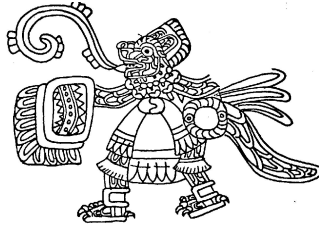


PLURALISM AND TRANSCULTURATION IN INDIGENOUS MAYA RELIGION



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Several religions are practiced in a highland Maya community. *Costumbre* and Maya spirituality perpetuate distinctive syncretic and anti-syncretic Maya traditions, and are analyzed here as orthodox and reform versions of Maya religion adapted to different status groups. Like Maya Pentecostals, both use institutional forms borrowed from other cultures in syncretizing strategies that perpetuate core aspects of Maya culture in a radically changing political economy. Strategic individual behavior, contention, and co-operation are documented for a village, indicating how the two traditions reconstitute Maya religion through transcultural processes. (Transculturation, syncretism, Maya religion, Guatemala)

In the 1970s the K'iche' speaking highland Maya town of Santiago Momostenango, Guatemala, had a population of 40,000, about equally divided between Catholics and *Costumbristas*—practitioners of *Costumbre*, the syncretized religion of earth lords, Jesu Cristo, saints, and ancestors, a year-bearer cult recognizing four sacred mountains as the seats of alternating mayors of the solar year, and the 260-day divining almanac or Ch'olK'ij (Tedlock 1982, Cook 2000). Between 1975 and the 1990s, the *cofradía* system (brotherhoods that sponsor festivals for the saints) was reduced in size and drastically reshaped by Catholic opposition to paganism and the elimination of mandated service to the *cofradías* by a municipal decree during La Violencia, the civil war of the 1980s. In 2005, Momostenango had a population and housing construction boom. Three of the five traditional dance-dramas were gone, and the central place of the missing Conquest Dance had been taken by *disfraces*, in which same-sex pairs of dancers arrayed in fantastic costumes portray characters based on popular culture (Taube 2006). The roasted ears of green corn served with lime juice and coarse salt that were the main culinary feature of the festival 30 years earlier were replaced by boiled sweet corn on the cob, slathered with red and green ketchup, mustard, and mayonnaise. This new corn, along with pizza, hot dogs, and fried chicken were emblematic of a younger generation that seemed uninterested in reproducing the ancestral world, the renewal of which had been of central concern to *Costumbre*

(Cook 2000). Fieldwork between 2005 and 2008 focused on understanding the new Momostecan fiesta and its meaning for Maya cultural continuity.¹

As Guatemala's highland villages like Momostenango become plural assemblages of resident and affiliated "post communities" (Ortner 1997), religious life responds to the emergence of new classes, new individual and family economic strategies, migrant labor, the remittance-based local economy, a spreading consumer culture, immersion in international cultural media, new religious choices, and a growing generation gap. The marginalization of the agrarian culture with its traditional authority and patrilineal control of estates presents new choices and opportunities that contrast with *Costumbre*, which requires its sponsors and participants to devote significant outlays of time and money in rituals performed at sacred locations. It also reduces the relevance of the renewal of an ancient world, which is the central purpose of traditional religious undertakings. Despite all this, the *Monkeys*, a traditional dance in which young men dressed as monkeys, a puma, and a jaguar and possessed by animal spirits, do dangerous tricks on a tightrope above the plaza (Cook 2000:107–18, Cook and Offit 2008) was performed in 2008. The *Conquest* dance, dramatizing the initial conflict between Spaniards and the K'iche' people, was also performed again after a gap of several years.

Research investigated religious change in this Maya town, identifying the strategies and accommodations that try to preserve portions of indigenous tradition and institutions reconstituting Indian culture (Farris 1984). The response in early highland Maya ethnology to Western colonialism was acculturation theory (Redfield, Linton, and Herskovitz 1936), which described a syncretized but indigenous religion (LaFarge and Byers 1931, LaFarge 1947, Oakes 1951, Bunzel 1952, Mendelson 1959). This approach persisted through the 1970s and beyond. A countervailing thesis driven by Marxist theory and supported by Mestizo nationalism in Mexico and Guatemala (Hale 1996) depicted Indians as a rural proletariat. Their cultures were regarded as the accommodations of a marginalized class to economic exploitation and political oppression (Carlsen and Prechtel 1991:23–24, Wilk 1991:21–23). This had Maya ethnicity and culture rejected by the left as false consciousness and by the right as anti-nationalist (Watanabe 1995:33, Fischer 2001:95–96).

