Catholics and Protestants in a Guatemalan Town

An Anthropological study of religion, tradition, identity, and change

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Thesis submitted to the

Department of Social Anthropology

University of Oslo

November 2007
ABSTRACT

I have conducted fieldwork in San Antonio Aguas Calientes, an Indian town (pueblo indígena) in the central highlands of Guatemala. My focus of research has been religious diversity and how different concepts and ideas of religion, culture, and change are expressed in terms of religious discourse. Catholic and pueblo traditions and identity expression have been closely linked in Indian Guatemala. Protestant identity construction centers around the rejection of Catholicism and Catholic tradition, but Protestants still retain a strong Indian identity. One question has been how Protestants conceptualize Indian and pueblo identity. I found that Protestants are ambivalent towards tradition as the problem arises over what to reject as ‘Catholic’ and what to keep as ‘San Antonio’ in identity expression.

I also take a look at public celebrations and explore how they reveal something of the social communities being expressed in celebrations and how individuals become localized in different ways in the spatial, symbolical, and social landscape. Another question of focus has been how the discourse of religious difference may be related to other discourses of tradition, modernity, and change by examining the concept of tradition and how it is used as a boundary marker between Catholics and Protestants.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Sarah Lund for all encouragement and inspiration throughout my work with this thesis.

To my mom: a big thank you for always supporting me and guiding me through even the hardest times

To “lesesalssjengen”: none of this would have been possible without your company.

To my informants: thank you for letting me into your lives and for always taking care of me. Muchas gracias!

Oslo, November 2007
Content

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................................................... 1

FOCUS AND THEME........................................................................................................................................ 2

DATA COLLECTION, AND INFORMANTS ....................................................................................................... 6

Family life.................................................................................................................................................... 7

Church life................................................................................................................................................ 8

OTHER METHODOLOGICAL NOTES ........................................................................................................ 10

Language.................................................................................................................................................. 10

“Ya aceptaste?” .................................................................................................................................... 10

CHAPTER OVERVIEW AND STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS........................................................................... 11

CHAPTER 2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT ........................................................................ 13

MAYAS, CONQUEST, AND COLONIAL SOCIETY ...................................................................................... 14

INDEPENDENCE, LIBERALISM, AND THE FIRST PROTESTANTS ............................................................ 15

THE 1930s AND INDIGENISMO .................................................................................................................. 16

THE TEN YEARS OF SPRING .................................................................................................................... 17

THE EARTHQUAKE AND “LA VIOLENCIA” ............................................................................................... 18

RIOS MONTT – THE PROTESTANT PRESIDENT ......................................................................................... 19

POST-WAR GUATEMALA ........................................................................................................................ 21

CONCLUSIONS .......................................................................................................................................... 22

CHAPTER 3 SAN ANTONIO AGUAS CALIENTES ...................................................................................... 23

SAN ANTONIO AGUAS CALIENTES: A “MODERN” INDIAN TOWN ................................................................ 23

THE QUINIZILAPA VALLEY AND COMMUNITIES .................................................................................. 26

San Andrés Ceballos and Santiago Zamora .............................................................................................. 28

Santa Catarina Barahona ............................................................................................................................ 29

ECONOMIC SITUATION, EDUCATION AND LITERACY ........................................................................ 29

EXPRESSIONS OF IDENTITY AND CULTURE IN SAN ANTONIO ............................................................ 30

Weaving, textiles, and clothing ................................................................................................................... 30
Language ..................................................................................................................................................... 34
Costumbre and tradition .............................................................................................................................. 35
DECLINE IN USE OF LANGUAGE AND DRESS ............................................................................................... 36
TOURISM ........................................................................................................................................................... 38
CONCLUSION ..................................................................................................................................................... 38

CHAPTER 4 CATÓLICOS AND EVANGÉLICOS ................................................................. 41

INTRODUCTION TO RELIGION IN SAN ANTONIO ................................................................. 41
CATHOLICISM IN SAN ANTONIO .............................................................................................. 44
  Maya spirituality and syncretism ................................................................................................................. 46
EVANGELICAL PROTESTANTISM IN SAN ANTONIO ........................................................................... 47
SYMBOLIC CATEGORIES AND SOCIAL BOUNDARIES – A DISCOURSE OF DIFFERENCE .................. 50
  Alcohol, vicios, and morals – “Ya te dieron guaro?” .................................................................................. 52
  Idols, saints’ processions, and fiestas .......................................................................................................... 53
  Tradition ...................................................................................................................................................... 54
MUTUAL PERCEPTIONS .............................................................................................................................. 56
CONCLUSION ..................................................................................................................................................... 58

CHAPTER 5 CELEBRATIONS OF COMMUNITY ..................................................................................... 59

THE FIESTA AND CATHOLIC COMMUNITY .......................................................................................... 60
  The fiesta of San Antonio de Padua ............................................................................................................. 60
COMMUNITY AND BOUNDARIES AS CONCEPTUALIZED THROUGH THE FIESTA ......................... 63
LA PLAZUELA AND THE SPATIALIZATION OF COMMUNITY ................................................. 64
THE CHURCH AND PROTESTANT COMMUNITY .............................................................................. 66
  The antorcha - evangélicos claim public space ........................................................................................... 67
THE SPATIALIZATION OF ESMIRNA COMMUNITY .......................................................................... 68
THE PRODUCTION OF LOCALIZED SUBJECTS ..................................................................................... 69
CONCLUSION ..................................................................................................................................................... 70

CHAPTER 6 CHANGE AND CONTINUITY: DISCOURSES OF IDENTITY ................................................. 73

vi
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This work is based on almost seven months of fieldwork, from January to July of 2006. I have stayed in a predominantly Maya Indian town called San Antonio Aguas Calientes situated in the department of Sacatepéquez in the central highlands of Guatemala. My focus of research has been religious diversity and how different conceptions and ideas of religion, culture, and change are expressed in terms of religious discourse. More specifically I explore relations between Catholics and Protestants, or evangélicos, how these groups and the boundaries between them are conceptualized and expressed, and how the articulation of difference reveal certain things about local concepts of community, identity, tradition, and change.

I came to Guatemala in the beginning of January 2006 with the intention of first spending some time in Antigua, and then as soon as possible finding a place to live in San Antonio Aguas Calientes. Antigua is the cabecera (department capital) of Sacatepéquez and one of the most important tourist centers of Guatemala. It is an old, colonial town with about 30.000 resident inhabitants, and a popular travel destination for a diverse crowd of Europeans, North Americans, Japanese, and Israelites, as well as for Guatemalans and other Central- and South American tourists. San Antonio Aguas Calientes is one of several smaller towns or villages in the surrounding area, situated about 25 minutes away by bus.

I had chosen San Antonio as the site for my fieldwork, partly because I had briefly visited the place three years earlier during a stay in Antigua, and partly following the advice of a

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1 In the local context the full names of towns are rarely used. San Antonio Aguas Calientes thus becomes “San Antonio”, aldeas Santiago Zamora and San Andrés Ceballos become “Santiago” and “San Andrés”. Neighbouring municipio Santa Catarina Barahona is referred to as “Santa Catarina” or simply “Santa”.
Guatemalan intern researcher at the University of Oslo. San Antonio is considered an Indian\textsuperscript{2} town (\textit{pueblo indígena}); 94 percent of the population is indigenous of Mayan decent, belonging to the Kaqchikel linguistic group\textsuperscript{3}. The town’s location, it’s relative safety, the fact that most people speak Spanish, as well as what I saw as an interesting ethnic situation, were all important aspects in choosing the town as a research site.

After not being able to reach a local linguist that was going to help me upon arrival in San Antonio I had to find another entry into the town. I decided to take Spanish lessons for one week knowing that many of the Spanish teachers in Antigua come from San Antonio, and fortunately that was the case with the teacher that was assigned to me. She agreed to help me find a place to live in San Antonio and by the end of the week she told me that she had arranged for me to go and live with her brother and his family. I accepted her offer, and on the 21\textsuperscript{st} of January I moved in with them.

Focus and theme

Qualitative research, such as the anthropological fieldwork, entails a going back and forth between theory, method, and data, constantly reforming and reconsidering one’s own choices, strategies, and perspectives during the course of the fieldwork (Wadel 1991). After only a couple of weeks in the field I came to the realization that I had to make some choices concerning the initial focus of my research, and I ended up redefining the whole project, though still keeping in with some central themes.

Originally, I had arrived in Guatemala with the idea of studying ethnicity and ethnic relations in the two adjacent towns of San Antonio Aguas Calientes and Santa Catarina Barahona. I had

\begin{footnotesize}
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  \item \textsuperscript{2} ‘Indian’ is the term generally used in anthropological literature to describe the indigenous population of Maya decent in Guatemala. The related Spanish term ‘\textit{indio},’ or the diminutive ‘\textit{indito}’ (‘little Indian’), has negative connotations and is largely used in a derogatory manner. Indians in Guatemala usually refer to themselves as ‘\textit{indígenas},’ which means ‘indigenous,’ or ‘\textit{naturales},’ which means ‘naturals’ or ‘originals’. In this thesis I will use ‘Indian’ and ‘\textit{indígena}’ somewhat alternately. ‘Indian’ has analytical connotations, while ‘\textit{indígena}’ is related to local concepts of “Indianness”.
  \item \textsuperscript{3} Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE), Guatemala C.A. 2002. “Lugares poblados con base en el XI censo de población y VI de habitación 2002.”
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
been told that in these two towns, only separated by a narrow street, lived people from two different indigenous Maya groups in addition to a significant number of ladinos\textsuperscript{4}. I had the impression that a range of conflicts over everything from the control over water resources to soccer were given ethnic expressions. This seemed to me a very interesting site to study relations between the different indigenous Maya groups as well as between the indigenous population and the ladinos, and how conflicts and tensions were expressed in terms of ethnicity.

However, when I got to San Antonio I found that the inhabitants of the two towns belong to the same indigenous Maya language group, the Kaqchikels. Also the portion of ladinos living there is relatively small so the community was more homogenous than I had thought and the ethnic conflict aspect less obvious. There are, however, tensions between the two towns that surface occasionally, especially over water resources, but I found this rather difficult to research. The reasons for this were, first, that it was not something that seemed to be very important in the daily lives of the citizens, and second, that I didn’t know where to find a suitable field to conduct my fieldwork and get significant information.

Maurice Bloch once told Richard Wilson and his fellow students at the London School of Economics that “You’ve got to talk to people about what obsesses them” (Wilson 1995:3). I soon came to realize that one topic kept being brought up in my conversations with the people that I got to know; namely religion and relations between Catholics and Evangelical Protestants. Protestants, or evangélicos\textsuperscript{5}, have been present for more than a hundred years in Guatemala, and have radically increased in numbers since the 1960s and 1970s (cf. Garrard-Burnett 1998; Stoll 1990). Different statistics show that maybe as much as thirty percent of the population now belong to Evangelical Protestant churches, and, as David Stoll points out,

\textsuperscript{4} Lado is the Guatemalan term for mestizo; people of mixed Spanish and Indian decent. It also refers to people of Indian origin who have adopted western or ladin language, clothing, and life style.

\textsuperscript{5} As opposed to the the term ‘evangelical’, which in the United States connotes a theological conservative who emphasizes the Bible, personal salvation, and evangelism, in Latin America ‘evangélico’ can refer to any non-Catholic Christian, including Mormons and Jehova’s Witnesses (Stoll 1990:4). As will become clear throughout later chapters, “Protestantism” or “Evangelical Protestantism” is not a church or a unitary movement; the terms encompass a range of different churches and beliefs. My informants used the term ‘evangélico’ to describe non-Catholic Christians. I will in this thesis use the terms ‘Protestantism’ and ‘Protestants’ and ‘evangélico’.
if one looks at the number of active, practicing church goers, then the Evangelical Protestant portion is probably larger than statistics reveal (Stoll 1990). In San Antonio there were no reliable statistics on religious affiliation, but different informants suggested everything from a ten to a fifty percent Protestant portion. The truth probably lies somewhere in between, and I suggest that approximately twenty-five percent of sanantoñeros are Protestant today.

Guatemala’s recent history is closely entangled with the emergence of Protestantism. Annis (1987) writes that three external events increased the pace of Protestant conversions; the earthquake in 1976, the civil war, and the regime of General Efraín Ríos Montt, all of which caused increased community fracturing and social dislocation while at the same time opening up for new possibilities for identification and community.

As the number of Protestant converts in Guatemala increased explosively in the 1970s and 1980s, anthropologists started to document the complex processes of conversion and cultural change, especially in the Indian population in the highlands. Such studies have typically focused on either external or internal explanations for conversion. Some of the external categories of explanation have been: Protestant acceptance of socially or economically marginalized and maladjusted individuals, support in dealing with urban social isolation or with alcoholism, the spread of literacy, and desire for economic gain (Annis 1987:78). Internal explanations have included: group solidarity and support, responsive and emphatic religious leaders, providing specific behavioral codes and guidance as well as linking behavior to higher moral codes, the strategy of appealing to both men and women in the family unit, and responsiveness to economic, social, and political claims (Goldin and Metz 1997:61).

My aim in this thesis is not to attempt to explain Protestant conversion. It is, rather, to explore the relations between Catholics and Protestants and how they conceptualize identity, how differences between them are expressed, and how the articulation of religious change may be related to general processes of cultural and identity change.
There is an extensive body of anthropological literature on Guatemala. Most of it has focused on issues concerning Maya Indian culture, community, and ethnicity. Two main traditions can be distinguished within this literature; one that conceives of Maya community and identity as being a primordial remnant dating back to pre-Hispanic times and one which holds that Mayan communities and cultural distinctiveness are results of opposition to colonial oppression (Watanabe 1990:183-184). Sol Tax’s (1937) insight into how it is the municipio which is the appropriate unit for analysis of Mayan Indian identity still holds water, though he had an essentialist approach to Maya culture. Since Eric Wolf’s (1957) comments on the “closed corporate community” the relational approach has been dominant as Wolf gave priority to external colonial and capitalist economic conditions in shaping Maya communities, rather than to pre-Hispanic traditions.

Catholicism, tradition, and community identity have historically been inextricably linked in Indian Guatemala. Wolf and Hansen (1972) separate between closed and open communities in Latin America. In the “closed” Indian community participation in religious activities is closely geared in with the search for prestige and the attainment of authority in the community, through participation in the civil-religious hierarchy. The fiesta cycle and the cult of the saints as managed by the cofradía (religious brotherhood) is the centre of community organization and participation. The right to participate defines who is a member and who is not. In the “open” community participation in the ceremonial system is not so intimately linked with political affairs as it is more outward oriented, participates in national processes, and deals with outsiders to a larger degree.

San Antonio Aguas Calientes is a relatively modern and developed town compared to most other Indian and rural communities in Guatemala, and may be classified as an open community in Wolf and Hansen’s sense. Still, Catholic traditions and religion are still important and the community retains a distinct Indian identity. Protestants reject ‘tradition’ when they convert, implying that they denounce their former lives as Catholics and assume what they see as a more pure relation with God and a strict moral code. My interest was therefore initially concerned with: what happens when people convert to Protestantism? Do they in some way “lose” their culture or their Indian identity? I soon realized that my
questions were misdirected and that my informants did not see what I had initially thought of as something of a contradiction between Indian and Protestant identity. Then my question became: how do Protestants conceptualize culture and identity when they so strongly reject the traditions of the Catholic community? And: how is community identity conceptualized by both Catholics and Protestants when there exists a division along religious lines? Catholicism and Protestantism are not unitary categories as will become clear, but I argue that by looking at relations between the two groups as they are conceptualized and at how ‘tradition’ becomes a principal boundary marker in expressions of religious and community identity, some general features of ideas of culture, identity, and change are revealed.

Data collection, and informants

My main approach to the field has been that of a participant observer, sometimes observing more and sometimes participating more. Participant observation is not a methodology in itself, but rather implies a range of different methods and techniques for the collection of data (Stewart 1998). The idea is to participate as much as possible in the daily lives and routines of informants and in that way get an insider’s view into their life worlds; why they do and say what they do (Wikan 1996).

The data I have collected come from several different sources. The family I lived with and their extended family network were naturally important sources for information as they were the people that I spent the most time with on a daily basis. Also, my participation in a local Protestant church, the Esmirna, has been essential. In addition to this I have extracted information from various different sources. I have conducted 15 more or less structured interviews and conversations, some with priests and pastors, others with people both outside and within the churches. I have read books and kept myself updated with newspapers, I have had friends and acquaintances that are both Catholic and Evangelical, both people very active in church activities and non-practitioners. I had access to a library in Antigua at the Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica (CIRMA), which provided access to an extensive literature on the Mesoamerican region. I have also accessed general statistical information about San Antonio and other towns and departments through the National Statistical Institute.
(Instituto Nacional de Estadística, INE) in Antigua. In addition to this, I have received lessons in Kaqchikel and back strap weaving. All of this has helped me getting to understand different sides and aspects of San Antonio and the people living there, and put the data collected into context.

**Family life**

It was important for me to live with a family as I thought of participation in family life as an essential source of information in addition to being a valuable help in “getting into” town life and getting to know people. The family I ended up living with consists of husband and wife, Antonio and Mayra in their early forties, and their four children between the ages of thirteen and twenty-three. The house we lived in was located in the western part of town just off one of the main streets, close to the road leading to the laguna and to aldea Santiago Zamora.

The house had walls of cinder block, and roofs of lámina. Upon entering from the street there was a small patio with a sofa, while two separate buildings containing two rooms each framed in a garden area in the back with lemon trees, flower beds, and a shed. The house had three bedrooms, a kitchen area with a gas cooking plate and a small table, a pila, and a toilet and shower. One provisional additional bedroom was built out of spare wood a few weeks after my arrival to house Antonio and Mayra, since I was lodged in their room. The house was, like most other houses in San Antonio, constantly under construction. Iron wires were sticking out from the top of cinder block walls, ready to support a future concrete roof and provisional wood board separated the kitchen from the girls’ bedroom. Much care was put into making the home cozy and beautiful, arranging the yard with trees and plants, and the flower beds were always blooming. “One day we will have two stories and there will be room for all the children and their families”, Antonio used to say dreamingly.

On each side of our house lived sisters of Mayra’s with their husbands and children. The larger plot of land had originally been property of the sisters’ deceased mother, and had been divided into four smaller plots for the construction of their houses. In total we were 18 people living next to each other. Antonio’s parents, sisters and brother with their families lived only a few blocks away. Except for two individuals all members of the family were Catholic.
These people were the ones I spent the most time with on a daily basis, taking part as much as I could in their lives and activities. Antonio and the two oldest children, Carlos and Ruth, worked in Antigua, but were always home for lunch, which we ate together. Mayra was at home during the day working in the house or weaving, while the two youngest children, Daniel and Andrea, went to school. In the evenings everyone would usually be at home and most nights we had dinner (cena) together around eight o’clock. We would often sit for hours around the table afterwards and especially Antonio was very eager to discuss things with me and quickly became a valuable informant. He was, or had been; involved in both the organization of the Catholic Church and in the politics of the village and through him I got an idea of how things worked in these areas.

I participated with my family in various Catholic religious fiestas, such as the celebration of el Nombre del Niño Jesús on the 21st of January, Lent and Easter in March and April, and the celebration of the town’s patron saint San Antonio de Padua and Corpus Cristi in June. Also I went with them to two weddings, a funeral, and a pilgrimage trip to Esquipulas near the Hondurean border with other Catholics in the neighborhood, to visit the shrine of the Black Christ of Esquipulas (el Cristo Negro de Esquipulas). I also attended Mass once in a while. My host parents normally went to Mass once or twice a week, while their children attended irregularly.

Living with the family I had the opportunity to talk about and discuss not only topics concerning religion, but various aspects of their lives, with both adults, youth, and children. But I also participated with them, and observed how they interacted with each other and with other people, and this gave me an important understanding that I would not have accessed from the outside.

