‘WE MEET AND MINGLE SEPARATELY:’
RELIGION, IDENTITY,
AND THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF CATHOLICISM IN CHILÓN, CHIAPAS

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CHAPTER ONE:	INTRODUCTION	3
CHAPTER TWO:	OUR WAY OF PROCEEDING: THE JESUITS OF CHILÓN AND THE POLITICS OF MEDIATION	18
CHAPTER THREE:	BEING CATHOLIC, BEING TSELTAL: INDIGENOUS IDENTITY THROUGH RELIGIOUS RITUAL	42
CHAPTER FOUR:	“WE, TOO, HAVE OUR PROBLEMS:” LADINO CATHOLICISM AND A SEARCH FOR IDENTITY	58
CHAPTER FIVE:	BRINGING CHILÓN TOGETHER: THE FEAST OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE	77
CHAPTER SIX:	CONCLUSION	86
BIBLIOGRAPHY		

CHAPTER ONE

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“If I go to a ladino house, they leave me at the door. But if I go to a Tseltal home, they let me in, they give me a seat and serve me coffee. A ladino will never understand how we feel. They will never suffer the way we suffer. They will never know the suffering that we’ve experienced in our bodies, en nuestro cuerpo. I can talk to them and they would listen, but they will never understand how I feel.” (Manuel, a 29-year old Tseltal).

“When I was little, I was taught that we were superior to the indígenas. I was maybe 7 to 9 years old when I first recall hearing that sort of thing. When we were playing, my parents taught us that we were superior por sí, porque sí – because that’s just the way things are. They taught me not to play with them for very long. My mother would tell me, ‘They’re different people, not like you or me. They’re just different.’” (Maria, a 26-year old ladina).

Introduction

Religion is a powerful force in shaping the contours of Mexican society. In a culture where religion was a critical element in the colonial project as well as in the emancipation therefrom, religion remains central to the way ordinary people constitute themselves as moral persons: who they are, what they value, what they stand for; whom they interact with and how. This thesis tells the story of one religion as practiced in three different ways by three different groups within the same, narrow confines of a provincial Mexican town. This thesis demonstrates how Catholicism is practiced in three different modes that can be simultaneously conflicting and symbiotic. The setting is a small Jesuit mission in a town of about 7000 people of indigenous Tseltal and Ladino descent. The Jesuits, who have been ministering to the community since 1956, remain steadfast in accommodating indigenous practices within their own ministry and stubborn in their support of the indigenous Tseltal. As a result, they have alienated the Spanish-speaking Ladino Catholics who are themselves searching for their own distinctive identity amid an indigenous ascendancy.

Religion is an interpretation of an order of existence, a human response to a reality of signs and symbols perceived as sacred. It establishes powerful moods and motivations as it celebrates the transcendent source through its confessional community, synthesizing a people’s ethos – their tone, character and most comprehensive ideas of order (Appleby 2000, Geertz 1973). The unique social location, cultural power and “remarkable persistence of religions” contain within them elements that can foster “harmonious and just relations among peoples” or nurture seeds of conflict (Appleby 2000: 8). This concern, conceived ultimately as transcendental, embodies concepts of “non-empirical existence and sanctions” as well as modes of actions designed to relate those concepts and experiences to human desires. It is because Geertz (1973) understood

culture as a system of values that he saw religion and culture forming one seamless whole. Religion, Geertz (1973: 89) writes, is part of "a historically transmitted pattern of meanings, embodied in symbols, through which people communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge towards life" (Geertz 1973: 89). Religion and culture, as an integral whole, inform notions of personhood and social identity and influence behavior in profound and lasting ways.

To tell the story of how a localized form of Catholicism can embrace this ensemble of religious practice is to trace how these signs and symbols perceived as sacred sustain and reinforce each other within an integrated whole. In many ways, the amalgamation of religious practices in Chilón by both Ladinos and Tseltales reflect the assemblages and appropriations inherent in the concept of mestizaje. The boundaries between the two identities are a construct shaped in large part by history but not necessarily reflected in their religious practices.

As I demonstrate in my thesis, the dialectic between Tseltal and Ladino practices has become a social reality commonly taken for granted, though happening at even the most intimate and personal levels. Amid this conversation between indigenous and Ladino, the Jesuits attempt to control the direction of religious synthesis through their own appropriation of indigenous practices into the Catholic liturgy. On a deeper level, however, this thesis demonstrates that drawing such boundaries between what the Jesuits view as "authentic" and what is not, what is indigenous and what is not, is a futile attempt at reifying the indigene when Chilón is – as it has always been – culturally hybrid.

Anthropology and The 'Hidden Grammar of Catholicism'

Christianity has always held an ambiguous place within anthropology. Anthropologists have suggested that the neglect of Christianity or a particular trajectory of its development can be traced to the anthropological fixation with "the other." Perhaps it is that anthropologists assume that when a particular culture is converted to Christianity it is by definition subsumed under the familiar guise of their *own* Christian culture. In addition, Christianity has often been presented as a secondary phenomenon to underlying social, political, and economic change. Historically, the anthropologist would arrive in a colonial area (Africa, for instance) in the wake of Christian missions while widespread conversion was taking place. Simultaneously, anthropology was defining itself as an academic discipline, at once depicting, explaining, and mirroring this pattern of Christian expansions. It has only been in recent decades that a specialized anthropology of Christianity has emerged as a well-defined area of ethnographic analysis, much to the skepticism of anthropologists who had been producing ethnographies of Christian communities for even longer (the late JDY Peel and the Comaroffs come to mind).

Anthropological debate, as a consequence, has centered on cultural continuities and discontinuities as part of the general conversion experience; that is, recasting older cultures in a new vocabulary and whether they become "authentic Christians."

The Anthropology of Christianity is likely to be a productive and informative framework if Christian patterns of thought and experience are shown to have genuine cultural significance over and above the underlying political, social, or economic orientations. Robbins (2007) emphasizes the universality of Christianity in actively changing local practices and beliefs. Many forms of Christianity stress radical change to the extent that rupture and discontinuity become part of the real and "authentic" experience in the lives of the Christian converts. He argues that anthropology favors "continuity thinking" to the extent that claims of "rupture" from past to Christian present that is inherent in the conversion process are treated with suspicion by anthropologists. Indeed, Robbins notes that fundamental Christian theology involves the concept of chronological "rupture" and radical change through the doctrine of the Resurrection; that is, that Christ had died and risen from the dead. This doctrine promises all Christian physical resurrection at the Last Judgment; that is, the coming of the Messiah. In his ethnography among the Urapmin living in a small village in Papua New Guinea, Robbins writes of Christian converts and their view of a future marked from the present by a single event: the second coming of the Messiah. The understanding of the concept provides "the possibility, indeed the salvational necessity, of the creation of ruptures between the past, the present, and the future (Robbins 2007: 10-11).

Napolitano (2017: 5), however, points that to understand how Catholicism has evolved in diverse contexts and settings, this analytical approach can be problematic since continuity "emerges time and again as an ethnographic concept in its own terms in the guise of 'tradition.'" Napolitano suggests that tradition does, in fact, have a basis within Catholic theology in the doctrine of apostolic succession or "the thread of permanent repetition that constitutes church authority." The success and survival of Catholicism depends not so much on a radical break with the past (as understood by Robbins within the conversion experience) but in maintaining "an optimal balance of difference and sameness in relation to a spiritual center." Religious authority – that is, who shapes theological discourse and how – is therefore central to the Roman Catholic tradition. As explained with clarity by David Mosse in his ethnography *"Saint in the Banyan Tree"* (2012: 25):

> "In the Roman Catholic Tradition, the uniqueness of the Incarnation, the centrality of sacraments, and mediation by the hierarchy of an ordained priesthood define exclusivity in mediation between humans and a divine power. To be Catholic is not so much to hold particular beliefs as to be part of a tradition through submission to authority within a structure that invokes a lineage of teachers and fathers of the Church, back to the Apostles and Jesus Christ."

Perhaps without meaning to, Mosse goes straight to what gives Catholicism its distinctive character as a world religion practiced in diverse cultures and seemingly contradictory contexts. With regard to how theological knowledge is produced and disseminated, Roman Catholicism lays great emphasis not only on scripture, but also on scripture and tradition *as interpreted by* the bishops of the Church (i.e., the Magisterium, in Catholic terminology).

While uniformity of interpretation (or at least consistency in its application) ensures some stability in the Catholic Church as a global institution, Catholicism is nevertheless subjected to accommodation, negotiation, and tension more than any other form of Christianity.

Fenella Cannell (2006: v) suggests that the "diverse and sometimes opposed theoretical positions" and the accompanying tensions emerging therefrom can be traced to the inherent paradox upon which Christianity has evolved: that God became human flesh in Jesus Christ (i.e., the doctrine of Incarnation); and that he had triumphed over mortality in his resurrection from the dead (Cannell 2006: viii). God is both present and absent simultaneously; He is absent first as creator apart from creation by virtue of the Original Sin and the fall from grace as symbolized by the expulsion from Eden (Mosse 2012: 25). Although embodied in Christ's birth, death, and resurrection, the presence of God becomes "conditioned by absence" and marked by uncertainty. Therefore, the *mediation* of the power of a God withdrawn from men becomes a central concern (Cannell 2006: xviii, emphasis added).

Similarly, mediation becomes critical in a faith that is revealed "only in and through a singularly enduring material institution" that is crossed "by a latitudinal axis of diversity in terms of practice" (Napolitano 2017: 7). Catholicism, Napolitano suggests, contains a variety of devotional structures and theological positions within a single embrace, within an all-encompassing stretch without breaking. Napolitano (2017: 7) attributes Catholicism's peculiarly "gymnastic" engagement with the world to the many modalities – theological, praxeological, and infra-structural – "by which it is able to collapse the 'many' into the 'one,' only to allow the 'many' to concertina out again, should the context demand:"

> "Consider, for example, how single (Roman) center of authority translates, over time, into a multitude of private lay organizations and missionary orders; how a single God (though at once Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) may be accessed through a plethora of saints; how a single Virgin Mary embraces an array of different names; and how a single priest embraces in his role as 'spiritual father' a multitude of lay."

From such a perspective of Catholicism, the role of clergy as mediator between institutional center and the multitude of practices and beliefs in the periphery become critical in how the religion is lived and socialized. A recurring theme in this thesis is how Catholicism can adopt indigenous sacred forms or embrace these local practices within the weft and weave of its own doctrinal theology. Thus, the conversation emerges less as a before/after dichotomy that is implied in Robbins' analytical framework, but a blending and meshing of belief systems into a new integral and coherent tradition.

Religion as Cultural System: Clifford Geertz and Religious Life in Chilón

Napolitano (2017: 4) notes Catholicism's "proclivity to cultural invisibility" that makes it unique and peculiar among other forms of Christianity. Catholicism as a set of beliefs and practices has been "constitutive of life-worlds that it barely registers as distinct."

It is, of course, a matter of power and authority; that is, its strength and influence in shaping secular powers all throughout the history of Western Europe. As an analytical category in and of itself, Napolitano argues, Catholicism's relative invisibility is linked to its historical connection with deeply entrenched systems of power. Indeed, this invisibility is indicative not only of Catholicism's success as a cultural system, but also of its political and historical legacy that has shaped communities at all levels.

This broad shape of Catholicism and its modalities can be understood against the all-encompassing view of religion as a cultural system of Clifford Geertz (1973, 1976). The Geertzian definition of culture is well known; that is, culture as part of a "historically transmitted pattern of meanings, embodied in symbols, through which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge towards life" (1973: 89). Religion, as a search of values that is part of that cultural matrix, becomes a system of symbols acting "to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivation in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence" (1973: 89). Central to this idea of religion is not only that religions seek to conceptualize reality as a whole, mobilizing people and orienting their lives by encouraging feelings, attitudes, experiences. The signs and symbols that make up culture, according to Geertz (1973: 91), "are as public as marriage and as observable as agriculture."

Whether cultural meaning is locked away in people's minds or embodied in publicly-observable signs and symbols is an ongoing debate in anthropology. What is relevant in the Geertzian conception of religion and to what will be demonstrated ethnographically in this thesis can be introduced in two points. Religion as a cultural system is composed of two symbiotic orders that mutually imply one another (Geertz 1973: 127): ethos (" the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic mood") and worldview ("their picture of the way things in sheer actuality are, their concept of nature, or self, of society"). What people value and what they fear "are depicted in its worldview, symbolized in its religion, and in turn expressed in the whole quality of its life" (1973: 131). The force of a religion in supporting social values rests, Geertz continues, "on the ability of its symbols to formulate a world in which those values, as well as the forces opposing their realization, are fundamental ingredients." In other words, religion seeks to harmonize what people conceive to be "the real" with what they conceive to be the appropriate way to live. It is this mutual reinforcement, this constant search for values that give religion its distinctive character. This thesis explores how this constant search for harmony occurs both within one's social category and without through a system of signs and symbols perceived as sacred, despite the underlying politico-historical differences and social tensions.

Why are the people of Chilón so drawn to religion and why is it so central to their way of life? In my view, Geertz (1973: 123) explains the centrality of religion and the signs and symbols with which religion is constituted from "its capacity to serve, for an individual or for a group, as a source of general, yet distinctive, conceptions of the world, the self, the relations between them."

That is to say, symbols become both models *of* and models *for* reality, a framework that is reflected in all levels of Chilón interaction from private and intimate sphere, to one's ethnic community, to the public at large. These are "models for" in the sense that signs and symbols perceived as sacred become templates for the production of reality, such as the ritual to the Madre Tierra which expresses their relationality to nature, spirits, and other-than-human persons. Similarly, the construction of the *torito de petate* (the twig-and-cardboard bull explained in Chapter Two) during the Tseltal fiesta becomes a template for finding one's place in the hierarchy of indigenous socialization; that is, an attempt at reinforcing social harmony that is central to the lives of the Tseltal. These signs and symbols become models *of* reality in the way that it serves to define oneself as part of the social group or one's place in the matrix of social roles. In the Geertzian paradigm, "models of" the social world reflect back the reality that "models for" have produced in a way that is both circular and complementary. Therefore, the social role of religion "is thus not so much a matter of finding correlations between specific ritual acts and specific social ties," though these correlations exist (Geertz 1973: 124). Rather, it is a matter of understanding how it is "that man's notions, however implicit, of the 'really real' and the dispositions these notions induce in them, color their sense of the reasonable and the practical, the humane, and the moral" (Geertz 1973: 124).

The force of religion in supporting social values rests "on the ability of its symbols to formulate a world in which those values, as well as the forces opposing their realization, are fundamental ingredients" (Geertz 1973: 131). Geertz seems to imply that the power of religion rests in its ability to produce moods and motivations as two kinds of dispositions – the former made meaningful with reference to the ends towards which they are conceived to induce; the latter made meaningful with reference to the conditions *from which* they are conceived to spring (Geertz 1973: 97, emphasis added). In his critique of Geertz, however, Talal Asad notes a shortcoming with reference to this particular point in the Geertzian framework for religion:

> "A modern believer might say that is not their essence, because religious symbols even in failing to produce moods and motivations are still religious symbols. In other words, they possess a truth independent of their effectiveness. What are the conditions in which religious symbols can actually produce religious dispositions? How does (religious) power create (religious) truth?"

Asad raises a vital question that is central to an analysis of religion in a Jesuit mission in rural Mexico (or, indeed, anywhere in the world): power and religious authority. For Asad (1983: 251), the nexus between religious belief and practice is fundamentally a matter of power – of disciplines interpreting true meanings, forbidding certain practices, while authorizing others. This line of inquiry establishes the connection between power and religion not merely in the sense of political interests having used religion to justify or challenge a given social order, but also in the sense that power constructs religious ideas, authorizes certain religious utterances, and produces religiously-defined knowledge. As Asad (1983: 251) puts it, "the argument is that a particular disposition is religious only because it occupies a conceptual place within a cosmic framework."

This raises a vital question which Geertz nowhere considers as to how the authorizing process represents the practice, utterance, or disposition so that it can be discursively related to the general ideas of order; that is to say, the question regarding the authorizing process by which religion or religiously-defined knowledge is created (Asad 1983: 244). As I demonstrate in this thesis, this debate becomes relevant to the Chilón experience given the power the Jesuits have in shaping the religious discourse in general, and the religious lives of both Tseltal and Ladinos in particular.

Syncretism, Synthesis, and a Theology of Inculturation

This thesis is about three communities in a predominantly Mayan part of southern Mexico, all of whom practice the same religion in their own distinctive ways – sometimes conflicting, other times complementary and contemporaneous. One of the arguments I present is that Chilón, with its mix of indigenous and Ladino identities, has its own character due to a particular form of spirituality that is at the heart of the Jesuit tradition; that is, a spirituality that encourages a search for the divine and the transcendent in all things. It is a theological approach that, in essence, brings into the Catholic fold the variety of devotional structures without breaking from a central dogmatic position. This theological praxis has been part of Jesuit missiology since the evangelization of Matteo Ricci in 17th century China or that of De Nobili in 18th century southern India. This theology of inculturation is not without its controversies, but as Cannell explains (2006: xxvi), inculturation is a theologically acceptable, even necessary, approach "as long as the presence of the transcendent deity presiding over all is acknowledged." My thesis joins this debate by arguing, as Cannell (1999) had done in The Philippines, that inculturation is not always a form of "countercultural defiance" (Cannell 2006: xxvi). Rather, it is a constant discussion by the believers within their own local religious practices of how church orthodoxy can be reconciled with local belief systems. While the idea of transcendence or a transcendent God defines Christianity as a global religion, this central idea embraces many possible Christianities within it.

Napolitano argues (2017: vii) that Catholicism's strength is based as much on its "rhetorical toleration of locality and difference" as on a theological position – a dogmatic core, if you will – that is grounded on a centralized institutional authority. Catholicism's many modalities (theological or practical) allow the collapse of diverse local practices into one theological core, depending on the contexts. Napolitano (2017: vii) cites, for instance, "how a single Virgin Mary embraces an array of different names" such as Our Lady of Guadalupe or how a single authority based in Rome translates into various missionary orders such as the Society of Jesus, each with their own ethos and spirituality. Thus the religious experience emerges less the "before/after story" of religious conversion as portrayed by Robbins (mentioned above) and more the blending of various localized religious systems into an integral tradition that could be understood under the anthropological rubric of "syncretism." Religious practice thus becomes a conversation between the doctrinal center adhered to by both clergy and practicing Catholics to the customs and spiritual traditions historically embedded in the community.

As will be demonstrated in this thesis, the theology of inculturation as espoused by the Jesuit priests combines with what Napolitano (2017: xi) calls "the everyday praxes of creative lenience," the mixture of "will, responsiveness, environment, and happenstance."

Eugenio Maurer Ávalos, a Jesuit anthropologist whose ethnography of Tseltal religion was the first of its kind, eschews the word "syncretism" for "synthesis" in his ethnography of Tseltal Catholicism. It is neither Indian nor Spanish, he writes (1978, 1993: 248), "but rather, like Mexico itself, mestizo." Maurer rejects the general approach of anthropologists working in Mexico during the 1960s through the 80s (Holland 1963, Vogt 1969, Thompson 1970, Sodi 1981, Ruz Lhuillier 1981), who have said that the Mayan Indian of the Chiapas highlands practiced a fundamentally a pre-Conquest belief system "with a light Catholic Christian façade" (Maurer 1993: 248).

Maurer further argues that the Maya Catholicism these anthropologists had depicted as "random, fanciful combinations of diverse elements of Hispanic and pre-Columbian origin" is in fact a coherent synthesis of belief systems in which pre-Columbian concepts are appropriated and placed "under the purview of an Omnipotent God." This Maya-Christian synthesis, Maurer says (1993: 238), is best understood as a whole, not as a system "in which Christian and pagan symbols are vying for dominance and eventual triumph over the other."

To what extent, then, can one go in "acculturating" Catholicism while still remaining Catholic? Especially after Vatican II, local forms of prayer and worship, local interpretations of what constitutes "the sacred" have been allowed greater accommodation. Despite its centralized institutional structure, the Catholic tradition is remarkably elastic for reasons already mentioned. Stewart and Shaw (1994: 11) echo the points made by Cannell, that the Catholic Church encourages local interpretations of the Christian message "in their own terms in order for easier understanding." After all, in Catholic notions of inculturation, "the word of God, the message of the Gospel, is knowledge of a transcendental, timeless, and transcultural truth that is not tied to a particular human language or cultural form, but adaptable into local idioms and symbolic repertoires" (Stewart and Shaw 1994: 11). As a Jesuit theologian as well as anthropologist, Maurer's position is in contrast to the pejorative dogmatic implications of the word "syncretic," which connotes a distortion of the Christian message in the incorporation or acculturation of local symbols (a view commonly held in more conservative circles of the Catholic Church). Maurer instead uses "synthesis" to refer to Tseltal Catholicism or, more relevant to my ethnography of Chilón, "mestizo." Though Maurer does not discuss to what extent he believes Tseltal Catholicism to be mestizo, nor does he address even tangentially the theme of mestizaje, my thesis seeks to further his analysis of Tseltal Catholicism by problematizing the racial inflections of Catholic practice in Chilón.

In a nod to Clifford Geertz (whom he mentions only in passing), Maurer takes as an example the Tseltal religious fiesta that in his view simultaneously symbolizes the harmony central to the Tseltal worldview as well as celebrate in traditional and accepted form the feasts of Catholic saints. The symbols deployed during the Tseltal fiesta in this thesis become models not only *of* what the participants believe but also models *for* creating reality in social practice (following Maurer 1978, 1993: 246). The fiesta both symbolizes and confers the state of grace that is embodied in social harmony, as well as helping to preserve the social identity of the community amid the ethnic diversity in a region populated by diverse Mayan groups." But if Tseltal religion is, like Mexico itself, mestizo, what is the nature of this mestizaje and how is it constituted? To what extent is the ideology of mestizaje (however defined) reflected in religion in Chilón?

Mestizaje, Mediation, and an Indigenous Theology

Throughout this thesis I use the term "Ladino" to refer to Chilón's non-indigenous. Though the word "mestizo" as the biological hybridity of indigenous and non-indigenous identities was familiar to me, I was told by my sources – who self-identified themselves as non-indigenous – that the word "mestizo" had little meaning in a place "where everyone had Tseltal blood." Following my informants in Chilón, I used instead the term "Ladino" to designate the non-Tseltal community. I doing so, I follow the analytical approach of Peruvian anthropologist Marisol de la Cadena (2000, 2005: 262), who proposed to "rescue mestizos from mestizaje – and thus challenge the conceptual politics (and political activism) that all to simplistically purify mestizos away from indigeneity." De la Cadena (2000) calls them "indigenous mestizos," challenging the binary dualism of indigenous *or* mestizo and rejecting the notion of racial purity inherent in the ideology of mestizaje.

In rescuing the mestizos from the notions of inclusion and exclusion within the politics of mestizaje, de la Cadena actively rejects the very idea of "simple sameness" to describe an active appropriation connecting indigeneity with non-indigeneity, thus remaining "different, unclassifiable, slippery and belonging to more than one order at once" (de la Cadena 2005: 284). De la Cadena's approach is not dissimilar to Maurer in that both move the debate surrounding cultural and racial hybridity away from the polemical dualism proposed by the likes of the late Mexican anthropologist Guillermo Bonfín Batalla (1987, 1996). For Bonfín Batalla, still widely read in Mexico's anthropological circles, the uniqueness of Mexico as a civilization lies in the cultural contributions of its Indian (i.e., indigenous) inhabitants and their descendants. He casts the Indian as victim whose histories have never been told. Any cultural intermingling was an imposition of an indistinguishable "Western civilization" that imposed its will on the historical Indian, denying any meaningful relationship between the two cultures. The true Mexico, who Bonfín Batalla describes in his book "Deep Mexico: Rescuing a Civilization" (1987), has been reproduced virtually unaltered over time, the Indian civilization of the Mexican countryside, relegated to the shadows (as it were), in the marginalized and disenfranchised areas of the urban areas. The term "mestizo," as understood in this language, is a love for everything that is not indigenous (i.e., of he portrays as an indistinguishable West).

Curiously, it is a worldview that in many ways is sustained by the Jesuits of Chilón (albeit unknowingly), a worldview of binary dualisms that de la Cadena challenges through her description of the multilayered ways of being indigenous beyond the "either-or" framework.

De la Cadena (2000) challenges not only the "either-or" framework of Bonfín Batalla (who she cites specifically) or the integrationist view that espouses assimilating indigeneity within the dominant culture of Cuzco, Peru, where essentialist notions of culture are being redefined. They accomplish this, de la Cadena says (2000: vi), "by replacing regional beliefs in fixed identities with infinite degrees of fluid Indianness or mestizoness." More relevant to this thesis, de la Cadena says this fluidity is measured in relational degrees by considering one's relative educational level or quality of employment with those lower in scale perceived as "Indian" or indigenous and those higher in scale as "the mestizo in the interaction." Indigeneity and mestizo-ness therefore emerge from social interactions, opening up the possibilities to ascend socially without shedding or denying indigenous ways.

With multi-layered links of power forming the backdrop, these "dialogic encounters" are articulated by relationships whereby the dominant side in one chain of power acts as the subordinate "other" in another aspect of community life. As will be demonstrated in this thesis, these fields of power are crisscrossed by issues of ethnicity, class, and generation, or, indeed, religion, with individuals reinventing themselves as they respond to the wider contemporary context (political, social, or economic).

How the Jesuits function as mediators given the backdrop of these "dialogic encounters" is largely informed by their own political ideas that, in its extreme, could be misconstrued to support the essentialist notions of culture and ethnicity of Bonfín Batalla. In my view, the Jesuit mission perspective is, however, completely understandable if one were to take into account the particular form of theology the Jesuits advocate, one that places the indigenous at the center of the theological discourse. The Jesuits call it "*Iglesia Autóctona*" (Autochtonous Church), which is essentially a strand of the theology of liberation that contextualizes indigenous practice – and the signs and symbols therein – within a liberationist perspective. To echo Oxford theologian Christopher Rowland's work on Liberation Theology (2007), it is a theology that starts from "a situation of oppression and vulnerability and in that situation discovering God."

The concern for those whose histories have been buried or forgotten is at the heart of Liberation Theology, still a controversial movement within the Catholic Church despite more than nearly half a century's presence in the theological discourse. Poverty is as much about disrespect for the human worth and dignity of the disenfranchised as it is about food shortages; as much about demeaning representations of indigenous peoples as it is about inadequate education and health care. The methodology itself – starting with observations of society and *then* to theological reflections – is a break from "the traditional doctrine-to-application approach which implies that truth comes down to earth form above" (Berryman 1987: 22).

Previously, Catholic theologians had interpreted Scripture by using historical and textual scholarship to sort out various layers of meaning and then finding points of correlation with modern culture, points at which people can actually hear a message of salvation. By contrast, the basic concern of Liberation Theology isn't so much how to believe what Christian (or Catholic) doctrine affirms, but rather the relevance Christianity has in the struggle for a more just world.

Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez, who had first presented these views to the Latin American bishops in 1968, understood poverty as form of evil – a result of oppression of some people *by* others. One wasn't just poor; one was *made* poor. Liberation Theology, as Gutiérrez subsequently coined it, called on the Church to resist collusion with institutions that perpetuate oppression in all its guises – state, industrialists, multinationals, or, indeed, mestizo landlords. Citing the image of Christ depicted in the letters of St. Paul ("…for your sake he became poor, so that through his poverty you might become rich" in 2 Cor 8:9), theologians of liberation believe the Church is called to solidarity with the poor, the marginalized, the disenfranchised, which in Mexico (as in other parts of Latin America) invariably means the indigenous.