Mayanists have since moved beyond this politically charged debate (Fischer 2001:9–14) to models that account for persisting Maya identity. A "pluricultural" ethnography emerged to study "hybridizing" processes (Watanabe and Fischer 2004) operating in a transnational economy (Goldin and Metz 1991, Goldin 2001, Green 2003, Burrell 2005, Little 2005, Foxen 2007). Indian towns, once depicted as homogeneous closed communities, are now regarded as having long been both ethnically divided and divided by class (Carmack 1995, Grandin 2000).

CULTURAL HYBRIDITY AND RELIGIOUS SYNCRETISM

“Hybridity” rather than “syncretism” is currently preferred in writings on religion that emphasize resistance and commodification (Kitiarsa 2005:461). This essay though follows the usage of Stewart and Shaw (1994), who identified contending syncretic and anti-syncretic movements in post-colonial societies, and Mackenzie (2005:347–56), who pioneered in applying this framework to the K’iche’ Maya..

Religious pluralism in Momostenango includes *Costumbre*, a blend of Christian and Maya religion. The *Costumbristas* oppose changing their practices as their central tenet is to reproduce the hallowed institutions they inherited. Changes to tradition are acceptable only when necessary to keep as much as possible of the tradition intact. Orthodox Christians,² both Catholic and Protestant, reject *Costumbre* as pagan because of its animism and deification of ancestors. There is also a group of Mayan nationalists who perceive *Costumbre* as impure because it has Catholic elements, like Jesus and the saints, and the liturgical year and Gregorian calendar (Fischer and Brown 1996, Molesky-Poz 2006:22–32). This group embodies anti-syncretism in the indigenous tradition. It is composed of activists who seek a Mayan identity and religious training through a guild of religious practitioners rather than local initiated specialists. They also rely on literature rather than oral tradition in order to purify Maya religion of Spanish and Catholic traits. For example, they do not use candles in their ceremonies since these have Spanish-Catholic origins, and they reject the use of Spanish in favor of invocations in K’iche’ from the sixteenth-century “Mayan Bible,” the *Popol Wuj*.

CASES OF INDIGENIZED CHRISTIANITY

In Guatemala, “orthodox” Christianity in a variety of forms has made substantial gains over the past several decades (Stoll 1990, Sherman 1997, Garrard-Burnett 1998), and Protestant values of thrift, saving, and abstinence from alcohol have even spread among Catholics (Goldin and Metz 1991). In some communities a blending of indigenous rituals and symbols into Catholic practice has occurred in an effort to strengthen liberal Catholic evangelization (Mackenzie 1999, 2005). These developments are consonant with a replacement in which Mayan culture (i.e., religion) is rejected in favor of a Christian modernity while keeping traits that maintain a Mayan identity, which may be called Mayan Christianity.

The greatest Christian growth has been in Pentecostal and charismatic Protestant churches favoring a spiritual warfare theology. These religious

movements aggressively confront and reject traditional Maya beliefs and practices (Molesky-Poz 2006), and the gods of the *Costumbristas* are defined as evil spirits and demons that must be defeated through conversion and prayer (De Bernardi 1999). Spiritual warfare's focus is on exorcism, and concerns like improved harvests and success in business as a result of conversion and the defeat of evil "territorial spirits." These religious themes could be portrayed as reconstituted Indian culture and indigenized Christianities, even as the *Costumbristas* are defined as witches and their cosmologies as demonologies.

The Pentecostal churches pose an additional interpretive problem. For example, in a Yucatec Maya village in Belize in the early 1990s, there were five new Pentecostal churches in a population of about 800 people. They had the forms of traditional highland Maya communities, once called *calpul* or *chinamit*, in which two intermarrying patrilineages maintained a joint estate. The estate in this case is the church, and its capital (generators, band instruments, and vehicles) is controlled by a charismatic elder (Fox and Cook 1996, Cook 2001). This constitutes a preservation or re-establishment of a Mayan form of community organization. The council of pastors became the *de facto* local government, rejecting the nationally mandated election-based system for a decentralized democracy. This is an anti-syncretic religious movement, and also a means for reconstituting an indigenous community model. Catholic Action, the vehicle for the spread of orthodox Catholicism among the Guatemalan Maya between the 1950s and 1970s, displays this same dynamic. It was used by the Maya *cacique* families, descendants of colonial indigenous aristocrats, to enhance their power in the hamlets and the decentralization of power in the municipality, at a time when an alliance between an urban commercial Maya elite and Momostecan Ladinos had led to the centralization of power and authority during the first half of the twentieth century (Carmack 1995, Cook 2007:71).

