Mayan Realities: Exploring the Base of the Pan-Mayan Movement

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Abstract:

This study compares the general ideology and goals of the Pan-Mayan Movement in Guatemala with local realities in the highland Mayan town of San Andrés Xecul. Using interviews with community members and observations in the town, it evaluates the validity of criticism directed at the movement’s advocacy of Mayan unity and its purported disconnect from the majority of Mayan people. Contrasting sources of identity, the definition of Maya, and the goals of the local community with those of El Movimiento Maya, this paper evaluates the proximity of the movement with the views of the Mayan people it claims to represent.

The Pan-Mayan Movement

The Pan-Mayan Movement, a response to the 36-year Guatemalan civil war and the racism it exposed, works for the preservation and revitalization of the Mayan culture while advocating for governmental reform in accordance with the Guatemalan constitution, peace accords, and international law (Fischer and Brown 1996: 13). The movement is led by Mayan activists and intellectuals such as Victor Montejo and Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil. Montejo describes it as “a cultural movement of self-understanding and valuation of the Maya heritage” (2005: 31). While activists foster recognition of a common Maya ancestry that is both a source of pride and unity (Bastos et al. 2007: 8), critics dispute both the unity of the Maya people and their intimate connection with the ancient Maya. Critics claim El Movimiento Maya is detached from the Maya peoples, both in ideology and goals (for an overview, see Warren: 1996).

The Pan-Mayan Movement is well-documented in academia through literature by both foreign and Guatemalan scholars, advocates and critics. In the end, however, the movement is primarily responsible to one group: the Mayan people with whose

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1 Also referred to in this paper as just San Andrés.
2 The Mayan Movement
voices it claims to speak. The movement’s leaders claim authority from their numbers and work for their advancement as a people. The goal of this study is to compare the general trend in ideology and the ends articulated by *El Movimiento Maya* with those of the Mayan community of San Andrés Xecul, Guatemala.

**Methodology**

Recognizing the wide range of opinions within Guatemalan society regarding the tenets of the Pan-Mayan Movement, Bastos et al. completed a survey of how those on the periphery, not generating the discourse, are receiving and interpreting the ideology of the Mayan and multicultural movement (2007: 12). They created seven “identidades étnicas de los(as) indígenas,” into which they placed communities and organizations. This study is an in-depth look at a town that best falls under Bastos et al.’s category of “Orgullosamente indígenas” (2007: 45). While Bastos et al. write in general terms that this group is distinguished by their positive ethnic identity, pride in what they consider their own culture, and a non-political outlook that does not necessarily coincide with that of the Mayanists, I take a deeper look into the specifics of San Andrés. In this way, my project is an extension of Bastos et al.’s 2007 survey.

This study is a spot check comparison of the blueprint of the Pan-Mayan Movement with local realities; it neither spans the breadth of topics covered by the various voices of the movement nor exhausts the depth of any one topic. I covered the issues most central to *El Movimiento Maya* and most relevant to the community of San Andrés. In so doing, I was able to analyze the various components of a broad social movement in a local context in order to evaluate the movement’s proximity in motivations, goals, and perspectives to the people it claims to represent.

To assess how well the Pan-Mayan Movement aligns with local realities, I explored three overarching questions. First, what are the sources of identity of the
Xeculenses? This question is integral to evaluating the movement because *El Movimiento Maya* generally assumes that there is a universal Mayan identity, a position that critics vehemently dispute. For the movement to successfully advocate for rights as a people, there must first be a legitimate and recognized group.

Second, who are the Maya? As the Pan-Mayan Movement attempts to unify people under this banner, I tried to discover the local meanings of this term and its implications. Lastly, how representative are the leaders and objectives of *El Movimiento Maya* of the town of San Andrès? I use community opinions of specific issues to evaluate criticism that the Pan-Mayan Movement is detached from local populations.

To explore these questions, I lived in the highland town of San Andrés Xecul, Guatemala from February 10, 2008 to March 3, 2008. K´iche is the predominant language on the streets, and it is rare to find a woman out of *traje*. With a population said by residents to be entirely Maya except for Ladinos who teach at the high school level, the town is an excellent location to investigate a Mayan perspective, and because the Pan-Mayan Movement is relatively unknown, the viewpoints are largely affected by the ideology propagated by the movement. Employing a participant observation approach, I attended Catholic and Evangelical church services, elementary and high school classrooms, and joined in the everyday activities of a host family. This approach allowed me to pinpoint the main categories local people use to identify themselves and others and gave me an idea of how the Pan-Mayan Movement has affected their lives.

