

**Recontextualization as a Mechanism for Acculturation: Protestant and Native Interactions
in Chan Kom and Amatlán**

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When the values and beliefs of an endemic culture come into contact with foreign influences, it is common for conflict to arise. This has been the case in many societies throughout history as native cultures have suffered drastic transformations after they interact with western civilization. The change this contact produces is often defined as acculturation and is the starting point for this paper, which seeks to explore the dynamics of autochthonous religious beliefs from two Mexico native communities as they face new influences when approached by evangelical missionaries from the United States. I look at the two case studies Chan Kom and Amatlán in Mexico which, at two different times, face the influence of evangelical missionaries who seek to change their system of beliefs. These indigenous communities are forced to enter into a cultural dialogue between their own syncretic identity and that of the missionaries. With this comparison in mind, I propose an explanation of the changes in religious practices in these indigenous communities through the redefinition of the concept of acculturation into a complex process of interacting mechanisms. Such endeavor allows for the better understanding of the dynamics of cultural change that seem to come into action in contact situations.

Acculturation Redefined: Recontextualization

When it comes to dealing with the idea of acculturation and changes within native cultures, anthropologists have traditionally strived to reach generalizations about distinct practices that arise after two societies come into contact. They have done this by examining the historical context and different levels of the community's social make up in order to infer

patterns of behavior that may be rationally catalogued. Under this rationale, the idea of acculturation seems to convey a generalized meaning which addresses every change that occurs after such an interaction. This is explained by Fernando Ortiz in his *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar*, where he mentions that the term acculturation implies the unidirectional process of change from one culture to another. In a reaction against this reductionist view, the Cuban anthropologist proposes a re-definition of the concept into the neologism transculturation which implies a bilateral transformation in both cultures (93). With this idea I begin my discussion of Chan Kom and Amatlán by re-stating the redefinition of the concepts of acculturation or transculturation, as Ortiz defines them, into a process of interacting mechanism that become active when differing cultures come into contact with one another. With this approach, it becomes possible to reveal in a more efficient manner the way in which cultures and societies work in a world that is continuously becoming more interactive. The two case studies under scrutiny exemplify one such mechanism which may be called recontextualization, that is, the redefinition of conceptual symbols or ideas when two opposing systems of beliefs come into contact. This is triggered when two cultures come into contact and may arise as a product of the dialogue between two or more differing perspectives. Another quality of this device is that it can be observed in action across space and time as it can act across generations and throughout the different levels of a society. This new conceptualization of acculturation, in addition to the mechanism already described, will be tested by looking at the first Franciscan mission in colonial Mexico and the new context in which modern day indigenous communities are ministered to by waves of protestant missionaries. With this in mind, I shall discuss the concepts of acculturation and recontextualization in the context of the reactions the religious beliefs and practices of

Amatlán and Chan Kom show when they come into contact with this new wave of Christianization.

XVI Century Franciscan missions in Mexico

In a historical context, the year 1521 marks both the fall of Tenochtitlan and the beginning of the slow but constant rise of Catholicism in the new world. This trend would ultimately create a spectrum of blends of beliefs coexisting with mainstream Catholicism and undergoing transformation processes which can still be found in modern day Mexico. Such processes include the assimilation through force, and different degrees of alienation and brutality as shown by the military forces lead by Cortez and other generals, in addition to the use of reason as shown by the Franciscan friars such as Toribio Motolinia, Jerónimo de Mendieta, and Bernardino de Sahagún who had extensive contact with the natives (Morales, “The native encounter” 2). Such approaches produce in turn a variability of interactions which may suggest a similar number of approximations to the path of evangelization of the colonies. Nevertheless, the ideas of reason and violence can be generalized in this historical struggle as major paths that come to co-exist in a volatile time. The first perspective of the warring mentality is embodied by the persona which the Spanish *conquistadores* brought to the new world as they were the product of a seven century long struggle for the re-conquest of their homeland from Islam and the idea of the knight and chivalry that arose from such conflict. The Iberian Peninsula had been under Islamic rule since the year 711, and it would remain so until the year 1492 when the city of Granada was reclaimed (Pharies 42, 142). This mentality or identity is strongly hinted within scholarly works as it was one of the main weapons used in the process of the conquest of the new world by the Spaniards and is especially the case for the conquest of Mexico. There the Spaniards found much resistance to their advances to the extent that “the subjugation of Yucatán,

which had neither gold mines nor a fertile soil, cost the Spaniards more lives than the conquest of the Aztecs and the conquest of the Incas combined” (Parkes 71). Such a resistance could have fueled the drive of the natives to oppose any future attempts to conversion or religious assimilation and may explain the state of their *costumbres*. In fact, many tribes located both outside and inside of the same peninsula in Mexico remain true to their native traditions far into the 20th century as it is observed in the examples of Chan Kom and Amatlán. A second point to discuss is that of the co-existence of reason with violent approaches in the area. This is noteworthy because of the rise of missionary work and preaching in the new world became major stakeholders in the inner workings of the evangelization process as opposed to violent approaches (Abbot 48-52).

