

ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE TOWNSHIP OF SALAMÁ DEPARTMENT OF BAJA VERAPAZ

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Introduction

Here below, thirteen themes are developed that make up the ethnography of the township that constitutes the departmental capital of Southern Verapaz. Salamá is a community anchored in a wide valley, surrounded by large mountain formations, made up of a mestizo and Achi' population in some rural communities, which inhabitants from the east of the country settled in the villages and raised hamlets of the south, following the bed of the Motagua River. The township represents an amalgamation of complex and diverse social, economic elements, and cultural expressions, particularly in the festive and religious sphere.

This universe has remained unknown in the eye of social research, unfortunately, due to the interest of

much research which have focused on Alta Verapaz or Baja Verapaz municipalities with indigenous roots such as Rabinal and Cubulco, so new knowledge is undoubtedly provided at the local and national level. The research was based on the ethnographic method, beginning field work and participant observation from September 2014 to May 2015, supporting the above in bibliography from the social sciences and other branches of knowledge, published and unpublished documents of Samalatec authors and local newspapers from the late 19th and early 20th centuries consulted in the Hemeroteca Nacional of Guatemala City.

Site, geolocation, and transportation

Salamá is not only one of the eight townships, also, is the departmental capital of Baja Verapaz. It borders to

the north with Purulhá (Baja Verapaz); to the South with San Jerónimo (Baja Verapaz) and Morazán (El Progreso); to the east with Panzós (Alta Verapaz Chicaj (Baja Verapaz).

The altitude of the township is approximately 940 meters above sea level, so the climate is usually temperate climate. It has a geographical area of 776 km² that correspond to both flat and steep terrain, so that the city is located on a wide valley that also includes the municipalities of San Jerónimo and San Miguel Chicaj, however, Salamá is bordered by the Sierra Chuacús and to the west is the Sierra Las Minas (Gall, 2000). The township has several communication routes, first of all there is the paved route via El Rancho which is 150 km away of the capital city. There is also the dirt and asphalt route via San Juan Sacatepéquez at only 165 km away, also, there is an access via La Canoa at 100 km, both with respect to Guatemala City (Mapa Red Vial, República de Guatemala 2001, Instituto Geográfico Nacional).

To get to Salamá there is a bus service from the companies “*Cubulera*” and “*Bajaverapacense*” that do not leave the departmental capital but from surrounding municipalities such as San Miguel Chicaj and Cubulco, to the Guatemalan capital and vice versa. Likewise, there is transportation to the

villages and other municipalities by means of large and medium buses, minibuses, and taxis. To some places like San Jerónimo and Cobán (Alta Verapaz) transportation is quite fluid in quantity and schedules. Regarding transportation, there are monopolies that do not allow the entry of other means, since approximately two years ago two motorcycle taxis known as “*tuc-tuc*” began operating but shortly after they were burned as an intimidating measure. In Salamá, it is common for men and women of all ages to travel on motorcycles, being so common that there is at least one per family.

Geographical distribution

The township is made up of the city of Salamá organized into nine neighborhoods that are: El Centro, El Calvario, La Alcantarilla, Las Piedrecitas, Santa Elena, La Estancia, Hacienda de la Virgen, San José, and Agua Caliente, these are located in the six zones that comprise the urban area, to which are added 20 neighborhoods and four sectors. The rural area constitutes the area with the largest geographical extension, made up of 65 villages, 51 raised hamlets, a farm (Concepción) and a place (El Monjón). The maximum height above sea level is 1843 meters in the village Chilascó and the minimum corresponds to 364

meters in the village El Nance, so the geography, climate and nature of the township is extremely changeable (populated places in Salamá, Baja Verapaz, Township of Salamá, November 2014).

Oral tradition provides certain data about the origins of some Salamatec neighborhoods, as well as information about their social, cultural, sports and, above all, religious activities, as well as notable figures. As a very special characteristic of the township, in every neighborhood, there is a Catholic chapel dedicated to different saints who become local patrons. The social organization is through committees of different nature: Catholic, pro-improvement, youth, parents and also brotherhoods that are protagonists of religious and dance celebrations. The information collected about some geographical areas of the city of Salamá is reviewed below.

Although the exact date of founding of the El Calvario neighborhood is unknown, the logical reference is that it dates back to around 1899 when the Catholic temple was built, the land of which was donated by Mr. Francisco de Paula Prera Pineda. Around 1916 the temple of Minerva was built, so both buildings gave rise to the settlement of this space. However, the largest number of

inhabitants was established 30 or 40 years ago, being people from rural areas, so that the fields that were once used for ball games and civic activities were used for the construction of residential houses (Guzmán, 2007). It should be noted that this neighborhood has three religious-cultural organizations: a brotherhood of El Niño and two of the Mazates dance.

The San José neighborhood is located on the old route of travelers to Alta Verapaz, with the Catholic chapel being the place where merchants and visitors from the northern region of Verapaz rested and spent the night. In the surroundings of the chapel, ceramic utensils manufactured in the Santa Elena neighborhood were sold, pig sellers shod the animals with leather bags so that their hooves would not wear out; also, it was the transit point for hundreds of heads of cattle brought by merchants such as Juan, Atenógeno, and Eugenio Ramírez. All of the above destined for commercial centers in Alta Verapaz (Information: Salvador Guzmán, November 20th, 2014).