**Church life**

The Protestant church I finally chose to get involved with, the Esmirna, was actually the first Protestant church to be established in San Antonio in 1919. It is not Pentecostal as many of the other churches or congregations in San Antonio, but define themselves as having a conservative doctrine more related to the Methodist church. The church has about 600
members, with about 150 regularly attending Sunday services. My participation in the Esmirna consisted mainly of regularly attending Sunday services and participating in a prayer group for women. Less regularly, I participated in another Bible studies and worship group for both men and women. I was introduced to the church by a young woman, Cristina, and her aunt, Clara, who I got to know in the mercado de artesaina (handicrafts market) in the centre of town. During my first weeks in San Antonio I had visited the mercado several times trying to talk to the women who worked there and get to know people. I started talking to Cristina one day and she offered to teach me how to weave and that way we began talking. I had visited a couple of other Protestant churches and interviewed the pastors there, but when I found out that Cristina was Protestant I asked if I could come to the Esmirna with her. She and her aunt provided me with a more natural approach and I was welcomed to both attend services and the women’s prayer group.

In the prayer group 35 to 40 women between the ages of 17 and 90 participated on and off and about 15 to 20 came to meetings regularly. Meetings were held once or twice a week in the afternoon, either in church or in one of the members’ homes. Usually we got together to sing and pray, sometimes the meetings would be dedicated to a woman who was sick or had some other problem. Then we would get together in that persons home and everyone would pray for that person and her particular predicament. Other times, if no one had asked for the meeting, everyone would articulate their private petitions and the group would pray for each woman’s petition. Often we also celebrated birthdays of women or children, held baby showers or just went outside the routine having small “parties” with games, playing charades, or dramatizing themes from the Bible. Through the group I also participated in one funeral, the celebration of mother’s day, the organization of a visit from a group of American missionaries, the organization of an anniversary and the celebration of another. I have also attended an excursion to a water park for a group baptism and visited the regional CAM seminar in Chimaltenango for one day where I attended classes with the youth pastor.
Other methodological notes

Language
Virtually everyone in San Antonio speak Spanish, although for some people this is a second language after the indigenous Maya language Kaqchikel. I speak Spanish well and had few problems understanding and participating in conversations. However, Kaqchikel was sometimes spoken both in my family and on other arenas, for the most part among older individuals. This may have caused me to miss out on certain conversations and specific information, but I don’t consider this to have been a significant problem. I actually took Kaqchikel lessons with a relative of my host family and learned enough to understand simple sentences and expressions. This was by no means sufficient to participate actively in conversations, but it gave me an understanding of the language and some of the logic or mentality behind it. It also included me more when Kaqchikel was spoken or when the subject of language came up in conversations, as it often did. I think that my presence and my efforts to learn Kaqchikel made my informants discuss and reflect on the language and its use more actively as well. This lead to many interesting conversations and discussions which became useful for me as an anthropologist.

“Ya aceptaste?”
“Did you accept yet?” or “Have you accepted?” were questions that were frequently directed towards me, mostly in a humorous manner by some of my friends in the pueblo or my family. ‘Aceptar’ or ‘to accept’ is the term commonly used for Protestant conversion. It refers to the change a person makes in his or her life by accepting Jesus Christ as their personal savior and by converting to Protestantism.

The fact that I lived with a Catholic family, occasionally went to Mass, participated in fiestas, and other Catholic activities while at the same time participating in a Protestant church and at prayer meetings, deserve a comment. This may have caused people in San Antonio to be insecure about my role and my own religious beliefs and affiliations. My own starting point was always that I was in San Antonio to study the different religions and the culture and that I were to write a thesis about it afterwards. I do feel that especially some of the women in the Esmirna kept their distance to me, and I suspect that this was partly because of their
insecurities as to why I was there and what were my intentions. To them I may have become an ambiguous figure towards whom they did not know how to behave. At the same time the fact that I did not claim any particular religious beliefs or associated myself with only one group of people allowed me to participate in many different activities rather unproblematically. This gave me an understanding of both Catholic and Protestant beliefs and ideas which I found essential and interesting.

When referring to my Protestant informants, I use the terms hermano and hermana (meaning brother and sister) with the person’s name. This is in part because that is how I know these individuals and that is how they address each other. This way of labeling individuals will also be of aid for the reader as to place individuals in the text according to religion.

All informants’ names are changed.

**Chapter overview and structure of the thesis**

In this first introductory chapter I have introduced the field and outlined my general approach in this thesis. In chapter two I introduce the reader to the history and society of Guatemala. I focus both on Protestant growth and influence and Catholic religious expression and the role of the Catholic Church, providing the larger context for the topics discussed. In chapter three I describe the *pueblo*\(^6\) of San Antonio Aguas Calientes and relevant concepts of culture and identity. In chapter four I focus on the religious diversity found in San Antonio, relations between the different religious groups, and how group boundaries are conceptualized and maintained. In chapter five I take a closer look at different concepts of community and how these are expressed through public celebrations. In chapter six I discuss the relation between conceptions of tradition, culture, and change. In chapter seven I highlight the conclusions that I have reached and sum up the thesis.

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\(^6\) *Pueblo* literally means ‘town’, ‘village’, or ‘people’.
Guatemala lies in Central America, situated between Mexico, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador, bordering the Pacific Ocean to the southwest and the Caribbean Sea to the northeast. It is divided into 22 departments (departamentos) and sub-divided into about 332 municipalities or townships (municipios). About 12.8 million inhabitants spread over an area of 108,890 km², which makes Guatemala the country in Central America both with the largest population and the highest population density. The country has a diverse geography, both in climate and terrain. The highlands are formed by a series of mountain ranges and are divided into the more extreme central or western area, and the less rugged eastern area. The highlands have a cool climate and gradually flatten out to towards the southeast border with El Salvador and the southwest Pacific coast. In the north the tropical Petén borders to Mexico, with rain forests and tropical climate.

The central and western highlands are the heartland areas of Guatemala’s indigenous majority. The indigenous population, which make up about 60 percent, is divided into 23 language groups of which 21 are of Mayan decent, the largest groups being the Mam, the Quiché, the Q’eqchi’, and the Kaqchikel. In addition there are Xinca Indians and the Garifuna, descendants of African-Caribbean slaves and mainly occupy the northeastern area of Livingston. Ladinos (mestizos), which include people of mixed Indian and Spanish decent as well as Indians who have adopted ladino or western language, dress, and customs, make up about 40 percent. Finally there is a small white elite of European decent as well as enclaves of German, Corean, and Chinese immigrants among others.

7 www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gt.html
Guatemala’s history is marked by conquest, war, conflict, military dictatorships, and social and racial tensions. At the core of these tensions and conflicts have been the great economic, political, and ethnic disparities, something that culminated in a 36 year civil war from 1960 to 1996. At the same time the religious landscape has undergone radical changes in the last hundred years through reforms and changes within the Catholic Church as well as the growth of Protestantism. The introduction of Protestantism to Guatemala at the end of the nineteenth century, and its subsequent growth in the population, as well as in the rest of Latin America, parallel general historical developments. In the following I give an account of some of the most important events in Guatemalan history and the role and position of the different religions and churches in society.

**Mayas, Conquest, and colonial society**

Pre-colonial Guatemala was home to several different Maya kingdoms, spread out over the area today known as Mesoamerica; the Yucatán peninsula, southern Mexico, Guatemala, and northern Honduras. The Mayas were known for their highly developed societies, cities, and cultures as well as for their knowledge and expertise in areas like astronomy, mathematics, and natural medicine. The Spanish conquest of Guatemala, lead by *conquistador* Pedro de Alvarado, took place between 1523 and 1535. Alvarado was known as a brutal ruler; he enslaved and abused the Indians freely throughout his reign from 1524 to 1541, avoiding the attempts of the Spanish crown to curb the violence and power abuse. Colonial society was marked by the measurements taken by the Spanish crown to maximize the extraction of wealth and natural resources and to ensure forced Indian labor and tribute (Handy 1984).

In the 18th and 19th centuries Guatemala was a rigidly divided and racially stratified society. A tiny white elite held all economic and political power over a population comprised of about two-thirds of Indians and close to one-third of *ladinos*. (Handy 1984)
Independence, liberalism, and the first Protestants

Guatemala gained its independence from Spain in 1821, but remained part of the Mexican empire until 1823 when the empire collapsed. In 1840 the United Provinces ultimately separated into the five nations which today, with Belize, make up Central America: El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. The nineteenth century was marked by conflicts between Conservatives and Liberals. The Conservatives fought to keep independent Central America shaped in the mold of traditional Hispanic society and government and gave strong support to the Catholic Church. The Liberals, on the other hand, defined themselves as ideological modernists and sought to “rationalize” Central America, implying a reconstruction of Central American government and society completely drawing on the development model of the capitalized, industrial, and Protestant nations of Western Europe and the United States (Garrard-Burnett 1998).

In 1872 the general Justo Rufino Barrios became president and the central issue in his new Liberal vision was the creation of the new nation which was to unify the wide range of different ethnicities, languages, classes, customs, and conflicting loyalties that existed in Guatemala (Garrard-Burnett 1998:9). In 1873 a Freedom of Worship (libertad de cultos) decree was issued, eliminating Catholicism as state religion and allowing for the open practice of Protestant worship. The introduction of Protestantism into Guatemala was part of a wider form of Liberal political agenda. On one hand Barrios wanted to attract what he saw as “civilizing” foreigners from modern, Protestant, capital-rich nations such as Germany and the United States. On the other, the Liberal anti-clerical legislation was largely designed to shatter the influence of the one institution that was competing with the state and nation for the loyalty of the people; the Catholic Church. Still, despite the Liberal efforts, the Church kept its spiritual hegemony and the Catholic identity of Guatemalans continued to be strong throughout the nineteenth century (Garrard-Burnett 1998).
The 1930s and *indigenismo*

In the first decades of the twentieth century the Liberal anti-clericalism had caused the Catholic Church to lose both property, personnel, hegemony, and its central religious and institutional role. As a result, syncretic local religion, or what has been labeled “folk Catholicism”, moved into the dominant position in the Indian population and the cofradía (Indian religious brotherhoods) as influential social and political institution regained its importance (Garrard-Burnett 1998). During the time of “strong man” Jorge Ubico, a certain body of discourse and theory labeled *indigenismo* influenced political thought and practice. The general idea of this discourse was that the large Indian population was obstructing Guatemala’s path towards modernity. The Indian majority was seen as backward and anti-modern and the solution to this problem was to civilize the Indian and integrate him into national life by assimilation, education, *castellanización* (linguistic Hispanicisation), and improved public health. What was seen as the pathology of Indianness was to be cured by the remedies of modernity along Western lines (Garrard-Burnett 2000:343). The discourse of *indigenismo* also became conflated with discourses of alcoholism as addiction to strong drink became a metaphor for the nation’s backwardness. Alcoholism was seen as a problem that especially inflicted the Indian population and “insinuated that endemic drunkenness and bootlegging exposed Indians as unfit beings, childlike and undisciplined creatures ill-adapted for full participation in the modern, developing state” (Garrard-Burnett 2000:354).

During the 1930s the first Pentecostal congregations were established by North American missionaries from denominations such as the Church of God and the Assemblies of God. In contrast with the majority of Protestant congregations which at the time were largely *ladino*, the first Pentecostal congregations, founded mostly in highland areas, were almost entirely made up of indigenous members and allowed Indians to be pastors and hold other important positions (Garrard-Burnett 1998).
The ten years of spring

The period of revolutionary government that lasted from the election of Juan José Arévalo to presidency in 1945 and through his successor Jacobo Arbenz’ rule from 1950 became popularly known as “the ten years of spring”. Arévalo’s and Arbenz’ policies were founded on ideas that strong nationalist policies were necessary to build up the Guatemalan economy without the influence of foreign capital, and to better conditions for the working class. They both promoted radical reformatory legislation in areas like land tenure, working conditions, and unionization. Under Arévalo Protestant missions became of great value to the national education program because of their expertise in areas like grass roots education and languages, but under Arbenz this good relationship ended as his radical nationalism became at odds with the idea of foreign missionaries in the country (Garrard-Burnett 1998).

At this time a particular movement emerged within the Catholic Church called Catholic Action (Acción Católica). As a way to consolidate the Church’s position in villages in the face of government-supported peasant leagues and political parties, Catholic Action was formed in 1946 to strengthen the position and presence of priests and attack local native “impurities” (Handy 1984:238). Through the work of lay Catholics evangelization was to take place at the local level, creating new groups of community leaders, promoting Catholic orthodoxy, and weakening the unorthodox religious beliefs and rituals of the cofradías (Warren 1978). A certain development was also taking place in the Protestant churches; during the ten years of spring converts made the first break with the foreign-based missions and Protestant identity gained for the first time a local value and meaning (Garrard-Burnett 1998).

In July 1954 Carlos Castillo Armas became the head of the national governing junta after a counter coup backed by the CIA overthrew the revolutionary government. The nationalization and redistribution reforms of the Arbenz administration was seen as a threat to the land properties and fruit production monopoly of the United Fruit Company which had had a central position in Guatemala since the 1950s, and the US administration also feared what they saw as the spread of communism in the western hemisphere. The coup represented the end of the last attempt of reform and functioning democracy in Guatemala and after 1954 and
throughout the 1960s and 1970s the military got increasingly involved in Guatemalan politics (Handy 1984).

Since the first missions were introduced to Guatemala Protestant growth in the country had remained at a minimum. The Protestant missionaries never made any real impact on the population and the “Catholicity” of Guatemala until the 1960s and 1970s when growth rates really started to escalate, despite the anticlericalism and restrictions of the Church that was started in 1871 (Annis 1987; Garrard-Burnett 1998). As late as in 1967 Protestant estimations showed a 1.6 percent baptized membership in Guatemala. However, three external events dramatically increased conversion rates throughout the 1970s and 1980s; the earthquake of 1976, the civil war, and the regime of born-again president Efraín Ríos Montt (Annis 1987:77).

The earthquake and “la violencia”

In 1960 a failed revolt against president Ydígoras Fuentes started what would be 36 years of civil war. The junior officers who took refuge in the countryside, would become the nucleus of the armed opposition to the government over the next decades. As the guerrilla organizations started conducting both armed attacks and economic sabotage, violence against all forms of opposition increased. Extreme right-wing groups tortured and murdered students, professionals, and peasants suspected of involvement in leftist activities and though the military partially claimed to have no part of it, divisions between death-squad gangs, the military, and the police were getting blurred (Handy 1984). On the morning of the 4th of February of 1976 Guatemala suffered a devastating earthquake which left approximately 30 thousand people killed, over sixty thousand injured, and over one million homeless. The Evangelical Protestant churches’ response to the disaster was quick, but because of rivalry between the local denominations it became the task of foreign interdenominational Christian agencies to organize broad relief programmes. To them the tragedy offered an opportunity to help rebuild Guatemala both physically and spiritually. Within a few months of the earthquake, the number of Evangelical Protestant church
members in Guatemala increased by 14 percent. Some critics labeled this increase in conversions as a “lámina por ánima” (a soul for tin roofing) phenomenon, but Garrard-Burnett states that this argument does not account for the continued increase in growth rates. Other effects of the earthquake contributed to Protestant growth, such as migration and urbanization which led to general dislocation. The lack of other organizations to offer both short- and long-term social aid and the attraction of the intimacy of decentralized, small Protestant congregations are also part of the explanation (Garrard-Burnett 1998).

The physical, economic, and social destructions were devastating and the earthquake became a major catalyst for social change in Guatemala, of which Protestant growth was only one aspect. The destruction of villages caused a dramatic disorientation of rural life, as they were the primary units of Indian cultural and economic integration (Annis 1987) and it brought to the surface a range of tensions and problems which had for a long time been latent in Guatemalan society (Garrard-Burnett 1998). In the months immediately following the earthquake support for the guerilla reached unprecedented heights, especially in the Indian population.

In August 1978 general Romero Lucas García assumed power and started what would become one of the darkest chapters in Guatemala’s recent history, also known as “la violencia”, or “the violence”. Political assassinations, violence, torture, and disappearances became regular features of the conflict and increased guerilla activity led to even more brutal retaliations from the government. In 1982 the armed resistance joined forces to form the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) and started taking control over large areas in the highlands. At the same time the army intensivated its counterinsurgency campaign (Handy 1984).

**Ríos Montt – the Protestant president**

In March 1982 a military junta seized power through a coup deposing of Romero Lucas García and in June Efraín Ríos Montt declared himself Chief of State. Ríos Montt was a born-again Christian and an elder of the Pentecostal church the Church of the Word. He had an explicit moral agenda which was communicated through Sunday night television- and radio
broadcasted speeches in which he addressed various political, economic, and social topics. Always with an evangelical religious undertone he emphasized the national poverty of values and the lack of moral structure in families as explanation for Guatemala’s many problems, preaching fidelity and sexual chastity, children’s obedience to parents, family planning, sobriety and abstinence from drugs and alcohol. He also initiated an extensive anti-corruption plan criticizing both political parties and private businesses for excessive greed, irresponsibility, and their role in the moral crisis of Guatemala (Garrard-Burnett 1998).

During Ríos Montt’s presidency the brutality reached even new heights. At the time the guerrilla was at the peak of its power the conflict between the army and the resistance had claimed more than six thousand lives, most of whom were civilians. Ríos Montt therefore launched an offensive in the highlands. He stepped up the scorched-earth tactic and the “fusils y frijoles” (“bullets and beans”) program was initiated. The idea of this program was on one hand to bring food, medical supplies and other resources (“beans”) to the population to win them over and turn them against the guerrillas, and on the other, to step up the military part of the program (“bullets”) by capturing and killing anyone suspected of being associated with the guerrillas or their supporters. The offensive resulted in the burning of homes and villages, Churches and crops, the killing and torturing of men, women, children, and livestock, and about one million people, mostly Indians, became refugees (Garrard-Burnett 1998).

During the offensive from 1981 to 1984 440 villages were erased from the earth’s surface and more than a million fled into exile. Hardest hit were the Indians in the western highlands and in May of 1982 the Bishop referred to the violence as ‘genocide’. This was the first time what had happened was described and defined in ethnic, rather than simply political, terms. The military program was effective; the guerrillas were more or less defeated by mid-1983, and the operation received in military circles the name “the Guatemalan solution” (Garrard-Burnett 1998).

By 1982, the annual growth rate of Protestant conversion in Guatemala had risen to 23.6 percent, nearly four times what it had been only a decade earlier. The greatest growth took place within Pentecostal groups (Garrard-Burnett 1998). Annis (1987:7) writes that
Protestants may have “tipped the war” in favor of the government. He writes that the key reason that Ríos Montt won the war probably was that there was no one left to fight after his brutal counter-insurgency campaigns in the highlands. But another reason may have been that Ríos Montt succeeded in providing a form of identification and social organization that allowed peasants to be nonguerrillas. The guerrilla had become indirectly and symbolically identified with the Catholic Church as Catholic organization, work among the rural poor, and secular developmentist activities were seen as recruitment bases for the guerrilla. The enemy became social organization in itself and mayors and other community and church leaders were killed at a high rate (Annis 1987:4-7).

Annis (1987) further writes that both the claim that Indians converted as a safety strategy and that they converted because Pentecostal style and emotion appealed in a time of chaos, are easy explanations, though partly true. But there were also a deeper cultural appeal of Protestantism, it provided “a new “way to be” that was physically safe, emotionally accessible, and economically rewarding” (Annis 1987:8). Garrard-Burnett writes that the increase in conversions most likely was owed to the military pacification program and what it did to further destroy families, villages, costumbre, and local community identity. She sees it possible that the sense of control and order, and the place for the individual that was lost during the violence is what was found in the Protestant churches (Garrard-Burnett 1998).

**Post-war Guatemala**

In 1983 Ríos Montt was deposed in a military coup. His successor, Oscar Mejía Victores started a reform process, in 1984 a new constitution was in place, and in 1985 Vinicio Cerezo became president in a democratic election. In 1996 Álvaro Arzú won the election and accelerated the process that would eventually lead to the peace agreement which was signed in December of 1996 after years of negotiation between the URNG and the Guatemalan government (Bendiksby and Ekern 2001).

After the signing of the Peace Accord in 1996, the official end of 36 years of civil war, Guatemala was officially declared a multicultural nation and particular indigenous rights were
included in the final document. The power void that emerged after the demilitarization and the emergence of a civilian police force has led to an increase in crime in the country. Gangs, drug traffickers, corrupt politicians and officials, and high rates of violence against women are all factors in present Guatemala (Bendiksby and Ekern 2001).