The Jesuits of Chilón still speak of the early days when many of them were still studying for the priesthood. The decades after the Second Vatican Council coincided with their formative years as Jesuits and was a time of great socio-political upheaval both in Mexico and in other developing countries. Amid this upheaval, people were asking then (as now) where the Church situated herself. Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff, another of the early advocates of Liberation Theology, wrote that this theological approach employed a dialectical analysis of social forces – one that analyzes tension and conflict affecting the poor and calls for a recasting of the social system itself. Liberation Theology is at the nexus of three closely-related tasks: to criticize society through theology, to observe and critique the practices of the Church itself, and to comment on the role of Christians (Berryman 1987: 185). Thus, Liberation Theology challenges the Church's understanding of itself as well as individual roles Church leaders should play.

It is not difficult to see how this approach to evangelization can inspire controversy, the pro-indigenous Zapatista rebellion notwithstanding. [1] The concerns of the institutional Church both inside and outside Mexico and the source of tensions are twofold: theological and political. As I explain in this thesis, it is as much an issue then, when Liberation Theology came to the fore, as it is now nearly half a century later. At the theological level, the Church questions the type of church that is portrayed in its theology, a church led from the grassroots. At the political level, it regards the criticism the liberationist approach presents as damaging to its strategy of creating closer ties with the State, particularly in Mexico where relations between church and state have been historically strained.

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[1] That many of the grassroots missionaries and catechists were instrumental in the formation of the EZLN (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional or Zapatista army for National Liberation) is well documented in the literature. The political context and the involvement of the Jesuits will be explained in greater detail in my chapter on the Jesuit mission.

Indeed, two models of the Church emerge from the discourse of Liberation Theology, with both models struggling for the soul of Mexico. One is a Church that has held sway in most of Latin American since the 16th century, which looks to the State to provide facilities for religious education and subsidize church buildings and projects. Challenging this model is that of a servant Church, as envisaged by Pope John XXIII in his radio address before opening Vatican II:

> "The Church presents herself as she is and as she wants to be – a Church for all mean and especially a Church for the poor."

The individual dimension of Christianity was being emphasized, John XXIII continued, "to the neglect of social responsibilities." This "church for the poor" is given specific form in Latin America through Liberation Theology, the origins of which should not be attributed solely to individual theologians such as Gutiérrez and Boff "since it constituted the reflection of a whole generation of Latin American theologians" (MacEoin 1996: 145).

The question thus arises (following Asad's critique of Geertz) as to what extend an authorizing power shapes the process and practice of religion, given that role the Jesuits play as mediator between Church and laity, between Ladino, Tseltal, and the wider institutional church hierarchy. The Jesuits incorporate into Catholic liturgy indigenous traditions and practices as part of their theology of inculturation (that is, syncretism "from above"). And yet, a deeper form of incorporation and amalgamation had already been happening at the intimate level of moral constructions of the person for both Tseltal and Ladino (syncretism "from below").

On both levels, mestizaje is being reconstituted and reformulated – a dialectic (as it were) between two poles: that is, whether it is to reify "the indigene" as the Jesuits are doing, or to affirm the boundlessness, relationality, and fluidity of identities in Chilón by the ordinary people themselves. For the Jesuits, their motives are clear: to challenge the hegemony of Catholic orthodoxy through the appropriation of indigenous practice within the church liturgy. Meanwhile, what de la Cadena refers to as "rescuing the mestizo from mestizaje" is happening outside the remit of Jesuit authority, similarly challenging the binary dualism drawn between indigenous and non-indigenous. Thus, these two different poles become the site of religious synthesis, with those who create meanings for their own use and in their own terms, and with those who claim the capacity – indeed, the *authority* – to define those meanings.

Overview of Thesis: Methodology, Definition of Terms, Chapter Outline

Religion can be notoriously difficult to research in terms of both methodology and theory. Religion collapses the distance between anthropologist and the people and culture under study: if an anthropologist holds the same beliefs as the locals, the implicit concern is that the anthropologist surrenders too much anthropological objectivity. On the other hand, these same beliefs can bring the anthropologist closer to his subjects, given the familiarity with and empathy for their beliefs.

The dilemma, therefore, is striking a balance between "insider" and "outsider" in order to find the appropriate tone. The need to investigate at a proper remove becomes critical, as important to ethnographic analysis as positionality and reflexivity.

Being a practicing Catholic gave me unprecedented access to avenues that would otherwise have remained closed to an outsider. For one thing, none of the ethnographic data that appear in this thesis would not have been possible had it not been for my first six weeks residing in the Jesuit mission itself – eating with them, praying with them, and, more importantly, traveling with them to far-flung *ermitas* (or village chapels) for Masses and minor fiestas. In the eyes of the indigenous Tseltal for whom having a religion and practicing its rituals are markers of respectability, my proximity to the Jesuits gave me bona fide status as a trusted member of the community. Because of this, I was able to interview at length not only the ordinary Tseltal (all of whom spoke basic Spanish) but also the older Tseltal village leaders from whom ordinary Tseltal would keep a respectful distance. Likewise, my regular attendance at Sunday Masses in Spanish dispelled any mistrust that the Ladinos might have had for a foreigner from a country they knew nothing about. It was the Jesuits who introduced me to my landlady and her husband – prominent members of the Ladino community – who, in turn, introduced me to the "old families" of Ladino Chilón.

Both Tseltal and Ladinos in Chilón remain notoriously closed to each other became oddly welcoming towards me, an outsider. Because I was neither a *gringo* white North American nor mestizo from Mexico City, neither group in Chilón had any preconceived notions about my behavior and beliefs that I would have had to overcome. Although Chilón lies on the fringes of what was then the epicenter of the indigenous Zapatista rebellion of 1994 (to be explained later in the this thesis), suspicion between the two groups – Ladino and Tseltal – undergirds socialization between the two groups. As a foreigner removed from the effects of the Zapatista movement, I became sensitive to those nuances of behavior, inflexions of speech and terminology that might have been misinterpreted as animosity between the two groups. Sadly, owing as much to my nationality as to my gender, the one avenue that remained closed to me was the hidden life of the indigenous woman. A critical look on the roles women play within Chilón social landscape would have revealed private mechanisms within the family in coping with multi-dimensional poverty (which is not unrelated to the practice of religion).

My being Catholic was a distinct advantage in terms of access to religious ceremonies both inside the town's parish church (a 17th century mission church recently proclaimed as an historical heritage site) as well as among the outlying indigenous communities. My personal knowledge of Catholicism in terms of both doctrine and local practice – where a tactile and sensory approach to performative practice was strikingly similar to that in The Philippines – gave me an advantage in seeing and understanding the nuances of Catholic rite and rituals. Nonetheless, self-reflexivity was a conscious effort all through my data-gathering if only to ensure that I was recording what I was actually witnessing and not what I had wanted to see.

Having been educated by the Jesuits in The Philippines and personally inclined to a "liberationist" perspective of my own faith, I had to remind myself constantly that my own sympathies and ideological inclinations were unhelpful if I were to understand how *all* communities in Chilón practiced their religion and not just the Jesuits. As expected, it was only after leaving the Jesuit mission quarters and renting a place of my own was I able to witness community life outside the Jesuit radar and study the hidden Chilón of faith healing and spirit possession (both of which will be discussed in this thesis). "Chilón is full of secrets," said one my main informants, a young Tseltal whom I refer to in this thesis as Manuel.

My first six weeks were spent in the Jesuit mission of Chilón. After moving out, I rented a small apartment overlooking the central road and owned by one of the town's oldest ladino families (who eventually introduced me to many ladinos and the mistress of the household eventually becoming surrogate mother during my stay in Chilón). As if to emphasize the interconnectedness of Chilón's indigenous and ladino communities, my landlady was in fact godmother to my main Tseltal source. My 15 months in Mexico was divided between Chilón, San Cristóbal de las Casas, as well as the Jesuit archives and anthropology libraries in Mexico City.

All my sources were Catholic. Although Chilón boasts more than 15 different Christian denominations and churches (depending on how one would define "religion" or "church"), it would not have been productive to shuttle back and forth between Evangelical or Pentecostal Church and Catholics. In a small Mexican town like Chilón where social relations are always personal, moving from one church to the other would be seen as disloyalty or, worse, manipulative and exploitative (hence the absence of any overview of Chilón's religious landscape). An ordinary day would have me accompanying my Tseltal friend (my primary source) in his daily chores – working, mingling with other Tseltal and ladinos; building his house. I conducted in-depth, personal interviews with close to fifty people in Chilón, both Tseltal and ladino. Depth of conversations varied during my first few weeks in Chilón, but slowly the interviews became thoughtful conversations on "being Catholic" or "being indigenous or ladino." The most important conversations – with my Tseltal friend and members of his family, the Jesuits, to name a few – I eventually transcribed; others remained slightly disorganized notes in my field notebook. My conversations were never recorded – something I regret not doing when I witnessed the spirit-possession and healing rituals for my chapter on the ladinos (though the healer said herself that her nephew had tried to record her sessions several times, but never succeeded "for unexplainable reasons").

Identities can merge and intersect, diverge and collide. In Chilón, "the other" may be members of the wider community whom one does not consider as part of one's ethnic or cultural milieu. "Others" may include spirits, animal spirit-companions, other-than-human entities on whom one has conferred the qualities of a person. This thesis covers major indigenous and Ladino fiestas of the religious calendar over an entire year (my fieldwork in Mexico covered 15 months in Mexico City and Chiapas).

My ethnography begins with Chapter Two, which recounts my first six weeks in the Jesuit mission and in which I describe my first impressions of Chilón and its surrounding villages. This chapter focuses on the Jesuits and their role as mediator (or not) between the predominantly indigenous community and the ladinos, from whom the Jesuits have become estranged since the pro-indigenous Zapatista rebellion of 1994. Chapter Three describes the indigenous Tseltal community and the rituals that bind them as one despite the varying degrees of participation or intensity of belief among the Tseltal themselves. This chapter reveals the ways in which indigenous belief and practice have survived over time, blending and merging with "traditional" Catholicism. Chapter Four explores the ladino community that has been searching for their own distinctive identity amid the Mayan ascendancy following the Zapatista rebellion. How these identities converge will be consolidated in Chapter Five, which disentangles the crisscrossing analytical strands of religion and identity that make up the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the highlight of the Catholic calendar not only in Chilón but over the entire country itself. How the "indigenous mestizo" as conceptualized by de la Cadena (2000) in Cuzco, Peru can be compared and contrasted to those of Chilón, Mexico will be described in this final ethnographic chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

OUR WAY OF PROCEEDING:
THE JESUITS OF CHILÓN AND THE POLITICS OF MEDIATION

"A missionary is one who is always hungry." (Fr. Ignacio Morales Elizalde, SJ in San Cristóbal de las Casas, 2012)

Introduction

The priest's arrival at Carmen Xaquilhá is greeted with much fanfare: the chapel grounds are bedecked with fresh flowers and multi-colored paper cut-outs, a six-foot wooden cross is adorned with fresh palm fronts and orchids, the ground covered with fresh pine needles (customary for major Tseltal festivities). A small band plays mariachi music – trumpet, trombone, violin, and large guitar. Tseltal women in traditional dress carry the flags of Mexico and Our Lady of Guadalupe (though it is not her fiesta) and a buzz of anticipation hangs of the small crowd. Conrado Zepeda Miramontes SJ and I arrive in an open-backed pick-up truck delivering food supplies to this Tseltal village hidden in the mountainsides of Chilón."This isn't even the farthest I've travelled on foot," says Conrado, after having walked me uphill on dirt road for over an hour and waiting another half hour for the truck to drive us yet *another* hour to this small village of about 30 families.

Conrado and I arrived for an ordinary Sunday Mass in this village chapel. Carmen Xaquilhá is a warren of mud-brick houses with corrugated iron roofs, a one-story building that serves as primary school and community center, a grass field with two basketball hoops on either end, and a concrete chapel painted bright blue enjoying a panoramic view of the hills. The Mass was to be celebrated around a Mayan Altar inside the chapel and then men were gathering the material needed for the altar: palm fronds and multi-colored candles, copal incense, flowers of four different colors, pictures of St. Peter and St Benedict (it was feast day of neither saint), and a small wooden cross to be placed at the center of the altar. The women had just finished cooking lunch to be served after Mass. "We don't see a priest here often, maybe once in a few months," said a thirty-something villager named Vicente. "The Jesuits taught us the Mayan altar and we've been doing this for about two years, more or less. We didn't know anything about this before but they told us this was part of our Mayan tradition."

One major area of contestation with regard to the role of religion plays in shaping social institutions is that religion ought to remain in the private sphere; that is, to be defined by a set of private beliefs, rather than as a subset of culture or "embodied doctrines of the afterlife" (Geertz 1976) embedded historically and socially. Post-Enlightenment discourse has wanted to individualize and privatize religion, "depriving it of its social dimension and roots" (Deneulin and Bano, 2009: 52). Consequently, the Catholic Church in general, and the Mexican church in particular, has had to carry out a protracted fight from the defensive. Missionary work,

therefore, is not just about political and social activities using religion, but also about the Catholic Church redefining its role in order to serve the needs of the poor and marginalized in a highly secularized and stratified society. Despite the general liberal Western bias against religion in the public sphere and, more importantly, the anti-clerical and atheistic politics of post-Revolutionary Mexico, the Mexican Catholic Church "has shown an amazing capacity to digest, change, and innovate because it has always covered its popular base," to quote historian of Mexican Catholicism Jean Meyer (2006: 282). Indeed, religion is at is has always been in Mexico: a highly contested field with respect to social transformation. "Politics and religion are not separate categories in the Tseltal mind," says Conrado. "Tseltal reality is of one complete totality – male and female, sun and moon, daytime and nighttime. Western categories do not apply here. Here liberation theology is alive and well, not like in other countries."

The role of clergy as mediator between institutional center and the multitude of practices and beliefs in the periphery are critical in how Catholicism is lived and practiced. In this chapter I demonstrate how the particular form of spirituality unique to the Jesuits has encouraged a theological approach that brings into the Catholic fold (as it were) the variety of devotional structures without breaking from a central doctrinal position. The resulting practice of religion becomes a constant discussion within the Church's institutional embrace of how orthodoxy can be reconciled (or *should* be reconciled, in the Jesuit view) with local belief systems.

Six Weeks in a Jesuit Mission: Liberation Theology at Work

A missionary is always hungry, Fr. Nacho had told me before I set off from San Cristóbal de las Casas to Chilón for the first time. "A missionary is always the last to eat. Everyone else goes first," he said with the calmness and gravitas of a priest who had clearly been hungry himself. "Once everyone has eaten, only then can a missionary eat. That's why a missionary is always hungry." Fr. Nacho was one of two Jesuit siblings who both pioneered the Jesuit mission of Chilón in the early 1960s, when traveling from San Cristóbal to Chilón took as long as three days on the road (as opposed to less than two hours today). Thus, I anticipated my first foray into ethnographic fieldwork with some trepidation. "Don't worry," Conrado tells me in the car. "We'll even go get some ice cream on our way to Chilón, something they didn't have back in Nacho's time."

The first thing to strike any visitor to Chilón is its utter plainness. Chilón is a sleepy town tucked away amid the folds of the formidable eastern mountain range of Chiapas. It is officially classified as municipality (total population: 110,000) with a town center that is not much bigger than a typical English village. The town center (total population: 7,368 is dominated by the 16th century mission church of San Juan Nepomuceno overlooking the mint-green municipal building and small public park.[2] Unusually for a Mexican town, Chilón has no public market.

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[2] Source: *Secretaría de Desarollo Social / Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarollo Social* 2010

On the main road, the pavement rises about a foot from the street and looks directly into people's living rooms. Or, into bakeries, meat sellers, clothing stores, internet cafes, small restaurants, and mini-markets selling anything from fresh fruit and vegetables, grocery items, votive candles, to pirated DVDs. Chilón has no malls and only one bank; no cinemas nor newspapers; only one hairdresser for women and two barbers for men. On a treeless, scorching, cemented street in the periphery are the *cantinas*, open only to men looking for ice-cold beer to escape the afternoon heat (no students, children, or unaccompanied women allowed).

Chilón's town center has the rural landscape of a generic, hardscrabble provincial *pueblo* with very little to make appear indigenous, although over 90,000 of its total population speak Tseltal Maya as their first language. [3] The only visible marker of Tseltal identity are the Tseltal women in traditional dress, many of whom still walk barefoot on the pavement, as well as regular Sunday masses in Tseltal. About 71 percent or 85,500 people live in extreme poverty (as defined by the Mexican government) and more than 54 percent of the total number of adults can neither read nor write. Even among its upper-middle class, Chilón has a striking uniformity and homogeneity. The more prosperous local businessmen still drive run-down pick-up trucks and vintage Volkswagens, and live in modest one-story houses without running hot water.

My first six weeks was spent in the Jesuit mission behind the 16th century church. Later, I moved to an apartment by the main road for the rest of my 15-month fieldwork. It was Holy Week when I first arrived in Chilón from San Cristóbal: Chilón could not have been more different to the genteel colonial atmosphere that tourists find in San Cristóbal. In Chilón, one could hear the ancient noises and smell the dusty air of small-town Mexico: everyone woke at the crack of dawn at the sound of bullhorns advertising potable water and fish (Chilón is landlocked); badly-recorded mariachi music blaring for all sorts of merchandise. By nightfall, the evening quiet is pierced only by the sing-song cadences of tamales and tortilla hawkers on bicycle. The average Chilonero living in the town center – to say nothing of the Tseltal peasant eking out a living in the surrounding mountain villages – has set his horizons as far as San Cristobal or even the state capital Tuxtla Gutierrez 180 kilometers away. Being met with a Filipino, therefore, was a novelty. "Which state of Mexico is the Philippines," I would be asked, "Can I take my car and drive there?" For the occasional boxing aficionado, there would be a quick association with Manny Pacquiao, the international welterweight champion who built his career from beating up his Mexican rivals (six times). Indeed, the residents of Chilón had never seen, much less met a Filipino before – Spanish-speaking ladino or indigenous Tseltal – which led to an unusual openness on their part as I embarked on a very personal and intimate research topic: to explore the ways in which residents of Chilón prayed to their Christian God.

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[3] Source: *Secretaría de Desarollo Social / Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarollo Social* 2010

The life of a Jesuit missionary is a solitary one. Although the community of four Jesuits priests and one Jesuit brother eat together, live together, and celebrate Mass together in their private quarters as regularly as they can, each one of them works mostly on his own. They celebrate Mass in the neighboring towns and outlying communities as well as organize seminars and meetings among Tseltal church workers. One works at a coffee cooperative set up by the Jesuits to organize the (exclusively) indigenous coffee growers around Chilón. Another works mostly on human rights issues, organizing meetings and capacity-building seminars for Tseltal community workers in the area. One functions as the parish priest, celebrating Masses in the church in both Spanish and Tseltal, presiding over all religious festivities and ceremonies in the town center.

In my six weeks living inside the Jesuit mission in Chilón, Conrado Zepeda Miramontes SJ and I traveled to more than an dozen indigenous communities in the area – by foot, by open-backed pick-up truck, by bus, by car. In those six weeks, it was clear that the driving purpose of the mission was to encourage the indigenous people to valorize their own language and culture, such as exemplified by the Jesuit revival of the Mayan Altar described in the opening of this chapter. "The Jesuits studied Mayan culture. Then they saw something like this Mayan Altar, perhaps in the monuments or paintings or historical places in the area. Then they brought it here and taught it to us," says Don Tomás Gómez, Chilón's most senior deacon.

I arrived from Mexico City (via San Cristóbal de las Casas) in time for Palm Sunday, the traditional opening of Holy Week observances. The first thing that struck me most about religious practice in Chilón – indigenous or ladino – was the performative aspect not unlike how Catholicism is as much lived practice as it is about doctrine in The Philippines. The Palm Sunday rituals began mid-morning, where both indigenous and ladinos walked from town to church waving palm leaves amid the billowing incense. Prayers were recited, fireworks sporadically set off (which later I would find out was traditional Tseltal celebration for religious feasts), musicians played. The procession had a mildly festive atmosphere with people laughing and children playing while the Jesuit priests said their prayers in Spanish and Tseltal. The following day, Conrado and I trekked to a Tseltal community of Miraflores in the nearby mountains for him to celebrate Mass in the village chapel. It was my introduction to the ways in which the Jesuits accommodated the Tseltal worldview into Catholic liturgy: deacons (the lay persons designated to assist at the Mass) were married, their wives stood at the altar beside the priest; the homily interrupted by comments from the indigenous congregation; the contents of the homily discussing themes that in other places would be deemed "political" (that is, the rights of indigenous as citizens, the injustice of American-made pesticides and herbicides dumped into Chiapas, the neglect of local government with regards health provisions to the indigenous communities). "What is political?" Conrado responds to my query regarding politics and religion as we relax after an early dinner of boiled chicken and chayote. "In the Tseltal mind there is no religion and no politics. The world is one and there is no division between the two. Also, in the Tseltal mind a man is not complete without a wife, and vice versa. So the deacons are always married. We do not ordain the wives as deacons, which is a misconception people accuse us of."

Nightfall came early and all was quiet in Miraflores the moment the sun went out. The village was some distance away from the town center and we spent the night on straw mats and thin blankets given to us by the Tseltal villagers, laid out on the chapel's damp cement floor. A missionary is always hungry, Fr. Nacho's words came to mind as I dozed to sleep – to which I added "hungry and cold."

We were back in the main church for the traditional rituals and observances to mark the Passion of Christ. The divisions between indigenous Tseltal and ladino had not yet been apparent to me, since the traditional Washing of the Feet on Holy Thursday in which men dressed as Christ's apostles would have their feet washed by the priest had a mixed composition of Tseltal and ladino men. Mass was said in Spanish and the scriptural readings during the Mass were both in Tseltal and Spanish (as was the priest's homily). The boundaries between identities were fluid, I thought, slightly worried that my initial assumptions of social divisions based on ethnicity (which would be the subject of my research) would have to be reassessed. I also thought that the poverty I had assumed would be prevalent was really not that bad: mobile phone sites operated even in the far-flung communities; running water and electricity were present in the indigenous villages we had visited thus far; food was readily available, though limited to the most basic Mesican diet (corn, chicken, chayote and potatoes). Moreover, in some of the village communities I had visited, government-run health clinics had been built and public elementary schools were thriving. But Conrado, echoing the sentiments of the rest of the Jesuits in the mission, was quick to remind me: "Remember that the poorest of the poor are always the Tseltal. There are many different kinds of poverty. Just because you see basic things, the indigenous communities are still marginalized and denied a voice. The ladinos have opportunities, but the Tseltal don't."

Nonetheless, both ladinos and Tseltal in Chilón prayed in ways that I simply labeled as "Mexican," rather than indigenous or ladino . As in other parts of Mexico (and, arguably, the entire former Spanish colonies from Argentina to The Philippines), the Catholicism of the Tseltal harks back to a 16th-century Spanish Catholicism that flourished during a particular period of Spanish history. In Chilón as in other parts of Mexico, one particular feature that would baffle visitors is an almost tactile reciprocity the indigenous and mestizo Catholics have with the Divine. As the Tseltal speak to their God with words and tears, with music and dance, so too is it important that they touch and that they feel.[4] A second feature even a Catholic might find questionable is an apparent fixation with suffering, whether represented by a bloodied, tortured Christ on the cross, or his mother weeping.

[4] It must be emphasized that this Baroque spirituality is not unique to the Tseltal, nor, indeed, to indigenous Mexico. The brooding quality of Latin American Catholicism (including The Philippines) is distinctive owing to the beliefs and practices exported by the Spanish friars to the colonies during the Spanish Counterreformation. In the Philippines, self-flagellation as a form of atonement remains popular during Holy Week, as are Good Friday processions of religious images and live crucifixions – visible cultural reminders that The Philippines were, during the colonial era, administered from present-day Mexico City as a province of the Viceroyalty of New Spain (*el Virreinato de Nueva España*).

That He resurrected on the third day takes secondary importance in terms of ceremony and ritual to the fact that He has suffered, died, and was buried. At no point in the religious calendar of Chilón (Day of the Dead, included) do these two qualities become more apparent than the Passion rituals preceding Easter Sunday.

Good Friday – the day in which Christ died on the cross – provokes the same mourning and long, drawn-out reverence all over the Spanish Catholic world. From Sevilla to Mexico City to Manila, elaborate rituals are performed to commemorate Christ's suffering and crucifixion at the hands of Roman soldiers. It is a religious occasion that is at once somber and celebratory, and Tseltal from all over the surrounding mountainside villages come to the town center to take part in the Easter rituals. Observance begins with the Stations of the Cross (Via Crucis), which commemorates 14 key events on the day of Christ's crucifixions with prayers and reflections on each episode or station. In the town center, the congregation – both Tseltal and mestizo – process from house to house, each with an adorned altar at the front door. The procession ends in the main church in the late afternoon, where the priest performs the customary Good Friday rituals as in the rest of the Catholic world. The rituals span a few hours, the climax of which would be the lifting of a wooden image of the dead Christ (with movable arms) on a wooden cross behind the main altar, nearly as high as the church ceiling. The cross is richly adorned on both sides with palm fronds and white flowers, and a statue of the weeping Virgin is placed at his feet in a crucificixion tableau. It is a ritual performed in varying degrees of intensity and depth in various parts of Chiapas, and, indeed, The Philippines (where it is called "*tanggal*," meaning "to remove").

The Good Friday rituals are bilingual; prayers and liturgical readings are in both Tseltal and Spanish. The church is packed: Tseltal women in traditional attire beside ladina women, Tseltal peasant-farmer beside ladino office worker; the indigenous congregation is separated with women on one side and men in the other, the mestizos are spread all over the church. After the readings and amid much incense, the image of the dead Christ which had been removed from its niche by the entrance of the church, is removed from its glass case by predominantly male volunteers (Tseltal and ladino) and lifted using a piece of white cloth tied under his armpits and across his chest. The crowd watches in reverential silence, save from the sound of the *tambor* (drum) and the wood-clapper when the image is pulled above amid billowing incense. Unlike other parts of Chiapas (e.g., among the Tsotsil of San Juan Chamula), the entire ritual is visible and uncovered by any piece of cloth. That image is left on the cross while the congregation is invited by the priest to approach and touch the image of Christ and the weeping Virgin, as a form of prayer. "This is a form of prayer," one Jesuit says, "And we invite everyone to touch the image of Christ and his mother."

Besides certain national characteristics of Catholic religiosity, Chilón boasts some regional variation. Both Tseltal and ladino approach the altar to venerate the cross and the image of the weeping Virgin in ways that are familiar all over the former Spanish colonies, but strange to Anglo-European Catholics.

They carry their infants closer to the images, in order for the child to brush its hands over the wood or cloth. They touch and caress the folds of her gown, wipe handkerchiefs and rosaries onto the Virgin's hands and feet, in the hope that these mundane, everyday goods would carry with them the blessings of the Divine. Flowers that decorate the wooden cross are pulled out and wiped on the Virgin, then brushed on themselves and their children, as if to cure themselves of bodily aches and pains. They even rub their faces and foreheads directly onto the statue, whispering supplications directly to the image in the hope that their prayers would be answered. Then at three in the afternoon (the hour at which Christ traditionally dies), the image is brought down slowly amid incense and whispered prayers, to be laid on a long table by the side of the altar.