The arrival of Franciscan missions to the new world set in motion a new perspective that shook the native system of beliefs and may have set the foreground for the native-protestant interaction in Chan Kom and Amatlán. The main aim of the XVI century approach was that of a peaceful conquest of the souls and minds of the indigenous community. Francisco Morales points out that this idea was championed by religious orders such as the Franciscan, and that it is to them that we owe the first accounts of the life and traditions of the people from the Yucatan peninsula, including their language (148-50). Though a historical account of the missionaries work in the Americas may be pertinent for this discussion, it is necessary to focus on establishing the context in which the recontextualization process is initiated in colonial México. This event takes place with the strategies the Franciscan missionaries took in their ministry to the Nahuas. These men were the first to record and write translations of the Gospel into the vernacular tongue. They additionally adopted the language and local cultural practices such as theater to incorporate Christian religious system and values. With this strategy they follow a different

approach to that of the conquistadores in XVI century Mexico, and the evangelical missionaries in Chan Kom and Amatlán. Moreover, their choice marks a critical instance for both cultures and the present discussion of the mechanism of recontextualization in acculturation. The religious beliefs of the Mayan world come into contact with those of Catholicism in such a way that the traditional practices converse with the new practices and adapt to the interaction by learning to coexist with the foreign system, reject it, or disappear completely. It is in this topic that the Franciscan interaction becomes essential for these case studies as it provides a context with which it's possible to interpret the events that come to pass when missions come into contact with a native culture and trigger this mechanism of acculturation. With this in mind, it is worth exploring some insights to the dilemmas of the contact between the two cultures and the ultimate task of this second approach.

1524 is a significant year for Native-European interactions as a group of twelve Franciscan friars arrived to New Spain to lead the missionary efforts (Pardo 2). Their ultimate goal was to convert the souls of the natives as they were to be the new subjects of the Spanish empire and the Christian God. Nonetheless, they faced the difficulty of having little or no understanding from both parties of the practices both the friars and the natives had. This event is addressed by Francisco Morales as he points out the drastic differences between the two groups beginning by saying:

On one side was the Christian religion in its medieval manifestation, enriched by Franciscan mystical practice. The first twelve Franciscans were exceptional representatives of that religious current. They formed part of a spiritually radical group that since the early fifteenth century was trying to return to the original ideals of the Franciscan order based on the strict observance of St. Francis' Rule

and Testament. Their struggle for a simple way of living their evangelical values, combined with a missionary idealism was in tune with some of the old thirteenth century spiritual movements close to the millennialism of Joachim di Fiori.

Without reaching their extremism, the first Franciscans of Mexico were anxious to see an almost immediate conversion of the natives to Christianity. (“The native encounter” 139)

He also points out that:

On the other side was the complex and, to the western Christian mind, incomprehensible Nahua religion. While not attempting to simplify its complexity, some fundamental elements are worth noticing in order to see which ones could offer a link to Christianity and which ones were totally unacceptable to it. (40)

From this interaction it becomes evident that a dialogue was necessary in order for any evangelization advances to occur. In other words, it became necessary for both the natives and the Franciscans to come to an understanding of each other but especially for the Franciscans as they faced a series of challenges that included the isolation of any outpost of Christianity and the independence of any central role the holy seed, or the Spanish crown may hold over them – the Spanish monarchy had the authority of evangelizing and naming the clergy in the new world (Parkes 105).

Another important difficulty of this first contact was the use of the language as the natives were reluctant to learn Spanish due to many circumstances, such as the contact with the violent conquest (Parkes 71). Nonetheless, the effect this interaction had on the natives escalated through time as the Franciscans took upon themselves the task of learning the language,

translating the gospel, and sharing in the culture they strived to convert into Christianity. Don Paul Abbot goes into further detail to describe the rhetorical approach followed by these friars as they applied classical rhetoric elements, the art of understanding and overall reason in preaching to the natives in an attempt to bring them closer to the Christian faith without the use of the violence (63-4). This approach came to a surprising halt as the final goal of the friars became too unrealistic to achieve. Morales hints that a possible explanation may be that the use of reason, education, and a search for the instatement of an Indian Church with their own practices and rites clashed with the interest of mainstream Catholicism, which was engaged in a war for souls in the old continent against the protestant reformation (“The Native Encounter” 149). It could also be argued that the clash of beliefs in Europe, in addition to the recontextualization that was occurring in the new world could have hindered any change in the catholic rite that may have occurred in the new world. Nonetheless, this interaction only reflects the official acceptance of religious practices that were occurring in the native communities, and it does not include the possibility of the appearance of the ritual in a folk manner and the possible devolution of the religious practice into a form of folk Catholicism.

This leads me to a description of the ultimate goal the Franciscan missionaries shared in their interaction. The job Franciscans took upon when they came to Mexico in 1524 was that of evangelizing the new found people. However, this task quickly became that of a recontextualization of the Catholic Church and their beliefs by molding the doctrine into terms that the natives could come to accept. This they did as they integrated the rhetorical practices of the time, into the dialogue which came to exist once they learned the language. These interactions acted in both their oral and artistic tradition of the two cultures as they sought the complete inclusion of these native people into Christianity and according to Morales has been

denominated “The Nahuatlization of Christianity” (“The native encounter” 145). This ambitious project was ultimately thwarted due to a lack of consistency in the approaches being followed throughout the new world – Despite Morales’ claim that “the friars were very much determined to establish their disengagement from the ‘Conquistadores’ and their ambitions” (“The Native Encounter” 155) – not to mention that these, and the other orders of friars and nuns were scattered across the country (Parkes 105). On the other hand, the biggest motive for the failure of this endeavor seems to lie in a particular shift of interest which occurs in the late XVII century and is marked by a change noted by Morales in which the printing documents cease to be evangelization materials of the likes of Catechisms and prayer books, and instead they begin to favor sermons (“Ecclesiastical” 360). Though this would be an interesting research topic that could be further explored, my interest in this paper does not rest in the implications of this change. I merely seek to point out that the final goal of these original missionaries was the conversion of the indigenous people into a new faith while assimilating the analogous practices, and that they were unsuccessful in this task as the Roman Catholic Church does not sanction the values and belief of this form of Catholicism.