TRANSCULTURATION

It is sometimes an effective strategy to accept profound change in some aspects of a culture in order to preserve some other institutional arrangements. "Transculturation," a term coined by Francisco Ortiz as an alternative to acculturation (Ortiz 1995:97–101), is a syncretizing process that maintains or strengthens selected indigenous institutions by adopting accommodative external forms (Ervin 1980:56).

Two current movements in Momostecan religious life are briefly reviewed below. A traditionalist movement within the patron saint's cult intends to reproduce *Costumbre*, renewing the world by replicating the prototypes left by its founders. It holds that the present world order is and should be continuous

with the past, and that the constitutive rituals of this syncretized/hybridized world blend K'iche' and Spanish, indigenous, and Catholic cosmologies into a unified whole. Another movement, called Maya Spirituality by its adherents, is informed by Pan Maya activism and uses the Popol Wuj to understand the Conquest as founding an oppressive world order which should be rejected. Intentionally anti-syncretic, it seeks to recreate an authentic Maya religion without Spanish or Christian elements (Mackenzie 1999, 2005).

In Momostenango, anti-syncretic movements seeking a return to pure Mayan rituals, offerings, and prayers are unintentionally creating new syncretisms by adopting some forms and behaviors of Western culture. Somewhat paradoxically, the conservative *Costumbristas* seek to maintain a tradition that includes external traits, while the anti-syncretic Maya Spirituality is dedicated to changing the indigenous religion. While it opposes Spanish or folk Catholic accretions, it is not averse to astrology or new-age influences, and so most likely will introduce new syncretisms appropriate to the current transcultural pluralistic context. Thus, within the pluri-cultural and generationally divided community that intentionally seeks to practice Maya religion, the *Costumbristas* are an orthodox sect and the anti-syncretic purifiers are a reform sect.

COSTUMBRE AND THE COFRADÍA OF SANTIAGO

The Cofradía of Santiago (Cook 2000:75–98) is an attempt by *Costumbristas* to reproduce the cult of Santiago, the patron saint of Momostenango. Fieldwork included several interviews with the head of the cofradía (the *alcalde*), here given the pseudonym Don Dionisio, and his assistant and chief ritualist, here called Don Anselmo, and participation in the cofradía vigils and processions in 2006, 2007, and 2008.

Paralleling events in other highland towns (Fischer 2001:182–87), the 21 Momostecan cofradías of 1976 have been reduced to eight. The remaining cofradías today include three leaders (*camal be* or guides): Santiago, Señor Resurrección, and María Concepción, down from five guides in 1976 (which then included Cristo Crucificado and Santa Cruz), and an additional five cofradías: Santa Cruz, Cristo Crucificado, San Antonio (the fertility deity), Santa Barbara (the custodian of San Simon of holy week), and San Francisco, a reminder of the Franciscan heritage of Momostenango. Except for Santiago, which has two officers and helpers (*mayordomos*), the remaining cofradías are down to one officer with few or no helpers.

The image of Santiago, said to have been obtained in Spain, was once taken from the Vicentes and kept by another cacique family, the Herreras. In the twentieth century, under the direction of General Teodoro Cifuentes, a local

Ladino *caudillo* (political boss), and as part of a project to build a town with centralized authority, Santiago became its patron saint, maintained by a *cofradía* controlled jointly by the *principales* and the priest. It was the focus for the annual *fiesta patronal*, a hallmark of modernity in the early twentieth century. The removal of the image from the cacique families was also its removal from the corporate groups that controlled estates within which a leading patrilineage was responsible for maintaining a *wachibal*, a cult of the patron deity of the group (see Hill and Monaghan 1987).