Conclusions

It is claimed that today as much as one third of Guatemala’s population consider themselves to be Evangelical Protestants or evangélicos though the high conversion rates have leveled out significantly since their peak during the war (cf. Stoll 1990). As this historical account shows, Protestant growth is not easily explained, but it parallels other developments in Guatemalan society. In the early times of the missions, Protestantism was associated with North American and European values of progress and development and was seen as a modernizing force that was deeply needed in Guatemala. In the 20th century Protestant churches became increasingly independent and indigenized.

The earthquake and the civil war bumped conversion rates and Protestantism became a major force of cultural and religious change. It has been argued that Protestantism provides new references for identity in a world in rapid change. Garrard-Burnett (1998:xiii) argues that Protestant growth in Guatemala is closely tied to issues of community. According to her the breakdown of “traditional community” through the processes of “development”, migration, and war, created a need for a restoration of a sense of order, identity, and belonging which many people have found in the new Protestant community of believers. “The crisis that began in the 1960s, accelerated in the 1970s, and erupted in the early 1980s was at heart based on the transition to the long-coveted goal of “modernization”” (Garrard-Burnett 1998:112).

In the next chapter I present San Antonio Aguas Calientes, the setting for my fieldwork.
San Antonio Aguas Calientes lies in the Quinizilapa valley about 8 km south-west of Antigua. The “chicken buses” which depart from the terminal in Antigua every 20 minutes, pass through Ciudad Vieja and San Lorenzo el Cubo before reaching the cumbre, the top of the hill where the road starts to descend into the valley. A magnificent view unfolds as the Quinizilapa valley and its towns become visible among the hills and mountains and the three surrounding volcanoes, the Fuego, the Acatenango, and the Agua, which make up the framing. The towns located in the Quinizilapa valley are surrounding what was once a big lake covering the valley bottom, but which dried up many years ago. Today that area is known to people simply as “la laguna” (the lake), it consists of patches of field owned by villagers who are used to grow vegetables and petate. From the mirador (lookout point) that has been built some thirty meters down in the mountain side one can see most of the valley, and what at first appears to be one single settlement is actually four different towns; the municipios of San Antonio and Santa Catarina Barahona, and San Antonio aldeas San Andrés Ceballos and Santiago Zamora. The hills and mountains are covered with square patches of fields where corn, carrots, lettuce, and beans are grown. A few places there is smoke coming up from small fires in the fields, and it mixes in with the mist or fog that often encompass the valley, especially during the rainy season.

San Antonio Aguas Calientes: a “modern” Indian town

As one leaves the mirador and the view and starts walking or driving down the road that descends the steep northern wall of the valley, houses and tourist tiendas emerge on each side

8 Petate – reed used to make woven mats.
of the road. San Antonio is an Indian town (pueblo indígena) and in the streets women and girls wearing traditional Indian clothing, or traje, is a common sight. The women of San Antonio are well known, nationally and internationally, for their intricate weaving techniques and the local woven huipil\(^9\) is considered to be one of the most beautiful and complicated in the country. San Antonio’s location less than 8 km from Antigua has made it a popular destination for tourists who want to have the experience of an “authentic” Indian village in just a few hours’ excursion, and as the American anthropologist Sheldon Annis\(^10\) (1987:13) writes; “The image of the San Antonio woman at the loom – clad in her huipil of blue and red and orange and a dozen other colors – has become a national icon for use on tourism and export promotion brochures”.

In 2001 the total number of people living in the municipio was measured to be 9892\(^11\), an increase of more than a hundred percent since Annis’ research. Annis described San Antonio as “underdeveloped” in the 1980s considering what he saw as its “sizable urban concentration by Guatemalan terms” (Annis 1987:18). Apparently he found no facilities or traits normally associated with towns of that size:

> There are no paved streets. There is no gas station, no mechanic, no welder. There is no doctor, lawyer, or government office, and no hardware or agricultural supply store. (…) there is no public eatery, not even a comedor (a rustic restaurant). Despite forty or so years of tourism, there is no pensión, much less a hotel. And, perhaps most unusual by Guatemalan standards, there is no marketplace (marketing takes place in nearby Antigua). (Annis 1987:18)

Today San Antonio has most of these things and more, except for the local market. There are a couple of doctors and a few lawyers practicing in the area, even a dentist, several hardware stores, four farmacies, a range of smaller family-run convenience stores, a small library,

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\(^9\) The huipil is the top or the blouse of the traje.

\(^10\) Sheldon Annis conducted fieldwork in San Antonio in the 1980s and 1970s. His focus was differences between Catholics and Protestant in relation to production.

several gift shops and *librerías* selling books, pens, and other office supplies. There are two relatively high standard hotels in town (however with few customers as most visitors stay in Antigua) and several smaller *comedors* and *cantinas* (small “bars” selling beer, liquor, and simple food), including an Italian pizzeria. However, there is no common market and everyday consumer products as well as most vegetables, meat, and other foods can be bought in one of the small stores around town. Most marketing takes place in Antigua, 25 minutes away by bus or 15 minutes by car, where the selection is larger and goods are at a lower price. What is relatively new, however, is the *mercado de artesanía* (handicrafts market) which was completed in 2001. The *mercado* is a two-story building located next to the government offices and the plaza. It holds room for about thirty sales stalls which focus their business on tourists that come to San Antonio to buy woven textiles or other handicrafts products.

The central plaza, or *plazuela*, which in Annis’ days was just a big dirt place has been totally renovated. It has now become a real park, beautifully framing in a large water fountain; with stone benches, figure cut trees, flower beds, and small patches of lawn-covered areas in between. Low (2000:84) writes of the colonial plaza architecture that “the central square of space and its surrounding structures - the cathedral, administration buildings, arsenal, customs house, and later the residences of the social elite - represented the double hierarchy of church and state (...).” This is also reflected in the San Antonio *plazuela* which is dominated on the east end side by the Catholic Church, an eighteenth century colonial style, white church so typical for Latin American towns. On the south end side is the *municipalidad* (government building), a large two-story modern building where the *alcalde* (mayor) and other officials have their offices. It also contains the town hall used for official, and wedding, ceremonies. Next to it on the left hand side is the handicrafts market and the *puesto de salud* (health care centre). To the west side of the park is the largest of many public *pilas* located at various places around town, where women sometimes come to do their laundry or to get water for other domestic purposes. The public *pilas* in San Antonio are still used even though most households now have portable water as well as smaller *pilas* in their homes. On the north end side is the police station and next to it a public elementary school. The corners of the plaza are marked by four *capillas* (small chapels) pertaining to each of the four *cantones* (town quarters) which the town is divided into.
Considering informants’ descriptions, as well as Annis’ account, the changes to the town’s physical appearance and facilities, as well as improvements to people’s homes and living standards, seems to have been quite drastic in the last few decades. Stories about the old days, just ten or fifteen years ago, contain descriptions of a town that had no paved streets, no proper plazuela or government building, houses that were made out of wood and caña, and many homes that did not have indoor plumbing or sewerage. “Sí hemos avanzado, we have really advanced”, Daniel commented once while his family was remembering the old days.

All streets in urban San Antonio are now paved and most houses are built out of cinder block and concrete. Still, one is left with the impression of a town that is constantly under construction; most houses seem unfinished, with some walls of caña or lámina, or roofless buildings with iron wires and beams sticking out. Like my host family, many families save money little by little, adding a wall, concrete floorings, or a proper door to their houses when acquiring sufficient amounts to do so. The desire to “salir adelante”, to “get ahead” or “move forward”, is important to many people and reflected in their efforts to “avanzar”, or advance, in living standards. The improvements that individuals and families make are mirrored by the improvements in the physical appearance of the town in general in which the plazuela, government buildings and other public venues, such as a large multiple use salon and the recently completed mirador, have been considerably upgraded in the last ten or so years.

The Quinizilapa valley and communities

The towns of the Quinizilapa valley that once occupied the shores of the Quinizilapa Lake, share a common history, both economically and culturally. The towns were founded after the Spanish conquest between 1524 and 1530, and were initially called milpas; pieces of land given to lieutenants by the conquistador Pedro de Alvarado as rewards after the invasion. San Antonio Aguas Calientes was therefore initially called the Milpa de Juán de Chávez after the first owner. The towns started out as slave colonies under the ownership of the soldiers, supplied with workers from different parts of Guatemala who had been taken during the Conquest. In 1550 Juán de Chávez and the other Spaniards eventually went back to Spain and
the towns were legally given to the inhabitants following the juridical abolition of slavery (Annis 1987).

The Indians who were put to work and settlement in the valley towns were from an extensive geographic and highly diverse linguistic area. Despite this background the inhabitants of the valley did not resort to the use of the ladino language, Spanish, as a lingua franca and did not become ladinoized\(^\text{12}\) through time as a result of the lack of common cultural roots. Instead the valley became more Indian with a strong Kaqchikel Indian identity and use of the Kaqchikel language. Annis attributes this to the Spanish attitude towards, and treatment of, the Guatemalan Indian population in the colonial era. Assimilation of the Indians was not in the Spaniards’ interest; rather, they wanted to keep the different population groups separated in an unequal relationship as the new class of indios was identified as an extraction base for workers and as payers of tribute (Annis 1987).

Today San Antonio is the town of greatest size, influence, and wealth in the valley. As discussed briefly, Guatemala is divided into 22 departamentos, each with its cabecera, or department capital. The departamentos are in turn divided into municipios which are administrative centers and which may have outlying aldeas or caserios. Antigua is cabecera of the Sacatepéquez department and San Antonio is one of sixteen municipios with two politically subordinated aldeas, San Andrés Ceballos and Santiago Zamora. Santa Catarina Barahona is a separate municipio with no aldeas, while San Lorenzo el Cubo is aldea to nearby Ciudad Vieja. Political hierarchical organization is reflected in the organization of the Catholic Church. San Antonio is the centre of Catholic religious expression among the communities and its now resident priest attends to the aldeas for mass and celebrations of important religious fiestas. The Santa Catarina parish is attended by a priest from San Miguel Dueñas. A majority of sanantoñeros are Catholic, but there is a considerable portion of Protestants and Protestant churches. There are no reliable statistics on religious affiliation, churches or church membership, but I estimate the percentage of Protestants to be somewhere

\(^{12}\) Ladinoize – adopt ladino or Spanish language and dress.
between 20 and 30, based on an overall assessment of collected information and statements. Neighboring municipio Santa Catarina Barahona is commonly known to have a larger portion of Protestants, perhaps a majority as some informants suggest. The same is the case with Santiago Zamora, while San Andrés has traditionally been a Catholic stronghold (Brown 1998; Annis 1987). Informants suggested that the reasons for Santa Catarina’s and Santiago’s high portions of Protestants may be because there are more necessities there or because they have sometimes been “forgotten” by clergy. Santa Catarina has always been in the sahdow of San Antonio, disadvantaged both in access to land, economic opportunities, and tourism (Annis 1987; Little 2004).

San Andrés Ceballos and Santiago Zamora
The two San Antonio aldeas of San Andrés Ceballos and Santiago Zamora lies at opposite extremes of the local economic spectrum. San Andrés is physically inseparable from the San Antonio settlement and stretches out southwards as an extension of the municipio. In 2001 the San Andrés population was 706. The inhabitants of San Andrés have the same dialect as well as the same style of traje as in San Antonio. Annis reports that although San Andrés in the fifties was considered to be at a lower economic level, in 1987 the aldea consists of relatively wealthy families due to intensive vegetable and coffee production (Annis 1987).

Santiago Zamora, on the other hand, is the poorest and most isolated town in the area and has about 84113 inhabitants. It lies a few kilometers to the west of San Antonio; just above the lake bottom, at the end of a dirt road going through the forest and fields. As Santiago is the town with the least land and is the most secluded from external income opportunities, many santiaguëños work on nearby coffee plantations (fincas), rent land from San Antonio landowners, or they devote themselves to the manufacture of petate (Brown 1998).

Santa Catarina Barahona

Though only separated by a narrow street, the difference between San Antonio and Santa Catarina is perceived as significant by locals. Santa Catarina is cabecera of a separate municipio with approximately 3000 inhabitants\(^\text{14}\), lying behind San Antonio towards the north-east mountain wall of the valley. The town has its own churches, both Catholic and Protestant, and celebrates its own saints’ days and Catholic fiestas. The Santa Catarina traje is different from the one typical for San Antonio and the population speaks a different dialect of Kaqchikel. The relationship between Santa Catarina and San Antonio has always been tense and strained by conflicts although it is calmer today. The conflicts have typically arisen over access to a water source under the control of Santa Catarina as well as San Antonio’s position as the “big brother” of the valley, both economically and politically.

Economic situation, education and literacy

San Antonio stands out among rural and indigenous towns in Guatemala when it comes to both economy and education. In a 2002 census 89.6 % of the total population of seven years or older were reported to be literate, of the women 85.9 % were literate. Almost two thirds (58.8 %) had more than three years of education and almost one quarter (23.3 %) had seven years or more\(^\text{15}\). Annis describes San Antonio as a “rich” town in relative terms; it is poor, but it is definitely less poor than most other towns. According to Annis, the economic success of San Antonio is primarily due to the wide range of economic alternatives that are offered there compared to in other towns, such as good land, a mix of crops, access to markets, education, convenient opportunities for wage labor, and tourism (Annis 1987). About 40 percent of the economically active population dedicate themselves to agriculture, while the remaining 60 percent hold various occupations, such as industrial manufacture, commerce, construction,

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transportation, and teaching.\textsuperscript{16} Most San Antonio families operate in several economic realms and as Brown (1998:106) points out; “It is not uncommon for a family to have a daughter earning wages in Antigua, a son in the military, a father growing corn on family land (...), and a mother weaving textiles for the tourist market”.

**Expressions of identity and culture in San Antonio**

Sol Tax (1937) was the first anthropologist to point out that indigenous identity in Guatemala was primarily tied to the local community or pueblo, and that cultural unity was to be found at the level of the municipio and not at the level of some larger language or ethnic group. Eric Wolf’s (1957) comments on the “closed corporate community” further strengthened the view that small local communities were the appropriate units for anthropological analysis. Indians in local communities in highland Guatemala continue to share a distinct form of dress and weaving technique, a language or dialect, their own particular patron saint and annual fiesta cycle, their own set of costumbre, and often their particular agricultural or economic specialization (cf. Annis 1987). The local community and pueblo continue to be important references for collective identity. When I asked informants about how they would describe San Antonio culture or the characteristics of sanantoñeros, most would list up; the weavings and the traditional clothing, the language, and the customs or traditions. In the following I show some of the ways in which culture and identity are conceptualized in San Antonio and what implications these may have for identity construction and choice.

**Weaving, textiles, and clothing**

‘Los tejidos’, or ‘the weavings’, is something that virtually all my informants emphasized as characterizing of the town and San Antonio identity. The characteristic San Antonio weaving technique, called marcador or cruzeta, is an especially complicated and time-consuming brocading technique that produces a cloth “de dos lados” (of two sides) – one that is identically woven on both sides – but other simpler techniques are also frequently used.

Virtually all women (as well as a few men) know how to weave as young girls are usually taught how to use the back strap loom from the age of six or seven. According to Annis about half of the women in San Antonio reported to weave on a daily basis, for three hours or more (Annis 1987). Women make a range of different products on the loom; from *huipiles* and *fajas* to be used by family members or sold to neighbors or acquaintances, *tzutes* for ceremonial use, *servilletas* for daily use, to tablecloths, bedspreads, and wall decorations, used in the home or sold to tourists. Woven products, as well as other handicrafts products, are commonly referred to as *cosas típicas* (typical things), *ropa típica* (typical clothing), or just *típica*.

The most important item woven by women in San Antonio is the *huipil*. As noted earlier, every highland Indian *municipio* in Guatemala has its own distinct style of dress and weaving technique. This is most visible in the *huipiles*, or blouses; recognized by distinct uses of colors, designs, and techniques. The full traditional *indígena* dress for women in Guatemala is called *traje* and consists of the *huipil*, the *corte*, which is a cloth wrapped around the waist as a skirt, the *faja*, belt, and sometimes various accessories like hair decorations, bracelets, and earrings.

Annis describes weavings as symbolic texts and *huipiles* as maps, with graphic elements that represent “spaces”, both geographic and social. Different levels of meaning can be read from the larger to the smaller graphic features in the *huipiles*. In the first instance the wearer of a *huipil* is marked as being “of Indian space”, placing herself geographically in the western highlands of Guatemala, but also implying the acknowledgement of Indian/ladino boundaries and the public placement of herself on the Indian side. On the next level the total design locates the wearer first as belonging to the eastern Kaqchikel region, then more specifically to the *municipio* of San Antonio Aguas Calientes. At a third level the sub-*municipio*, such as the *cantón* or *aldea* can be signaled, and at a fourth, “personal style” distinguishes the wearer from others as no two *huipiles* are ever identical (Annis 1987:117-120). Variations in designs, styles, and colors are matters of personal taste, fashion, and sense of tradition, as different individuals, households, and generations express themselves in distinct manners. Through looking at the style of dress of a woman one can get a sense of where she is from, both
geographically and socially, and what references she uses for identification.

![Photo 1: San Antonio traje for women and gabán for men (the gabán is no longer used in San Antonio). Taken at an exhibition in the mercado de artesanía.](image)

There is a great range of variation in the choice of dress and clothing style for women. Men exclusively wear western style clothes, reportedly the last person who wore the traditional men’s gabán died a few years before my fieldwork. Some form of traditional clothing (ropa típica) is commonly used by most women and girls, though not by all. Older women tend to wear the full San Antonio traje, while younger women and girls more frequently wear the corte with either western style t-shirts or tops, or manufactured blouses with patterns reminiscent of huipil style and patterns. Those who choose not to wear any form of traditional dress, wear western type of clothes like jeans and t-shirts, skirts, and blouses. Some may wear a t-shirt or blouse at home while doing household chores and put on a nicer huipil when they go out. It is also common to wear huipiles from other pueblos and communities. For some, this is because San Antonio huipiles generally are very expensive, while others just think that the huipil of another pueblo is beautiful.
The choice of wearing or not wearing traditional clothing may be based on a range of factors and varies from individual to individual. Barnes and Eicher (1992) stress the communicative aspects and social meaning of dress. Dress positions the wearer within the society, defines a person’s identity geographically and historically, links the individual to the specific community or group, and at the same time differentiates the individual from other individuals.

Mayra, 42, and her sisters all grew up wearing traje on a regular basis and never wear anything else, though switching between the San Antonio huipil, other towns’ huipiles and manufactured blouses. They are all housewives who divide their days between household chores and weaving, and occasionally selling artesanía to tourists in a stall borrowed from an acquaintance in a market in Antigua. Mayra’s two daughters, Ruth, age 20, and Andrea, age 17, normally wear jeans and t-shirts or other forms of western style clothing. Ruth works in a book store in Antigua throughout the week, while studying at the university on Saturdays. She never wears traje or any type of traditional clothing. She is a “modern-minded” young woman who expressed ideas about not necessarily wanting to marry and have children, desiring to pursue a career of her own and to be an independent woman. Andrea goes to high school in Antigua to be a kindergarten teacher. She doesn’t normally wear traditional clothes neither, but on special occasions, such as the San Antonio fiesta in June, she sometimes puts on the traje. They were both taught how to weave as young girls, but only Andrea still practices it sometimes during school holidays. Weaving is very time consuming and both Ruth and Andrea said that they just didn’t have the time or the interest to sit down and weave on a regular basis.

Hermana Cristina, age 25, works selling típica to tourists at the mercado in San Antonio. She did not grow up wearing traditional clothes. She usually wears skirts and blouses, but when at work she always wears some form of traditional clothing, as do all the women and girls working at the mercado. “I wear it because the tourists like to take pictures”, she explains. In the market competition is tough and women know that the tourists look for “authentic” weavings, so presenting oneself according to the tourist image of the “real” Indian becomes a business strategy (cf. Little 2004). Hermana Florentina, 46, always wears the San Antonio traje in different versions of design and colors. She is a woman who is successful in the
tourist industry, owns several shops, and has a strong position within her church. Her traje are always expensive and of the finest quality. To her to own several expensive high-quality San Antonio trajes is a sign of wealth and authority.

