so does untangling and re-ordering imply a constant task against the chaos that would reign supreme without human "ordering." *Cholq'iij* ("ordering of the days/time") is derived from the verb *cholob'a'xik* ("to line up, arrange, put in order"). While *solooneem* involves disentangling the situation, "putting things in order"

requires lining up the *tz'ite'* seeds, counting the days, and orienting one's actions using the *Cholq'iij*.

Pajooneem, which means "to balance or weigh," is the Tz'utujil term for *tz'ite'* seed divination. In divining about an issue, the *ajq'iij* weighs various concerns against the signals he receives in the divination. And just as a traditional scale includes two platforms for weighing one thing against another, so is the contextually detailed situation here weighed against the meanings and associations of the *nawales* of the *Cholq'iij*. In this careful juxtaposition, one's actions are guided by the central themes and values embedded in and expressed by the *Cholq'iij*.

The actual technique of *pajooneem* varies but a set of features tend to recur again and again. Foremost, the *ajq'iij*'s knowledge of the *Cholq'iij* remains central in *pajooneem* and though the diviner appreciates the details of each case, he must constantly rely on the positive and negative aspects of the *nawales* that emerge in the divination.

Disentangling a problem and weighing it against norms, standards, and values also involves the giving of advice, *pixab'axik*. *Pixab'*, a concise statement that combines wisdom with normative force, is an important institution of highland Maya culture. García translates *pixab'* as: "advice that anticipates, recommendation that repairs, and reflection that resolves" (2008). Some thinkers have considered *pixab'* to be an analogue of "law" although, deriving from an oral tradition, it differs greatly from the textually-based law systems dominant in so many other contemporary societies (Gómez 2001). *Pixab'* "…has as its ultimate goal the orientation of the individual in every respect to the correct and the incorrect, the good and the bad, the

positive and the negative, the constructive and the destructive in individual and collective ways of life" (Gómez 2001). This philosophical statement suggests that the normative force of *pixab'* derives less from the institutionalization of a "law" than from the basis of *pixab'* in ethical exemplars—one's esteemed seniors and venerated ancestors—who embody these teachings.

While many *pixab'* take on the form of proverbs, they also may include particular advice that one's elders, typically one's parents and grandparents, give in regards to a situation. A K'iche' *ajq'iij* from Nahuala described *pixab'* as a kind of ancestral wisdom: "The wisdom of our people is with the old people, like my grandfather, particularly in the *pixab'*; because they explain the causes and the effects of our acts, they tell us where the *awas* (cause-effect relationship behind error) is, which is the right path, the true knowledge and its source. That's why we definitely agree that the wisdom of our grandmothers and grandfathers is in the *pixab'*" (García 2008). The process of *pixab'axik* is the final part of a *consulta* when, having heard all the aspects of the situation and having received divinatory signals, the *ajq'iij* makes some particular assessment of a situation or offers guidance.

Tz'ite' Seed Divination

There are a few reasons why this type of divination became my focus. First, it remains popular among various ethnolinguistic groups in the Guatemalan highlands. This has made it accessible and of interest to someone like me who appreciates comparative approaches to the study of ritual. Second, it has been well-studied by ethnographers throughout the 20th century (see Table 4.1) which provides yet more

Table 4.1: Ethnographic examples of *tz'ite'* seed divination

Ethnographic Studies of *Tz'ite* Seed Divination		
Name	**Fieldwork (up to time of publications)**	**Principle Publications**
Horace Dudley Peck	San Juan Ostuncalco and environs (Mam), 1922-1970	*Practices and Training of Guatemalan Mam Shamans* (1970)
Oliver LaFarge	Jacaltenango (Jakaltek), 1927 Santa Eulalia (Q'anjob'al), 1932	*The Year Bearer's People* (1931) (with Douglas Byers) *Santa Eulalia: The Religion of a Cuchumatán Indian Town* (1947)
Leonhard Schultze Jena	Chichicastenango and Momostenango (K'iche'), 1930-31	*Indiana: Leben, Glaube und Sprache der Quiché von Guatemala* (3 vols.) (1933) *La Vida y las Creencias de los Indígenous Quichés de Guatemala* (1947)
Ruth Bunzel	Chichicastenango (K'iche'), 1930-32	*Chichicastenango: A Guatemalan Village* (1952)
Charles Wagley	Santiago Chimaltenango (Mam), 1937	*The Social and Religious Life of a Guatemalan Village* (1949)
Maud Oakes	Todos Santos Cuchumatán (Mam), 1945-47	*The Two Crosses of Todos Santos* (1951)
Benjamin and Lore Colby	Nebaj (Ixil), periodically between 1966-76	*The Daykeeeper: The Life and Discourse of an Ixil Diviner* (1981)
Barbara Tedlock	Momostenango (K'iche'), 1975-76, 1979	*Time and the Highland Maya* (1982)
Dennis Tedlock	Momostenango and Department of el Quiché (K'iche'), periodically between 1975-1993	*Breath on the Mirror: Mythic Voices & Visions of the Living Maya* (1993)
Eike Hinz	San Juan Ixcoy (Q'anjob'al), 1980-81	*Existence and Identity: Reconciliation and Self-organization through Q'anjob'al Maya Divination* (2008)
Thomas Hart	Quetzaltenango and environs (K'iche' and Mam), 1993-2008	*The Ancient Spirituality of the Modern Maya* (2008)

comparative data for consideration. Finally, *tz'ite'* seed divination is a complex practice that orchestrates an array of interacting components; it is a nexus of relationships within Maya thought and spirituality. In order to study such a practice, one must approach it as a complex system and by studying this system I have had the opportunity to ponder many aspects of highland Maya life.

The performance of *tz'ite'* seed divination typically involves a Maya ritual specialist (*ajq'iij*), one or more clients, and a host of ritual objects and techniques. The diviner interviews the client(s) and then begins to consult his divining tools. The most important of these is a pile of red seeds from the *tz'ite'* tree (*Erythrina corallodendron*) mixed together with small quartz crystals. Invoking many of the "special beings" of highland Maya cosmology, the diviner mixes his seeds and spontaneously takes up a handful of them. Next, the diviner lays out the seeds in small groups that correspond to the day names of the 260-day ritual calendar that is often referred to as the *tzolkin* in the literature but is most commonly known as the *Cholq'iij* in the Guatemalan highlands. The diviner "maps" the days of the *Cholq'iij* onto the arrangement of seed clusters and counts through the calendar various times by pointing to each seed cluster and addressing it by the name of its day. Typically using an idiosyncratic technique, the diviner determines which days/clusters are "speaking" combinations. Employing his knowledge of the *Cholq'iij*, the diviner considers the client's problem in light of these "utterances" and interprets their meaning for the client's benefit.

In *tz'ite'* seed divination, the interplay of randomization, interpretation, and "thematicity" (Strauss and Quinn 1997), as expressed in the use of the calendar's

polysemous meanings, produce an "applied epistemology" of use to the client(s). The process enacts a decision; it either makes the decision (especially when used for a group purpose) or it offers information that, in turn, alters the "cognitive ecosystem" from which the decision will derive. Either way, the ritual practice has become an inextricably cognitive one as well. Divination has become decision-making.

The prominence of divination in highland Maya culture is noteworthy. One measure of its importance is surely the variety of divination methods employed. During my preliminary study of the Tz'utujil language, in the summer of 2007, I observed four types of divination—and this without intentionally researching the topic! Indeed, it was the diversity and popularity of these practices which forced me to wonder about their significance. During that summer in San Pedro La Laguna, I observed divination by fire, divination by flowers, *tz'ite'* seed divination, and "pulsing" divination in which the diviner gains information by inspecting and palpating the client's forearms and hands. Why is there such a remarkable elaboration of divinatory meanings and practices in this place? What are their uses, their meanings, and their significance?

In taking up the topic of divination in the Guatemalan highlands, I encountered two excellent volumes right away. Both appeared in the early 1980s and focused on *tz'ite'* seed divination (Colby & Colby 1981; B. Tedlock 1982). Not only is this divinatory technique among the most common within a variety of ethnolinguistic communities, it is also the practice recorded in the *Popol Vuh*, an early colonial transcription of K'iche' myth and history (Christenson 2007; Tedlock 1996). Many of

the ethnographies written about highland Guatemala mention *tz'ite'* seed divination either in passing or with some consideration of its form and meaning.

In their book, *The Daykeeper*, Benjamin and Lore Colby recount their work with an Ixil Maya "daykeeper" named Shas Ko'w (1981). "Daykeeper" is a common translation of *ajq'iij* and refers to the specialized knowledge that diviners possess and make use of in their divinations. The core of this knowledge relates to the ancient Mesoamerican calendar known in the highlands as the *Cholq'ij*. The calendar is composed of 260 days: 20 days, each with its own set of themes and qualities, and a numerical coefficients ranging from 1 to 13. The days (or *nawales*) of the *Cholq'iij* encode essential cultural themes and mythic associations (e.g. the day *K'aat* means, among other things, "net" and is often associated with the woven net bag that every maize farmer uses to bundle together his ears of corn during the harvest). The cluster of attributes for each *nawal* forms an important part of the "cultural grammar" that subsumes divination as a meaning system.

The Colbys' cognitive anthropological approach sought to understand the cultural grammar at work in the divination techniques. In his 1975 article, Benjamin Colby asserts that "culture is not a well-integrated, holistic system but rather an orchestrated constellation of many small systems. These small systems are what I shall refer to as culture grammars" (1975). Cultural grammars, like linguistic grammars, are the basic conceptions, values, and normative structures that lie within culturally constituted meaning systems. *Tz'ite'* seed divination, which explicitly draws on these core values and themes—which are the tissue of the *Cholq'iij* calendar—can be seen as a guide book consulted in cases when meaning is rendered

opaque or when one needs reassurance about the proper way to go about some critical action. In *The Daykeeper*, the Colbys describe Ixil divination as "a folk model of Ixil life and culture" (1981:265). And while models are merely distillations of reality, people lost in the morass of experience and action often need to consult such heuristics to help guide them.

Uncovering a cultural grammar is especially difficult, though, since it tends to be ingrained in practice and helps to form a person's "common sense." Expert speakers usually do not know or cannot articulate the rules which enable them to convey meanings clearly just as most people cannot delineate the core values, symbols, and meanings which organize their own understanding of culture. In *Culture and Inference*, Edwin Hutchins discusses the concept of cultural grammar noting that "once learned, it becomes what one sees with, but seldom what one sees" (1980). The *Cholq'iij*, then, is a powerful tool; it is the redundantly preserved and frequently consulted guidebook of expert wayfinders. The *nawales* of the *Cholq'iij* serve as essential cultural models that have helped to structure Mesoamerican lives over the millennia.

Speaking more generally about the power and meaning of divination, Benjamin Colby writes:

> Forged through time over many generations and through changing situations, an explicitly codified divination is guided by an implicit narrative grammar and decision model that encapsulates life situations in that society. If analyzed to its fullest extent, a codified divinatory system can be likened to a cultural Rosetta stone that translates the behavioral, biological, and physical conditions in which individuals of a society typically find themselves. (2004:84)

Presciently, the Colbys relate divination to "prosthetic devices" for cognition, a notion that is concordant with ideas about distributed cognition:

> Proverbs, old saws, myths, folktales, divinations, and numerous other cultural devices summarize human situations in useful ways. Such devices reduce the great complexity of human motives and circumstances to a conceptually manageable size. Interposed between individuals and their raw environment, they act as intellectual prosthetic devices, just as material artifacts enhance or amplify our physical abilities. (1981: 222)

In this model, divination serves as an important device to help people make decisions in the face of high cognitive load (see Sterelny 2005). By relying upon cultural decision-making structures, like divination, people lessen the burden and stress of individual deliberation. The Colbys, who convey functionalist sensibilities, believe that divination exerts a curative power due to this stress reduction property (1981:222), a finding mirrored in Eike Hinz's later studies of *tz'ite'* seed divination (2008). Upon reviewing the Colbys' ideas about *tz'ite'* seed divination, it becomes clear that this practice serves as an important topic for a study of culture and cognition; it has the capacity to highlight the processes by which culturally constituted tools may facilitate decision-making.

In her 1982 book, *Time and the Highland Maya*, Barbara Tedlock eschews cognitive approaches in favor of practice theory (3). In her initial fieldwork among the K'iche', Tedlock became ill. In consulting a diviner, it was determined that her illness was brought on by some indiscretions she and her husband had committed. That insight, combined with prophetic dreams, convinced the diviner she had consulted that the two ought to apprentice as diviners themselves. This rare opportunity afforded Tedlock subtle insights into highland Maya divination practices.

Time and the Highland Maya is the anthropologically sophisticated record of her apprenticeship.

Tedlock recorded the underlying operations and meanings behind the practice of *tz'ite'* seed divination. But whereas the Colbys emphasize the propositional structures behind divination, Tedlock believes that an equally important part of the *tz'ite'* seed divination is a somatic intuition called *koyopa* or "speaking of the blood" (1982; 2001). This capacity emerges as a tingling that the diviner feels during the divination session. Sometimes this comes up in listening to the client's problem, more often in response to combinations of the *tz'ite'* and quartz crystals that are manipulated in the sortilege practice. But even this highly intuitive aspect of divination is best understood by the underlying suppositions about *koyopa* and where it occurs in the body. In short, the practical mastery that Tedlock valorizes must always be considered as inseparable from the learned meanings regarding the *nawales* as well as aspects of an "embodied geography."

In the Colbys' study of Ixil Maya divination predominantly cognitive theories and methods are employed. The Colbys acknowledge this approach as just a beginning. For them, it is an attempt to model a more complex set of traditions and practices (1981:265). In operationalizing the divination system well enough to make a computer program out of it (Colby and Knaus 1974), the Colbys did not intend to characterize divination as an axiomatic process. For in dealing with the symbolism of the *nawales*, there simply are no fixed and reliable meanings; they are nodes of metaphorical associations (see Appendix for a lengthier discussion of this topic).

In Tedlock's ethnography, skill is favored over operational/semantic content. *Tz'ite'* seed divination comes from a lifetime study of cultural themes and the integration of those representations into a practical system of guidance and orientation. An increased emphasis on cognition versus skilled practice is not pertinent as they would refer to a false dichotomy. The Colbys were essentially observing an expert in practice while Tedlock had the unusual opportunity of taking up the practice herself. In a sense, the Colbys' ethnography illustrates the height of an outside-in approach while Tedlock relates something closer to an inside-out perspective. In both accounts one finds a fascinating clarification of subtleties.

For Maya peoples, past and present, divination has been relied upon as an important ritual for dealing with life's vicissitudes. In addition to the details that the Colbys and the Tedlocks have articulated, I would emphasize the importance of the natal astrological (or "*nawal*-ogical") scheme that commonly shapes a *tz'ite'* seed divination. The influences that each person has by virtue of his time bound entry into the world go on to shape his destiny. In my experience, many divinations were foregrounded by what it would or could mean for the person given his particular calendrical "identity."

The client — *José*

José, or aaShep in Tz'utujil, is in his early thirties. He was born and raised in San Pedro La Laguna. I met him one day in August 2008; we were among the other dozen passengers in the boat crossing Lake Atitlán from Panajachel to San Pedro. His wife, Linda, and I had met at a large fire ceremony in Sololá just a couple of weeks

earlier. She recognized me when I climbed into the boat; so she, I, and her husband began a friendly conversation. Within a short time, I became close friends with José and Linda who often invited me to share meals with them, attend family events, all while offering me patient and thoughtful instruction in the intricacies of Tz'utujil culture.

I found José to be an excellent teacher. He was well-connected in the community, a staunch practitioner of Tz'utujil ritual, and deeply interested in learning and teaching about his cultural traditions. He always seemed to have some prior knowledge of whatever topic I brought up and was a superb communicator; for whatever reason, even when he spoke very fast, I understood him exceptionally well. He spoke to me in Spanish and Tz'utujil and helped to clarify many of the indigenous terms and phrases that I had been learning. He had a talent for explaining subtle points and I came to rely on him as a key informant and colleague. There was a mutual respect between us as we shared an enthusiasm for learning all we could about local history, culture, archaeology, language, and related matters. José had even begun a program of video interviews of many of the oldest members of the community as he felt their knowledge of the past would be lost if not recorded for posterity.

During his young adulthood, José's interest in Tz'utujil traditions grew. He had begun to practice Maya spirituality in earnest some nine years earlier, in the year 2000 when he was in his early twenties. José had grown up in a Catholic family while his wife had grown up in an evangelical Christian family. He told me that they were one of very few interfaith couples in the community. Though he and Linda came from different religious backgrounds, he felt that their mutual interest in and practice of

Maya spirituality had helped bring them together and facilitated their happy marriage. While both participated in Maya spirituality, they also celebrated their families' religious traditions, José periodically attending Mass with his brother or parents, and Linda often attending evangelical services with her family.

According to Linda's mother, the midwife noted that her daughter was born holding something in her hand and predicted that she would grow up to be a healer. This is a classic sign of "election" to a religious office (Paul 1975; Paul and Paul 1975; Rogoff, et al. 2011). Though her evangelical Christian family did not act on this information and bring her to ritual specialists for training, as would have been done traditionally, neither did they exclude her from developing her capacities from a young age. When she was five years old, Linda began to heal people working from her intuition; this in spite of the fact that her mother had not told her about the midwife's observations during her birth. When she was six, Linda found one of the objects that she continues to use in her work as a *wekol baak* (bonesetter), a healing tradition for which San Pedro La Laguna is well-known throughout the region (Hinojosa 2002; Paul 1976). As is common among *ajq'ijaa'* and other ritual specialists (Brown 2000), Linda has been in the habit of collecting objects she felt to be special or otherwise intended just for her.

When José first introduced me to his father, I immediately recognized him as a member of the group with whom I had first visited the Tz'utujil *ajq'iij*, Don Francisco, in July 2007 (see narrative below). The entire family had been very kind and gracious to me, greeting me in the streets, and welcoming me to intimate family events. It was thus an ideal case when José brought up his desire to consult Don Francisco for a

tz'ite' seed divination in regards to an important decision that he was considering. I asked him if he would mind if I joined him. He told me that I was welcome to accompany him and that he would call me after he had spoken with Don Francisco and scheduled the meeting.

The context — *José's Job*

Three days later, on January 19, 2009 (2 *Q'aniil*), José and I went to San Juan La Laguna for his divination with Don Francisco. I had learned that José intended to have Don Francisco help him decide a critical matter: José possessed an excellent job in an office in San Pedro La Laguna but the workplace environment had become unbearable because of some recent changes; he had been contemplating whether or not to quit.

San Pedro and San Juan, neighboring communities, had developed working relationships with a variety of governmental institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Because of these relationships, there were a handful of lucrative, highly sought after jobs in the offices of these organizations. Generally, such jobs were reserved for the select few who possessed college degrees, but even rare credentials were more plentiful than these jobs. This led to a situation in which there were jealousies and occasional flare-ups between the few who held these positions and the others who wanted these jobs or otherwise felt someone else "deserved" one of them. At the time, José was right in the middle of such a situation.

A new boss had taken over at his workplace and intended to replace some of the employees with his own friends and associates. The new boss had acquired his

position due, in part, to the efforts and politicking of these supporters. Now they expected some payback and began to express their dissatisfaction when he did not hire them. But to some extent his hands were tied since it was not an easy thing to overhaul an office in a small community like this without social and political consequences. The present employees, including José, had worked in their positions for some time and enjoyed the full support of the prior head of the organization. When the former boss retired, he had indicated to his successor (who was new to the office) that there should be as little change as possible since the employees were skilled and productive in their positions. The new boss thus had to walk a fine line between nudging these employees out without overtly trying to replace them. He had already found pretenses to replace two employees. But there were many people who still expected a job from him and remained unhappy that he was not making good on the implicit contract they felt had existed between them beforehand.

One of the manifestations of this displeasure was gossip and accusations against the present employees in the office. The job seekers were trying to paint a portrait of privilege and corruption against the present employees in order to facilitate their departure. José was one of the targets of these accusations. He deeply resented the situation and felt he was attacked on all sides since the new boss was trying to nudge him and the other workers out at the same time that these agitators were spreading rumors about them. José had begun to consider quitting but faced a terrible dilemma. He not only needed the money that his position provided, but he genuinely appreciated the work and the role it provided him with in the community. So while he felt pressure to quit, he did not want to give up the job, though he had obviously come

to dislike the new supervisor and the unpleasant atmosphere of the workplace. He hoped Don Francisco could help him to gain some clarity so they could determine the best response to the situation.

The *ajq'iij* — *Don Francisco*

Don Francisco, an *ajq'iij* in his early sixties, lives in San Juan La Laguna and has practiced as an *ajq'iij* since 1997. Many years ago, a series of personal and familial crises led him to consult *ajq'ijaa'* who informed him that his troubles would not cease until he responded to his calling and began to work as an *ajq'iij* himself. At present, he is well-known in the area for his work as an *ajq'iij*. He does not "live" by his work as an *ajq'iij*, that is he does not demand payment or set fixed rates for his services, but, like so many other Tz'utujil men, tends to his *milpa* and grows coffee for his income. He has kept his reputation unblemished, avoiding any financial exploitation of his role as an *ajq'iij* and repudiating witchcraft. He has sought no publicity but has occasionally expressed resentment that he and his sacrifices have gone unappreciated by the community. He believes *ajq'ijaa'* like himself should have at least as much authority and public acknowledgment as Christian priests and preachers. Among my friends and associates he is the "go-to" *ajq'iij* even if it means they need to travel from their communities to San Juan in order to consult him. If others are also respected, it seems Don Francisco is always *trusted*.

Don Francisco was the first *ajq'iij* I met. On July 20, 2007, 12 *Kawoq* in the *Cholq'iij*, during the first summer I spent in San Pedro La Laguna, my Tz'utujil language teacher, Andrés, invited me to a *ceremonia Maya*. Andrés took me along

with some friends of his to visit Don Francisco in San Juan La Laguna. This group belonged to a political party and wished to consult Don Francisco about their desire to run in the upcoming elections. Don Francisco welcomed us into his office, a small house three blocks from the compound where he and his family live, and invited us to sit down. As we entered, I followed Andrés example and stooped over and kissed Don Francisco's right hand as he offered it to me. This is the protocol for showing respect when meeting an elder in the Tz'utujil community.

Don Francisco's office, which housed his altar, was a cinder block structure with a corrugated metal roof. Small holes in the roof permitted shafts of sunlight to stream into the dark room. Don Francisco asked questions of the men and I noticed that his right hand played in a pile of *tz'ite'* seeds and small quartz crystals. He did not conduct *pajooneem* at the time but seemed to be "using" the seeds and quartz crystals in some way during the lengthy interview. After various questions to Andrés and colleagues, Don Francisco made a long declamation in Tz'utujil which, only a few days into my Tz'utujil classes, I did not understand. As he spoke I surveyed the room.

Against the far wall was Don Francisco's altar which possessed an effigy of *Rilaj Mam* sitting atop it. This figure, more popularly known as *Maximón*, wore a black hat and a dark coat; a mess of silk scarves hung around its neck. A cigarette was wedged between its wooden lips and an attractive odor of various colognes and aftershaves hung about it. On each side of the statue were smaller idols. Liquor bottles, aromatic tinctures, and flowers were arranged around *Rilaj Mam*. On the floor in front of the table were stones and archaeological pieces, two of these appeared to be torch holders and were coated in soot. To the left of the table, resting on a board just a

few inches off the ground, were three well-worn sculptures of Classic Maya figures, it was difficult to assess their age. Various eclectic pieces were assembled around them including a bird's nest with small blue eggs visible within.



Figure 4.1: Don Francisco (face concealed) and his altar in smoke-filled room

When Don Francisco was done with his speech, Andrés and the other men stepped outside and consulted one another. Don Francisco and I were in the room alone for a few minutes and chatted in Spanish. He asked me where I was from, what I was doing in the area, and other basic questions. He was friendly and patient with the brief questions I asked him in return. The men came back inside, questioned Don

Francisco about something, and gave him a wad of money. He then began to gather the materials he would need to perform a fire ceremony.