The name of the neighborhood is due to the fact that at the beginning of the 20th century several carpenters such as Eusebio Guzmán, Sebastián Santos, Manuel Meza and Cipriano Milián established themselves as a very Catholic people who adopted

Saint Joseph, who was also a carpenter, as their patron. In the artistic aspect, specifically in terms of music, there have been violinists, guitarists and especially *marimbistas* (marimba players), and *marimberos* (marimba makers); large number of prayers (men and women), altars, confectioners and cooks of traditional foods, the main reason for all this activity being Catholic religious celebrations (Information: Salvador Guzmán, November 20th, 2014).

The La Alcantarilla and Las Piedrecitas neighborhoods are located to the south of the city, divided by the Orotapa ravine and at the foot of the Santa Cruz hill. They are places that are characterized by the roots of different expressions of traditional culture such as the production of clay utensils, musical instruments (*tun*) and masks for the Mazates dance. Regarding the latter, there are two of the strongest brotherhoods in the township, with greater validity, organization, and number of participants. The name Las Piedrecitas is due to the fact that the land is made up of small, loose stones, which does not prevent it from being used for the production of ceramics (Interview: Edith Oliva, May 3rd, 2015). In the case of La Alcantarilla, it corresponds to the fact that in the past there was an aqueduct that carried water from

Orotapa to Salamá, of which only vestiges remain today (Interview: Juan Hernández García, April 10, 2015).

Some communities were formed as a consequence of recent social events, since the Trapiche de Agua village was made up of people of the Achi' ethnic group from San Miguel Chicaj and displaced by the internal armed conflict in the early 1980s. With the help of the Dominican religious, vacant land was acquired and distributed among the families, giving rise to the current community (Interview: Berta Fajardo, May 14th, 2015).

Population

Based on information from the National Institute of Statistics (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística - INE-*), the projected population of Salamá for 2010 was 54,399 people, of which 28,251 were women and 26,148 men (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2004). The data coincide quite closely with those managed by the Centro de Salud in 2013, since the number of women is estimated at 29,512 and men at 27,326, making a total of 56,838 people. The population of the township, as in the rest of the country, is quite young, since the age group from 0 to 39 years old is made up of 43,183 people; from 40 to 79 years old 12,979 and from 80 years or older 676

(Information: *Sala Situacional* 2013, Salamá Health Center). Although there is no updated data on the ethnic nature of Salamá, the last 2002 census determines that the inhabitants are mostly non-indigenous (36,657) and the indigenous population is significantly smaller (10,617). Likewise, most people live in rural areas (29,194) and a smaller number in urban areas (18,080) (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2005).

Idiosyncrasy

Clearly the identity, temperament or personality of a society is permeated by the historical processes that determine it. In this sense, the influence that the Dominican order had for more than 400 years on the Salamatecos is undoubted. Religious practices associated with Catholic traditions permeate the collective imagination of society and are expressed at different times of the year, through the activities carried out by organizations such as confraternities and brotherhoods during the commemoration of the patron saints from every neighborhood, the Lenten, Holy Week and the Christmas cycle, the celebration of the Holy Cross and the Ascension of the Lord through the dance of Los Mazates, among others.

Regarding the above, Walter Boteo (Salamateco professor and writer)

states that: “*Here the ideology, the idiosyncrasy of the people was marked by the presence of the Dominicans, they are a very religious people, excessively religious. The Salamateco, I would say, spins around religion*” (Interview: November 21st, 2014). It is common to find neighbors devoted to the celebration of different saints, offering *novenas*, or giving offerings in the form of food or money. For instance, Mrs. Marta Molineros has been organizing a *novena* in honor of San Judas Tadeo for 50 years, for which funds are raised. obtained through two *cuchubales*¹.

He has also been providing lunch for one of the Mazates brotherhoods for 39 years, the reason being: “*My husband just now celebrated his 39th anniversary on May 3rd and I, through his intention, have fed the Mazates [...] for me it is a great satisfaction to give them with all my heart, I do it for the Holy Cross and for the soul of my husband*” (Interview: May 14th, 2015). Mrs. Molineros also contributes to the decoration of the church in the village of San Ignacio for the festival of the

¹ Several trusted people are organized to contribute each month, generally for a year, a certain amount of money to a common fund, that money is delivered as interest-free loans to each participant on the date that was requested, or it randomly corresponds to them.

Lord of Ostúa and she is assigned the penultimate day of the *novena* of the Tres Habanas de Las Flores procession.

Another case of Catholic devotion in the context of popular Salamatec traditions is the Reyes Hernández family from the La Tejera sector of the El Calvario neighborhood. They have been commemorating the Ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ for approximately 70 years through a *novena*. Everardo Reyes de la Cruz inherited the devotion of his paternal grandfather: “*I became attached, very attached to my grandfather and he told me that if in any case the children [uncles of the interviewee] did not want to continue, I could follow him. I followed it up and I have been celebrating it for 18 years [...] I think that the veneration will continue once they find children who want to continue... have a little help... I believe that it will extinguish.*” The scope of the celebration has as economic support the contribution of the nuclear family (husbands and children) and extended family (siblings, cousins, nephews...), as well as the support of social networks of neighbors who contribute through money, groceries, or work volunteer.