As becomes apparent, there is great variation in preferences and habits when it comes to the question of wearing the traje. The decision that each woman makes is based upon different factors, such as what they grew up with, their occupation or education, what their friends do, or age. Following Annis’ (1987) and Barnes and Eicher’s (1992) arguments, dress, and in Guatemala especially the huipil, expresses something about who the wearer is and how she is related to the community or the social and symbolic reality in which the clothing finds meaning. The fact that many women and girls in San Antonio wear huipiles from other pueblos, or manufactured blouses and t-shirts, can be seen as a sign that identity tied to the local community is not the most important to communicate. The use of some form of ropa típica positively identifies the wearer as indígena, while only the San Antonio huipil will reveal the individual’s local community and belonging. The most significant space to be localized in seems to be the indígena space, and then, the individual one. This leads to two arguments. First, the indígena/ladino divide remains important and relevant, and the need to place oneself in relation to that divide is significant. Second, to place oneself as an individual in relation to the local community’s symbolic space seems less relevant. To present oneself as an individual with a distinct taste and style, acquired through the innovative use of colors or the use of other huipiles or modern blouses, is more significant. This may be a sign that the local community, or pueblo, is losing its immediate relevance as reference for identification.

Language

The most significant cultural marker for indígenas in Guatemala, aside from dress, has been the language. The indigenous Maya languages have had an inferior position in Guatemalan society as Spanish became the official language in colonial Guatemala. Many indígenas in the highlands do not speak Spanish or it is a second language to the Maya language of their community. Kaqchikel, which is spoken in San Antonio is the fourth largest Maya language group in Guatemala today. To the extent that something has served as a reference for identity outside the immediate local community, it has been the larger Maya language group, while
“Maya” as social category has been practically irrelevant. In more recent years, however, efforts of the Maya movement has brought “Maya” into the consciousness of indígenas as a relevant category for identification through their work to revitalize the languages, Maya cosmology, and culture (cf. Warren 1998).

Practically everyone in San Antonio speak Spanish, although to many it is their second language. According to findings in San Antonio by R. McKenna Brown in 1988 66% of the population was fluent in Kaqchikel, 23% had a medium fluency level, and 11% did not speak it at all (Brown 1998:120). This situation of bilingualism puts San Antonio in an almost unique position; San Antonio has never experienced a period of predominant monolingualism unlike many Indian communities in the highlands. Annis interestingly points out that higher levels of education and income correlate with bilingualism and not monolingualism in Spanish. Social and economic success has required facility in both Indian and non-Indian spheres and language represents a social boundary, not an obstacle (Annis 1987:28).

The Kaqchikel of San Antonio is slightly different from the Kaqchikel of Santa Catarina Barahona and the “proper” Kaqchikel of Chimaltenango and the larger region, standardized by la Academia17. Sanantöñeros pride themselves of this as a way to express a distinct identity for the municipio among other Kaqchikel municipios and towns, but this fact has also made it harder to learn because most of the educational material is in the more formal form of the language.

Costumbre and tradition

Costumbre literally means custom, but most often it has referred to Catholic religious practice, rituals as mediated by the civil-religious hierarchy. Warren describes costumbre, or tradition, as the belief system and religious practices of the civil-religious hierarchy (Warren 1978:48). Costumbre has been seen as closely related to Catholic syncretic religious practice. Among my informants ‘costumbre’ and ‘tradition’ were terms used alternately to refer to both

17 La Academia Guatemalteca de las Lenguas Maya. Institution that works to develop standardized versions of the Maya languages for use in educational material, for public purposes, and to generally facilitate and promote the use of indigenous languages in Guatemalan society.
religious traditions as well as other types of customs. In addition to being related to Catholic religious expression and traditions, it would refer to such things as typical food, way of life, wedding traditions, or milpa agriculture. It encompasses a wide range of practices and objects that can be seen to represent indígena and San Antonio identity. The complex nature of the concepts of costumbre and tradition is discussed in chapter six.

**Decline in use of language and dress**

Brown shows that there has been a drastic decrease in Kaqchikel use in San Antonio in recent generations. He found a clear trend showing that the median age of respondents who reported an average fluency level was going down (Brown 1998:119). Parents increasingly speak Spanish with their children and he describes what he calls the “shift generation”, a generation of children who grow up not learning Kaqchikel at home and who will not carry it on to their own offspring.

In San Antonio Kaqchikel is generally no longer taught in most schools or it happens sporadically. The children in my host family had all attended the Catholic primary and secondary school and Daniel, the youngest son, was still in sixth grade. Ruth told me that for a period of time when she attended the Catholic colégio they had a few classes of Kaqchikel weekly. Daniel who attends the same school today does not. “Instead they have computer classes and English,” Ruth explained. Many adults told me about what they called the “loss of culture” and expressed concerns about it, while younger people were more indifferent towards it. When asked more thoroughly about why it was a negative thing that language, weaving, and dress were in decline and what should be done about it, many hesitated and expressed ambivalent attitudes towards the subject. Antonio told me:

> Why learn Kaqchikel? That is not an easy question. I think it’s important not to lose one’s culture... And if we had a vision that Kaqchikel was to be a world language or something, that it could be like English, then we should have fought for that. But that is not realistic. It is important to learn other languages to be able to talk to different people. And to show that ‘I’m indígena, but I’m intelligent’.
The common attitude among people I talked to seemed to be that it was important to know Kaqchikel and that it was also important that children learned to speak it. At the same time, explaining why this was important sometimes proved difficult. Many answered that it was important because it was part of tradition, part of their culture and their ancestors’ culture. When adults were asked why their children did not speak it and why they did not push them to learn it by teaching them, they answered that children and youth simply weren’t interested nowadays and that they didn’t care to put much effort into teaching them either. Hermana Mariela, a woman in my Esmirna prayer group explained:

The youth today, they want to be more modern, more advanced. They may feel embarrassed of their background. They may feel like with their culture they won’t advance (avanzar), they won’t move forward (ir adelante). But this is wrong, we have a rich culture, for instance our language. Most people don’t speak Kaqchikel anymore. We’re losing it (se pierde). It’s no longer important to the youth, they don’t want to learn.

It seemed to be a common perception that Kaqchikel was losing its relevance in the “modern” world and that other things were more important than to spend time learning it, even though this was also seen as a loss. This view is reflected in the fact that for Daniel Kaqchikel lessons have been replaced by English and computers. While Kaqchikel is only relevant and useful within the town or within the Kaqchikel indígena region, English and computer science are relevant and facilitating for success in the larger society.

Brown writes that the decrease in the use of the Indian language is parallel to higher education levels, stronger household economies and the shift from milpa agriculture to wage work, and changes in use of traditional clothing (Brown 1998). These same trends are expressed when it comes to clothing and weaving as well. Both language, traditional clothing, and weaving are cultural and identity expressions that are symbolically relevant within the local community, or to some degree within the larger Indian space. Outside this space language, traditional clothing, and weaving become mainly markers of indígena identity. In the larger society being indígena is associated with discrimination, subordination, and perceived backwardness. As more sanantoñeros are leaving the home community to study or work, are subjected to
outside notions of Indian identity, and access global flows of information, identity and style, these things seem to lose relevance. I talked to Mayra once about these issues and why her daughters were not wearing traje. I asked about Ruth and Mayra said that it is very hard to get a job if you are wearing traje; “They [ladinos] think indígenas are stupid, you know? They don’t want an indígena in a traje working for them.”

**Tourism**

Tourism continues to be an important source of income in San Antonio and is a part of practically every sanantoñero’s life in one way or another. Some work in the mercado de artesanía or in típica shops in Antigua or in town, others travel to other parts of the country or abroad to sell their products. Women weave to sell to tourists or típica products are bought from other vendors. Sanantoñeros interact with visitors from all over the world in the market, in the plazuela, as well as in their private homes. Home exhibitions of “authentic” and “traditional” Maya life and customs are not uncommon. Little writes that sanantoñeros grow up in a performative space in which presentations and representations of culture and tradition are common features of daily life (Little 2004).

Sanantoñeros are attentive to the tourist discourses and conceptions of culture, tradition, authenticity, and what it means to be “Maya”. Also, through the market, tourism, and interaction with other people sanantoñeros are linked to both the global and the local flows of information, ideas, and concepts (cf. Little 2004). The touristic field is an important arena for expressions of culture, and it is also a place where different concepts of culture, tradition, and identity are presented, contested, and negotiated. As a tourist town San Antonio takes part in a diverse range of local and global processes and flows, both economic, cultural, ideological, and political.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have described the setting for my fieldwork, San Antonio Aguas Calientes, as a pueblo, as well as some features of identity marking and conceptualization. San Antonio is a
“modern” town, and an open community in Wolf and Hansen’s (1972) sense. At the same time it is a *pueblo* which has always retained a strong Indian identity. I have outlined some of the San Antonio landscape, both physically, spatially, and conceptually. To be able to identify someone we have to locate them on our “mindscapes” based on information that includes among other things embodiment, clothing, and language (Zerubavel cited in Jenkins 2004:6). Weavings, dress, and language are localizing markers of identity in that they connect the individual with the local community. Their relevance is within the *pueblo*, or to some extent, within the Indian sphere. While community centered cultural expressions such as dress, language, and weaving are still important for the conceptualization and expression of San Antonio identity, the trend shows that there is a decline in their use. Identity and self-presentation are increasingly matters of individual choice as new possibilities and references for identification emerge, both in terms of education, work, and lifestyle.

In the next chapter I take a closer look at the religious landscape in San Antonio and the position of religion in society. While I have in this chapter focused on identity in San Antonio as related to *pueblo* and place, I will in the next look at how differentiation along the lines of religious affiliation separate the *pueblo* into two distinct groups which in turn create and conceptualize their own communities and identities.
The religious landscape in Latin America has changed considerably over the last hundred years. After being the most influential institution and mediator of authority, position, identity, and social relations for almost 400 years, the Catholic Church now has to compete for the people’s loyalty with a range of different Evangelical Protestant churches, sects, and congregations. A majority of sanantoñeros still consider themselves to be Catholic, but Protestants make up a considerable portion of the population and a range of different Protestant churches and congregations have emerged since the first missionaries set foot in the town in the early 1900s.

‘Catholic’ and ‘Protestant’ as categories of both people and religions conceal a greater variety in belief, practice, and affiliation. Still, the two categories are meaningful to sanantoñeros; both as conceptual constructs and as references for identification. This chapter is about the conceptualization of Catholics and Protestants as groups and how boundaries between them are expressed. I argue that there exists a discourse of religion in which differences are articulated following certain patterns. I start by describing the religious diversity in San Antonio with a focus on churches, beliefs, and practices. Then I go on to explore how Catholics and Protestants, despite the diversity and variations that exist within both groups, are constructed in public discourse as groups with essential differences and as distinct categories with specific characteristics.

Introduction to religion in San Antonio

The closed Indian community as described by Wolf and Hansen (1972) was integrated through the cult of the saints and participation in religious activities was at the centre of community life. The civil-religious hierarchy structured the community and was the only way
individuals could obtain authority, status, and power. Through the cargo system men served in alternately administrative and religious positions in the community, something that usually required considerable personal expenses and responsibility (Watanabe 1990:106). The religious part of this system was based around the cult of the saints, in which religious brotherhoods (cofradía or mayordomía) served as caretakers of the church and the saints and as organizers of saints’ celebrations (Wolf and Hansen 1972). The civil-religious hierarchy was the primary mediator of costumbre; the traditions, belief system, and religious practices of the community. Wilson (1995:22) writes that: “Across Mesoamerica, the cofradía was the community institution that served for hundreds of years as a vessel for traditional Mayan beliefs and community values”.

The Catholic Church continues to be important to people in San Antonio, but the Church and the civil-religious hierarchy are no longer the “hub” around which everything else in the community evolves. San Antonio can be said to be an open community in that participation in the ceremonial system is less intimately linked with political affairs and that individuals and households are freer to form relations outside the religious realm.

Protestantism was first introduced to San Antonio Aguas Calientes by the American missionary William Cameron Townsend of the Central American Mission (CAM) and in 1918 the first Protestant church, the Esmirna, was founded. For many years the Protestants were met with suspicion and hostility and recruitment was slow, but since then a number of different churches and congregations have been established. Evangelical Protestantism in Guatemala and Latin America is not one singular or uniform church or movement, but is better described as a range of Protestantisms with different expressions at different times and places (cf. Stoll 1990). Still, Protestant churches and congregations in Latin America draw on a tradition of beliefs stemming from the European Protestant Reformation as well as from North American Evangelicalism. Stoll describes Latin American Evangelical Protestantism in the following manner:

(...) evangelical Protestantism is best defined as a tradition distinguished by three beliefs, including (1) the complete reliability and final authority of the Bible, (2) the need to be saved
through a personal relation with Jesus Christ, often experienced in terms of being “born again”, and (3) the importance of spreading this message of salvation to every nation and person, a duty often referred to as the Great Commission. (Stoll 1990:3)

Evangelical Protestants generally emphasize the personal spiritual relationship between the individual and God without the reliance on mediators such as priests and clergy or saints as in the Catholic Church. The Bible is emphasized as a direct source to the will of God, in opposition to the Catholic reliance upon traditions, interpretations, and the church hierarchy. In most Protestant churches (Lutherans are an exception) infants are not baptized as it is believed that every individual has to make the conscious choice to “accept”\(^{18}\) Jesus Christ as their personal savior, open up their heart to Him and surrender to His power and love. By doing so the individual will continue on to “live in Christ” (vivir en Cristo) being guided by Jesus. In the Esmirna where I focused my research, youths therefore go through a baptism when they reach adolescence. Older individuals who convert, generally from Catholicism, are baptized after a period of participation and learning, after publicly denouncing their old ways and the old religion, and surrendering to Jesus. Satan is a very real figure in the lives of Protestants, imagined to be lurking at every corner or even in your own home, waiting on the doorstep when you come out of church, anticipating that one wrong step that will send you to damnation.

As opposed to the authoritarian institutional hierarchy of the Catholic Church, Protestant church structure is generally more concentrated around egalitarian ideals and lay leadership. Some analysts have argued that this can be seen to be a movement towards democratization and a subversion of traditional social order, while others hold that Protestant and Pentecostal structure restore authoritarian patron/client relations because they are so centered around their founding pastors (cf. Robbins 2004). Within the CAM, of which the Esmirna is part, aspiring pastors go to a seminar for three or four years of education and work practice. In many other, especially independent Pentecostal, churches formal training is not required to preach or to

\(^{18}\) ’Aceptar’, or ‘to accept’, is the common term used to describe conversion.
lead a church and anyone who feels inspired by the Spirit may form his or her own congregation. Typically a man equipped with a Bible and a calling will start preaching to his immediate family and neighbors, then expand little by little in the hopes of making a living (cf. Stoll 1990). A related issue is that in most Protestant churches women can be pastors and hold other important positions within the church, whereas in the Catholic Church these positions are reserved for men.

**Catholicism in San Antonio**

Catholic religious expression in San Antonio centers around the Mass, the annual ritual cycle of public celebrations, as well as the adoration of shrines and saints’ images in private homes. The colonial style Catholic church is located on the east end side of the central **plazuela**. Upon entering it has red-brown tiled floorings and white-washed walls, along the sides of the room are rows of benches separated by an isle leading to the pulpit. Images and statues of saints and the Virgin Mary are placed in display cases in niches along the side walls. The benches can seat 150 to 200 people. For Sunday Mass or Thursday celebrations of the Eucarist the church is normally filled up and late arrivers stand or kneel in the back, in the isle, and in the doorway.

San Antonio has its own resident priest, who also attends to **aldeas** San Andrés Ceballos and Santiago Zamora. The town is separated into four neighborhoods, or **cantones**, and each neighborhood has their representative responsible for celebrations in his particular area, called a **cabecilla**. During Semana Santa (Easter) each **cantón** has their own procession and altars in people’s houses in the neighborhood. Three **cofradías** are active in San Antonio today, functioning principally as fiesta-organizers who are responsible for their specific saints and the adoration and processions of the idols, or **imágenes**.

Mass is characterized by its form and its solemn and respectful atmosphere. Upon entering the temple or when passing by one of the saints images (**imágenes**), people kneel and do the sign of the cross before quietly finding a seat, maybe folding their hands in a prayer. Many people dress up for Mass; most adult and older women wear **traje** and bring with them a **tzute**, a
colorful, woven square cloth for ceremonial use, which they fold together and place on the head as a sign of respect. Other women and girls may use a shawl to cover their hair. Mass follows a certain order of liturgy and rite, with variations only in the content of the sermon and some specific prayers. The priest leads the ritual and the congregation recite prayers and sing the songs in unison, as they sit, kneel, and stand alternately at specific cues.

Wolf and Hansen (1972) writes that for most Latin American Catholics God is experienced as inaccessible, unpredictable, and impossible to deal with directly. To act as intermediaries are the saints and the Virgin Mary who can be approached in a more personal manner with specific problems and issues. Saints are adored through the processions during fiestas or in the privacy of the home. Public celebrations follow the annual ritual cycle, with Semana Santa in March and April and the joint celebration of patron saint San Antonio de Padua and the Corpus Cristi in June as the most important events. These fiestas are large scale celebrations which involve most sanantoñeros in some way. Participation no longer require the financial
expenses and efforts they did before, but are none the less important events symbolizing Catholic community. Fiestas are spent with family and neighbors at home or in the plazuela. A range of other activities take place during fiesta, the most important are the processions of the saints’ imágenes.

Annis writes that most Mesoamericanists saw the cofradía to be where Indian values found their fullest expression as the civil-religious hierarchy served to integrate individuals with the life of the community. Through extensive financial expenditure and religious obligations that were demanded for participation in celebrations, the cofradía served to level wealth within the village and both enforced and legitimized a life of material poverty. He further notes that though the administrative and moral authority of the cofradía in Guatemala began breaking down decades ago, the ideological ideal of communalism based on individual sacrifice to the collective good prevails (Annis 1987).

Although division and fractions are normally associated with the different Protestant groupings, the Catholic Church is not unitary neither. There are groupings with conflicting visions and agendas that cause tension within the Church organization. The deepest division is between the older and the younger generations of lay leaders, cofradía members, and catechists. According to Antonio, the traditionalists oppose any change to how things are organized, while the younger forces are more reform-minded, something that gives rise to conflicts and polarization. Catholic charismatic sects or groupings, referred to as carismáticos, are also noticable in the San Antonio religious landscape. They preach a strict moral code and abstinence from alcohol, focus on the authority of the Bible, and have a way of worshipping that is similar to the Pentecostals. They often gather in small prayer groups in private homes, use singing, loud music, and intensive prayer and some may also speak in tongues. The charismatics have been allowed to celebrate their own Mass in the temple the first Tuesday of every month in an effort to keep the Church united despite of differences and divisions.

Maya spirituality and syncretism
In Guatemala, what has been called “folk Catholicism”, local versions of Catholicism mixed with elements of traditional Maya beliefs, rituals, and spiritualism, has been prominent among
Indians in the highlands. This was the form of Catholic costumbre historically expressed through the cofradía. Elements of traditional Maya spirituality and syncretic religion exist in San Antonio, but it no longer hold the position it once had in the population, according to my informants. In Catholic religious expression traditional elements can be traced in decorations in the church or in private and public altars, the making of alfombras during fiestas, or the symbolic sacrifice of corn, vegetables, and other foods during celebrations.