My initial observations allowed me to format my research instrument, a list of 17 questions designed to elicit in-depth information about identity, the definition of Maya, and opinions on the specific tenets of *El Movimiento Maya*. These questions, listed in Fig. A, were posed during formal interviews usually lasting about 45 minutes. I

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3 Xeculense is the local term for a person from San Andrés Xecul.
4 Traditional Mayan dress. *Traje* styles vary by community, and each community has its own traditional style (Field notes February 11, 2008).
found this format useful given the complexity of the questions because it allowed for follow-up questions, clarifications, and an overall depth of answers that a written questionnaire might not have provided. In two interviews, I spoke with two informants at once, but I found this method less effective because interviewees tended not to agree with each other and did not offer the dissonance I found through individual interviews.

Attempting to isolate other major variables that might influence responses, I categorized respondents by age, sex, and religion, and I considered occupation and family ties between contacts. I ensured that I had a broad sampling of interviewees. For a complete breakdown of the categories and how they influenced responses, see Fig. B. I found my contacts through my interactions in the town, especially church services, schools, and the families that hosted me and the other students.

This research was limited by three main factors. First, my position as a foreigner studying Mayan culture at times made direct and truthful answers elusive. This problem was most apparent when learning about the community opposition to K’iche lessons in the school; few parents would directly say they did not want it taught because they did not want to either devalue their language in front of me or appear as if they did not esteem their culture. What information I found on this subject came from second-hand accounts by teachers and from one family with whom I became close enough that they explained both their opinion and their perceptions of the reluctance of other parents.

Second, I found interviews with men more difficult to arrange and generally less informative, so my data may be missing critical viewpoints. Men were often out of the house, and when they gave interviews, they were less open with me than the women, possibly because of the more traditional gender roles in the town. Lastly, this study was limited by time. Three weeks presented a snapshot of life in San Andrés, but it did not reveal aspects and intricacies that would doubtless have been exposed with more time.
In my discussions, the term Maya was controversial. While some told me it was a synonym of *indígena,* but for others it carried a deeper meaning, which will be discussed later in the paper. I use the term Maya in this paper to describe those who, from an etic perspective, show Mayan characteristics: they wear *traje* and speak K’iche. I use this term throughout the paper, although interviewees used both Maya and *indígena* in their discussions about themselves and the people of San Andrés Xecul.

**Identity in San Andrés Xecul**

The Pan-Mayan Movement espouses a Mayan unity and common peoplehood in its discourse. Maintaining that “[t]he Maya consider the 30 Maya nationals/linguistic communities to be a common people,” Cojtí Cuxil claims many rights on the basis of this peoplehood (1996: 27). However, opponents claim that the Maya are not a unified people, but rather many smaller groups with loyalty to their local community rather than to an overarching Mayan culture (Warren 40). If loyalty to local communities prevents an overarching unity, it repudiates the legitimacy of the Pan-Mayan Movement and its ability to speak for the Maya as one people.

In my fieldwork, I discovered layers of identity for each person, and in this paper I will present the four general levels most pertinent in the lives of the Xeculenses and relevant to the Pan-Mayan Movement. In each category, people spoke in terms of *nosotros* and *ellos,* recognizing distinct differences between groups and commonality within them. This paper orders these categories of identity from most local to most universal.

**Religion**

Within San Andrès Xecul, religious identities had primacy. Most social interaction observed was within religious groups. Well-attended evangelical religious

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5 indigenous  
6 us  
7 them
services run every night for at least two hours, and many evangelicals attend service before the day begins at five a.m. as well. Many young people spent the majority of their time with friends from their church; my host brothers spent their evenings with fellow students from their catechist class, and my host sisters spent time with other girls from the Catholic choir. Many adult Catholics are also members of small organizations which meet socially to pray and do social work together.