The Momostecan image of Santiago is a small wooden statue of a man on horseback brandishing a sword in his right hand, bedecked in blankets, towels, and scarves, and wearing boots. Only the face, hands, and parts of the horse are visible. Among *Costumbristas*, Santiago is identified with Venus, the morning star, he is a war god that protected the Momostecan militia in the early twentieth century and is the leader of the rain bringers. As the protector of Momostenango, he is the most powerful and dangerous of all saints and requires massive expenditures of labor and money in his festivals in Momostenango and in the hamlets of San Vicente Buenabaj and Peublo Viejo, where the image is reunited each year with “his women,” Santa Isabel and Santa Catarina, for their festivals in November. In an earlier and more miraculous time, the image had the power to ride its horse at night to legitimize changes of political power and administrative authority and would speak to the caciques, the descendants of the indigenous nobility. Today the image still appears in the dreams of *cofrades* (members of the brotherhood that sponsors its festival) and dancers, and gives signs by snakes in its altars, skunks at masses in its chapels, misfiring skyrockets, or sudden sickness or death of the officiants at its rituals.

Thirty years ago, prior to its dismantling, the *cofradía* of Santiago was staffed by eight men in ranked positions—a first and second *alcalde*, a first and second *deputado*, and four *mayordomos*—as well as a women’s team with three ranked women. They paid for and staffed the celebration of the festival for Santiago, with a peak of activity between July 24 and 31, which was conjoined with the celebration of a second image, San Felipe, said to be the secretary of Santiago and lacking an independent *cofradía*.

Years ago, when the *cofradía* membership changed each year, the first *deputado* tended to remain in office for long periods, supervising and performing the offerings at mountain altars and ensuring that someone with detailed knowledge was available to oversee the complicated schedule of offerings at the Patron’s altars during the year of service.

Today, Don Anselmo, the *deputado*, a respected elder in his sixties, is an initiated shaman of the highest rank and has several years of experience as priest for the Santiago cult, and is also the ritualist for the monkeys dance. Thus, every

other year, his duties are divided during the festival and he is spread very thin. Don Dionisio, the alcalde, a dynamic younger man in his thirties, is also an initiated shaman. He and Don Anselmo take turns performing offerings on specified days in the Maya calendar. This necessitates visits to several altars located on hilltops and near springs. An offering of incense, copal, and candles accompanied by an hour or so of invocations and prayer, is involved each time. These offerings are done for the *cofradía* and the entire town, and reflect the shamanic form of *Costumbre* in which individuals representing larger groups make offerings of prayer, incense, and candles.

By the end of the 1970s it was clear to leading *Costumbristas* that due to Catholic Action tactics they were in danger of losing the traditions of offerings, processions, and vigils associated with Santiago. These customs, and the supernatural benefits that accrued to those in the cult and the community from their intercessions, were critical if the *Costumbrista* community were to have a collective purpose and not be reduced to individuals pursuing shamanic intervention in private or for personal reasons. To forestall this, the *Costumbrista* principals of Barrio Santa Isabel formed a society devoted to Patron Santiago. Several fraternities (*hermandades*) had previously figured in Momostenango, but they were all Ladino organizations derived from family connections with Ladino religious brotherhoods in Guatemala City, Antigua, and Quetzaltenango, and acted locally to ensure public devotion to a couple of images that were not venerated by the indigenous population.

The new “Indian” fraternity for Santiago recruited a few additional urban indigenous members, and gained access to land in Barrio Santa Isabel where they built a chapel for their vigil during Santiago’s festival. This attempt to preserve the offerings and rituals associated with the patron saint in a new Momostenango—where the church was successfully opposing paganism and the municipal authorities had withdrawn oversight and financial support—is an example of the transculturation process. An institutional form, created by the dominant Ladinos to perform public rituals that demonstrated their status and that confirmed the importance of the Cifuentes heritage in Momostenango, was adopted by the ever more marginalized and embattled *Costumbristas* to protect their status and heritage within the increasingly pluralistic religious organization of Momostenango. It was also adopted to obtain supernatural benefits for devotees and the community by invoking, honoring, and entertaining the souls of the dead founders of the traditions and the spirit of Santiago.

The founders of the fraternity, some 20 years ago, have died or are very old and inactive. Through some astute moves by the parish priest when the *Costumbrista* owner of the chapel died, the chapel is now owned by the Catholic Church and there is no longer a functioning indigenous fraternity for Santiago,

although there are several *hermandades de bandas* that raise money for the bands that perform in the festival. Thus, a new strategy has maintained the Costumbrista festival through a “private” *cofradía* of Santiago that operates outside of the church. However, since the image of Santiago and the silver *cofradía* emblem that accompanies the image during the fiesta belong to the church, the new entity can only operate with the co-operation of the priest and the sacristan. The dissolution of the Indian fraternity has left a vacancy in sponsoring the festival in the old fraternity chapel.