The previous examples show us how the strength of faith and tradition motivate people to carry out different

religious celebrations practically without sparing expenses, it is inherited generationally from grandparents, from parents, both on the paternal and maternal lines, projecting subsistence of custom through children and networks of solidarity among neighbors. This deepening of the Catholic religion expressed through popular religiosity has influenced Salamá as a conservative society with right-wing political sympathies. Regarding this matter in the context of the internal armed conflict, Walter Boteo expresses: “*Here there were more military commissioners, ultra-right people, here the MLN [National Liberation Movement] won the elections calmly, without doing propaganda, the little flag and the dagger were stuck in the minds of the people*” (Interview: November 21st, 2014).

In the same way, Eriberto Ramírez reaffirms the Catholic character and conservative of the Salamatec expressing: “*The majority of people here have been right-wing. And sometimes extreme right*” (Interview: November 22nd, 2014). An example of this is the attempted coup against the government of Jacobo Arbenz that took place from one in the morning on March 28th, 1953, until 5 PM the following day, known as “El

Salamatecazo” (Boteo, 2007). In that historic event, the father of the interviewee was cruelly murdered: *“They dragged my father, they almost tore him to pieces. He became involved in the movement to overthrow [Jacobo] Arbenz. The thing is that here precisely because we are right-wing people were more with [Francisco Javier] Arana.”* In Walter Boteo's opinion, this situation was caused because the leaders convinced the people that the government, because it was communist, was atheist and *“...they were going to take away their religion, so they did it for their religion, defending religion”* (Interview: November 21st, 2014).

It can be stated, then, that the Catholic religion² through expressions of popular devotion is the transversal element in the life of the majority of the Salamateca population, however, there are profound differences between the inhabitants of urban and rural areas, mestizo and indigenous. The residents of the urban area view themselves as passive, timid, and even indifferent people contrasting greatly with the inhabitants of neighboring

² Even if there are other Christian churches of an evangelical and even Mormon nature, the Catholic religion is the most widespread and predominant.

municipalities with indigenous roots such as Rabinal and San Miguel Chicaj, who on several occasions have expressed their disagreements with de facto measures: *“They have come to burn the courts, they are coming here on the march. A Salamateco, will you say that we are going to go out with banners to protest for the light? two or three go... the others stay watching”* (Interview: Salvador Guzmán, November 20th, 2014).

A distinctive feature of the men from the rural area of the Achi' communities of Salamá is their interest in military service, just to *“fitting into the quota...young people prefer to be soldiers first and then something else in life.”* It is evident that at the level of local values, military training is a source of social prestige even for marriage since *“...a woman does not marry someone who has not gone to the service. If young men are not cuque yet, he is still not a macho, he is not a grown man enough to have a woman”* (Interview: Salvador Guzmán, November 21st, 2014).

Usually, several situations occur in the area of marriages and interethnic relationships. In urban areas where the population is mostly mestizo, marriage or cohabitation between a man and a woman normally occurs *“with people from the same town”*, and cases where the unions are between indigenous and

mestizos are rare. Likewise, incest is considered taboo because parents usually warn their sons: *“be careful, you marry her, she is your cousin, it is a sin.”*

Conversely, in the villages located to the south of the municipality such as La Canoa or Llano Grande (bordering the Motagua River) endogamy is usually quite common, with the most frequent surnames being Véliz, Barcárcel, Peláez, Cuéllar... among others. It is believed that these people migrated from the east of the country as people with white skin, blondes, and light eyes, which is why they are known as *“the canches of the South.”* Apparently, there is a reluctance on the part of these people to unite biologically with individuals of mixed ancestry *“...by now, they do not want to mix with us, those from the urban area... they do it to maintain racial purity”* (Interview: Walter Boteo, November 21st, 2014).

This racist feeling was studied by Marta Elena Casás Arzú in relation to the Guatemalan oligarchy, however, in her conclusions she offers a broader scope regarding the racial segregation of the country: *“Racism has polarized Guatemalan society into two social groups: indigenous and ladinos, within this second group, a pigmentocracy has been generated, which negatively values skin color and the percentage of*

indigenous blood, to differentiate itself from the Other. The pattern of Guatemalan racism seems to obey more to genetic racism than to a racism of difference or 'culturalist’” (2010: 259).

The above is what happens with people with Caucasian features from the south of Salamá, who share with their neighbors practically the same economic, social and cultural activities, racism being a psychosocial factor that urges them to maintain the biological purity of physical features that they, in their perception, are considered better than those who identify their mestizo and indigenous countrymen.

Social issues

According to information provided by personnel from the 52nd Police Station of the National Civil Police (*Policía Nacional Civil -PNC-*) based in Salamá, the townships of Baja Verapaz that report the highest crime rates based on arrests are: Salamá, Rabinal and San Miguel Chicaj, by contrast, Granados, El Chol and San Jerónimo are considered the quietest (Interview: Hilder Pérez, October 23rd, 2014). In total, by the end of 2014, 914 arrests were officially reported for several criminal acts, the main ones being the following: vehicle drivers' irresponsibility, scandal under the influence of liquor or drugs, domestic

violence and violence against women, negligent injuries, fights, and crimes against the environment. environment (Information: People detained in 2014, National Civil Police of Salamá).