Young children revealed particularly well the division religion causes within the community. Anna, a sixth grade student who became my friend over the weeks, asked me what religion I was, her third question after my name and where I was from. Upon discovering that I am also baptized Catholic, she grabbed my hand as if she had discovered a deep bond and told me we were like sisters (Field notes February 15, 2008). I further understood the connection of religion when I saw a group of students taunting a girl because her family members were brujos who practice the Mayan religion (Field notes February 20, 2008). The sixth grade teacher Luis Revelino pointedly stated that, while he is Catholic-practicing at home, at school he has no religion because the divisions of religion do not belong in the classroom (Interview February 15, 2008).

This separation of religious groups was so prominent that it overshadowed ethnic identity for many people. Don Pedro repeated a belief common among many who practice the Mayan religion, “Personas que asisten las iglesias Evangélicas no son Maya porque los Mayas no crean en eso” (Interview February 11, 2008). Thus, religious rifts have a direct impact on the unity of both the immediate community and the Maya people as a whole.

Municipio

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8 Witches, a common term used by those who do not practice the Mayan religion.
9 municipality
Despite these divisive religious identities, all contacts presuppose a commonality among their fellow Xeculenses. They often pointed out the different traje styles as a major division and form of identity, as well as differences in food and customs. For example, in San Andrés Xecul, the custom of pedir novia comprises one day in which a young man’s family brings gifts to the home of a girl’s family in courtship, but in other towns it lasts eight days (Apolonio, interview February 23, 2008). While such differences may seem like nuances to an outsider, they spark definitive statements by Xeculenses. Magdalena, when asked to describe similarities between municipios, said, “Todo es diferente: forma de vida, de ser, sus culturas, comida…” (Interview February 16, 2008). Luis Revelino summarized, “Nuestra cultura es de nuestro municipio” (Interview February 15, 2008).

**Language**

On a broader level, the Xeculenses place great weight on the common bond of their Mayan linguistic groups, the K´iche Maya. K´iche Maya from surrounding areas come to participate in ceremonies on San Andrés Xecul’s holy sites and share in their festivals (María, Field notes February 11, 2008). Such common activities and the facility of communication have formed a group bond and recognition of a common culture. Don Juan expounded, “es posible que todos [Mayan linguistic groups] tengan la misma cultura,” but because of the language barrier he cannot be sure; all he knows is that the K´iche are similar (Interview February 20, 2008).

This linguistic bond overshadows religious differences. While accusations that evangelicals are not Maya ran rampant, I was corrected when I suggested that they were no longer K´iche. Don Pedro told me that evangelicals remain K´iche because they use the language, even in their churches (Field notes, February 25, 2008). Both Catholic and evangelical churches employ Spanish and K´iche during religious services and prayer.
Contrary to Kray’s finding that, “the association of the Spanish language with the God of the institutional church (whether Catholic or Protestant) is today quite clear,” (2004: 117), K’iche is a valid part of the San Andrés religious system. These findings speak to the importance Xeculenses place on language and explain how the linguistic bond transcends religious divisions.

Maya

Finally, all sources recognized a universal Maya identity, a feeling of peoplehood with other Maya groups that eclipses language and location. One external manifestation of this affiliation was in the wearing of traje. Although not wearing traje (for a woman) is nearly universally disdained in San Andrés Xecul as “no identificamos de donde somos” (Marí Isabel, Interview February 21, 2008) or acting ladino, traje styles may be and often are adopted from different regions. This decision is simply a matter of fashion, and the choice is not seen as a rejection of their culture (Noemi, Interview February 27, 2008). Thus, in traje, identifying as Mayan is more important than identifying as Xeculense.

Discrimination and unequal opportunity is a common theme when discussing similarities among the Mayan groups. Apolonio draws their association back to the Conquistadors, who had the same effect on all Mayan groups (Interview February 23, 2008). Magdalena said today “todos tienen la misma discriminación,” (Interview February 16, 2008) and Mari Isabel goes so far as to say it is the strongest similarity between groups (Interview February 21, 2008).