Folk Catholicism and Beliefs in Mexican Native Communities

After presenting this description of the first mission it becomes pertinent to mention some of the qualities of the *costumbres* found in Chan Kom, Amatlán, and throughout the native world in Mexico as they are a product of the initial contact between the natives and the Spaniards and are subject to attacks by new waves of protestant missions. These trends show two distinct practices with overlapping natures. One practice is Catholic ritual, which has its roots in the ceremonies instated by the first Catholic missionaries and subsequent interactions natives had with the institution of the Church. The second interacting practice has pre-Hispanic roots, and

these are based on the native beliefs with different Catholic undertones (Redfield and Villa Rojas 107-26; Sandstrom 318-22). These differences can be appreciated across the native world as the overlap of the two rituals may differ depending on a variety of factors such as economic circumstances of the village or the proximity of Catholic institutions as it is observed by Redfield and Villa Rojas in their case study (1-8). A detailed description of this religious overlap can be found in “figure 12” of *Chan Kom: A Mayan Village*. In this example the Maya prayer and the Catholic Novena interact as they both use the same image, or *santo*, to fuel the spiritual need of the villagers (Redfield and Villa Rojas 125). Though these are different rituals in which the two distinct practices may have deeper interactions, this example serves to demonstrate the manner in which the metaphysical realm is perceived in Chan Kom. It additionally illustrates a way in which the Mayan community recontextualizes different images to fit their needs. This leads me to emphasize two aspects of the *costumbres* in both Chan Kom and Amatlán. These are the image of the *santo*, which is a constant in many of the prayers and rituals found throughout the native world, and the *fiesta* of the patron saint of the village, which is a major component of the Indigenous village life as Redfield puts it in his book *Tepoztlan: A village in México* (64-5).

Redfield and Villa Rojas dedicate a significant portion of their original work at Chan Kom to describe the importance of the *santo* in the village. They begin by establishing the differences between the *santos* the community venerates and explaining their importance in relation to the different social and religious practices in the pueblo. With this, they go as far as clarifying a distinction between the intangible idea of the Gods, which is a constant in the supernatural world found both in Chan Kom and the rest of the native world, and the heirlooms which some individuals may possess which will be the object used for the prayer (107). The *santo* is thus explained as an image that becomes personified to the degree that the patronage of

the particular Saint becomes entangled with the position of the object itself. This is the case for statues, images, crosses, among other objects which are subject to different degrees of veneration throughout the native world. Another example that is worth mentioning that represents this connection between the image and the *santo* is the status which the image of Child Jesus and the Cross have in the native community of Chan Kom as Redfield and Villa Rojas observe in their study. In this case, these effigies are considered a *santo* as they are subject to the same rituals other saints experience in the village despite being treated in a different manner by mainstream Catholicism. Nonetheless, the description presented in this particular case study suggests that the image of the Cross may be more constant than that of other saints through the native world as it is the case in Chan Kom where the Holy Cross is venerated by everyone in the village and it can be found in nearby communities. Moreover, it is given a higher status as its veneration may occur even if there is no physical representation of the object in the ceremony (108-111). With this in mind, it is possible to point out the different types of veneration that may be performed for a *santo* in the community as a prayer may be offered for the object or a more complex ritual with pre-Hispanic undertones. I will dedicate the rest of the section to describe the importance of this distinction as the protestant mission attacks these practices and they seek to put an end to them.

This agenda puts protestant missionaries in conflict with their native subjects as the contact use of the *santo* as the object of veneration and most important source or catalyst for the rituals is a constant in the native world. Despite of the multiple saints, Redfield and Villa Rojas, Lewis, Reina and Schwartz, among other anthropologists who have researched native communities in Mexico and Central America agree that no other ritual is more important for these different communities than that of the *fiesta patronal* (Redfield and Villa Rojas 148-151; Lewis 13; Reina and Schwarts 164). This is because they are often the foundation for the social

interaction within the community and catalyze internal conflicts as observed in Chan Kom and Amatlán. Keeping this in mind, it is important to consider that every village in Mexico has a patron saint. Hence, there are multiple celebrations that may be celebrated throughout the native world which may differ at some levels from one another and will include a mixture of pre-Hispanic elements such as dances, food, or games. This is in addition to the Catholic prayer which, in most cases, is a Novena for the *santo*. Redfield and Villa Rojas additionally point out in their analysis of Chan Kom's fiesta the crucial role the dance "*Jarana*" takes in the fiesta. They explain that "the *jarana*" is the major point of interaction in the context of socialization within the village and go as far as saying that most men in the village will meet their wives in this performance (153-158). In a subsequent study by Redfield that takes place in Chan Kom he mentions that the *jarana* in the *fiesta patronal* is used to define the identity of the village when it goes through a schism (*A Village* 96). This event will be further described later in this paper as this is the ultimate result of the first contact the villagers of Chan Kom have with evangelical missionaries.