The officers of the *cofradías* are now recruited and appointed by the members of the Costumbrista fraternity of bands, doing what once belonged to the principals and the municipal government. The *alcaldes* of the other seven *cofradías* validate the legitimacy of Santiago’s *cofradía* by visiting for prayer and lunch at noon following the all night-vigil at the *cofradía* house, and then by accompanying Santiago in procession to the fraternity chapel for a second vigil with its high point at midnight when, behind a screen, the *cofrades* of Santiago change the image’s clothing, thus symbolizing the beginning of a new year in the covenant between this patron saint and his people.

The *cofradía* house, in this case the residence of Don Dionisio, becomes a shrine for the Santiago devotees in July. The visit of Santiago to the house, which in the *cofradía* of the 1970s would have been a new-year celebration following a mass at which the outgoing *cofrades* presented flower crowns to their incoming replacements, no longer marks a change in personnel as there are no new *cofrades* waiting to serve each year. Thus the same small group of families bear these expenses every year; and the fiesta is very expensive, estimated to cost the *alcalde* alone over \$3,000. Costs cover feeding the guests, the Monkeys dancers, the Mexicans, and the Conquest dancers, who visit to eat and entertain the saints and guests. There also are the costs of hiring musicians. When Santiago travels in procession he is preceded by dance teams and their musicians, and is followed by a brass band. At the *cofradía* house, hired bands play almost continuously for the 24 hours of the vigil, and guests who wish to dance do so in the inner courtyard with an occasional interlude, when the images are danced around the courtyard to honor and entertain them and to ask their blessings on the house, the seed corn in the rafters, the household, and the visiting guests.

For each of the past two years, the *alcalde* has had to sell land to cover the *cofradía* expenses. He now employs an entrepreneurial Mayan strategy, converting the front room in the *cofradía* house, which is his own house, into a year-round shrine for the Guatemalan deity San Simon. This permanent shrine, following the traditional K’che’an pattern for a privately owned miraculous image, would be occupied briefly each year by Santiago and San Felipe and prompt substantially heightened visitation by the faithful. Like other San Simon

shrines in Guatemala, if successful in attracting local and perhaps regional visitation, it would provide a steady income through cash offerings donated at the shrine, but more importantly through sales of beer, wine, liquor, candles, cigarettes, and incense.

During a conversation about the new shrine, Don Dionisio provided a series of origin accounts for the sacred stones placed on the floor in the candle burning area in front of the altar table, each of which came from the vicinity of a powerful altar in distant locations, where each was revealed to him by signs. This illustrates the way in which the Santiago-centered Costumbrista cult institution, and the people who struggle to carry it into a new century, are adapting to the social and economic realities of the new Guatemala where principales cannot mandate individual service in the cults of the saints, and where privatization strategies seek to maintain traditions using new social and financial models. In this case the financial model is a traditional one harking back to the shrines maintained by the Vicentes and the Herreras prior to the centralization of the *cofradías* in the early twentieth century. That is, an indigenous institution has been either resurrected or created to resolve the dismantling of the traditional *cofradía* system. The idea of a San Simon shrine has been borrowed from examples that are part of the hybridized national religious culture shared by indigenous and ladino Catholics. Like the fraternity that preceded it, this new *cofradía* is a syncretized or hybridized example of transculturation.

THE NEW MAYA SPIRITUALITY

Since the 1990s, new groups seeking to develop purified and authentic indigenous religion have emerged in Guatemala communities. There is limited scholarship on Maya religious revitalization, but a few trends have been documented. A k'iche' speaker from San Andres Xecul taught a rationalized Maya religion to students from K'iche', Kekchi, and Cakchiquel communities in the 1960s and trained young Maya activists. By 1985 this movement had produced a ceremonial guide ("*Nuestro Cosmovision Maya*"), including invocations from the sixteenth-century Popol Wuj, and prophetic calls to purify Maya religion of colonial and Catholic accretions (Mackenzie 2005:481–86). Heightened activism following the Quincentennial in 1992 and landmark legislation protecting the indigenous religion (Molesky-Poz 2006:29–32) contributed to rapid deployment of the reform religion, Maya Spirituality, in the early twenty-first century.