There are several practitioners of different forms of Maya spirituality and ritual, called sacerdotes mayas or brujos. ‘Sacerdote maya’ means Mayan priest and is the term usually used by the practitioners themselves, while ‘brujo’ or ‘bruja’ have negative connotations and means ‘witch’ or ‘shaman’. These individuals practice as ritual specialists and some with natural medicine. Most perform rites on request (and usually for money), such as for the recovery of a sick child, for the prosperity of a business venture, for the continued affection of a lover, or for help in a difficult economic situation. Central to the practice of traditional spiritualism is the adoration of Maximón (in Spanish San Simón) portrayed as a Spaniard, often with a cigar in his mouth and a bottle of rum in his hand. People burn candles in front of him and buy him liquor, beer, and cigarettes. The spiritualist rites may include the killing of hens, burning of copal insence and candles of different colors, and the sacrifice of food and liquor. Of my informants most claimed not to believe in these things and rejected them as things of the past and the superstition of the older generation. Spiritualists were also frequently described as frauds who scammed people out of their money. Still, people do visit these, sometimes out of despair when everything else has failed.

**Evangelical Protestantism in San Antonio**

There are between ten and fifteen different Protestant churches or congregations located in the municipio of San Antonio. Sanantoñeros also attend churches in other towns, mostly in Santa Catarina or San Andrés, or in San Lorenzo del Cubo or Ciudad Vieja. Conversely, churches in San Antonio attract believers from these other towns as well. Santa Catarina has the largest
Pentecostal church in the area with more than 1200 members; the Iglesia Evangélica Cuadrangular. This church attracts many believers from San Antonio as well as the aldeas and nearby pueblos. While the Iglesia Cuadrangular and the Esmirna have several hundred members, other smaller congregations may consist of only a few families.

The churches or congregations differ greatly in both number of members and physical presence in the town landscape. As opposed to the Catholic temple and its location in the central plazuela, which reflects its historical entanglement with political organization and hierarchy, Protestants churches are scattered around town. The Esmirna inhabits a large, bright red, US-style concrete building and an adjacent courtyard close to the border to Santa Catarina. Smaller groups may get together in members’ homes or in the home of the pastor, and are therefore not easily noticed from the outside except for maybe a sign on the door and the often loud and intense singing and praying which pour out into the street.

Protestants address each other as hermano and Hermana (brother and sister), a public expression of who belongs to the community of faithfuls and who doesn’t. Worship is centered around the service (servicio or culto) held several nights a week, smaller prayer groups, Bible study groups, and other activity groups. Esmirna Sunday servicios may attract up to 150 people, while in other services, especially the Pentecostal cultos, only ten to thirty individuals may attend. Servicios in the Esmirna follow a semi-structured routine of singing, music, prayer, and sermon for about an hour and a half. The atmosphere is generally open and light, people greet each other as they approach the church, talk, and laugh as they, Bible in hand, sit together in groups with friends or family. Here the women are also dressed in traje or skirts and blouses, while the men have on their nice shirt and pants. While praying people stand up and hold onto the chair in front of them, or they stay in their seats and put their faces in their hands. Eyes are closed, lips move in silent whisper or mumbling, while occasional outbreaks pierce through the murmur of voices; “Oh, heavenly Father! Oh, powerful Lord! Your word is the truth...”. After the main session, one hour is reserved for other activities, such as group

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19 Interview with the pastor of the Iglesia Evangélica Cuadrangular (the Evangelical Four Square Church) in Santa Catarina Barahona, June 2006.
discussions, “educational” lectures on themes from the Bible, or talks on the state of Evangelical Christianity in society. The children and youth leave to have Sunday school.

A majority of Latin American Evangelical Protestants are Pentecostals (Stoll 1990) and this is probably the case in San Antonio as well. Pentecostalism is a form of Protestantism in which believers recieve the gifts of the Holy Spirit and have ecstatic experiences such as speaking in tongues, healing, and prophesying (Robbins 2004). Pentecostal congregations are generally smaller, but there are exceptions such as the Iglesia Cuadrangular in Santa Catarina. Pentecostal churches are often founded based on family membership, with only some twenty to thirty members and often the pastor is a family authority. Their cultos feature loud and intense prayer and music. When inspired people will get on their feet, raise their hands to the ceiling and shout “Praise the Lord!” and “Hallelujah!”, some may cry or fall to the floor, or start speaking in tongues.

Photo 4: The Esmirna

Conflicts and divisions within Protestant churches are quite common, and many congregations are founded by a group leaving a church with which they have disagreements. The reason may be internal power disputes or disagreements over such issues as the doctrine
or form of worshipping that is followed. The Esmirna is sometimes called “the mother” (*la madre*) of Protestant churches in San Antonio because at least five of the other Protestant churches have originated from it. Some of these have in turn split up and formed separate congregations of their own. The Iglesia Evangélica Cuadrangular in Santa Catarina was apparently founded after a conflict within the Esmirna. Conflicts over which type of music to use, if dancing and speaking in tongues should be allowed seemed to generate separation in the end. The Iglesia Cuadrangular became increasingly Pentecostal, while the Esmirna maintained a more conservative doctrine.

Catholic expression is closely related to the *pueblo* and *pueblo* traditions as references for community, it is place bound to a greater degree than Protestantism which claims universality and places less importance on public expression. For Protestants there is a focus on salvation as obtained through the individual’s personal relation with Christ and not through participation in a community of believers, such as the Catholic ‘body of Christ’ (Annis 1987). The rejection of saints and idols is part of the idea that religion is about the spiritual relation to God and not material objects, rituals, and artifacts. Protestant religious practice is therefore centered around personal prayer, rather than collective celebration. Protestant community and belonging is experienced through the specific church and not some larger entity. In this sense Catholicism is more general, a majority of Catholics are not particularly active in church and many don’t even attend Mass. Protestants are active to a greater extent as a natural consequence of the fact that most Protestants are converts who have recently or in the past made the decision to join a new religion. It was expressed in the Esmirna, though, that they are experiencing some of the difficulties of keeping people active and devout as has been characteristic of the Catholic Church. This is because Esmirna members are increasingly being born into Protestantism.

**Symbolic categories and social boundaries – a discourse of difference**

As this account shows, there is considerable religious variety and diversity to be found in San Antonio. It is clear that differences are important and that neither Protestantism nor Catholicism as major religions are unitary categories, but that branches and subgroups exist
on both sides. Still I argue, like Annis did (1987), that there are some fundamental differences between ‘Protestants’ and ‘Catholics’ that exceed intra-group variations. Just as importantly, these differences are perceived as fundamental by people in San Antonio and I argue that the distinction between ‘católico’ and ‘evangélico’ as social groups and as categories that serve as references of identification is very much present, significant, and relevant. I will in the following describe some aspects of the relationship between católicos and evangélicos and how these categories are perceived by people in San Antonio.

Ever since Barth’s (1969) paradigmatic work on ethnicity in the introduction to “Ethnic Groups and Boundaries” the focus on boundaries and interaction in processes of group formation and conceptualization has been essential. This relational approach dominates approaches to all aspects of individual and group identity (cf. Cohen 1989; Jenkins 2004) Processes of identification involves categorization and classification. Cohen writes that the concept of community suggests that the members of a group both have something in common with each other and that this something distinguishes them from the members of other groups in significant ways; in order for “us” to know who “we” are we have to distinguish ourselves from “them”. He further argues that communities are symbolically constructed, that is, their boundaries are imbued with particular meaning and expressed symbolically as “something for people to think with”, rather than being definite descriptions of the actual community of individuals (Cohen 1989:12-19).

When people in San Antonio (both Catholic and Protestant) explain what it means to be Protestant, they usually do so by contrasting Protestantism with Catholicism, and by contrasting evangélicos with católicos. Through various conversations, interviews, and discussions with both Protestant pastors and Catholic priests, women in my prayer group and other Emirna members, as well as my family and friends, I gradually came to see that the ways the two groups are conceptualized in the discourse of religious difference follow certain distinguishable patterns. Generally, differences between the groups are by Protestant and Catholic informants alike presented along three main lines more or less in the following manner; 1) evangélicos don’t drink, they don’t dance, and they don’t smoke; 2) evangélicos don’t believe in idols (imágenes); 3) evangélicos don’t believe in the tradition (la tradición).
Alcohol, vicios, and morals - “Ya te dieron guaro?”

Evangélicos are expected to abstain from any type of alcohol, tobacco, and dancing. These are referred to as vicios (vices) and are generally associated with Catholic rituals and celebrations. Of the vicios the most important is the ban against alcohol. Drinking is a natural part of most fiestas and cofradía-related celebrations, as well as weddings, funerals, and other Catholic events. It is thought to lead to other types of immoral and sinful behavior, such as promiscuity and infidelity, violence, instability in the home, and crime. Protestants view drinking, as well as dancing, smoking, and doing drugs, as part of an ambiente, or environment, that is essentially negative and sinful. One’s heart and spirit should be focused on God at all times, and it is the responsibility of the individual to stay away from the temptations of the flesh.

A common perception among Protestants is that most Catholics are heavy drinkers. Once I discussed my host family with hermana Clara, one of the women in the Esmirna prayer group. We were sitting in her stall at the mercado de artesanías conversing and I was telling her about how I had been invited to attend a wedding in which Antonio and Mayra were going to be testigos (witnesses). I was exited about this, but Clara immediately expressed her concerns for me. She said I had to be very careful because at these big Catholic weddings it was custom for everybody to get very drunk and in a situation like that anything could happen. I told her I wasn’t worried, I was sure that my family would take care of me, and that I could take care of myself. We talked a little more and she wanted to know how I was managing living with a Catholic family. “Ya te dieron guaro? Ya te invitaron a tomar con ellos?” she asked me; “Did they give you any liquor yet? Have they invited you to drink with them?” She was leaning forward and giving me a worried look. I explained that my family never drank much alcohol and that this had never been a problem. Clara gave me another searching look and I could see that she was not at all convinced.

The stereotypical image of the drunken Catholic is not entirely misplaced. Alcoholism is known to torment many individuals and families and the sight of drunken men (commonly referred to as bolos or bolitos) lying more or less unconscious around in the streets, especially on Sundays or on days of fiesta, is not uncommon. The link between alcoholism and conversion has been discussed by June Nash who suggested that Indian conversion to
Protestantism could be seen as a way of dealing with alcoholism and “analogous to becoming a member of Alcoholics Anonymous” (Nash 1960:50). It has also been suggested that women seek Protestantism as a way to escape husbands’ problems with drinking and infidelity (cf. Gill 1990). Still, not all Catholics drink excessively and not all Protestants practice complete abstinence. There is a constant concern that converted Protestants will relapse into alcoholism. I was also told about individuals who choose to have a drink or two on occasion, though this was never confirmed. Such stories are often put forward by Catholics as “proof” that Protestants are not as “good” as they claim to be, but they are also discussed among Protestants themselves.

**Idols, saints’ processions, and fiestas**

The discourse of alcoholism is closely related to the discourse concerning *fiestas*, Catholic public celebrations. Much of the alcohol consumption and the problems that are assumed to follow are related to *fiestas*, which by many Protestants are seen to generally be a negative atmosphere and a symbol of Catholic traditionality and vice. Essential features of *fiestas* are the processions in which statues (*imágenes*) of the saints, Jesus Christ, and the Virgin Mary are paraded through town streets. To Catholics the saints serve as mediators between people and God and they are thought to inhabit certain divine powers and abilities that can be of help in difficult situations or times of crisis. Many people have images or statues of San Antonio de Padua, the Virgin Mary, and Jesus in their homes which they decorate with flowers, crosses, and candles and pray to or ask for help with specific problems.

To *evangélicos* the veneration of saints and idols is seen as idolatry; it is to put something in the place of God to worship in His place. The belief in saints is rejected because Protestant doctrine stresses that there is only one God and that every individual is created with direct responsibility to Him. When Catholics celebrate and adore saints’ images, to *evangélicos* what they do is first, believe that human beings can have divine powers, and second, equate God with the *imágenes*, attributing divine powers to what is nothing more that pieces of wood. According to many *evangélicos* Catholics confuse the *imágenes* with God, believing that they themselves have powers to perform miracles.
To say that Catholics believe in the images paraded on days of *fiesta* or worshipped in private homes, and mistake them to be God in person or having divine powers, is a way to separate themselves from what they see as the ignorance and misdirection of Catholics. In highlighting their own pure and spiritual relation to God as opposed to Catholics’ misguided and false belief in idols they attribute an ignorance and backwardness to Catholics that is seen as connected with their traditionalism and unableness to see the truth.

**Tradition**

The big difference is that we believe in God and in the Bible, and they believe in the tradition and the idols. Well, I guess they believe in God too, but they put tradition first [of the Bible]. To us nothing could ever come before the Word. (Esmirna pastor *hermano* César, conversation, March 2006)

The third point concerns tradition and encompasses to a great extent the two previous ones. On one hand ‘tradition’ refers to the sacred traditions that form part of the basis of Catholic dogma and which serve as foundation for the interpretations of the Holy texts by the institutional Catholic Church. On the other hand, ‘tradition’ is related to *costumbre*; the belief system and practices as expressed through the civil-religious hierarchy and community centered Catholic religious celebrations and ritual (Warren 1978), as well as certain concepts of culture. In chapter five, Antonio makes this distinction between holy tradition and what he calls “just tradition”, but I never heard this distinction stated from anyone else. This suggests either, that it is seen as an obvious distinction and not worth mentioning, or, as is part of my argument, that the different types of tradition are, partly, merged in most people’s minds into a single, but complex, conceptual category; ‘tradition’. This will be further explored in chapter six.

The Protestant rejection of tradition implies a rejection of participation in *cofradías* and *cofradía*-related ritual, the veneration of saints and processions, *compadrazgo*\(^{20}\), and *fiestas*. Protestants also reject Maya spiritualists and see these practitioners as frauds or as being in

\(^{20}\) *Compadrazgo* – ritual godparenthood
touch with the dark forces and Satan. They consistently refer to them as ‘brujos’. Still, one sacerdotes maya I talked to claimed that she received clients from all layers of the population, both Catholic and Protestant.

As reflected by hermano Cesar’s statement, when Protestants criticize the importance of tradition in Catholic religion and practice they do so by placing it in opposition to the Word of God as it is revealed through the Bible. Protestant literalism emphasizes the authority of the Bible and encourages people to read it for themselves, by that going straight to the source instead of relying on the interpretations of others. Among Catholics to read the Bible is less common, except in specific Bible study groups or among the carismáticos. People don’t bring Bibles to Mass and many may not even own one (cf. Stoll 1990). In Protestant servicios, prayer meetings, and Bible study groups, on the other hand, practically everyone will bring their own Bible, well-worn and with highlighted passages and notes in the margins. The Bible is used actively during the servicio, the pastor will refer to passages for reflection and people will flip the pages back and forth to follow the sermon.

This third point, then, encompasses the two first ones in that both the problem of alcohol and vicios and the veneration of saints and idols are seen to be integral parts of Catholic tradition or costumbre, primarily as expressed through the fiesta. To Protestants, ‘tradition’ becomes a symbol of all that is wrong with Catholicism, for many it also symbolizes their own pasts.

As we have seen, these differences are laid out as a series of negatives. It is about what Protestants don’t do as opposed to what Catholics do. Protestants accuse Catholics of being alcoholic idolators who are more concerned with the traditions than the spiritual relation to God. To Catholics in San Antonio, tradition is a symbol of identity, community, and common history. It is seen as something worth preserving as part of the identity of the town and of the people as it is mediated through Catholic religious practice. The Protestants are the ones who have changed, they are the ones who are “different” in the pueblo context. As a natural extension, they are the ones who have the most urgent need to mark difference and distance. Their identities as Protestants are based on the change from a past to the present, from the old to the new, on the rejection of Catholicism. Catholics tend to respond to Protestant criticism
by criticizing Protestants for distancing themselves from the community and elevating themselves to a position of moral and religious superiority.

**Mutual perceptions**

Classification and categorization implies emphasizing shared characteristics over individual differences, therefore they are commonly expressed through stereotypes (Eriksen 2002). As we have seen in the previous sections, the way that group boundaries are marked and expressed in public discourse leaves ‘católicos’ and ‘evangélicos’ as categories attributed with certain sets of characteristics.

In a survey conducted in the western highland town of Almolonga, Goldin and Metz made some interesting discoveries. Asking for comments about, and descriptions of, Protestants and Catholics as groups, Goldin and Metz found that Catholics were generally characterized by the categories “go to mass, like fiestas, get drunk, believe in idols, are kind and good, practice ‘costumbre’, have not changed, have vices, are backward, have no fear of God, are careless, believe in several gods, are changing, and like to attend processions”. Protestants were characterized by the categories “they like to go to service, are kind and good, are affectionate, have changed their lives, are different, do not like fiestas, have no vices, set good examples, are true Christians, have fear of God, do not drink, and have the truth”. As could be expected, Protestants generally described themselves in positive terms, but were quite critical towards Catholics and the Catholic life style. What was interesting was that Catholics were also generally positive towards Protestants, and that one out of five were critical towards Catholics as a group (Goldin and Metz 1997:72-73).

I found a similar pattern among my informants. The characteristics that are viewed as positive are generally the same among informants from both religious groups; such as sobriety, respectability, being kind and good, fearing God, and being hard working. The difference is that Protestants see many of these characteristics as inherently Protestant; characteristics and virtues that derived from the acceptance of Jesus as savior and conversion to Evangelical Protestantism. Many Catholics, on the other hand, see these characteristics as general features
of being a good person, and though admitting that many Protestants hold these characteristics they do not see conversion as necessary to obtain them. This is especially in regards to sobriety, vicios, and devoutness to God and the religion. In other words, there is a cultural or religious critique that can be traced in both Protestant and Catholic discourses.

The early times of Protestantism in San Antonio are remembered as filled with quite a lot of conflict and confrontation as the community in general was very suspicious of the missionaries and early converts. Violence and fighting over religion no longer take place; the importance of having respect for others and their beliefs is emphasized by both Catholics and Protestants. Though differences are rigidly contracted in discourse, in everyday life they find relevance in other ways. Both family relations, friendships, and marriage cross-cut the religious boundaries, though not without tensions. Still, there is a high level of religious coexistence. In Tecpan and Patzun Edward Fischer (1991) found that differences between Catholics, Protestants, and traditionalists were frequently played down under the banner that there is really one god, although s/he is differently conceived by religions and individuals. He argues that individuals were judged by their behavior more than by the church they attended.

I also found that there are ways to be judged by others as a person that exceed the Catholic/Protestant divide. One can speak of a continuum along which individuals and behavior are judged. But the criteria by which people are judged are often different for Catholics and for Protestants. For example, a person may be characterized as “good” (buena) or “bad” (mala). A Protestant may speak of a Catholic neighbor as a “persona buena” (good person), meaning that they are respected for their behavior despite being Catholics. Antonio and Mayra were frequently described as “buena gente” (good people) and I got the impression that they were well respected in the local community, by both Catholics and Protestants. Others were less esteemed and were criticized because of bad behavior and vicios, such as excessive drinking or infidelity. In the same way, Protestants were judged based on their behavior and respectability, though the standards were sometimes different.
Conclusion

In this chapter I have described the religious diversity that exist in San Antonio. I have shown how Catholics and Protestants relate to each other and how boundaries are expressed through a discourse of difference focusing on three main issues; alcohol and morals, saints’ worship and *fiestas*, and tradition. I argued that through this discourse Catholics and Protestants are constructed as categories with certain characteristics. This is not to say that behavior always follows the “rules” set in this discourse. My point is, rather, that through the symbolic expression of boundaries certain values and concepts emerge that relate to other concepts and ideas as will be explored in chapter six.