In Salamá, the neighborhoods that are considered red areas are the Agua Caliente, Hacienda de la Virgen, La Estancia, Las Piedrecitas and the Minerva sector of the El Calvario neighborhood, the main events reported being: irresponsibility of vehicle drivers, domestic violence, and violence against women. Although there are no reports of organized groups properly such as “*maras*”, the PNC agents recognize that “...*there are small groups that give plenty of work to do.*”

In the opinion of some residents, common crime has increased significantly compared to previous times; however, it should be remembered that in the late 1970s and early 1980s the violence generated by the internal armed conflict was experienced. Currently, official data does not include several events that occur, and that people do not report for different reasons (fear of reprisals or lack of trust in public authorities), since comments about assaults on pedestrians and extortion of businesses often circulate among neighbors.

A topic treated with great discretion among the Salamatecos is the proliferation of organized crime in terms of drug trafficking. It is reported (as an open secret) that the old highway that leads to Cobán is currently used for the transfer of drugs. Likewise, drug traffickers find young men in rural communities who have generally served in the military as valuable elements for their illicit actions. Regarding this aspect, one interviewee said:

“...as they are the type of boys who go to the army... they do not tempt their souls to defend their country, they jump fences and everything. They have grown up in such a talishte way [n/t: stick-in-the-mud way]... with such massive legs they climb those mountains as if nothing was happening... they play tricks behind the police. And they are so dumb that what they do is become kaibiles [n/t: elite soldiers] afterwards. And those are the ones the drug traffickers are recruiting.”(Interview: October 26, 2014).

Environmental characteristics

At altitudes between 500 to 1,200 meters above sea level, as is the case of the townships of Salamá, San Jerónimo, San Miguel Chicaj, Rabinal,

Cubulco, El Chol, and Granados, a dry thorny forest usually predominates. This is characterized by the prevalence of low-growing vegetation such as cactus and thorn bushes, popularly known by different names: *ixcanal*, cat's claw, *sarzas*, *cascamite*, pigeon's food or *chichicaste*. The varieties in terms of fauna include birds (hawks, buzzards, *chorchas*, *xaras*, owls, *siguamontas*), mammals (wildcat, mice, raccoons, armadillos, coyotes, *tacuacines*) and last, reptiles (rattlesnake, coral, liana snake, black-tailed snake or *babatua*, mousetrap, *mazacuata*, lizard) (Ramírez, 2005).

This type of forest is the one that prevails in the Salamá valley with clear skies and intense sun. In terms of ambient temperature, it has an average of 22° Celsius, the rainy season runs from May to October, especially in the afternoon and evening hours. However, the characteristics of the forest favor its easy predation by spontaneous and provoked fires, population growth and expansion of the agricultural frontier, which has influenced Salamá, along with five other townships, to constitute part of the Guatemalan dry corridor (territories that, without having the desert climatic characteristics they are acquiring) with the effects of subsequent droughts and famines.

The Baja Verapaz Environmental Defense Foundation (FUNDEMABV)

together with the municipality of Salamá, have created the Los Cerritos-El Portezuelo ecological park for the protection of the dry thorny forest. This same objective is intended by the Cerro de la Cruz ecological park, which there are organizations such as Club de Amigos del Cerro that coordinate reforestation activities with different sectors of the society of Salamá (Interview: Maritza Córdova, November 20th, 2014).

The biodiversity of the township also includes the classification of such montane forests, an ecoregion that includes tropical and subtropical humid broadleaf forests, with oaks, oaks and conifers standing out for their presence, as well as orchids and bromeliads. At the fauna level, there are unique species such as the Cabanis tanager, the chub turkey, and the quetzal; reptiles such as lizards and tree snakes, also recently discovered amphibians. (Consejo Nacional de Áreas Protegidas, 2011)

Salamá includes two large and protected areas: Sierra de las Minas and the University Biotope for the Conservation of the Quetzal "Mario Dary Rivera". The first of these living spaces also covers the townships of San Jerónimo and Purulhá (Baja Verapaz), also, extending to several communities in the departments of El Progreso, Alta Verapaz, Izabal, and

Zacapa. The biotope was declared a protected area on October 4th, 1990, including an area of 240,803 hectares. In the specific case of Salamá, the reserve covers the villages of Chilascó, Niño Perdido, and Divina Providencia, In Chilascó, the Salto de Chilascó can be found, which is a one of the largest waterfalls of Central America with more than 130 meters high (Mapa turístico de Salamá, Baja Verapaz, 2013).

The vegetation of the Sierra de las Minas is as diverse as its extension is wide, in the cloudy forest area that corresponds to Salamá can be found a complex coexistence of conifers, oak forests and diverse populations of lauraceous with abundant associations of mosses, ferns and epiphytes. When it comes to bird species, the quetzal, golden-faced warbler, peregrine falcon, and the chub turkey stand out. Among the felines, the puma, the jaguar, the Onza creel, and the ocelot stand out; reptiles such as the leaf litter snake, the Ibarra toad, the bronzed tree lizard and the Sierra de las Minas salamander (Consejo Nacional de Áreas Protegidas, 2011).

The Quetzal Biotope, as it is commonly known, was founded in June 1977, covering an area of 1,022 hectares in the township of Purulhá and Salamá. The life zone corresponds to the subtropical low montane

rainforest and cold subtropical humid forest. The main water bodies are the Las Canoas, Quililá, Cafetales, and Colorado rivers, around 20 streams, creeks, and springs. Its main attraction is the populations of quetzals that can be observed in the early morning and afternoon when they come out to feed and during the months of February to September (Cottón, 2007: 17-18).