The last important ritual and belief that must be addressed in the context of Catholic practices by the natives is that of Baptism. This is an important rite of passage that takes place in most communities and may differ in practice. Though most indigenous communities in Mexico may consider themselves Roman Catholic in principle, their practices often show elements that differ greatly from those of mainstream Catholicism. Morales explains this trend by pointing out that Franciscans were open to the creation of a Nahua Catholic rite that would be able to coexist with that of Rome ("The native encounter" 148). Hence, it becomes evident that differences in practice, and the use of images and their dynamic dialogue are not a new development in the practices found in the New World. On the other hand, there seems to be a correlation between

these differences with the ability of priests to visit the town as Redfield observes in his second visit to Chan Kom where people will often travel to a nearby town for marriages and baptisms (95). This is also inferred by Sandstrom in his visit in Amatlán (317). In both cases priests were able to visit the town sporadically, and, due to that, many of the rituals and practices were led by lay people. This arrangement gives the community certain independence in their religious practices. For instance, the use of paper figurines in prayer, which are prohibited by the Catholic Church in Amatlán, were observed when the priest was absent and were hidden during his visit (Sandstrom 317). Despite this freedom or resistance to abandoning their pre-Hispanic beliefs, traditional Roman Catholic ceremonies, such as Baptisms, are of great importance as described by Redfield and Sandstrom at the time prior to the first contact with protestant missionaries. In the two case studies, these rituals were to be performed by the priest alone and they reflect the importance of the rite as a sacrament performed by the institution of the church and also as a source for the people's identity. Baptisms were to be performed during infancy in most cases or as soon as a priest was available, and may also include reciting a novena by the family members as it was observed in Chan Kom (Redfield and Villa Rojas 184-88). With this in mind, the change that occurs in its practice after the contact may also serve to describe the mechanism of recontextualization which seems to be at work in the two studies.

Chan Kom: Ethnography and First Protestant Interaction

Chan Kom is an agricultural village located about 20 km south of Chichen Itza and their history may be traced back to the pre-Hispanic through archaeological evidence. Redfield and Villa Rojas explain that the current settlement in this area has a recent history as in 1880 three agriculturalists laid the foundation for the first inhabitants to migrate from the nearby village of Ebtun. They additionally describe the mode of life of Chan Kom as a peasant village as it shares

the same characteristics as other Yucatan peninsula settlements (6). They state that “These villages are small communities of illiterate agriculturalist, carrying on a homogenous culture transmitted by oral tradition” (1). Such a similarity allows for the extrapolation of possible generalizations and findings to other peasant villages in the area and in the country of México in general. A further look at “Figures 2 and 3” in *Chan Kom: A Mayan Village* provide more information about the location of the town in relation to other communities with which they interact (5-7). This book also covers geographical issues that could become pertinent in a further discussion on the subject matter.

Chan Kom is a relatively young settlement as it was founded in its current format by three agriculturalist and their families in 1880 and it quickly developed to become a *Rancheria* with over one hundred inhabitants in 1919 (Redfield and Villa Rojas 24). This quick transformation continued as the rural community acquired the status of a *pueblo* in 1923, with a drastic transition which saw the town strive for progress and the characteristics of a Spanish town (26-8). It is noteworthy that Redfield and Villa Rojas acquire a good portion of this information from their informants and stress the importance of oral tradition in the community of Chan Kom. They state that “as Life in Chan Kom is lived without books, continuity with the past is made by oral tradition alone and history extends backwards only to the time of the fathers of the older men now living” (11). This aspect becomes even more interesting when the demographics of the area are taken into account. *Chan Kom: A Maya Village* describes the population of the village as young as of the year 1930. The census taken in that year showed that 83 percent of the people living in the village were less than thirty years old. This is not a surprise as the village was relatively new at the time of Redfield and Villa Rojas’s visit, and it had undergone an increase on its population because of immigration (27).

Two other important aspect of the community in the village are those of race and the language in use as they relate to the issue of the native identity which is a topic of importance in discussion section of this paper. According to the Redfield and Villa Rojas's information, Chan Kom is a community in which, with only one exception, all individuals bear Mayan names and seem to be Indian. In other words, no mixing seems to have occurred within the society. Nonetheless, the two anthropologists acknowledge the possibility of mix races in the community as the people in the area have been in contact with European decedents since the conquest (15). This demographic trend may be of importance as it can be related to the identity of the community. Most individuals in Chan Kom consider themselves Indians, and the Maya is the general language of communication during the time of Redfield and Villa Rojas' study. Moreover, the use of Spanish seems to become a source for upward mobility in this progressive town as it is regarded by the community as the language of prestige and the way to communicate effectively with the outside world which is considered progressive. This choice is described in more detail by Redfield in *A Village that Chose Progress: Chan Kom Revisited*, where he revisits his original case study and describes the impact the evangelical missions have in the town since his last visit (15-18). This last description gives me the starting point to the description of the mechanism of recontextualization as observed in Chan Kom.