In the next chapter I explore the expression of religious community and identity through rituals and celebrations.
Oh...there are big differences [between Catholics and Protestants]. Catholics think that the tradition is very important. We separate between ‘holy tradition’ [tradición sagrada] and ‘tradition’ [tradición]. The holy tradition is what’s in the Bible, in the Gospel. The other is just tradition. The evangélicos don’t want any of that; they only want what’s in the Bible. We call them fundamentalists. They have distanced themselves from the traditions of the pueblo. They don’t participate in Catholic religious fiestas, they think Catholics are idolaters. They don’t eat the food and snacks sold at the food stands in the plazuela [during fiestas] because it’s made for an idol. If you go to them and you give them some tamales21, for instance, they will accept it, but they throw it away as soon as you leave their house. They won’t eat it because it is made in the honor of an idol, with that purpose. They are very different; they have distanced themselves from the tradition. (...) The evangélicos don’t participate much in the life of the pueblo. Ya no vienen a la plazuela [they no longer come to the plazuela]. (Antonio (42), conversation, 2006)

In this chapter I explore some of the different concepts of community that are significant to sanantoñeros and how these are marked and communicated through celebrations. An important way to express, maintain, and confirm community and community boundaries is through rituals or celebrations, which serve as “consciousness raising” events in that they make people more explicitly aware of their belonging to a specific community (Cohen 1989:50). At the same time as they communicate something about group boundaries, who belongs and who doesn’t, celebrations express something about relations between individuals and between the individual and the group. Through celebrations I argue that both the

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21 Tamales – mass of corn (maza) boiled with meat, wrapped in big plant leaves, food dish normally eaten on Saturdays or on days of fiesta
individual and the group become localized in specific ways, both socially, spatially, and conceptually in the relevant social reality or order. First I take a look at Catholic fiestas, the fiesta of San Antonio de Padua in particular, to show how they on one hand are expressions of community and that they on the other reveal something about concepts of tradition and identity. Then I discuss how Protestants also use celebrations to express community by analyzing the antorcha, an anniversary torch race. Towards the end of the chapter I show how the different celebrations produce differently localized subjects which relate to the spatial, social, and symbolic realities in different ways.

**The fiesta and Catholic community**

The fiesta is the highlight of public Catholic religious expression, and much time, energy, and resources go into its organization. Though the cofradias, and the fiesta cycle no longer integrate social, political, or economic life, the celebrations are none the less important symbolic events through which community boundaries are affirmed and reinforced and social relations are expressed. Antonio sees the fiesta as an expression of tradition and as such, both Catholic and pueblo community. The evangélicos are described as having distanced themselves from pueblo life and from community as expressed through participation in the fiesta. By using the concept of the plazuela, the physical, social, political, and Catholic religious centre of the town, to make his point, he locates his perception of the community in the spatial environment, something that adds to the notion of pueblo community and Catholic community as overlapping.

**The fiesta of San Antonio de Padua**

Each Guatemalan pueblo has a patron saint and therefore also a principal fiesta. The 13th of June is the day of San Antonio patron saint San Antonio de Padua and since the variable holiday of Corpus Cristi (feast in honor of the Holy Eucharist) also falls on a date around this time, the two are celebrated together. In 2006 the fiesta lasted from Saturday the 17th to Tuesday the 20th of June during which a range of different activities took place. Preparations for the fiesta start several weeks in advance, particularly with the construction of descansos; elaborate altars or decorations in the homes of selected people depicting situations or themes
from the Bible or from the work and life of San Antonio de Padua. The main procession of the Corpus Cristi on Sunday the 18th follows a certain route around town visiting all of the fourteen different descansos. My family was asked to be responsible for one of these descansos and after considering it for a few days Antonio accepted. This is seen as an honor, but there are also financial issues to be considered. The costs of making the decorations are high, and one must also be prepared to serve food, liquor, and refreshments to visitors and those who help out. The four capillas marking the corners of the plazuela and pertaining to the four cantones, are also decorated. Responsible are the cabecillas, who collect money from people in the neighborhood for the decoration.

The coming of the fiesta is marked in the weeks before with special Masses, processions of the imágenes of San Antonio and the Virgin, regular dances of los gigantes (large wooden figures portraying Spaniards and indígenas, with men inside carrying them on their shoulders), and burning of fireworks in the night and early morning. Throughout the whole fiesta the plazuela is transformed into the scene of a multitude of activities. Food stands are put up where they sell both drink and traditional foods and snacks. There are video game booths where the younger boys spend their money and provisional cantinas and comedors where older boys and men spend theirs. There is a Ferris wheel and a merry-go-round, people selling candy and sweets, a band playing marimba music, and lots of people just hanging out and socializing with others.

On the 13th, the actual saint’s day, there is a special Mass in the morning and in the afternoon the imágenes of San Antonio and the Virgin are presented by the cofradías in a procession. In the night fireworks are burned in the plazuela and the church bells ring to mark the day. Then, everyone just waits for the real fiesta to begin. On the morning of Saturday the 17th, the streets where the main procession is going to pass are decorated with colorful flower alfombras, balloons, and paper decorations and festoons. Neighbors help with the decorations and preparations to make our street look beautiful. Inside, the men lead by Antonio, put their final touch on the descanso, which is located right inside the door. The decoration is a presentation of the risen Christ appearing to two disciples walking on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaús. The background is painted on a large piece of canvas, while the figures are cut out from
cardboard. It is decorated with flowers and plants, and framed in by a colorful cloth with golden embroidering. Children cut out letters from cardboard and blow balloons, while the women are gathered in the cooking area preparing tayuyos, tortillas, pepián, and tamales. The food is both for visitors who come by to see the descanso and for dinner later. Though this descanso is hosted by Antonio, both family members and neighbors contribute and help out with all the work and some of the financial costs. Antonio’s mother, his sister Carmen, and his brother José with his family are there. Mayra’s sisters with families also help out, as well as some cousins and uncles. At night the community is invited to a preview of all the descansos and at eight o’clock people start coming around. We run in and out to offer tamales and coffee to the crowd. After most people have passed around eight o’clock, we sit down to eat with the family and neighbors.

Sunday morning a Mass honoring the Corpus Cristi and San Antonio is held outdoors in front of the church. The Guatemalan bishop, monseñor Bruno Musaró, has arrived to conduct Mass and participate in the procession and a large crowd spread out in the plazuela and surrounding streets. Afterwards the procession starts, the Bishop carries the ostia in a golden casing, the piece of bread representing the body of Christ, right behind him walks the San Antonio priest and the cofradía. People form lines on each side of the street in front, three boys swing the copal incense from side to side, and the band is playing. When reaching a descanso, the procession stops, the Bishop enters the house with the ostia, say a prayer, and reflect on the theme of the decoration. After stopping by all of the descansos, the procession finally visits the four capillas in the plazuela before returning to the temple. In our house the women start cooking again for the meal of the evening. People are still walking around to see the altars and are served food and refrescos. In the night there is a large concert in the plazuela with a band playing cumbia and marimba music. People are dancing and drinking and having a good time.

Both Monday and Tuesday there are Masses in the morning and then processions of San Antonio and the Virgin around the central park visiting the decorated altars of the four capillas. In the afternoon there are bull-fighting competitions in the football field of the public school. These competitions have long traditions and stories circulate of passed years when the bulls were released in the plazuela, of brave men and drunken men, and of near death
encounters with the frightening raging animals. The bull-fight attracts large crowds who scream in terrified delight every time the bulls come close with their horns. By this time the religious activities are finished, only a few food stands are left in the plazuela, and on Tuesday night the fiesta is over.

**Community and boundaries as conceptualized through the fiesta**

Most people celebrate fiesta with their families, neighbors, and friends. They spend time together, participate in processions and Masses, cook, eat, party, and socialize with others in the home and in the plazuela. Though the fiesta is not the main integrative institution in San Antonio, participation is an important marker of belonging. Important to the expression of community is the exchange and sharing of food. Food is exchanged at various festive occasions; between families or compadres, for instance at weddings or baptisms. It is also tradition to give food and drink to people who contribute in celebrations, such as in the construction of the altar. The neighbors and family who helped my family out during the San Antonio fiesta were given food and drink and were also invited to eat and take part in the celebrations in our house. The exchange of food strengthens and confirms social relations and bonds between individuals and families.

Mauss (1990) wrote of how exchanges between people express something about the persons or the groups involved, and about the relation between them. What he called “the institution of total services” implies an obligation to give, but also an obligation to receive; to refuse to give, or to reject a gift, “is to reject the bond of alliance and commonality” (Mauss 1990:13). Food that is bought, sold, and shared in the plazuela during fiestas becomes an example of the reciprocity between members of the community that is symbolized by the celebrations. In the introductory quote Antonio uses the exchange of food as an example of the nature of relations between Catholics and evangélicos. The description of the evangélicos who refuse to take part in these exchanges becomes the ultimate proof that they really have separated themselves

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22 Religious sponsors through the compadrazgo, or ritual kinship system. The sponsor of your child is your compadre.
from the rest of the pueblo in a profound way. It becomes a rejection of the social community expressed during fiestas through, among other things, the exchange of food. The rejection of the food becomes a rejection of the giving individual as well as the pueblo community and tradition.

Through the celebrations, the processions, the activities in the plazuela, and family meals; fiestas serve to link families and friends, and to strengthen and consolidate social relations and bonds in several ways. In Victor Turner’s words, rituals are ‘multi-referential’ and ‘multi-vocal’, that is; they communicate on a variety of levels. At the level of the group they express something about that group’s relation to other groups. At the level of the individual participant they express something about the relation of the individual to his or her group and to the world as it is mediated by his or her group membership. At both levels social boundaries are constructed as well as experienced (Cohen 1989:54). Through family celebrations the social bond between the individual and family is strengthened, and through the processions and other activities in the plazuela (and other parts of the pueblo) bonds to the larger community, are strengthened and communicated. Neighborhood belonging is marked through contribution to the capilla, and through contributions to decorations of the street and descansos on that street in which one lives. In this sense the celebration of community in the fiesta becomes a symbolic event that “localizes” the individual in the social and symbolic landscape of the pueblo, as well as manifesting its relation to the spatial environment.

**La plazuela and the spatialization of community**

The conceptualization of community and social relations is also expressed through the use of public space during celebrations, that is, how they are spatialized. To spatialize is to locate – physically, historically, and conceptually – social relations and social practice in space (Low 2000:127). In San Antonio the pueblo and pueblo life can be seen as physically and symbolically manifested in the plazuela. The plazuela is essentially constituted by the central park, but also includes the immediate surrounding area and San Antonio’s most important institutions, such as the municipalidad, the artesania market, the police station, and the Catholic Church. The plazuela is the centre for a range of social and cultural activities; it is
where children hang out after school, where older boys hang out at night, where the tourists gather outside the mercado to take photos, and where people occasionally get together for a wedding, a concert or other cultural events.

In addition to being the general political and social centre in town, the plazuela is inextricably linked with the Catholic temple and public Catholic religious expression. As noted in chapter three, colonial architecture with the central plaza surrounded by the Church, the government buildings, and other important buildings, was a representation of the double hierarchy of Church and state. Rodríguez (1998:41) writes that “fiesta ‘domesticates’ the plaza by bringing crowds of longtime familiaris together to eat and party within its open, yet bounded, confines”. During fiesta, the plazuela is where most of the “action” is, the centre for the celebrations and where community is experienced. When Antonio states that “The evangélicos don’t participate much in the life of the pueblo. They no longer come to the plazuela” he makes the conceptual connection between the plazuela (and what goes on in the plazuela) and pueblo life and community. The plazuela can be seen as a physical, as well as conceptual, symbol of the pueblo as a community of interacting people who participate together in town life and celebrations.

In the San Antonio fiesta the procession links the plazuela to private homes by visiting the descansos and also to the neighborhoods, or cantones, by visiting the four capillas that represent each cantón. The fiesta and the procession thus symbolize the relations between families, their cantón, and the pueblo. Other venues used for activities in the fiesta, such as the football field for bullfighting competitions, the streets for dances and other activities are also symbolically connected to the plazuela, the pueblo, and the community.

Antonio states that evangélicos distance themselves from tradition, don’t participate in pueblo life, and that they no longer come to the plazuela. By this, tradition and pueblo community as symbolized by the plazuela are conflated with Catholic community. When Antonio speaks of “traditions” he sees them as something one participates in as part of a community, as a member of the pueblo. The evangélicos don’t participate in traditional fiestas; therefore, distance from tradition means distance from the community and the “communitas” (cf. Turner
1969) that this implies during celebrations. In order to be inside, to be one of “us”, one has to act as an insider. In this case that means to participate in the fiesta. If an individual does not participate, then he or she does not take part in the social and symbolic community that is created and communicated during a ritual or celebration. To abstain from participation, and in fact to actively distance oneself from the ritual practice, is an act that states very clearly that the individual or group in question is not part of the community or social reality being communicated, and that the ritual is not relevant to their perception or experience of the social reality in which they live.

The ideals of community, sharing, collective celebrations, and commonality within the pueblo, which are closely related to what is seen as Indian values and identity, are expressed through the fiesta. The fiesta remains a primary symbol of San Antonio community. It is centered around the pueblo as a place and as a community on interacting people. First, the social relations that are communicated are relevant within the pueblo. Second, there is a focus on traditions, which are also centered around place and pueblo. Culture, tradition, and religion in this context become mixed. The pueblo is the main reference for identity and social location as expressed through Catholic celebrations.

**The church and Protestant community**

As we have seen, Protestant religious practice is less concentrated on group liturgy and public celebrations and more on personal prayer and testimony. Sense of community is in the first instance related to the specific church and expressed through participation in church activities such as servicios, prayer groups, directives, and Bible study groups, by serving in different positions such as elder, and through church celebrations. There is no common institution or organization which unites Protestants in shared celebration and little or no cooperation across church boundaries within San Antonio. Protestant celebrations are confined to members of the church, or on occasion, invited guests. Catholic celebrations are public and open; they attract people from outside the pueblo as well as non-practitioners within the pueblo, and sometimes tourists. The focus on the inner work makes it less important for Protestants to mark themselves publicly.
The antorcha - evangélicos claim public space

Still, Protestants occasionally use public space to mark themselves and express church community. One such occasion took place in April when, celebrating the anniversary of the youth and children’s groups, the Esmirna organized an antorcha, or a torch race. On this particular afternoon I catch a ride to Antigua with my friend Cristina and a few other people from the Esmirna. The sky has opened up for the daily downpour of rain which is so characteristic for this time of the year and in the back of the pick-up we try to cover ourselves under a couple of umbrellas. After about ten minutes we reach the outskirts of Antigua and stop there to wait for the rest of the people from the Esmirna. Today we celebrate the anniversary of the youth and children’s groups and as is an Esmirna tradition, there will be an antorcha, or a torch race, to mark the occasion. The antorcha is started in the central park of Antigua; it will circle the park and continue through some of the main streets of the town. Then it starts on the road to San Antonio where our small group is waiting because we were a little late.

After about ten minutes we hear a lot of noise, cheering, and car horns in the distance and soon we see a familiar group of people approaching. About 20 children and teenagers run in front and one of the older boys is holding a torch. They all wear t-shirts that say “Esmirna”, “Anniversario”, or “Jesus Loves Me”. After the group of children a caravan of about 15 cars and pick-ups follows. People are honking their horns, blowing whistles, and cheering, making a lot of noise. The children are singing church songs. When the parade passes by us we join in the line of cars. Isabel, a young girl who is with us in the pick-up jumps out and joins the others. All the way from Antigua, through Ciudad Vieja and San Lorenzo el Cubo to San Antonio, the children and teenagers take turns holding the torch. Some get tired and jump into one of the cars to rest before joining the group once again. The line of cars and buses behind us gets longer and longer because we are moving so slowly, but no one seems to care and no one gets aggressive towards us.

After passing through Ciudad Vieja and San Lorenzo we reach the cumbre, the point where the road starts to descend into the valley and the pueblo. The noise from the car horns and the ones who are cheering gets louder. People who live along the road come out to see what’s
going on and stand in their doorways as the caravan passes by. The main street stretches from the cumbre all the way to the church located one block from the Santa Catarina border, and after running through the whole pueblo we finally reach the destination. We gather in the church courtyard where some of the women have prepared tamales, refresco, and coffee. There is a speech from the youth leader and then a prayer where we thank God for the good work that the group has been able to do and ask blessings for the year that is to come. Afterwards people stay around for about half an hour to chat and socialize before returning home or to work.

The spatialization of Esmirna community

The antorcha is performed a few times a year to celebrate the anniversaries of the youth and children’s groups and the Esmirna colégio. These are the only real occasions for members of the Esmirna to mark themselves publicly in town and to make use of public space for their celebrations. Like the Catholic fiesta, the antorcha becomes a celebration of particular notions of community, where a certain social reality is made relevant and where identity and belonging are communicated and enforced. The antorcha is a consciousness-raising event (cf. Cohen 1989) that, though not close to the scale of the fiesta, is also a public expression, a way to make oneself visible in the public sphere. By getting together children and adults, using t-shirts that say “Esmirna” and singing church songs, they make specific and explicit the community to which they belong, both to themselves and others. By blowing in whistles, honking the car horns, and making a lot of noise they make sure that everyone else notices as well.

As with the fiesta the particular use of public space reveals something about the conceptualization of identity and community. The antorcha and the procession resemble each other in that they start in one place and then move through the physical landscape in a particular way. But where the procession ends up in the plazuela and the Catholic church where it initially started, the antorcha starts in one place and ends up in another, making a linear movement. The San Antonio fiesta and Corpus Cristi procession serve to link individuals, families, and cantones to the pueblo, as symbolized by the visit of the descansos,
the four capillas, and the plazuela. In the antorcha, on the other hand, the link is made directly between the Esmirna and the outside world, as represented by Antigua. The antorcha starts in the central park in Antigua and ends up in the Esmirna courtyard, without even passing by the San Antonio plazuela. As a matter of fact, San Antonio doesn’t seem particularly significant at all as it becomes merely one of several towns passed by on the path towards the church. The spatial connection symbolized through the antorcha is between the Esmirna and the world, rather than to San Antonio.

Inasmuch as San Antonio may seem irrelevant to Esmirna public expression of community and belonging, at one point the antorcha reveals that the Esmirna Protestants are very much aware of their connection to the pueblo. As described, when reaching the cumbre upon entering town, the cheering, singing, and noise increase in volume and intensity. While in Antigua and on the road towards San Antonio the antorcha would more or less drown in the more hectic atmosphere of people, cars, and town life. People passing by would look up to see what was going on, but not pay much attention. San Antonio is quieter and calmer and when the antorcha approaches it is like they want to wake up the sleepy town and make people come out to the street as if saying: “Here we are, now it’s our turn!”.

**The production of localized subjects**

Cohen (1989:59) writes that: “(...) both in its social and psychological consequences, ritual confirms and strengthens social identity and people’s sense of social location: it is an important means through which people experience community”. Religious celebrations are localizing practices in that they express community, social relations, and the individual’s position within these relations. Appadurai (1996:179) points out that rituals are concerned with the production of local subjects; “actors who properly belong to a situated community of kin, neighbors, friends, and enemies”. My argument in this chapter is that different religious celebrations in San Antonio produce certain localized subjects, that is, situated subjects with a certain sense of community, place, and of belonging.
The *fiesta* integrates the *pueblo* in shared celebration, spending, and religious activity. Through the *fiesta* relations between individuals, families, neighborhoods, *cofradías* and *cabecillas*, and the *pueblo* are strengthened and symbolized by the procession and the activities in the *plazuela* and in other parts of town. The main references for identity as expressed through the *fiesta* are the local community, the *pueblo*, and other *sanantoñeros*. In the *fiesta* the *plazuela* becomes the expression of both the Catholic community and the *pueblo*; physically, socially, and symbolically. The *pueblo* and Catholic community, thus, are conflated.

In the Protestant community the individual is more directly related to the church through participation in *servicios* and groups. Through celebrations the relation between the individual, the church and the outside world is emphasized and expressed as symbolized by the *antorcha*. The *antorcha* and other celebrations therefore express identity as primarily related to church and then to the world. Through the rejection of tradition and participation in *fiestas* Protestants are disembedded from the local community, ties, and relations to a larger degree. This can be seen in the declining use of *traje* as well as in the expression of community through the particular use of public space. Protestant community is related to the church and links the individual to the church, then to the outside world and to perceptions of a larger world wide community of believers committed to the Protestant faith.

The Catholic *fiesta* strengthens the individual’s sense of social location in relation to family, neighborhood, and town, while the *antorcha* becomes an expression of the way that the Esmirna Protestants distance themselves from traditions and from the *pueblo* as relevant primary reference for identity.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have shown how conceptualizations of community find expression through celebrations. Communities and community boundaries, are “thought”, that is, they are conceptualized symbolically and imbued with meaning that exceeds the “objective” boundary markers, in this case religious boundaries (Cohen 1989:12). On one hand celebrations serve as
events that make people aware of community belonging and identity. On the other, my argument has been that they reveal certain things about how community is conceptualized by the different religious groups. I have shown that these events express something about the perception of the relevant social reality and how individuals are related to, and positioned within, that reality. By comparing the use of public space in the San Antonio fiesta and Corpus Cristi procession, and in the Esmirna anniversary antorcha, I show how perceptions of community and belonging are manifested in the use of the physical space. Celebrations serve to both express something of the social reality relevant to the group, but also to socialize and thereby localize both socially, spatially, and conceptually, the individual into that reality.