Don Francisco motioned Andrés and his colleagues outside and gave them two baskets, one full of large corn husks that had been diligently wrapped into packages and one full of smaller corn husks that appeared the same except for their diminutive size. Andrés told me that I could help with the preparation. He began cutting the three ties which bound each husk-wrapped bundle. After cutting these, he would hand them to me and I would shake out their contents; each held approximately 20 small black briquettes of hand fashioned resin and plant incense (*ensartes*). We continued until the basket brimmed over and then did the same to the smaller bundles which held coin-sized briquettes that appeared to be made of the same material (*cuilco*). Meanwhile, Don Francisco rolled out a large brick and mortar circle that he set in the middle of the dugout space just in front of his office, where we were preparing the materials. Don Francisco tied a red handkerchief on top of his head and, pouring sugar from a one kilo package, carefully formed a counter-clockwise circle upon the brick base. He crossed the circle with two lines of sugar and then placed a dot of sugar within the resultant quadrants. Don Francisco prepared a basket, setting packs of herbs and other ingredients within it, and began uttering prayers

We handed him our baskets of incense briquettes and he slowly built up a circle of the large briquettes and began layering it up until it was approximately three briquettes deep and nearly two feet in diameter. He poured sugar upon these and then began layering it with various ingredients, including rosemary (*romero*), *palitos de estoraque* ("cut sticks of resinous *liquidambar* tree"), and granules of *copal*, a tree

resin incense. Don Francisco took a thick chocolate bar and broke it up into chunks which he set towards the outside of the circle. He then put four pastries on the pile, one in each cardinal direction. He placed a series of candles in the offering, their wicks pointed inward to the center of the circle, and then set pieces of *ocote*, a resinous pine wood, atop these. With steady patience, he poured a small bottle of honey over the mound of materials. Don Francisco then knelt on a woven reed mat in front of the fire, struck a match, and lit the candle wicks in the center. He began a series of prayers and waved the group's political flyer above the fire.



Figure 4.2: Don Francisco's ceremonial fire

Don Francisco continued praying throughout the ceremony. He recited each of the days of the *Cholq'iij* calendar. As he did this, he counted out thirteen tokens of *cuilco* and offered them to the fire one at a time, addressing each set of the twenty *nawales*. At one point, he paused and handed four large candles to each of us. Then each of us in turn stood before Don Francisco. He waved the candles around us and had us kiss them. He motioned Andrés over and waved the flyer above the flames a few more times. The fire had been going at least half an hour by this point and continued to burn well. Don Francisco handed smaller candles to each of the party members and recited more prayers. He had them approach the fire and drop their candles into its center. The black smoke gave off an aroma of sweetness and incense. Don Francisco went inside and grabbed a bottle of strong liquor called *aguardiente*. He poured some of the liquor onto objects on and near his altar inside his office then came outside and splashed it onto the four cardinal points of the fire which hissed and shot up blue flames. He additionally offered a few drops of the liquor to some of the stones in the dugout area surrounding the fire. He pulled out a long piece of rebar and began to mix and stoke the fire with it while mumbling prayers. Don Francisco was sweating profusely by now, not surprising given his proximity to a hot fire for over an hour. He added more honey to the fire, sprinkled sugar atop it, and later offered it more *aguardiente*. He then distributed some of the small incense briquettes to each of the party members and recited more prayers. Each was then asked to come to the fire and placed his *cuilco* briquettes into it. Finally, as the fire had transformed itself into smoking granules and well-burnt coals, he uttered prayers while waving the political flyer over it and then laid it upon the embers. The flyer briefly flared up and was

consumed. The ritual had lasted nearly two hours. We all went inside and sat in front of the altar. Don Francisco used the handkerchief on his head to wipe the sweat and soot from his face. He talked for a while and then everyone got up to leave. Each thanked him and we all headed out. It was two o'clock in the afternoon. We had been there a total of three and a half hours.

Though we had been cramped into a small space for hours, witnessing and participating in the ceremony, all the men left energized. Andrés had zeal in his eyes. We returned to San Pedro La Laguna and while I headed off for a cool drink the rest of them organized a rally. Soon they were in a truck, driving around town honking and blaring political slogans from megaphones; a pattern of behavior I had already witnessed numerous times in anticipation of the upcoming elections. Apparently, this ceremony, if it did not decide the issue of their participation, increased the men's enthusiasm. In late September, Andre's party took over the town council after winning the election.

I considered this first experience with Don Francisco to be an auspicious start. Over the ensuing years, I would come to participate in dozens of fire ceremonies with him and consulted him for interviews dozens of times, some of which I recorded and transcribed. During the early stages of my research, he was not always eager to speak with me at any length but, after time, came to trust me more and more.

In an ideal scenario, I would have worked with him, facilitating in some manner so as to learn fine details of his ritual and divinatory practices. I found him to be very private, though. He was not comfortable with my presence when I visited him during consultations with clients who were not my friends or associates. He permitted

me to film some rituals but at other times, even when performing the same types of rituals, he would not permit me to film or record. He never allowed me to film any *tz'ite'* seed divinations as he considered the use of *tz'ite'* to be particularly delicate, and thought it dangerous to film or take photos of the process. He told me once that *tz'ite'* was a "double-edged sword." In other words, it had the capacity to harm and heal, even in the same hands. He did permit me to make an audio record of a few *tz'ite'* seed consultations. The following case study with José was the first of those opportunities.

Case Study — *José's Job*

It was Monday, January 19, 2009, 2 *Q'aniil* in the *Cholq'iij*. Don Francisco invited us in and we each took his right hand and kissed it as a gesture of respect. I sat against the wall while the two of them faced one another and discussed the reason for José's visit.

Don Francisco's altar was in much the same configuration as when I had first visited him in 2007. Derived from photos and notes, the illustration below, while not presenting a comprehensive account of all the ritual objects, represents the most easily identifiable ones on, near, and in front of Don Francisco's altar from the period of December 2008-January 2009. To the right of the altar was a smaller table with additional stones and relics. Just beneath it, perpendicular to it and perched against the wall, was a low-lying plank supporting three statues. Against the same wall, a higher bench provided seats for Don Francisco's clients.

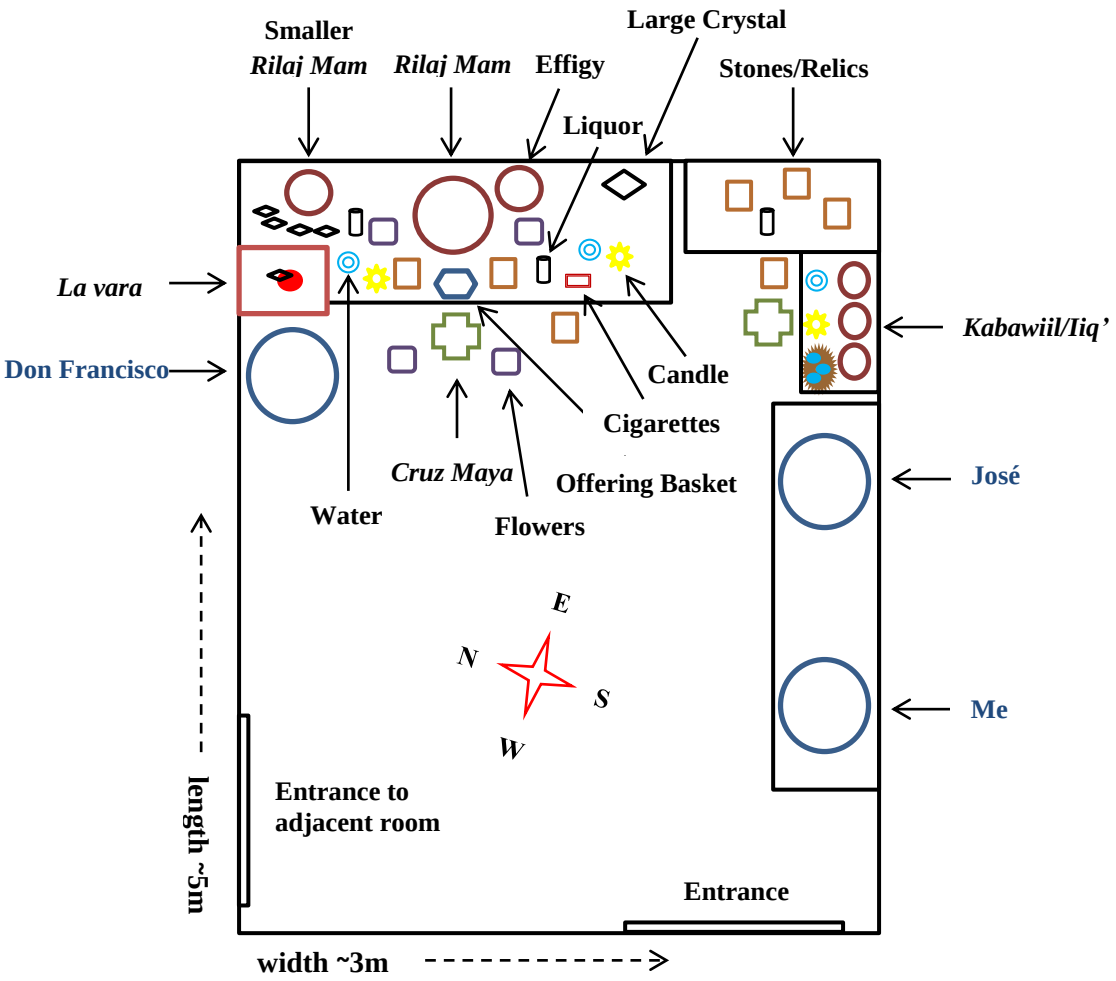


Figure 4.3: Don Francisco's altar

The exchange between Don Francisco and José was in Tz'utujil. José, a competent linguist, translated the exchange line-by-line from Tz'utujil to Spanish. Using square brackets, I indicate where I have altered José's translation, usually for

the purpose of anonymizing people's names or other identifying information. I have kept as faithful as possible to his Spanish translation while also attempting to construct a colloquial English narrative that captures the original tone of the speakers. This has required transposition of words as well as selective editing.

(Recording 00AQ011909)

(pre-recording-:10) Context: Don Francisco and José chat briefly and joke a bit as Don Francisco arranges things so that he can begin the *pajooneem* ritual.

(:11-1:14) José:

…now these two people want to work again and they feel supported in this, since the new boss, who is from [a nearby town] received their help in order to get [his job] and now they're saying, 'we helped you, now give us the jobs,' and for this reason they are upset with us because we're still in our positions there…

(3:36-3:54) José:

Almost every day when we began work they used to come in to see [the boss] to tell him to get rid of us and that they felt betrayed by him due to the commitments they had made beforehand. [The boss] would tell them that he couldn't make decisions on his own and furthermore he needed our help with the work…

(4:29-4:59) José:

On Wednesday or Thursday of last week one of them came to insult us in our offices right in front of some other people who were there. Sure, this would matter if he were really telling the truth. For all these reasons I feel bad. I'm very sensitive to this situation, to problems. Some have told me not to pay attention to what they say, but it affects me and I just don't feel good at work anymore.

(6:32-6:44) José:

For this reason, I want you to do me a favor, to consult, to see and observe, if I ought to continue working…

(6:59-7:13) José:

…what I'm asking you, so that I can go on thinking about how I'm going to live my life, because a job is necessary, we need money, but if I shouldn't continue working, well, that's that, I shouldn't force things because that can end up bad.

(7:14-7:15) Don Francisco:

Uh-huh, that's right…

(7:16-7:20) José:

For this reason I've come to you in order to consult you about the situation, excuse me.

(7:28-7:54) Context: Don Francisco and José chat briefly as Don Francisco arranges things so that he can begin the *pajooneem* ritual.

(7:55-9:01) Context: Don Francisco begins mixing the *tz'ite'* seeds, moving his right hand in a counter-clockwise motion atop them while reciting prayers quickly and in a quiet voice. At **9:01** he stopped the mixing and took up a handful of *tz'ite'* seeds in his right hand. José provides the following description of this time period:

He begins to speak with the Creator and Former [name from *Popol Vuh*] he also speaks to the ancestors, asking their permission for the divination. Meanwhile, with his right hand he tries to move all the *tz'ite'* and the small crystals that he has with all the *tz'ite'* (it's not possible to transcribe every single word he uses due to the fact that the audio is not clear in this part.) He asks the question, 'can [José] continue in his job, should he continue or not?' After a moment he takes up a handful of the *tz'ite'* at random…

(9:02-10:51) Context: Don Franciso sets down the handful of *tz'ite'* seeds and pushes the rest of the pile aside. He begins sorting and arranging the seeds and during this time engages in casual conversation with José asking him about one of his former co-workers **(9:23-10:51)**. José provides the following description of this time period:

> **…and he begins to separate the *tz'ite'* from the crystals and then makes clusters out of four *tz'ite'* seeds in order to have various groups of them (of four *tz'ite'* seeds).**

When Don Francisco finished arranging the *tz'ite'* **(~10:00**), he ended up with the following layout:

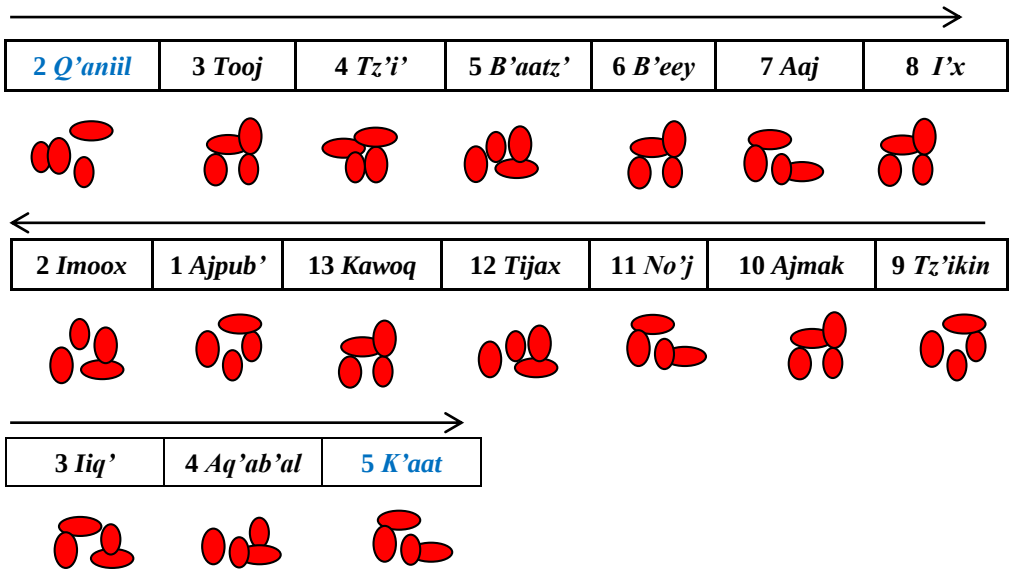


Figure 4.4: Question 1, Reading 1

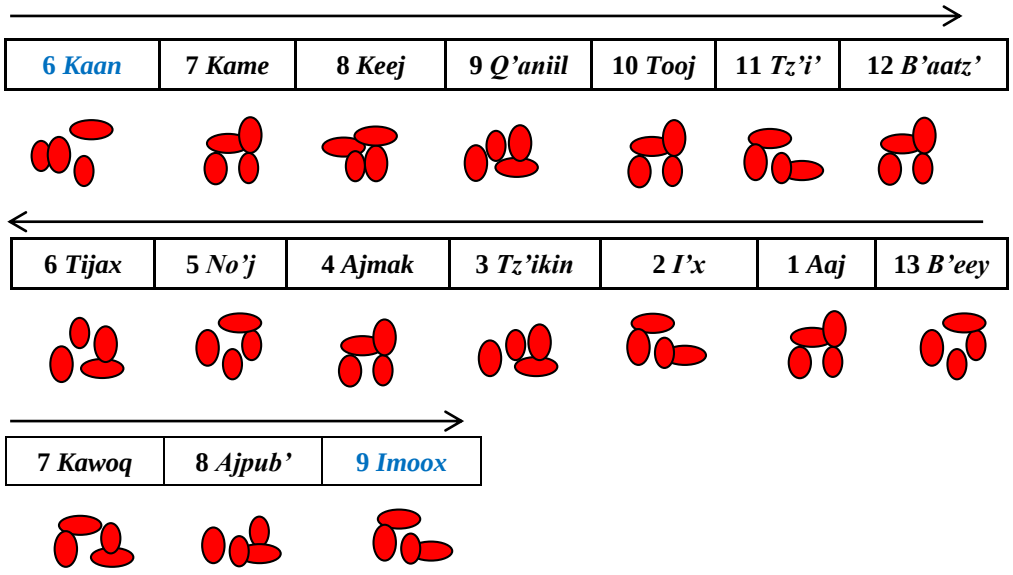


Figure 4.5: Question 1, Reading 2

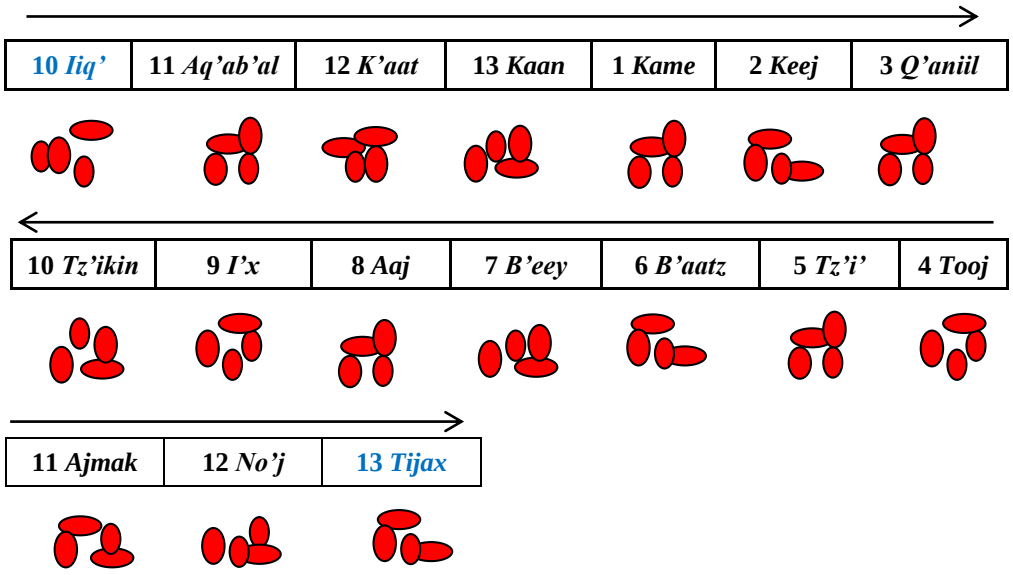


Figure 4.6: Question 1, Reading 3[1]

(10:52-11:51) Context: Don Francisco counts through the arrangement of *tz'ite'* clusters. At **11:40** José asks him what day it is in the *Cholq'iij*, acknowledging that it is *Q'aniil* but expressing his uncertainty about which number of *Q'aniil* it is. Don Francisco responds that it is 2 *Q'aniil*.

(11:52-13:04) Don Francisco:

Your situation is difficult. More problems are coming for you all. They will always be upset about this and more than one of them (of the troublemakers) has a lot of energy from his day. They will confront you with problems. As soon as you're in someone's sights you know more problems are on the way. They will pursue you and hurt you, that's to say, they're never going to be happy. Everything will be complicated for you. All that begins in a controversy is problematic, and this work is 'delicate,' you know, it's related to the ancestors. Good work's been done for them and it's 'delicate' that this is being turned into a problem…

(13:05-13:07) José: *Sí, así es.*
Yeah, that's right.

(13:08-13:35) Don Francisco:

Your divination says two things; first, that the men will continue bothering you…

(13:36-13:46) José:

I interrupt [Don Francisco] telling him: 'Yeah, that's exactly what one of them came to say, that they were going to get the people together to have them fired…'

(13:50-14:12) Don Francisco:

Uh-huh, that's what it's said, yes, that was what it said. Okay, ultimately it's your decision if you want to put up with this whole situation, but the ancestors are indicating to me, through the divination, that there just isn't any harmony between you and they.

(14:19-14:30) José:

I ask him whether the lack of harmony is between us and them or us and the ancestors.

(14:31-14:37) Don Francisco:

[Don Francisco] responds that both are upset, because the ancestors aren't happy either for being dragged into all of this over a job.

(14:39-14:41) José:

Okay, then that's what the divination is telling me here.

(14:42-14:58) Don Francisco:

You guys need to be careful, there are people involved that have a lot of energy and you might set them off.

(14:59-15:51) José:

Yeah, that's for sure. My parents and grandparents have always told us that whatever is 'forced' ends badly. Oh, also, I asked the group what it is I've done, to tell me if my work's been done poorly, but no one was able to say anything because I know that I've done a good job. But it's always good to 'get a consultation'/divine] about things, about decisions, at times we take action without first ['getting permission'/divining] about which is the best way to go, or, I guess in this case, finding out if some other work opportunity might be on the horizon for me.

(14:54-15:51) Context: Don Francisco begins to mix the *tz'ite'* seeds anew at **14:54.** He takes up a handful of *tz'ite'* at **15:22**. There is no record of him reciting prayers during this time because José is talking to him. Don Francisco is casually responding to José during this time, affirming him in what he is saying.

(15:52-15:54) Don Francisco:

What's [the new boss's] opinion about everything that's going on?

(15:55-16:33) José:

He says we shouldn't pay any attention to these problems, but we see that he's lying to us and that he's helping the other group, but, ultimately, only god knows the truth about all of this.

(17:03-17:21) Context: After discussing some of the uncertainties about the new boss's actions and a bit of gossip, the two fall silent. During this period, Don Francisco counts through the new arrangement of *tz'ite'* clusters. I was unable to note the arrangement of clusters with any certainty. I had stood up and counted the number of clusters with the first arrangement (above). During this reading I hesitated, especially since Don Francisco was more hunched over the arrangement than before.

(17:22-18:14) Don Francisco:

From what I see, there aren't any positive things for this year, there are going to be a lot of problems at work and at times one is going to regret the consequences. You decide what to do, but from this point on, I anticipate that there will be problems for you…

(18:15-19:00) José:

That's what I'm seeing too and it's bothering me that they may be harming my reputation within the community. I'm not sure if you've heard, but I'm helping a small group, offering them my time for free and we're also hoping to put together a Maya spirituality group with you and some other folks, which I'd never leave for anything…although I may quit my job, I won't leave our spirituality. Dealing with this situation makes me feel bad and I've asked them if I've done something wrong, but who knows what they think, everyone always has their opinions…

(19:01-19:11) Don Francisco:

That's what I've seen in the divination, only problems.

(19:15-20:20) José:

Okay, I think everything is clearer now, but I'd like to ask another question, excuse me for everything I've brought you. I prepared my résumé for a job that I had heard about last year, they were telling me to submit my résumé because there might be a job opportunity for me there. There's a new institute that the government is starting up and they'll be paying the staff. And since I've graduated from college and that's one of the requirements for the application, I went ahead and sent them my résumé last year, I don't know why I did it, it's not like I enjoy putting my papers together, and the prospect didn't appeal to me much but I went ahead and checked it out because one of the people in charge told me that with my particular background there could be an employment opportunity. And their answer could be on Friday [6 *B'eey*]. What I'd like you to divine is whether or not a job opportunity is coming my way.

(20:21-23:22) Context: Don Francisco begins to mix the *tz'ite'* seeds and crystals again. At **20:23** Don Francisco asks José if the institute is a school. José answers that it is like a place that offers career training. At **21:00** José takes a phone call and steps outside. José notes that he cannot hear all the details of the Don Francisco's recitation but he does hear him question the ancestors and the creator:

"…does [José] have an employment opportunity coming his way?"

Don Francisco takes up a handful of seeds at **21:08** and begins arranging them in clusters. José returns from outside at **22:18**. There is silence from this point up to **23:23** but there is a faint sound of mumbling from Don Francisco and he seems to take his time deliberating over the *tz'ite'* clusters. I was able to get a long enough glimpse of the arrangements to carefully count them through twice. There was an arrangement of eighteen clusters with four seeds in the last cluster.