The origins of Chan Kom can be traced back to three individuals that settled in the area in 1880. These individuals brought their families with them and began the struggle for power within the community. According to Redfield, the three most prestigious families in the village of Chan Kom are the Cemes, the Pats, and the Tamays. Their interactions before and after the protestant mission comes into the village bring about major events in the community (*A Village* 3). Prior to the missions, this relationship centered in a battle for prestige which was both a result

of the possession or not of the image a *santo*, and the number of individuals who were able to speak Spanish. Under these conditions one family, the Cemes, set themselves apart as the leaders of the pueblo. They were the owners of the image of the patron saint and possessed a good number of individuals that were able to speak the official tongue of Mexico (93). At the same time, the Pats had continuously strived to gain a greater stake hold in the inner workings of the village both by allying themselves with other families and starting the veneration of a new *santo* the Child God (93). This struggle for power would ultimately set the stage for events Redfield calls the schism and is an example of the mechanism of recontextualization in scrutiny.

Robert Redfield recounts that before the arrival of the Protestants in 1931, every person in the village shared the same religious beliefs or *costumbres*. He also explains that, the word Catholicism did not have a special connotation and that prior to the arrival of protestant missionaries all religious practices performed by the villagers, including the Maya rites, were considered to be part of Catholicism (88). This issue is of special interest in the analysis of the process of acculturation as it describes an account of a first-contact interaction between foreign and native cultures and the successive effects on each culture. With this in mind, it is convenient to summarize Chan Kom's first contact with the protestant missionaries and the events that followed and preceded it as an interesting dynamic came to exist within the community.

Redfield's sources describe that, prior to the time of the Protestants arrival, an event occurred which had caused the community to lose faith in their leaders. A new school building fell and killed one villager. At this disheartening moment, two evangelists came to bring, as Redfield puts it, "The true teaching of the Lord" (*A Village* 90). This introduction was observed favorably by the people of the village as these evangelists represented progress and brought with them the promise of success. The second message these missionaries brought into Chan Kom,

was the idea of a connection between Protestantism and progress, in addition to the exemplification of the United States both as the embodiment of this achievement and their place of origin. This connection is of uttermost importance as the missionaries said that Americans were Protestant too (90). The following two years feature the active return of these missionaries as they try to convert new souls by using the tools of preaching in the local tongue and a new holy instrument in town, the Bible. This interaction is further enforced by the support they receive from the local government which enabled them to create a formal congregation in 1932. This is because the *comisario*, Don Eus Ceme, took upon the task of arranging the meetings for the convenience of the missionaries and hence approved the new movement. This official sanction catalyzed the drastic shift which Redfield describes as follows:

The little thatched church was closed; no services took place there. The effigy of San Diego, the village patron, was removed to the house of the Tamay family, one of the few that would have nothing to do with the new religion; and the day of the saint came and went without any public celebration. Most of the people of Chan Kom were talking of the new cult, attending its meetings, and studying its tenets through the words of the missionaries and discussion among themselves. It was said in the neighboring settlements that Chan Kom had turned *Evangelista*. (91-92)

An initial observation of this change in the society would reveal an apparent rejection of the old cultural practices that were autochthonous to Chan Kom. The veneration of the *santo* and the *fiesta patronal* are the first elements discontinued and can be explained by scrutinizing the message these missionaries were bringing into the village as they called for a complete cessation of any activity that pertained to the usage of any element regarded as Pagan by these newcomers.

This was the case of any image, prayer, or *fiesta* related to the *santos*. This order was followed by most of the inhabitants of Chan Kom as Redfield's prior statement infers. However, the choice has deeper roots that do not surface when solely observing this change. Redfield seeks to explain the interaction by referring to the intricate relationship that existed between the three main families as one of the driving factors of the change that occurs in the village. This relationship is also explored in *The two Milpas of Chan Kom: Scenarios of a Maya Village Life* in which Alicia Re-Cruz suggests that the repercussions of such interaction become inscribed in the recorded history of the village (95-99). Nonetheless, my interest in the dynamic of the change differs from that of Re Cruz and Redfield's as I seek to interpret the mechanism that comes into action in the protestant-native religious interaction. This interest centers round the tug of war that occurs in the years that follow the first contact in which the inhabitants of Chan Kom dialogue directly and indirectly with the new concepts brought by the outsiders. Initially, Redfield documents a relatively slow return to the previous religious practices by the majority of the town which coincide with both a radicalization of the evangelic movement. They did not tolerate any native elements in any aspect of the village's life, such as the *jarana*, the much important dance that took place in the patron saint's festival as it was deemed related to the veneration of the *santo* (*A Village* 96). In this matter, Redfield notes that changes in the membership of the new cult began as early as 1934 with most of the Ceme family withdrawing from the Protestant rite and by the year 1948 most of the divisive effects that were brought by the missionary's work had been resolved but were still a part of Chan Kom's reality (112). He also mentions:

If the one Pat family that still remain in Chan Kom should leave the village, the new religion would, I think, come to an end there and would not revive without a new missionary effort from outside. Yet the effects of the past missionary effort

upon the community are in large sense permanent; the change is really irreversible. In the wider political world in which the leaders of the village now conduct its affairs – in the scores of settlements making up this and neighboring *municipios* – Protestants are established, and the religious difference is a continuing factor in the political process. (112)

Robert Redfield further expresses that this particular interaction has indeed defined clear divisions in the identities of the inhabitants of Chan Kom and their visitors as they have come to identify themselves as Catholics or Protestants, which emphasizes the reality of his previous statement.