Among the tree species typical of this cloudy forest are: aguacatillo, pimientillo, sapotillo, dragon's blood, pigeon fruit, as well as a diversity of orchids, tilansias, fungi, mosses, lichens, and tree ferns. Regarding the fauna the mammals that stand out are the following: porcupine, skunk, howler monkey, white-tailed deer, and the kinkajou; amphibians like golden salamander, long-nosed frog, and red-eyed leaf litter frog; reptiles such as: Godman's montane pitviper, the gushnayera snake, red-necked *Corytophanes* (also *cutete*), and the spiny lizard. On the other hand, the biotope area includes private reserves such as El Ciruelo, Posada Montaña del Quetzal, Ram Tzul, Cerro Verde, Saq Ha'. Also, in the surrounding area, there can be found different hostels and restaurants (Consejo Nacional de Áreas Protegidas, 2011).

Education

According to data provided by the Ministry of Education of Baja Verapaz, in the township of Salamá there are 141 kindergarten, 197 elementary, 38 middle school, and 12 high school educational centers in the official sector. The private sector is present only in the urban area and its coverage is much lower, since there are only 14 kindergarten, 14 elementary, 30 middle school, and 29 high school establishments centers. There are also 2 elementary education centers for adults, 6 education centers of middle school per cooperative, and only per cooperative (Information: Ministry of Education, Salamá, Baja Verapaz). At the level of higher education, the campuses belonging to San Carlos de Guatemala, Mariano Gálvez, D'Vinci, Panamericana, and Rural universities are established in the township of Rabinal.

Although Salamá has several communities of Achí origin, the intercultural and bilingual education programs are unusual, since in the opinion of Alfredo Primero³ “...*the government has not been specifically interested in an intercultural bilingual*

education” so it does not constitute a public policy. The programs have little budget, little coverage (there are only 10 kindergarten schools and 36 bilingual elementary schools), there is no method to train teachers to work in indigenous areas, among other shortcomings, because as corroborated by the interviewee, the Ministry of Education:

“...it gives guidelines, it gives norms... but it does not change the structure. When hiring personnel, the indigenous population has not been interested. Contract positions have no modality, it does not matter whether a bilingual teacher arrives or not.” (Interview: November 20th, 2014).

The Mariano Gálvez University is the only entity that provides teaching in sociolinguistics applied to intercultural education, but following this preparation will depend exclusively on the interest and economic capacity of every teacher. In this sense, the University of San Carlos is lagging behind since the teaching staff it teaches is of a general nature and the curriculum only includes a “vernacular language” course which added to the pejorative nature of the term, has no major relevance for the degree. The communities that today

³ Responsible for the Intercultural Bilingual Education Program of the Ministry of Education.

have intercultural bilingual education are: El Tempisque village, Santa Inés Chivac, Paso Ancho, Ixcayán, Las Trojas, San Julián Chuacús, Payaque, San Antonio Chivac, Trapiche de Agua and Chuacusito. Likewise the hamlets Candelaria (Las Palmas), La Ceiba, Los García, El Duraznito (Las Limas), Las Veguitas and Coyotera (Chagüite), Los Magueyes (Las Cuevas).

Public health

Generally, for this topic, interviews have been achieved with the main person responsible for public health of the municipality investigated. On this occasion it was not possible due to the multiple occupations that said person usually has. However, quantitative information was provided by the statistical unit of the departmental health area corresponding to 2013, offering a general perspective on this extremely important social aspect.

Officially, public health in Salamá is organized in a national hospital (based in zone 4), a health center also located in the urban area and several health posts located in rural communities that cover the needs of surrounding villages and hamlets, these being the following: La Canoa, El Amate, El Tempisque, Llano Grande, San Ignacio, El Nance, Las Limas, and Chilascó. This entire set is defined

as a Health Services Network. (Sala Situacional de Salud, distrito municipal número 1, Salamá, Baja Verapaz, January to December 2013).

The main cause of morbidity (disease) in children (0 to 10 years old) is acute respiratory infections (ARI) such as pneumonia, equivalent to 44% compared to other diseases. Although these types of conditions also occupy first place in adolescents and adults (24% and 14% respectively), they tend to be significantly less frequent compared to children. In smaller percentages, children are also affected by the following diseases: bronchitis, intestinal parasitism, diarrhea, conjunctivitis, vitamin deficiency and different skin conditions such as dermatitis and fungi. In the adolescent and adult population, other complaints such as gastritis, headaches, urinary and vaginal infections, neuralgia and myalgia are added. In the case of older adults, ARIs are in the lead with 22% of cases, in descending order there are other illnesses such as: high blood pressure, muscle spasms, arthritis, among others common to other age groups.

Regarding the reasons for death in Children under 1 year of age are: pneumonia, low birth weight, sepsis, unspecified fever, hemorrhages and vomiting. Deaths in children between 1 and 10 years old are less frequent,

according to official data, with two deaths reported due to epileptic seizures. Likewise, in the adolescent population, three deaths are reported due to epileptic seizures, heart disease and unspecified fever. In adults, deaths caused by diabetic complications and cardiovascular accidents predominate, but in women a much wider diversity is shown: high blood pressure that causes strokes and acute heart attacks, liver disease, malignant breast tumors and unspecified fever. Finally, the elderly generally die from strokes, liver disease and complications derived from diabetes.