Quoting from a Momostecan leader of the emerging purified Maya Spirituality, Mackenzie (2005) concludes that its practitioners are generally respectful towards the elderly practitioners of syncretized *Costumbre*, but also critical of their lack of historical consciousness and knowledge of the syncretism that sullies

their tradition (Mackenzie 2005:488). There is considerable diversity in the goals of practitioners of Maya religiosity ranging from loosely organized groups to professional guilds, with some even advocating active proselytizing to spread the religion to non-Maya (Mackenzie 2005:489–90). There are numerous associations of Maya spiritual guides, with at least three important national ones originating in the 1990s, and an unknown number of local groups (Mackenzie 2005:562).

A regional group that operates in Momostenango, called Consejo de Ajq'ijab Belejeb Batz (Council of Day-Keepers Nine Thread or Nine Howler Monkey) is named for a day in the nine-month Chol K'ij, the divining calendar. The description presented here is from interviews and conversations with a Momostecan co-ordinator of the group with the pseudonym, Don Eligio, and participant observation at a ceremony to initiate a new member in 2007 and a fiesta for Santiago in the fraternity chapel sponsored by Don Eligio and his wife in 2008. Belejeb Batz's membership is mainly K'iche' speakers from Totonicacapan and Momostenango and has recently included more K'iche' speakers, some Mam speakers, and some Pokomam. Regardless of the language spoken or the home town, all members use a standardized K'iche' language divining calendar consistent with the count of the days in Momostenango.

Don Eligio reported that Belejeb Batz in 2008 had 300 members, with 13 “teachers,” among whom he is the only male. The group is almost 90% female, with only 35 male members. Individual members may practice as diviners and curers for private clients. When divination indicates the need to be initiated, membership in the group follows. Recruitment then is via a typical shamanic sickness followed with initiation. As in traditional Momostecan shamanism, the initiation takes place over nine months, but unlike the ideal pattern in *Costumbre* initiation, it can occur on any day that is deemed appropriate.

The association is divided into smaller local groups that interact regularly and within which the rituals of the religion are practiced, in the form of collective offerings and ceremonies on important days at shrines in their home communities and as pilgrims at sacred shrines as far afield as Guatemala's eastern frontier. Don Eligio's group has a core of 15 women and 4 men. The members of Belejeb Batz and of Don Eligio's more intimate group are almost all younger than 40, with the vast majority in their twenties and thirties, and to his knowledge none have been raised as *Costumbristas*. Most are from orthodox Catholic families, and Don Eligio reports that one member of Belejeb Batz had been ordained as a Catholic priest. Don Eligio is from a Mormon family and practiced as a Mormon until he received his calling via a series of blackouts that caused him to have several accidents and to lose his job as a truck driver.

Belejeb Batz was until recently growing rapidly via active recruiting and seems to provide a vehicle for the expression of Maya identity that is more attractive to the young than is *cofradía* service, and it provides a central role for women, a feature missing from *cofradías* and traditional dance teams. It faces significant financial challenges as the members wish to develop a structure like an NGO, with an office, computers, digital technology, publications, and perhaps a salaried staff. However, a sudden drop in active membership in the fall of 2008, related by Don Eligio to the costs of frequent ceremonies and to a reduced rate of conversions, suggests that the rapid growth may have had some features of a pyramid scheme in which ceremonial costs were covered by the payments of new students.

According to Don Eligio, Catholics and *Costumbristas* are not currently antagonistic to the new Maya Spirituality, and though its practitioners see *Costumbre* as sullied by syncretism, they treat *Costumbristas* with respect as the carriers of community traditions. However, they have not sought local *Costumbrista* elders as mentors since the elders are reluctant to share their esoteric knowledge without initiatory apprenticeship payments, and as the elders frequently distrust each other.