When Don Francisco finished arranging the *tz'ite'* **(~22:00)**, he ended up with the following layout:

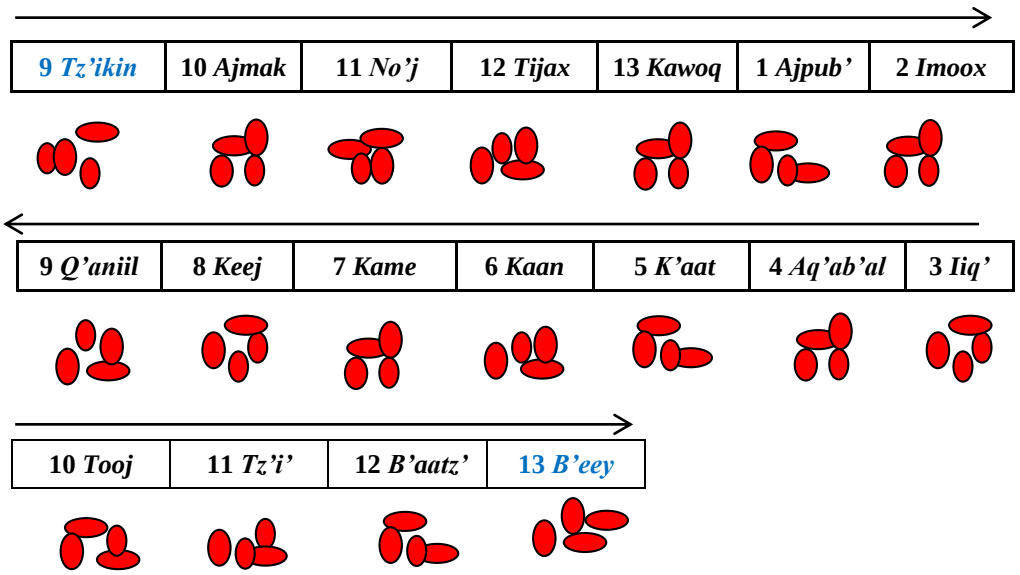


Figure 4.7: Question 2, Reading 1

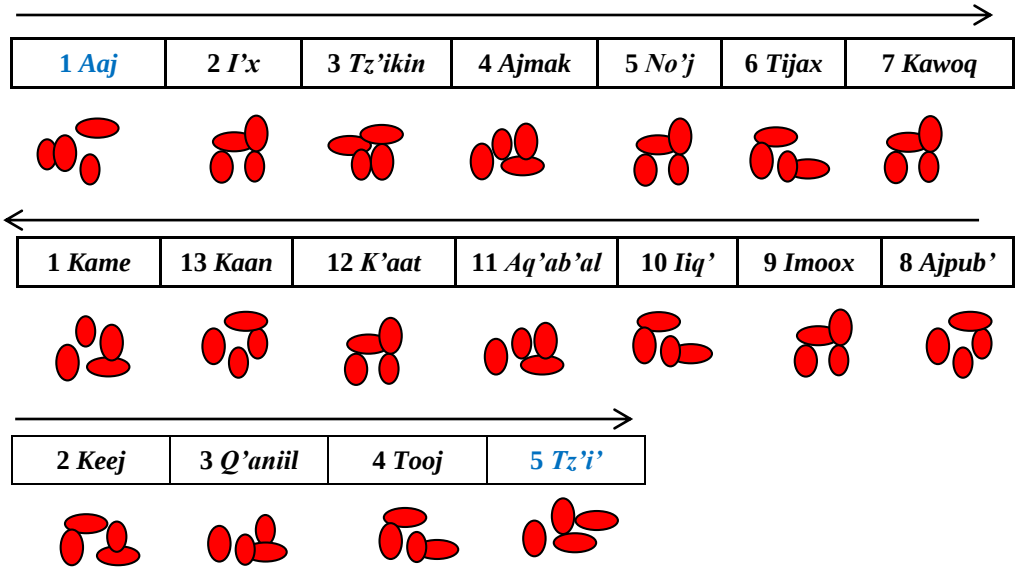


Figure 4.8: Question 2, Reading 2

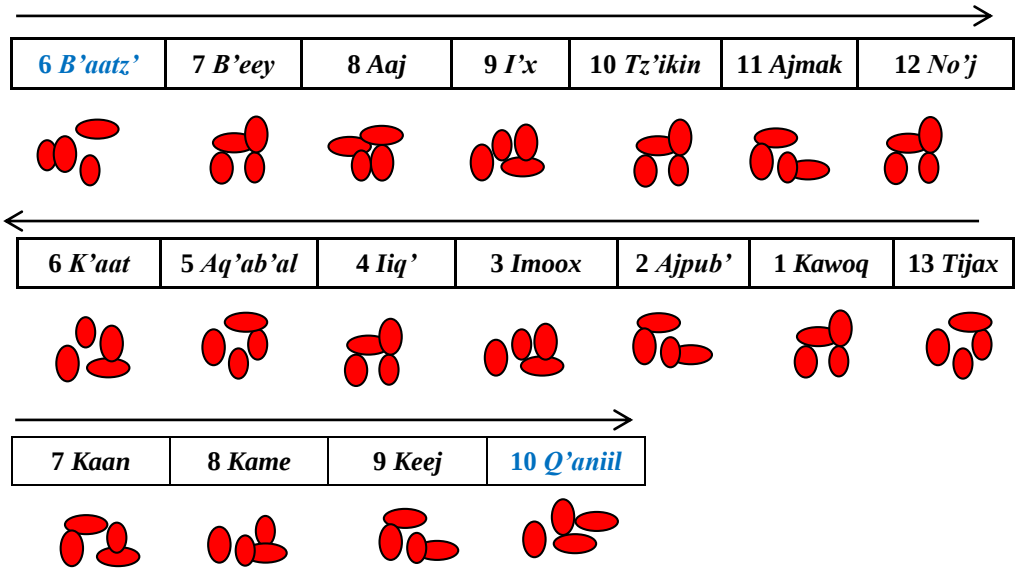


Figure 4.9: Question 2, Reading 3

(23:23-25:57) Don Francisco:

You do have a new work opportunity, pray to god about this and remember that today is *Q'aniil*, tomorrow *Tooj*, you should pray the next three days and burn your candles as well. You do have a job prospect, the ancestors know that you are not being appreciated in your current job, they say that you have a new path opening up for you so that you can enjoy your life and you should hope for the response this Friday. With this you'll leave your current job and you'll avoid some major problems. New paths are opening to you so you can make a name for yourself in the community. Get away from all those who are doing whatever they want to. You'll leave with dignity, walking tall, above reproach. Look for a new job and from there you'll realize what you're worth. Quit your job, avoid problems for yourself…

(26:11-26:33) Don Francisco:

If you keep going, they'll bother you until they get the better of you, it's best to rid yourself of them now.

(26:34-28:13) José:

My mom told me the same thing. One of them used to be very friendly with her and now when he bumps into her he doesn't even say hi, so it's really gotten bad. For all these reasons I don't think it's worth the trouble to be in a job where I feel

uncomfortable, worried about everything, anxious, that's what I said to the boss, that it's senseless that we're fighting over this.
I think I'll quit towards the end of the month, so I can get paid.
I can put my my résumé together for job prospects later on, because I have faith in the lord, god willing there will be some great work opportunities.

(28:14-28:17) Don Francisco:

…the best thing is to leave your job and look for new opportunities.

(28:18-28:24) José:

I know that they've been talking bad about me but I'm not the kind of person to harm anyone, some are still my colleagues. Only the lord knows what the future has in store for me.

(28:25-28:51) Don Francisco:

Don't forget our spirituality, that god… the lord knows what he's doing.

(28:52-31:05) Context: Don Francisco and José say goodbye to each other, affirming and reaffirming the correct way to go. José thanks him repeatedly, I thank Don Francisco for permitting my attendance, and we get up to leave at **31:05**. I notice that as we depart José has a very worried look on his face.

I was worried about José and wondered whether or not he would go through with this very difficult decision. Don Francisco was not ambiguous, he clearly expressed that continuing with this job was not only a bad idea, but that it could bring harm to José. Internally, as a secular-minded observer, I marveled at the thought that José might give up an excellent job because of the discomfort of the situation coupled with this strong divinatory assessment.

As luck would have it, José was offered the job for which he had submitted his résumé. On Thursday, 5 *B'aatz'*, one day earlier than he expected to hear anything about the job, he was offered, and readily accepted, the new position. He was able to resign gracefully from his position in the contentious office, avoiding any bad blood between himself and the new boss, and looked to the new job with great excitement. I met with him about three weeks later to interview him regarding what had transpired in his divination session.

First Follow-Up Interview with José

It was Saturday, February 7, 2009, 8 *Keej* in the *Cholq'iij*. Nineteen days had passed since José's divination with Don Francisco. José and I had made plans to meet with a different *ajq'iij*, one from San Pedro La Laguna whom I had been getting to know at the time, at 4pm. I had asked José if I could stop by his home a bit earlier to review what had happened during his divination session. I knew he had been in a good mood because of the seamless transition he experienced leaving his problematic job for the interesting new position he had been offered but I wanted to get a better sense of how he understood the meaning of the divination. He invited me to come by for a chat at 3pm.

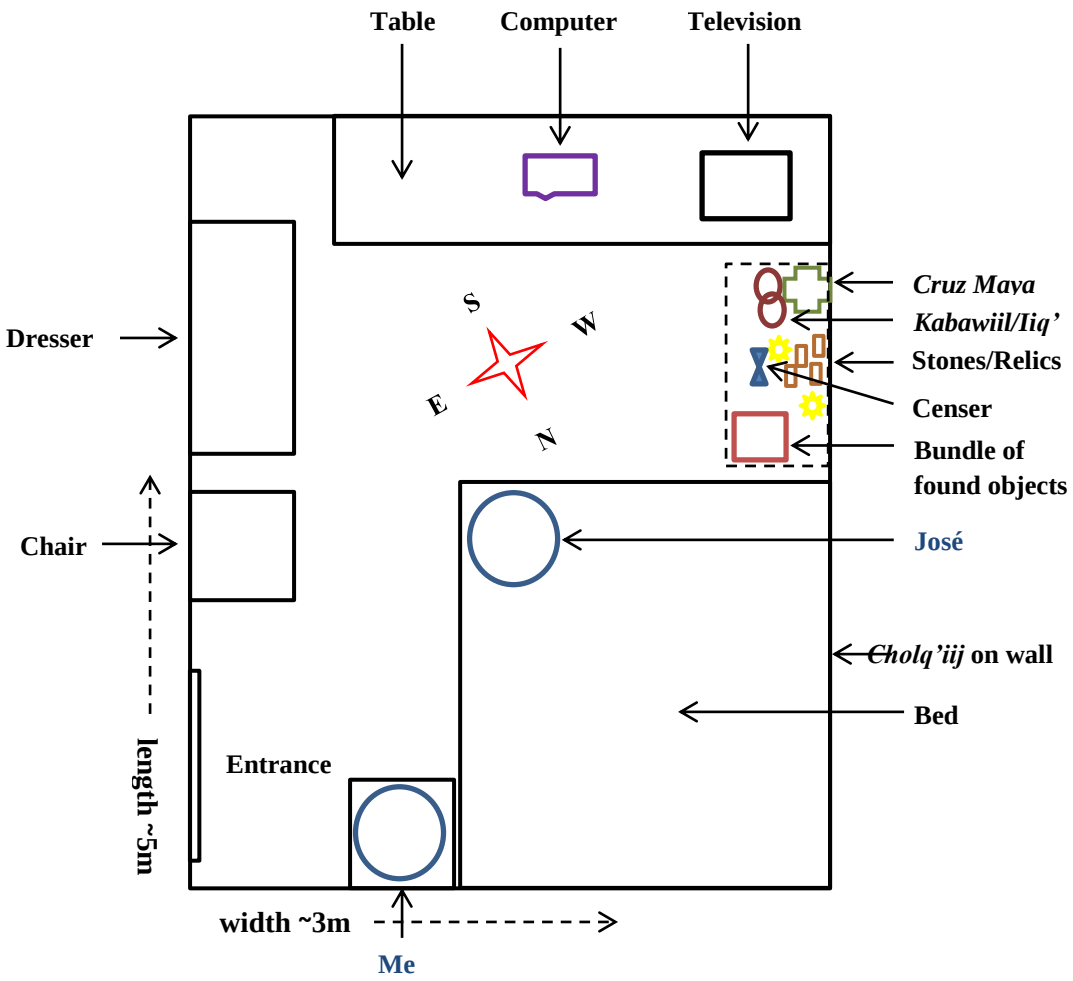


Figure 4.10: Jose's home



Figure 4.11: José's home altar

(Recording 00AQ020709)

(pre-recording-6:46) Context: I arrived at José's home and was invited to sit down on a chair next to the bed. Their living space was one room, which served as their bedroom and living room; there was an adjoining kitchen in back. Just beyond the bed, as one entered the room, was José and Linda's home altar which included a variety of ritual objects including a Maya cross. One of the many stones that composed the altar possessed an interesting, stylized face. José had come across it when wading in the lake as a child. A small woven bag on the right-side of the altar was Linda's. It contained a number of objects she felt to be special that she had encountered over the course of her life. A few of the objects that formed the altar represented Jose or Linda's *nawal*. José had arranged two objects, a cane emerging from a glass of water, to represent the union of their two *nawales*.

We began to chat about various things that had been going on recently, including our 4pm visit to the San Pedro *ajq'iij*. As our discussion began to shift towards topics of my research, I asked and received permission from José to record the following exchange. Our conversation was in Spanish, which I have transcribed and translated below. From the beginning of the recording to

6:46, at which point I asked a directed question regarding divination sessions in order to steer him towards his own recent consultation, he told me about the role of *ajq'ijaa'* and divination in community decision-making. Numerous members of José's family had been involved in town leadership over the years so he was well-informed about these practices, both traditional and contemporary. At **6:46**, I asked him about the conditions and 'correct mentality' one needs to have when consulting an *ajq'iij*. At **8:40** he begins to construct a hypothetical case for visiting an *ajq'iij* for a divination which leads him to discuss his own *pajooneem* session on January 19, 2009 (2 *Q'aniil*).

(8:40-8:50) José:

…so during the divination you tell him about something that's been going with you on that you want to do and explain that you aren't sure about your decision.

(8:51) Me:

Okay.

(8:52-9:14) José:

And so you go to see the elder, you go to the *ajq'iij,* and you ask the question 'I want to do this…or I'm thinking about doing this but will it be okay, will it be the right thing to do, or will it be wrong…okay…will it be correct or incorrect…okay…
what can you tell me about it? Please consult the ancestors,
the *tz'ite'*…what can I …what decision should I make?

(9:15) Me: *Mmmhmm…mmmhmm…*

(9:16-9:20) José:

Right…because…uh…perhaps your heart tells you one decision, your mind tells you something else…

(9:21) Me:

Exactly.

(9:22-9:23) José:

And you're like…what do I do?

(9:24) Me:

Lost.

(9:25-9:26) José:

It's like when one falls in love…

(9:27) Me:

Right, exactly.

(9:28-9:52) José:

In your heart you may be totally in love but your mind is saying, 'no, she's this way or…he's this way.' So, they're at odds. But in order for you to be well they have to be in harmony, your mind and your heart. So it's very important for…for this. So…you ask the elder…with his *tz'ite'*, with the divination the elder orients you…and says, 'all right, the best thing is this.'

(9:53) Me: *Mmmhmm…mmmhmm…*

(9:54-10:06) José:

But it's not like the elder tells you, 'do this and do this and do…' No. He simply…gives you some advice, a *pixab'*[2] (Tz'utujil for "wise counsel")…he tells you 'you should do this, it's the best thing.' Pause. But you always decide.

(10:07-10:09) Me:

There's an…assurance in his, his words.

(10:10-10:17) José:

Right. So, this or that will happen, if you do this, and something else will happen if you do that.

(10:18) Me: *Ah.*

(10:19-10:24) José:

So…it's…like [extended pause]…ah, something that gives you a signal about what you should do.

(10:25) Me:

Right, right.

(10:26-10:44) José:

Right…so…you're making the decision, of course. But if you are…if you have a positive energy, if you really want to do something…it's very easy…sure. I was just telling this to…to [my wife], 'do you realize?,' I said, 'everything that, that's happened?'…I was unsure and I still didn't have any other work, I was stressed out…

(10:45) Me:

Right (chuckle), right.

(10:46-10:51) José:

Yeah, and I was telling you how I got very sad when [Don Francisco] and the *tz'ite'* said, 'it's best that you leave [your job],' I was feeling bad!

(10:52) Me:

(Chuckle), I noticed that (chuckle)…

(10:53-10:55) José:

I was almost crying (laughing), John.

(10:56-58) Me:

Because, because it was a major change!

(10:59) José:

For sure!

(11:00-11:01) Me:

And it was…a loss of security…and everything.

(11:02-11:14) José:

Right…so…and economically…it was going to affect me but…I said to myself, 'okay, if I have to do this, I have to do this,' because one part of me was telling me that I had to do this…

(11:15) Me:

Right.

(11:16-11:17) José:

But another part of me was saying no…

(11:18) Me:

Right.

(11:19-11:22) José:

But that…that…which, which was the revelation from the *tz'ite',* that I should leave…

(11:23) Me:

Right.

(11:24-11:32) José:

…my job…and…and…look for and pray for another job…and the truth is…that it was…very easy!

(11:33) Me:

I know, look.

(11:34-11:35) José:

I've been saying, saying to [my wife], 'it's yet another miracle in my life.'

(11:36) Me:

It's (chuckle)…it's true.

(11:37-11:44) José:

Really, it really is. There are some people, I've been realizing, who have spent a couple of years looking for work, and they aren't finding anything.

(11:45) Me:

Yeah, yeah, exactly.

(11:46-11:47) José:

Yes. And at times we forget to be thankful about such things.

(11:48-12:12) Context: José explains how he came to get his prior job, in the office from which he recently quit, and mentions that this, too, was a surprising opportunity that he hadn't gone looking for in any particular way. He thus appreciates serendipity in his life which he attributes to the action of higher powers.

(12:13-12:24) José:

So they, they, they're the things, uh, that's why they happened…for human beings, in our culture it's, it's very important. But unfortunately a lot of people don't practice this anymore…

(12:25) Me:

Right.

(12:26-12:35) José:

People make a lot of decisions without, without divining…without, without, without asking God, because…the divination is with *Ahaaw* [God] after all, ya know.

(12:36) Me:

Right.

(12:37-12:55) José:

***Ahaaw* [God] is who guides…the *ajq'iij* because it's, it's his work…ya know. That's his job…no other power besides Ahaaw [God], the ancestors, nature…all of it, guides him. It's He**

who directs the elder to do the whole divination and everything. Ya know.

(12:56) Me: *Mmmmhmmm…*

(12:57-13:14) José:

Yeah. It's because of this too…that one needs to have a lot of trust with, with, with the *ajq'iij*. Ya know. You need to have a good sense of everything, because…I can…go in…I'm going to a town, I want to meet an *ajq'iij* and I'm going for a divination but I don't really know what kind of…

(13:15) Me:

Right.

(13:16-13:29) José:

…work the *ajq'iij* does. It could be that he's just cheating…and he's going to…sometimes help people, but other times harm them…that's why it's also really important the…the personality… of the *ajq'iij*, what he's like.

(13:30-13:34) Me:

And his, his, his relationship with the community, with the people, his family…

(13:35-13:46) José:

Right, you need to know him really well. That's why when people ask me, 'who can you send us to, with whom can we make a divination?,' I try to get [Don Francisco] because I already know him. Ya know.

(13:47-13:48) Me:

Yeah.

(13:49-13:53) José: **I'm sure…there are other people perhaps with greater power than him but I don't know them, I don't know...**

(13:54) Me:

Exactly.

(13:55-14:05) José:

...what they're like or if they have less power but I don't know so…that's very, very important. Earlier, like I was telling you, the ancestors always used to…used to do this, ya know.

(14:06) Me: *Mmmhmm…mmmhmmm…*

(14:07-14:08) José:

…through the ceremony, and also divinations…

(14:09) Me:

Right, right.

(14:10-14:15) José:

…with the fire…ya know. Divinations with fire, also signals from the body.

(14:16) Me:

Yeah.

(14:16-25:00) Context: José goes on to talk about various kinds of divinatory signals, including "pulsing" (Oakes 1951; Vogt 1993). We then discuss a controversy between different religious groups in town and some of the fallout from that conflict.

Case Study 1 — *Second Follow-Up Interview with José*

(Recording 00AQ0421093)

(pre-recording-) Context: I arrived at José's home, greeted he and Linda, and began a series of recordings with his permission. The physical setup of the space and of ourselves in that space was much the same as in the

first follow-up interview. Since time was abundant and we were having interesting exchanges, I thought I would check in with him, now three months after the January 19 divination, to get a sense about how he had assessed and contextualized his experiences. Further, I wanted to fully clarify whether or not he had settled into a decision before the divination or if the process genuinely played a part in his decision-making about quitting his prior job.

(1:08-1:18) Me: **Had…had you decided something beforehand or not? And also, what was your reaction to the divination?**

(1:19-1:24) José:

Right. Before, before the divination…I… wa...wasn't sure.

(1:25) Me:

Okay.

(1:26-1:28) José: **Right. I wasn't able to say that was leaving, or wanted to leave, or anything.**

(1:29) Me:

Right, right.

(1:30-1:53) José:

That was…and because I already asked the question of [Don Francisco] whether…[Don Francisco] 'could it just be a test in my work. Is it just a phase? Because if it's just a phase, I'll continue,' I said to [Don Francisco]. But if it's…the whole job then what can I do. I wa..wasn't sure whether to continue or not. I was unsure.

(1:54) Me:

Right, right.

(1:55-2:00) José: **And that's exactly when you do a divination. (Pause) Okay. Because…this, this happens.**

(2:01) Me:

In order to receive.

(2:01-2:08) José:

You can…yes…in order to receive an indication. You can do it or not do it…it depends on you, of course.

(2:09) Me:

Okay.

(2:10-2:31) José:

But. This…it's precisely because of this…in order to clarify everything. Because we've had a divination that's completely contrary to what one wants. Ya know. A guy, or a couple of people, I mean a couple, had the opportunity…and…the girl wanted to continue with the guy…and he wanted that too…but the divination said no.

(2:32-2:34) Me:

Aahh…and they…they didn't go on?

(2:35-2:38) José:

They…they…said, 'No, let's stay together.' They kept dating.

(2:39) Me:

Okay.

(2:40-2:43) José:

They got married. They had problems, now they've been separated for eight years.

(2:44) Me: *Aahh…*

(2:44-2:46) José:

Yep, they're separated.

(2:47) Me: **Right, right.**

(2:48-2:49) José: **That was one of the first diviners that I did.**

(2:50) Me: *Aahh…*

(2:51-2:52) José: **That was one of the first, because…**

(2:53) Me: **But…you?**

(2:53-2:55) José: **I've been in all of this [Maya Spirituality] like nine years, more or less.**

(2:56-3:00) Me: **And you did…it was only with…that was like a friend, right?**

(3:01) José: **Yes, right.**

(3:02) Me: **Right, right.**

(3:03-3:08) José: **Yes, in that case, yes. So, when I went to [Don Francisco]…I wanted to get rid of my doubts.**

(3:07) Me: **Right, right.**

(3:08-3:19) José:

I was wanting something to guide me because while I was able to decide…I didn't know if it was…if I would make the correct decision. So I had to…to…to ask him about it.

(3:20-5:18) Context: José recalls an incident that happened just days after the new boss began; he pulled José and a friend aside and told them that they had a lot of opportunities and if they, for some reason, ended up leaving the office, they they shouldn't forget the good work they had done. From this moment, José began to have doubts about the job and about whether the new boss was working against him. So from this moment up until the divination, he was in a state of insecurity and uncertainty about the job and what to do. Shortly after this, he had the opportunity to speak with a K'iche' *ajq'iij* and though they weren't talking about his job, the *ajq'iij* said that work had been troubling him and that he knew what to do about it. José was surprised by this assessment but says he, in fact, did not know what to do about it. When addressing a larger group of the workers a moment later, the *ajq'iij* said they would face challenges but needed to stay united and struggle for the good.

(5:19-6:08) José:

So…when I had the divination with, with [Don Francisco]…it was like, ah, I felt freer…more, ah, ah, relaxed at last because, yeah, it hurt me, I didn't feel well because leaving leaving that job wasn't easy for me, it cost me a lot because I had my friends…I like the work…I like it a lot and leaving it, like I said…I… I shouldn't but…because of the divination, the divination allowed me to see more clearly. [Don Francisco] told me, "Yes, you…you can decide, but this is what I see…in your work, in the future…

(6:09) Me:

Right, right.