Because Salamá is part of the so-called dry corridor, it is common for farming families to be affected by droughts that affect the low productivity of crops, contributing to food shortages. There is no doubt that the above, affects the nutritional health of people, particularly children, so that the places where the highest rates of malnutrition are reported are: Payaque, El Tunal, Niño Perdido, Paso Ancho, Chilascó, Las Anonas, Las Trojas, Las Cañas, Las Limas and Rincón Grande. This reality even affects the urban area of the township, as malnourished children are reported in the neighborhoods of Hacienda de la Virgen, Las Piedrecitas, La Alcantarilla, El Calvario, Agua Caliente and El Centro.

Although data from the Ministry of Health indicate that in 2013 only 17 cases of moderate malnutrition were reported, 5 of severe and 1 of kwashiorkor (Sala Situacional de Salud, distrito municipal número 1, Salamá, Baja Verapaz, January to December 2013), there are people who, due to their work experience, know that the real data is greater. In this regard, the nun Berta Fajardo refers to her experience in the Santa Bárbara hamlet (officially Santa Bárbara El Camero) where a comprehensive human project began in August 2014. According to the informant, this place was chosen because “*it lacks all basic services*” and the diagnostic study:

“...tested positive for severe and in some cases chronic malnutrition. In 2013 there were 5 deaths due to malnutrition; in 2014, there were 3 deaths due to malnutrition, now [2015] there is one” (Interview: May 14th, 2015).

In Berta Fajardo's opinion, public policies to combat malnutrition and its consequences have been insufficient in Salamá, since the projects have a welfare nature (solidarity fund, insurance bonus...) they do not seek to empower people about their reality and the responsibility that they have corresponds to transform it. In his

opinion, there must be a balance between what the government (or any other entity) contributes and the people of the communities, since for example, in the Santa Bárbara project, food is not given to the people, but a dining room was established for them, in order to the beneficiaries commit to attending it and there is no risk that the food will be used for different purposes. In this regard, the interviewee says: *“What do we do about this problem? Do we give food? We know it doesn't work. So, we said: the best thing is a dining room. With conditions of their responsibility that they have to get to the dining room... they don't get food from there... they get to eat there.”*

Likewise, Berta Fajardo considers that in addition to the aforementioned aspects, the problem of malnutrition is associated with the lack of basic services and geographical isolation, since the Santa Bárbara hamlet is located 4 hours from Salamá (45 minutes by vehicle and 3 hours on foot). As the only public service available is the national school, the following activities are planned for this year and the next three: latrization, drilling of water wells, donation of productive animals and finding a market for their artisan products, so that *“...the community is intended to be self-sustaining.”*

On the other hand, the indicators of maternal deaths are encouraging since only the death of one woman was reported in 2012. The rate of maternity in girls and adolescents has tended to decrease since in that year the following data were recorded: 7 cases of mothers from 11 to 13 years old; 122 cases from 14 to 16 years old and 277 cases from 17 to 19 years old.

Productive activities and migration

As in the majority of municipalities in Guatemala, productive activities in Salamá vary between urban and rural areas, the city of Salamá practically has no green area or space without buildings, becoming the center of influx for people from the rural and municipal communities areas to de, in order to develop the normal functions of any organized society: commerce, finance, transportation, education, religion, different kinds of social organizations and the management of public administration. In this order of ideas, the urban area of Salamá is where people hold jobs in a dependency relationship both in the public sector and in the private sector, with opportunities being scarce for the great supply of labor so people often accept wages below the minimum.

However, the largest workforce is found in agricultural activities, and livestock. In the opinion of engineer

Otto Guzmán⁴, the *minifundio* is the form of land ownership that prevails among peasants focused on subsistence crops such as corn and beans. On average, people tend to have between half and one block of land, generally overexploited each year. In the center of the valley of San Jerónimo and Salamá is where the large estates better known as “large farms” are located, which today mainly produce tomatoes, chili, and French green beans with the qualities required by the American and European markets, although there are also exports to Mexico, Honduras, and El Salvador.

Historically, the oldest latifundia of the colonial period were the sugar mill of San Jerónimo and the livestock farm of San Nicolás, property of the Dominican religious. Sugar production was in force until approximately the middle of the 19th century, with several reasons for the decline, but according to Otto Guzmán:

“...competitiveness was lost due to the fact that sugar cane plantations were established on the south coast. Now there is only artisanal and

small-scale milling, it is a family economy” (Interview: October 24th, 2014).

In 1876, during the government of Justo Rufino Barrios, the production of vines or grapes was promoted in Rabinal and Salamá, in the latter municipality the music teacher Cecilio Ramírez was the one who took the grape shoots to the capital. Although several families managed to develop vines for some years (achieved by the quality of the volcanic soil and the warm climate in the summer and cold from November to January) the production was not sustainable in the long term due to an uncontrollable plague of *zompobos* (Economic Society, November 5th, 1876: 1-2; La Baja Verapaz, February 1st, 1905: 4).