The male volunteers – and only male – cover him with a white blanket, hiding him from view to remove his white and gold loincloth. The women do not touch the image, for this in Chilón (as in the Philippines) to touch the image is a male prerogative. All throughout, the Tseltal women blow incense onto the image of the dead Christ, as the men place him in his glass "coffin" covered in the white blanket up to his neck. He remains at the foot of the altar all through the night of Friday, accompanied by devotees reciting prayers in Spanish and Tseltal, wiping their hands, their handkerchiefs, and candles on the glass case, then onto themselves. After the image has been settled into the glass "coffin," the mestizos move to the side chapel that had been prepared for the Blessed Sacrament, the chalice covered in white cloth containing the consecrated host. Silence predominates the chapel, thick with the heat of the many lit candles below the altar on which the Blessed Sacrament rests. The crowd is mainly ladino: youth groups leading the litanies in Spanish, women praying the rosary, men sat with their eyes closed. A handful of Tseltal join them, but majority remain in the main church accompanying the image of Christ. They, too, have their prayers and litanies in Tseltal. As in other parts of indigenous Mexico, these local practices of Catholic religiosity are woven into the national tradition, giving Chilón a special quality and marks every stranger as foreigner to indigenous Chiapas.

The Blessed Sacrament remains in the side chapel (called the Altar of Repose in Catholic tradition) until Saturday noon, in preparation for the Easter Vigil which begins in the early evening. No Mass is held on a Good Friday, and wooden clappers are used instead of the church bells until the Easter Mass. The Easter Vigil is as in other parts of the Catholic world – liturgical readings, renewal of baptismal vows, the lighting of the Paschal Candle in a dark church to signify the Resurrection. At the point in the liturgical readings when Christ has risen from the dead, the wooden clappers and *tambor* (drum) breaks the silence of the church in a loud continuous stream. The banners and flags held by the Tseltal women in front and at the back of the church are twisted and turned, while the palm fronds that adorned the large cross are shaken vigorously to simulate the Resurrection.

Normally, more than one priest presides over the rituals, one of who delivers a homily that reflects a liberationist approach to theology predominant among the missions of Chiapas (Jesuit or otherwise). "Is it not proof of Christ's love for the poor and marginalized," the Jesuit asks a packed church of Tseltal and ladino, "That our Lord Jesus Christ resurrected from the dead, chose to appear for the first time not to any of his apostles, not to Peter or John, but to a woman – a former prostitute, no less. We must remember this fact that we may recognize all women, recognize the poor and the marginalized as children of God."

In her sensitive description of Good Friday rituals in Bicol, The Philippines, Fenella Cannell (1999: 165-182) describes a proper burial for the statue of the dead Christ that is meant to inspire pity and empathy from the devotees. It is through this feeling of pity that intimacy is established with the dead Christ as well as acknowledgement of his power, from which the devotees hope to draw theirs. In her monograph 'Power and Intimacy in the Christian Philippines' (1999), Cannell describes how women bathe the statue of the dead Christ in scented oils, even changing his underwear delicately while the statue is covered in a white blanket. Though the Chilón example is nowhere as elaborate (though, as in The Philippines, the statue of the dead Christ is processed through the streets following the deposition), the Chilón example approximates the *performance* of religion as described by Cannell. Having been exposed to Holy Week practices in my father's hometown in provincial Philippines, I was struck by the tactile manner and, indeed, sensuality the people of Chilón have towards their sacred images. There is no gender distinction or ethnic divide in the ways both men and women, indigenous and ladino, communicate with the Divine: they touch, they feel; they kiss the base of the wooden statue of the weeping Virgin, lips moving in whispers only they can hear; they hoist their children as high as they can so the children can touch – as a blessing – the clasped hands of the Virgin; they quietly steal a flower and a palm leaf that decorate the cross, to take home and place on their own altar. This was all too familiar to me – a practicing Catholic Filipino – for I had done the same many times.

Indeed, the performativity of Tseltal religion is a challenge to the interiority of faith – the discernment – that is part of the Jesuit ethos. "Ignatian spirituality takes many forms," Fr. Jose Avilés SJ explains to me on a separate occasion. "This is something that I constantly reflect on: how to accommodate the Tseltal way of thinking into Ignatian spirituality? Discernment and reflection is something the Tseltal understand. It is difficult to teach them our way of proceeding – they pray in loud voices, they cry, they dance – but it is important that we teach them that God can be present in all things." Padre Pepe (as he is known) is completely bilingual and extends his mission to all aspects of Tseltal life: from adult catechism to gender equality workshops, from political awareness seminars to spiritual retreats for deacons and church workers.

The underlying mission running through all these endeavors is "guiding the Tseltal, giving them the confidence to strengthen their culture on their own," as one of the Jesuits puts it simply. It is a politically activist project, no doubt, and one that is (surprisingly) not being actively suppressed by the institutional church. [5] In "guiding the Tseltal" through their own culture and traditions (to use the Jesuits' own phrasing to describe their work), the missionary priests – as a religious elite – reinforce the very same discourses of power they seek to challenge. Their message is one to insulate indigenous culture from the larger ladino culture, but within the confines circumscribed they the Jesuits themselves.

The Tseltal provide no dissent, of course, as they enjoy the spaces of cultural autonomy created by the Jesuits; that is, the church-based seminars and workshops exclusively for the Tseltal, the use of church grounds for their own minor celebrations and *bailes* (dances) during the fiestas, and the like. "Why should I give up my place in this church," says one active church worker who regularly attends both Tseltal and ladino church activities. "This is *my* church. This church was built by *my* ancestors. This church belongs to *me* – to us, to all the Tseltal." The Jesuits present an alternative message in which the Tseltal hold themselves as equals to the dominant ladino culture, but in a way that they envision is defined, approved, and, above all, controlled by the Jesuits themselves. They define the boundaries within which the Tseltal may flourish independent of ladino influence (or seemingly so), without realizing that isolating the indigene in the interests of what the Jesuits perceive to be "authentic" indigenous culture is a futile attempt in a complex and fluid culture (as will be demonstrated later in this thesis).

The Jesuit project of inculturation is, indeed, an expression of power dynamics, as Asad (1983) had pointed out in his response to the Geertzian paradigm of religion as culture. While it is trued that Jesuit efforts in embracing such "traditions" as the Mayan Altar within Catholic practice have bolstered Tseltal belonging and confidence in their own distinctive culture, these ethnically-marked practices ignore the many ways Chilón has become both indigenous *and* mestizo, two complimentary rather than contrasting strands. To what extent does reifying ethnic salience (ie, recognition) address social inequalities (ie, redistribution) that is the ultimate objective of a liberative approach to theology? To what extent have the politics of recognition the Jesuits advocate been successful in addressing racial issues in Chilón? "We have always been a tranquil place," says a 58-year old ladina housewife from one of Chilón's more respected families.

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[5] Following the Zapatista uprising of 1994, the diocese of San Cristóbal (of which Chilón was part) were forbidden by Rome to ordain indigenous deacons "out of ignorance of indigenous customs and traditions," says Conrado. "We were told not to ordain Tseltal deacons because not only were they married but Rome thought we were ordaining the wives as well. They did not realize that the wives would only accompany the deacons during the entire ceremony in keeping with the Mayan worldview of complementarities. A man is not complete without a woman, and vice versa."

"We respect each other here, regardless of religion. I have a good friend who is a pastor in the evangelical church and he has never tried to convert me. I have godchildren who are Tseltal and they look at me like family. I mean, if something happens to their parents, I will become their parents. It wasn't until this set of Jesuits came around that Chilón has become divided."

Brief Overview: Church, State, and Liberation Theology in Mexico

In order to understand the influence of religion in Mexico, one must go back to the colonial era in which the Catholic Church was a potent and powerful symbol. Throughout the Spanish colonial empire from the Americas to The Philippines, church and state were wedded to each other under the terms of the *Patronato Real de las Islas*, which bound the Spanish Crown to support and protect the Catholic Church. The agreement between Spain and the Holy See allowed missionaries travel to the Spanish colonies at the Crown's expense and receive stipend from the Crown directly, or in the form of official tribute from locals as part of the colonial project. In return, the Crown reserved the right to nominate candidates to the Holy See as colonial bishops, who in turn approved the appointment of parish priests. Directives from Rome were not binding unless endorsed by the Spanish monarch, defining the intimate nature of church-state relations throughout the colonial era.

Backed by the might of the colonial Spanish government, the Mexican Church amassed vast properties bequeathed in wills or taken in mortgage for loans when the Church was Mexico's chief moneylending institution. Because the Church was a landowner who never died and whose property was therefore never subdivided among heirs, by the mid-1800s the Church owned half the best farmland in Mexico – not to mention monasteries, convents and other urban real estate. The clergy enjoyed a broad legal tax exemption called a *fuero*, and parish priests often supported themselves by charging fees for their religious services. In addition, Mexicans were obligated *by law* to pay a tenth of their income to the Church as tithe. As the Catholic Church in Europe retreated into ecclesiastical centrality in the face of rising secularism in 19th century Europe, so did the Mexican Church withdraw unto itself and refuse to accept any reform that suggested government control over ecclesiastical affairs during the early years of the newly-formed Mexican state (Chasteen 2006: 154).

The period following Mexican independence in 1821 was fraught with tension between the newly-emerged liberal-secular government and the Catholic Church, culminating in a series of anti-clerical laws that prompted the Vatican to withdraw official diplomatic ties (only to be restored in 1992). The Catholic Church represented reverence to colonial traditions in general, and the liberals called for political autonomy, increased citizen participation in government, freedom of speech and worship, racial equality (even if the liberal leaders were invariably white and upper-class) and above all, separation of church and state. The incipient Mexican state found itself weak and fragile as the Catholic hierarchy remained powerful, wealthy and organizationally solid: the Church was Mexico's largest *latifundista* (landowner) and its privileged status included overseeing its own legal and intricate patronage system (Floyd 1996:

146). The Church was a key point of contention, with the liberals attempting to diminish its power and the conservatives wanting to sustain it. Liberals believed in private property and small landholding as the backbone of economic growth, and sought to weaken the position of the Church as property owner and relegate religion as an exclusive, individual and private form of worship.

Among the first decrees of the newly-emerged Mexican state was the Juárez Law of 1855, which attacked military and ecclesiastical *fueros*. The year after, liberals issued yet another anti-clerical decree forcing the Church to sell its vast landholdings. Additional laws were subsequently passed mandating all births, deaths and marriages be registered by civil rather than religious authorities, prohibiting the Church from charging exorbitant fees for administering the sacraments (Chasteen 2006: 156, Floyd 1996: 146-147). That animosity briefly waned during the dictatorship of Porfírio Díaz, who assumed the presidency in 1876 and embraced the Church for its potentially legitimizing role (Floyd 1996: 147). Diaz integrated Church into the power structure once he recognized the value of the capacity for social control Catholicism could exert. Thus, when the Mexican Revolution erupted in 1910, the Church was again an easy target (Floyd 1996: 147). As various forces fought out the Mexican Revolution, a set of liberal-minded and middle-class Mexicans eventually gained the upper hand, drafting a new and fiercely anti-clerical constitution in 1917 that all but deepened the rift between church and state (Chasteen 2006: 222).

Nationalism was enshrined in the 1917 Constitution, still Mexico's charter to this day. Article 27 appropriated on behalf of the Mexican State all mineral rights such as oil, then under foreign control. It also paved the way for the redistribution of large estates (*latifundios*) as commonly-held land (*ejidos*) among the peasants, initiating a series of agrarian reforms whose success could only be described as slow and haphazard at best. More importantly for the Church, the 1917 Constitution abolished tithes, confiscated church properties and claimed that the law would not recognize "any personality in religious groupings called churches" (Article 130). In other words, the Catholic Church could no longer own real estate *at all* and its clergy (numbers now limited by law), could not wear ecclesiastical clothing on the streets nor teach in schools.

Tension between the Vatican and Mexico reached its peak during the term of Plutarco Eliás Calles (1924-1928), whose presidency coincided with the Vatican's efforts to revive the Catholic Church on a global scale. Using legal provisions under the 1917 Constitution, Calles reduced the number of Catholic priests who could carry out their ecclesiastical duties. An avowed atheist, Calles required all churches and religious groupings to register with the state, appropriated church property (again), expelled foreign priests (read: Spanish leaders of the church hierarchy) and shut down monasteries, convents and religious schools. The Vatican responded in kind, suspending all religious services – baptism, marriage, confession, funeral services and even town fiestas celebrating their patron saints (then, as now, one of the most important dates in the average Mexican's calendar).

During this volatile period, the Church withdrew from social involvement as Mexico consolidated the gains of the Revolution (Floyd 1996: 148). Thus, the progressive Catholicism which emerged after Vatican II broke into a social and political scene already fraught with historical tensions between the Mexican State and the Catholic Church.

Mexican anti-clericalism during this period coincided with a Catholic hierarchy in Rome "physically and morally on the defensive" and coming to terms with a modern industrial society (Lehman 1990: 88). Pope Pius IX (1846-1878) sought internal retrenchment by convening Vatican I (1869-1870), which proclaimed the primacy and doctrinal infallibility of the pope. His successor, Leo XIII (1878-1903), turned his gaze outward by writing on the necessity of just wages for a day's work, decent living conditions and the worker's right to organize. Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* ("Of New Things," 1891) laid the foundation of Catholic social action and remained the dominant social doctrine of the Church until Vatican II (Lehman 1990: 89).

Still one of the most often-quoted encyclicals to date, *Rerum Novarum* meant to some extent that the social order "was to be formed by movements coming from below" as well as by authority and power from above, as Jesuit historian John O'Malley puts it (2008: 63). Some Catholics accused Leo XIII of overstepping the bounds of his office by addressing questions outside the realm of faith and personal morals (O'Malley 2008: 54-55). This was the context in which the succeeding pope, John XXIII (1958-1963), spoke to the Catholic world of a "church for the poor" and a clear commitment to address poverty and oppression. Speaking on Vatican radio one month before the opening of Vatican II (1962-1965), John XXIII warned that the individual dimension of Christianity was being emphasized "to the neglect of social responsibilities" – an idea even more controversial at that time than a "church for the poor." With respect to underdeveloped countries," John XXIII announced (www.vatican.va). "The Church presents herself as she is and as she wants to be – a Church for all men and especially a Church for the Poor." John XXIII's words seem commonplace today, but in a papacy that was on the defensive against a secular-liberalism profoundly antagonistic to Catholicism, the words of John XXIII flung open the doors of the Vatican to the growing involvement of the church in secular affairs – an involvement that would later evolve into the critical social praxis that was part of liberation theology.

The Jesuit mission as it has evolved in Chilón today finds its place in the history of Mexico and the Mexican Catholic Church against a reasonable account of this critical social praxis, which entails reaching out to the poor and marginalized and making them conscious of their condition and, more importantly, their power to change it. At its core is a "preferential option for the poor;" that is, a firm conviction that the Church must carry on its work to bring about authentic growth where the wounds are sharpest and most painfully felt. This was a paradigm shift, a radical new approach to Scripture that differed from other theological approaches as it emerged from a contextual analysis and aimed to respond to the crisis people experience directly.

It was a shift that would not have been possible without Vatican II, which brought profound changes in the way Catholics related to each other, to their flock, to religious and secular authority, and to all kinds of political, social and moral issues. Vatican II recognized the pluralism and complexity of the Catholic tradition in style, language and practice, how they preached, dressed, spoke to themselves and to their God (Lehman 1996: 48).

Pope John XXIII convened this council attended by *all* bishops in the Catholic world as an "updating" (*aggiornamento*) necessary to bring the Church closer in touch with the era. One of the central themes of Vatican II was greater involvement of the laity and the opening up of the Church to the influences of the modern world. Against this unfamiliar climate, John XXIII's successor Paul VI (1963-1978) issued his encyclical *Populorum Progressio* ("On the Development of the Peoples," 1968) in which he denounced the gap between the rich and poor, the inequalities of trade and the selfishness of rich nations. The encyclical, however, did not mention the social inequalities *within* poor nations, and the Latin American Bishops Conference (*Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano* or CELAM) took up that theme, convening their own "mini-Vatican Council" in Medellín, Colombia that same year (Lehman 1990: 109).

Radical in their approach and provocative in their conclusions, their views on "structural sin," "institutional violence" and the "fight against unjust structures" paved the way for even more controversial interpretations of the role of the Church. In its concluding document drafted by, among others, a young Peruvian theologian named Gustávo Gutiérrez, the Medellín conference proclaimed that the poor were people of God who needed the Church most, and to help them achieve a life of dignity was to "rescue social structures from their sinful state" (Lehman 1996: 109). More controversially, the Medellín document implied that the poor were more deserving of God's grace than the unrepentant rich. There could be no peace until this institutional violence had been overcome (as Paul VI called it in his 1968 encyclical, mentioned above). Thus the bishops opened a way for lay involvement by recommending the creation of grassroots ecclesial communities or *comunidades eclesiales de base* as the fundamental nucleus of the Church in its efforts to evangelize among the poor (Lehman 1990, CELAM 1985: Ch. 5 para. 10).

Medellín marked the beginning of liberation theology, which Oxford theologian Christopher Rowland (2007: 5) describes as "a way, a discipline, an exercise which has to be lived rather than acquired as a body of information." It is a process of "wrestling with theological texts which explicitly start from a situation of oppression or vulnerability and in that situation discovering God" (Rowland 2007: 5). Among the bishops at Medellín, there was a sense that church doctrine – even after Vatican II – had to be molded to the conditions of underdevelopment, injustice and dependence in Latin America (Lehman 1990: 117). In liberation theology, the oppression of the poor is as much a result of the structures of capitalism as of the moral rapaciousness of the ruling class. Central to liberation theology is a "preferential option for the poor," which simply meant that the poor ought to be the first (but not the only) objects of solidarity, for it is in and with the poor that the problems of today are most apparent.

"Preferential" does not mean exclusivity to the love of God, but a divine predilection for "history's last" within the universal nature of God's love (Gutierrez 1993; 235). The option for the poor is not optional in the sense that a Christian may wish not to take that option, any more than the love we owe every human being, without exception, is an option we may not wish to take. Rather, it is a deep ongoing solidarity, a voluntary daily involvement with the poor (Gutierrez 1993: 235).

Catholic social action at the time, however, had its limitations in mobilizing the poor to address (or even be aware of) structural or institutional poverty. Hence the Latin American bishops sought to bring "consciousness-raising" or "conscienticization" (*conscientizaçao*) one step further by promoting *comunidades eclesiales de base* (base ecclesial communities) which entailed a more active role for the laity. The idea of a grassroots community was innovative for its time, based in a large part on the writings of Brazilian educator Paolo Freire, who coined the word "*conscientizaçao*" which meant a consciousness among the poor of their agency and their power to address social injustice. Inevitably, the new grassroots catechism movement which sprung from that ethos (as it were) raised suspicions from the hierarchies of power both inside and outside the Church as a potentially subversive method of popular mobilization. It was certainly regarded as such by the political and landed elite of Latin America not so much because it offered the poor to learn basic skills such as literacy, but because it did so through channels beyond their control (Lehman 1990: 97-98).

The Vatican only grudgingly acknowledged the new ideas and methods of liberation theology, but many priests and nuns in Mexico became animated in their work among the poor. In the diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas, the already-existing *catequista* program became infused with the reforms of Vatican II and the radical ideas of Medellín. Under its bishop, Samuel Ruiz Garcia (1924-2011), the *catequista* (catechism) program created spaces where popular mobilization, grassroots organization, empowerment of indigenous peoples, and the struggle for land redistribution, political autonomy and democracy became intimately intertwined with religion.

In the early 1960s, there were about 700 *catequistas* in the diocese fulfilling the traditional role of religion educators. In 1961, Bishop Ruiz founded two training schools in the diocese for *catequistas* to study dogma, scripture, canon law, liturgy – traditional elements of Catholic catechism. By 1993, their numbers had grown to almost 8,000 (roughly 90 percent of whom were indigenous, fluent in both Spanish and a Mayan language), articulating issues such as hunger, sickness, poverty and death. The *catequistas* were instrumental in recruiting delegates and coordinating the First Indigenous Congress of 1974 held to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the birth of Fray Bartolomé de las Casas. The Congress provided a setting in which the indigenous communities could air basic grievances: the need for land, the destruction of their culture and human rights abuses (Floyd 1996: 159). By the time of the Zapatista uprising in 1994, the Catholic Church had been active in grassroots organizing and peasant "conscienticization" longer and more active than any other single organization in Chiapas.

'Our Way of Proceeding:' Jesuit Spirituality and the Politics of Mediation

"Mediation is intrinsic to Catholicism's very nature," writes Kirstin Norget (2017: 189) in her essay on the Virgin of Guadalupe in the recently-published volume 'The Anthropology of Catholicism.' Through various theologies, objects, persons, Catholicism as lived religion bridges the natural and supernatural, "earth and the divinity of the stars," living and the dead, devotees and Christ. On a meta-theoretical level for the Catholic Church, evangelism (of which missionary work, in my opinion, functions in similar manner) as a mediating design points to the tension between universalism and localism – a tension that that may appear among the church elite (i.e, the clergy) given the church's imperative of maintaining authority of doctrine versus the missionary imperative "of making the faith meaningful and rooting it in diverse local settings" (Norget 2017: 189). Here, Norget sensitively points out the underlying push-and-pull inherent in modern-day Catholicism (i.e., post-Vatican II): the "centrifugal" flows of local interpretations of Catholic images and words globally, as well as the "centripetal" reining in of Catholic doctrine (Norget 2017: 190).

While the Vatican II concept of inculturation – "an adaptation of church teachings to the cosmovisions and understandings of Others, especially indigenous cultures" – formed the basis of modern post-Conciliar missionary work, Norget suggests (though without much elaboration) the tension arising from church encounters with the periphery. "It is one in which a benevolent and inclusive church is seen to be nourished by the authentic faith of local, autochtonouse peoples as these are enfolded into the church's unifying, paternalistic embrace," Norget concludes (2017: 196). Jesuit mediation through indigenous rituals such as the Mayan Altar (it could hardly be a "revival" as it had never been practiced before, my Tseltal sources confirm) reflects this tension that for the Jesuits – personal and individualistic in their "way of proceeding" *("nuestro modo de proceder"*) – is not in the least extraordinary. This "way of proceeding" is not unlike the way the Catholic Church throughout the colonial era had used the symbol of Our Lady of Guadalupe to "control Indians' sacred imaginaries by….a reconfiguration of the meaning of certain syncretic representations" (Norget 2017: 197).

The visit of Conrado Zepeda Miramontes SJ to the mountain village of Carmen Xaquilhá provides a snapshot of this larger Jesuit project of inculturation and the focus on indigenous identity (not only Tseltal, as there are Jesuit missions among the Tsotsil as well as Ch'ol peoples of Chiapas). Through Conrado's visit to this particular landscape – rough, bare, mountainous, remote despite the proximity to the town center – I sensed the outlines of more general tensions within the politics of inculturation, as seen though Jesuit eyes. This in itself reveals how a theology of liberation, which began nearly half a century earlier, has evolved into a movement with a genuinely emancipatory response to demeaning cultural representations of subordinated groups "that cannot be remedied by redistribution alone" (Fraser 2003: 22-23).

This particular strand of the theology of liberation highlights an overtly political agenda within this Jesuit indigenous revival: the long-term Jesuit goal of restructuring relations between the Tseltal and the wider nation-state of Mexico, as well as the need to position themselves as servant-priests to *all* believers (indigenous or not). In their zeal to provide for the neediest members of the community (which, by all accounts, would be the indigenous Tseltal), the Jesuits have, in a manner that echoes Bourdieu's conception of religious authority and habitus, legitimized themselves as representatives of the Church, forcing both ladino and indigenous into their own discrete spheres of socialization. "It is something we are aware of," says José Avilés SJ, director of the Jesuit human rights center based in Chilón. "The ladinos feel we have betrayed them since we are ladinos ourselves. They feel we have betrayed our own culture. This is a result that we are aware of and hope to address."

What Avilés refers to as "result" is a theological movement borne during a particular historical context both within the nation-state of Mexico and the Catholic Church as a whole, a movement that had takes shape over decades and found culminating expression in the Zapatista rebellion of 1994. [6] Focusing on the theology of liberation as pure theology rather than as a social movement that it has become makes it easy to overlook the broader socio-political climate within which this contextual theology had developed, a climate that very much exists to this day. By considering this liberative theology in aggregate, we gain a better sense of the myriad ways in which other social movements, other ideologies, other religious orders and non-state players continue to mutually influence and construct each other. An argument I wish to make in this chapter is that this movement of indigenous revival (as a whole) has been driven not just a socio-political context that holds Mexico's indigenous at a disadvantage. Rather, it is driven by a particular ethos that is unique to the Jesuits summed up in that oft-repeated phrase in Jesuit discourse, that is "our way of proceeding" (nu*estro modo de proceder*).

Underlying this unique spirituality of accommodation and inculturation practiced by the Jesuits is a belief in the immanence of God, "who has a continuing and active presence in all aspects of the material world," to quote David Mosse (2012: 11) in his ethnography of the Jesuit mission in southern India.[7] It is worthy to note that Mosse has highlighted an important point with respect

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[6] Shortly after midnight on New Year's Day of 1994, some 3,000 indigenous men and women took over the tourist town of San Cristóbal de las Casas calling itself the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (*Ejército Zapatista de la Liberación Nacional* or EZLN). The uprising was a deep embarrassment to President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, whose North American Free Trade Treaty (NAFTA) took effect that same day. Nearly 14,000 soldiers descended upon Chiapas, searching in vain for the masked rebels who immediately withdrew to their hidden bases. By conservative estimates, more than 70 rebels, 13 army soldiers, 38 state police and about 50 civilians died in the fighting (Gomez Peña 1995, Ross 1995, Harvey 1998, Womack 1999: 12). The link between liberation theology and the EZLN has been the subject of prolific research in recent years (Floyd 1996, Harvey 1998, Montemayor 1998, Kovic 2005, Earle and Simonelli 2005, Estrada Saavedra 2007).

[7] In his book '*Saint in the Banyan Tree: Christianity and Cast in Southern India*' (University of California Press 2012), Moss demonstrates skillfully the transformative power of religion (i.e., Catholicism) through its distinctive forms of thought and action mediated by the Jesuit missionaries since the 19th century. Mosse explores the synthesis of Hindu practices and Catholic tradition, and the tension it engenders with respect to caste. Though useful in many respects, the assumptions Mosse makes with respect to caste and dalit theology (yet another strand of liberation theology founded on the experience of the untouchables) do not necessarily apply to the indigenous of Chiapas.

to Catholic tradition, that this theology of immanence of Christ's "real presence" in the Eucharist has always built a bridge to popular practice, "including the many cults around miraculous objects, images, and relics." This process of "finding God in all things" (to use yet another oft-repeated phrase in Jesuit discourse) requires an interiority and examination of conscience – a *discernment*, if you will – that lies at the heart of Jesuit formation. This tradition of spirituality founded by Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) places emphasis on Ignatius' own *Spiritual Exercises*, a set of prayers, meditations, and recursive reflections "on the experience of reflection" (Endean 2008). The outcome is an approach to spirituality that respects individuality, that each one should be open to whatever God might want to bring about within us or ask of us (Endean 2008: 61). The underlying issue with this approach, however, is that the conviction of God's working directly with each creature raises the logical possibility "that what the individual discerns in this way may go beyond what is ecclesiastically sanctioned" (Endean 2008: 62). Thus the Jesuit tradition is underpinned by a tension between a missionary commitment to life at the Church's boundaries – as Mosse (2012) and Stirrat (1992) had described – and an allegiance to the hierarchical, institutional Church.