(6:10-6:19) José:

…and I see another option. Yes. So…yes, like they [ancestors and *nawales*] said to him [Don Francisco], just three days later; it was a very big surprise for me!

(6:20-6:26) Me:

Yeah, but have you…or had you decided before…that opportunity?

(6:27) José:

No.

(6:28) Me:

No…so…

(6:29-6:30) José:

No. I said, 'I'm going to rest…' (laughs) Like…like I told you…

(6:31) Me:

Ah, right, right.

(6:32-6:40) José:

So what am I going to do…and…and…I…I… I didn't have anything…nothing sure…because…this…not like anything interesting…no…like I said…no…

(6:41) Me:

Right, right, right.

(6:42-6:43) José:

I'm going to go for a spell…

(6:43) Me:

Right, right.

(6:44-6:46) José:

…two, three months without work and afterwards bit by bit I'll start looking for…

(6:47) Me: *Mmmmhmmm…*

(6:48-7:02) José:

That…was my, my, my…that was my, my intention but I never thought, I never thought, and now I'm asking myself,

for me it's like…you could call it…ah…in Christianity, a miracle.

(7:03) Me:

Right, right.

(7:04) José:

Because no one…

(7:04) Me:

It was really fast.

(7:05-7:30) José:

Yeah. They don't give an opportunity like that to anyone. And…right now it's going real well for us, at least. So, ah…I…I…that's what I saw…I didn't know what they were going to say to me…but…what I was sure about was that they were going to tell me that I was going to make an important decision…if they were telling me……it's better not to then it's better not to…and if they said to me, 'continue, you have to fight' and all of that…

(7:31) Me:

Right, right.

(7:32-7:33) José:

…I also know that's my mission…

(7:33) Me:

Right.

(7:34-7:38) José:

…and that's what has to be done. So this oriented me in order to make a…a decision...

(7:39) Me:

Right.

(7:40-7:44) José:

So…before I went, well…I didn't have anything sure, I didn't have a clear decision.

(7:45-7:54) Me:

And how…how do you feel now…about… the whole thing and the decision that…that you made and everything?

(7:55-8:00) José:

I feel really, really good because…ah…I know I did the right thing.

(8:01) Me: *Mmmmhmmm…*

(8:02-8:48) Context: José went on to talk about three of his former co-workers and the troubles they have faced in the office since he left. Two of them ended up leaving in that time period and another was close to quitting.

(8:49-8:52) José:

…and when I left…I said…okay, God knows why I've left…

(8:53) Me: *Mmmm…*

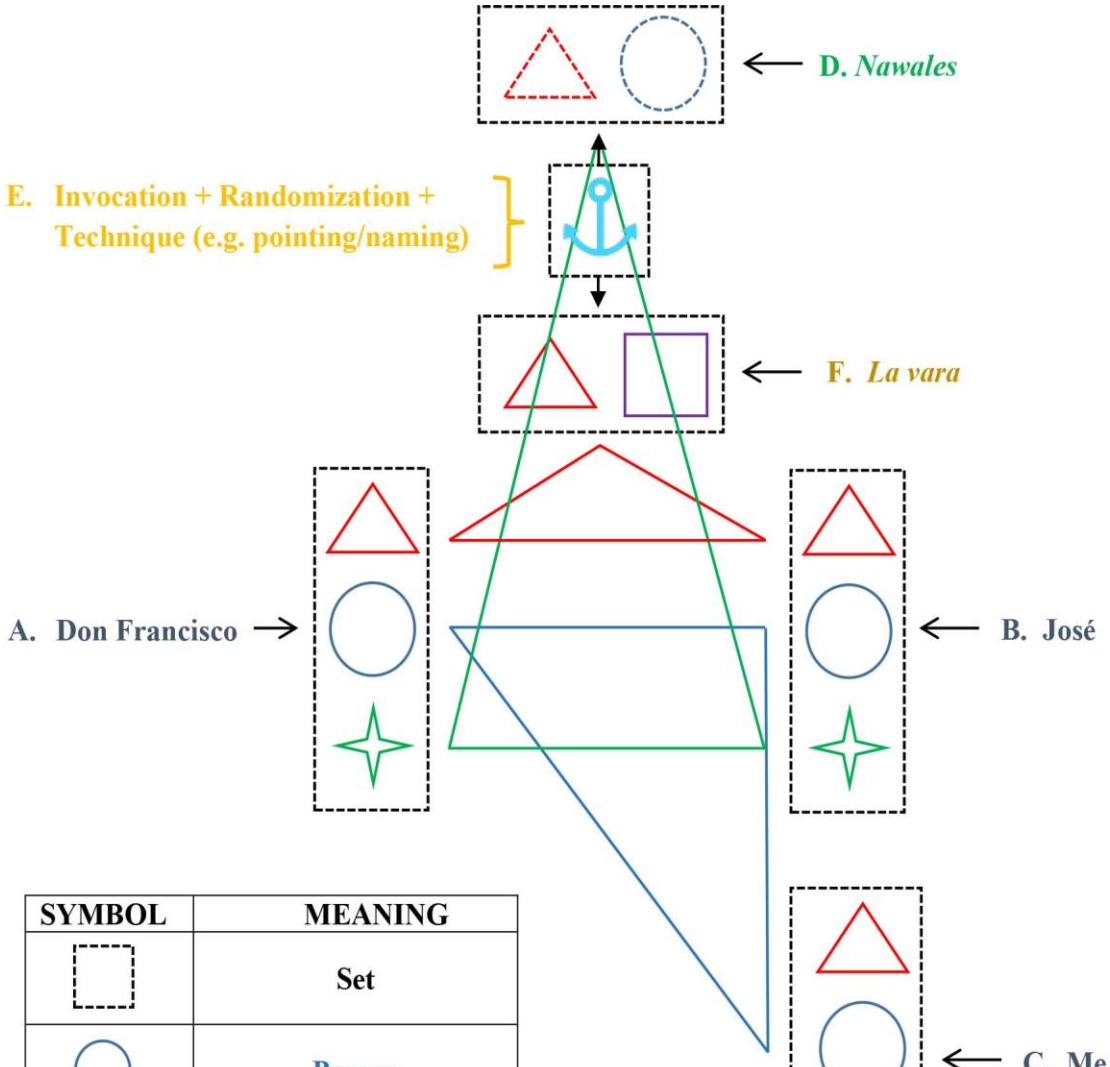
(8:54-9:03) José:

But I generally…concluded that…that the divination helped me immensely in order to free me of those problems…

(9:04-15:26) Context: José goes on to discuss the details of his new job and how he is excited about the opportunities it affords him to help the community. He then discusses how Maya spirituality has helped his marriage.

Case Study — *Mediators and Information*

In Figure 4.12 I schematically diagram some of the important components and relations that go into the constitution of the cognitive and ritual ecosystem of José's consulta with Don Francisco.



SYMBOL	MEANING
	Set
	Person
	Object
	Material Anchor
	Agency
	Representation
	Processes and Practices

Figure 4.12: Mediators and Information

A, **B**, and **C** detail the three people present at the divination: Don Francisco, José, and me. The blue lines that form a triangle between us represent the relations that define us as people. To a great extent, personhood is shared; that is, one must acknowledge others as persons in order for one's own personhood to be acknowledged. Personhood can usually be defined by embodiment and by a complex set of representations about what people are (e.g. possessive of consciousness, agency, internal and external representations, capable of verbal and nonverbal communication) which makes the presence of others significant for all one's actions in a given time and place. So even though I did not share some of the internal representations that José and Don Francisco jointly enacted through the ritual, my presence had some effect on the situation. For instance, in the follow-up conversations I had with José he cued me to recall certain events that occurred during the divination thus acknowledging my presence at the event and my capacity to observe and form memories of it. Among other things, my presence added a witness to the event which changed some of the representations that could be attributed to the divination. It is usually the case that a greater number of witnesses to an event, deem it more "real" to all those involved. Claims to public experience are common processes for establishing facts (e.g. "I'm not sure what I saw" versus "Did we really just see that?" versus "We all saw it").

Jose and Don Francisco shared representations about *nawales* (and other special beings) and ascribed some of these to *la vara* which served as a material anchor of those representations through processes that included Don Francisco's invocation, his randomization of the *tz'ite'* seeds, his arrangement of the

underdetermined number (i.e. randomized) of seeds into clusters of four and rows of six, and his pointing and naming of the clusters as *nawales* of the *Cholq'iij*.

Don Francisco certainly ascribed many more representations to *la vara* (i.e. "this is my spiritual spouse") and to the *tz'ite'* seeds than did Jose but both shared and believed enough of the same representations to enact a ritual frame. In contrast, I shared some representations but my more limited experience and belief (in regards to these representations), as well as my representations and beliefs that oppose these kinds of ascriptions in general, rendered me an incomplete observer-participant in the situation; in short, I did not share the same ritual frame as they did.

Among the more important representations that Don Francisco and Jose ascribed to the *nawales* and to *la vara* (both as an entity in itself and as a conduit for the *nawales* and other special beings), were ideas about agency. The processes and practices enacted, especially by the hands and utterances of Don Francisco, permitted *la vara* and the *tz'ite'* seeds to serve as physical representations of concepts; that is, to serve as material anchors for conceptual blends.

Case Study — *Analysis*

The excerpts above provide details of the divination session relevant to this case, as well as two follow-up interviews with the client, José. The previous material is essential for an analysis of the perceived meanings of the events by those involved. Since I had a high-quality audio-record of the divination, José was able to carefully review all exchanges and contextualize them. His description of various contextual details greatly aids in the assessment of the cognitive and ritual ecosystems as he

participated in them during the divination session and during the lived consequences that followed this divination.

Over the ensuing months, I had many opportunities to interact with Don Francisco. Multiple times, both as I recorded our interactions and when I dropped by to chat with him, I asked him about this case. I often brought the case up indirectly, using it as a means to clarify some other aspect of ritual, in the hope that he would elaborate on the details of the *pajooneem* process. He always seemed reticent to say much about José's case. He eventually opened up about the process of *pajooneem* in general, though, and I will include his statements throughout this analysis as a means to provide insight into the techniques he uses and their significance for this particular case.

To recap: on January 19, shortly after we arrive in Don Francisco's office, Don Francisco and José begin their exchange. They speak for approximately eight minutes before beginning any divination techniques. This period represents part of the *solooneem* process—the clarifying, untangling, and unwrapping of what has occurred, who is involved, and where the tensions are located (García Ixmatá 2010; García 2008). During these eight minutes, José thoroughly describes the situation, mentions the people involved, and indicates what he is thinking and feeling in relation to all of this. Don Francisco does not ask him any additional questions. It would seem that José is familiar enough with the process to have offered all the relevant information so that Don Francisco did not need to inquire for other details. At ~7:00 in the recording, José mentions an important *pixab'*, a concise teaching, which Don Francisco affirms.

He states "…I shouldn't force things because that can end up bad." This *pixab'* came to play a significant role in the divination as described below.

After hearing the whole case presented, Don Francisco begins the divination. He spends approximately one minute mixing the *tz'ite'* seeds and crystals while praying over them. While neither José nor I could perceive the details of his invocatory prayers, José did note that Don Francisco prayed to the Creator and Former as well as to the ancestors. He asked permission for the divination and specifically asked the question if José could continue in his job, if he should or should not continue working there. After a minute of this, Don Francisco snatched up a random handful of the seeds which yielded exactly 17 clusters of four seeds each, a total of 68 seeds. The four seeds in the final cluster indicated a clear divinatory response. While it would seem that the four seeds in this cluster might be interpreted as a "yes" to the question, Don Francisco focuses on the meanings of the *nawales* from the readings rather than any simple "yes" or "no."

Counting the clusters from the current day of 2 *Q'aniil*, the final cluster resulted in 5 *K'aat* for the first reading (see Illustration 4). The *nawal K'aat* is most commonly associated with "net" and may connote entanglement or getting "caught up" (see Appendix). As a response to the question, *K'aat* meant that the job would present increasingly messy entanglements. Don Francisco then began counting through the arrangement again, this time starting from the day following 5 *K'aat* (see Illustration 5). The second reading yielded 9 *Imoox'* as the final cluster. *Imoox* means "rain" as well as "insanity" (see Appendix). As a response to the question, this could mean that the workplace would be challenging for José, a place of dangerous

emotions. Both the physical net represented by *K'aat* and the mental confusion represented by *Imoox* do not bode well for Jose's case.

During an interview with Don Francisco in December 2010, I asked him about the meanings of the final clusters in relation to José's divination session. I told him that my notes had indicated the cluster *K'aat* as the final one and whether this would relate to being "tangled up" or "caught" in the net represented by the *nawal K'aat*. His response, at first, was simply that he did not remember. He seemed curious that I had taken notes about this and I mentioned to him that since he had not permitted video for the session, I had made notes about what had transpired. He seemed vaguely uncomfortable but did not press the point. I went on to ask him whether other divinatory signs would have represented problems in José's office. At this point he interrupted and said the problem was indicated by *K'aat* because it had indicated being tangled up in problems. He then quickly shifted the topic. The multiple indications he had given me in terms of not shooting video or taking photos of his *tz'ite'* seed consultations led me to believe that he did not want to talk about such specific cases or uses of this technique. Again, he was happy to discuss uses and meanings of the technique in general but seemed very uncomfortable about discussing particular cases.

A short time later in this December 2010 interview, Don Francisco mentioned that he is familiar with three different techniques of *tz'ite'* seed divination. He stated that for his technique he makes rows from seven clusters of seeds and reads them through two or three times. From my notes, I had observed these rows of seven and two readings of the first layout, yielding 5 *K'aat* and 9 *Imoox'*, respectively. A third

reading of the layout ended on 13 *Tijax*. *Tijax* is sometimes associated with "evil words" and is considered a particularly delicate *nawal* (see Appendix).

The meanings of *K'aat* and *Imoox* both seem to be germane as negative assessments of José's situation. Indeed, Don Francisco's first statement after reading through this layout is that José's situation is "difficult." He tells José that more problems are coming and that one of the troublemakers has a lot of energy from his "day," that is, from his *nawal*. It is not immediately clear what sign indicated this to Don Francisco but the second reading, ending in 9 *Imoox* and the potential third reading, ending in 13 *Tijax*, both have associations with danger, so it is reasonable to infer that one of these led to Don Francisco's statement.

Don Francisco does not interpret this ambiguously. He is clear in his assessment and forthright in asserting that more problems will come should José continue in his job. Moreover, he believes that the people involved, as well as the situation itself, is dangerous and could get out of hand very easily. Don Francisco notes the ancestors are upset about all this. José inquires whether the ancestors are upset with him and seems surprised to hear that they are. For them, the whole situation is unpleasant so they are not choosing sides in any discernible way but are simply upset about this important work being muddied by individual interests and seem poised to create trouble should things persist in this way.

Interestingly, Don Francisco wants José to know that the decision is ultimately his to make but that the situation is dire and pessimistic. José corroborates this assessment and refers to the aforemention *pixab'*, which he identifies as coming from his family. According to this teaching, "anything forced ends badly." The divination

clearly indicates friction and continuing troubles which have every opportunity to increase and get out of control. To persist in the job, José infers, would be to "force" the situation and thus assure a "bad outcome."

After three minutes of discussions regarding the first divination, Don Francisco mixes the seeds and crystals. He performs a quick divination and seems not to have recited any prayers. Don Franciso asks a pointed question regarding the new boss and his attitude about the whole conflict. José reiterates his distrust of the boss's intentions. As previously noted, I was unable to make a count with any confidence of the clusters so I could not model the kinds of signs that Don Francisco took note of in this divination. Whatever occurred, it seemed mainly to confirm the prior divination. Don Francisco stated that the year would bring many work problems for José. Again, Don Francisco tells José that he must make the decision but that the divinations indicate more problems.

José accepts this pessimistic forecast and brings up the possibility of a new job. He asks Don Francisco to divine whether this new job prospect will turn out well for him. Don Francisco begins another divination which includes prayers and a question about this job opportunity. He lays out all the seeds; there are 18 clusters of four seeds each, a total of 72 seeds. Again, having four seeds in the final cluster suggests a strong, clear divinatory signal. For this divination, the third one in just a few minutes, there appears to be some hesitation. If Don Francisco began his count of these 18 clusters from the current day, 2 *Q'aniil*, he would end up on 6 *Kaan* for the first count and 11 *K'aat* in his second reading. These would not seem to be particularly germane to the question Don Francisco asked. *Kaan* represents, among other things, the

"plumed serpent" as well as a mysterious cosmic energy that would be difficult to interpret in relation to a job prospect (see Appendix). Had Don Francisco begun his count from the next *Tz'ikin*, though, a *nawal* that *ajq'iijaa* often start with when considering a job, then he would end his first count with 13 *B'eey* and have a second reading ending in 5 *Tz'i'*. The statements that Don Francisco made just after this divination suggest that his interpretations derived from these signs, 13 *B'eey* and 5 *Tz'i'*. Indeed, the hesitance that Don Francisco exhibited when reading through this third divination of 18 clusters supports the idea that he first employed a reading beginning, once again, with the current day (2 *Q'aniil*) but, having yielded signs that did not seem especially relevant vis-à-vis his question, recounted the clusters beginning from the next *Tz'ikin* in the *Cholq'iij*, 9 *Tz'ikin*. Don Francisco optimistically assesses José's chances with the job prospect, noting that he has a "new work opportunity," "a new path," and that "new paths are opening up" for him. All these statements strongly support the idea that Don Francisco interpreted the third layout with 9 *Tz'ikin* as the beginning which would end on the day, 13 *B'eey*. Since the most common translation of *B'eey* is "road" or "path" and often relates to the career one pursues, then 13 *B'eey* would translate to a new set of opportunities (see Appendix).

Don Francisco follows up with the statement that José needs to make offerings, beginning on the current day, Monday 2 *Q'aniil*, and continuing for three days, that is, Monday (2 *Q'aniil*), Tuesday (3 *Tooj*), and Wednesday (4 *Tz'i'*). In this context, these days would be meaningful for a variety of reasons. First, the most typical association with *Q'aniil* is "seed" (see Appendix). Praying and making offerings on *Q'aniil* helps

to assure the favorable growth of an opportunity. The following day, *Tooj*, is literally the day of offerings so it is always important to be thankful for what one has on this day and pray for the things one needs (see Appendix). The third day, *Tz'i'*, often suggests some kind of impurity (see Appendix). This would not be especially germane in this context. Rather, another key meaning, that of authority and justice, would seemingly be the apt interpration. Praying and making offerings on this day would translate to asking the authorities to be on one's side and offer justice; that is, returning things to a state of equilibrium. Indeed, the statements that Don Francisco made, namely that José would "leave with dignity, walking tall, above reproach" resonate with this *nawal* of justice. A series of three offerings on these days, then, would be especially meaningful in this context. Additionally, though, they are the last three days represented in the second reading of this divination. So they almost assuredly follow from a question about what is needed to assure the favorable outcome of 13 *B'eey*. Moreover, they map onto the current and following two days of that week, the days immediately preceding a moment when José expects to hear whether or not this job opportunity will be offered to him. While he had indicated that he expected to hear on Friday (6 *B'eey*) about this job, in fact, it was on Thursday (5 *B'aatz'*) that he actually received the favorable news. Later, José interpreted this as an especially favorable sign. He had prayed and made offerings for exactly three days, as Don Francisco had directed him, and then heard the very following day, one day earlier than he expected, that he was being offered the new job.

The entire consultation, including three divinations, had taken just half an hour. And while Don Francisco had twice told José that the decision was his to make,

the final divination, regarding the favorable response about José's job prospect, led Don Francisco to categorically state that José should quit his job. By the end of the entire process, then, it was clear that continuing the job would be to prolong and amplify a set of difficulties and that leaving the job and seeking out a new path was the best thing to do.

As I observed when we left Don Francisco, and as José admitted later during the first follow-up interview, José was quite worried about quitting his job. Though he had now perceived clarity concerning the future, he knew the gravity of the decision, including the potential economic difficulties he might encounter after leaving the position. But, as he admitted, especially during the second follow-up interview, he was committed to following this course of action. He felt the divination to be clear and he also felt it to confirm an important *pixab'* from his family that had apparently been on his mind for a while.

José humbly prayed and made offerings as Don Francisco had directed him to do and then heard the favorable news that Thursday. Just as Don Francisco had forecast, he would be able to leave his current position "with dignity…above reproach" because he had an alternative opportunity available to him. For José, the successful outcome of the situation once again confirmed the efficacy of *pajooneem* and gave him the sense that he had done the right thing. In *Subjectivity and Suffering*, Parish described selves as "…incarnate in a body and world, exquisitely expressive and self-aware, inhabiting cultural worlds with the particular identities of particular life histories. They inhabit such worlds through subjectivity: the feelings that happen as life happens are grasped in imaginative terms and define self. This self turns, in the

act of imagining self, to face life" (2011). Through the ritual of *pajooneem*, José could face life renewed and affirmed in himself, as a Tz'utujil, a husband, son, brother, and friend. He described the process as a "clarification" since it gave him a path away from his doubts towards what Michael Jackson has called a "provisional certainty" (1989). José described *pajooneem* as "orienting him for making the decision." After the divination, he felt "freer" and "more tranquil." The *nawales*, both as invisible agents and as meaning-infused days in a cyclical ritual calendar, had forecast and prescribed the appropriate response for José. Through the *pajooneem* process he had found much needed guidance.

Pajooneem revolves around the *Cholq'iij* which exhibits a qualitative, rather than simply quantitative, notion of time. It is, in fact, much more than a calendar. It is a repository of essential cultural teachings and values. As Arthur Demarest noted about the Classic Maya who used the same 260-day calendar as their descendants: "The cyclicity of time provided a close connection to the ancestors as it is structurally linked to the present, past, and future" (2004). Organizing one's life by the *Cholq'iij* permits the *nawales* to balance the interests of the time-bound person with the structures of the timed world. In "Maya Knowledge and Wisdom," Ajpub' Pablo García Ixmatá wrote that: "…the use of the sacred ceremonial calendar is an extremely important tool for obtaining the types and degrees of knowledge that lead to personal equilibrium, proper upbringing, and the correct training of the self. The calendar is a medium for achieving and maintaining the equilibrium of knowledge and it strengthens the practice of good values" (2010). Basing his actions on a decision guided by *pajooneem*, José felt properly oriented in the world. The fortuitous

consequences of the decision to leave his workplace confirmed the relevance and efficacy of the *nawales* in his life.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

> The game of the problematic and the imperative has replaced that of the hypothetical and the categorical; the game of difference and repetition has replaced that of the Same and representation. The dice are thrown against the sky, with all the force of displacement of the aleatory point, with their imperative points like lightning, forming ideal problem-constellations in the sky. They fall back to Earth with all the force of the victorious solutions which bring back the throw.
>
> —Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*

Introduction — *In Search of a System*

Does *tz'ite'* seed divination exist? This may seem like a fanciful question but it is not; my investigations of these ritual practices have led me to question many basic assumptions about social institutions. To clarify: Is there a "system" of *tz'ite'* seed divination? If so, where is it? Is one of Oliver La Farge's (1947) cases indicative of that system? Or perhaps one of Maud Oakes's (1951) informants has described it in its true form? Or certainly Barbara Tedlock, herself an initiated diviner and a long term practitioner, must have conveyed "the system" once-and-for-all (1982)? If none of these satisfies, perhaps some evidence might turn up as a record from long ago, a pristine inscription dating to the golden years of Copan, Tikal, or Palenque that itself conveys the "canonical" way to perform a *tz'ite'* seed divination? Could one assess all contemporary practices of this ritual and determine which one was most like the version performed centuries ago, thereby identifying that which is closest to "the real thing?" Or, learning the correct technique from the past, would one be forced to

conclude that the cases reviewed in this dissertation and the many more enacted every day in the Guatemalan highlands are all fraudulent? All these instances rendered—in a flash of archaeological discovery—as simulacra trying, but forever failing, to construe what used to exist in its true, authentic form?

I argue that this entire quest is an errant, quixotic one. There is no "system" of *tz'ite'* seed divination. Here as elsewhere, there are practices that echo and resemble one another, all enacting forms of relationality among their primary components (McGraw 2015; McGraw and Krátký in press); but there is no fixed system to this or any other Maya rituals I have observed. Contemporary Maya Spirituality and the myriad ritual practices referred to as *costumbre* in the ethnographic literature are nonliturgical; they derive from continuously transforming syncretic hybrids of Maya and (primarily) Catholic rituals. Insofar as the divinatory practices reviewed throughout this dissertation draw from some reservoir of resemblances and partake of sound ecological relations, they each—and all—may be entitled *tz'ite'* seed divination.