At the beginning of the 20th century, colonial crops such as cochineal still existed, which apparently “was of the best quality.” In the journalistic note consulted, the diversity of products generated in Salamá, San Jerónimo and San Miguel Chicaj is detailed: “...*coffee, corn, beans, rice, chili, sugar cane, cocoa, vegetable wax, fibrous plants, sarsaparilla, gums, cochineal, dyewood, construction wood, skins and livestock.*” At the same time, it is indicated that “...*the following could be profitably obtained: cotton,*

⁴ Responsible for Planning, monitoring and strategic information of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food.

tobacco, wheat, oats, barley, vanilla, sesame, jiquilite and castile wax." (La Baja Verapaz, February 1st, 1905: 3; Eco de Salamá, March 1st, 1904: 2).

With the new market demands, productive diversification begins in the central valleys of Baja Verapaz. In the middle of the 20th century, sugar cane production continued, with cotton, tobacco and coffee becoming more popular. Around the 1970s, a new productive sector developed known as the "tomateros", who today produce the main vegetables required by the international market, hiring labor to harvest tomatoes, chilies, and French beans at harvest time. Regarding the exchange of labor or transfer of farmers following the agricultural cycle of different crops, the main migrations occur for the coffee and cardamom cuts in Alta Verapaz and for the harvest on the south coast.

In the above, the "jaladores" or intermediaries who hire young men from Rabinal, San Miguel Chicaj and Cubulco to cut sugar cane in the southern sugar mills play a determining role. The intensity and quality of said work, the weather conditions mean that many people acquire endemic diseases such as malaria, dengue, and gastrointestinal infections, some believing that:

"...when we come here [back to their places of origin] we come with illnesses... what we are going to earn we spend on medicine" (Interview: Sergio Zuleta, October 23rd, 2015)

In the same way as in other regions of the country, the migration of indigenous labor was an institutionalized and widespread phenomenon from the colonial period until well into the 20th century, meaning the abandonment of their own crops and the impoverishment of the Achi' indigenous people. A note found in a Salamatecan newspaper from the late 19th century tells of the above: "...hundreds of young men are taken to very distant farms where they remain for three or six months, thus leaving the villages or towns depopulated and abandoning their own land, soil that they could very well have been cultivating; and all without any good coming to the municipality or to the poor young men" (La Regeneración, June 30th, 1893: 4).

On the opposite, another newspaper from the same year (1893) states that there is a "shortage of arms to go out to work outside of Baja Verapaz" due to the public construction works that were being carried out in the municipalities of Salamá, Rabinal and San Jerónimo, pointing out: "...there

is no longer the increased emigration as in other times for the jobs of the Costa Grande, emigrations that almost left the towns deserted from which the flocks of indigenous people who had no employment at home” (La Regeneración, March 14th, 1893: 2).

On the other hand, in terms of livelihood profiles, the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food (MAGA) establishes that the northern region of Salamá corresponds to the cultivation of cardamom and coffee (Código GT14), while the central and southern region to basic grains and sale of labor (Código GT09). Livelihood profiles “...document the way in which populations live, referring to the means that households in a particular geographical area use for their subsistence, that is, sources of income and food, as well as threats to which they face and the response mechanisms they use when faced with them” (Information: Livelihood Map for Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua. Acción contra el Hambre/FAO/MFEWS/SAG/ SESAN /WFP/USAID).

More specifically, the engineer Otto Guzmán of MAGA states that:

“... in the southern region of Salamá, loroco, rose hibiscus, corn and beans are generated. In the center of the valley tomato,

cucumber, chili, French green beans, sweet corn... in the northern, more mountainous part, coffee, and cardamom” (Interview: October 24th, 2014).

Migration to the United States has had an impact on improving the quality of life of people in rural areas. This phenomenon began with impetus around 20 years ago, the dollar remittances that families in Salamá receive are reflected in better housing, food, and studies for their children. Some migrants with greater vision return to the country and establish businesses that multiply their savings; it is even a source of social prestige for getting married, since, for example, in some villages in the southern sector of the municipality

“...women prefer men who have gone to the United States... because they have a better economic position... how do they identify them? Since they are small places, everyone knows what the others do... also because they like to wear big gold chains” (Interview: Sergio Zuleta, October 23rd, 2015).

Family disintegration is a common negative effect with others places in the country, since many times people abroad form new emotional

relationships without necessarily implying neglecting economic responsibilities towards the family in Guatemala. Women face the burden of raising children in the absence of the father, which has an emotional impact on the entire family group, reflected in behavioral problems on the part of the minors. The migration of people through family support is so systematic and complex that there are communities where there are practically no men of productive age, such is the case of the village El Amate (southern sector of the municipality) where:

“...there are almost no men between 20 and 40 years old, they leave, you only see women, children and the elderly”
(Interview: Sergio Zuleta, October 23rd, 2014).

Market day

The market days (*días de mercado*), in the urban area of the city are Fridays and Mondays, –it must be remembered that for the Salamateco, Saturday and especially Sunday are days to attend religious services and share with the family–, with the 5th street and 5th Avenue of zone 1 as the core points where sales are set up shortly before 6 AM. The merchants come from villages in Salamá and surrounding municipalities such as San Jerónimo,

San Miguel Chicaj and Rabinal, even from places in the west of the country such as Momostenango (Totonicapán) and Almolonga (Quetzaltenango).

The Salamá market constitutes a time and space beyond commercial activity, where different regional ethnic groups, different social strata and merchandise specially designed to satisfy basic and daily needs of families come together. Around seven and eight in the morning, large and small buses arrive with people from rural communities and surrounding municipalities. There is even a lot of passenger movement to Cobán (Alta Verapaz) and vice versa. Dual transmission pick-ups overloaded with people come from mountainous and difficult-to-access places.