This "way of proceeding" is a phrase that entered the Jesuit discourse with more regularity and frequency during the tenure of Pedro Arrupe SJ as superior general of the Society of Jesus (Endean, private conversation 2010). In many ways, the election of Pedro Arrupe, one of the most influential and important superior generals of the Society of Jesus (O'Malley 2014), was a turning point in the general history of the Order. As major superior of a religious order of men, Arrupe was able to participate in the fourth session of Vatican II (1965). Arrupe spoke at the Council, which quite literally changed the way Catholics lived their faith (O'Malley 2010). Drawing upon his own experience of having been a Hiroshima during the explosion of the atom bomb, Arrupe spoke at the Council of the need to become "at home in diverse cultures and learn from them" (Hinsdale 2014: 299). In the succeeding decades of Arrupe's term as superior general, "inculturation" and "integration" of faith and justice would become hallmarks of the Jesuit missionary vocation and would be Arrupe's lasting legacy to Jesuit theological discourse (Hinsdale 2014: 299). "We cannot remain silent, in certain countries, before regimes which contribute without any doubt a sort of institutionalize violence," Arrupe said in a speech in 1971 (cited in Hinsdale 2014). Thus, "inculturation" and "liberation" became major concerns for both Jesuit theologians and missionaries. It must be emphasized – and not just as a footnote – that his unyielding struggle for social justice resulted in 40 Jesuit priests killed during Arrupe's tenure (Hinsdale 2014: 301).

How this liberative theology had mobilized (and continues to mobilize) both clergy and lay people in Mexico can be understood when the complementary strands of identity recognition and economic redistribution are taken into consideration. As a social movement, the theology of liberation advocates recognition for the poor and marginalized indigenous as equal members of society, entitled to a fair and equitable distribution of resources (social or material).

As such, the theology of liberation has been effective in constructing what Hobson (2003: 15) wrote of social movements, “representations around a shared identity that contest social hierarchies in arenas of power.”

Conrado Zepeda Miramontes SJ hails from the northern Mexican state of Sonora and has been a Jesuit for more than 15 years. Fluent in Tseltal and English, he has been working with the Tseltal in both Bachajón and Chilón for almost five years. He greets the residents of Carmen Xaquilhá with the good-natured humor and disposition of someone who loves his job. “I am at home here among the Tseltal. It is here where you see the real meaning of *agapē*,” says Conrado, referring to the Greek word for “love” as it is used in the New Testament Bible. He walks up the hill and children greet him by offering the crown of their head for him to touch as he, in turn, removes his hat and bows to the village *principales* in traditional Tseltal manner. Meanwhile, the small brass band plays festive music and the villagers congregate outside the chapel doors. Conrado puts on his vestments and the band leads the entire congregation in a procession around the perimeter of the church, moving counterclockwise, in keeping with Tseltal tradition of entering a sacred space or beginning a sacred occasion. “*Caracoles* (snails),” which Conrado says signifies “growth and spirituality ever-moving upwards in circles.”

On the floor inside the chapel is the Mayan Altar, a circle of leaves, orchids, and multi-colored candles around which Conrado will celebrate the Eucharist. The circular altar of palm fronds is divided into quadrants, each quadrant representing the four compass points. The altar is orientated towards the east and Conrado stands west to celebrate the Eucharist facing towards where the sun rises. Each quadrant has different colored flowers and candles. Before the Mass begins, the congregation place white candles around the perimeter of the altar. A middle-aged Tseltal woman in traditional dress – wife of a *principal* – blows incense over the entire circle. Women carrying the flags of Mexico and Our Lady of Guadalupe stand beside Conrado, as the congregation kiss both flags one by one. Conrado intones the opening prayer of the Mass, which, surprisingly, is celebrated in a mixture of Spanish and Tseltal. “I invite everyone to dance,” Conrado says during one part of the ceremony. “To dance in thanksgiving to the Madre Tierra for all the blessings and harvest we have received. This is not a game, but something very important and serious. We do this in gratitude and in respect to the Madre Tierra.” Less than half the congregation join Conrado in the dancing, which is essentially a mere shuffling of feet, light swaying from side to side to the music of the brass band.

“Adaptation” and “dialogue” had been a hallmark of Jesuit missionary ever since Matteo Ricci in China and Roberto de Nobili in India (Hinsdale 2014: 304). From the early 1970s onwards, however, Jesuit missionary effort was led by the understanding that the way in which Christ is preached and encountered will be different in different countries, different for people with different backgrounds” (Hinsdale 2014: 304). This Jesuit “way of proceeding” had, in fact, closely resembled the hermeneutical method of contextual interpretation of the Gospel that was the hallmark of the theology of liberation.

"*La realidad*" (reality) is constantly referred to by Chilon's Jesuits when Gospels are interpreted: text (the biblical message), context (the socio-political reality), are thus merged with the interpreter (the priest).[8] It is this approach to Scripture, of beginning with the actual praxis of dialogue with context rather than church teaching or institutional doctrine that had raised concerns not only within the Mexican church, but in the Vatican as well. At issue is the very definition of "being church:" one that looks toward institutional authority as the source of doctrine and interpretation, toward the church as depository of grace and truth as entrusted to it by Christ; the other, handing over to the people – as main agents of history – the responsibility for their own evangelization (MacEoin 1996: 145).

The struggle for recognition – the negotiation, construction, development of a confident, collective Tseltal identity – is at the heart of the Jesuit missionary effort in Chilón. Achieving recognition as a distinct and legitimate social group and guiding on this to redress structures of disadvantage are recurring themes in the missionary discourse. "Our objective is to have the Tseltal own their own culture and to be proud of it," Conrado says. "When they are confident in themselves, confident in the richness of their culture, then they can carry on the struggle on their own, without our help." Recognition struggles, as this theology of liberation in Chilón has become, "name, interpret, and make visible histories of discrimination and disrespect," as Hobson (2003: 5) says of recognition struggles. The Jesuit mission constructs political identities and understandings of social justice within a specific cultural milieu, as well as framing their shared histories of daily life experienced within a specific political and cultural context. For the Tseltal of Chilón, however, the terms of engagement are neither political nor economic, but religious in character. "Why should I share this church with anyone," says Miguel, a thirty-something Tseltal who organizes volunteer catechism for the church. "This church was built by my ancestors, by the work of my Tseltal ancestors. This church is ours." This recognition perspective enables us to identify the cultural dimensions of what are usually regarded as redistributive economic policies. Conversely, the redistributive perspective aids in understanding the economic dimensions of recognition issues (Fraser 2003). Indeed, the missionary discourse as it has evolved in Chilón is less about material production than about cultural representations and social integration.

Religious authority is of central importance to Christianity. In the Roman Catholic tradition, the centrality of the sacraments and the mediation of an ordained priesthood "define exclusivity in mediation between humans and divine power" (Mosse 2012: 25). To be Catholic is not so much to hold particular beliefs as to be part of a long tradition of authority within a structure that invokes lineage all the way back to Christ and the Apostles (Asad 2002: 124, Mosse 2012: 25).

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[8] Herein lies the methodological controversy surrounding the theology of liberation. Previously, Catholic theologians interpreted Scripture by using historical and textual scholarship to sort out various layers of meaning and then finding points of correlation with modern culture, where people can actually hear a message of salvation (Berryman 1987: 25).

Because a primary marker of indigenous identity in Mexico is language, the valorization of the Tseltal language as medium of religions instruction and evangelization has secured for the Jesuits a vital role in controlling which cultural or religious narratives matter, and which will become the religious beliefs and values to define and unite the Tseltal as a larger collective.[9] In fact, one of the first projects of the Jesuit mission when it was founded in Bachajón in 1958 was the full and definitive translation of the bible, which was published only in 2005. By the 1980s, the Jesuits had also translated into Tseltal, Mexican laws and legal documents pertaining to land distribution and land reform. "The missionaries, men and women, accompanied the Tseltal on their exodus," says the history of Bachajón mission prepared by the Jesuits themselves (unpublished manuscript).

The Jesuit reading of liberation theology is one that many theologians of liberation would find uncomfortable in some respects while secure in others, as it evolved through the discourse on indigenous rights culminating in the Zapatista uprising of 1994. Jesuit reinterpretation (as it were) of the theology of liberation has as its ultimate aim the social and political recognition of an indigenous Tseltal identity that is not only comfortable but confident in his own indigenous identity. On the one hand, it is a safe and mildly depoliticized reading of this liberationist perspective. On the other hand, however, it is one that if taken to its logical extreme, would most likely bring a true autochtonous church into being. In the latter model of "being church," the local indigenous people would be in control of its very character and workings, far from the systems and bureaucratic processes of the institutional church. "Why can we not have a truly Tseltal liturgy?" says one Jesuit at a large meeting with indigenous lay deacons (and their wives). "If there is a liturgy in Latin or Spanish or English, why can there not be one in Tseltal? Whey can we not include prayers to the Madre Tierra in the liturgy, whom we thank for the blessings during the Mass?"

Catholic services in Chilón are thoroughly bilingual. Masses are said separately in Tseltal and in Spanish, but even when the congregation is largely monolingual (Spanish or Tseltal), the services are in both languages. The Lord's Prayer, for instance, can be said in Spanish during a Tseltal Mass, as are scriptural readings. Conversely, during the Sunday Masses in Spanish for the ladino community, the Gospel is read in both Spanish and Tseltal. "We wanted a completely bilingual Mass where the entire Chilón would pray together," says parish priest Carlos Camarena Labadie SJ (1930 - 2016). "But the Tselal wanted Masses just for themselves, so they could pray the way they do, in their own language, among their own people. It creates a separation in the community which we do not necessarily want, but what can we do if the Tseltal insist on that way?"

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[9] All the Jesuits in Chilón, which is administratively a part of the Bachajón mission about 40 kilometers away, speak fluent Tseltal. Part of the missionary effort is teaching theology in Tseltal, as well as translating and teaching modern concepts (e.g. "contamination" or "environmental degradation") in Tseltal. They hold regular classes for free in the Chilón mission to teach the Tseltal these concepts. I have been told by my bilingual sources, that these classes have been powerful in making young Tseltal aware of recent changes with modernity, such as damage to the environment.

Even for a Jesuit who can preach with ease in both languages, the complete exclusion of Spanish from Tseltal church dealings is virtually impossible to maintain. For the most part, the Jesuits see no "disjoint" in reviving an essentialized and – in their view, at least – authentic indigenous past, and the church's transformative agenda that is contained in the theology of liberation. As mentioned earlier, this spirituality of accommodation, this "way of proceeding" that may go beyond what is ecclesiastically sanctioned has been a hallmark of Jesuit practice.

Recognition and Redistribution: Indigenous Theology as Social Movement

On a normal Sunday the late morning Mass is celebrated in Tseltal, the early evening one in Spanish. One can tell it is a Tseltal Mass even before it begins: the women are on one side of the church, the men on the other. Sometimes, families or young couples sit together, especially at the back pews. Generally, however, the two genders sit separately. The lay Tseltal deacon and his wife (sometimes two deacons and their wives) sit at the altar with the pries at the center. The Mass opens in Tseltal, though sometimes bible readings and the Gospel are read in both Spanish and Tseltal (as it is during the Spanish Mass in the evening). Occasionally, a trio of trumpet, violin, and *guitarrón* accompany the Mass. On some occasions, the priest calls for the entire congregation to come to the middle aisle and dance during the Mass (essentially just shuffling of the feet, as Tseltal normally do when required to dance during traditional Tseltal festivities). The women move to the center with the men and dance three sets facing the altar. Young mothers bring their children to dance; sometimes entire families. "This is the way the Tseltal like to pray," says the late parish priest Carlos Camarena Labadie SJ. "They like to dance. They like to pray out loud (*en voz alta*). If you go to church on an ordinary day, you will see them kneeling in front of Our Lady of Guadalupe crying, lighting candles, praying *en voz alta*. The dancing is very important to the Tseltal. It feeds their soul. So if they want to celebrate Mass separately from the ladinos, how can we refuse?"

That the Tseltal deacons sit with their wives and the priest at the altar is a controversial aspect of this Jesuit approach to inculturation. Deacons are ordained lay ministers who assist the priest in administering the sacraments. Like the priest, they are normally single, celibate, and always male. In the urgency to locate the sources of the Zapatista uprising, Mexico's political and economic elite accused the Catholic church of fomenting rebellion by granting greater influence and responsibilities to lay indigenous deacons. More controversially, the institutional church had objected to the greater role placed upon the deacons' wives during the liturgy. "People who did not understand the Tseltal world thought the women were being ordained deacons with their husbands," said Zepeda Miramontes SJ. "But for the Tseltal, a man is not complete without his complement: that is, his wife. So they have to function together." In the aftermath of the Zapatista uprising, the institutional Mexican Church cased to ordain indigenous lay deacons for this reason (and upon the orders of the Vatican). They had also officially forbidden the Jesuit mission from giving theological training to prospective indigenous deacons.

The move sparked controversy among the Jesuit missionaries, who accuse the Mexican Church of purposefully diminishing the role of the indigenous Tseltal within the Catholic church and keeping them away from the circuits of religious authority.

"There are two approaches to liberation theology," says Pablo Romo, former director of the Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Center in San Cristóbal de las Casas. "There is the Jesuit approach and the Dominican approach. Romo, himself a former Dominican priest at the helm of the Human Rights Center during the Zapatista rebellion, says that these two strands of liberation theology explains the extend to which the Jesuits immerse themselves in indigenous culture. For one thing, the Jesuits all speak the indigenous language(s) spoken in their areas of mission work, while the Dominicans are largely monolingual Spanish. And yet, Romo emphasizes, the centers of Zapatista resistance were all in Dominican areas of responsibility. "For the Dominicans, liberation from poverty means the struggle for land," says Romo, who now teaches human rights at a university in Mexico City. "Liberation theology is about the struggle for resources. For the Jesuits, on the other hand, the struggle for land is through culture (*a través de la cultura*). For the Dominicans, culture is an overarching theme – but the central, most important issues is the struggle for resources, the liberation from material poverty. The struggle for land is the struggle for land (*lucha por la tierra*)."

What Romo has done in his presentation of the "complementary approaches" (Romo, private conversation 2012) taken by Jesuit and Dominican missionaries is a recasting of liberation theology as social movement: the tension between the recognition of identity and the struggle for reallocation of economic resources. In essence, the theology of liberation today has expanded social spaces in which collective identities can contribute in the "formalization" of discontent, giving social actors the space in which to translate issues into structural change (to paraphrase Cohen [1983] in his definition of social movements). Following Tilly (1992), social movements attempt to recognize specific rights and reshape an understanding of public issues, framing social problems to convince a wider audience that these issues must be addressed. "Who said liberation theology was dead?" asked Conrado Zepeda Miramontes SJ, in response to my observation that perhaps the theology of liberation had waned in the wake of the Zapatista rebellion of 1994. "There are many different kinds of liberation theology and they are all grounded in God's love: love for the poor, love for the *indígena*, love for the oppressed and the marginalized." To characterize the theology of liberation as one or the other – inherently political in nature or cultural in approach – obscures its complex nature as the social movement it has become. Indeed, grievances typified as "political" oftentimes rest on cultural foundations that shape our ideas of self worth, personhood, and *identity* (McAdam 1995, Touraine 1985, emphasis added).

Recognition and redistribution are twin dimensions of social justice that cut across all social movements, as Romo clarifies with respect to liberation theology in Chiapas. His views echo that of Fraser (2003), who writes that struggles for recognition assume the guise of identity politics aimed at challenging demeaning cultural representations of subordinate groups, and the

recognition perspective enables us to identify the cultural dimensions of what are usually regarded as redistributive economic policies. Although the redistributive dimension aids in understanding the underlying economics in recognition struggles, Fraser's dualism consists of cultural obstacles involving misrecognition and economic impediments such as maldristirbution. Fraser (2003: 22) further argues that recognition struggles serve "less to supplement, compliment and enrich redistribution struggles" than to eclipse them, despite the globalizing context in which income inequality has been a visible result. While it may be the case that a lack of recognition for the poor and oppressed as cast in the theology of liberation is sustained by unequal economic structures, righting the economic wrongs – following Fraser (2003) – may be an insufficient response, as these disadvantaged groups struggle for their own voice in Chilón and, indeed, Mexican society over issues that concern them.

Recognition struggles are dynamic. They revolve around processes where social actors seize political opportunities and reconfigure the surrounding politics. In this "messy world of politics," Phillips (2003: 264) argues that a more thorough understanding of social movements must needs a dissolving of the dichotomy Fraser advocates. Although struggles over redistribution challenge injustices in the uneven apportioning of power and resources, not all claims on social resources fall neatly into this mould. While Phillips shares Fraser's general perception that two kinds of issues are at stake, no phenomenon falls neatly into one or the other type. People are battling not just demeaning stereotypes that deny them self-respect or self-esteem; they are advocating recognition as a distinct group with a right to speak on its own issues and enjoy the material benefits of participation and citizenship (Phillips 2003). "It is not either-or, one of the other," a Mexican Jesuit academic once told me. "You strengthen their culture, give them the confidence in their own indigenous identity, such that they are able to fight and to struggle *on their own*. To ask what they are being liberation *from* is a silly question. Poverty is complex and means many things."

Indeed, the Jesuit approach reveals the tension between Fraser and Phillips (2003: 265) who argues that groups marked out by their particular identities need to be recognized as political actors in their own right as a distinct group, for without this they will have limited influence in the public area. What is at issue is the political *agency* of the group, more than the collective agency as such. Shaking off external perceptions of what they are or ought to be and establishing their right to define themselves through self-organization emerges as a central theme. Oppressed or subordinated groups have to be able to find their own voice, to speak for themselves, to be recognized as active participants. But recognition struggles are often forced to choose between pursuing the "recognition" objectives that require consolidation of collective identities, or the "redistribution" objectives that depend on "reducing salience of group difference (Phillips 2003: 265). The point Phillips (2003: 271) argues is that in seeking to establish the subordinated individuals as full partners in social life, recognition may not require any assertion about the validity of the group identity, for it is the *individuals* who are to be recognized as full partners rather than the groups to which they belong (Phillips 2003: 273, emphasis added).

Conclusion

The Jesuits are committed to protecting the indigenous Tseltal given that they are as they have always been, Mexico's most marginalized peoples. In the later chapter on the ladinos of Chilón, the ladinos themselves will speak of the Jesuits' "preferential option for the poor" (in terms used by Gustavo Gutiérrez) that results in the neglect of the ladinos. It is an accusation the Jesuits themselves do not deny, particularly in light of their interpretation of a liberationist theology that places the poor and marginalized first and foremost. That the Jesuits reconfigure the indigenous sacred imaginaries through their own adaptations of church teachings to Tseltal understandings may be overstating the Jesuits' sense of agency or impact. In the succeeding chapters of Tseltal and ladino religiosity, my ethnography will reveal that much of the merging and meshing of indigenous and ladino identities happens underneath the Jesuit gaze.

CHAPTER THREE:

BEING CATHOLIC, BEING TSELTAL: INDIGENOUS IDENTITY THROUGH RELIGIOUS RITUAL

"The Tseltal speaks more freely, more comfortably, more honestly with another Tseltal. Even if a ladino speaks good Tseltal, the Tseltal will not speak freely. But even if a Tseltal does not speak the language as well as he should, another Tseltal will still feel he can talk from the bottom of his heart." (Manuel, age 28)

Introduction

Manuel was 26 at the time I met him. He lived in the town center of Chilón with his common-law wife, their four-year-old daughter; his grandfather, mother, brothers and their families – all gathered in two houses. Like most Tseltal of his generation, he had finished secondary school and even preparatory school for university. He speaks Spanish at work and with his friends, his native Tseltal to his family. A regular churchgoer, he is as popular with the Tseltal as he is with the Ladinos and the Jesuits residing in Chilón. He is well versed in Tseltal folklore – stories of spirits and flying ghosts prowling for souls in the dead of night in search of prey – and introduced me to the most famous healers and practitioners of Tseltal religious ritual (he is also well-abreast of the latest small-town gossip).

"You know, if I go to a *kaxlan* house, they leave me at the door. But if I go to a Tseltal home, they let me in, they give me a seat, and possibly even serve me coffee. [10] A *kaxlan* will never understand how we feel. They will never suffer the way we suffer. They will never know the suffering that we've experienced, that we are still experiencing in our bodies," Manuel tells me over lunch of chicken mole and tortillas. "I can talk to them and the *kaxlan* would listen, but they will never understand how I feel. As *Mamá* used to say, a fellow Tseltal will know immediately what to do when he sees another Tseltal sad or in trouble. They will give me coffee to bring home, *frijoles*, corn, clothes – but a *kaxlan* will never do that. A Tseltal will cry with me because he will know how I am suffering, because he's experienced the same. If you have a problem, say, your wife leaves you or your children hate you and you talk to one of the Jesuits or to a Tseltal deacon, who do think will understand you better? The Jesuits, of course. [11] It's the same with me. Maybe we Tseltals are more sensitive that way. We know how the other Tseltal feels immediately."

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[10] *Kaxlan*: Pronounced "cash-lan" is the Tseltal term to denote non-indigenous, both Ladinos and foreigners. It is derived from the Spanish word "Castilla" or "Castellano," the term which is used to refer to European Spanish during the colonial era.

[11] Of the six Jesuits in the mission, not one is indigenous. In fact, in the entire mission of Bachajón of which Chilón forms part, not one is Tseltal.

As comfortable as he was in ladino company, Manuel embodies all the ambiguities that beset the indigenous identity: at once conscious and proud of their rich cultural heritage and yet craving for that same recognition from the non-indigenous residents of Chilón. “I want to maintain our traditions,” he says. “But I want to do in the proper way. I’m never invited to a proper *kaxlan* home, so maybe you can show me pictures of their household altars? I want to keep my beliefs, but I want to know how to do it the proper *kaxlan* way.” That Manuel mentions the household altar that is a fixture in many Mexican homes – the crucifix and motley collection of saints, colored candles, pictures of deceased family relatives, and more importantly an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe – reflects the central place religion holds in the construction of self among the Tseltal.

Religion is a medium through which identity can be negotiated and actively asserted. In a postcolonial context such as Mexico, religious synthesis reveals that religious practices are never truly received wholesale through passive absorption or inculturation. Describing Catholic practice in Chilón, among a people who trace their culture to the ancient Maya, in any unitary view is certain to be inadequate. The assumption that the universalizing force of Christianity supplants local systems of belief is proven here the contrary, with local practices having persisted despite centuries of Christianity. In this chapter, I will attempt to demonstrate the depth and intensity with which the Tseltal view their own religious rituals and the values that lie concealed in their observance

Being Tseltal, Being Catholic: The Politics of Religious Synthesis

At the heart of Chilón community life is the parish church, recently proclaimed officially as patrimony of the Mexican nation. It sits atop a low hill overlooking the town, which spreads out below in a grid pattern typical of Spanish colonial planning: church and state at the geographical center of town life; paved roads (formerly of stone) spreading out from the main artery that is about two kilometers from end to end; single-story colonial houses made of heavy stucco walls, and low-pitched tile roofing. With church and local government at the geographical center of Mexican towns, religion has been intertwined with local politics and the negotiation of identities throughout the Spanish colonial era and beyond. With local religion in the indigenous communities of central and southern Mexico a fusion of Mesoamerican and Catholic beliefs, syncretism or syncretic belief has become (as Steward and Shaw [1994] have described) deeply contentious and politicized terminologies: supposedly “pure” and “authentic” Catholic tradition are ostensibly “infiltrated” by symbols and meanings belonging to other, incompatible traditions.

The Tseltal take their Catholic rituals seriously, especially the Mass. The Tseltal village chapel (*ermita)* is humble, but clean. It can sometimes be built with whitewashed blocks and cemented flooring depending on the community’s level of affluence, and the chapel is always strewn with pine needles in keeping with traditional Tseltal decoration for special occasions.

Oftentimes it is a dirt-floor cabin, its function signified only by a large wooden cross facing the main entrance, both adorned with palm fronds and flowers. The main altar is a wooden table covered with a linoleum sheet, above which are banners of plastic lattice-work of the heroes of Mexican independence in the red-white-green tricolors of Mexico. A large image of Our Lady of Guadalupe holds pride of place behind the altar, underneath it an array of images of saints or a plastic doll dressed in an infant's bonnet as the Child Jesus.

The Tseltal Mass contains all the basic elements of Roman Catholic liturgy in structure, form, and content. The basic differences lie in manner and style. Copal incense in constantly burning, and the Mass proceeds in Tseltal. The priest normally walks toward the assembly during the homily, the part of the Mass where the priest preaches on the Gospel, negotiating the public boundaries between priest and congregation. Whereas in conventional liturgy, the homily is a reflection of the Gospel text, the homily can include a conversation between priest and congregation, where the priest interrogates the community members on issues often unrelated to the Gospel text. "Why do we need all the herbicides and pesticides being thrown here from the United States? Because it is illegal there and they are forcing us to use them, when in fact all that damages the soil," says one Jesuit walking directly into the assembly, who nod in approval. It is not unusual for the priest to tackle issues of daily concern for the Tseltal *campesino*: that herbicides and pesticides are dangerous for the soil, that we should reject the advertisements of foreign (read: US) companies promoting their use, that Tseltal farmlands have been used since time out of mind for the benefit of corporate Mexico, that indigenous lands are being used as a dumpsite for chemical fertilizers banned in the United States, that maize is sacred and should be defended, protected from corporate profiteering both in Mexico and abroad (read again: US). "Religion and politics are inseparable in the Tseltal cosmology," says the Jesuit. "Light and dark, male and female, sun and moon – they are all complimentary. Oxford categories don't exist in the indigenous mind. For the Tseltal, reality is not divided into categories – sacred and secular, religion and politics. God is both male and female – God is a totality."

This male-female complementarity is the obvious difference between Tseltal and conventional Roman Catholic liturgy – a contentious subject that has still to be resolved in the upper echelons of the Church hierarchy. Whereas Church regulations allow for only male deacons (lay persons ordained to administer limited sacraments). Among the Tseltal both deacon and wife are visible in their duties. "In the Tseltal mind," says one Jesuit, "A man is not complete without a female partner. Although it is the male, and only the male who is ordained deacon, his wife assists in carrying out his liturgical responsibilities." In fact, the general female presence at a Tseltal Mass is considerable: they constantly blow incense onto the images, the priest, and the Bible before the Gospel is read; they stand beside their deacon-husbands at the altar when the bread and wine is consecrated by the priest; they stand holding a candle beside their husbands when they distribute the Communion Host. They sit separately from the men during the Mass, but all come together and dance in the central aisle of the church before Communion is given.