Amatlán: Ethnography and First Protestant Interaction.

Amatlán is located in the northern part of the state of Veracruz. It belongs to the *municipio* of Ixhuatlán de Madero and is run by a local political leader called the *Presidente*, who is elected popularly for 3-year terms (Sandstrom 59). Alan Sandstrom explains in his book *Corn is our Blood: Culture and Ethnic Identity in a Contemporary Aztec Indian Village* that this region includes different geographical features such as mountains, foothills, and the Gulf of Mexico (55-6). These come together to produce distinct climate conditions that will vary depending on the altitude of the area in which one may be. He also states that rainfall will vary from year to year in this area, which indicates variability in the weather conditions that affects the activities of a village that depends on agricultural and horticultural practices to sustain itself. This is a remote and inaccessible region as most roads in the area become impassable under heavy rain and trips to most places in the area may involve a long walk or a trip by horse (59).

The history and population of the village of Amatlán is of particular interest as it resembles to that of Chan Kom. First and foremost, the pre-Hispanic component of their origin is

somewhat unknown as the Spaniard did not have much contact with the inhabitants of that region and the few chronicles that exist originate from contact between Aztec observers who only reported differences in the rituals the natives of that area practiced (80). The area also features ruins which are believed to have been occupied by unknown ancients that disappeared. The villagers of Chan Kom have a similar view about the builders of their own ruins and those of Chichen Itzá (Redfield, *A Village* 18-22). That being said, the settlement of the area where the village is currently located seems to have occurred much earlier than that of the Maya village as it seems to date back to the *encomiendas*, a land granting policy that the Spaniards instated with the intention of distributing the native's land and additionally assimilating them into Christianity (Sandstrom 84). Nonetheless, the current format in which Sandstrom finds the village on his original visit can be dated to "August 5, 1923" (88). He explains that the people of Amatlán had requested land for cultivation from the agrarian reform commission so that they might meet the necessities of life. Nine years later a second petition was presented, which included a census that reported 178 inhabitants in the village. The commission considered forty four of them to qualify for land and in 1934 the government allocated 352 hectares to the community, which came to be called *Ejido de Amatlán* (88-89). Two last demographic facts to consider are the population growth, which occurred following the allocation of land as the population grew from 179 individuals in 1932 to 600 people in 1972, and their race, as most inhabitants were for the most part Aztec Indians (89). These facts are important as they are subject to the influence of the protestant missionaries that come into the town.

Since the bulk of the population in Amatlán is Indian in principle, the people of Amatlán have a similar historical background, language, and cultural practices as those observed in Chan Kom. This background can be traced back to the contact that occurred between the Spaniards and

the Nahuas during the conquest. Despite the numbers of inhabitants in this region, Indians have faced a history of violence and discrimination in the area. This has taken a toll on their cultures and on the vision they have on their own existence. Nonetheless, the people in Amatlán continue to use the ancestral language, and they consider themselves to be natives regardless of the consequences (63-72). This is the concept the villagers of Amatlán have of themselves at the time Sandstrom meets them for the first time and sets up the foreground for the dialogue they will establish with the Protestant visitors once the initial contact occurs (49). Prior to this event, Sandstrom had spent several years interacting with the people at Amatlán. This contact originally occurred as a part of his dissertation research in the 70s, but ultimately it became a major part of his work which continued far into the next decade. In his book, he describes his interaction with the village over time and the subsequent difficulties. For instance, he explains that he had to be allowed entrance into the town after a town meeting when he first made contact with the community (22). Later on he explains that the elders ask him to record the traditions as they feared their eventual disappearance (359). His book additionally features in-depth descriptions of ritual practices and more importantly, the issues of identity and their relation to their native ritual performance. Hence, Sandstrom's firsthand experience, in addition to the account he gives of the process he undergoes to gain the trust and invitation of the villagers to participate in the rituals, are of uttermost importance to the evaluation of any mechanism that may come into action when the village of Amatlán is visited and impacted by the new religious movement brought by Protestant missionaries.

According to Alan Sandstrom, the history of Catholicism in the area of Amatlán can be traced to missionary work done by Franciscans before 1530. However, their mission had limited success as the interaction with the Indians in this area was difficult due to the harsh terrain that

surrounded them and because of internal conflicts that involved the different religious orders that sought their conversion (85). Nonetheless, history shows that these missions had a long lasting influence on the natives and were accompanied by a chain of violence geared towards the non-Europeans. Thus, they were forced to conform to the new religion while suppressing some of the elements of their native beliefs. This facet of Amatlán is best represented by the following statement from Sandstrom:

Sixteenth-century Spanish Catholicism was particularly intolerant of the traditional religion were killed by the Spaniards. Interestingly, shortly after the Conquest the Spaniards issued a decree specifying jailing, whipping, and public shearing for baptized Indians caught offering paper at religious sacrifices (Lenz 1984: 359). With this level of persecution and given the fact that missionaries moved into the southern Huesca in the 1520s, it is no wonder that the paper cult religion continues to be practiced with discretion. Active suppression has now ceased, but an occasional itinerant priest will rant at villagers for continuing what he considers to be their pagan belief. (231)

Hence, there are historical reasons why the natives at Amatlán, and from other regions of Mexico, conceal some of their rituals despite of a Roman Catholic identity. Sandstorm goes a step further in his description of this suppression of the *costumbres* by stating that the rituals are a means for the individuals to demonstrate the fullness of their Indian identity. Thus, in their practice they separate themselves from any outsider such as the *Mestizos* (9). With this idea in mind, the use of religious practices of the like of the paper sacrifices in Amatlán may then be an example of the mechanisms of recontextualization at work. It may also be possible to generalize this trend as such syncretic performances are not limited to the two case studies in scrutiny. For

instance, Ruben Reina and Norman Schwartz observe the use of skulls for prayers in Guatemala by which is a not a Roman Catholic Sanctioned practice (164). With this in mind, it is convenient to summarize the first contact Amatlán has with Protestant missionaries.