But to return to the original questions that led to and continuously informed this investigation: What is divination? Why do people seek it out? And how does it affect decision-making? Agreeing with Peek, that divination articulates the epistemology of a people, I have endeavored to clarify one kind of epistemology at work in the Guatemalan highlands. The elaborate meanings encoded in the *Cholq'iij* and the sophisticated system of calendrically mediated decision-making greatly reduce cognitive load (see Krátky 2012), coordinate interpersonal behavior, and imbue decisions with the authority of ritual and tradition. I believe that Gossen was right in his assertion that some scholars must be "willing to cast a fairly wide net" and have

attempted to study *tz'ite'* seed divination in all its meanings and varieties as I feel it is just the sort of net to drag in some of the "generative principles" that inform a Maya cultural logic (1986).

A comparative study of the literature and of actual cases I observed leads me to identify the following "basic features" of *tz'ite'* seed divination: the presence and interaction of *ajq'iij* and client(s), the use of *tz'ite'* seeds, the ajq'iij's practice of breathing upon one's hand before handling the *tz'ite'*, the random selection of a handful of seeds, the counter-clockwise motion of the right hand on the pile of *tz'ite'*, and the invocatory prayer. But while these serve as the necessary conditions for this practice, the sufficiency of a *tz'ite'* seed divination is achieved only when it is performed for a task, such as decision-making, and that task is achieved; in other words, a decision is enacted as a consequence of the ritual. If the client goes to the diviner and the divinatory technique is performed but the client does not make a decision influenced by the divination (e.g. someone else makes the decision on his behalf) then it can be said that the *tz'ite'* seed divination was insufficient for the case. In other words, ritual is more than the technique associated with it; a ritual is actual when it affects an outcome within or among its components (e.g. a solution, an attitude, a revelation), whether or not that outcome results in "real world" consequences, particularly those derived from an etic perspective. If a client goes to a diviner in order to decide something but does not make a decision involving the ritual then it has failed. As a whole, it was insufficient to its task and did not function as stipulated. Whatever the reason for this failure (such as lack of faith on the client's part), a breach in the ritual ecosystem has occurred and the necessary components of

the ritual have proved to be insufficient for its enaction (see Parish 2009). But such failures are rare when looking at the intersection of cognition and ritual because cognition is so sensitive to the continuous information flows that partially compose it. To do a ritual with some cognitive consequence in mind is to achieve a cognitive consequence, intended or not.

Conceptual Blends and Material Anchors in *Tz'ite* Seed Divination

For example, in treating the clusters of four *tz'ite'* seeds as *nawales*, a common feature in the divinatory practices reviewed earlier, one witnesses material anchors functioning within larger cognitive and ritual ecosystems. The seed clusters stabilize the representations of the *nawales* of the *Cholq'iij* calendar. Like a mathematician at work with pencil and paper, the diviner uses the seed clusters as representations of the *nawales* so that they can be more easily counted and their meanings considered in the context of the client's situation (compare to Clark 2008). Additionally, by having all these representations manifest and accessible to the gaze of client(s) and diviner, the legitimacy of the process is enhanced and cognition is made visible (see Tylén and McGraw 2014). The representations at play are not merely in one person's head or even shared as (the same) intersubjective representations between multiple parties; instead they are manifest right before everyone as the *ajq'iij* points to the *nawales* (in the form of the seed clusters) and verbally counts through the *Cholq'iij*. Tampering with the system or investing it with more of one's own intentions becomes decidedly harder when representations are so "materialized." Material culture, ritual, and

decision are fused in this divinatory practice and no piece, apart, exists in the same way as when they all operate together.

The figure below, inspired by the work of Jesper Sørensen (2007), models how *tz'ite'* seeds come to take on their ritual properties in the divinatory process. The blend invests the seed clusters with the conceptual representations of the *nawales*. Symbolically, the ascription of religious power to material artifact (a "hierophany") provides additional gravitas to the ritual action. Instrumentally, as material anchors, the seed clusters do some of the work accomplished by the representations of divinatory readings I have made use of throughout this document. These figures are somewhat misleading. As charts of the *tz'ite'* seed layouts, they are doing exactly the sort of thing that is *not* available in the real situation: they provide cognitive scaffolding, such as rich visual structure, for the set of representations. In an actual divination, the seed clusters allow the diviner to juggle the complex representations of the *nawales* while also counting. In the *tz'ite'* seeds, cognitive and religious representations take on potent material forms.

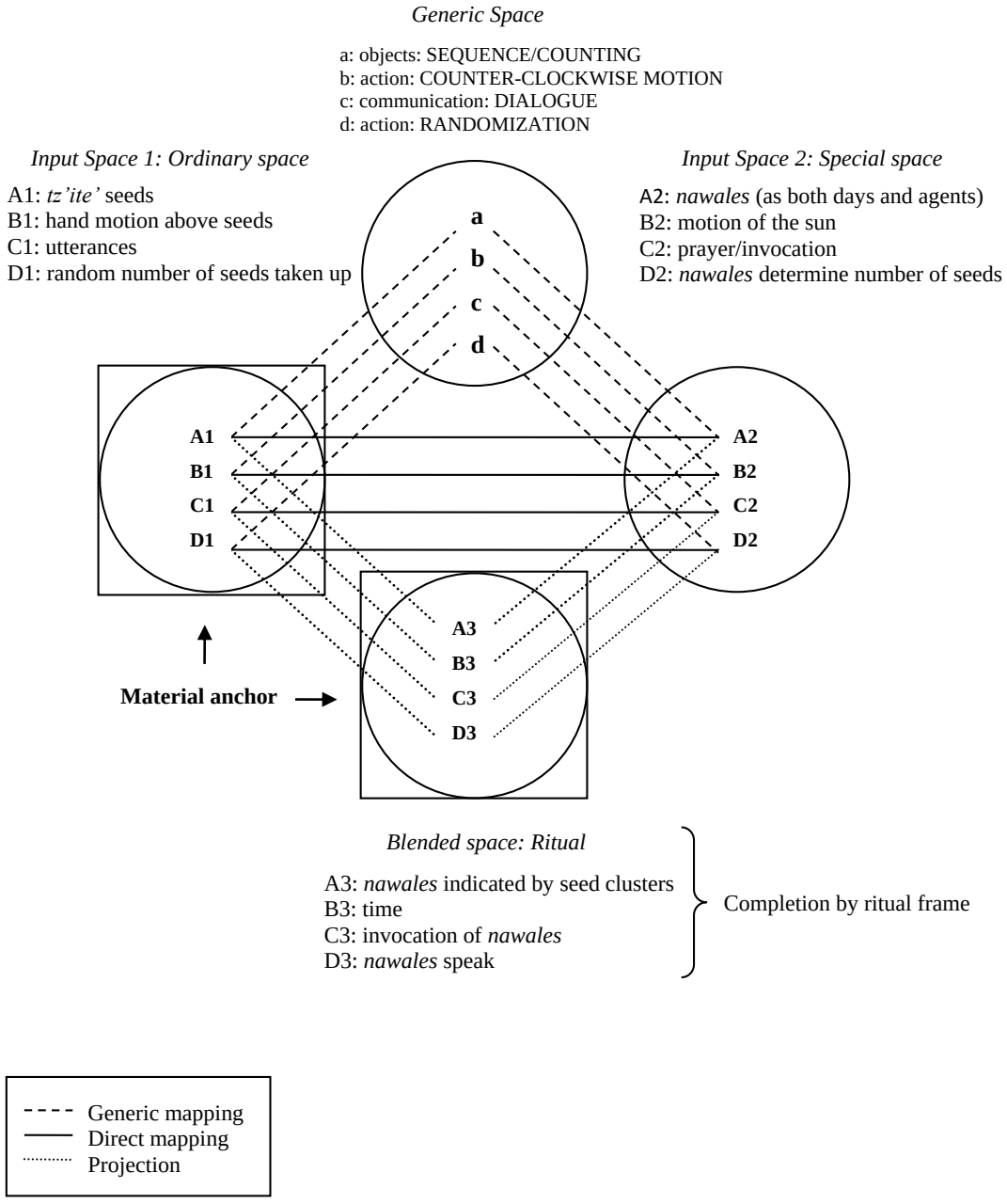


Figure 5.1: Conceptual blend of *tz'ite'* seed divination

The completion of the action by the ritual frame suggested at the bottom of Figure 5.14 refers to the context that supplies ritual actions with so much of their power. Rituals are not the same as games which are not the same as commercial exchanges. Each of these events, though they may all utilize similar conceptual blends and other cognitive skills, carries with it a special set of understandings conveyed through elaborate cultural models (Shore 1996; Sørensen 2007). The reference to a ritual frame indicates that a conceptual blend always takes place within a larger cognitive ecosystem. The inference of intentional action by occult forces, for instance, proceeds from a ritual frame primed by a variety of artifacts (the bright red *tz'ite'* seeds, the *ajq'iij*'s costume, quartz crystals), prayer (invocation of the *nawales*, the ancestors, and other special beings), and the setting (sanctified table directly in front of an altar composed of a variety of symbolically potent artifacts). All these salient elements participate in the cognitive and ritual ecosystems and shape the expectations and understandings of all those involved.

Randomization and the Distribution of Agency

One of the critical aspects of using *tz'ite'* seeds in these divinatory practices is the role they play as a randomizing device, something common to many divination techniques the world over (Matthews 1992). When handling small seeds of subtly different sizes and weights, it becomes impossible to control the exact number taken up into one's hand; after all, a single seed can change a final cluster from four (affirmation or high certainty) to one (negation or little certainty).

The randomizing property afforded by the *tz'ite'* seeds creates a space wherein the intentions of the diviner and client cannot control all aspects of the divination. The client shapes the divination in critical ways; his framing of the question is particularly important. In the Case Study, had Don Francisco used an alternative technique (had he begun the count on some other day for instance), the results would have been different. Each human agent plays a necessary and essential role in the activity and constrains the possibilities of the reading but the *tz'ite'* seeds play just as significant a role in the process. The randomization of the seeds creates a vacuum wherein occult forces enter into the divination. The prayer and invocation has invited these powers to provide guidance and information to the client.

Why displace some of the agents' intentions from the divination? The vacuum of intention produced by the randomization allows for the play of the occult forces that the *ajq'iij* has invoked. Should that component be removed, the whole process would be altered; the interaction would then constitute something close to a counseling session rather than a religious ritual. But, indeed, many people would prefer to keep all aspects within human control. So why include randomness in a decision-making activity?

In a 2007 paper, Anders Lisdorf described how randomization creates an "intentional deficiency" in divination. Accordingly, the inference of occult agency is a "repair process" that occurs in the minds of the participants. As always, these are not simply individually "bound" minds as the "repair process" draws from the contextually primed cognitive ecology, including cultural models about the special beings of Maya cosmology. These cultural models are typically reiterated and

emphasized in the ritual space, especially when an altar is part of that space. The invisible sources of agency within the divination must be provided through other components of the cognitive ecosystem, such as the ritual objects present in the space, the prayer and verbal exchanges between the client(s) and diviner, or the activation of rich cultural models. In *tz'ite'* seed divination, the *nawales*, ancestors, and altars play some of these requisite parts.

In her book *Randomness*, Deborah Bennett noted that "the purpose of randomizers…was to eliminate the possibility of human manipulation and thereby to give the gods a clear channel through which to express their divine will" (1998). Without the rich contextual factors, the entirety of the cognitive and ritual ecosystems, the divination would be perceived as introducing "mere chance" into the process. But given the ritual frame, with its cultural models, assumptions and expectations, divination becomes a special medium through which divine (or simply occult) forces operate. As William Bascom wrote: "when decisions are left to divine guidance rather than chance, the individual has far greater assurance that he is following the correct course of action. He can proceed with greater confidence; and, accordingly, in some cases he probably has a greater chance of success" (1969). The diviner and his client understand the randomizing event as an invitation to invisible agents to guide the decision (see Groark 2009 for a similar approach to Maya dream interpretation).

Persons and Minds in Context

The theories that inform this study, and the observations that derive from it, suggest that ritual, cognition, and indeed *persons* may be better conceived using an

ecological perspective that focuses on relationality, recruitment and coordination of distributed resources, and constitutive interaction, including "inter-enaction" (Torrance and Froese 2011) and "participatory sense-making" (De Jaegher and Di Paolo 2007). This perspective stands in clear contrast to what Geertz (1975) called the "Western conception of the person," that is, "the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively against other such wholes and against its social and natural background." Given how much this description appears to be caricature, I would table it as a "straw man" were it not a core assumption of the reigning economic and political philosophies of the world (Heilbroner 1999); though even in the places where it is most deeply entrenched, this Western conception of the person seems to be under revision (Carrithers, et al. 1985; Parish 2011; Taylor 1989; Thompson 2015).

The continued use of divination for decision-making suggests that people are frequently driven by and concerned about more than the "personal" (see McGraw 2012; McGraw and Krátký in press) and the "immediate" (a logical oxymoron in a non-Cartesian ontology) (see Wertsch 2007). Or, to say it differently, the personal and the immediate reveal themselves to be impoverished fictions when an ecologically-informed "theory of self" reorients the "instant of decision" into a more accurate orientation of the human experience of time as an equilibrium among past, present, and future concerns and events; for no moment in time transcends its causes in the past or its consequences in the future, even though cognitive biases illustrate a surprising pliability for re-sculpting memories of the past to serve present or future needs

(Gilovich, et al. 2002). All these factors of human existence in time (see McGraw in press) frame the person as a robust, but inherently dynamic, product and process of the set of relations in which he or she develops and interacts (see Neisser 1993).

Few have expressed this ecological point-of-view so vividly as Timothy Ingold. His "dwelling perspective" is an attempt to "to show that organism-and-environment and being-in-the-world offer points of departure for our understanding that are ontologically equivalent, and in that way to unite the approaches of ecology and phenomenology within a single paradigm" (2011). And this is the great work of philosophical anthropology: to make sensible (transmute) the first- , second- , and third-person accounts (both singular and plural) as different aspects of the same world(s), physical and otherwise (see Gallagher and Zahavi 2008).

In particular, how can the subjective and intersubjective be aligned with material accounts of mind (Bateson 1979; Edelman 2006; Frith 2007) in a manner that does not leave anything fundamentally unexplainable? And with no great leaps required, even as the fluctuating parameters of open systems (Bertalanffy 1969) keep things probabilistic (Suppes 1984), and thus precarious (Cappuccio and Froese 2014; Stewart, et al. 2010), rather than categorical or certain? How to remove all appeals for a "God of the gaps," including "mysterian" ideas about the human soul (McGraw 2004) as the chief – if not only – source of intention, as well as the veritable "engine of reason" (see Churchland 1995)?

I believe mixed methods approaches to broad research questions ("moving targets"), as exemplified in this cognitive ethnography, offer new means and new insights about mind by drawing from recent theoretical and methodological

developments in cognitive science (e.g. Clark 2008; Hutchins 1995; Lave 1988; Merleau-Ponty 1962). Combining some set of these approaches with an ethnographic investigation, as in cognitive ethnography, affords novel, and sometimes unpredictable, synergies that can be brought to bear on old questions. At this moment a transition seems to be occurring as old arts are increasingly identifying themselves with/as "new sciences" (e.g. Churchland 1986; Slingerland 2008; Smail 2008; Taves 2009) and, in doing so, are recording – in high fidelity – the blurring, if not the shifting, of paradigms as these new sciences, with all their hybrid vigor, creep ambitiously towards the edge of discovery. Promising innovations in the study of mind and behavior, such as Xygalatas's "experimental anthropology" (Konvalinka, et al. 2011; Xygalatas, et al. 2011), Roepstorff's anthropological investigations of "social cognition" (Roepstorff, et al. 2010; Roepstorff and Frith 2004), or the recently minted field of "experimental semiotics" (Fusaroli, et al. 2012; Galantucci, et al. 2012; Tylén, et al. 2009) offer empirical support for the erosion of strict boundaries between person and environment: We dwell in habitats that we co-constitute to greater or lesser extents (Hallowell 1955; Ingold 2011).

Ingold's ecological perspective recognizes that "the identities and characteristics of persons are not bestowed upon them in advance of their involvement with others but are the condensations of histories of growth and maturation within fields of social relationships. Thus every person emerges as a locus of development within such a field, which is in turn carried forward and transformed through their own actions" (2000). But these fields of social relationships are far from sufficient for constituting persons. As important as the social and the cultural are, they are founded

on the much sturdier substrates of biology, geography, and ecology all of which need to be considered as co-constitutive of human experience (Diamond 1997; Miller 2005). Inspired by ideas coming from developmental biologists, Ingold relates how "the characteristics of organisms, they argue, are not so much expressed as generated in the course of development, arising as emergent properties of the fields of relationship set up through their presence and activity within a particular environment" (2000). Particular configurations of environments, built from social, cultural, historical, and natural vectors, constitute who and what a person is.

Person, mind, and world are inseparable in this ecological perspective; they are merely labels for different, though coupled, processes within a set of ecosystems. John Haugeland describes this vision of mind in *Having Thought*:

> If we are to understand mind as the locus of intelligence, we cannot follow Descartes in regarding it as separable in principle from the body and the world. ... Broader approaches, freed of that prejudicial commitment, can look again at perception and action, at skillful involvement with public equipment and social organization, and see not principled separation but all sorts of close coupling and functional unity. ... Mind, therefore, is not incidentally but *intimately* embodied and *intimately* embedded in its world. (1998)

Similarly, Jean Lave describes how "…the self has a historical and contingent character, unfolding through the creation of value in action, in relation with other selves, in setting. Its character is thus a relational one. Some of those relations are constituted interactively rather than as internal fixtures of the person, and the social world is partially embodied" (1988). Reviewing these scholars, it would seem that those who study cognition in context always come to the same conclusion; that mind, body, and world(s), when considered together, are "mutually constitutive."

As alluring as this ecological perspective is, similar ideas have been hovering in academic circles for generations now. Lev Vygotsky (1978) represents just one of many articulate voices who offered similar insights beginning more than a century ago. Relating one of Vygotsky's notions, Hutchins describes how "in individual ontogenesis, all higher level psychological processes appear twice. They appear first as interpsychological process; a child participates with others in cultural practices and in that context enacts shared psychological processes. With repeated experience, the child may 'internalize' the interpsychological processes which then become intrapsychological processes" (2010). So if these exciting approaches are not so new, why have they failed to take root and flourish as standards of psychological and cognitive studies?

Mary Douglas begins her book, *How Institutions Think*, describing the hostility that Durkheim and his early followers encountered when they attempted to promote a similarly framed epistemology (1986). She observes that "the very idea of a suprapersonal cognitive system stirs a deep sense of outrage" (1986). These notions threaten some of the ideas about personal agency that many institutions and individuals hold dear. Suprapersonal (and I would argue subpersonal) processes that impinge on a "sacred self" and its Promethean will seem like frightening, Orwellian tools for misinforming and dominating a self that, at some level, recognizes its own fragility. But as will be discussed below, the divisions and conflicts between personal agency and structural constraints derive from improper, insufficient theories of self and person. The structure/agency dichotomy is a residue of ill-conceived epistemologies that have been in place for centuries; agency and structure is the very

prototype of a false dichotomy given what social scientists have learned about mind, culture, and biology over the past century in particular. To be clear, promoting a stark dualism between "agency" and "structure" is an increasingly precarious stance given the innovations reviewed above.

Much recent work supports the breakdown of divisive categories in favor of processual approaches (e.g. Stengers 2011); a transition supported by innovations in philosophy of mind as well (Clark and Chalmers 1998; Hurley 1998; Menary 2010). Culture cannot be understood as a collection of external forms and artifacts nor as a particular institution or understanding. Culture operates as a set of distributed phenomena whose appropriate unit of analysis is neither the individual nor the social organization nor the implementation of the cultural practice across varied media. Culture emerges from ecological relations that functionally specify human actions like decision-making. In studying the manner that practices like divination enact cultural cognition, something of the whole may be perceived in the part, as the part in the whole. The study of highland Maya divination as a subjective, interpersonal, and interactive whole has been an attempt to support a processual approach to the study of cognition and culture.

Cognitive anthropology, while often employing insights and terminology from such diverse fields as computer science, neuropsychology, and linguistics, need not render the person or mind as some thinly described agent (e.g. information processor, gene transporter, subaltern, subject). In fact, many of the folk models of mind that people cherish may be preserved if used as clues for the development of increasingly sophisticated models of the person.

Roy D'Andrade treats folk models of the mind as working hypotheses about how people understand their own minds and those of others. By carefully sifting through the statements people utter, the inferences they make, and other such qualitative data, the social scientist can "reverse engineer" the psychodynamics and cultural models at work in culturally constituted minds (D'Andrade 1987; D'Andrade 2005; Quinn 2005). In short, leading cognitive anthropologists have come to the conclusion that folk theories and scientific ones can harmonize without either being reduced to the other.

Folk psychology relates to the commonsense ideas people have about how the mind works. It is an explanatory scheme rife with the language of intentions, beliefs, desires, judgments, values, and the like. Jerome Bruner, a witness to the cognitive revolution, addresses folk psychology at length in his book *Acts of Meaning* (1990). He argues against the reduced model of mind proposed by many cognitive psychologists. Bruner favors more contextualized ideas of the person: "Folk psychology, though it changes, does not get displaced by scientific paradigms. For it deals with the nature, causes, and consequences of those intentional states—beliefs, desires, intentions, commitments—that most scientific psychology dismisses in its effort to explain human action from a point of view that is outside human subjectivity" (1990). Bruner believes that folk psychology can lead to genuinely scientific ideas about the mind and that it supports personhood as something that is culturally constituted. For Bruner, intersubjectivity is only possible when people have a "shared sense of the ordinary" (2008:35). When people share cultural conventions, including

conventions about people themselves, they make use of these ordinary truths as the foundation for intersubjectivity.

Cognitive psychology, given its assumptions and methodology, often abstracts human beings away from culture in order to create models of mind that are true to all and none at the same time. As Bruner writes: "It is man's participation in culture and the realization of his mental powers through culture that make it impossible to construct a human psychology on the basis of the individual alone. To treat the world as an indifferent flow of information to be processed by individuals each on his or her own terms is to lose sight of how individuals are formed and how they function" (1990). Accordingly, psychological findings should integrate folk psychological discourse about the person and mind in order to avoid veering too far from the relevant (and potentially true). The "shared sense of the ordinary" needs to be a powerful attractor in scientific discourse as it serves as a sort of epistemological P-value against which a finding should be assessed. But since folk models are never static, they can be conservatively updated with new ideas and theories; especially when those resolve a set of problems or gaps in previous understandings.

By constructing a framework of "meaning-making," Bruner hopes to better unify social scientific research. Meaning-making cuts across disciplinary boundaries and keeps action and meaning at the center of social science. The model of personhood that Bruner espouses is consonant with ideas about distributed cognition:

> I have tried to show how the lives and Selves we construct are the outcomes of this process of meaning construction. But I have also tried to make it clear that Selves are not isolated nuclei of consciousness locked in the head, but are "distributed" interpersonally. Nor do Selves arise rootlessly in response only to the present; they take meaning as

> well from the historical circumstances that gave shape to the culture of which they are an expression. (1990:138)

Bruner's theoretical paradigm, centered on meaning-making, supports all the core concerns of an ecological approach. Here we have the notion of personhood as distributed cultural phenomena and processes. And Bruner's assertion that history matters in the construction of meaning is confirmed by studying a divinatory practice grounded in the continuous reckoning of a three thousand year old calendar.

In D.N. Perkins's article, "Person Plus: A Distributed View of Thinking and Learning," similar models are espoused. Perkins writes that "perhaps the person proper is better conceived not as the common core but the set of interactions and dependencies; not as the intersection but the union of involvements; not as the pure and enduring nucleus but the sum and the swarm of participations" (1993). Ecological perspectives like this seem to be converging on approaches to person, mind, and culture as deeply, if not essentially, interconnected.

In mapping out representations of "visible thought" in the *tz'ite'* seed configurations, I have endeavored to accurately depict the necessary components and conditions in this sociotechnical assemblage. I have described the enaction of this ritual technique of distributed cognition through the real world case of a Tz'utujil *ajq'iij* and his client. By doing so, I have hoped to demonstrate how such a sociotechnical assemblage is brought to life by the demand to make a critical decision, one whose effects ripple across a community.