Conclusion

In response to the criticism leveled at the Pan-Mayan Movement, this study finds that while there is strong identification with the local community, it does not diminish the ties to the larger “pueblo Maya” (Julia María Chan, Interview February 13). These
findings support Montejo’s acknowledgement that the recent past has been pivotal in the creation of a Pan-Mayan movement because of the solidarity resulting from common persecution (2005: 27-33). The people of San Andrés Xecul believe that, despite their differences, all Maya face the same discrimination and all want the same rights that have been denied them.

Luis Revelino provided a fitting analogy of the layers of Mayan identity (Interview February 15, 2008). The whole Mayan people are like a family, he said, one with many parts. Other communities are like brothers to San Andrés Xecul; they are not identical and Xeculenses are quick to note differences, but nevertheless they share a common bond and have a common origin that is as important as their differences.

The most divisive factor affecting the Mayan identity was religion and its relation to being Maya. In a community rapidly converting (San Andrès Xecul was 31% evangelical according to the 2005 census, an 11% increase from the census data available when Seth Procter wrote his paper in February 2006), evangelicalism is a force that must be considered if the Pan-Mayan Movement is to unify the Maya under a common cause as a common people. The role religion is to play in this peoplehood must be determined. This study has determined that in San Andrés Xecul, the sentiment of unity as a Maya people is present; what remains necessary for the Pan-Mayan Movement is to unify the definition of this people.

**The Meaning of Maya**

Kay Warren writes, “Maya culture represents the meaningful selective mix of practice and knowledge, drawn on and resynthesized at this historic junction by groups who see indigenous identity as highly salient to self-representation and as a vehicle for political change” (1998:12). This classic constructionist position stands in contrast to the Maya “essence” with core values and a distinct worldview activists such as Montejo
claim was passed on to the Maya people from their common ancestors (2004: 231). Constructionists find “no essential...Maya, but rather, in the face of discrimination, a complex, ever changing self-authorship, which sometimes reweaves and sometimes rejects the past” (Warren 1998: 74).

This section explores what it means to be Maya to the people of San Andrés Xecul: their link to the ancient Maya, the most important aspects of the culture today, and the mutability of Mayan identity. The most interesting finding was the lack of a unified response, either from the community or from subgroups within the community. There was no obvious pattern along the variables of age, sex, or religion. Even within the same immediate family, responses varied greatly when the interviews were completed with members separately. Fig. B shows some of this variation.

_The ancient Maya_

When prompted with the initial question “¿Qué es Maya?” all interviewees except one referred to the ancient Maya of the precontact period. No one referred to the modern people, though some called the ancient Maya “nuestros abuelos” (Luis Revelino, Interview February 15, 2008) or “nuestros ancestros” (Don Juan, Interview February 20, 2008). “Eran grandes hombres,” Julia María Chan said, explaining that they created a writing system based on symbols and an advanced calendar. Fielding questions about how these great men relate to the Maya today, she explained that “Maya no existe hoy,” and there is no connection between the Maya and the “Maya o indígenas” of today (Interview February 13, 2008).

While Julia María Chan’s response was the most radical version, the sentiment that “puros Mayas” do not exist due to cultural deterioration was echoed by five other respondents. Some of these people, such as Flori and Susana, claimed only an

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10 The one outlier, Marí Isabel, said Maya is a religious ceremony. To be Maya, she said, you must be born on the correct day of the Mayan calendar, and this _nawal_ means you can perform these ceremonies (Interview February 21, 2008).
indigenous identity for the Maya of today because of their differences from the ancient people (Interview February 18, 2008). Others, like Julia María Chan, simply accepted that the term Maya has two different meanings, one for the ancient people and one for the different, unconnected Maya of today (Interview February 13, 2008).

Flori said of her evangelical family, “Somos más adelantados que los antiguos Maya” because they do not practice the brujería\textsuperscript{11} of the Mayan religion. Even these brujos do not follow all of the original Mayan customs, however, so they cannot be considered “puros Mayas” either, she said (Interview February 18, 2008). Don Andrés presented the opposite view. The ancient Maya were stronger, he said, explaining how their wisdom in natural medicines, knowledge that modern medicine has displaced over the years, kept them from getting sick (Interview February 21, 2008).

Like Pan-Mayan Movement leaders, most contacts recognized the ancient Maya as the source of their culture, a link in which they take pride. Don Andres defined being Maya today as being proud of the good customs past on from the ancestors, the first inhabitants of Guatemala (Interview February 21, 2008). Don Juan elucidated, “Vivo aquí, en mi tierra, y soy orgulloso de mis antepasados” (Interview February 20, 2008).