Despite the more progressive sentiments that have emerged since Vatican II (1962-1965), voices within the hierarchical church institution (global as well as Mexican) dispute the concept of syncretism, reserving the term as a particular onerous "-ism" for a narrower, negative subset of religious synthesis where the Christian message is diluted or lost (Steward and Shaw 1994). In general, however, notions of inculturation within the Catholic theological discourse allows that the Word of God, the message of the Gospel – the knowledge of a transcendental, timeless, and transcultural truth – "is not tied to a particular human language or cultural form, but adaptable into local idioms and symbolic repertoires" (Stewart and Shaw 1994: 11).

Ch'ulel: Saints and the Tseltal Soul

A central feature of local indigenous Catholicism is the reciprocal relationship of the individual, the family, the community, and the intermediaries with the Divine; that is, the saints. The saints are not mere symbols but living entities, which move, speak, cry, and reside in home altar and sanctuaries (Bantjes 2006). In the Tseltal world, spirits, animals, even atmospheric phenomena are apprised as other-than-human persons. Even landscape becomes an intermediary with the Divine, rather than mere background upon which humans leave their mark. These other-than-human persons become volitional, sentient, aware, and intelligent beings with whom one communicates and, indeed, propitiates for future blessings. This field of "the sacred," which the Tseltal call *ch'ulel* is represented by an existence that is different from our ordinary world, understood in terms of that which form "the other." Beings and things are permanently unstable in this sacred *ch'ulel* state, where boundaries and categories are not clearly distinguished (Pitarch 1996, 2010). This relationality with nature and landscape becomes the underlying ethos running through much of Tseltal ritual, such as that of the Madre Tierra to be described in this chapter.

As Pitarch (1996, 2010, 2011) describes it, in the Tseltal conception of what comprises the human soul, inanimate beings become part of what is conceived as the sacred. This *ch'ulel* (lit: holy or sacred place) state can be acquired at birth and relinquished at death. At the moment of birth, the human body captures inside it the sacred *ch'ulel* state which form part of that person for the rest of his or her individual life. These souls (in effect) may be animals of any species, plants, or even atmospheric phenomena such as lightning bolts or gusts of wind. The *lab* (as these are called) comprise the Tseltal conception of the soul, beings which in fact personify an antithesis of their bodied selves, fragments of a sacred state encapsulated in the body (Pitarch 2010). Thus the saints, as inanimate objects, are conceived not only as intermediaries with the Divine, but as themselves forming part of the sacred *ch'ulel* with whom one speaks, converses, and celebrates.

During the saint's fiesta (Sto. Domingo, for the Tseltal), the wooden statues are serenaded with song, wiped with oil, dressed in new festive garments, "cleaned" (*limpiar*) profusely with copal incense, paraded through the streets, and prayed to in different homes each day of the fiesta season.[12] As such, the saints provide what Bantjes (2006: 146) calls a "counterbalance to the risk, danger, and existential anxiety" of a people constantly threatened by poverty, government neglect, as well as by the malignant supernatural (*malignos*).

The Cargo System: Religion and Tseltal Social Structure

What draws the Tseltal closer among themselves and to their neighbors is a system of "civico-religious" duties and responsibilities that operate outside the ambit of church as much as it does within it. The system, which historians of Mexico say emerged during the late colonial era, can be defined as a hierarchy of ranked offices that together comprise a community's civic and religious administration (Chance and Taylor 1985). This system links religious practices to the local socio-political order, with those ascending this dual hierarchy attaining prestige through the ceremonial sponsorship of local fiestas. This system allows the Tseltal community, through their village elders or *principales* to maintain a degree of autonomy with respect to the state (Bantjes 2006). Chance and Taylor (1985) have found that the cargo system allowed indigenous villages "greater leeway to reconstitute their ceremonial organization and express religion *in their own terms*" (emphasis added).[13]

This *sistema de cargo* (henceforth "cargo system") rests on a substratum of power hierarchies that anthropologists and archeologists of the Maya have argued as distinctive to pre-colonial social organization. When anthropologists write of village democracy (past or present), they usually refer to the "village elders" whose opinion on issues concerning the community are regarded with deep respect. They are not necessarily the eldest in the Tseltal community, but possess an aura of respectability that comes from knowing deeply Tseltal tradition. They value their close connections with the mission church, abide by its teachings, fulfill their Sunday obligations, organize religious fiestas, and, when called on occasion, perform Tseltal rituals.

[12] Chilón celebrates two fiestas, San Juan Nepomuceno (May 16) for the ladino community and Sto. Domingo de Guzmán (August 8) for the Tseltal. The feast of Sto Domingo is celebrated a few days earlier than the saint's actual feast day, which is celebrated on the formal feast day in neighboring Ocosingo. Due to a lack of priests during the colonial era, religious feasts were celebrated on different dates in different areas.

[13] The Mesoamerican cargo system has nothing to do with the "cargo cults" in Melanesia. The Melanesian cargo cults are social movements (political or religious) that embrace prophecies and innovative ritual practices or worship of ancestral spirits, promising the arrival of "cargo." This could mean the kind of manufactured goods shipped in by the American military during the war, or a representation of more abstract concepts (e.g., transformation or transcendence). The Mesoamerican cargo system, however, is a set of secular and religious unpaid obligations that a person can through to achieve recognition or respect of the community. That the cargo system had been influenced by the church-based *cofradías* (brotherhoods) brought from Europe by the Spanish as a form of establishing control is a perennial topic of research among Mexican historians. Suffice it to say that the prestige attached by the Tseltal to their cargo system far exceeds what the ladinos give to their own religious institutions.

To speak of these *principales* (male) and *prioras* (female) who make the upper stratum of the Tseltal community as having wealth is pointless, if not ridiculous, for wealth or financial stability are not the criteria for holding this *cargo*. They are educated relative to their generation, and value education for the children and grandchildren (as evidenced by the diplomas of their family members hanging on their walls). They are not from the propertied or landed gentry (even in Tseltal terms) nor are even part of their commercial allies, but are economically stable enough to carry out their *cargo* without leaving themselves in a state of need. By the very definition of their *cargo*, the *principales* and *prioras* nurture an intense loyalty and devotion to Tseltal traditions and customs, about which the community expects them to be knowledgeable in the purest, most authentic form. When younger Tseltal meet them in the streets, they bow and wait for the *principales* or *prioras* to touch the crown of their head, while addressing them as *tatic* (father) or *mamtic* (mother).

Chilón's town center has eight *principales* and six *prioras* (one passed away recently and the other has chosen to relinquish her *cargo*). They are senior in age, regular churchgoers, always present at even the most minor religious events; with no known extra-marital affairs, and enjoying family life that is free from rumor or scandal ("Chilón is a small town. Chilón has no secrets," says Manuel, my main Tseltal informant mentioned earlier). They are generous with their knowledge of Tseltal tradition and custom, eager to encourage that learning in others (including fieldworkers as myself). Their opinions are held in great esteem and though they do not adjudicate disputes (for that, there is a separate *cargo* called *juez Tseltal* or "Tseltal judge"), they may be consulted for personal advice. Doña Juana, the second most senior *priora*, is often called to pray over the recently deceased and entrusted with the mortuary rituals (e.g., washing the body, wiping it with olive oil, covering the navel with special herbs). She is also called to anoint the newborn baby with oil or identify the child's *lab* ("companion spirit," see above) from the signs present at childbirth.

The *principales* are distinct from the ordained deacons who are in charge of supporting the church ministry by offering catechism in community chapels, apart from assisting the priest at regular church activities (especially Sunday Mass).[14] "Before the arrival of the Jesuits, the *principales* used to walk around waving a wooden stick to let people know their authority and their power to discipline," says the most senior Tseltal deacon, Don Tomás Gómez.[15] With their reputation as repositories of indigenous knowledge, both the *principales* and *prioras* are oftentimes rumored to be skilled in the traditional healing.

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[14] The deacons are addressed as "*jBanquil*" ("my brother" – note the first person possessive) rather than "*Tatic*" (father), as they do to the *principales*.

[15] The Jesuits arrived only in 1956. The area was previously evangelized by the Dominican priests, hence Sto. Domingo de Guzmán as the patron saint of the Tseltales in Chilón. It is not uncommon to have older residents of Chilón to use as their time frame "before the Jesuits" and "after the Jesuits." The impact of the Jesuit mission will be discussed in a separate chapter.

Older members of the Tseltal community still remember the time when parents would scold their children with threats to be disciplined by the *principales*: *"Ya cac'at sc'ap me'il tatil* !" or *"Te voy a poner en las manos de los principales!"* ("I shall place you in the hands of the *principales*!"). Indeed, to be asked to fulfill the *cargo* of *principal* or *priora* is a great honor, and (to my knowledge) only one man had refused the *cargo* when it was offered to him. "There is something dark about the *principales*," says an 82-year old Tseltal, whose own mother-in-law was a *priora* in the 1960s.

The *principales* and *prioras* are at the top of Tseltal social organization in general, the fiesta and other religious events in particular. The *capitán de fiesta* (literally, "captain of the fiesta") whom they appoint, is formally given his responsibility with great formality in church at the end of each fiesta, looking towards the one year that he holds his *cargo*. The ceremony does not require the presence of a priest, even if it is held in church. That the *juramento* ('swearing in') is held in church is significant. No mass is held and the presence of the priest at this turnover is a mere formality (he leaves after the initial greeting and doesn't stay for the entire ceremony). Incidentally, all fiesta captains in Chilón have been Tseltal. Only one member of the ladino community, schoolteacher and local historian Julio Ali Reyes Monterrosa, has been asked to become fiesta captain. Reyes Monterrosa refused "because of the heavy responsibility." With the *principales* are the outgoing fiesta captain and the incoming fiesta captais. The "changing of the captains" begins with the entourage that includes all *principales* and *prioras* walking the interior of the church three times counter-clockwise, as the Tseltal do when entering a holy or sacred place. The most senior of the *principales* lays out a straw mat on the ground in front of the church altar, kisses the ground three times, and gives a red banner to the incoming fiesta captain. On his knees with the most senior *principal*, the incoming fiesta captain receives the banner as the former makes the sign of the cross three times on the pole itself, saying "*Dios jTatic, Dios nich' anil, Dios Espiritu Santo* (God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit)." [16] The fiesta captains then receive one by one all members of the entourage, who thank the outgoing fiesta captain and welcome the incoming one.

Unlike the Ladino community, the Tseltal fiestas function as a "closed corporate community" as described in the anthropological literature on the cargo system, in the sense that the Tseltal reject political support from the local government and merchandising from commercial establishments. Once the *juramento* is over and turnover complete, the fiesta captains are ready to organize his fiesta organizing committee, which includes younger members of the Tseltal community (tasked to organize dances).

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[16] Note that for the word "Holy Spirit," the Tseltal use the Spanish translation "*Espiritu Santo*" rather than the Tseltal word *ch'ulel* (holy), as explained earlier. Similarly, for the word "soul" the Tseltal use the Spanish word "*alma*" rather than the Tseltal translation of *ch'ulel*, which is the Tseltal equivalent of the concept of "the soul." The problems of translation and semantic equivalence will not be discussed in this thesis, though worthy of further research.

This inclusion of unmarried men and women is important as it provides an opportunity for the younger members of the Tseltal community to display – and I used the word "display" purposefully – their active participation in the fiesta, whether it is to set off fireworks, decorate the venues with colored buntings, prepare coffee and bread, or play the marimba.

Structure and agency have been recurring themes in the anthropological discussion of the cargo system, ever since Cancian's (1965) now-classic study among the Tzotzil in Zinacantán, Chiapas. The cargo system is what separates "Indian community, a community separate and distinct from its ladino counterpart," writes Cancian (1965: 133). The cargo system creates the boundary that defines the community and is the glue that holds it together, ranking the members of the community into a single social structure (Cancian 1965: 135). As with Wolf's earlier work (1955), participation in this system, according to Cancian (1965), defines membership in the community, making and constantly establishing boundaries. The cargo system was about individuals doing service to the community and in return gaining prestige and position in the village hierarchy. In other words, the cargo system was about the production of social structure and prestige. Similarly, other studies on the cargo system focused on various themes in anthropology, shifting focus in a seeming continuum of discourse between structure and agency: the history of the cargo system (Chase and Taylor 1985, Rus and Wasserstrom 1988), the broader political economy and politics of exchange (Greenberg 1981); gender identities and participation (Stephen 1991). Most recently, Magazine (2012) suggests limitations to the prestige model: the cargo holder does, indeed, produce something of value – action and subjective agency in others – "but does not own and thus cannot accumulate this product and value" (Magazine 2012: 69).

Magazine (2012: 68) suggests that previous readings of the cargo system overlook the interdependence that is the most prominent feature of indigenous Mexico: people cause each other to act but without controlling each other and instead producing "active subjectivity in others." In other words, the accumulation of prestige and its conversion to power through the moral authority that comes with this prestige, is an overworked interpretation of the cargo system following Cancian's (1965) classic text. No one gains anything "that can be converted into power or control over others," writes Magazine (2012: 71). The *mayordomo* (as the fiesta captain is called in Magazine's fieldsite of Tepetlaoxtoc in central Mexico) has performed his duty by producing something of value through "active subjectivity," as opposed to control (Magazine 2012: 68). In fact, power – in the sense of power as control over others – becomes problematic given the prevailing ethos reciprocity and interdependence that mark daily life in indigenous Mexico. Although a good fiesta captain is needed by the community to perform his cargo, he in turn needs them in order to carry out his responsibilities.

Granted that Magazine (2012) rightfully acknowledges the culture of interdependence and reciprocity that is part of indigenous Mexico, my research situates the cargo system within the larger context of power dynamics of indigenous society, the rites and rituals that are (in effect) a sacralization of power, and the social institutions that have formed around it.

Power does not necessarily involve the use of direct force or compulsion; rather, the maintenance and distribution of power are, in many ways, symbolic in nature. To understand the *process* of power and the maintenance of social structures, then, is to understand the nature of symbols and the rituals through which these symbols are consciously or unconsciously employed and manipulated. Indeed, people are generally unaware, that they themselves endow the world with their symbolically constructed version of reality. People assume – as many Tseltal do of their own rituals – that the world presents itself in the form in which it is perceived, with nary a thought that symbols and rituals are influenced by the distribution of resources and our relationships with these forms of social, cultural, or religious capital. To quote Kertzer (1988: 5), through symbols and ritual "we recognize who are the powerful and who are the weak, and through the manipulation of symbols the powerful reinforce their authority."

Speaking to Nature: The Sacrifice to the Madre Tierra

A large wooden cross is planted firmly on the ground, festooned with fresh flowers and palm leaves. At the foot of this cross more than six feet tall is a deep hole, bordered on either side with two white candles and a terracotta dish of copal incense. Bowls of black beans, tortillas, corn flatcakes (*memelas*), fermented corn drink (*atole*), cacao, coffee, and a bottle of *aguardiente* (clear spirit) are neatly arranged in a semi-circle around the hole. Two live chickens (one dark-colored male, one white female) rest in a large wicker basket nearby. The leader of the prayers sprinkles water all over the surrounding area with a bundle of leaves, intoning blessings for the entire household in a mix of Tseltal and Spanish. "There are only a few who can pray to the Madre Tierra the traditional way. There are many who do it, but they are copies. They are false and just pretending," says Don Miguel Vargas, the most senior of *principales* who leads the prayers.

No template or prescribed script exists for the ritual to the Madre Tierra, performed traditionally during or around the Feast of the Holy Cross (May 3) or for very special occasions such as house blessings. The entire ritual could be divided roughly into four parts: an invocation, sacrifice, offering, and a commensal meal of the sacrificial victim (i.e., the two chickens). With a male assistant called *mayordomo*, Don Miguel performs a traditional Tseltal toast and prayer to begin religious festivities called the *pat'otan*, a toast in the form of a prayer that traditionally marks formal Tseltal festivities. [17]

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[17] The *pat'otan* is performed at Tseltal religious events: wedding, baptism, house blessing, dances during the fiesta, as well as the ritual to the Madre Tierra. It is essentially a toast where the most senior *principal* or celebrant offers *aguardiente* to the guest of honor. Instead of a normal toast, what is intoned during that toast are prayers offering this occasion to God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, to Our Lady of Guadalupe or the patron saint whose feast is being celebrated. Blessings are requested on behalf of all present, for the host and owner of the house where the meal is held, or for the leader of the team for the fiesta preparations. The words of prayer and thanksgiving are almost indistinguishable as they are recited rapid-fire, punctuated by *"gracias compadre/gracias comadre"* ("thank you, compadre/ thank you, comadre"). The *pat'otan* is always led by a man. It is always said in Tseltal (with a smattering of Spanish) and strictly a Tseltal tradition. The Ladinos do not perform the *pat'otan* unless with a Tseltal host leading.

Don Miguel then kneels in front of the hole at the foot of the cross. He grabs the necks of the chickens one after the other, pointing the head towards the hole:

"….li' laj lamal ta asit, ta awelate te ch'ul pom,
te ch'ul candela, ch'ul nichim ha'laj me jc'op ca'beyej.
A'bon awutsil, a'bon aloquil ta stsaquel.

Hich nex laj me ya xcopojon ec ta stojol te ch'ul lumqu'inal
Ch'ul jnana, ch'ul jch'nat cu'un
Ta scuenta ini te jcompadre, jcomadre
Le' laj tal axi'el, tal mahtan
Hich but'il ini jch'ul me' qu'inal…"

(….Here before your eyes, the holy incense, holy candle, the flowers.
Here are my words,
Give me blessings, give me our bounty and take these gifts.

And I speak to holy Madre Tierra
Holy mother of mine, (in) my breast
On behalf of my compadre, comadre.
Here we give you these gifts, we give you this offer on this day….
….gifts to you mother.")

The *mayordomo* then gives a sharp twist to the neck of each chicken killing them instantly. Don Miguel kisses the earth three times and the cross three times, after which the women clean and boil the chickens for the main meal. After another *pat'otan* between Don Miguel and the most senior cook in the kitchen, Don Miguel kneels again in front of the cross with the food to be offered to the Madre Tierra: the hearts and lungs of both chickens (arranged on a plate in the form of a cross), broth from the boiled chickens; three glasses of *aguardiente*; followed by the beans and other dishes. Don Miguel places each into the hole, more incense is waved over the offering, and Don Miguel closes the hole with a rock. The women spread banana leaves on the ground right in front of the cross, upon which the meal is served and shared. "We have to eat close to the soil because Madre Tierra eats with us," says Don Miguel. The host family – who happens to be a *priora* and her husband – sits with Don Miguel and his assistant for the meal (the rest of the family eat in the kitchen). After the meal and coffee, the lady of the house gives Don Miguel a tin of biscuits and other gifts, which he accepts. She takes out from her wallet 200 pesos (8.30 pounds) tightly folded up, which Don Miguel vociferously refuses. She insists and places it herself in his shirt pocket with his gratitude. [18]

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[18] I point out this exchange as it reflects the perception that money is not to be exchanged for the honor and prestige of this religious service. Chilón is, however, a modest community where lower-middle class in more prosperous towns would be considered wealthy. The perception that money "pollutes" this religious ceremony is therefore given wider context when the modest economic life of Chilón is taken into

Only two *prioras* and Don Miguel are acknowledged as being the only three people capable or worthy to perform this sacred rite to the Madre Tierra, at least in the town center of Chilón.[19] "Madre Tierra is alive," says Don Miguel. "We must beg forgiveness from her the same way we beg forgiveness from our own mothers who carried us on their backs when we were babies. We live above the Madre Tierra. We stain Madre Tierra. We contaminate the soil and we must as her forgiveness. I hope that the younger people will continue this tradition. It is important for us as Tseltal." In this ritual, the Tseltal engages with the natural world on which they are dependent and with which they share the processes of life. By performing this ritual, they acknowledge the role of Madre Tierra as intermediary or intercessor, much as they would the Catholic saints. "When we pray to the Madre Tierra, we have to give her food. When Madre Tierra has a feast, she also brings all her friends to feast with her. We have to provide for all of them," says Doña Juana, one of the two senior *prioras* called upon to pray to the Madre Tierra. Thus, the devotional practices associated with Madre Tierra are not unlike those accorded the saints. As symbols of social identities, as markers of belonging or cultural boundaries (Christian 1972: 100), these intermediaries to the Divine embody in a particular way how the Tseltal regard "the sacred" (*ch'ulel*).

The Torito de Petate: Tseltal Social Order and a Burning Bull

Rituals such as the sacrifice to the Madre Tierra allow the Tseltal an opportunity to participate in the performance of their culture. These rituals allow them to fulfill certain roles in their particular social matrix, allowing them to find their place in the weft and weave of Tseltal hierarchy while eliciting emotions of confidence, loyalty, and pride. "I left my new job so that I could come home to Chilón for this fiesta," says Juan Carlos Lema, who in his late twenties is leader of the younger of Tseltal church volunteers. "I have been doing this as my father had been doing and my grandfather before me. I will start a new job when the fiesta is over. But in the meantime, I have a *cargo* to fulfill." What Juan Carlos refers to as "this" has been part of Chilón's collective memory for as long as anyone can remember. Every Tseltal has a childhood memory associated with a representation of a bull called the *torito de petate*, named after the reed mats (*petate*) with which it was formerly constructed.

The tradition exists, of course, in other parts of Mexico. In the state of Michoacán, for instance, home of the Purépecha, Otomí, and Nahua peoples, the *torito* is a realistic papier-mâché bull made with wood or even leather. It is paraded through the streets accompanied by a man dressed as a woman (*maringuías*) who act as jester or buffoon. It is the centerpiece of the Carnival parade that marks the beginning of Lent (*Cuarésma*). In neighboring Oaxaca, to cite another example, some communities perform the *torito de petate* as part of the Easter rites.

consideration. This exchange between the *priora* and Don Miguel not only reflects the nature of exchange but has gender dimensions as well. There is no way that a female Tseltal would move this close to a male Tseltal (particularly when both are of an older generation).

[19] I emphasize that every Tseltal community has its own *principales* and *prioras*.

In the Oaxaca version, the *torito* is a large reed cylinder with the head of a bull, carried from the inside by a man and accompanied by a peasant-cowboy-clown with a hat, into which donations are thrown. [20] "I grew up with the *torito*," says my bilingual Tseltal informant Manuel, secondary-school educated and father of one. "Like all children, we used to chase after it and my mother would get so nervous all the time! It is part of Tseltal fiestas and we all look forward to it."

Dissecting the various definitions of ritual will not be within the remit of this thesis. Rather, I would like to describe how a ritual such as the construction and performance of the *torito de petate* channels people's emotions, organizes social groups, defines one's participation in these groups, while reinforcing the benign authority of the traditional Tseltal hierarchy that are the *principales* and *prioras*. As Kertzer (1988: 63) has said: "Ritual dramatizes and energizes collective representations that mediate between society and the individual." More importantly it is the visible act of participation and prestige that comes with it that elicits active involvement – an emotional involvement, even – as well as respect of one's peers. On one of the two occasions I was invited to participate in the construction of the *torito* for the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, two of the young men involved in its making started their morning visibly drunk.[21] Once the *principales* had appeared to "preside" over the construction, however, these two young men – eyes bloodshot and breath reeking of *pox* – had pulled themselves out of the shade to start working, much to the quiet amusement of everyone present.

The *torito de petate* is triangular in shape, roughly two and half meters tall, three meters long, and a meter wide at the widest point in its base. The head is made with strips of pliable bamboo wrapped in colored paper (complete with eyes and a pink tongue sticking out). The frame is of stripped vine on which are tied cardboard panels and covered in brightly-colored sheets of paper. Fireworks then make the final layer, strapped onto a wire frame over the entire body of the *torito*. Too heavy and costly in its original *petate* mats, the contemporary version still wieghs a good 50 – 60 kilos, including the fireworks. Several young Tseltal male take turns carrying the *torito* on their back to walk through the streets, while Juan Carlos Lema is tasked – as his father and grandfather were before him – to carry the *torito* as the fireworks on it are set alight. "My body gets really tired," says Juan Carlos, who performs the *torito* three times during the nine-day novena prayers leading up to the fiesta. "But if you drink a lot of *pox* your body gets numb and you don't hear the noise!"

[20] Sadly, the tradition is as yet poorly documented in the anthropological literature. In the Chilón version of the legend, the bull is said to have appeared while Christ was in battle with the Devil, offering its help to Christ win. The bull emerges successful, prompting Christ to ask what he would like in return. The bull says it would like to be remembered forever, and the *torito de petate* becomes its symbol.

[21] It is made only twice a year for the fiesta of Sto. Domingo and the fiesta of Our Lady of Guadalupe (which will be described in the conclusion of this thesis).

Finding one's place within the web of indigenous social hierarches is something young men (and women) like Juan Carlos are conscious about. "I've been doing this for years – building the *torito* and carrying it during the dance," Juan Carlos says, having another swig of his bottle of *pox* after he had just crawled out from under the heavy *torito* frame, his shirt completely drenched in sweat. "My uncle is the one who makes the *torito* for the mestizos during their fiesta. This is our own Tseltal tradition and we have been doing this for generations in our family." As the *torito* becomes symbol of continuity and remembrance, so does the making of it give public expression to social solidarity among the Tseltal – from gathering of the vines and purchasing the fireworks in the neighboring towns (which they call the "*recorrido*"), to the construction itself and the final dance. The young express their social dependence, participation, and emotional involvement to produce bonds of solidarity and belonging to a social group. The construction of the *torito* is the province of young men, while the women prepare the meals and cut up the colored paper that decorate the *torito*. After all the vines have been gathered by the young men during the *recorrido*, the team gather at a Tseltal home for breakfast of *frijoles*, chili, scrambled egg, and tortilla. Opening prayer is said, the women serve the men, and the meal is consumed in an air of cheerfulness and conviviality that marks the entire construction of the *torito*. After the meal, the men strip the vines and cut up the cardboard panels, while Juan Carlos makes the *torito's* head. Jokes are traded and banter exchanged, while majority of the group fan themselves under the heat. "They're here," Juan Carlos says in a flash. "The *principales* are here."

Immediately the atmosphere changes as if a switch had been turned on: some grab the nearest machete or pair of scissors to strip clean the vines, others find boxes of cardboard to cut up into squares. As the *principales* settle down and greetings exchanged, the *mayordomo* accompanying the *principales* brings out a bottle of *pox* (pronounced "posh" or *aguardiente*) for the *pat' otan* described above. Two of the most senior principals – Don Miguel and his predecessor Don Urbano – face the leader of the older team with a glass of *pox*. Don Miguel offers prayers to the Madre Tierra, to Sto Domingo, to Our Lady of Guadalupe. Don Miguel offers the glass to the leader of the older group, who returns it untouched, and the glass is passed around to all the *principales* and *prioras* amid interjections of '*gracias, compadre'* and '*si, comadre*.' After all the seniors have had their *pox*, the glass is offered by Don Miguel to the leader of the group still standing before him, who finally drinks his *pox* in one go. The glass is then refilled by the *mayordomo* and passed around to all the men and women holding senior *cargos* (myself included).

The construction of the *torito* then begins, while the *principales* sit in the shade to watch. The girls make paper flags that will decorate the *torito*, while the *prioras* take a nap. Children make their own toy version using twigs and scraps of cardboard. The buzz of activity continues for a few hours amid general good cheer. When the *torito* is done, the fireworks are set on a web of wires and twine covering the *torito's* frame. Carried by Juan Carlos on his shoulders, it will dance in front of the church for a few minutes, bowing three times towards the church doors. It is set alight and the *torito* becomes a whirl of colored sparks and flashing lights, the deafening noise competing with cheers and laughter from the spectators (Ladino and Tseltal alike).