Decision Ecology

In "Meaning without Intention," John Du Bois wrote that "…facts need to become not only 'known' but socially legitimated" (63). Indeed, decisions rarely affect just the divinatory client. The consequences of an important decision touch many peoples' lives. Just as cognitive ecology is the appropriate model for an analysis when studying cognition as activity, researchers should study all the variables involved in "decision ecology" in order to resolve new features of human decision-making. For example, this study suggests that people who are cognizant of a decision and who inherit its outcomes should be modeled as components of that decision ecosystem. Most weighty, existential decisions not only forecast possibilities but anticipate the consequences of decisions and/or decision-making strategies. Prediction is not merely an assessment of some single outcome, but an assessment of peoples' responses to various outcomes. In sum, the socio-cultural aspects of cognition need to be included as essential parts of decision-making, as co-constitutive of the "decision ecosystem."

To decide a course of action is to take responsibility for its consequences as well. If things go well, one's reputation and authority may be enhanced. But if things turn out poorly, blame and embarrassment often follow. In the Case Study, had José come home one day and told his wife that he had left his job, a potentially unpleasant confrontation might have resulted. If his decision led to hunger and want, the damage to his authority might be irreparable. Similarly, had he described the work situation to his wife and then said, "let's flip a coin to decide," his wife might think he had lost his mind. One does not leave such grave concerns to "mere chance." But by consulting a

respected *ajq'iij* and putting the question to an ancestral divination technique, José could not only decide his course of action but also have this decision "certified" by higher authorities. Neither wife nor parent would dispute a divinely-guided decision. Or, if they did, they could not find fault in José alone as the decision had been distributed among components of its cognitive and ritual ecosystems.

George Park wrote: "it is the peculiar property of the diviner's role that he is able, in the public conscience, to remove the agency and responsibility for a decision from the actor himself, casting it upon the heavens where it lies beyond cavil and beyond reproach" (236). Divination serves as a decision-making technique that also invests a decision with authority and legitimacy deriving from the ritual practices that enact it. The "emergent properties" of *tz'ite'* seed divination cannot be located in any one component but are immanent throughout the cognitive, ritual, and decision ecosystems that compose it.

This study of *tz'ite'* seed divination suggests that divination is a means for people to draw from their cultural resources—especially resources of a religious or spiritual kind—in order to contend with uncertainty and navigate the crises of their lives (see Parish 2008). It is a ritual that coordinates these resources, including ritual specialists who embody roles grander than themselves, a ritual calendar which serves as a mnemonic compendium of cultural themes as well as a means to value their interdependence and rhythms. This divination ritual invokes the special beings who inhabit the physical and spiritual terrain of the highland Mayas and who govern time itself. All of this is brought together and enacted to resolve a problem, someone's genuine concern. People seek divination out because the problems they experience

require the aid of myriad resources in order to make decisions that are cognitively and normatively satisfying. People do this in spite of some cost, some risk because *tz'ite'* seed divination affects decision-making in a favorable way: it provides strategic information, harmonizes normative structures that bind people, places, and cultural practices, and enacts a much grander decision than one achieved by the individual alone. Such a decision is invested with the authority of powerful beings and forces, tends to reduce ill-feelings between people, and may provide additional hope and optimism when they are most lacking.

APPENDIX: Comparative Compendium of the *Nawales* of the *Cholq'iij*

For the purposes of this dissertation, only the *Cholq'iij* will be discussed though it is just one of many important Maya calendars. For almost every type of calendrically related divination practice, use of the *Cholq'iij* is paramount. Part of its importance simply relates to the fact that it was never lost, in contrast to many other counts. In fact, it seems that the *Cholq'iij* has been tracked, without interruption, for thousands of years (Rice 2007).

One colonial document after another attests to the universality and importance of the 260-day calendar. Speaking of the Mexica, for instance, Sahagún wrote:

> But the count of the soothsaying art, which he wrongly calleth a calendar, is a particular kind of count, because its purpose was established to foretell circumstances and events to befall those born under each sign or character. This count only the soothsayers and those who had the skill to learn it, knew; because it containeth many difficulties and obscurities. Those who knew this count they called *tonalpouhque*; they esteemed and honored them very greatly. They considered them to be prophets and knowers of future things. Hence they depended upon them for many things, as in days of old the sons of Israel depended on the prophets. (1957)

And while Mayas have kept many additional calendars besides the 260-day divinatory count, it may be the case that many of these other calendars were meant to corroborate or specify revelations available through the *Cholq'iij*:

> …the astronomical tables and astronomically related almanacs in the codices suggest that Maya astronomers were using celestial events for the sake of making astrological predictions. Their writings embody one vast divinatory scheme and seem directed toward a single goal: to establish an order to human existence by bringing the naturally occurring astronomical cycles into accord with the 260-day calendar. Again and again we have seen that this fundamental unit of time lies at the foundation of every almanac in the codices. (Aveni 2001)

Aveni's idea of "establishing an order to human existence" is a promising thread to pursue. Order and ordering lie at the heart of the *Cholq'iij* and its related divinatory practices. In fact, *Cholq'iij* is a the union of a verb meaning "to order, arrange, put in sequence" and the noun for day or time (Pérez Mendoza, et al. 2001). So "the ordering of time" is perhaps the best way to translate this term.

The calendar is much more than a means of tracking time, it was the primary ordering device of social existence for the Mayas who developed it. Conceiving of the *Cholq'iij* as the divinatory calendar or even the ritual calendar is too small. Speaking of the Maya calendars, Monaghan thinks it would be "closer to the mark to view them as social charters" (1998). Hinz offers a synthetic appraisal of the Cholq'iij's meaning: "…the 260-day calendar and the system of divinations attached to it constitute a 'pre-scientific theory of the order of life and the world.' As a mental systematization, this theory is one of the great accomplishments of the early complex societies or horizons of civilization. The contents of this theory are comprised of 'naïve' behavior and ethics, decision-making, and existence as a view of destiny, individual development and future" (2008). Indeed, for centuries if not millennia, the *Cholq'iij* has provided a means of facing reality and organizing one's efforts according to the schematized meanings and associations embedded in the calendar. Molesky-Poz calls if a "referential field" for interpreting why things are the way they are (2006). Interpreting how things have become as they are and, more importantly, shaping one's response to present concerns can all be mediated through interpretation of the calendar. Using the divinatory techniques associated with it, one can determine whether or when to take a journey,

whom to marry, what one should do about an illness, and how best to provide for an education of one's children (1894). Indeed, the promise and power of such oracle for living a more orderly existence is monumental.

The following tables include excerpts from a variety of sources about the *nawales* of the *Cholq'iij*. As is clear from a review of this compendium, significant variety abounds in these statements. Because knowledge of the *Cholq'iij* depends heavily on an individual *ajq'iij's* revelations, variety is to be expected. In spite of this variety, there is often a resemblance across many of the statements that may suggest structuring principles at work. One such structuring principle lies in the names of the *nawales* themselves. These names typically develop a set of analogical mappings related to the nature or attributes of the day name. For example, the *nawal B'eey* is Tz'utujil word for "road" and relates to roads and paths and a person's future. The divinatory practice may signal whether the road is "open" or not. *B'eey* is also related to the Tz'utujil word *eeyah*, or "teeth." Analogies to the nature and characteristics of roads and teeth end up playing part of the ideas people have about the quality of this *nawal* and how it can relate to one's activity on one of these days or in a divinatory reading.

The Twenty Nawales

I have used the Tz'utujil spellings of the days of the *Cholq'iij* from "Maya Knowledge and Wisdom" (García Ixmatá 2010), slight variations of these spellings may be found in the *Diccionario Tz'utujil* (Pérez Mendoza, et al. 2001).

B'aatz' (K'iche', *B'atz*; Yucatec, *Chuwen*) see discussion on page 269.

B'eey (K'iche', *E*; Yucatec, *Eb'*) see discussion on page 270.

Aaj (K'iche', *Aj*; Yucatec, *B'en*) see discussion on page 271.

I'x (K'iche', *I'x*; Yucatec, *Ix*) see discussion on page 272.

Tz'ikin (K'iche', *Tz'ikin*; Yucatec, *Men*) see discussion on page 273.

Ajmak (K'iche', *Ajqmaq*; Yucatec, *Kib'*) see discussion on page 274.

No'j (K'iche', *No'j*; Yucatec, *Kab'an*) see discussion on page 275.

Tijax (K'iche', *Tijax*; Yucatec, *Etz'nab'*) see discussion on page 276.

Kawoq (K'iche', *Kawoq*; Yucatec, *Kawak*) see discussion on page 277.

Ajpub' (K'iche', *Ajpu'*; Yucatec, *Ajaw*) see discussion on page 278.

Imoox (K'iche', *Imoox*; Yucatec, *Imix'*) see discussion on page 279.

Iiq' (K'iche', *Iq'*; Yucatec, *Ik'*) see discussion on page 280.

Aq'ab'al (K'iche', *Aq'ab'al*; Yucatec, *Ak'b'al*) see discussion on page 281.

K'aat (K'iche', *K'aat*; Yucatec, *K'an*) see discussion on page 282.

Kaan (K'iche', *K'an*; Yucatec, *Chikchan*) see discussion on page 283.

Kame (K'iche', *Keme*; Yucatec, *Kimi*) see discussion on page 284.

Keej (K'iche', *Keej*; Yucatec, *Manik'*) see discussion on page 285.

Q'aniil (K'iche', *Q'aniil*; Yucatec, *Lamat*) see discussion on page 286.

Tooj (K'iche', *Toj*; Yucatec, *Muluk*) see discussion on page 287.

Tz'i' (K'iche', *Tz'i'*; Yucatec, *Ok*) see discussion on page 288.



Figure A1: *Nawales* of the *Cholq'iij*

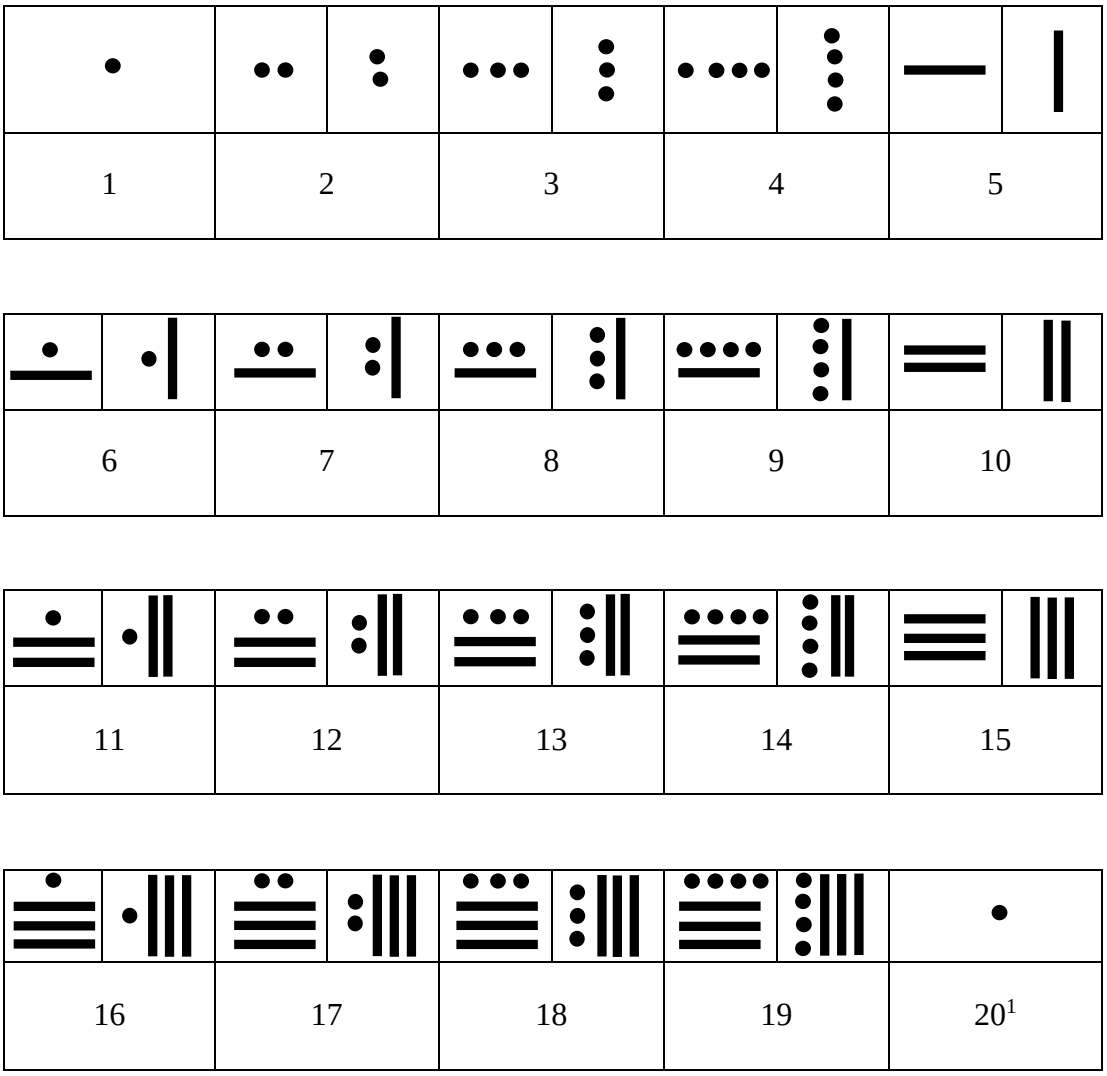


Figure A2: Maya numbering system

Table A: Comparative descriptions of the *nawales*

B'aatz'		
	***Source***	***Description***
	(La Farge 1947:163)	"*Principal del Canil.*"
	(Wagley 1949:70)	"Favorable day for rich people and a good day to pray for money."
	(Bunzel 1959:277)	"A good day, the day of the perpetuation of the ceremonies and customs of our ancestors. Therefore, on the day 8 *bats*, we give thanks for whatever ceremonies we possess, especially those of the calendar. The day 7 *bats* is the day for making the communication for the ceremony of 8 *'e*, the commemoration of our life and fortune." She notes that *bats* is symbolic of continuity with the past, as embodied in ritual.
Gloss: *"Thread" "Monkey"*	(Molesky-Poz 2006:144)	(thread, monkey)—signifies the thread, the placenta, the count thread of time. It is a day referring to spin, as in spinning thread, or rolling or winding up, to ask. This day marks our origin, a continuation with the past. It was this energy that orientated the first wise ones to form humanity and it is the ultimate end of the universe. It is a good day to begin or initiate any activity.
Direction: East	(Hart 2008:42)	"*B'atz'* is a good day. *B'atz'* is intelligence."
	(García Ixmatá 2010:227)	Bodily Association: "touch, hearing, vision, thought" Association in Nature: "monkey, thread"
Animal: Monkey		

Table A: Comparative descriptions of the *nawales (continued)*

B'eey		
	***Source***	***Description***
	(La Farge 1947:163)	For pigs.
	(Wagley 1949:70)	Owner of the year; excellent for all *costumbres*.
Gloss: *"Road" "Tooth"*	(Bunzel 1959:278)	"This is a good day, the day of one's personality and fortune. The days 8 *'e* are days for giving thanks for that which one has, for one's occupation, if one is a lawyer, merchant, carpenter; for the ceremonies with which one has been entrusted. And also one gives thanks for one's possessions, house, land, money, animals. If the divinations come out in *'e* it is a good sign. It concerns one's personality. Perhaps one has neglected to give thanks for what one has, or else one has had disputes over what one owns, or quarrels over the division of inheritance. But one has only to ask pardon. If divinations come out in *'e*, many times, and always the same, it may means that one is not fulfilling one's destiny, that one is called to the profession of *chuchqajau*." She notes that *'e* is symbolic of destiny as embodied in the name, i.e. the day of birth.
Direction: West	(Molesky-Poz 2006:144)	(the road, destiny, tooth)—signifies the good road, the straight road, the long road, destiny; the nerves in the human body. It is the day marking the development of history.
	(Hart 2008:42)	"*E* for a student; we ask on *E* for a good path, good ideas, intelligence."
Animal: Wildcat	(García Ixmatá 2010:227)	Bodily Association: "taste, thought" Association in Nature: "tooth, road"

Table A: Comparative descriptions of the *nawales (continued)*

Aaj		
	***Source***	***Description***
	(La Farge 1947:163)	Prayer for grace and miracles.
	(Wagley 1949:70)	Neutral.
Gloss: *"Maize"* *"Family"*	(Bunzel 1959:278)	"*Aj* is the name of the day of one's destiny. This is general for all people. 8 *aj* is the day on which to establish one's destiny, to call it, and recognize it. For it is our belief that the fortune of a person is incarnated in some small animal, some serpent, large or small; some flying creature, large or small, or some quadruped of the mountins, like coyote, deer, etc. Such is one's fate. If divinations come out in *aj*, it may mean that one is sick because one's fate is calling one. One may have done no harm, nor, on the other hand given thanks to one's fate." She notes that *aj* is symbolic of destiny as embodied in the *nagual*.
Direction: North	(Molesky-Poz 2006:145)	(the cornstalk, the reed, the young ear of corn)—signifies the home, the family. In *Popol Wuj*, Junajpu and Xb'alanke each plant an ear of corn in the center of their grandmother's patio before they depart to play ball in *Xib'alb'a*, the underworld. They leave these instructions with their grandmother: "Each of us will plant an ear of corn. We'll plant them in the center of our house. When the corn dries up, this will be a sign of our death: 'Perhaps they died,' you'll say, when it dries up. And when the sprouting comes, 'Perhaps they live,' you'll say, our dear grandmother and mother" (Tedlock 1985:133). *Aj*, then, is related to the home, to the family; it is the sign of triumphing over all forms of illness, even death; it is a symbol of resurrection.
Animal: Armadillo	(Hart 2008:42)	"*Aj*, for the family. We have a home, we have to put a ceremony on *Aj*. Because *Aj* is life; *Aj* is resurrection, triumph."
	(García Ixmatá 2010:227)	Bodily Association: "heart, thought" Association in Nature: "cane, abundance"

Table A: Comparative descriptions of the *nawales (continued)*

I'x		
	***Source***	***Description***
	(La Farge 1947:163)	For money.
	(Wagley 1949:70)	A bad day; one that *chimanes* fear.
Gloss: *"Altar"* *"Wilderness"*	(Bunzel 1959:279)	"*Ix* is the name of the commemoration of the world. The days 8 *ix*, 9 *tsikin* are days in which all people give thanks for their lodging in this world, for land which one has acquired either by inheritance or by purchase, and to give thanks to the former owners of the land. If divinations come out in *ix* and *tsikin* it is a good sign; it is a question of land; perhaps one has not given thanks for one's lodging, or perhaps the land has not been paid for, or there has been quarrelling over land, or an unfair division of inheritance between brothers." She notes that *ix* is symbolic of the creative forces of the universe as embodied in the concept of the earth (*mundo*).
Direction: South	(Molesky-Poz 2006:145)	(strength, jaguar, tiger, sacred appeal of the earth)—symbolizes vigor, the creative forces of the universe. It is a day of feminine energy. It also represents the Maya altar, the place of the sacred power of the earth; it is the day of the mountains and the plains.
Animal: Jaguar	(Hart 2008:42)	"*I'x* does two thinks. *I'x* does good and does bad. Because *I'x* is the Seven Capital Sins…so it does bad, so 7 is bad, but not all *I'x*: 1, 2, 3, 6 are good; it's just 7. …But *I'x* is the Mayan shrine, the place to offer ceremonies."
	(García Ixmatá 2010:227)	Bodily Association: "feet, brain" Association in Nature: "jaguar, vitality"

Table A: Comparative descriptions of the *nawales (continued)*

Tz'ikin		
	***Source***	***Description***
	(La Farge 1947:163)	For poultry. A good day to ask grace.
	(Wagley 1949:70)	Neutral.
Gloss: *"Bird"* *"Money"*	(Bunzel 1959:277)	"*Tsikin* is the name of good luck in money. The word also means bird, a good day. The days 8 *ix*, 9 *tsikin* are days to give thanks for one's lodging in the world, and the days 7 *ix*, 8 *tsikin* are days to give thanks and to ask for good fortune in money. If divinations come out in *tsikin* it is a good sign. It is a matter of land and money." She notes that *tsikin* is symbolic of good luck in material affairs.
	(Molesky-Poz 2006:145)	(fortune, bird, eagle, wisdom, and knowledge)—the day who sees all things from up above, who mediates between God and humans. This characteristic represents space, the air, the light, the clouds, the cold, the warmth of the Heart of Heaven and Heart of Earth that has put itself in our service. It is a day to cry for, to ask for money, success.
Direction: East	(Hart 2008:42)	"*Tz'ikin*, this is for money. For money, bank notes, for *quetzals*, for dollars."
Animal: Bird	(García Ixmatá 2010:227)	Bodily Association: "brain" Association in Nature: "bird, liberty"

Table A: Comparative descriptions of the *nawales (continued)*

Ajmak		
	***Source***	***Description***
	(La Farge 1947:163)	For the earth.
	(Wagley 1949:70)	No one could give any significance.
Gloss: *"Sinner"*	(Bunzel 1959:279)	"*Ajmaq* is not a bad day, or only partly bad. It is a day to ask for forgiveness of sins. The days 7 *tsikin*, 8 *ajmaq*, 9 *noj* are the days in which to pray for protection, for from these days evil may come to one for his sins or his evil thoughts. When one loses money one prays on these days that it may not happen again, for the loss has some meaning." She notes that *ajmaq* is a day without clearly defined character, but essentially symbolic of moral forces as embodied in penitential rituals.
Direction: West	(Molesky-Poz 2006:145)	(vulture or owl, pardon, the dead ancestors)—a symbol of moral forces, a day to remember our dead ancestors, to ask pardon for our sins before the sky, before Ajaw, before the earth, before the ancestors. Those who have gone before guide the present and help us so the best will come in our future.
	(Hart 2008:42)	"*Ajmaq* is the day of the dead, and also a sinners' day."
Animal: Owl	(García Ixmatá 2010:227)	Bodily Association: "sight, brain, hand" Association in Nature: "fault, evil"

Table A: Comparative descriptions of the *nawales (continued)*

No'j		
	***Source***	***Description***
	(La Farge 1947:163)	Same as *Tz'ikin*. (For the earth.)
	(Wagley 1949:70)	Owner of the year; excellent for all *costumbres*.
Gloss: *"Thought"*	(Bunzel 1959:279)	"This is the name of our thoughts or manner or customary mode of behavior. The day 8 *Noj* is the day to ask for good thoughts. *Noj* is a day on which to ask protection against evil thoughts, for one may have evil thoughts about someone, and, on the other hand, others may have evil thoughts, envious thoughts about one." She notes that it is symbolic of ambivalent moral forces of the human mind.
Direction: North	(Molesky-Poz 2006:145)	(wisdom, creativity, intelligence)—relates to the earth's movement, to motion or movement, the result of applied force, as an earthquake. It signifies intelligence, wisdom and understanding, and creativity, which are of *Ajaw*.
	(Hart 2008:42)	"*No'j*, this is Idea: wisdom and intelligence; this is *No'j*."
Animal: Coyote	(García Ixmatá 2010:227)	Bodily Association: "brain, intelligence" Association in Nature: "sky, clouds"

Table A: Comparative descriptions of the *nawales (continued)*

Tijax		
	***Source***	***Description***
	(La Farge 1947:163)	For the earth, day of grace and miracles.
	(Wagley 1949:70)	Good day to make *costumbre* for hunting.
Gloss: *"Obsidian Blade"*	(Bunzel 1959:280)	"The day of quarrels and evil words. The day 8 *tijax* is a good day to confess sins, especially quarrels with one's wife or relatives, and, above all, with one's parents." She notes that *tijax* has no special character, and is rarely the occasion for ceremonies.
	(Molesky-Poz 2006:145)	(obsidian knife, suffering, pain)—signifies suffering. The glyph is the flint knife or the sharpened obsidian knife, the emblem of the gods of the sacrifices. This day is a reminder of how the first parents struggled with themselves through danger, suffering, and pain. It is the day of healers.
Direction: South	(Hart 2008:43)	"Now, with *Tijax*, again there's positive, and there's negative. The positive is: curer. They do good, they cure people, *Tijax*. Now the negative, a machete has two blades, it has one here, and one here. Be careful because this is strong! *Tijax* has two blades, does good and does bad. Like light and shadow, that's how *Tijax* is."
Animal: Swordfish	(García Ixmatá 2010:227)	Bodily Association: "strength, energy" Association in Nature: "flint, obsidian"