In the Catholic community there is an emphasis on tradition and participation in tradition as expressed by Antonio, while Protestant community is conceptualized as a group of people who have rejected tradition. In the next chapter I take a closer look at the concept of tradition, how it is used as a boundary marker in relations between Protestants and Catholics and how it relates to other concepts, such as culture, religion, and change.
In the previous chapter I demonstrated how religious celebrations serve as means through which community, sense of locality, and identity are communicated, and through which boundaries are marked, expressed, and reinforced. The *fiesta*, and all that it entails, is the primary symbol of Catholic religious expression and community and of the importance of, or emphasis placed on, ‘tradition’ by Catholics. To Catholics the *fiesta* is the climax of adoration in the religious cycle of the year and where ‘tradition’ finds its strongest expression. For Protestants it is the symbol of all that is “wrong” with Catholicism. ‘Tradition’ becomes a concept, imbued with particular meaning that serves as a principal boundary marker between ‘Catholics’ and ‘Protestants’. Antonio expressed how he feels that Protestants reject the *pueblo* community as they reject tradition, while for Protestants tradition becomes a symbol of the ignorance, backwardness, and misguided religious beliefs of the Catholics. In this chapter I will explore what I call the “conceptual landscape” as it is revealed through discourses of religious and cultural change, and how Protestants and Catholics are localized or situated in relation to concepts of tradition and change.

‘Tradition’ and symbolic boundaries

As described in chapter four, the symbolic construction of collective identities is about boundaries. Groups identify themselves in opposition to an “other”; the defining of “us” implies a defining of “them” as something different, something that “we” are not (cf. Cohen 1989; Jenkins 2004). By looking at how boundaries are symbolically constructed we can

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23 By “conceptual landscape” I mean to refer to an open field of ideas and concepts upon which meaning and identity are constructed.
therefore gain insight into how groups conceptualize themselves and how they are conceptualized by others. This is not to say that the articulation of the boundary and the categorization of people into distinct groups are necessarily determining of how individuals within each group identify themselves or how they will act in given situations or contexts. Neither will a person’s self-description as Protestant or Catholic be an adequate description of his or her beliefs, because it will be a description of affiliation and not philosophy (cf. Cohen 1989:73). The boundary will typically be constructed outward as symbolically simple, while hiding the inward complexity (Cohen 1989). Still, I argue that boundaries are drawn in a specific conceptual or symbolic “terrain” upon which classification, categorization, and the symbolic construction of groups and communities take place. Taking a closer look at how boundaries between Catholics and Protestants are expressed in San Antonio, as well as the positioning of groups according to that boundary in the conceptual landscape gives us a clue as to how they relate to other concepts as well.

For a minority group, such as Protestants in San Antonio, the articulation and symbolic maintenance of the boundary towards the majority is essential to their self-perception as a group. In a town where the majority is Catholic and in which Catholic and syncretic traditions have had, and still have, a central position in symbolizing the pueblo and ethnic community and identity, their boundaries are under threat and require constant maintenance and reinforcement. Protestants are the ones who have made the drastic change by publicly rejecting the past and the traditions. By doing this they publicly communicate that these traditions and the Catholic way of life and world view are no longer relevant to their perceptions of the world. Catholics, on the other hand, don’t have this same urgent need to mark boundaries towards Protestants. As we saw, Catholics often express rather indifferent or sometimes quite positive feelings towards Protestants. Their main points of critique towards Protestants are that they criticize Catholics, elevate themselves to a position of moral superiority, claim a monopoly of the truth, and that they reject the pueblo community and their traditions.

As we saw in chapter four, boundaries are expressed through a discourse, in which differences are articulated around three main themes; vicios (vices) and morals, the veneration of saints
and idolatry, and “tradition”. The differences are by both Protestants and Catholics explained by what Protestants don’t do, or don’t do anymore, as they are the ones who have made the change in which they reject the past. We saw that Catholics are accused by Protestants to be drunkards and morally weak, idolaters, and ignorant followers of tradition, while Protestants describe themselves as “having changed”, putting the “state of Catholicism” behind them as they now lead a better life. Catholics, on the other hand, accuse Protestant of distancing themselves from the pueblo community as expressed through traditions and Catholic religious practice.

From this discussion it becomes clear that the boundary as it is expressed revolves around two principal themes; ‘tradition’ and ‘change’. In this chapter I argue that the valuation of these concepts as used in boundary imagery is significant. I will now take a closer look at the concept of tradition and the symbolic conceptual landscape in which it is part and how tradition is used in San Antonio. Through this discussion I will outline a part of the conceptual landscape against which Catholics and Protestants are conceptualized as groups and as categories with inherent characteristics.

‘Tradition’ in the conceptual landscape and in public discourse

As a concept in San Antonio discourse, ‘tradition’ encompasses both the traditions of the institutional Catholic Church, local Catholic religious traditions (costumbre) as expressed particularly through fiestas, the veneration of saints and its expression through idol processions, cofradía ritual and practice, syncretic religion and Maya spirituality, as well as cultural expressions through weaving, clothing, and language.

The concept of ‘tradition’ bears with it a long history in general political and intellectual thought and public discourse. Ever since the Enlightenment period of the 18th century, when the ideas of freedom, democracy, reason and rationality became the new ethos of Europe, tradition has been the object of much ambivalent emotion and evaluation. The rationality and scientific principles of the new society was seen as opposed to the tradition and traditionality, ignorance, and superstition of the ancien régime (Shils 1981:4-7). Through the discourse and
theories of modernization these ideas were developed further. Societies were seen to develop in a linear fashion from a state of traditionality and primitivism to a state of modernity. Western, capitalist, and industrialized societies were placed at the ultimate stage on this development ladder into which all societies and cultures would eventually evolve. Tradition was associated with ignorance, superstition, and backwardness, while the Western modern societies were equated with the ideals of enlightenment, education, science, progress, and rationality. The accent of much intellectual and political discourse since then has been on a movement forward from the recent and the remote past in which change became a virtue in itself and largely equated with improvement, progress, development, and civilization (cf. Shils 1981; Hobsbawm & Ranger 1992).

As described in chapter two, the Guatemalan political discourses of progress and modernization were essential parts of Liberal politics and thought since the 19th and 20th centuries. A recurrent theme in Guatemalan politics has been governments’ determination to remake the nation in the image of what they have seen as the developed and modern North American and European nation states. These thoughts have historically dominated the state’s attitude toward the Indian majority, which has largely been an anomaly in the Guatemalan nationalistic project. Indians did not fit into the scheme of the modern society and were seen to be slowing down the processes of modernization and progress, because of their “customs, world views, and loyalties [which] seemed the embodiment of all that was backward, recalcitrant and anti-modern” (Lovell and Lutz cited in Garrard-Burnett 2000:342). As the discourse of indigenismo merged with that of alcoholism “Indianness” became conflated with drunkenness, primitive customs and religious sentiments, vicios, and general backwardness and ignorance (Garrard-Burnett 2000).

**Tradition in discourses of modernity and Protestantism**

The idea of social change as a process of development, improvement, enlightenment, and movement forward from a traditional and primitive past to a modern, civilized, and rational present is also traceable in Protestant discourse. A conceptual and discursive divide is created between past and present, tradition and modernity, ignorance and enlightenment separated by
a rupture or transformation through conversion. Birgit Meyer (1998:317) notes that for Pentecostals in Ghana:

(...) the appeal to ‘time’ as an epistemological category enables pentecostalists to draw a rift between ‘us’ and ‘them,’ ‘now’ and ‘then,’ ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ and, of course, ‘God and the ‘Devil’. In this way pentecostalist discourse takes up the language of modernity as it spoke to Africans through colonialization, missionization and, after Independence, modernization theory. Indeed, a clear analogy exists between the pentecostalist and, for that matter, the Protestant in general, conceptualization of conversion in terms of a rupture with the past and modernity’s self definition in terms of progress and continuous renewal.

Keane writes that the project of becoming self-consciously “modern” resembles that of religious conversion in some respects. The historical self-definition of Protestantism, particularly in the missionary encounter, has been an understanding of bringing “the unsaved into a new historical trajectory” (Keane 2002:67). Keane suggests that the project of becoming self-consciously “modern” resemble that of conversion. He (referring to Marshall Berman and Charles Taylor) stresses three features of modernity (as self-description, an idea, and conceptual orientation for action). First, there is a focus on the individual’s agency, inwardness, and freedom; second, there is a vision of the possibilities for individual self-creation; and third, high value is attributed to social as well as individual change in contrast to a relatively devalued “tradition”.

These ideas are reflected in the discourse of religious difference in San Antonio. Protestants in San Antonio reject tradition; Catholics are seen as drunkards, promiscuous, ignorant, as stuck in past practices, vicios, and a religion that focuses more on the external factors and public expression than on purity, spiritualism, and morals. What was seen as the “pathology of Indianness” (cf. chapter two) is rearticulated in Protestant discourse as the “pathology of Catholicness”. The Catholic is constructed as drunken, vicioso (vice-ridden), backward, traditional, and ignorant.
On one hand, ‘tradition’ is therefore seen as opposed to modernity, progress, and rationality, and associated with superstition and ignorance, viceful behavior, and traditional views. This is becomes clear both through discourses of change, ethnic identity, and religious change. In a context where change and improvement are valued and encouraged, ‘tradition’ bears connotations to something that is static and lacks change, something of the past, and as the opposite of progress and development. In San Antonio we have seen that these views are both reflected in the desire to salir adelante, improve living standards and economy, and in Protestant religious discourse of transformation and conversion.

On the other hand, ‘tradition’, or ‘costumbre’ (custom), refers to practices that are considered important for the expression and experience of identity on various levels; both on the level of the individual, the community, and the ethnic group. In this sense the concept evokes ideas of historical continuity and legitimacy as well as cultural authenticity, all of which are important elements of group-/ethnic identity construction and imagination. In the expression of indígena, Maya, and San Antonio identity ‘tradition’, costumbre, and típica are central. They refer to traditional clothing, traditional weaving technique and designs, traditional food, traditional way of life, traditional spirituality, and traditional rituals. Concepts of tradition are frequently evoked and referred to, “invented” or not, in the discourses of nationalistic or ethnic essentialist projects as justification for group identities and demands (cf. Hobsbawm & Ranger 1992). The Maya movement has an essentialist concept of culture and identity as they stress continuity with the Maya past in their work with revitalization of Maya language, cosmolgy, and culture.

It becomes clear that the relation to tradition is a complex one. The centrality of change and improvement in modernity discourses are reflected in discourses of Protestantism. The focus is on an improvement from a dark past into a bright future.

**Tradition and ambivalence**

I found that many of my San Antonio informants are ambivalent towards ‘tradition’, and that this ambivalence is expressed on two main levels. First, as discussed in chapter three, there is...
a general ambivalence among both Catholics and Protestants towards the continuation and preservation of traditions such as weaving, language, and dress, because they are losing their immediate relevance in the modern society in which the pueblo and the local community are no longer the only references for identity and self-realization. Still, there is an idea of these traditions being important for cultural expression and identity as people often express, but not much effort is put into preserving them (cf. chapter three). The cabecilla of our cantón, Ramón (52) explained to me how traditions are important for identity and how there are differences between ladinos and indígenas in this respect. He can be said to be a traditionalist who is concerned with the continuation of traditions, both those related to Catholic religious expression and language and dress.

The traditions are important. They are expressions of our Maya past and our pueblo. We use the corn a lot for decoration and sacrifice for instance, that is because the corn was very important to the Mayas. This is something particularly indígena, ladinos don’t have this and they don’t have cofradías for instance. They think that these things are not true religion. But the traditions are declining [se están perdiendo], many people think that they are muy atrás [backward].

(Ramón, conversation, February 2006)

The traditions are seen as important for indígena and pueblo identity, but they are also associated with something being atrás (back, backward). As we saw in chapter three this ambivalence was expressed by several informants. The traditions are described as something that people, especially the youth, see as backward. Antonio also stated in chapter three: “It is more important [than learning Kaqchikel] to get an education, to show that I am an indígena, but that I am intelligent.” Here, Antonio relates Kaqchikel to Indianness, which may be seen as backward.

A presentation of culture

At a second level, Protestants express ambivalence towards tradition because boundaries between what is San Antonio, Maya, or indígena tradition and what is Catholic tradition are often blurred. As tradition is important for identity construction and perceptions of culture, the issue arises in some contexts of defining what is acceptable and proper Protestant identity
expression and what is not. This happened at a meeting I attended with the women from my prayer group in which we were to plan the welcoming celebration for a group of American missionaries which came to visit the Esmirna in March. About 15 women were gathered in the courtyard outside the church. Chairs and benches were arranged in a circle under the roof of the building outside the kitchen area where we were protected from the burning sun. As the discussions started, it soon became clear that the celebration was to contain features of “culture-presentation”; the idea seemed to be to present the culture and traditions of the Esmirna and of San Antonio. The women were largely in agreement as they discussed flower arrangements, food, and table arrangements, but when it came to particular decorations and the entertainment and activities there were some disagreements.

While discussions went back and forth hermana Florentina commented on the decorations: “We could make some alfombras24. That’s part of our tradition.” Then, as if correcting herself: “Or maybe not alfombras as such, but some flower decorations spelling out ‘welcome’ or something?” Hermana Dora, sitting across from her, burst out as if horrified by the suggestion: “But alfombras is kind of what the Catholics do. We can’t do that. How bad wouldn’t it look if someone was to pass by and there we were making alfombras! Ay, Dios!” She put up a facial expression that demonstrated just how embarrassing that would be, shaking her hand in the air and turning to the women around her laughing. Some of the other women nodded at her comment and laughed too. It was agreed that they would instead welcome the Americans by decorating the big front wall behind the pulpit with colored cardboard letters.

A little later the discussion moved on to the entertainment and again Florentina made a suggestion; “Well, what about a marimba25, then? I’ve been looking into it and I’ve found one in Ciudad Vieja that’s available, I’ve heard that they’re good”. Hermana Chela stated that a marimba must be okay; “that’s our tradition too”. Perhaps still a little worried hermana

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24 Alfombra is a type of decoration used widely during the Catholic celebration of Easter (Semana Santa) to decorate the streets before the processions. Made out of flowers, colored sawdust, vegetables, and plants among other things.

25 Marimba is a traditional music instrument.
Dora asked if Florentina was sure that “the musicians are *hermanos*” (that they are *evangélicos*). Florentina assured her that they were and that she knew that they had been used by another Protestant church at other occasions, something that seemed to reassure the group.

In this situation it was demonstrated that the boundaries separating what is ‘Catholic’ from what is ‘San Antonio’ are not clear-cut and that there are discussions concerning these distinctions within the group. The discussion concerns objects which are to be used in a ceremony for a group of American missionaries. In the presentation which the women are planning it becomes important, first, to present the Esmirna as a Protestant church, or as non-Catholics, in the context of largely Catholic San Antonio; second, to show off their distinct culture and traditions as something of pride and something different from that of the Americans; and third, to mark community and sameness with the Americans as one single community united in the adoration of God “across national and cultural borders” as the pastor Cesar later expressed.

How to do all of this in one presentation is the focus of the meeting. Some elements are seen to be indisputably ‘San Antonio’, such as the *traje* and the *tipica* with which they will decorate the church room. When Florentina suggests the making of *alfombras*, Dora’s reaction reveals how afraid she is to be perceived as crossing the boundary. Both the *alfombras* and the *marimba* band were on the border line of what was acceptable as they are both closely related to Catholic celebrations. For Protestants in San Antonio the rejection of Catholic traditions is central to their identity imagery and self-presentation; what primarily defines a Protestant in San Antonio is the rejection of Catholicism. Any association with Catholic practices therefore becomes potentially dangerous as it puts into question what category the individual in question really pertains to. When *hermana* Dora reacts the way she does it is with the desire to control the boundary as she perceives it to be threatened. Instead they decide to go for a decoration that is neutral and unambiguous.

*Hermana* Florentina is the leader and representative for the women in the prayer group, and one of the members who started the group 15 years ago. She is from a family that have been prominent members of the Esmirna church for generations, a family that is also one of the
richest in town and has been one of the families which have had a relative monopoly on the tourist industry in San Antonio for decades (Little 2004). *Hermana* Florentina is a well respected member of the group with an unquestionable position and authority among the women. *Hermana* Dora is a convert, though she also holds a strong position within the group and has been a Protestant for many years. It seems that Florentina is more confident in her position and role as Protestant, as she has lived all her life in the church and has a strong position in the church as well as in town. She does not have the same need to completely distance herself from anything associated with Catholicism, because she knows that her position and identity are not threatened by such actions. She knows herself, she knows God, and she knows that making *alfombras* doesn’t make her Catholic. She also knows that anyone who might have seen her doing this would never think of questioning her dedication to the Protestant religion or to the Esmirna church.

More recently converted persons will be more wary of these nuances. Some of the other women may be less confident in their roles and positions, something that makes them more vulnerable to misinterpretation, gossip, and, in their own eyes, erroneous categorization. It seems that for those who are not quite well and safely situated within the category of being *evangélico* the demonstrative aspect of always displaying their unambiguous identity is something that they are continuously conscious of. For others who are not subjected to scrutiny, discussion, and dispute concerning their religious identity this becomes less important. It becomes important to “keep matter in place” by keeping actions, behavior, and appearance within unambiguous categorical distinctions. A Protestant behaving like a Catholic will have problems, even if she defends herself by claiming historical cultural legitimacy to her actions.

van der Veer argues that ambivalence is one consequence of both modernity and conversion:

Conversion and modernity have something in common – they both view change positively. (...) The authentication of the present is often in terms of continuity with the past, but in both modernity and conversion there is a deep ambivalence about the past. (van der Veer 1996:18)
He further writes that “an important element in the need for continuity is a respect for the religion of the ancestors, and, by that token, for the integrity of the larger family” (van der Veer 1996:19). The rejection of the religion of the ancestors and the family, and thereby the means through which community, identity, and culture have historically been expressed, has implications for how this “authentication of the present” is conceived among (some of) my Protestant informants. As I will show in the next sections, the ambivalence towards the past and towards tradition is met with a particular way of constructing Indian identity.

So far, I have shown how the discourse of religious difference in San Antonio reflects general discourses of conversion, modernity, tradition, and change. The way that “the Indian” was constructed in national political and intellectual discourses mirrors the way Protestants construct “the Catholic” in theirs. We have also seen how the Protestant rejection of the past causes ambivalence towards culture and identity as the question arises of what to reject as ‘Catholic’ and what to keep as ‘San Antonio’ or ‘Indian’. Next I will show how my Protestant informants reconstruct culture, heritage, and ethnic identity in a reality where Catholicism is rejected.

**Religion, culture, and change: improvement, purification, and pollution**

Once in the beginning of my fieldwork Antonio was taking me to see the doctor who was an acquaintance of his and an evangélico and member of the Esmirna. We were sitting in the waiting room when hermano Rogerio came in, another member of the Esmirna who was also there to see the doctor. We began talking about my stay in San Antonio and how I was studying “the culture and different religions”. It all developed into a conversation in which Antonio and Rogerio discussed the state of the culture and language, and also some things about Maya politics. Rogerio was the most engaged in the discussion. He went on about how all this about revitalization and standardization of languages and everything that the Maya movement was into, was really all about politics, funding, and really not relevant to people’s lives. He stated that in his opinion these things meant nothing, what was needed was a change of “the culture”. “We have to get rid of the negative elements of our culture and keep all the
good things. We have to better ourselves.” To this Antonio agreed, but he didn’t bring the subject further, perhaps to avoid it getting into a discussion over religion.