After less than five minutes, the noise fades, the sparks dim, and air is reeks of burnt gunpowder – the performance is over. “I need a drink,” Juan Carlos says, as his father – who had done the same not so long ago – beams with pride and hands him some *pox*.

“The preparation is very tiring,” Juan Carlos tells me during the construction of the *torito*. “The younger ones of today just show up on the day of the fiesta itself. But for the preparations, for the work, they’re not here.” On the contrary, says Julio César Gómez, who at 19 is one of the most active of the group. “This is my eleventh year of getting involved and I will continue to do to this. My mother stopped this work when she got married – too many responsibilities with me and my siblings. But I will continue.” Julio César says that when he was eight years old, the *principales* visited his mother to ask if both he and his sister would like to get involved with this sort of community work. His mother agreed, of course, as this was the sort of involvement she had done in her youth. “Besides, the *principales* came to our house!” Julio César says, still moved that the *principales* visited his home more than a decade ago.

The ritual to the Madre Tierra is an expression of Tseltal identity and the centrality of ritual in Tseltal social organization in the private sphere, in the intimacy of hearth and home. In the construction of the *torito de petate*, how religion becomes a filter through which Tseltal identity and social organization are revealed becomes more evident. Identity is reflected in the social bonds engendered by the *torito’s* construction, a reflection of social harmony that Fr. Conrado had said was a central feature of Tseltal life; that is, that an individual identity is also a social and community identity, that being Tseltal means relating to one’s fellow Tseltal as part of the social whole. In the following section, my analysis of Tseltal socialization progresses to the wider social whole; that is, the community at large.

The Tseltal Fiesta of Sto. Domingo: Religion and Social Organization

A detailed discussion on the various definitions or constructions of ritual is not the purpose of this thesis. What I wish to point out regarding ritual is the potency of ritual within Tseltal religion and the power of the *principales* and *prioras* in shaping that worldview. As Turner had pointed out in his 1969 classic ‘The Ritual Process,’ people express their unity with others through ritual. By employing ritual to detach oneself from the alienating relations and tensions of a hierarchically ordained society, ritual allows people to generate a social bond. The value of Bourdieu’s (1979) analytical apparatus is that it illuminates the way in which agents and institutions undertake the production and control of legitimate forms of capital particular to the religious “field,” religion being a vital source of the legitimation of power and status. In other words, the systems of representation, the structures that emerge from such systems, the religious practices particular to one social group or another contribute to the perpetuation and reproduction of the social order. This is an important aspect to an understanding the cargo system that neither Magazine (2012) nor others have shed light upon in their studies of the cargo system.

The cargo system and the social capital wielded by the *principales* and *prioras* (and the *capitanes de fiesta* whom they select) come to the fore during the feast of the Tseltal patron saint, Sto. Domingo de Guzmán. Like the ladino fiesta of San Juan Nepomuceno and the town fiesta of Our Lady of Guadalupe (explained in the next chapter and last chapter, respectively), the feast of Sto. Domingo follows a set pattern: nine-day novenas in which the saint's image is carried from one Tseltal household to another, where prayers are conducted and lunch is served; daily processions – sometimes with *torito de petate* – with musicians and fireworks. The fiesta captain (*capitán de fiesta*) leads the entire organization, having started his fundraising (and the *capitán* is always male) the year before. The fiesta captain has predetermined all the houses to which the image is brought and will ensure that the organization runs smoothly, under the watchful eyes of the *principales* and *prioras* (to whom the fiesta captain is ultimately accountable). Unlike the ladino fiesta of San Juan Nepomuceno, the Tseltal fiesta solicits no sponsorships from beer companies or receives any funds from the local government; the funds being raised *entirely* from the community members themselves (which includes Tseltales from the outlying mountain villages). To assist the fiesta captain, the younger Tseltales aged between 16-40 called *nocheros/-as* organize the dances, set off the fireworks (a cargo of honor for the younger Tseltal males), and build the *torito de petate*.

Previous ethnographies of the Tseltal (Bréton 1979, Maurer 1994) have, in one way or another, touched upon the hierarchy of civico-religious duties that is the hallmark of indigenous Mexico. Indeed, a deep sense of importance is placed upon the positions the Tseltal hold within the cargo system, however trivial the responsibilities may be. Magazine (2012) rests his analysis on the subjectivity of agents within the cargo system, rather than the fulfillment of socially-determined or historically-determine social roles. My own investigation into the cargo system among the Tseltal reveals a hierarchy of social identities from which flow moral obligations and commitment to values and actions of various kinds. The Tseltal are, indeed, aware of the deeper motives and moral obligations attached to position sin the cargo system. Though much of the actions can be explained with reference to what is expected or acceptable by the winder community, emotional weight one places on these social roles with the Tseltal community provides, I believe, a more nuanced explanation.

The cargo system is the bedrock upon which the Tseltal community rests, says ladino schoolteacher Julio Ali Reyes Monterrosa. Reyes Monterrosa says that the cargo system may change as it adapts to the modern demands of work and employment. "The cargo system, the Tseltal fiestas – all that is based on the agricultural cycle," says Reyes Monterrosa. "But things are changing. In the past, younger Tseltal have had to quit their jobs in order to fulfill their cargo. They've had to come home from well-paying jobs outside Chilón to fulfill their duties. But that probably won't be sustainable. In the long run, the cargo system won't be as important as it used to be." As more and more Tseltales leave the predictability and freedom of agriculture-based occupation and enter the more rigid patterns of professional employment "where they lose control of their own time," Reyes Monterrosa doubts that the complex organization that is the cargo system today will be the same "in the next, say, 20 years."

The fiesta of Sto. Domingo is celebrated on the 4th of August (though the saint's proper feast day is the 8th of August). Local history has it that until the early 20th century, the area had so few priests that religious feast days – Holy Week observances included – were celebrated on different days, based on the availability of the priest. As is customary for all religious feasts in Chilón, the feast day of Sto. Domingo beings at 4:00 in the morning, with musicians, *principales*, *prioras*, and a handful of Tseltal devotees serenade the statue of Sto. Domingo with the traditional Mexican *mañanitas*. The crowd then walks to the home of one of the principales for breakfast. By 10:00 in the morning, the procession of the statue of Sto. Domingo begins through the winding streets of the town center, with the fiesta captains in their distinctive bright red tunics and ribboned sombreros to signify their cargo. Music is important in Tseltal religious celebration, and apart from the traditional bamboo flute and lone drummer, the marimba players perform from the back of an open pick-up truck. The procession ends in the main church, where a Mass is said in Tseltal. After the Mass, the *torito de petate* is set alight (as described above) and a public dance with live marimba music continues well into the night in the church plaza.

In understanding Catholicism as a cultural as well as religious system, Napolitano (2017) doesn't stray very far from Geertz's all-encompassing understanding of religion. For Napolitano (2017:4-7), Catholicism as a set of beliefs and practices has been "constitutive of life-worlds that it barely registers as distinct." That is to say, this "invisibility" is in large part linked to its historical connection with deeply entrenched systems of power – in the case of Chilón, the appropriation into its religious embrace the complexities of the Mesoamerican cargo system. Indeed, Napolitano argues, Catholicism's strength and influence is that it can contain a variety of devotional structures within a single embrace, within an all-encompassing stretch without breaking. Thus – as will be described in the final chapter on the Feast of Guadalupe – the conversation emerges less as a conversion experience that has been prevalent in the anthropological literature on Christianity, but a blending and meshing of belief systems into a new integral and coherent tradition.

Conclusion

Napolitano (2017: 7) sums up perfectly what, to me, remains unique about Catholicism as world religion, that Catholicism "is spatially and organizationally elastic in that it can stretch to contain a bewildering variety of devotional structures and theological positions without breaking." The uniqueness of Catholicism, Napolitano (2017: 7) wisely points out, is based "as much on its rhetorical toleration of locality and difference as on its universalizing, and highly centralized, 'infallible' core." As evidenced in the way Catholicism has evolved among the Tseltal – not to mention how the Jesuits have supported the incorporation of Tseltal tradition into Catholic liturgy – singularity and multiplicity can, in fact, coexist in a way that Napolitano says is Catholicism's "gymnastic" engagement with the world. In the succeeding chapter, I demonstrate not only the further elasticity of Catholicism, but how the religion itself has become the medium through which the fluidity of identities – indigenous and ladino – are revealed.

CHAPTER FOUR

“WE, TOO, HAVE OUR PROBLEMS:”
LADINO CATHOLICISM AND A SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

“We’re all members of this church and this church is patrimony of this entire pueblo, both Tseltal and ladino. I remember one time one of the sisters of the Divina Pastora asked me to sing and play the guitar in the indigenous communities. Since this group of Jesuits arrived, they only focus on the indígenas. But I told the sister, ‘Oiga, hermana, we, too, have our problems, no?’” (Miguel, a ladino carpenter and amateur guitarist).

Introduction

Don Jorge’s first visit from the spirits (*los viejitos* or ‘the old ones,’ as he calls them) was when he was twelve years old. They came to him in his dreams, Tseltal healers of the past whose names still echo in the minds of Chilón’s townsfolk. The indigenous spirits taught Don Jorge, a ladino, how to speak Tseltal through those dreams. They told him which herbs to use for what sickness, where in the mountains to find them, and how to pray. “I wasn’t afraid. It happened naturally….like it was a gift,” Don Jorge says from his home in a mountainside community outside the town center bearing the felicitous name of Filadelfia.

Don Jorge remembers well how he first started healing more than half a century ago (he is 71). Don Jorge’s first patient was his uncle, who had been bitten by a snake. He had dreamt of the dead Tseltal healers one evening, and they told him where to go looking for the herbs and how to grind them into an emollient. His first patients were all members of this family and in those days before government hospitals and clinics (Chilón then, as now, has no hospital), his reputation grew rapidly. Patients from as far away as San Juan Chamula (137 kilometers north) would come for a consultation. Don Jorge is devoted to both the Tseltal patron saint of Sto Domingo and the Ladino patron saint of San Juan Nepomuceno. A devout Catholic, he refuses money as payment for healing. For him, curing the sick is “service to the community,” and by “community” he makes no distinction between Tseltal or Ladino, even if he identifies with the latter. ”My parents were Ladinos. My ancestors were Ladinos. I am Ladino,” he says.

Don Jorge’s experience is unremarkable in an area – indeed, in an entire country – where traditional healing is deeply embedded in the local psyche. What is unique about his experience is how Ladino healers are taught Tseltal language and tradition by Tseltal healers of the past, who visit them in their dreams. “I’m not Tseltal so I didn’t grow up speaking the language,” he says. “I learned Tseltal through my dreams. *Los viejitos* talk to me in Tseltal.” Don Jorge also makes regular offerings to the Madre Tierra with biscuits and bread, as well as praying to his Catholic saints.

He communicates with the “spirits of the mountains,” he says, in a way that echoes the Tseltal belief of nature as intermediary with the Divine. He gets “possessed” (*poseído*) as the spirits enter his body and converse with him: “I can’t call the spirits. The spirits come to me. Some days they are more active and I am more receptive. Sometimes bad spirits try to enter but I do not allow them.” Don Jorge can even talk to the spirits of the dead, both Tseltal and Ladino, but chooses to heal using traditional Tseltal herbs instead.

In the previous chapter, I explained how, when I had first arrived in Chilón, the Jesuits had gone great lengths to present a Chilón of their own imagining; that is, a community of binary categories, indigenous and Ladino, opposing and oppositional. I also argued that this was understandable given the considerable work the Jesuits have been doing in working with the poor and marginalized as part of their approach to liberation theology. In this chapter, I explore the tensions that have come as a result of that missionary focus on the indigenous communities and the resentment it has caused on the Ladinos out of perceived neglect. This ambivalence towards a more confident and assertive Tseltal identity has been brought into sharp focus by the socio-political changes that followed the Zapatista uprising of 1994.

The reification of the indigene that followed the Zapatistas has prompted a search among the Ladinos of Chilón as to what their Ladino identity should be to begin with. In this chapter, I demonstrate how ritual and religion have become idioms through which the Ladinos search for their own distinctive identity as they appropriate and, indeed, embody Tseltal knowledge and practices. I demonstrate that everything the Ladinos do appear to be a reaction to what the Tseltal do. As in my chapter on the Tseltal, I trace this ambiguity that comes from the merging of identities from the personal to public platform, from the intimacy of body and person to the performance of public social role.

Day of the Dead: Chilón’s Public Cemetery as Metaphor

Chilón’s main public cemetery (*panteón*) lies on the fringes of the town center, still within walking distance from the church and the plaza but tucked within the folds of the surrounding hills. The people of Chilón, Ladinos and Tseltal alike, begin cleaning the graves of their dead the week before Day of the Dead. They strip the brambles and weeds off the gravestones, sometimes cleaning them with soap, scraping off the candle wax from last year’s celebration. How someone from Chilón communes with the dead on this one day of the year is not unique. What is particular about Chilón is that unlike other parts of southern Mexico – say, the town of Sitalá about 21 kilometers away – Chilón’s public cemetery is for both indigenous and ladinos together. Economic and social status is, naturally, reflected in the kinds of gravestones or where they are situated: old ladino families have theirs by the only paved pathway leading up the hill from the main entrance – mini-mausoleums in bright orange, lime green, or canary yellow. Nonetheless, along the very same pavement beside them are graves of Tseltal families, easily identified by their simple cement gravestones and wooden crosses instead of the gated mini-mausoleums.

Similarly, further up the hill are ladino gravestones that look just like those of the Tseltal, covered in vines and brambles – working-class ladino families beside their Tseltal counterparts. In one visual image, the complementarity of Chilón's twin identities is literally carved onto the geographical as well as psychological landscape.

Mexico's intimacy with death and its cultural significance are amply represented in the literature. Most notably, the monumental work by anthropologist Claudio Lomnitz (2005) traces the variegated relationship between death, killing, violence, art and visual imagery from colonial Mexico to the present. Kristin Norget's (2006) ethnography of death as communal ritual and popular Catholic practice among Oaxaca's urban poor is yet another sensitive portrayal of Mexico's fetishization of death. For the purposes of this thesis, however, I choose to focus on how the popular practice of this revered ritual – which Lomnitz (2005) calls Mexico's "third totem" after Guadalupe and Benito Juárez – become part of a public expression of Chilón's ethnic ambiguities through the lens of religious practice. In this section, I demonstrate how, through the public celebration of the Day of the Dead, Ladinos draw on the symbolic repertoire of Tseltal symbols to assert, paradoxically, their own claim and ownership of what they perceive as integral to Chilón's cultural identity. At the same time, the Tseltal express their own social and cultural status through the *cargos* entrusted to them by the Jesuit priests, that of praying over *all* the dead whether Ladino or Tseltal. The resulting configuration then appears to be a dialectic between indigenous and ladino that will find full expression during the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe at the close of this thesis.

The Tseltal community elders (the *principales* and *prioras*, as explained in Chapter Two) and ordained deacons assemble in the church plaza in the early morning of November 1. The sisters of the Divina Pastora – a Jesuit-affiliated order of nuns who live and work to complement the Jesuit mission – with various church workers serve everyone sweet bread and coffee. The deacons wait patiently with *principales* and *prioras*. Don Miguel Vargas holds a tall wooden cross adorned with multi-colored ribbons – the mark of his *cargo* as the most senior among the *principales*. The parish priest walks out of the church to give everyone his blessings. He will not be accompanying them this morning, he says, and leaves the prayers for the dead up to the deacons. The entire entourage walk in the morning sun from church to cemetery, including the *prioras* taking turns carrying the burning incense and the lone drummer beating time. At the entrance of the cemetery where the more prominent ladino families have their mini-mausoleums, a mariachi band sings the Mexican classic of resignation, pessimism, and death '*Puño de Tierra'* (Fistful of Earth) to a small audience of dancing children, adults enjoying beer and steamed corn; vendors of ice cream and *tamales*:

"El dia que yo muera
No voy a llevarme nada
Hay darle gusto l gusto
La vida pronto se acaba;
Lo que pasó en este mundo

No más los recuerdos quedan
Ya muro boy a llevarme
No más un puño de tierra…."

[On the day that I die
I take with me nothing
You must life life to the fullest
For life ends so soon
Of all that happened in this world
Nothing more than memories remain
When I die I take nothing more
Than a fistful of dirt.]

The entourage walk through the crowd, the solemnity of the lone drummer and *prioras* bearing incense providing contrast to the festive fiesta atmosphere. They walk up the paved pathway to the highest point up the hill, where the more modest families – Ladino and Tseltal – stand quietly over simple gravestones and wooden crosses. Don Tomás Vargas, most senior of Chilón's Tseltal deacons, leads an opening prayer in Tseltal with the four ordained deacons of Chilón.[22] They separate and head to different directions of the cemetery to say their prayers of the dead to every family requesting for them.

Don Tomás moves from on Tseltal grave to the other until a ladino asks him to say a prayer over his late wife's tombstone. "A prayer if you please, Don Tomás," he says, opening the flimsy wire fence that surrounds his wife's tombstone. The corrugated iron sheet that is a sad representation of a roof trembles precariously as Don Tomás and the most senior *principal* Don Miguel accompanying him walk inside. Don Tomás sprinkles his holy water from a small plastic bottle over the grave and unfolds a sheet of paper of Spanish prayers from his Tseltal breviary. "*Oye* Marcos, " Don Tomás whispers to me discreetly. "Do you know how to say the prayers for the dead in Spanish? My Spanish is not good enough." Neither is mine, I answer as he grins in amusement. Don Tomás reads his prayers in Spanish as the ladino widower, alone and without children, removes his straw hat and bows his head. "*Muchas gracias*, Don Tomás," the ladino, visibly moved, says after Don Tomás makes the sign of the cross over his wife's grave. "I'm sorry but I have nothing more to offer to eat or drink," he says as he pulls out a two peso coin from his pocket. Don Tomás smiles, "*Está bien*… We don't charge anything." Don Tomás walks between tombstones as a Tseltal family wave at him to come over.

[22] As a sign of respect, Don Tomás is called *jBanquil* Tomás – *jBanquil* itself a shortened version of *'jBanquil muc' utese o'tanil'* or 'the chief who gives animates and gives breath to our hearts.'

In this area, at the farthest distance from the main entrance, the average ladino and Tseltal have their gravestones exposed to the elements. Both ladinos and Tseltal leave food on the tombstones as *ofrenda* (offering) for the departed to enjoy on the one day they return to visit the living. The Tseltal generally leave a more elaborate presentation: boiled chayote, oranges in quarters, coffee, Coca-Cola, cigarettes, bread, tortillas, an occasional grilled chicken, *aguardiente*, *pozol* (fermented corn drink), white candles arranged in the form of a cross, colorful ribbons over the tombstone, fresh flowers such as (though not exclusively) orange marigolds that are the traditional flowers for the dead. Tseltal musicians play nearby – two violins and two large guitars– and Don Tomás and Don Miguel are offered food and drink wherever they go to pray. “I told you there would be lots of *tamales*,” he says to me. It is a visible feast as families congregate in the festive atmosphere: children playing ball, men drink and sing with a guitar, women hand out *tamales* and sandwiches, more than a few families tend an open barbecue. On his way out after five hours of continuous praying one grave after another, Don Tomás, his shirt drenched in sweat, is back near the main entrance at the bottom of the hill where the old ladino families have their mini-mausoleums. Don Tomás and I enter the largest one right by the entrance of the cemetery, owned by one of the more prominent ladino families of Chilón, while the *principales* and *prioras* who had accompanied us wait outside.

The widow of the deceased, a venerable lady of 82 from one of Chilón’s wealthier families, remains seated as Don Tomás takes of his *sombrero* in greeting. The other members of the family smile and make way for Don Tomás to come close to the tombstone, which lies on the faux-marble floor by a wall painted bright orange. Don Tomás pulls out his piece of paper with the prayers in Spanish and reads as everyone maintains a respectful distance. After prayers, a member of the family – a tall, burly ladino with deep Iberian features – grabs Don Tomás from behind and gives him a tight hug. They were classmates in secondary school. He pours Don Tomás and myself a shot of tequila each, without asking if either of us would want one. “*Oye* Don Tomás,” he says. “It’s good to see you again Just like old times, like we were back in secondary school!” Don Tomás breaks into a wide smile and grabs his *sombrero* to his chest, drinks the shot of tequila in one go, and leaves after another round of *abrazos*. “*Es muy bueno Don Tomás*,” says a daughter of the deceased. Don Tomás is a good man. “*Es un campesino pero muy bueno*.” A peasant, she adds, but a good one.

The traditional Durkheimian view of ritual is one that gives to ritual the social function of fostering solidarity. An extended discussion of Durkheim and other theories on ritual as binding force for society will not be part of this thesis. Suffice it is to say, however, that the idea that ritual (or *public* ritual, to be more precise) producing social solidarity in the face of social conflict and social tension through some form of uniformity of belief and practice is not a novel concept. What we see here in the Chilón’s Day of the Dead, however, are two groups of ethnicities commonly depicted as opposing and oppositional, vying for social prominence through the appropriation of cultural symbols or the fulfillment of social our public roles (as seen from the Tseltal deacons at the public cemetery).

Indeed, by the afternoon of the Day of the Dead, the town plaza comes alive with secondary schoolchildren (and their teachers) setting up altars for the dead (*ofrendas*) in public view as part of a competition hosted by the local government. The organizers of the event – all Ladinos – are on a makeshift stage announcing the competition as a showcase "of our rich cultural traditions of Chilón" (note the absence of any reference to the Tseltal specifically). By sunset, all five *ofrendas* are ready for judging. Unsurprisingly, all of them are replete with Tseltal imagery: plastic life-sized skeletons wearing traditional Tseltal dress, terracotta dishes burning with *copal* incense, the ground covered in pine leaves (in keeping with Tseltal custom for decorating sacred or festive space), altar offerings of traditional Tseltal dishes in addition to the standard *tamales*. "The (Zapatista) uprising of 1994 had nothing to do with us Ladinos," says one well-respected member of the ladino community, also active in church and local government social projects. "The uprising was not due to Ladino 'oppressing' the Tseltal, as they tell you. It happened because the indigenous were fighting among themselves for who gets what resources from the government. I've been to the communities and I've seen them fight each other and argue! They hack each other just for a piece of land (*se machatearon por la tierra*). I mean because other Tseltal can afford a brand new watch or a car or something like that, and another Tseltal wants the same. It had nothing to do with us."

That kind of ambivalence towards the Tseltal – "social silence" as it were, of what is obvious but left unsaid – becomes evident during the meetings of Ladino church volunteers. Unlike the Tseltal pastoral committee, the Ladinos had only organized themselves in the past few years. In addition, only a dozen participants at most ever attend the meetings held at the church office. "I admire our Tseltal brothers when they organize their *pastoral Tseltal*," says one active church worker in charge of catechism for children. "When they call a meeting, the whole church is packed. Maybe not all of them are listening, but they're there. They are so beautifully organized while we ladinos complain too much – we like to be comfortable, we like to take it easy. Why can't we be like them?"

In addition to that admiration tinged with a bite of envy for the sense of community among the Tseltal, one result of the 1994 uprising it seems is that the ladinos have both a yearning for the bygone days in which both ethnicities lived in perceived harmony and independence, without acknowledging the overt racism that had marked ladino pre-eminence. If the modern-day ladino of Chilón were, in fact, confronted with anecdotes of racial superiority, they quickly assume a more self-critical stance and reposition themselves as cautious advocates of multi-cultural equality – or better yet, blaming the Jesuits for the social tension brought about by an ascendant indigenous culture.

"I am a native of Chilón," says a Ladino in the food business, whose father was once a public official. "I can tell you that 20-30 years ago things weren't this way. It is only recently with the Jesuits that things began to change. They want to keep Chilón divided. They say it is to protect the indigenous culture. Fine. But there are other ways of doing that. Before, there was *convivencia* (living together in harmony)…" – and here he holds his hands together in prayer – "…and now the Tseltal look down on us mestizos and hold their heads up in pride. And then the mestizos look at them with suspicion. Now there is no *convivencia*." What he didn't mention was that up until the time of the Zapatista uprising in 1994, many Tseltal in Chilón still remember having to step down from the pavement in order to make way and allow a ladino to pass.

Fiesta of San Juan Nepomuceno: Ladino Solidarity and Religiosity

As has been demonstrated in the chapter on the Tseltal fiesta above, religious festivities are critical in the construction and representation of community and collective identity. Through the religious fiesta, the Tseltal frame their own collective genealogy through rituals that demonstrate their connections with what they perceive as their authentic culture. But while the Tseltal assert year in and year out their identity through this public performance of social roles, for the ladinos the religious fiesta becomes a venue in which to enact and publicly display their *idea* of community among themselves and demonstrate their connections to the wider ladino culture. That is to say, the ladinos display their bonds with the wider "imagined community" of ladinos. The fiesta thus becomes a response to the perceived assertiveness and cultural ascendancy of the indigenous Tseltal.

The ladino fiesta of Chilón has all the trappings of a regular fiesta in the former Spanish colonies: carnival rides, market bazaar, food stalls and taco stands from out of town, *carros alegóricos* (parade of floats), beauty queen, music and entertainment. The opening of the nine days of prayers (*novena*) leading up to the fiesta, however, is a series of rituals that signify this fiesta is located in indigenous Mexico. The fiesta organization is divided into two: the *junta de la iglesia* (church committee) and the *junta de la calle* (the "street committee"). The former takes charge of all events inside the church (including raising their own funds) and the latter takes charge of all events outside the church. As in the indigenous fiesta, the celebration begins with the *junta de la iglesia* taking down the image of San Juan Nepomuceno from his glass case beside the main church altar. Together with (predominantly) ladino members of the community, the *junta* assemble inside the church in the early morning, musicians in tow.

The musicians play as the *junta* bring down the image of the saint and set him down on a table in front of the main doors of the church. A few members of the *junta* get ready for a ritual cleansing where they whip every devotee with branches of leaves. Some devotees kneel before the image in prayer, others wipe themselves (and their children) on the hem of the saint's garments.

They caress the saint's wooden body, kiss the feet, whisper prayers in his ear, rest their forehead on the saint's body – a tactile form of communicating with the Divine, a form of reciprocity expressed in affective gestures and silence.

The *jefe* (boss) of the *junta* carefully cleans the image of San Juan with oil and cotton balls, some used swabs he reserves for devotees who would like them as talismans for healing, he says. A small crowd gathers by the church doors, ladino and Tseltal, awaiting their turn for the cleansing by three of the members of the *junta*. The men grab a bunch of leaves, wipe them on the image of the saint, and whip sharply the entire body of every devotee, concentrating on parts where the devotee says has been causing them aches and pains. Mothers bring their children – some of them crying – as the men rest the branches firmly on the children's head and body. A ladina lady from Ocosingo about 42 kilometers north of Chilón waits patiently carrying new garments for the image. "For a favor I was granted," she says. "My brother was sick and I prayed to San Juan and now he is cured." Meanwhile, the male members of the *junta* pass around a leather jug filled with sweet wine they call "*orine de San Juan*" (urine of San Juan). All men present drink from the same communal jug, myself and a Jesuit priest included. "Never refuse," the Jesuit had warned me. "It's bad manners and insulting to the men. In these parts, the image of the patron saint is generally the responsibility of the men and the virgin, the women. In Bachajón, it is the single men who are the custodians of the patron saint." Even the Jesuit priest waits patiently for his "*consultorio*" ("They refer to it as if we were going to see the doctor," the Jesuit whispers to me). One of the members of the *junta* – reportedly a healer – whips the priest on the crown of his head, the nape of his neck, his forehead, shoulders, and all the way down to his feet. "I've been doing this for 18 years now," the man says after. "For as long as anyone can remember the fiesta has been celebrated like this." The used branches he sets aside to be thrown away "or they can take it home to be planted," he says.