CONTINUITY IN INDIGENOUS RELIGION

Transculturation seems to be the major vehicle for maintaining selected indigenous elements in village religions. In Pentecostalism the churches are renewing and perpetuating a traditional Maya social structure while opposing traditional indigenous cosmology and theology as demonic. In an inversion of this pattern, the practitioners of anti-syncretic revitalized Maya spirituality seek to eliminate Christian and Spanish elements from their ceremonies. Yet they manifest a desire to rationalize their beliefs and emphasize that they are practicing a religion of the book in which they use a “Maya Bible,” the *Popol Wuj*; and in their rejection of the hierarchical and shamanic forms of *Costumbre*, they have a form of worship which adopts a native American circular format at outdoor altars and a focus on a sacred fire, but which is more like a non-hierarchical Pentecostal church with charismatic leadership than a *Costumbrista* prototype. These ex-Catholic and ex-Protestant converts, in their anti-syncretism and striving to return to the practices from a sacred text, represent a reformation—a Protestantized/Pentecostalized indigenous religion that now parallels the much older and established Catholicized *Costumbre* tradition.

Unlike the Pentecostals and the Reform Maya, the *Costumbristas* or Orthodox Maya face some daunting obstacles to the perpetuation of their religious expressions in the cult of the patron saint. Although divination and individualized

shamanic practice are widespread and vital elements in religious practice in Momostenango, the traditionalists face major expenses without an adequate base of subscribers to cover the costs of the traditional dances and the *cofradía*. There also is a shortage of volunteers to staff the entry level and leadership positions in these institutions. This is partly because many young people have been forced to leave town in search of work, and partly because the new fiesta observances of expensive imported popular bands and the new and expensive *disfraces* dances (Taube 2006) are absorbing the resources that used to support the *cofradía* festivals and traditional dances.

There are also important thematic differences in the dances that are part of the *Costumbrista* tradition that may explain their lowered competitiveness in the current pluralized market for indigenous religiosity. The most popular dances in 2005–2008 were *disfraces*, in which paired dancers in Hollywood-quality elaborate costumes with fiberglass masks embody images from national and international media pop culture. The new dance form lacks the ideological salience of the traditional dances with their stories about, and ideological glosses on, ethnic relations, castes, inheritance, and cosmogonies of celestial/terrestrial warfare. It also fails to link community structure to origin tales and to the local mountains and springs; that is, it reflects the world view and values of a new generation that validates status via consumption, is comfortable with open competition, and is familiar with pop culture and its transnational iconic imagery. To the extent that the reform indigenous tradition plays more effectively to the psychological needs and world view of a new generation, and as it provides the possibility for leadership roles to women, it seems likely to grow, and do so at the expense of the orthodox hierarchical, patriarchal, and gerontocratic tradition of *Costumbre*.

Having experimented successfully with a transculturized fraternity as the strategy to overcome Catholic Action opposition in the 1980s and early 1990s, the *Costumbristas* are now struggling to support the traditional vigil and all the offerings for Santiago within a community that is unwilling to donate money. The *alcalde* then, as a religious entrepreneur in constructing a syncretized and traditional solution, is developing a shrine for San Simon, to underwrite the costs of the festival for Santiago. This is a return to the kind of local institution that organized and supported the festivals, visits, and vigils for the saints and images of Jesus prior to the centralization of the images in the church, and prior to the system of mandated sponsorships that defined the Mesoamerican *cofradías* in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Chance and Taylor 1985), albeit in the context of a far less organized local community structure, and one lacking in the collectively owned and managed estates that typified the *chinamit* system in the colonial period.

In a development that may portend the next step in the evolution of local indigenous religion, Don Eligio has vowed to sponsor the festival of Santiago for nine years in what used to be the fraternity chapel. He is quite sincere about his new faith in the patron saint, but his wife, who was raised as a *Costumbrista*, is worried that the expenses of this sponsorship will break the family, recognizing that once promised it must be completed or Santiago will punish the family by killing one of its children.

Whether this marks an opening move in the campaign by a Reform religion's spiritual guide to take control, for his faction, of the most important *cofradía*, or is the start of a new era of co-operation and perhaps of the sharing of lore and eventual syncretism in practice between the traditionalists and the new reform Maya religionists is not clear. In any case, it is through the complicated negotiation of new and unknown terrain that highland Maya people are simultaneously constructing and reconstituting indigenous cultures and the identities these cultures make possible.

NOTES

1. The authors gratefully acknowledge the support of The Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc. during the 2007 field season which made this project possible.
2. Sherman (1997) used this term to distinguish the syncretized Maya religion from the anti-pagan reform Catholicism introduced by the Catholic Action movement of the mid-twentieth century.

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