The first contact between the community of Amatlán and the missionaries occurred in 1983 and is described by Sandstrom as it was told to him by his informants (351). Three North Americans and a Mexican came into the village seeking the permission to address the community in a village meeting. Once in the village, the Mexican missionary introduced the three North Americans in their tongue and introduced a new religion called "*agua viva*" (351-352). He also said that the Indian religion was devil worship and that the new faith brought by the Americans would bring salvation. He then handed pamphlets written in the native tongue, and, after addressing the crowd for a while, said that those that wished to become Protestants were to abandon Catholicism and their native traditions, in addition to alcohol and tobacco. In doing so, they were to destroy all their images and home altars and buy a Bible written in the Nahuatl language which they were selling (352). In other words, they came to Amatlán to destroy the old religion and to instate a new faith with the promise of salvation. They went as far as stating that the followers of the new religion were not to have their children attend to any school activity other than class and that they were to renounce all medical aid claiming that those with true faith in the new religion would never fall ill (352). This address came as a shock to the community as the health assistance formed part of the benefits that came from belonging to the Indian Race. Another action that took the natives by surprise was the projection of the movie which featured actors that spoke both the native tongue portraying natives burning in hell with a devilish figure laughing, and at the same time, scenes where Jesus instructed the Indians about

the new faith (352). This event had a big impact on the people as most of them had never experienced a movie. Sandstrom states:

The villagers had little experience with movies, although they were familiar with still photographs. Among their possessions, many people treasured black-and-white pictures of family members, taken by me on previous visits or by itinerant photographers who visit Indian markets. They thus interpreted the movies as being similar to a photo portrait, perhaps posed, but basically a true representation of reality, in much the same way that we might view a newsreel. They were not fully aware that movies are often artificial constructs with sets, costume designers, and actors playing roles and reading scripts. (Sandstrom 352)

He further explains in his book that at the end of the presentation, the missionaries said that virtually all North Americans were Protestant and that this condition had provided the United States with the divine blessing of their wealth. They also attributed all the misery in the world and the hardships the Indians experienced in the village to the *costumbre* religion as it was from the devil. Lastly, they threatened them by saying that if did not convert to the true faith Communists would come to murder everyone in the village with the exception of the believers (353).

Though this missionary interaction is similar to that of Chan Kom there is no evidence that suggests that the two movements were sponsored by the same evangelical denomination. Sandstrom finds it difficult to trace the origin of the missionaries to one church in the United States and is only able to give a rough area of precedence for these individuals. He explains that the missionaries came from Texas and Louisiana and that their pamphlets did not provide any home-church information (Sandstrom 353). Redfield has a similar problem in his analysis of the

protestant interaction as he only mentions that they are American (*A Village* 90). Nonetheless, the two evangelical missions observed in the case studies share similar perspective to many fundamentalist movements that come into Central America to evangelize this type of villages. Thus, they provide for a good point of comparison to develop my discussion of the mechanism of recontextualization in acculturation as observed in the native religions.

Chan Kom and Amatlán: Recontextualization in action

The interaction between evangelical missionaries and the communities of Chan Kom and Amatlán seem to activate mechanisms of social change that only surface when two distinct cultures come into action. In the case of the two villages, this is observed in an apparent dialogue that takes place between the old practices and the new protestant system of belief. This interaction is enhanced with the documented reactions performed by the community in both case studies. Chan Kom goes through a great schism, as narrated by Redfield and Re Cruz, where every single individual of the community with the exception of a few families convert to the new faith. This initial conversion proves to be only a first stage in the dynamic dialogue that occurs through the next sixteen years as a tug of war comes to exist between the two factions. This is an attempt, unconscious or not, to reach a balance between the different cultures and systems at work. The same mechanism seems to be in action in the case study of Amatlán where the individuals that seek conversion do so with the understanding that the new system of belief clashes in an incompatible manner with the old *costumbres*. They are thus forced to come into terms with a new set of rules of conduct and cultural practices that will ultimately clash with those from the village. With this in mind, it becomes possible to consider the intrinsic variability in this type of social interaction and the continuity of the mechanism of recontextualization in order to fully understand the system at work.