Hermano Rogerio is in his late fifties and was born a Protestant, as a member of the Esmirna. He used to be a Kaqchikel teacher in the public primary school in San Antonio and has authored several educational books and other material in Kaqchikel. Though he is now critical towards the efforts of the Maya-revitalizationists, he has worked with la Academia de las lenguas Mayas de Guatemala, a government-sponsored agency run by Mayanists and dedicated to the standardization of the Maya languages and the facilitation of their public use. He has also worked as a preacher and held the position of elder in the Esmirna where he is a well respected member. He is conscious about what he sees as the “real” culture and what he thinks is fake and used by people for their own gain. Rogerio thinks that the Spanish Conquistadors destroyed all that was good and positive when they came to Guatemala and that those who claim to be practicing Maya spirituality and culture today are frauds.

The Maya culture is what was before; it has nothing to do with Catholicism. The Spaniards implemented Catholicism when they arrived and destroyed all that was Maya. Mayas don’t exist anymore, even though some [the Maya movement] try to bring that back again, but this is not the same as what was before, in the old times. What was Maya doesn’t exist anymore. It was a very rich culture. They were doing natural medicine without chemicals like they are now. They were astronomers, dealt with numbers and so on. The Catholics ruined all of this. Those who were sacerdotes mayas [Maya priests or shamans] before were the ones who were the most educated [preparados] in society, those with the most knowledge. The people who are sacerdotes mayas today are not the same. They only do the rites and all of that, with the sacrifices and dancing and the incense and candles and whatnot. (Hermano Rogerio, interview, May 2006)

To hermano Rogerio the Maya culture was destroyed or “polluted” by Catholicism and the Spaniards. He sees these negative influences as stemming from the Conquest and colonial society, only to be continued today out of ignorance and as confused with Catholic religious beliefs and rites. Harrison (1999) notes that “identity pollution” is one kind of cultural
boundary imagery often employed in the construction of ethnic identity. Identity pollution is when a group sees its culture or identity as being intruded by elements from outside sources. He illustrates the point with the example of Quebec, where the French nationalists discourse presents the French-Canadian culture as being threatened by US American culture and values. The counter strategy to this “pollution” becomes that of “purification”, in which group identity is symbolically constructed around what is considered the “pure” elements of the culture. Harrison further notes that by adopting the identity pollution perspective culture is constructed as something reified and essentialized. By emphasizing rigid boundaries between cultures, they are at the same time seen as bounded entities.

As we already have seen, the boundaries between religion and tradition can be blurry. To Catholics the two have historically been inextricably linked; tradition is an important part of Catholic religious expression and ethnic identity and community has been defined through the Catholic religion. To Protestants the separation of religion from tradition becomes important both in the expression of boundaries and, as a natural extension, in the expression of own culture and identity as Protestants who at the same time are sanantoñeros. What is ‘San Antonio’ has to be separated from what is ‘Catholic’ and both should be separated from what is true ‘religion’, or the spiritual relation to Jesus Christ.

So, the idea of purification through Protestantism is double. First, the Protestants reject Catholicism and Catholic traditions and adopt a new belief system in which emphasis is put on the individual’s direct relation with, and moral responsibility to, God, and in which the Bible is the final authority and source to His will. In this respect, culture or tradition is seen to disturb, or “pollute”, the pure spiritual relationship between the individual and God. So on one hand, Protestantism, as seen by Protestants, becomes a purification of religion and the spiritual relation between God and man. On the other hand, this same rejection of tradition opens up for a redefinition of culture and San Antonio or indígena identity more related to essentialized concepts of weavings, language, and food, rather than Catholic and other pueblo traditions associated with Catholic religion. This form of conceptualizing culture and identity is free of the perceived vicios, immorality, fiesta traditions, and backwardness of the Catholics, which Protestants reject.
As pointed out, a central theme in the discourse of religion and difference concerns change. Change is discussed through conversion stories as treated below, in the discourse of general religious change in town and relations between religious groups and churches, as associated with economic change, improvement of living conditions, modernization of the physical structure of town, and in relation to cultural matters such as the decline in language and dress. Through ideas of purification as I have described them the positive and “safe” parts of culture are kept as “real culture” while the rest is rejected as “Catholic”. The Spanish-Catholic era is rejected as not relevant, while the things selected are more related to the Maya past or to the present way of life. Hermano Alfredo, an Esmirna informant who converted many years ago, expresses his view on tradition in this way:

It [Protestantism] is not really about leaving one’s traditions. We keep the things that are our *costumbre*. I still work in the fields with my machete and my *sombrero*, I eat my *tortillas* and beans, I sow. My wife still weaves, she still wears her *traje*. We keep all this even though we are *evangélicos*. What we do leave is the drinking, but that is not part of the *indígena* culture. That is something negative. (*Hermano* Alfredo, interview, May 2006)

*Evangélicos* claim that religion has nothing to do with culture or their identity as *indígenas* or as *sanantoñeros*. Alfredo relates *indígena* identity to the *indígena* way of life. It is a matter of keeping the traditions and parts of the culture that are positive, and leave behind the traditions that are negative, such as the drinking and the idolatry. These traits are part of a tradition that is negative, sinful, and hindering the healthy development of society as a place where God and the spiritual are placed center stage. Protestants see tradition as coming in the way of this and misleading the people into sinful behavior, the worshipping of idols, and general backwardness.

These topics were not discussed by all my informants in San Antonio and seldom in these same terms. It is not coincidental that it was *hermano* Rogerio and Antonio (as will be further presented below) who were the most articulate regarding these ideas of improvement and purification. They are both committed to their churches and work actively within them.
Antonio is also involved in the politics of the municipio, while Rogerio is engaged in language politics and Maya movement activities.

“Estas cosas no tienen sentido”

The ideas of reform and purification, as related to religious and cultural change, are not discussed exclusively among Protestants. As described in chapter four there are divisions and fractions within the Catholic Church among which these are recurrent themes as well. The concern is that all the non-religious activities that are part of religious celebrations take focus away from what is really important, which should be the spiritual and religious message.

One example of this was the celebration of el Nombre del Niño Jesús on the 21st of January. From morning to nighttime there were a range of different activities in town. Groups of men from other towns, dressed up and a little drunk, held hilarious dance performances in the streets. Men on horses, portraying Spaniards and Moors, fought their fierce battles and scared the crowd with their aggressive characters and seemingly uncontrollable animals. I was accompanied by Carmen throughout the day, while Antonio joined us later for the procession of the imagen of Jesus. The procession started around nine o’clock from the temple for its designated route following the principal streets around town. A lot of people were out in the streets, many walked in the procession while others were just hanging out watching the festivities in the streets and the plazuela. On almost every block there was something going on as the procession proceeded through the streets. There were the dance groups, displays of fireworks, and a performance of a satirical play among other things. The procession went very slowly and ended up lasting over four hours, finally returning to the temple at one o’clock in the morning, because it was delayed by all the other activities taking place along the route.

Most people think that these things are fun to watch and many had taken stand at the locations for these activities even before the procession arrived and did not participate in the actual procession around town. So wherever there was one such activity the procession would stop so that people could watch it and because it could not get through the crowd. People who were there for the procession had to wait and were forced to stay out until after mid-night.
“Estas cosas no tienen sentido”, “These things have no true sentiment”, Antonio told me as he explained the situation. To people like Antonio and Carmen these activities are not relevant to the religious message and act of adoration that is important to them. They are both devoted Catholics, Antonio has been a catechist and is involved with different groups and the organization in the church. He has also been cabecilla of the cantón in which we live and responsible for the celebrations of that area. He is a self-declared “liberalist” who identifies with the younger and more liberal forces which work for change in the church. Carmen (36) is also a devoted Catholic. She is not married, but lives in her parents’ house and works as a Spanish teacher in Antigua. “The religious message should be at focus, not the fiesta and all the other things. These things are important too, but not to the extent that they become the focus of the whole thing or have negative influences on people”, Carmen explained.

Also when it came to drinking related to celebrations Antonio had expressed his concerns as he saw it as problematic and getting in the way of the religious content of fiestas. He attributed it to the cofradías and the traditionalists who were only concerned with the traditions and the partying, more so than with the religious and spiritual message of celebrations. For instance, it is custom to serve alcohol to those who have helped you out during preparations for a fiesta, as with building a decoration or an altar, or preparing the graveyard after the death of a person. Antonio described how he himself at one time, while being cabecilla (representative for the cantón or town quarter), had been responsible for one of the four cantones’ exhibition in the plazuela during a San Antonio fiesta. To build the altar and decoration he had received help from a group of men and after the procession had passed and their work was more or less done the men had expected to be served the complementary liquor. Antonio had wanted to deny them this and instead tried to serve them some food, snacks, coffee, and soda, but the men had become furious at this. They had demanded to be served the liquor that they thought they deserved, and had started a big argument. After realizing that opposition was too strong Antonio finally gave in and went off to a nearby tienda to buy several bottles of rum and beer, which he then angrily thrusted at them. “Why should I bother?” he told me with a resigned sigh. “If all they want is their guaro and to get drunk, well, I can’t stop them. It should be that they worked because they wanted to, because
they wanted to contribute to the religious message. That’s how this older generation is; they only want to keep with the traditions and don’t care about anything else.”

As briefly discussed, there is a cultural critique that can be traced in both Protestant and Catholic discourses and we have seen.

**Conversion – a total transformation**

When discussing conversion my informants in the Esmirna emphasized that it was a process that involved a longer period of reflection, quest for insight and understanding, and prayer; the acquirement of knowledge and spiritual insight. Conversion is not something that comes by itself, it is something that one has to actively seek and prepare for by learning and praying. The actual baptism is only a celebration of this process to mark the beginning of a new life in the Holy Spirit. The focus is on the radical change that takes place in the convert’s heart and life as he or she opens their heart and accepts Jesus as their savior. Still, as much as conversion is seen as a process, it is perceived to be a drastic and complete break with the past and the old way of living.

Conversion narratives typically contain descriptions of a “before” and an “after”, two states of being put against each other in radical opposition (cf. Gill 1990; Meyer 1998). Where stories of the “before” typically contain descriptions of living in darkness [*oscuridad*], being lost [*perdido/-a*], in a state of ignorance [*ignorancia*], vicios and sin [*pecado*], poverty [*pobreza*], misery [*miseria*], and destructive behavior, the “after” is described as a state of having reached insight, of truthfulness, being “found”, of things falling into place, right living, feeling the proximity of God, of something pure and true. The conversion is described as an awakening or enlightenment process, where the individual is gradually pulled out of the darkness and misery, realizes the truth and the right way, and surrenders his or her heart to Christ and to salvation.


**Hermana Mariela’s story**

_Hermana_ Mariela is 40 years old and has five children from the age of six to eighteen. She and her husband, Aníbal, are active members of the Esmirma church after their conversions to Evangelical Protestantism about seven years ago. Mariela was born in San Antonio, but grew up in one of the Guatemala City suburbs where she met her husband. About fourteen years ago they moved back to San Antonio to get away from the crime ridden capital and the problems they had there. They are now devoted members of the Esmirma; Aníbal is currently serving a two year term as an _anciano_ (elder) and Mariela herself has held various positions in different directives such as the _directiva feminil_ (women’s directive). Mariela is also a regular participant in the women’s prayer group.

We sit in the combined hallway and dining room as she tells me her story. Her house is located only a block from the _plazuela_, it is made of cinder block and concrete and the rooms are sparsely furnished. When I arrive Mariela is in the kitchen preparing food for the next day’s work. She works in and around the central park and cathedral in Antigua selling home made lunch meals. Her husband sells _artesanía_, he has his own little _tienda_ stall in one of the handicrafts markets in Antigua. Mariela calls in one of her daughters to watch the pots on the stove before coming in to sit down with me. She untangles the apron around her waist and arranges her hair with her hands as she enters the room. She is dressed in a flower-patterned skirt and a t-shirt, and is as always, smiling and talkative. As she tells her story she gets an intense look on her face, her eyes widen a bit, and she smiles as she thinks back:

It began when a woman from the women’s prayer group approached my husband one day in Antigua. She asked him if the group could come to the house and have a meeting with us. My husband said it was ok and they came that same night and held a prayer meeting right here in the house. I liked it and then started going to more meetings with them. For me it [being introduced to Protestantism] was a very special experience. It was a total change of my life. We used to live very badly when we were Catholics. In my family there was a lot of alcoholism, both my parents used to drink. My life was very difficult when I was younger, it was hard. I was the oldest of my siblings and I used to have to clean and cook all the time because my mother was always drunk. And my husband and I had problems too, we liked to drink a lot as well.
Whatever we did we needed alcohol to have a good time. And I loved to dance too! We really liked to party. Now we rather go to servicio every Sunday and we feel a lot of joy doing that.

The conversion was something very special, it is something you feel in your heart. It can not be described with words, you just feel it inside. I really wanted to make a change in my life. Before, the songs and everything had no meaning [sentido] to me. I liked to listen to Christian music before also, but I just liked it because of the songs and the melodies. I used to sing along with the lyrics, but they didn’t make any sense to me. Now it is different, now I get it, I understand it. The words really have meaning [sentido] now. This is something very special and I know that I will never go back [to how things used to be].

We used to be very poor because of all the drinking and partying, and we had many problems. Well, we are still poor, but now we stick together more as a family, and we know that God will help us no matter what. He will never let us suffer like we did before. I feel joy and happiness in my life now. Before I didn’t go to church, maybe only a few times a year. But in the Catholic Church no one ever missed us, no one cared that we were not there. Now it is different, people take care of us, are interested in us, miss us and they care if we don’t show up for church as usual. Then they come to our house and ask what’s the matter. In the Catholic Church it’s not like that. People don’t talk to each other, when Mass is over they just go home.

In the Catholic Church there is only tradition. They teach things that your grandparents said and believed, but they are only lies. Costumbres and traditions that we do just because we are taught to do them. In the Catholic Church we never read the Bible, they only tell you all this nonsense. In the Evangelical church everything is explained thoroughly, if you wonder about something, all you do is ask and things are explained to you. This has really come to make sense [tener sentido] to me now. And in the Bible it says that you shall not follow traditions. (Hermana Mariela, 38, interview, May 2006)

In Mariela’s story the conventional “before” and “after” elements of conversion narratives previously described are prominent. The “before” is remembered as a life of sin, with alcoholism, dancing, and partying as common features. As consequence there is suffering,
struggle, and poverty. Life after conversion, on the other hand, is characterized as a good life where going to *servicio* and being close to God replaces the alcohol and partying. The result is a life filled with feelings of joy and happiness, and strengthened family bonds. As opposed to the Catholic Church where personal and intimate relationships and contact are described as non-existent and where no one cares about the individual, the Protestant church is seen as a community of warmth and inclusion where the spiritual and physical health of the individual is important to the other members. Finally, the “before” is seen as a state of ignorance and lack of true knowledge and insight. All that is important in the Catholic Church are the traditions and *costumbre*, associated with the past and older generations, which people follow without knowing better and without looking to the one true source of God’s will; the Bible. The “after”, on the other hand, is a state of enlightened consciousness, knowledge, and being educated on, and true to, the Word of God. Mariela says that before she used to sing along with Christian songs, but never understood the meaning of the words. Now, however, the songs and their meaning make sense (*sentido*) to her; she has acquired the knowledge, through the Spirit, to understand instead of just following the melodies, or traditions. The transformation, in her eyes, is total.

**Change – break or continuity?**

Joel Robbins writes about the centrality of rupture and discontinuity in Pentecostal-charismatic worldview and discourse and that the Pentecostal-charismatic symbolic world is “integrated around the key notion of transformation” (Martin cited in Robbins 2004:123). Further he notes that “the kind of transformation involved is a radical one that separates people both from their pasts and from the surrounding social world” (Robbins 2004:123). Austin-Broos sees conversion as “a passage” that is neither about syncretism nor an absolute breach, two concepts that most analyses of conversion have relied on. The conversion passage is a process that involves learning over time and the integration of knowledge and experience;
“To be converted is to reidentify, to learn, reorder, and reorient”. Conversion in this view is seen as a quest for human belonging and as a passage that negotiates a place in the world (Austin-Broos 2003:1-2).

Protestants perceive their conversions as absolute breaks with a Catholic and “dark” past. New meaning and place in the world is found in the new spiritual relationship to Christ that one encounters through conversion. My argument in this thesis is that the change through conversion is articulated in a language that is rooted in the local context, in this instance, San Antonio as a predominantly Catholic pueblo. Change to something new implies a change from something old. In a new reality and state of being the old is necessarily rearticulated in specific terms, something that implies a redefinition of old ways and categories.

Zygmunt Bauman (1991:58) writes that:

(...) hermeneutic problems [as ambivalence] do not undermine the trust in knowledge and the attainability of behavioral certainty. If anything, they reinforce both. The way in which they define the remedy as learning another method of classification, another set of oppositions, the meanings of another set of symptoms, only corroborates the faith in essential orderliness of the world (...).

I argue that through the processes of purification and improvement Protestantism becomes a way in which people can be both indígena and “modern” at the same time without the contradictions imposed by the Catholic lifestyle. Protestants reconstruct “Indianness” to be not about ritual, Catholic costumbre, the fiesta cycle, alcohol, and vicios, but rather about pride in one’s Maya heritage and culture, such as the clothes and language, and at the same time leading a life in fear of God. Perceived backwardness is thus attributed to Catholic religion and ignorance and effectively separated from “Indianness” as something that is essentially or inherently indígena. Protestant conversion can in this view be seen as a possible way out of the “pathology of Indianness”. It becomes a way to be both modern and Indian at the same time.
Conclusion

As I have shown, discourses of Protestantism and religious difference are related to general discourses of change and modernity. Protestant rejection of tradition is essential to their identity and conceptualization of community. But the rejection of tradition generates ambivalence in that it becomes difficult to separate Catholic traditions from San Antonio traditions. In the meeting with the women in the group this spurred discussions around which elements that were appropriate and which weren’t. *Hermano* Rogerio, on the other hand, draws on Maya traditions and states that Catholicism destroyed what was Maya. Different aspects are emphasized in the boundary. Through Protestantism there is a purification of both religion and culture. Protestantism becomes a way to redefine oneself in relation to concepts of culture, identity, religion, tradition.
CHAPTER 7

Concluding remarks

My main focus in this thesis has been to explore relations between Catholics and Protestants in San Antonio Aguas Calientes and how concepts of tradition, culture, identity, and change are articulated and expressed through discourses of religious difference.

As we have seen through the discourse of religious differences Catholics and Protestant are constructed symbolically as groups with essential differences. Difference is articulated around the subjects of alcoholism, saints and fiestas, and tradition. The ideas of change and rejection of tradition are also ideas that are prominent in modernity discourses. This is not to say that Protestants are modern and Catholics are traditional. My point is, rather, to show that concepts of tradition, identity, and culture are parts of a complex field of ideas and that they are constantly negotiated in San Antonio. Religion is but one of the arenas where these issues are discussed and negotiated in which larger changes in society become articulated through a religious discourse.

My aim has neither been to explain Protestant growth or why people convert, nor to give a clear answer to what it means to be Protestant or to be Catholic. What I have done is look at the relations between the two groups and how the discourse of difference gives rise to certain concepts.

Protestant identity construction revolves around the rejection of tradition as something backward, sinful, and something of the past. In the view of many Catholics the break of the individual conversion, or also the more long-term breaking of ties and continuous rejection by the Protestant community, becomes as we have seen a rejection of the pueblo community as expressed through tradition and Catholic religion. It is also a rejection of the past, of the common history and culture. In this way, the discourse of Protestantism is also a discourse of
change as it involves ideas of continuity and discontinuity, development and break, improvement and rejection. The discourse of religion and Catholics is merged with the discourse of modernization and Indianness, so that the negative aspects of Indianness and Catholicness are articulated in the same terms. But the result is not that Protstants become ladinoized or reject their culture or Indian identities. Instead they reject the parts of culture that they see as negative and attribute it to Catholicism instead of to Indianness. So it can be seen as a way to be both “modern” and Indian at the same time.

I have argued that Protestantism provides new directions for identification. The conceptual landscape serves as an open field of ideas of religion, tradition, culture, and change in which people orient themselves. Protestantism is one of many forces that challenge old community structures. It becomes a way to “be” in a modern world where old ways seem to lose their relevance and sentido.
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