Table A: Comparative descriptions of the *nawales (continued)*

Kawoq		
	***Source***	***Description***
	(La Farge 1947:163)	For the cornfields, beans, and other plantings.
	(Wagley 1949:70)	Bad day; brings wind and rain to ruin *milpas*.
Gloss: *"Woman"*	(Bunzel 1959:280)	"This is a bad day. It is no day for giving thanks or for requests or defenses. It is an unfavorable day, a violent day. If divinations come out on 8 *kawaq* in the case of sickness, then it means that some relative or enemy with whom one has quarreled and who since has died is punishing the victim from the other life because of the quarrel which they have had. In that case one must ask those who have already passed into the other life to adjust this quarrel." She notes that it is symbolic of evil embodied in the malice of the dead.
Direction: East	(Molesky-Poz 2006:145-146)	(lawsuit, difficulties, problems, bad luck)—signifies lightning and thunder, concomitants of the electrical storm, celestial dragons; also the rain. On the earth there are problems, but as our first grandparents demonstrated, they were able to conquer the obstacles and to accomplish their work for humanity. It is a day for judges, lawyers, and those who intercede for health or an end to problems.
Animal: Turtle	(Hart 2008:43)	"*Kawoq*, here the midwife comes into it. She's the boss of the woman who's a midwife. But it's not a strong day, it's weak; because it's a woman's day. But it's also a curer's day, a Mayan Priest's day, whether woman or man."
	(García Ixmatá 2010:227)	Bodily Association: "blood, sight" Association in Nature: "storm, water, rain"

Table A: Comparative descriptions of the *nawales (continued)*

Ajpub'		
	***Source***	***Description***
	(La Farge 1947:163)	For cattle.
	(Wagley 1949:70)	Owner of fire (it is male); fires come to burn down houses on this day.
Gloss: *"Lord"*	(Bunzel 1959:280)	"Name of the day of commemoration of houses. If, for example, I wish to erect a house it is necessary before beginning the work to make offerings to the World, and for this one waits for the day *ajpu*, and also to give thanks. It is also a day to work evil against an enemy in his house. One calls evil in his house, according to the wrong he has done. If divinations come out in *ajpu* it indicates something wrong within the house, unpleasantness with the woman, or quarrels between brothers over inheritance, or perhaps failure to give thanks to the deceased owners of the house. Or it may mean that some enemy has sent evil into the house." She also notes that *ajpu* is symbolic of evil embodied in the malice of the dead.
Direction: West	(Molesky-Poz 2006:146)	(deer hunter, sun, hero)—the glyph sign for *Ajpu'* is *Ajaw*, which represents the radiant sun, a manifestation of *kinh* (day). It is not only a divine face, but also the root of time. Further, it is a flower. In *Popol Wuj*, Ajpu' is one of the hero twins who passed through death in *Xib'alb'a*, but revived and was transformed into the sun. So this day represents a triumph over problems and difficulties.
Animal: Human Being	(Hart 2008:43)	"*Ajpu* is a day of hunters, those who look for birds, things like that. Now a hunter, spiritually: there's an angel when there are thunders, storms, this is *Ajpu*. *Ajpu* is the tempest—Saint Gabriel, let's say. And the sun; the sun is *Ajpu*. This is a good day. And the person who's born on *Ajpu* is a kind person—a very soft, very good heart, not a bad person."
	(García Ixmatá 2010:227)	Bodily Association: "body, wisdom" Association in Nature: "blowgun hunter"

Table A: Comparative descriptions of the *nawales (continued)*

Imoox		
	***Source***	***Description***
	(La Farge 1947:163)	Day of weavers and good for all.
	(Wagley 1949:70)	Neutral.
Gloss: *"Rain" "Insanity"*	(Bunzel 1959:280)	"*Imux* is the name of all secret or hidden things. In general it is a bad day, a dangerous day. But if one does not have evil thoughts, and if one's personality is open and candid, then it is not a bad day but a day for hope. If divinations come out in 7 *ajpu*, 8 *imux*, 9 *iq'*, it is a question of failure or confusion in regard to the idols in one's house. One may not have given thanks, or one may have quarreled or fought in the presence of the idols." She notes that *imux* is symbolic of the hidden forces in the universe made manifest in insanity.
Direction: North	(Molesky-Poz 2006:146)	(craziness, lake, water lizard)—the sign, a fish-like animal, a crocodile, signifies the material beginning of existence or life in the Earth or in the individual, the occult forces in the universe. It can also indicate one who becomes possessed or crazy, one who tends too much to details in life. It is a day to humble oneself before Mam, the Earth Lord.
Animal: Lizard	(Hart 2008:43)	"*Imox* is a bit of an idiot; idiot, because it's the left hand, yes, the left hand. But it's not their fault, because there's a grandfather long ago who clashed with *Xib'alb'a*, so his arm was removed. For three days the arm of a grandfather called *Ajpu* was removed. It was hung in the kitchen where the smoke of the fire comes out. Afterward, when our grandfather managed it, his arm was brought and put back on. And that's why it was left half deaf; it's not normal. It was the left arm, so this is a bit of an idiot. Or a madman—with just two or three words, they get cross. That's what *Imox* is like."
	(García Ixmatá 2010:227)	Bodily Association: "brain, nervous system" Association in Nature: "lizard"

Table A: Comparative descriptions of the *nawales (continued)*

Iiq'		
	***Source***	***Description***
	(La Farge 1947:163)	Day for justice, and the wind. Protects cornfields.
	(Wagley 1949:70)	Good; another owner or *alcalde*. This year (1937) it was owner of the year. It is necessary to make *costumbre* so that rain and winds will not ruin corn on this day.
Gloss: *"Wind"*	(Bunzel 1959:280)	"This is a bad day, a dangerous day. This is the day that is sacred to the idols. I, for example, have idols in my house. When this day comes I honor them by performing a rite in my house. If divinations come out in *iq'* it is a sign of sin before the idols. Divinations in *iq'* and *aq'bal* signify slanders, perhaps on the part of an enemy, before idols. Painful swellings, and cancer are attributed to this day." She notes that *iq'* is symbolic of the destructive forces of the universe embodied in the stone idols.
Direction: South	(Molesky-Poz 2006:146)	(air, wind, Tepeu)—like the secret breath of life, this day carries a mystic spirituality and intelligence. It's the day of the winds of the altars that fill us with life.
	(Hart 2008:43)	"*Iq'* is the air. It's the wind. It's the Heart of Heaven. The air. Of the air, we ask—if there's a sick relative, they have to put their ceremony in *Iq'* so that the wind may take away their suffering. So they remove it in the name of the spirits. *Iq'* is good—its positive side. It also has a bad side, a negative side. Because *Iq'* is also when the whirlwind comes and the house is taken off. Yes, the air, the *Iq'*, is fierce. If you have a good house, this lifts it, because *Iq'* is tremendous. Through whirlwinds. This is *Iq'*.
Animal: Hawk	(García Ixmatá 2010:227)	Bodily Association: "gall bladder, brain, nose, lung" Association in Nature: "lightning"

Table A: Comparative descriptions of the *nawales (continued)*

Aq'ab'al		
	***Source***	***Description***
	(La Farge 1947:163)	For grace, life and health, and the cornfields.
	(Wagley 1949:70)	Good day to pray for poor people.
Gloss: *"Dawn"*	(Bunzel 1959:281)	"*Aq'bal* is a bad day, the day of slanders. 8 *aq'bal* is a day to ask protection against slanderers, if one wishes no evil. But the 'strong' day, 12 or 13 *aq'bal* are days for working evil against others; for asking justice before the Lords of Justice that enemies may be punished for their slanders and calumnies. If divinations come out in *aq'bal* it is bad; it means that some enemy is working sorcery against one. Then one must defend oneself with strong ceremonies." She notes that *aq'bal* is symbolic of the evil in the hearts of men.
Direction: East	(Tedlock 1982:108-110)	*Ak'abal*, like any day, imparts its *nawal*…to a child born on that day. In the case of *Ak'abal*…the child will be feminine, wealthy, verbally skillful, and possibly a liar, cheat, or complainer. …on *Ak'abal*, a young man and his family plan his marriage, first approaching the Mundo through the agency of his lineage priest-shaman…and then approaching the girl's family. An *Ak'abal* day is also chosen to introduce (through prayer) a new baby to the ancestors at the lineage shrine. When the day *Ak'abal* appears in a divination, the diviner must select from the three mnemonics and their ritual associations a coherent but inspired answer to the client's question.
	(Molesky-Poz 2006:146)	(dawn, obscurity, harmony)—symbol of the first rays of dawn, the closing of the darkness, literally the aurora, the guardian of all creation. The sunrise appears over the mountains and shatters the night's obscurity and confusion. It is a day of peace and happiness.
Animal: Bat	(Hart 2008:44)	"*Aq'ab'al* also has two tasks. *Aq'ab'al* does good, and it does bad. It does good, because this *Aq'ab'al* is the early morning; it's dawning, it's becoming light. And *Aq'ab'al* is the hand. The hand—'work' first, to ascertain anything, the hand. This is the positive. Now the negative: *Aq'ab'al* is the one who does sorceries, does witchcraft. People have to speak to an *Aq'ab'al* so they will do their evil work. Just those who are born on 13 *Aq'ab'al*; the others are good, just that day is bad. On *Aq'ab'al*is when thieves or robbers come in.
	(García Ixmatá 2010:227)	Bodily Association: "sight, brain" Association in Nature: "dawn"

Table A: Comparative descriptions of the *nawales (continued)*

K'aat		
	***Source***	***Description***
Gloss: *"Net"*	(La Farge 1947:163)	The same as Iq' (Day for justice, and the wind. Protects cornfields.), and for calumnies and intrigues.
	(Wagley 1949:70)	Owner of fire; seems to be the female counterpart of Ajpu'.
	(Bunzel 1959:281)	"This is a bad day. The days 7 *aq'bal*, 8 *qat*, are bad days, cruel days, days of slanderers. On these days one can pray for protection against the envy of others… If divinations come out in the days *aq'bal* and *qat* it is bad." She notes that it is symbolic of evil in general.
Direction: West	(Tedlock 1982:110-111)	…the day for paying one's debts to the Mundo and to Nantat (ancestors). One pays these debts by offering netsfull or great heaps of copal, which are burned. When the day *C'at* appears in divination, the diviner has a pretty good idea that, regardless of the question, the client is somehow lacking in his duties to the Mundo or ancestors, or else in the everyday social world. A person whose birthday is *C'at*, because of the associations of this day, will be a fornicator or debtor or both.
	(Molesky-Poz 2006:146)	(the net to guard the corn, a womb; also heat, fire, fervor)—a sensitive day because it can roast one; it also symbolizes the fire. It is a special day to entangle, snare, or wind something, but also a day to untangle, unsnare, or unwind something. It's a day to look for companions to form a group.
Animal: Spider	(Hart 2008:44)	*"K'at* also does good and does bad. Because *K'at* is the net; there the corncobs are kept. The net—there the fish die. Also in *K'at*—more people are brought together…Do a job on *K'at* so that more people come, all united in their way of thinking, all working together. *K'at* is good good; such a person is a partner—active, strong. This is its positive side. Now its negative: if one is tied up, you can't move, because you're tied up. Like when the corncobs are put away—it's tied up in a net, it can't do a thing. So on *K'at* evil people will harm their neighbor; we're tied up, we're left all tied up—sickness, some financial failure, a whole pile of things. But the evil people do it on *K'at*. Now, good people, they'll get more partners together. That's why *K'at* has two tasks."
	(García Ixmatá 2010:227)	Bodily Association: "eyes, brain" Association in Nature: "net, web, fire"

Table A: Comparative descriptions of the *nawales (continued)*

Kaan		
	***Source***	***Description***
	(La Farge 1947:163)	For crops, anise and chile.
	(Wagley 1949:70)	Good day to pray for corn. *Chimanes* direct people to plant, clean, or harvest *milpa* on this day, if possible. Good day to pray for people with dysentery, which is sometimes due to eating corn.
Gloss: *"Cosmic Serpent"*	(Bunzel 1959:281)	"This is a cruel day, the day that brings sickness. If divinations come out in the day *qan* it is a bad sign." She notes that *qan* symbolizes the arbitrary cruelty of the universe.
Direction: North	(Tedlock 1982:111-112)	When *Can* appears in a divination, the diviner immediately asks the client who his enemy could be. He may then explore the possibility that an *ajmesa* might have been hired by this enemy to send illness or death. If the divination concerns marriage, a business deal, or the selection of a religious leader, the day *Can* means that the woman, business associate, or priest-shaman in question is an enemy or may become one, and all plans should be dropped immediately. A person whose birthday is *Can* will be a strong, powerful, evil person; the higher the number, the more extreme the character.
Animal: Snake	(Molesky-Poz 2006:146)	(snake, *Q'ukumatz*, Plumed Serpent)—symbolizes the force of the universe, the warmth of the Plumed Serpent, which appears on the horizon and communicates between the earth and the sky; a manifestation of the Heart of the Sky, Heart of the Earth. It is the mystery of the coiling of creation. The sign of the Creator, the Founder, it also is the duality of good and bad. The day of justice. *K'an* is the vision of the Maya people.
	(Hart 2008:44)	"*Kan* is the plumed serpent. The plumed serpent made itself seven times like a plumed serpent, and seven times it made itself like a spirit, flying in the air. Because the Holy Spirit nowadays [i.e., what is now called the Holy Spirit]—this is *Kan*. Because we all havae a spirit. We don't see it, but because of it, we walk, because of it, we speak—an angel's spirit. This is *Kan*. The plumed serpent has wings, it flies; we all have it. It's also fierce, but good. If you're late, *Kan* scolds a lot, he doesn't want the person to be late. Right now! So the work is done quickly. And when the work is ready, then *Kan* doesn't have the right to scold—no problem…"
	(García Ixmatá 2010:227)	Bodily Association: "genital organs, brain" Association in Nature: "serpent"

Table A: Comparative descriptions of the *nawales (continued)*

Kame		
	***Source***	***Description***
	(La Farge 1947:163)	The same as *I'x* (For money), and for calumnies and intrigues.
	(Wagley 1949:70)	Fair day; make *costumbre* for domestic animals.
Gloss: *"Death"* *"Ancestors"*	(Bunzel 1959:281)	"The day above all others for forgiveness, for asking pardon for all kinds of things. If one has stolen one asks pardon; if one wishes to sell something, one asks pardon; if one wishes to plant one asks pardon, if one has killed, one asks pardon. It is the day to ask pardon for all the evil deeds which one has committed. If divinations come out in *kamé* it is another thing. This is a good day; a pardonable day. Therefore it is a good sign not a bad one, for it means that one's evil deeds will be forgiven and the sickness will pass. Then one performs the ceremony of 8 *kamé* to ask general pardon." She notes that *kamé* is symbolic of the ultimate dissolution of all things, good and evil, in death.
Direction: South	(Molesky-Poz 2006:146)	(death)—the termination of something, of life, of obscurity, of death. It is a symbol of day and night with lots of roads, nervousness, sicknesses, a day to ask pardon.
	(Hart 2008:44)	"*Kame* has two positions. *Kame* is a good day, a strong day, fierce; this is the positive. Now, the negative, there are accidents, whatever kind of accidents, there it is, it comes in there on *Kame*. *Kame* is King of Death, King of the Skull; yes. There you die, by your own doing—you hang yourself with a rope, you strangle yourself by your own doing. In *Kame* this is. Or you have an accident; because it's all of a sudden, it hasn't been forethought, there it comes in *Kame*."
Animal: Owl	(García Ixmatá 2010:227)	Bodily Association: "all the senses, brain" Association in Nature: "death and rebirth"

Table A: Comparative descriptions of the *nawales (continued)*

Keej		
	***Source***	***Description***
	(La Farge 1947:163)	For abundance of animals.
	(Wagley 1949:70)	Make *costumbre* for horses and mules. The day name means 'horse' or 'deer.' It is an owner of the year or *alcalde*.
Gloss: *"Deer"* *"Four Corners"*	(Bunzel 1959:282)	"This is a good day, the day above all others for asking favors. The day 8 *kiej* is the great day, the day of the commemoration of the dead. It is the day for giving thanks to the ancestors for all that one has from them, for one's possession, and especially for ceremonies which come from ancient time. *Kiej* is the day for performing all the ceremonies of initiation into the arts of divination and magic." She notes that *kiej* symbolizes the transfiguration and fulfillment in death, as embodied in the ancestral cult.
Direction: East	(Molesky-Poz 2006:146)	(deer, pillars of the four cardinal points)—as the four cardinal points, pillars sustain the dynamic relationship between the earth and the sky; it is a day of solid foundations, a day of authority and honesty.
	(Hart 2008:45)	"In *Kej*, this is the four winds, the four pillars; this is a good day. Yes, they're fierce, but they're good. They are good. *Kej* is the bearer—bears good ideas, good intelligence. Yes, this *Kej* is good."
Animal: Deer	(García Ixmatá 2010:227)	Bodily Association: "shoulders" Association in Nature: "deer, authority"

Table A: Comparative descriptions of the *nawales (continued)*

Q'aniil		
	***Source***	***Description***
	(La Farge 1947:163)	Good for all, on account of being Bearer.
	(Wagley 1949:70)	Good day to pray for turkeys. One who prays on this day should always sacrifice a turkey.
Gloss: *"Seed"*	(Bunzel 1959:282)	"*Qanil* is the day of the *milpa*, a good day. It is a day to give thanks for one's *siembres*, for harvest and planting. After the harvest one waits for the day *qanil* , either 2 or 3 *qanil* , to give thanks. …it is obligatory for all people to give thanks for their food and their land on 8 *qanil* ." She notes that *qanil* is symbolic of the regeneration of the earth, of rebirth after, death, as exemplified in the growth of corn.
	(Molesky-Poz 2006:147)	(seed; the four colors of corn in Mesoamerica)—this day is the seed, the germ, the origin of life, of plants and of animals. *K'anil* is the guardian of all kinds of seeds and yeast. It is the special day to ask for seeds, to have an abundant harvest, to begin a project.
Direction: West	(Hart 2008:45)	"This is the seed; corn seed, of beans, of wheat, all kinds of seed. Now in *Q'anil*, sicknesses come into it. You get sick a lot, you do it in *Q'anil*. One who drinks *guaro*—there's *Q'anil*, the drunk, that's *Q'anil*, This is the problem they suffer from, the *Q'anil*…"
Animal: Rabbit	(García Ixmatá 2010:227)	Bodily Association: "the entire body" Association in Nature: "venus, seed, life"

Table A: Comparative descriptions of the *nawales (continued)*

Tooj		
	***Source***	***Description***
	(La Farge 1947:163)	Good for abundance of turkeys.
	(Wagley 1949:70)	Good day to pray for turkeys. One who prays on this day should always sacrifice a turkey.
Gloss: *"Offering"*	(Bunzel 1959:282)	"This is a bad day, a day of sickness. On the day *t'oj* one burns incense in the house for the Lord of Sickness. *t'oj* is also a day for calling sickness to punish an enemy. If divination comes out in 7 *qanil*, 8 *t'oj*, 9 *ts'i'* it is bad. These are bad days. The content of *qanil* is corn, or the milpa, *t'oj* is sickness, *ts'i'*, 'dog,' some shameless act." She notes that *t'oj* symbolizes the suffering which is caused by sin.
Direction: North	(Molesky-Poz 2006:147)	(offering, to pay, suffering, pain)—this day symbolizes suffering due to sin, so it is the day indicated to offer, to pay, to give, to ask for strength, for justice.
	(Hart 2008:45)	"*Toj* is good, because *Toj* is the offering; *Toj* is the person who gives an offering, who gives a sacrifice, yes. They put themselves at peace with God and at peace with the communities, with other people; this *Toj* is good. *Toj* gives a fine; since you're in prison, you're in jail, you have to give your fine to get out of jail. This is what *Toj* means."
Animal: None	(García Ixmatá 2010:227)	Bodily Association: "brain" Association in Nature: "rain, offering"

Table A: Comparative descriptions of the *nawales (continued)*

Tz'i'		
	***Source***	***Description***
	(La Farge 1947:163)	Good for dogs, justice.
	(Wagley 1949:70)	Neutral.
Gloss: *"Dog"* *"Justice"*	(Bunzel 1959:283)	"*T'si'*, 'dog,' a bad day, the worst of all. The day of shameless and beastly actions (especially sexual). This is the meaning of *t'si'* in divinations. There are no ceremonies for this day, because it is evil. But if one wishes to ask forgiveness for one's evil acts, one asks it on the next day (9 *bats*). If divinations in sickness come out in *t'si'*, it is a question of one's evil deeds. For if one is sick for a long time and does not get well, the belief is that until one has confessed to his wife his sins he will not get well. This is the meaning of the days 8 *t'oj*, 9 *t'si'*." She notes that *t'si'* symbolizes sin, especially sexual impurity.
Direction: South	(Molesky-Poz 2006:147)	(dog, raccoon)—the dog, as a symbol of disequilibrium, disorients wisdom, can bring destruction. This day is the day to dig for the good, for example, to investigate laws, to bring order and justice. It is day of authority, friendliness, intelligence.
	(Hart 2008:45)	"*Tz'i'*: this is justice. This is the law. *Tz'i'* is the governor, is with the solicitor, is with the justice of the peace—there is *Tz'i'*. *Tz'i'* is the law, and justice. Does good and does bad. Because justice does good and does bad. The good justice brings one the just; the bad justice dispenses justice, but wrongly. …*Tz'i'* is strong. *Tz'i'* is the bite."
Animal: Dog	(García Ixmatá 2010:227)	Bodily Association: "sense of smell, brain" Association in Nature: "dog, justice"

GLOSSARY

Below I provide the most typical Tz'utujil and Spanish spellings of important terms related to this investigation. Where possible, I offer common variants of the terms as well as translations in other languages. For certain terms, I have included citations so that the interested reader may continue researching the meaning and uses of these words. Ruth Bunzel (1959) is a good source to consult in regards to these specialized terms as is Nathaniel Tarn & Martín Prechtel (1997) and Vincent Stanzione (2003) .

ALMG *(Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala)*: **A national organization funded by the Guatemalan government to study and preserve Mayan languages. Each of the twenty-one ethnolinguistic community's has its own ALMG office, usually in its largest town. The national office is based in Guatemala City. [http://www.almg.org.gt/]**

Ab' *(Tz'utujil; var. Haab):* **The 365 day solar calendar of Maya peoples**.

Abuelo *(Spanish):* "grandparent." **Sometimes used to indicate an Ajq'iij, other times to refer to ancestors more generally (see *Q'atit Q'amama*)**.

Aguardiente *(Spanish):* **An inexpensive, strong liquor**.

Ahaaw *(Tz'utujil; var. Ahau, Ajau, Ajaw):* **God**.

Aj'iitz *(Tz'utujil):* **A witch/warlock**.

Ajmesa *(Tz'utujil):* **A type of religious specialist who possesses the capacity to work as a spiritual medium**.

Ajpop *(Tz'utujil):* **A Maya leader**. In Maya spirituality this term is sometimes used to indicate the invisible leader/owner of a place.

Ajq'iij *(Tz'utujil, pl. Ajq'ijaa'; K'iche', Ajq'ij, pl. Ajq'ijab'; Spanish, sacerdote Maya, guía espiritual):* **A Maya religious specialist**; sometimes referred to as a *'sacerdote Maya'* in Spanish though many practitioners prefer the translation *'guía espiritual.'*

Ajq'oom *(Tz'utujil, pl. Ajq'oomaa'):* **Healer**.

Altar Maya *(Spanish; Tz'utujil, Xukulib'al):* **A site for ritual**. Often an archaeological site or an *encanto*.

Atiteco(a)*:* **A person from Santiago Atitlán**.

Awas *(Tz'utujil and K'iche', var. xajaan):* **The cause-effect relationship between a person's actions and their consequences (see García 2008)**. Often these come in the form of prohibitions (Gómez 2001).