In order to understand the implications of Recontextualization as a mechanism of acculturation, it is necessary to consider the nature of both case studies as they feature events that take place in both towns over long periods of time. In each case, time has allowed the mechanisms to progress and to produce measurable results. Such is the case with Chan Kom's conversion into the protestant faith and the communities' subsequent return to the old *costumbres*. In this example, the dynamic can be observed in the Baptism ritual which, prior to the evangelical missionaries influence, was performed by a priest that would travel from the neighboring town of Valladolid. This practice had to be discontinued during the time of the schism and when it was re-started, it did so with some changes. That is, children that were born during the turmoil of this dynamic and were not baptized would not receive the sacrament until proper instruction could be given (Redfield, *A Village* 127). Despite the changes in performance, the dialogue between the two factions seems to finish after the last Protestants leave town. This is proposed by Redfield as he explains that the missionary-induced changes had been resolved in such a way that only a new missionary effort would be able to incite a protestant revival (*A Village* 112). The case study of Amatlán, on the other hand, presents a different situation for the purposes of the discussion of recontextualization as these changing factions do not present a fully developed pattern of interaction as those observed in Chan Kom. This may be due to the fact that the missionaries are still at work in the region during Sandstrom's study and that the change seems to have only begun in the area. However, it was pointed out that the elders in the community feared the possibility of losing their identity and native rituals because of this interaction and the effects of modernization (Sandstrom 359). With this in mind it may be possible to suggest that the dialogue between cultures becomes visible at an early stage of the contact but the lengthy change that seeks to restore the balance between the interacting pressures

can only be appreciated post fact. Hence, it becomes significant to look at similar interactions as those of Chan Kom and Amatlán to test the variability of this mechanism, and reach a satisfying conclusion.

History tells us that with the first contact with Catholic Missionaries in the XVI century the Indians in Mexico were forced to come into terms with the realities of the conquest when the new religion that was introduced. This reality meant the adoption of a religion which was different from the old *costumbres* and the subsequent dialogue between cultural practices from which the adoption, inclusion or rejection of elements results. Such is the case of the use of paper figurines in Amatlán as these were hidden when the priest visited the town (Sandstrom 317). This example reflects the syncretic nature of the religious practices in their areas as the cultural practices performed differ from those of the Roman Catholic Church. It is worth mentioning that this dialogue seems to be a general trend in our time as is seen in case studies in Guatemala that share a similar historical context with Chan Kom and, to a degree, the same underlying native religion as they are Nahua Indians. These examples vary in the way in which Protestantism deals with the interaction, and they include a new differentiation of Catholicism as this institution has taken the initiative of improving the evangelization practices in villages that do not have acting priests. This was the case in Petén, as was described by Ruben Reina and Norman Schwartz, where new Catholic missions have evolved in a context where the indigenous population has been isolated from mainstream Catholicism and visited by Protestant missions (183). Carolyn Gallaher notes a similar trend in Protestant strategies in Oaxaca by stating that “making these changes makes it easier for indigenous people to convert to Protestantism without rejecting key parts of their culture, and in a few cases even by embracing it” (90). This could mean that rejection of the new religion practice on the basis of cultural incompatibility as it occurred in

Chan Kom may be averted by allowing for the practice of some of the *costumbres*. At the same time, it may be a further proof of the on-going recontextualization process that is also affecting the foreign culture as Ortiz had proposed in his transculturation (94). That is, the Protestant-native interaction may be evolving in such a way that the Protestant mission must come into terms with the resistance of Indians to the prohibition of cultural practices and fatalistic approaches of conversion. Such a trend is observed by Redfield in Chan Kom prior to the schism as a split within the evangelical movement originated in which a faction led by the Cemes sought to maintain some of the social interactions within the town which included attending the *fiestas patronales*, and other social events that were linked to the old native rites (99-102).

With this in mind, it becomes evident that the redefinition of the term acculturation is a possible venture to achieve. The historical record and the examples of Guatemala, Oaxaca and the two case studies show that a mechanism of the system in question seems to become active when two distinct practices are at odds. It also becomes clear that the degree of change of such a system of values or beliefs will vary due to the processes at work when the cultural premises and ideas of two societies interact. This mechanism is best explained as a recontextualization that may act when two societies, such as the native villages, must come into terms with conflicts of symbols, images, or concepts such as the *santos* or the *fiestas patronales* as a result of contact. These original practices cease to be constant as they come into terms with a new existence in which the foundations may be changed, accepted or discarded. This was the case for Chan Kom, as their *costumbres* underwent a transformation that shook the identities of the natives and ultimately alter their path towards modernization, as explained by Redfield (*A Village* 89-93). This seems to be the path that Amatlán follows as they face an obstacle that could ultimately

redefine their identity and could be the general trend as protestant missionary practices modify their approaches of evangelization.

Conclusion

As it can be appreciated by the information discussed thus far, Chan Kom and Amatlán provide a good example of the processes that come into play when differing cultures interact. This mechanism is an integral part of the process of acculturation that is activated in instances in which opposing factions face each other in search of a compromise that ultimately transforms different aspects of the two. This type of interaction is longstanding in the American continent as the conquest brought together European cultures with others that were to be assimilated into the Western world and in turn produced effects that are still unfolding. One of such changes resulted in an on-going dialogue between the Catholicism and the pre-Hispanic world observe in Chan Kom's belief system. With this in mind, the villages of Chan Kom and Amatlán may be regarded as archetypes for native societies in modern day Mexico as they show a continuity of the pre-Hispanic past and the Catholic reality of the original missions in the Americas which comes into contact with the foreign pressures of modernization when Protestant missionaries come into their communities to change the already unstable dynamics of the religious rites and society. That is, the sixteen year long recontextualization that Chan Kom experiences which results in the rise and fall of Protestantism in the village and the beginnings of the dialogue that will continue until a satisfactory solution can be reached in Amatlán.

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