The devotees of San Juan have their own *cofradía* (brotherhood) that has its roots in the religious organizations of the Spanish colonial period. The ladinos who are devotees of San Juan Nepomuceno are called *Los Negritos*, for the black (*negros*) crosses that they paint on their forehead and faces to mark the plague of smallpox from which the saint had delivered the town in the 17th century. As the Tseltal deepen their social bonds inwards within their own community, so do the Ladinos extend their bonds outward to other ladino communities in the area. At one point during the novena prayers leading up the fiesta proper, the patron saint of the neighboring, predominantly ladino town of Yajalón 12 kilometers away comes to Chilón in pilgrimage to San Juan Nepomuceno. The image of Santiago Apostol (St James the Apostle), formally dressed as if for his own fiesta, is carried on the shoulders of his devotees to meet San Juan in the streets of Chilón.

The two images are held on the shoulders of their respective devotees and made to bow to each other to music, applause, and fireworks before being walked to church for a Mass, then brought back to Yajalón. "We connect with other ladino towns," says a ladino schoolteacher. "Bachajón (14 kilometers north) is mainly indigenous, so they never bring their patron here.

One time it was Sitalá (21 kilometers northeast) quite far away. But those guys still made the effort. They're also mostly ladinos." They have always been a minority, says the ladino schoolteacher, but that numerical disadvantage came to prominence following the Zapatista uprising of 1994. The uprising prompted a more determined effort to "connect" with other ladino communities in the area, says the schoolteacher.

"The fiestas used to have a sense of history, like telling the story of this place Chilón. But now you see more and more things from Chiapa de Corzo," says the schoolteacher, referring to the tourist destination 188 kilometers south, whose *parachico* masks and traditions have been named Intangible Cultural Heritage by the UNESCO. "Before, the parade of floats told a story: first was an indigenous on a horse, then the Catholic kings Fernando and Isabel, then the moors – it was telling the story of conflict and historical events. And the dances were only with traditional marimba music – none of these big, expensive bands from far away in Mexico." The fiesta season (i.e., the start of the novena) actually begins with the parade of floats – but not in the least described by the schoolteacher above. Every year, a young girl is chosen as Queen of the Fiesta and her float is the tallest and most lavish, complete with two young boys dressed as court pages. Dancing groups of men and women join the parade, many of the men in the *parachico* masks mentioned above. Clowns on stilts attempt to dance to the rhythm of the marching bands, men in bright dresses and colored wigs lead a group of scantily-clad young women dancing. With a float of their own are Hollywood and cartoon characters: Mickey Mouse, Winnie the Pooh, Thor and Batman – all coming from outside Chilón and invited to participate by the fiesta street committee. The leader gives his speech to formally open the fiesta, thanking the mayor and local government profusely "for their support."

"Things changed 10 – 15 years ago," says the schoolteacher, who is in his late 40s. "When I was growing up, the fiesta had a kind of moral dimension, if you can believe me. I mean, there used to be this guy who had a sort of *cargo* called '*cadenero'* (*cadena*, meaning chain), who enforced discipline and order during the fiesta. He wasn't a public official but he was recognized by the community as having the power to throw people in jail for the duration of the fiesta. For example, if someone had owed me money, I could go to the *cadenero* and tell him that so-and-so owed me money. The *cadenero* would go and pick him up and collect the money that was owed me, and give that money to the fiesta church committee as my own contribution to the fiesta. The *cadenero* could also throw drunks in jail even if only for overnight – which is unlike the Tseltal, who can drink all they want during the fiesta." Without mentioning, of course, that it was and still is the Ladinos who have been turning a clean profit from alcohol sales to the Tseltal communities.

While the ladino fiesta is nowhere as elaborate a social institution as the indigenous fiesta, the Ladinos nonetheless have their own particular traditions that they recognize as being distinctively Chilón. Even before the parade of floats, the Ladinos gather at the residence of the leader of the fiesta street committee to prepare their costumes for the fiesta.

Certainly not as elaborate as the Tseltal *torito de petate,* but an opportunity for the ladinos young and old to come together and sit through fireworks to mark the beginning of the fiesta season, to chat, and maybe enjoy lunch hosted by the fiesta street committee. On the year that I attended, I clearly spotted some young Tseltal secondary school students whom I had seen construct the *torito de petate*. "This is not exclusive," says the ladino schoolteacher after I had pointed that out to him. "The Tseltal can participate, though not many come – and not the older ones. Of course no one is turned away. It's an indication not of the ladinos, but of the Tseltal of Chilón. The Tseltal of Chilón are not of the exclusionist type. Because of that, the ladinos do not exclude them either. Unlike in Bachajón, where the Tseltal there stopped me from taking pictures of their fiesta, even if I had had the permission of the *principales*. Chilón naturally integrates people from the outside (*los de afuera*), whether ladino or indigenous. The Tseltal here are not closed."

At the crack of dawn on the day of the fiesta, the *Negritos* assemble in church for the *pedir licencia* ("to ask for permission") a tradition in which permission is sought from the patron saint to begin the fiesta.[23] The *Negritos*, with their faces marked with black crosses, sing calmly – almost a lullaby or quiet serenade – to San Juan, asking permission to don their traditional fiesta attire: bright orange capes and tall, multicolored hats for the men; light blue capes for the women[24].

"Ave María dijo un Ángel
al empezar a cantar
al empezar a cantar
Ave María dijo un Ángel

Ave María digo yo
al empezar a cantar
al empezar a cantar
Ave María digo yo.

Y la vuelvo a repetir
y no me digan que no
y no me digan que no
y la vuelvo a repetir

[23] The *Negritos* are not exclusively made up of the church organizing committee (*junta de la iglesia*), hence the change in name. Children are also part of the group of *Negritos*, as are women. The mark their faces with black crosses to commemorate the plague of smallpox (v*iruela* or '*la pesta negra,*' the black plague) during the 17th century. Legend has it that the image of San Juan Nepomuceno was brought over from further south in Guatemala and the town was miraculously healed. Chiapas was formerly part of the Guatemala during the Spanish colonial period.

[24] This form of singing *versos cantados* (sung verses) is also performed when visiting the houses of the *capitanes de fiesta,* asking permission to enter. The ladinos are particularly fond of this tradition, which, they say, the Tseltal do not have.

Aquí nos tienes reunidos
que tu fiesta ya empezó
que tu fiesta ya empezó
Aquí nos tienes reunidos

Y la vuelvo a repetir
yo con todo el corazón
yo con todo el corazón
y la vuelvo a repetir.

Aquí vienen con nosotros
los hermanos de Yajalón
los hermanos de Yajalón
aquí vienen con nosotros.

Y lo vuelvo a repetir
yo con toda mi inocencia
yo con toda mi inocencia
y lo vuelvo a repetir.

A pedirte hemos venido
si nos concedes licencia
si nos concedes licencia
a pedirte hemos venido."

[Hail Mary said an angel
At the start of singing,
At the start of singing,
Hail Mary said an angel

Hail Mary, I say
At the start of singing
At the start of signing
Hail Mary, I say

And again I repeat
And don't tell me not to
And don't tell me not to
And again I repeat

Here we must reunite
That your fiesta has begun
That your fiesta has begun
Here we must reunite

And again I repeat
With all my heart
With all my heart
And again I repeat.

Here they come with us
The brothers from Yajalón
The brothers from Yajalón
Here they come with us.[25]

And again I repeat
With all my innocence
With all my innocence
And again I repeat.

To beg of you we have arrived
If you grant us permission
If you grant us permission
To beg of you we have arrived.]

Meanwhile, all throughout the days of the fiesta ad especially the fiesta proper itself, ladinos from the neighboring towns – even as far as Ocosingo and Sitalá – pour into Chilón to enjoy the the entertainment: boxing, *lucha libre* wrestling, and live *ranchero* music and dancing at the football pitch. "Of course there has been commercialization and even globalization of the fiesta," says the schoolteacher, visibly irked at the recent changes in the fiesta. "The *junta de los negritos* function more as a corporation now, and not the *cofradía* it used to be. It used to be a hereditary position – if my father was a *negrito*, then so was I. If the father of the family was a *negrito*, then the whole family would get involved to support him. But now things have changed. Who knows what it will be like in the future. Some younger Tseltal don't speak Tseltal anymore. Many of them can't count in Tseltal. Even the radio in Tseltal uses Spanish when counting because Tseltal is more complicated. Chilón has always been a mix of cultures, so who knows?"

[25] As mentioned above in the *peregrinación*, in which the patron saint of Yajalón is brought to Chilón during one of the novena Masses for San Juan.

Spirits, Saints, and Dreams: A Merging of Identities at the Level of Person

Her first patient complained of a steady pain that began from his testicles and travelled down his legs to his feet. With a rosary across her neck and lemon quarters in her apron pockets, Doña Aura feels his pulse and tells him that it's stress that has caused the inflammation in his groin. The patient, who had come from the state capital Tuxtla Gutiérrez (about 193 km north), insists there's really something more serious wrong as the pain will not go away. "Something with the supernatural, perhaps?" he asks. "I will pray and find out," Doña Aura answers.

Doña Aura drinks from a bottle of cloudy white liquid she calls her *agua bendita* (holy water, which I found later was water mixed with cologne) and spits a few bursts of fragrant spray over the patient's head, both sides of his face, and both sides of his thighs. She spits on the two eggs the patient had brought and sets them down on her altar, which is a dizzying arrangement of amulets, religious icons, old pictures, dried flowers and fruits, used candles of different colors, crucifixes of various types and sizes all over and even under the table.

She holds a bundle of multi-colored candles and rubs them on the crown of the patient's head, forehead, the nape of his neck, forearms and thighs. She rubs half a lemon from her apron pocket on both her palms and whispers to her patient reassuringly, "God gives us problems, but he also gives us the medicine." Doña Aura stands before her patient, seated in the middle of the room, closes her eyes and takes a deep breath. She opens her eyes and fixes an unflinching, unblinking gaze straight over her patient's head. Her voice changes to a rich, resonant baritone that comes from deep in her chest. She begins what she calls her "*conjuro*" (conjuring) or incantations to God the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and a litany of saints known and unknown:

"Casa de Jerusalén en donde entra….
Santísima Tridnidad,
Tres potencias, tres necesidades,
Que la cadena se rompan,
Que venzan la mala
Cristo Vencedor
Por la muerte, Dios clemente
Sangre de Jesús,
San Alejo, San Alejo, Mal de aquí, sal de aquí
Dios te manda, malimundo…."

[Home of Jerusalem from where one enters…
Most Holy Trinity,
Three potencies, three necessities,
That the chains be broken,
That the evil be vanquished

Christ the Victor
For death, God most clement
Blood of Jesus
San Alejo, San Alejo, evil here present, get away from here
God commands you, evil of the world…]

She raises a white candle over her seated patient: "*Divina Maria, a quitar el dolor…." [Divine Mary, to remove the pain…"* She raises a red candle: *"Libera de brujos y hechizeros…" [Deliver us]rom witches and sorcerers…"* She raises a seven-colored candle to the forehead and back of the patient's neck. She draws a cross with the candles on the head of the patient and over his whole body, then finally whips the patient with fresh basil and fennel leaves as she invokes the archangels:

"Malos espíritus, sal de aquí
San Agustín, San Andrés, San Pedro, Sta Margareta, San Judas Tadeo…"
[Evil spirits, get away from here
Saint Augustine, Saint Andrew, Saint Peter, St Margaret, Saint Jude Thaddeus…]

"Ilumina su camina, que le protege…"
[Illuminate his path, the you may protect him…]

"San Gabriel, San Uriel, San Rafael, San Miguel, San Ignacio…."
[Saint Gabriel Saint Uriel, Saint Rafael, Saint Michael, Saint Ignatius….]

Doña Aura then closes her incantations with a *limpia* (cleansing). She rubs the two eggs she had sprayed with her holy water on her patient's forehead and his entire body while quietly reciting more prayers. She takes another sip of her water and spits again on both the eggs and sets them down on her altar. She lights a cigarette and blows smoke on the eggs three times. She taps the eggs three times on the rim of the glass then drops the insides into the water. "It is envy that caused this. *Es la envidia*. Get three pieces of cinnamon bark, three branches of basil, three bay leaves, and thirteen pieces of cloves. Boil that and rinse with it after your shower. Recite the Our Father while you're rinsing" she tells her patient after staring at the eggs floating in the glass of water. "You can't find a job because someone envies you. Pray."

Though her prayers are in Spanish, Doña Aura learned her craft through visitations from spirits and healers of the past – both Ladino and Tseltal – like Don Jorge in the opening of this chapter. "I died when I was 11," she says matter-of-factly. "My father killed a snake and I collapsed. The snake was someone's spirit-companion (*lab*). I couldn't move or breathe and they placed me on a bed.

A healer came and sliced open a live chicken. He smeared the blood all over my body. He told my parents to place the live chicken in a big jar and cover it – but the chicken jumped out and ran to the patio! Then I breathed again and came back to life."

Doña Aura's method of healing is replete with the language and symbols of Catholicism as well as the indigenous. She tells another patient, an indigenous Ch'ol Maya from a village three hours away that he must bury on the ground a basket she had arranged with white candles, small bottles of oil, basil and fennel leaves, lemons, and garlic. Not on the cement, she warns him, but on the ground of his newly-built house. "This must go into the earth for Madre Tierra," she tells the patient through his Spanish-speaking Tseltal wife. "Take half a lemon in your pocket and give the other half to your son, then the both of you bury this in front of your house. Remember it must go into the soil, not cement. I will pray to Madre Tierra to give your family peace."

The anthropological literature is rich with accounts of healing (*curandería*), spirit possession (*espiritísmo*), and other phenomena gathered under the general rubric of "witchcraft" (*brujería*). Theories abound on witchcraft as social leveling amid the ambivalence brought by "modernity" (Geschiere 1997) or witchcraft as colonial construction of the indigene as "savage" (Taussig 1986) or even witchcraft, rumors, and the power of language and curses (Favret-Saada 1981). My focus in this instance is not so much to argue the social function of witchcraft as to demonstrate how the indigenous and Ladino identities of Chilón become co-eval and contemporary through this idiom of healing.

Such blurring of cultural boundaries is revealed in the case of the Ladino healer Don Jorge, whose visit from Tseltal healers of the past guide healing practices, as well as Doña Aura with visitations from Tseltal and non-Tseltal spirits. "I work with four to five spirits on a regular basis," Doña Aura says after her healing sessions. "The spirit who accompanies me is actually a four-year old child named Panchito Reyes. He opens up the energies to let the other spirits through to help me heal the sick." She removes her apron and throws away the quartered lemons in her apron pockets to prevent the bad spirits from attaching themselves to her ("They don't like lemons"). She lights a cigarette and pauses with the cigarette between her fingers. She fixes me a sideways stare and notices I shift in my seat. "You don't believe me," she says, more a challenge than a question. "*Pués, vamos a poner la mesa*." Let's set the table, as she calls her séances.

Doña Aura places more lemon quarters in her pocket. She rubs a wedge on her forehead and back of her neck, both times with the sign of the cross ("In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit…."). She sits across from where I am sat, closes her eyes, and takes a deep rasping breath that echoes to the back of her throat. She lets her head fall back as she exhales long and steady through her mouth. Her voices instantly switches to that of a child – the r's becoming l's – and she stomps her feet, shakes her hands, and moves her head from side to side as a child would in throwing a tantrum." I want some sweeties!" She gives a child's high-pitched scream.

Her assistant, who has been standing away from her with a basket of sweets, gives her some. She calms down as she chews on her candies one after the other, her eyes completely shut the whole time. “My name is Panchito Pélez (Pérez) and I am from Chiapa de Corzo. Don’t be afraid of me. I am four years old. My favorite color is light blue. I was baptized by Padre Enrique and I died shortly after I was born. I play with many other spirits. *Pendejo*! [26] Your friend can’t find a job because many people envy him. He needs help with his job, his business. He must pray to San Rafael and to the God Our Father. He has to do something for the earth. We all have to help the earth.” Her spirit-companion (though she calls him her “friend”) says how he normally opens up the skies for other spirits to pass through, and that he will do so straightaway. He flies into yet another tantrum for sweets, then ends abruptly, “*Dios te bendiga....Adiós* (God bless you….Goodbye)!”

Doña Aura’s séance took less than five minutes. She takes another long, rasping breath and exhales through her mouth, head tilted back and eyes closed. “*Puta madre*!”[27] she yells in a deep, resonant baritone. She kicks the floor with her heel and starts to sing a few verses in Spanish: “I am Milo and I am 130 years old.” Doña Aura extends her hand for me to shake (with her eyes closed) and I hesitate. Her assistant nudges me on the shoulder to give my hand, which I do. She continues: “I am Tsotsil from San Juan Chamula and I love girls. Give me a tequila!” Doña Aura yells, as her assistant pours her a shot. Still with her eyes closed, Doña Aura stands up and dances in a circle in the middle of the room, kicking her heels into the floor singing the post-war hit *Solamente Una Vez.* She pauses and says in a deep baritone, “Your friend the *indígena* (indigenous), the head of the family. He is unfortunate as many people envy him. He has to pray to the earth. He has to make offerings to God and St John that they may give him blessings. We are all of the earth. We sing inside. We sing in our souls inside…for the earth is holy, but dirty. I will ask permission from this holy earth, that God protect us.” After more singing, one more shot of tequila, Doña Aura sits down without warning. She repeats the breathing and her séance continues as she is visited by three more spirits – a Spanish soldier named Julio Enrique, a healer from Veracruz named Eligio Perez, a rowdy drunk named Panchito Ruiz, a healer named Joaquín, and 17-year old named Miguel Alemán (who described himself a “blond Caribbean” that landed in the Lacandón forest in a plane called *Alemán*, hence the name).[28]

At the end of her séance with the young man from the Caribbean, Doña Aura kneels and kisses the floor four times in the figure of a cross and says quietly in her normal speaking voice: “I ask permission to leave this holy table (…*a despedir esta santa mesa).*” Doña Aura takes on a final, rasping breath, exhales, and collapses into her chair.

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26 *Pendejo* (Sp. Vulg.): Asshole.

27 *Puta madre* (Sp. Vulg): Son of a bitch.

28 Miguel Alemán Valdés (1900 –1983), President of Mexico from 1946 to 1952. It appears Doña Aura’s spirit companion is only a full namesake or *tocayo*.

She opens her eyes and blinks a few times and yawns. She takes a mouthful from her holy water and spits into her palms. She wipes the perfumed water on her face, her hair, her neck and arms. She lights another cigarette and is visibly drained from the experience.

Doña Aura's 'spirit companions' and Don Jorge's visitations from Tseltal healers are not unlike those experienced by healers in central Philippines, described with great sensitivity by Cannell (1999). In her ethnography of folk Catholicism, Cannell describes spirits being attracted to human beings out of pity for their poverty or powerlessness. Healers in the Bicol region where Cannell did her fieldwork experience a loss of consciousness when they appear to experience a "death" only to be "resurrected" after three days – drawing heavily upon the Catholic repertoire of ritual, not unlike the Mexican experience. In Cannell's (1999: 107) ethnography, the healer's spirit-companion whom the locals call *saro*, is "companion, other person, sibling, workmate… but also commands life and ultimately death" of the chosen human. Like Doña Aura's "friends" (as she calls them), the spirit-companions of Bicol can have certain ethnicities such as Jordanian, American, Japanese (ethnicities with immediate connections with many Filipinos) and accompany the healer as 'other person' even when the healer is not actually being possessed. The recurring theme in Cannell's account is one of unequal power between spirit-companion and healer – an ambivalent and delicate relationships in which intimacy with the spirit is thrust upon the healer, requiring constant propitiation and sacrifice and, interestingly, even birthday parties for the spirit-companion. As pity and unequal power are the themes that stand out in the Bicol experience, what stands out in the Chilón experience is the contemporaneity of ethnicity and identity: that of the Tseltal spirits "living" through the ladino healer, the 'Other' Tseltal constituting the Ladino person, the two identities co-eval.

Cannell (1999) describes the relationship between healer and spirit-companion as fraught with ambivalence. "The power of each party can be allied," writes Cannell (1999: 106). "Or they can be balanced in combat with each other, or one party may elide, dominate or overwhelm the other….The spirits are seen as pulling people who cannot 'manage' them into the invisible world with an almost hydraulic force, and audible suction." The Chilón experience (and I say only Chilón and not 'Mexican' deliberately) is decidedly far more benign. For healers such as Doña Aura, the visitations of her spirit-companions can be controlled: she can enter into a trance-like state and "open" herself to their visits. For Don Jorge, the spirits of dead Tseltal – who are different from spirit-companions – appear to him in dreams to impart knowledge and, indeed, power. "When I died at 11," Doña Aura says of her initiation into healing. "I dreamt of a man dressed in white with a long, flowing beard I believe was Moses. He told me not to be afraid. That it was not my time and that I should go back to cure the sick, to help people." Doña Aura further recounts that during her séances, the child-spirit Panchito allows other spirits to communicate with her. "Evil spirits try to enter, but I don't let them. Panchito doesn't let them," she says.

It is possible that these evil spirits can come and take her *ch'ulel* (the Tseltal "soul" as explained in Chapter Two), Doña Aura says. In which case, she would have to find another healer to perform the particular cleansing ritual that would restore her soul to her body, otherwise she would go mad or sick, or even die. "These *brujos* (witches) are dangerous. They can take away a person's souls. I myself can restore a person's *ch'ulel* when it is lost or taken away, but it is very, very tiring.I 'm exhausted for days after. These *brujos* – they even ask you to drink urine or a woman's menstruation of the third day, then they will take a picture of the person (whose *ch'ulel* they want to steal) and bury that picture in the public cemeter). You will be lost and you will die unless you find a very powerful helaer to help you."

It is significant that Doña Aura draws from the Tseltal understanding of *ch'ulel* Don Jorge, for this part, recounts his interpretation of the sacred *ch'ulel*: "I had a young girl as a patient once. She went mad. They told me her family had seen a white mouse and trapped it in a glass jar. The girl went mad after. I said the white mouse was the girl's *lab* (spirit-companion) and should be set free. I prayed and they set the mouse free and the girl was revived. I had to ask her *lab* and *ajaw* [29], and I had to talk to the *chich' me'tic* and *chich' mamtic*[30] in my dreams in order to help. They are more powerful on Thursdays and Fridays. You see, if we pray in Tseltal, the bad spirits will not take us because the Tseltal are close to the earth and their knowledge is powerful."

Clearly, the idea of Tseltal knowledge, the belief in Tseltal healing and folklore is as powerful among Ladinos as it is among the Tseltal. One of the oldest residents of the town center's ladino community, 86-year old Abuelito Pedro, speaks of the the loss one's *ch'ulel* through witchcraft with the same gravitas Doña Aura speaks of spirit-companions and healing. "They can steal or lure your *ch'ulel* to a particular area and send it to the *ajk' abalnaj*.[31] You will have to perform a healing ritual to bring your soul back to your body. I am sure that I once saw the *lab* of Doña Nena in the plaza. It was a big cow. I caught the cow and tied it to the post myself. The next morning I saw Doña Nena there at the plaza, right where I tied the cow – the cow was gone! That's how I knew it was her *lab*." Similarly, another of Chilón's oldest living Ladinos in his late 70s, Don Ramiro speaks of spirits and the supernatural with equal fervor. "They came to me in my dreams, these dead Tseltal healers wearing white hats. They were all there – I recognized them from my childhood. They were at a banquet, a long table with lots of food and liquor. They spoke to me in Tseltal and invited me to join them to become a healer like them, but I refused. Imagine that – inviting me. I am 100 per cent ladino without a drop of Tseltal blood in my body but the Tseltal healers came to me in my dreams and invited me to be a healer," Don Ramiro says.

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[29] *Ajaw* (Ts.): 'The lord of the cave;" that is, the lord of the underworld.

[30] *Chich' me'tic / chich' mamtic* (Ts.): Male and female Tseltal spirits, respectively.

[31] *Ajk' abalnah* (Ts.): Lit. "*Montaña oscura*" or "dark mountain." In Tseltal belief, it is where all the souls are trapped after their death. Or when their *ch'ulel* is trapped after it is taken from them in spite.

It is as if the Ladinos, amid a resurgent and ascendant indigenous identity, were saying: Yes, we, too, are Tseltal. At this intimate level and private world of dreams and healing, the Ladinos have *become* Tseltal despite their own feelings to the contrary. The two worlds of ladino Chilón and indigenous Chilón merge within this private space – a space which the Jesuits themselves have not explored, or, as seen in the previous chapter, even denied existed. From this private space, both Tseltal and ladino identities become more visible – though not without their understandable tensions.

Conclusion

The concept of race or ethnicity is always a difficult subject to dissect, and *mestizaje* in Mexico even more so. Particularly in light of the Zapatista uprising of 1994, Mayan rights and claims to empowerment have highlighted the salience of ethnicity over traditional categories of class (e.g., *campesino*, worker, landowner, etc.) under which the indigenous had disappeared. Sadly, the complexity of *mestizaje* – which is generally acknowledged to have been an ideology of "whitening" (*blanqueamiento*) conceptualized by Mexico's elite – can only be explored sensitively and thoughtfully in a separate thesis on its own. In this chapter, I have chosen to focus the ladino responses to a more culturally assertive Tseltal identity. As I have in my previous chapter on the Tseltal, I have demonstrated here the centrality of religious practice as an idiom through which people search for their place within the wider social world. As will be shown in the succeeding interlude following this chapter, the sentiments of the ladinos of Chilón regarding their "*hermanos Tseltales*" (Tseltal brothers) reflect a deeper ambivalence and incertitude that have forced them to ask: who are we as ladinos in the first place?

In the next and final chapter, I conclude this thesis by demonstrating how the Tseltal and Ladinos celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe – Mexico's quintessential icon of nationhood and belonging. I demonstrate how during this particular fiesta – and no other – becomes the platform during which all the three social identities of Chilón (indigenous, ladino, Jesuit) "meet and mingle separately" as described in the title of this thesis.

CHAPTER FIVE

BRINGING CHILÓN TOGETHER:
THE FEAST OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE

"The term 'mestizo' means nothing in Chilón. We all have Tseltal blood. We are all, in one way or another, indigenous. I am sure of it." (Julio Alí Reyes Monterrosa, 2012)

Introduction

Doña Rosa cradles the child in her arms and whispers prayers in Tseltal. She holds the four-year-old ladino boy close to the base of the statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe so that the child is able to reach out and touch the hem of the statue's gown. It is the day after the Feast of Guadalupe and the statue of the Virgin is stood at the entrance of the chapel that was used the ladinos of Chilón for the fiesta. The statue is draped in a green robe and the red-white-green colors of the Mexican flag still decorate the entire chapel. After this despedida ("farewell"), the three-foot statue will be returned to her place behind glass at the main altar, not to be opened or moved until the next fiesta.