Ceremonia Maya *(Tz'utujil, xukuleem, var. mejeleem; K'iche', k'otzij):* **A fire ceremony that is one of the central rituals of *la espiritualidad Maya***. The ceremony typically includes offerings of various sorts, ritual cleansing/purification of participants, and a recitation of all 260 days of the *Cholq'iij*.

Chak Patan *(K'iche'):* **The destiny, or "work", that one is intended to accomplish in life. This is often related to the burdens and responsibilities of religious specialists.**

Chimalteco(a)*:* **A person from the town of Santiago Chimaltenango**.

Chimán *(Mam):* "Grandfather." **A Mam religious specialist**, analogous to *Ajq'iij* (see Wagley 1949).

Ch'obonik (*K'iche')****:* **A verb meaning "to understand" that Tedlock (1982) uses as a translation for *tz'ite'* seed divination**. Christenson corroborates this translation in his K'iche'-English dictionary (Christenson 2003). Although there is an entry in *Diccionario Tz'utujil* for *ch'ob'ooj* which means "to think, to divine; to understand" (Pérez Mendoza, et al. 2001), none of my informants knew of this term as a translation for "*adivinar*." The people I spoke with always used *pajooneem/pajooj* as the typical term for *tz'ite'* seed divination. Even in Momostenango, the people I spoke with used the equivalent term in K'iche', *pajanik*.

Chojq'aaq' *(Tz'utujil):* "**Strength, power, energy.**" (see ***Q'aaq'aal*** also) (Pérez Mendoza, et al. 2001).

Chok' *(K'iche):* see ***Ilb'al***.

Cholob'a'xik *(Tz'utujil):* "**To line things up, to put things in order**" (see related "choloj" in García Ixmatá 2010; Pérez Mendoza, et al. 2001).

Cholq'iij *(Tz'utujil; K'iche', Cholq'ij):* **A 260 day ritual calendar common throughout Mesoamerica**. See spellings of the individual days at the end of the glossary.

Chuchkajaw *(K'iche'):* "Mother-father." **A K'iche' religious specialist**; typically considered to be more advanced than an *ajq'iij*.

Consulta *(Spanish):* **A consultation and/or divination with an *ajq'iij***; this may or may not include use of *tz'ite'* seeds for *pajooneem*. *Consulta* is the most typical Spanish term for divination among my informants and colleagues.

Copal: **An incense used in a variety of rituals**.

Cosmovisión *(Spanish):* **The "world view" of Maya spirituality which includes an appreciation of space, time, and ecological holism.**

Costumbre *(Spanish; var. espiritualidad Maya):* "Customs." **A blanket term used to refer to a variety of traditional practices and beliefs**.

Cuilco: **One of the ingredients of a typical fire ceremony; small, black disks (approximately 2 cm diameter) of incense**.

Curandero(a) *(Spanish).* **Healer**. See ***Ajq'oom***.

Daykeeper: See ***Ajq'iij*.**

Delicado *(Spanish):* "Delicate." **Used to indicate something that is sensitive, dangerous, or requires great care**.

Divination: **A means of obtaining occult (that is, hidden or unknown; not otherwise accessible by typical means) information from special beings such as ancestors or deities.**

Don *(Spanish):* "gift." **Typically, an innate or divinely bestowed power, talent, or skill**. See also ***Chak Patan*** and ***Q'iij Alxik***.

Dueño del Cerros:

Encanto *(Spanish):* **An "enchanted" place where unusual things often occur**. These may be sites of ritual offerings as well.

Ensartes *(Spanish):* **One of the ingredients of a typical *ceremonia Maya*; black disks (approximately 5 cm diameter) of incense**.

Espiritualidad Maya *(Spanish; var. costumbre):* "Maya spirituality." **The most common term for the variety of ritual practices and beliefs practiced by contemporary Maya peoples, particularly in Guatemala.**

Guía Espiritual *(Spanish):* "Spiritual Guide." **see *Ajq'iij***.

Jacalteco(a): **A person from Jacaltenango**.

Il'bal *(Tz'utujil):* **A crystal used for divinatory scrying**.

Iiq' *(Tz'utujil, var. aj iq'):* **Stone sculptures, often with facial features, that are thought to have special power**. These serve as some of the ritual objects that *ajq'ijaa'* collect throughout their lifetime (Hart 2008).

Iyoom *(Tz'utujil; Spanish, comadrona):* **A midwife** (Paul 1975; Paul and Paul 1975; Rogoff, et al. 2011).

Kaa' *(Tz'utujil; Spanish, metate):* **A stone used for grinding maize or other foods** (Pérez Mendoza, et al. 2001).

K'abawiil *(Tz'utujil):* **see *Iiq'***.

Kaqchikel*:* An indigenous group of highland Guatemala. The ancient capital of the Kaqchikel is called Iximché, near the present town of Tecpán.

Kaxlan *(Tz'utujil):* "foreign, foreigner." **A term used for anything that is not indigenous**. For instance, the Tz'utujil translation of bread is *kaxlan way*, "foreigner's tortilla," and any foreign language is discussed as *kaxlan tziij*, "foreigner's words."

K'iche' *(var. Quiché):* **The largest indigenous group of the Guatemalan highlands**. The ancient capital of the K'iche' is called Q'umarkaj, near the present town of Santa Cruz del Quiché.

K'otzij *(K'iche'; Spanish, Ceremonia Maya):* **see *Ceremonia Maya***.

Koyopa *(Tz'utujil and K'iche'; var. Coyopa):* "Blood lightning." **The embodied sensations, thought to be related to lightning, at least metaphorically, that certain diviners make use of in their divinatory technique** (Tedlock 1982; Wagley 1949).

K'u'x *(Tz'utujil):* **Soul, heart, essence, core, being**[1] (see Fischer 2001; García Ixmatá 2010; Pérez Mendoza, et al. 2001).

Ladino*:* **A non-Maya Guatemalan. Ethnically, a Ladino may be Maya but so long as one does not identify with his Maya heritage (speaking only Spanish, dressing in non-native costume), then he is considered Ladino.**

***Lancha** (Spanish):* **A small boat that makes frequent crossings between towns on the shores of Lake Atitlán**.

***Lake Atitlán**:* **A freshwater lake situated in a basin surrounded by three volcanoes in the Guatemalan highlands**. Lake Atitlán was formed when a large magma chamber beneath this area collapsed. The Western and Southern shores of Lake Atitlán are populated by Tz'utujiles while the Eastern and Northern shores are populated by Kaqchikeles.

***Maxeño(a)**:* **a person from Chichicastenango**.

***Maximón**:* **a special being in highland Maya cosmology who possesses characteristics of a *Dueño del Cerro*. Popular cult centers of *Maximón* exist in Santiago Atitlán, San Jorge La Laguna, Zunil, and San Andrés Itzapa** (Carlsen 1997; Hart 2008; MacKenzie 2009; Mendelson 1959; Mendelson 1965; Tarn and Prechtel 1997).

***Mebil** (Tz'utujil and K'iche'):* **household shrine/altar** (Christenson 2003).

Mejeleem** (Tz'utujil; Spanish, Ceremonia Maya):* **see *Ceremonia Maya. A verb meaning "to bow, to prostrate oneself" (Christenson 2003).

***Milpa**:* **The corn (maize) plot that the vast majority of families possess**. Such plots range from being just sufficient for the family's needs to being rather extensive, and thus providing a significant source of income. Tending to the *milpa* typically involves elaborate *costumbre* to assure a successful crop.

Miches (var. *Mixes*): **see *Tz'ite'***.

***Momosteco**:* **A person from Momostenango**.

***Mundo** (Spanish):* "World." **In many traditional contexts, this word denotes a complex earth deity**.

***Naa'ooj** (Tz'utujil):* **Thought, knowledge, wisdom, experience, behavior, character** (García Ixmatá 2010; Pérez Mendoza, et al. 2001).

***Nawal** (Tz'utujil, var. nagual, nahual):*

***Ocote**:* **One of the ingredients of a typical fire ceremony; resinous wood used to start fires in both ceremonial and non-ceremonial contexts**.

***Ojeer** (Tz'utujil):* **In the past; may also refer to a vague 'ancestral time' or 'in the old days'**.

Oxlajuj Ajpop *(K'iche'):* **This phrase (13 rulers/leaders) is the name of an organization of *ajq'ijaa'* who work for a variety of cultural and political goals, such as the protection of sacred sites and free access for *ajq'ijaa'* to celebrate ceremonies in the state supervised archaeological sites. [ ]**

Paas *(Tz'utujil; Spanish, Faja):* **A woven belt.**

Paca: Donated clothing, *usually coming from the United States, that ends up being graded and distributed by entrepreneurs in Guatemala. This provides a steady stream of inexpensive clothing.*

Pajooneem *(Tz'utujil, var. pajooj; K'iche', pajanik):* **The typical term that was used to indicate *Tz'ite'* seed divination**. The translation given in *Diccionario Tz'utujil* is "to weigh; to balance" (Pérez Mendoza, et al. 2001).

Pan dulce*: "***Sweet bread**." Sometimes used as an offering in ceremonies.

Petate (*Spanish; Tz'utujil, pop****):*** **A woven reed mat used for numerous purposes including as a bed mattress in the past**. The woven reed mat was long used as a symbol of authority as Maya leaders used to sit on them when giving counsel. See **Ajpop**.

Pixab' *(Tz'utujil and K'iche'):* **Wise counsel**. A concise statement that sums up an important teaching (García 2008).

Pixab'axik *(Tz'utujil; K'iche', pixab'anik):* **To advise, counsel** (Pérez Mendoza, et al. 2001).

Popol Vuh: **A K'iche' text transcribed in the eighteenth century that recounts myths from a much earlier period** (Christenson 2007; Tedlock 1996).

Q'aaq'aal *(Tz'utujil):* "**Energy, brilliance, power.**" (see ***Chojq'aaq'*** also) (see Carlsen and Prechtel 1994; compare with "Bundled Glory" Christenson 2007; Pérez Mendoza, et al. 2001; compare with the "Bundle of Flames" Tedlock 1996) .

Q'atit Q'amama *(Tz'utujil; Spanish, abuelos var. antepasados):* **A term used to refer to the ancestors**.

Q'iisoom *(Tz'utujil; Spanish, characotel):* **A shapeshifter** (Bizarro Ujpán and Sexton 1992; Tax and Hinshaw 1969)***Quetzalteco(a)****:* **A person from Quetzaltenango**.

Quetzal*:* **The national bird of Guatemala; also the name of the country's currency**. In 2008-2009, the exchange rate varied between 7.5-8 *Quetzales* per 1 U.S. Dollar..

Rilaj Mam*:* **see *Maximón***.

Ruda *(Spanish):* **Rue**; an herb that is sometimes used as an offering in a *ceremonia Maya*.

Sacerdote Maya *(Spanish):* "Maya Priest." **see *Ajq'iij***.

Sanjuanero(a) (var. Juanero)*:* **A person from San Juan La Laguna**.

Sanpedrano(a) *(var. Sampedrano(a) and Pedrano(a)):* **A person from San Pedro La Laguna**.

Secreto *(Spanish):* **A secret skill or gift that one has received either through birth (as a *don*), learned in dreams, or taught by a deity**. To reveal a *secreto* usually leads to its loss.

Solooneem *(Tz'utujil, var. solooj; K'iche', solonik):* **A verb that means "to untangle, to unravel, to untangle, to unwrap"** (García Ixmatá, et al. 2009; Pérez Mendoza, et al. 2001). Part of a process of a *consulta* or meeting when those involved try to understand and clarify some situation (García 2008).

Sortilege: **A variety of divination; indicates the 'casting' of some objects or their random selection**.

Suut *(Tz'utujil):* **A large piece of cloth, typically embroidered, that *ajq'ijaa'* wear atop their heads when conducting a ritual**.

Tojil *(var. Tohil)*: **An important deity of the K'iche' and Tz'utujil during precolonial and early colonial periods** (see Christenson 2007; Recinos 1988; Tedlock 1996).

Traje *(Spanish): The traditional costume of a community. Each community typically employed a distinctive style in their dress.*

Tuk-tuk*:* **A small, three-wheeled covered vehicle with an engine between 50-75cc**. It resembles a motorcycle more than a small car, perhaps a golf-cart is the closest analogue to it in the United States. It is used as an inexpensive taxi. In 2008-2009, a ride from almost any two points in San Pedro La Laguna cost between 5-10 *Quetzales.*

Tz'atab'al *(Tz'utujil):* **see *Ilb'al***.

Tz'ite' *(Tz'utujil and K'iche', var. tz'ite, tz'ajtel, tz'ijte'l; Erythrina Corallodendron; English, Coral Tree; Spanish, Palo de Pito; Mam, Mix; Ixil, Mich):* **A squat sturdy tree with bright red flowers and seeds**. The seeds of this tree are the principal components of an *ajq'iij*'s *vara* and effigies of *Maximón* are traditionally made of this kind of wood.

Tzolk'in: **see *Cholq'iij*.**

Tz'utujil: **An indigenous group in highland Guatemala**. The Tz'utujil live along the Western and Southern shores of Lake Atitlán in the Department of Sololá. Additionally, there are small communities of Tz'utujiles west of this region in the Department of Suchitepequez. The Tz'utujil speak a Mayan language that is closely related to K'iche' and Kaqchikel. The ancient capital of the Tz'utujil is called Chuitinamit, near the present town of Santiago Atitlán.

U'ku'x Kaj, U'ku'x Ulew *(K'iche'; Spanish, Corazón del Cielo, Corazón del Mundo):* "Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth." **Deities mentioned in the *Popol Vuh*.**

Vara *(Spanish, var. baraj, envoltorio sagrado):* **Literally translated as "staff," *la vara* is the common term for an *ajq'iij*'s divining pouch which usually contains *tz'ite'* seeds, quartz crystals, and other ritual objects**. An *ajq'iij* receives *la vara* on the day that she is initiated, often this is on 8 *B'aatz'* after a long period of training. The word *vara* is also used to denote a finely carved rod or staff that leaders traditionally received to represent their authority. *Vara* is also a common unit of measurement in the highlands of Guatemala that is equivalent to a yard in length.

Weqol B'aaq *(Tz'utujil; Spanish, curandero de huesos):* "One who joins bones." **A variety of *curandero* that specializes in healing fractures and other orthopedic problems**. San Pedro La Laguna has long been famous for its *Weqol B'aaq*. Consult the following references for examples and discussions: (Bizarro Ujpán and Sexton 1992; Douglas 1969; Hinojosa 2002; Paul 1976; Rosales 1949).

Xib'alb'a *(Tz'utujil):* **The underworld in Maya myth and cosmology**. Discussed at length in the *Popol Vuh*, *Xib'alb'a* is a place where important deities dwell. In Mesoamerican cosmological schemes, there are typically 13 levels of the upper world and 9 levels of the underworld (Miller and Taube 1993).

Xukuleem *(Tz'utujil; Spanish, Ceremonia Maya):* **see *Ceremonia Maya*.** In *Diccionario Tz'utujil* this verb is translated as "to kneel" (Pérez Mendoza, et al. 2001).

Xukulib'al *(Tz'utujil; Spanish, Altar Maya):* **see Altar Maya**.

Zajorín *(Spanish)*: **see *Ajq'iij*.** (Prechtel 2006).

ENDNOTES

Chapter 3

[1] For the meaning of *secreto*, review the glossary entry. For a related discussion of Tz'utujil perspectives on *susto* and its treatment (see Quiacain Coché & Cholotío García 1998: 52-53).

[2] *"Oh! Jesucristo mi Dios: tu Dios hijo, con el Padre y el Espiritu Santo, eres un solo Dios. Hoy, en esta dia, a esta hora en este dia de Tijax; imploro a las santas que acompanan la aurora y los ultimos rayos del dia; con las Santas almas te invoco a ti! Oh! Principe de los genios que habitas en este monte de Sija-Raxquim. Venid almas santas de Juan Vachiac, de Dn. Domingo Vachiac, de Juan Ysquiaptap; almas santas de Grancisco Ecoquij, de Diego Soom, de Juan Tay, de Alonso Tzep; almas santas repito, de Diego Tziquin y de Dn. Pedro Noj; vosotros! Oh Sacerdotes, vostros a quienes esta todo patente; y tu Principe de los genios; vosotros Dios del monte, Dios del llano Dn. Purupeto Martin, venid, recibid este incienso, recibid ahora esta candela…"* This extract was taken from (Weeks, Sachshe, and Prager 2009:152). See that volume as well as (Brinton 1894:50-52) for additional discussions about this prayer and related documents.

[3] *"Francamente no comprendemos la mentalidad de aquellos que aseguran haberse salvado la Fe en Guatemala gracias a los Cofrades. Es la patraña más grande inventado aquende los mares. La verdad monad y lironda es que en Guatemala se ha mantenido la Fe Católica* ***a pesar*** *de los Cofrades… ¡Basta pensar qué elementos patrocinan las iniciativas más descabelladas de los Cofrades…! Esta es la breve noticia de una larga historia, la enojosa historia de los Cofradías de San Pedro La Laguna y de sus filiales, que pudiendo hacer tanto bien, hicieron incalculable daño."*

[4] Hart recounts an interesting statement from a Catholic priest he interviewed: "Aspects of Catholicism and the Mayan worldview have become mixed up, what they call syncretism, there's no clarity anymore. But I don't think it's wholly or totally syncretism, rather, it's part of the way people have managed to adapt Christianity; or rather to put the qualities of Christianity within the Mayan worldview, in its own specific way" (2008:176).

[5] I am less worried than some scholars about calling these beings gods or deities (and occasionally do so in what follows); all such titles should be considered with care regarding the details whenever studying a religious tradition. One tradition's god is never quite the same as what is meant by that term in some other tradition or practice.

[6] *"Lo cierto es que Maximón vive con nosotros los que creemos en él, y cada vez que mencionamos su nombre se manifiesta en diferentes canales, en diferentes medios,*

incluso en el amigo que tenemos cerca, en el movimiento del agua, si tenemos una copa de agua, o si estamos en la orilla de un lago, río o mar, en el bosque, o los medios más cercanos donde se conecta espiritualmente."

[7] *Ceremonia 11 Kame:* December 18, 2010

[8] In a correspondence with Thomas Hart (July 29, 2011), he concluded that a *nawal* might best be conceived as the spiritual "essence of something." As he noted when *nawal* is understood this way, it can easily refer to "1) a day-name in the calendar (its essence, personality, character); 2) a sacred stone; 3) 'the spirit' of anything or anyone; 4) that part of the soul which is transformed into another form (animal changer) or manifested symbolically by an animal; 5) the part of the soul which leaves the body in dreams, or stressful events; 6) a protector (sometimes 'angel') much like a guardian angel."

[9] *"…y el demonio los engañaua, y aparecia como leon, tigre, o coyote, q[ue] es vn animal como lobo, y en forma de lagarto, culebra, o de pajaro; porq[ue] destos animals, y aues de rapiña, ay muchos en esta prouincia: y estos llaman naguales, que era táto como dezir guardadores, o compañeros; y quando moria el pajaro, tambien moria el Indio que estaua con el prendado…y era de manera que les parecia que el que no tenia nagual, no podia ser rico."*

[10] *"Mágica o nigromancia: Puz, o naual. Y a los mágicos o hechizeros llamaban así. Era género de mágica de q[ue] vsaban, transformándose en águilas, leones, tigres, etc. Y, así, decían: ru puz, ru naval Pedro lae cot, balam. Y a algunos árboles o peñas, o otras cosas inanimada donde el demonio les hablaba, o en los ídolos q[ue] tenían, llamaban: puz naval, o qazlic che, qazlic abah huyu, qo ru naval, creyendo q[ue] auía en ellos vida. Tenían sus exércitos y soldadesca para guardar sus tierras, y los capitanes (y muchos q[ue] no lo eran) tenían sus navales. Al capitán, llamaban: ru qal ach[i], r'ohob achi; ti r'uqaah ru pocob, ru qhamey a[h] quay, ti be chi navalil ["el que lleva su escudo, su bastón de mando, el que va con naual"] Hacer así estas mágicas o nigromancias: tin navalih, v[erbo] actiuo."*

[11] *"Poder: …Al poder q[ue] tienen los sacerdotes de perdonar los pecados y dar sacramentos, le llaman, o an llamado: puz, naval; vg., ta bana a confessión ch'u vach P[adr]e sacerdote, at vaya, rumal chire yaom vi can rumal Jesuchr[ist]o k'ahaual ru puz, ru naval; rumal chiri quo vi cachbal mac, chiri qo vi nima maihabal, chiri qo vi r'utzintacibal pa qui qa Padres ['haz tu confesión frente al padre sacerdote, enfermo, porque a él le fue dado por Jesucristo nuestro señor la virtud, el poder; porque el perdón de los pecados, la facultad de obrar maravillas, su poder está puesto en manos de los Padres.']"*

[12] (OneNote 55081308)

[13] (OneNote 55070808)

[14] (00AQ020709 1:00-4:00)

[15] (00AQ020709 2:27-3:25); this is very similar to a statement by one of Molesky-Poz's informants (see 2006:66-67).

[16] *"En el idioma Kaqchikel está definido como Jawal, el cual es sinónimo de Nawal; significa encanto, dueño, guardián, cuidador, protector, esto quiere decir, que las denominaciones tienen que ver con el context, si se habla de un lugar, o un cerro, se refiere al nawal o al encanto o guardián propio del cerro o del lugar…"*

[17] *"En el contexto humano, lo podemos definir como el guardián de la persona, es un espiritú de protección."*

[18] *"Las sociedades indígenas tuvieron como base el establecimiento de relaciones de reciprocidad: es decir, las relaciones entre las personas, and entre estas y el cosmos se fundamentan en "la obligación de dar, la de recibir y la de devolver". La base de las regulaciones sociales surge del delicado equilibrio entre lo que se da -y es obligación de recibir-; lo que se recibe y lo que se devuelve."*

[19] (November 17, 2011) Personal communication, Montreal

[20] (00DPC020509 9:40-9:46) *"…siempre anda conmigo. Porque esta es mi mujer. Esta es mi pareja."*

[21] (November 17, 2011) Personal communication, Montreal

[22] (00E071708 60:12)

[23] (00DJS010909 45:10)

[24] (00APG122510 20:00)

[25] *"Si yo cobrara por mi trabajo y los servicios que presto para alimentarme, dejaría de tener valor mi trabajo, que es ayudar. Si yo dijera cobro tanto por consulta y los compañeros me ven, no lo aceptarían, nuestro trabajo se perdería. Nosotros trabajamos para los hombres y las mujeres de nuestro pueblo. Así que seguimos el Cholq'ij, para saber como vamos a proceder día a día."* (García 2008:61)

[26] This image is page 75 of the Codex Vaticanus 3738 (Ríos 1979: 54v)

Chapter 4

[1] Don Francisco has stated that he counts through an arrangement two or three times (00DJS122610 8:30-10:16). The first two readings, then, are highly likely while the third modeled here may or may not have been a consideration for him in his interpretations.

[2] *Pixab'* (Tz'utujil for "wise counsel") is used in passing but deserves a lengthier discussion. Among highland Maya groups *pixab'* is an essential means for the transmission of wisdom from elders to the community-at-large. While it most simply means "advice" there are, in fact, a complex set of connotations about *pixab'* that imbue it with ancestral authority and the transmission of wisdom interpersonally and intergenerationally. These connotations include notions of cause and effect in regards to human action (cf. García 2008: 59-63). Additionally, *pixab'* is sometimes translated as "laws" (Gómez Gómez and Oxlajuj Ajpop 2001:83-85) and other times as "norms" (Defensoría Indígena Wajxaqib' No'j 2003:22).

Appendix

[1] After 19, the number 20 and higher were represented vertically in powers of 20. So a dot above the number 11 (above) would indicate 31, that is, a bundle of 20 plus 11. A dot above thirty one would indicate 431, that is, a bundle of 400, a bundle of 20, and 11, et cetera.

Glossary

[1] *K'u'x* has an interesting parallel in the Yucatec term *k'uxan*. Astor-Aguilera discusses the term: "Maya crosses are often conceptualized as a living green tree or plant, causing some of my consultants to conceive of their crosses as being *k'uxan*, that is, alive. Live here does not mean that these crosses are literally believed to be animate living objects; rather in indigenous Maya thought, the term *k'uxan* in this context refers to invisible beings with volition and agency that are associated with these or other communicating objects" (2010:96)

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