This pride in the past encourages the continuation of Mayan culture. Noemi explained, “No quiero cambiar traje o lengua porque tienen valor a mis ancestros” (Interview February 27, 2008). Even Julia María Chan, who does not recognize a link with the ancient Maya, values the continuation of tradition and said, “Mi mamá era de corte y yo no quiero cambiar” (Interview February 13, 2008).

\textit{Mayan culture today}

When discussing what it means to be Maya today, the majority of interviewees (including the majority of evangelicals) mentioned religion among their first responses;

\textsuperscript{11} This term for Mayan ceremonies is common among those who do not practice the Mayan religion.
in San Andrés Xecul, the word Maya has strong religious connotations. While Cojtí Cuxil claims the right of the Maya people to “freely organize and administer their own…religious institutions” (1996: 43), the Pan-Mayan Movement generally does not present religion as a foremost issue. Montejo’s discussions of the unity of the Maya people draw from linguistic roots, descent from a common culture from the precontact period, and common oppression in recent times, hardly mentioning the role of religion in this unity (2005: 16-36).

In contrast, in San Andrés Xecul religion ranged from one factor of Mayan identity to the decisive factor. Apolonio, an evangelical pastor, self-identifies as Maya although when asked what being Maya means today he said, “Tener presente nuestra religión, cultura,…” (Interview February 23, 2008). Despite his statements that Mayan ceremonies are brujería that he does not practice, he still lays claim to the Maya religion (“nuestra religión”) based on his ancestry. Many who reject the Mayan religion likewise see it as a part of the Mayan culture, but a dispensable part that they can discard without contradicting their cultural identity.

As noted in the section on religious identity, many deny that one who does not practice the Mayan religion can be Maya, calling them instead “indígena” (Maria, a Maya-practicing Catholic, Field notes February 22, 2008); Flori, an evangelical, Interview February 18, 2008) or “mestiza” (Lorenza, a Maya-practicing Catholic, interview February 14, 2008) because they mix the Mayan and Spanish cultures. For these people, Maya is a religious term, separate from the term “indígena,” which has ethnic connotations based exclusively on birth and non-religious cultural traits. “Somos Maya y aparte somos indígenas,” Don Pedro explained (Field notes February 14, 2008).

Other markers of Mayan identity were more straightforward and accepted in academic literature, that of traje and language. These are aspects of the culture actively
promoted by the Pan-Mayan Movement and universally recognized as Maya (Cojtí Cuxil 1996: 32-39). The importance El Movimiento Maya places on language as a highly visible and central aspect of the Mayan culture is supported by sources in San Andrés Xecul, all of whom could speak K’iche. Lorenza leads a local organization, Poder y Fuerza, which supports K’iche writers actively revitalizing the culture by propagating the Mayan language. While discrimination has tinged the language with embarrassment, Lorenza classifies it as an important feature of the Mayan identity that needs to be revindicated as such (Interview February 14, 2008).

At times the theoretical importance community members placed on the K’iche language did not match the realities I found in the town. Flori declared that language is so important that if “perdimos nuestra lengua, perdímos nuestra cultura,” a disastrous possibility according to her (Interview February 18, 2008). However, her elementary school-aged children Brenda and Alexander claimed they could not speak K’iche and could only understand parts, a common statement from the young people of the community (Field notes February 11, 2008). While Flori declared that they are lying and that she speaks to them in K’iche and they understand everything; she believes that they will speak it when they get older and thus the language will be passed on to their children (Field notes February 25, 2008).

Some respondents mentioned the loss of K’iche in the community with nostalgia and fear. Susana said the language is disappearing rapidly; just 20 years prior everyone spoke K’iche, but now a mix of Spanish and K’iche is heard. Soon, she fears, K’iche might vanish completely, a loss of identity and knowledge of “de dónde somos” (Interview February 18, 2008). Don Juan said of the hybridization of Spanish and K’iche, “La mezcla es mala porque nos confunde. Ni hablamos bien el K’iche ni el
español” (Interview February 21, 2008). In addition to the loss of the Mayan culture, he sees this mix destroying communication in San Andrés Xecul.