I am stood by the side of this small group of ladinos, where the only Tseltales are the prioras and a handful of elderly Tseltal men and women in traditional attire. The prioras pour more incense on the burner embers below the statue of Guadalupe. On the far end of the chapel from where I am stood, the carcass of the previous night's torito de petate of the ladinos – the colored paper burnt and browned from the fireworks that covered it – sits forgotten by the windowsill. Meanwhile, the Tseltal priora, Doña Rosa, prays over a brown-haired, fair-skinned ladino boy. One after another the devotees of Guadalupe line up for Doña Rosa's prayers until finally, she prays over Doña Sofia, her fellow priora from the town center. To end this despedida, the ladinos of Chilón are led in prayers by the Tseltal prioras in a small, intimate ceremony that is representative of the sameness and differences that are a hallmark of indigenous-ladino relations in Chilón.

Time and again I had heard comments from both Tseltal and ladinos in Chilón of how one group is similar to the other or how one group differs from the other in manner, language, dress, or, indeed, religious observance. Secondary schoolteacher and local historian Julio Alí Reyes Monterrosa, whose ancestors include indigenous Tseltal as well as German and ladino Mexican, elaborates: "Mestizo is not a precise term at all to describe us ladinos in Chilón. We are all of mixed blood. Maybe the Tseltal who live in the faraway secluded villages can boast to be pure indigenous, but here in the town center we are all of mixed blood, us ladinos. That's why I think the term 'ladino' is more correct. It means a way of living – *una manera de vivir.*

Like me, for instance, my great-grandparents were German but their son, my father, married an indigenous woman. So I have dark skin. And yet, I identify as ladino even if I speak a little Tseltal, even if I am the only ladino to have ever been asked by the Tseltal *principales* to be *capitán de fiesta.*" Through an ethnography of the Feast of Guadalupe, I demonstrate in this chapter that the "either-or" model of ethnicity and essentialist notions of culture are challenged in lived practice, in infinite degrees of fluid Indian-ness or mestizo-ness (De la Cadena 2000) such that the ladinos become indigenous and the indigenous, ladinos.

In any model of ethnicity, elements are bound to be complex and even unrepresentative (or at least poorly representative) of the total whole. "Modern Mexico is a racial mix," writes Oxford historian Alan Knight (1990: 72) in his skillful essay on race and relations since the Mexican Revolution. Indians "were not solely defined in bodily terms," writes Knight (1990: 73), but on a range of characteristic "ethnic" identification: language, dress, religion, social organization, and culture, and consciousness. Since these were "social rather than innate biological attributes," Knight continues (1990: 73) they were capable of change. At no other point in Chilón's religious calendar is this fluidity more apparent than during the Feast of Guadalupe: ladinos wear Tseltal dress as well as the colorful attire associated with ladino culture in Chiapa de Corzo; while Tseltal pray with the ladinos and celebrate with them with traditional Tseltal prayers and rituals. Though their worlds are separate for the most part of the year, both ladinos and Tseltales in the town center (and sometimes even beyond the outlying villages) come together on this particular day. The boundaries that define sameness and difference become irrelevant and merge into one seemingly coherent whole as the ladinos become indigenous or, as De la Cadena (2000) puts it, "indigenous mestizos."

Mirror Images of Celebration: Tseltales in Church, Ladinos at Chapel

They are actually mirror images of each other, the ladino and Tseltal communities of Chilón. During the novena as well as the fiesta proper, each group has its own peculiar tradition or religious practice that mirrors the other's in much the same manner and style: the Tseltal have their Guadalupanos, informal youth organizaionts tasked with the nitty-gritty of organizing the festivities, while the ladinos have their own. During the fiesta, the women of both groups are indistinguishable as they both wear traditional Tseltal attire. The ladinos have their own daily processions during the nine-day prayers (novenas) leading up to the fiesta, with the devotees carrying the small statue of Guadalupe from one ladino household to the other. So it is with the Tseltales, who hose lunch and recite prayers at different Tseltal households on each day of the nine days up to the fiesta. The Tseltal organize evening dances (*bailes*) with music, fireworks, *ponche* (dried cake soaked in warm pineapple juice), while the ladinos host a street party complete with professional musicians brought in from out of town, as well as Mexican street food and beer. None of these socials I had attended ever had a mood or tone of exclusion.

"If you hear someone saying that one group excludes the other, then that person giving that comment is most likely an outsider, definitely not a Chilonero," says local historian Julio Alí Reyes Monterrosa, pointing out the crowd during an evening *baile* hosted by the ladinos. "Have a look around you. I can already point out how many Tseltal there are in the crowd. And if you go to their *bailes*, I'm sure you will also find a few ladinos as well."

The spectacle and symbolism of Guadalupe and her place in the Mexican psyche is widely covered in the literature. That the mother or Christ appeared as brown skinned to an indigenous peasant in the 16th century has been at the heart of nationalist narratives and theoretical abstractions on mestizaje dissected by anthropologists and historians (the classic being Wolf 1958). The brown-skinned Madonna is said to have appeared to Juan Diego (now a saint of the Catholic Church) speaking Nahuatl at the hill of Tepeyac where the basilica is now located in Mexico City. As hisotirans have pointed out, the Virgin of Guadlupe is commonly regarded as a syncretic fusion of the pre-Hispanic goddess Tonatnzin and the Virgin Mary, the resulting hybrid becoming a powerful unifier for a new "creole" society with the Catholic Rhurch having a central role (Gruzinsky 2001). The church can therefore be seen to have attempted "a concerted, deliberate 'indianization' of the Christian supernatural, planting seeds for the eventual emergence of a decisively Catholic nation" (Norget 2017).

Having followed the Chilón religious calendar for an entire year, I had grown accustomed to seeing the ladino and Tseltal communities of Chilón live their Catholicism in separate (albeit similar) ways at different points in the religious calendar. In the nine days leading up to the Feast of Guadalupe, however, the two groups performed their religious rituals, their observances of the iconic symbol of Mexican nationhood in ways that undermined my initial impression of a Chilón divided into two discrete ethnic groups. "We have our way of celebrating the fiesta," says Juan Carlos Lema, leader of the Tseltal Guadalupanos in charge of organizing non-church related activities during the fiesta. "The ladinos have their own way of celebrating and we have our own way. But that doesn't mean we cannot attend their prayers or that they cannot attend ours. IN fact, the one making the *torito de petate* (explained in my chapter on the Tseltal) for the ladinos is my uncle, my father's brother."

Lema, whose father and grandfather before him both led the Tseltal Guadalupanos in their time, makes sure that all able-bodied men and women under thirty are at church on the first day of the novena prayers. The girls help the Tseltal women decorate the church while the men take down the large image of Guadalupe from her altar to be cleaned and carried from home to home during the nine-day novena. Two of the young male Guadalupanos were visibly nursing a hangover on the morning of the first day of the novena, faces flushed red and reeking of alcohol, but were quick to help the *principales* in taking down the heavy image of Guadalupe and carrying it to the church entrance. "This is something I have to do every year," one of them tells me, his breath reeking of stale alcohol. "Every year I have been doing this and this year is no exception, no matter what."

With the *principales*, they leave the image of Guadalupe by the church doors, the *prioras* blowing incense around the image. Once the image has been set on the red carpet and decorated with flowers and candles, everyone present kisses the image several times, wiping the glass in veneration. Outside the church, the musicians sing the traditional hymn to Guadalupe while the younger Guadalupanos ready for procession the red-white-green banners emblazoned with the image of the Virgin. A smaller image and a statue is processed from church to different Tseltal homes for the entire nine days. On the first day of the novena, the statue was brought to a Tseltal home where a *Pat O'tan* (explained in the chapter on Tseltal) was performed.

Meanwhile, the ladinos prepare for the own festivities in similar manner. Though not as big a group of Guadalupanos, the ladinos process their image of the Virgin from house to house during the novena. The ladinos, however, celebrate the novena and fiesta Mass at the hilltop chapel of Guadalupe built in the early 1980s not far from the main church. The small group of ladino Guadalupanos – some, like their Tseltal counterparts, as young as 6 years old – hold their novena prayers together at the chapel during the festivities. If a Jesuit priest is available, Novena Masses are said; if not, a Jesuit brother recites the novena prayers in Spanish. "The Jesuits wanted all the Tseltal to move to the main church and celebrate the Feast of Guadalupe there," says the Tseltal caretaker of the chapel, a *principal* of that community and occasional healer (*curandero*). "But we Tseltal have as much right to this chapel as the ladinos." The Jesuits claim their suggestion to have both communities celebrate separately was for practical reaons: the chapel is simply not big enough to house both Tseltal and ladinos. The Tseltal organization is much more elaborate (as explain in the chapter on Tseltal above), which called for greater physical space. "We really wanted both communities to celebrate together, including ordinary Sunday Masses, as suggested by the archdiocese," says one Jesuit. "After all, we are one community of believers. But both the ladinos and Tseltal wanted separate Masses. The Tseltal wanted to pray in their language and the ladinos wanted Masses in Spanish."

Like the Tseltal, the ladinos have their banners with the image of Guadalupe sewn on it – a visible reminder of the power of the Guadalupe symbol in galvanizing the people during the war of independence from Spain. Like the Tseltal, the ladinos too carry their statue of Guadalupe through the streets before their early evening novena prayers: children bear candles and flowers that accompany the statue; an elderly Tseltal marking time with a homemade drum; Tseltal ladies and *prioras* carrying incense and reciting prayers; an occasional firecracker set off in the evening quiet, in keeping with the Tseltal traditional in celebrating religious fiestas. They numbered around 15 when I walked with them one evening. As we passed the main church on our way to the chapel, the Tseltal musicians with their guitars and violins could be heard serenading their own image of Guadalupe, the chatter of the Tseltal crowd providing ambient noise to the shuffling footsteps and rhythmic beat of the solitary drummer that made up the ladino procession. The ladinos (and the handful of Tseltal with them) were solemn in their own thoughts, it seemed, with one or two whispering their prayers in Spanish.

"It's very quiet and intimate compared to the Tseltal, isn't it?" says Mirna Martínez Lara, a twenty-something recent college graduate who self-identifies herself as ladina, though proud that her father is indigenous Ch'ol. "My grandfather says that long before, even before the Jesuits settled in the 1960s, the Tseltal and ladinos were much closer, celebrating the Guadalupe fiesta as one."

The Tseltal are a bigger group, with their novena prayers beginning at the home in which the image of Guadalupe had been brought. The Tseltal community – young and old; Guadalupanos, principales, prioras – gather for lunch at the home where the image of Guadalupe had been taken. Prayers are said in front of the image, sometimes the Pat O'tan performed (as described in the chapter on the Tseltal), while the younger Guadalupanos prepare their own *torito de petate* (if the *torito* is to be performed that night). After conversation and rest, laughter and prayers, the image is brought back to church in a procession led by the *torito de petate* and the Tseltal musicians. On certain nights, the Tseltal host an early evening dance or *baile* attended by both young and old, either in a Tseltal home or in the church plaza. It has a very clam and controlled atmosphere for a *baile*: the Tseltal ladies on one side and the men on the other – sometimes dancing but never touching – while the younger Tseltal look on. If the *baile* is performed in the church plaza (following the performance of the *torito de petate*), everyone dances to the Tseltal rhythms and melodies – ladinos included (the "dance" might be a simple shuffling of the feet of swaying to the beat).

The ladinos, too, have their turn on the eve of the fiesta, when they host their own *baile* on one of the streets close to the chapel of Guadalupe. It is actually a street party in which alcohol and street food are sole (alcohol being forbidden during Tseltal religious festivities, save for the Pat O'tan). A dance band of popular Mexican dance music is brought from out of town; a makeshift stage set up at a street junction; lights and sound system hired for the occasion. The crowd is mixed: ladinos and Tseltal, young and old. The live music can be heard from across the town center and younger Tseltal boys and girls can be seen drinking alcohol and mingling in the dark. "It is difficult to get close to a Tseltal girl," says Manuel, a bilingual Tseltal family man (mentioned in my chapter on Tseltal). "I'm not saying it always happens, but often the young Tseltal attend these late night *bailes* so they can meet the opposite sex and have some fun. Sometimes they end in sex, sometimes not. Some of them have sex for the first time after these *bailes*."

It is for a specific, fiesta-related reason that the ladino *baile* is held very late on the eve of the fiesta until the wee hours of the next morning. Tradition dictates that the revelers/devotees from the *baile* proceed directly from the street party to the chapel and greet the Virgin with the customary singing of the *mañanitas* (early morning serenade for birthdays and feast days) before dawn on the day of the fiesta. They did not proceed directly from *baile* to chapel on the year of my fieldwork, but took a break in order to rest and freshen up before walking together to the chapel.

Nonetheless, the ladino Guadalupanos (children included) walked up the hill at around 4 in the morning on the day of the fiesta. As if in real-time mirror image, the Tseltal musicians with some *principales* and *prioras* did the same at the main church. Musicians played the traditional Mexican hymn to Guadalupe (in Spanish) while the Tseltal congregation sang. "Communities in the mountains have their own fiestas for Guadalupe, but celebrating with us in the town, in the main church is a different kind of celebration," says Juan Carlos Lema, dressed in a freshly-ironed shirt and wearing his medal of Guadalupe. By the crack of dawn, the Tseltal Guadalupanos have started to trickle into the church plaza – the men in their Sunday best, the women and girls in traditional Tseltal attire. The women wear short white veils and all wear the medallions of Guadalupe that mark their *cargo* as Guadalupanos. "I bring this out only once a year," the twenty-something Tseltal Guadalupano who nine days ago I had interviewed at church half drunk and reeking of stale alcohol. "The rest of the year I keep this medallion safe and secure with my best clothes. It is my most prized possession."

Being Ladino, Becoming Tseltal: The Fiesta of Guadalupe and the Dialectics of Ethnicity

In his seminal essay on Our Lady of Guadalupe, historian Eric Wolf (1958) called her the "master symbol…which seems to enshrine the major hopes and aspirations of an entire society (1958: 34). Wolf (1958: 36) notes the emotions generated by the symbol, owing to its place in Mexican history, derives from the ties of kinship the symbol provides, from the "closed and static life of the Indian village" to the larger "mobile and manipulative live in communities which are actually geared to the life of the nation." The Virgin is addressed in passionate terms as a source of warmth and love in the former; and is charged with "the energy of rebellion" in the latter, as the embodiment of hope "in a victorious outcome of the struggle between generations." The Guadalupe symbol, Wolf writes (1958: 37), "stands for life, for hope, for health" with supernatural mother and natural mother equated symbolically "as are earthly and otherworldy hopes and desires." More importantly to the Indian groups, the Virgin of Guadalupe becomes more than embodiment of life and hope. The symbol of Guadalupe restores to the Indian the hope of salvation that the Virgin appeared brown skinned to an indigenous peasant, validating the Indian "to legal defense, orderly government, to citizenship, to supernatural salvation, but also to salvation from random oppression" (Wolf 1958: 37). The Guadalupe symbol, therefore, links family, politics, and religion; colonial past and independent present; Indian and Mexican, Wolf writes (1958: 38). "It reflects the salient social relations of Mexican life, and embodies the emotions which they generate."

Kirstin Norget (2017) calls the Virgin of Guadalupe the quintessential symbol of neo-baroque aesthetics," a phrase that in my opinion perfectly describes how the people of Chilón *perform* the fiesta of Guadalupe against the theological complexity and ostensible contradictions that is Catholicism inculturated. It is a cultural system, Norget writes (2017: 188-189), with the characteristics "of grandeur, excess, complexity, chaos, contradiction, hyperbole, and sensationalism." The symbol of Guadalupe, as icon of local and national histories, serves to galvanize popular faith "infused with passionate and sensory devotion."

In keeping with the baroque Catholicism of the New World that relied on aesthetic splendor, the emotionally evocative performance of the Feast of Guadalupe underlines the transcendence of Catholicism while encouraging particular ways of "being Catholic." At the same time, Norget writes (2017: 193, emphasis added), "the church-driven baroque sensibility became fused with *indigenous* senses of the sacred in ways that shape the very course of syncretism."

Indeed, ladino becomes indigenous and indigenous becomes ladino during this one day in the entire religious calendar. The two communities each have their own Guadalupanos, Tseltal *prioras* and *principales*; their own framed image of the Virgin on decorated pick-up trucks; their own revelers, fireworks, and *torito de petate*. The pick up trucks on which the images of the Virgin rest are decorated with the tricolors of Mexico, with young girls on either side of the image wearing traditional Tseltal dress. The Tseltal Guadalupanos escort their image of Guadalupe with young girls carrying the Guadalupe banners, the *prioras* bearing incense, the *torito de petate* weaving in and out of the crowd, dancing to the rhythm of the brass band. The entire Tseltal contingent proceed to the chapel, where the ladinos wait in anticipation. The ladino brass band beings to play as the Tseltal procession approaches – *prioras* light more incense; girls smooth their skirts, dust their blouses, and fix their white veils; the ladino *torito de petate* gets ready to dance with its Tseltal counterpart. As the two communities meet at the bottom of the chapel steps, the brass bands play louder and in unison, with the ladinos shouting "Viva!" to their "*hermanos Tseltales*" (Tseltal brothers) while the Tseltal respond with their own "Viva!" with equal fervor, cheering their "*hermanos ladinos*" (ladino brothers). Fireworks are set off in the mid-morning heat, applause ensues, the two *toritos de petate* – ladino and Tseltal – dance in circles, bowing to each other as they crisscross paths. The Tseltal have nothing else apart from their *torito*, but the ladinos have different sets of participants in the procession: ladina women in floral dresses and men in Parachico masks and brightly-colored ponchos that are traditional to Chiapa de Corzo 184 kilometers away; men and women on horseback dressed as northern Mexican *gauchos* (cowboys) wearing wide-brimmed sombreros. "It was only in the past ten years or so that we've included elements from Chiapa de Corzo," says Reyes Monterrosa. "I think the ladinos are looking for something typically ladino, something distinctive, something special to distinguish themselves from Tseltal traditions. So they looked towards Tuxtla Gutiérrez (the capital of Chiapas) and Chiapa de Corzo because there really isn't a ladino or mestizo tradition here like that."

That Mexico "is a racial mix," Knight says (1990: 72) is a cliché that has no explanatory power. It is, however, indicative of how modern Mexico has evolved from several groups "who displayed contrasting somatic features" as a result of Spanish and Indian miscegenation since the 16th century. The blending of Spanish and Indian cultures, Knight writes (1990: 76), paralleled the blending of Spanish and Indian blood, thereby ensuring that many features taken to be "Indian" were of European origin: Indian food, dress, technology, religion, and social organization – "the whole battery of social traits diagnostic of the Indian" – were all infused with Spanish elements.

Echoing the quote of Reyes Monterrosa that opens this chapter, Knight (1990: 76) suggests that it is precisely this syncretic culture – "a fusion of earlier cultures into one that was new and different, that it becomes "somewhat pointless to produce checklists of pristine Indian against imported Spanish/mestizo elements or to try to sort them into poles of positive Indian assets and negative colonial accretions."

Despite efforst of post-Revolutionary governments to "mestizo-ize" the Indians and "Indianize the mestizos" to create a national synthesis on the basis of reciprocal contributions, Knight suggests (1990: 86) that "a tight unitary fusion" between the two categories of identity would be more reflective of Mexican realities, as opposed to the notion "of a bipartite Indian culture, possessing distinctive and potentially separable Indian and European elements." One feminist-anthropologist I had interviewed who came from one of the town's more prominent ladino families said that her mother had always told her as a child that the Tseltal were different: "She used to tell us not to play with them that much because they were different from us. But at the end of the day, who are the ladinos and who are the Tseltal when we are all mestizos?"

It is this "either-or" framework that De la Cadena vigorously refutes in her sensitive ethnography of Cuzco, Peru – yet another richly complex community that force us to rethink the rigid and binary models of ethnicity. Echoing the nuances of the ladino-Tseltal encounter during the Feast of Guadalupe, De la Cadena notes (2000: 35) that ethnicity in Cuzco (or "cuzqueñismo" as she puts it) is "a shared dialogic field, the cultural expressive space from which both groups (i.e., mestizo and indigenous) draw inspiration, the sphere where they both compete for influence and an important public arena in which to dispute the meanings of identity labels." De la Cadena refutes the notions of inclusion and exclusion implied by the binary model of ethnicity espoused by the late Mexican anthropologist Guillermo Bonfín Batalla (1987, 1996) whom she cites specifically. For the latter the particularity of Mexico as a nation is the collective cultural contribution of the Indian (i.e, the indigenous), marginalized throughout history, their stories left untold. Any cultural interaction or "dialogic encounter" (as it were) is an imposition of an indistinguishable "Western civilization" whose dominant strength denies any meaningful relationship between the two cultures.

But for De la Cadena (2000: 316), drawing cultural boundaries (fluid as they may be) between indigenous and ladino (or mestizos, in her terminology) "is to abide by only one definition of indigenous culture and, indeed, the dominant one." De la Cadena (2000: 316) suggests that indigenous culture "exceeds the scope of Indianness and includes subordinate definitions of mestizo/a." From this perspective, labeling someone mestizo or indigenous "is fixing momentarily a point of reference inherently related to that which is Indian (or mestizo/a)." Similarly, becoming mestizo implies distancing oneself from the Indian social condition "and thus de-Indianizing." De la Cadena (2000: 316) prefers the phrase "indigenous mestizaje" to describe the complexity of Indian-mestizo relations in Cuzco, Peru where identities "combine the endless motion between contestation and acquiescence."

Thus, identities move beyond the “conceptual binarism…that fix the indigenous as one discrete colonized pole whose liberation is only achieved through wholesale rejection of its cultural markers in favor of others that mark the other discrete pole, which may be referred to as Hispanic or white. “

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION:
AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF CATHOLICISM ACROSS CULTURES

Syncretism has become a key theme in ethnographies of Catholic settings all over Latin America, the region with arguably more Catholics anywhere else in the world. Catholicism has become a product of particular indigenous (or non-indigenous) histories having particular effects, even in singular nation-state such as Mexico. Inculturation, syncretism's theological equivalent, has been at the forefront of missionary discourse ever since Vatican II highlighted the relationship between doctrinal center and periphery. This approach continues to promote concern "for the retrieval and reinvigoration of indigenous or local sacred concepts and practices" within an official Catholic framework, or, as Napolitano (2017) had put it, within Catholicism's "paternalistic fold."

Inculturation, however, is not without its theological controversies. Missionaries at present (the Jesuits in Chilón included) have had to tread carefully the fine theological lines that had not been necessary before. To what extent can Catholic doctrine accommodate the languages and belief systems in which it would be expressed? Can the one Catholic "Truth" be conceived or re-conceived apart from these cultures in which it would be practiced? How is one to separate conceptually the indigenous social world into what is contrary to Catholic doctrine (that is to say, what is "idolatrous" or "evil")? Given that the Ignatian spirituality of "listening and discernment…and a courageous articulation of a Christian 'faith that does justice,' (Hinsdale 2014), to what extent can Jesuit tradition draw their religious *praxis* of dialogue with non-Christian traditions in order to discover the nature of theological pluralism itself?

This thesis is about three communities of different cultural backgrounds practicing "the one, true, Catholic, and apostolic faith" – sometimes conflicting; perhaps even complimentary, co-eval, and contemporaneous. Rituals form a deep part of their religious practice, but nowhere in this thesis has there been a discussion between ritual and belief. It is clear from the ethnography provided in this thesis that religion in general (and Catholicism in particular) has its performative aspect, whether by way of music and dance as worship or prayers and rituals intoned. It is through these performative and affective aspects of religious devotion that their membership to Church is affirmed. To what extent, then, can we force the necessity of belief as integral component for ritual to be considered valid? Napolitano points out (2017: 19) that some cultures allow individuals a more passive role in relation to piety. Rather than striving for theological correctness, therefore, subjects "may orient themselves toward a 'lack of incorrectness' without sacrificing their claim to Christian identity. "Catholicism," Napolitano writes (2017: 20, emphasis in original) does not exact high levels of reflexive certainty from everyone, or at least from every individual *all the time*."

That the Tseltal attend Sunday Masses and receive Communion, that the Tseltal do *not* pray to the Madre Tierra as Creator, that the Tseltal do not stray from basic Church teachings – can these be sufficient to validate their performance of ritual or should belief remain the central component? "If they practice the basics of the Catholic faith," an Oxford Dominican theologian once asked me during a discussion of Tseltal religious syncretism. "If they recite the Credo and are good Catholics – then what's your problem?" In other words, one could reconceptualize the necessity of belief (which is, arguably, a Protestant, post-Enlightenment approach) in the practice of ritual.

Sadly, the role of women – particularly Tseltal women – in the performance and practice of religion is limited to superficial descriptions in this thesis. The world of the indigenous woman is notoriously closed to the opposite sex (indigenous or otherwise), much less an outsider with limited working knowledge of the language. Conceptualizations of masculinity, feminitity, and their relationship with devotional activities (see Mayblin 2017) are conspicuously absent in my research. Does devotional activity increase as gendered bodies grow more distant from the phase of sexual reproduction? In addition, the aspect of youth and the role religious participation plays in their constructions of self and personhood also remain absent in this thesis. "Things have changed since the cellphone arrived," says Manuel, my main Tseltal source. "You can see young Tseltal not able to speak the language fluently like I did at that age. And you can see them dancing in public to Thalia and other pop stars."

Similarly, the role of the cargo system in Tseltal religious practice (and even, arguably, ladino religious observance) merits deeper analyses with regards power and religious authority. To what extent do the *principales* and *prioras* exercise their authority in the practice of Tseltal religion? The role of the cargo system is well dissected in the historical and anthropological literature on Mesoamerica, but is there a need to problematize their role with respect to the bureaucratization of religion (to borrow the Weberian terminology). Indeed, religion is public in Chilón, as in (arguably) the rest of Mexico and in other developing country settings. The visibility of the cargo system and the influence they wield over religious observance in itself question three major assumptions about: (1) the widespread assumption that as societies modernize, religion loses significance in the public sphere; (2) that religion ought to be defined as a set of private beliefs, rather than as a subset of culture or embodied doctrines about the afterlife that are embedded socially and historically; (3) that religion may be a source of potential conflict – political, cultural, social – and allowing it to enter the public sphere is bound to make societies more unstable. From a development aspect, this thesis could be pushed further in order to question the validity of these assumptions.

The title of this thesis “We Meet and Mingle Separately” presents the main trajectory of this research: that categories of identity – indigenous or ladino – are not fixed, binary concepts with one excluding the other. Indigenous and non-indigenous as analytical concepts emerge from social interactions that open up the possibilities of appropriation (or not). As the ethnography in this thesis suggests, the “dialogic encounters” (in De la Cadena’s wording) are articulated whereby the traditionally dominant side in one level of power could be the subordinate “other” in another aspect of Chilón community life. As such, these fields of power are crisscrossed with issues such as class or, indeed, religion well, whereby individuals of whatever self-identified ethnicity are able respond to or reinvent themselves given a wider contemporary context. Identity, therefore, is constantly reconstituted and reformulated – a dialectic (as it were) between two poles: between reifying the indigene (as the Jesuits do, for whatever reason) or to affirm the fluidity and relationality of categories of identity among the ordinary people themselves. That religion remains the central medium through which these two different poles create meanings for their own use and in their own terms speaks of the power of religion in the public sphere that can unite as well as divide. It goes deep into conceptions of identity and moral personhood, of kinship and social organization, penetrating deep into the inner structures of intimate life.

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