A common theme in interviews was the reluctance of other community members to uphold the Mayan cultural traditions such as traje and K’iche because of embarrassment. Juana said of Xeculenses, “Muchas tienen vergüenza [of traje and K’iche] y no quieren mantener la cultura” (Interview February 22, 2008). María seconded that it is now impossible to successfully uphold the culture because of the influence of those wear Western clothing and refuse to speak K’iche (Interview February 22, 2008). Luis Revelino told stories of parents who would not allow their children to wear traje or speak K’iche because they hope they will one day move to the city and they worry it will make them vulnerable to discrimination and put them at a disadvantage (Interview February 15, 2008).

Despite efforts to find contacts in San Andrés Xecul that reject the Mayan culture, this group remained a mythical minority in my study. In my three weeks, I saw few girls regularly out of traje (although many young girls occasionally wore gym pants in order to play sports). When I asked about those that I saw, I was always told in hushed voice that, rather than a rejection of their culture, their jeans were a sign that they could not afford to wear the more expensive traje. Noemi, like many women, agreed that traje was very expensive and that women with financial difficulties often have to wear pants because they do not have traje or have only one (Interview February 27, 2008).

When describing the essence of their culture, respondents often pointed to something less measurable than language and traje as the central aspect: a common respect for others. María and Juana distinguish respect as the most important feature of their culture, and they regret most the loss of customs that maintain that respect
Traditionally, one would greet elders individually with a *buenas días* in the morning and the elder would touch the head of the young person in recognition, they explained, but today people are more likely to scurry past without acknowledging their elders. Don Juan also named respect as the fundamental component of the Maya “forma de ser,” an element that is dissipating with time (Interview February 20, 2008). The true Mayan way to finish a meal, he explained, is to thank everyone in the room individually; today many use a perfunctory *gracias a todos* in its place, but this phrase fails to convey the same respect as the old custom.

Culture loss is perceived as an almost inevitable occurrence and, even by the young people, always with nostalgia for better times, but contacts claim not to know the source of this loss. The loss of cultural values is called “alienation” by Montejo, who blames “media, TV, and video games” for their influence on young people (2004: 237). However, unlike the more public displays of Mayan culture, respect cannot be revitalized through a government-funded program, especially if it is the result of outside media and influences; media will inevitably leave its mark on even the most remote *aldea*. Thus, in the loss of the most vital part of the Mayan culture according to the people of San Andrés, the Pan-Mayan activists are relatively impotent.

**Mutability of the Mayan identity**

Finally, to further delve into the Mayan identity, I asked if one could choose not to be Maya. The essentialist view attributed to the Pan-Maya Movement claims that Mayan identity is deeper than a simple way of life; it is an essence. Although Montejo recognizes the process of “ladinization” in which Mayas “try to pass as Ladinos by denying their cultural heritage,” his rhetoric implies that such a decision is farce rather than an actual transformation from Maya to ladino (2004: 237).

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12 Good day  
13 Thanks to all  
14 Small town, village.
The people of San Andrés Xecul agree with Montejo, and no interviewee said that a person could completely negate their Mayan identity. However, there were different terms for what one becomes when they reject their Mayan culture. María labeled those who reject *traje*, K´iche, or the Mayan religion “indígena” (Field notes February 22, 2008). Julia María Chan said someone born to Mayan parents can become “mestizaje” if they act ladino (Interview February 13, 2008). Apolonio maintained that while those who “no acepta su realidad” can reject the culture, they cannot change their blood and therefore remain Maya (Interview February 23, 2008).

Luis Revelino and Don Juan see Mayan identity as a layered entity, of which some can be peeled off while still maintaining its core spirit. Don Juan identifies as Maya “tal vez solamente en idoma porque mi apellido es espanol,” and those who have lost their language as well identify only “por su naturaleza,” he said (Interview February 20, 2008). While Luis Revelino said many have lost parts of their culture, the presence of other elements, whether *traje*, language, religion, or even just Mayan parentage, reveal that they are still Maya at heart (Interview February 15, 2008).

These statements of the immutability of Mayan identity are convincing evidence that the community, like the Pan-Maya Movement in general, hold an essentialist view of their identity. Furthermore, contacts echoed Montejo’s statement that “Mayas and ladinos are different and move within different conceptions of the world” (2005: 14). When María said the Maya “forma de pensar” is different than the ladino form, Juana agreed, giggling, “Maya piensan más que los ladinos” (Interview February 22, 2008).

**Leaders and Goals of El Movimiento Maya**

While the previous sections compared the ideology of the Pan-Mayan Movement with local beliefs, this section will compare the goals and ability of the movement to speak for the people of San Andrés Xecul. Much criticism of *El
*Movimiento Maya* is leveled at its leaders, socially-mobile, affluent intellectuals. Their cosmopolitan lives, so different from the rural poverty in which many Maya live, puts them in danger of losing connection with the needs of the base of their movement (Warren 1998: 40). Warren writes that the disconnect results in activists and rural communities pursuing separate agendas with different values and goals (1998: 30-31).

**Movement Leaders**

While all interviewees recognized that higher education had the ability to disconnect a Mayan student from their people, most said this change was a decision that could be avoided. Well-educated, Mayan individuals are faced with the decision of whether or not to discriminate against and belittle those who have not achieved the same educational opportunities, they said, and it they choose not to practice discrimination they maintain their Mayan essence. Don Juan said, “cuando la persona es sincera,” they can stay true to their roots. Apolonio agreed, “Si tiene sabiduría, no cambia; si no, cambia.” The consensus in San Andres Xecul is that criticism of the Pan-Mayan Movement leaders because of their education is unfounded.

**Bilingual Education**

Despite the national criticism, the Pan-Mayan Movement has brought their discourse and multicultural ideology to the national arena, initiating the “Mayanización” of the country (Bastos et. al 2007: 11). *El Movimiento Maya* successes have been particularly ample in the Ministry of Education, with bilingual education and curriculum reform (Fischer and Brown 1996: 15). These changes are visible in the Juan Ruperto Escuela Mixta in San Andrés Xecul.

When bilingual education was introduced, it was rejected by parents who see Spanish as a more necessary part of their children’s education. Both teachers Julia María Chan and Luis Revelino said parents’ complaints caused the bilingual program to
be discontinued (Interviews February 13, 2008 and February 15, 2008). Flori, a mother, justified that while K’iche is taught in the home, “español es progresar,” the language needed to travel or work outside of San Andrés Xecul (Interview February 18, 2008). When K’iche is taught, it takes time that could be spent practicing Spanish, an area in which students struggle to speak and write correctly. She complained that many teachers who speak K’iche primarily are not able to properly teach the Spanish language. Knowing that her daughter Gladys will need a good background in Spanish if she is to continue her education, Flori transferred her from the class of a Xeculense teacher into that of a teacher from the city who spoke Spanish as her primary language.

Susana added that knowledge of Spanish must extend beyond simple grammar because a K’iche accent brings discrimination in the city (Interview February 18, 2008). Many Spanish-speaking Maya do not pronounce words correctly, leading to derision and humiliation when they move away from San Andrés. Even within the town, Spanish is highly valued, Flori’s daughter Gladys said, and the Reina Indígena15 competition includes an assessment of written and spoken Spanish (Field notes February 25, 2008).

**Rights of the Maya people**

The Pan-Mayan Movement’s focus is on “self-determination as the right of indigenous people to freely express themselves by using their knowledge system and cultural values” (Montejo 2005: 196). Cojtí Cuxil’s claims to rights for the Maya people include equalizing measures such as Maya representation in Congress (1996: 32-33) and “reducing the discrepancy in material development between regions” (1996: 45). However, they also extend to culture-specific measures such as “Mayanizing” teaching techniques (1996: 39) and the “development of Mayan languages” by government-funded standardization and promotion programs (1996: 36).
When asked about the rights needed for the Maya people, contacts spoke more of equal rights than rights that correspond to peoplehood. “El respeto” was the most desired right, described as the end of “racismo, desigualidad” (Don Andrés, Interview February 21, 2008). Magdalena cited that the Maya are protected from discrimination in the peace accords (Interview February 16, 2008), and Luis Revelino invoked the constitution as the source of the freedom to practice one’s culture without discrimination (Interview February 15, 2008). Flori, Susana, and Don Andrés mentioned equal access to health and education specifically (Interviews February 18, 2008 and February 21, 2008). No one asked for cultural rights beyond equality, all stressing like Don Juan that, “Todos son iguales” (Interview February 20, 2008).

**Conclusion**

This study attempted to evaluate the proximity of the Pan-Mayan Movement to the local realities in San Andrés Xecul. I found that while the ideology of *El Movimiento Maya* is grounded in local beliefs, their goals extend beyond the perceived needs and priorities of the local community and their ability to successfully implement changes. Furthermore, the Pan-Mayan Movement fails to reflect local rhetoric and changes in the demography of the Maya people.

Despite the critiques, the Pan-Mayan Movement is based on a unity recognized by the *Xeculenses*. It is true that the *municipio* is the immediate source of identity and claims the loyalty of its citizens. However, the people recognize a bond with all Mayan people, strengthened by common oppression and a desire for the same equal rights. The significance of this finding is that the base of *El Movimiento Maya* is perceived in San Andrés as a valid and unified body that can legitimately make demands on the government as one entity.
However, unlike Xeculenses, the Pan-Mayan Movement caters to the academic needs of the culture through advocacy of standardization and revitalization programs and demands for autonomy. While Xeculenses are interested in the preservation of their culture, their priority is on cultural values such as respect rather than language standardization or governmental autonomy. While they value their language, its worth does not extend to the detriment of Spanish education. When the Xeculenses consider rights, they think foremost of equality. Overall, they have a pragmatic view of their rights; they desire that “no perdamos lo que es nuestro” (Apolonio, Interview February 23, 2008), but they want equal opportunity to progress and to have the education and language skills to find employment without discrimination.

Lastly, the rhetoric of the Pan-Mayan Movement will have to take into account local definitions and changing religious demographics before it can unify the Mayan people. Because many Xeculenses consider religion an essential part of the Mayan identity, the growing evangelical movement is undercutting the unity of the term. While the term Maya has powerful historic roots and implies the rights of peoplehood, it has an ambiguous and divisive definition in San Andrés Xecul.

*El Movimiento Maya* must disseminate a universal definition in order to successfully unify those who practice the Mayan religion and those who do not under a common title. Future investigations of how to unify the Mayan people of all religions are vital to the success of the movement as an increasing number of Mayans convert to evangelicalism. The ability of the Mayan people to retain their unity throughout this process will be a powerful determinant of the future success of the Pan-Mayan Movement.
Fig. A: Interview Questions
¿Qué es Maya?
¿Qué significa a ser Maya?
¿Los Maya hoy en día tienen una conexión con los Maya de antiguo?
¿Es usted Maya? ¿Por qué?
¿Qué significa a ser indígena?
¿Usted es orgulloso de ser Maya? ¿Por qué?
¿Cómo es la cultura Maya?
¿Cambia la cultura Maya? ¿Estas cambias son buenas?
¿Hay influencia español en la cultura Maya? ¿Es bueno o malo?
¿Asistiendo a una universidad puede cambiar una persona Maya? ¿Cómo?
¿Hay algunas cosas que tienen en común todos los grupos Maya?
¿Hay unidad en un nivel nacional?
¿Qué derechos debe tener el pueblo Maya?
¿Cuáles son las diferencias entre los Maya y los ladinos?

Fig. B: Interviewees
Name: Age: Sex: Religion: Self-Identified:
María T F C, M M
Juana T F C, M M
Don Pedro S M C, M M
Florí A F E I
Susana S F E I
Julia María Chan A F C I
Don Simón S M C, M M
Luis Revelino A M C M
Lorenza S F C, M M
Magdalena T F C, M M
Don Juan S M E M
Marí Isabel T F C, M I
Don André S M C M
Apolonio A M E M
Doña Rumelia S F C, M M
Noemí A F E M

Key:
Age- T 15-25 Sex- M male Religion- C catholic ID*- M maya
     A 25-40 F female    M mayan I indígina
     A 40+ E evangelical

*Indígena in this table indicates a rejection of the Mayan identity. All respondents identified as indigenous.
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Simón (Don Simón)

Susana

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