The sales positions or stands are located in front of formal businesses, –which also have the greatest growth in sales–, the time of greatest influx of customers is during the morning, mainly from 8:30 AM to 12:30 PM. A miscellany of products are located on the aforementioned artery: vegetables (tomato, chili, onion, carrot, lettuce, cabbage, *loroco*...), fruits (watermelon, pineapple, apple, sapodilla, jocotes de corona, de bolita...), spices (dried chilies, cinnamon, annatto, cloves, raisins, hibiscus rose...), meats (especially chicken, pork and beef), poultry (chickens and turkeys known

as *chuntos*) as well as large quantities of charcoal, “pork” soap from Rabinal, and chocolate from Mazatenango (Suchitepéquez).

There are several stalls where traditional sweets are offered such as *jocotes*, *coyoles* and *manzanillas* in honey, *jocotes de bolita* de San Miguel Chicaj, cassava and cooked *elotes*, as well as the traditional Salamateco sweet known as *quitandé*. Towards the end of the fifth street (in front of the pretrial detention center) the atmosphere changes completely, becoming silent and with little influx of buyers, there are sales of masonry, carpentry, mechanics, plumbing and various utensils tools. kitchen, both new and used, which indicates that people go to the market mainly to purchase items for daily consumption.

It should be noted that despite the large number of buyers and sellers, the market is usually quite silent (with the exception of cell phone sales companies that offer them with loudspeakers) since merchants who offer their products by raising their voices are rare, it seems that everything is governed by the habit of knowing in advance where what is needed is. There is no shortage of sales of Western clothing (made in *maquilas*) especially for children and women, there are abundant used clothing stalls and the only thing that

could be observed was the existence of a cutting business for the making of indigenous women's clothing.

From the municipality of Rabinal they come crafts based on rigging (*bows*, *backpacks*, *hammocks*, *mecapales...*), ceramics are mainly transitional or neo-crafts for decorative purposes and intended for tourist consumption (*platforms* and *vases* with vividly painted reliefs of houses and regional landscapes), *Chinchín*-type gourds or for drinking liquids are less elaborate than those of yesteryear and the colors red, yellow and black predominate. The paint used in these crafts is of industrial origin without finding traces of the natural dyes used in other times. There are also some sales of local utilitarian ceramics such as *comales*, pots and bowls, which do not have any type of decoration and come from different indigenous villages in Salamá.

It is interesting to compare how the consumer items offered in the municipal market have changed in relation to remote times, since a journalistic note from 132 years ago announces that in the Baja Verapaz market you can purchase: “sugar, rice, cheese, coffee, first and second class *panela*, liquor, myrtle, deer hides by the pound and common *maquila* flour” (*La Voz del Norte*, March 1st, 1883: 4). From a similar era to the previous one

are the products offered by the Cambo y Cía pharmacy owned by Andrés Izaguirre, which offers: “Pure, fresh and varied medications. Special care in the delivery of prescriptions and reasonable prices. The syrup against whooping cough and all kinds of medicines against malaria have just arrived” (El Progreso, June 30th, 1908: 4), being an example of the beginning of formal businesses and the medicines used to combat diseases that in that historical moment were endemic in the region, since outbreaks of smallpox, influenza and cholera are mentioned (La Baja Verapaz, January 1st, 1905: 2-3; El Quince de Marzo, February 1st, 1895: 3; La Regeneración, January 14th, 1893: 3).

In the same way as happens in other places in the country, the establishment of the municipal market becomes secondary, overshadowed by the bustle of sales on public roads. In Salamá, the market building has been the subject of several fires that have destroyed it, the last of which took place a few years ago and while the current market known as La Terminal was being built, the vendors were provisionally installed on the 5th street in zone 1, but when the works were completed, many merchants did not accept the transfer and rather the number of sales increased to other

arteries in the city center, remaining in said spaces until today.

Festivities

Las Minervalias, celebration of yesteryear

Also known as Minerva Festivals, they were created during the government of Manuel Estrada Cabrera (1898-1920) through legislative decree 604, their formal objective being to celebrate the students and teachers who had completed the school year, for which the last Sunday of the month of October, the first Minervalia being held on October 29th, 1899. The true purpose of these celebrations was to promote the cult of the personality of the megalomaniacal Guatemalan president, who was proclaimed “Protector of the Scholarly Youth” and “Homeland Distinguished”. Also, it was mandatory the participation of all students from the public and private sectors, local authorities and neighbors with better socioeconomic positions in different places.

Regarding Salamá, there are records that the Minervalias were commemorated on October 29th, 1901. As the construction of the temple that exists in the Minerva neighborhood was completed in 1916, the ceremony was carried out in that place but

outdoors, erecting a provisional but quite elaborated, with Esteban Arias being the person in charge of the Ornaments Commission:

“In the center of the plain was erected the sumptuous building, of considerable size, made up of bowers that covered the roof supported by wooden pilasters, also decorated with pacaya leaves. On both sides were the entrances formed by arches, and in front was the superb doorway that served as its main decoration due to its perfect and well-arranged decoration. This had the Ionic appearance and architecture, holding on the frontispiece an allegory of Peace with the warrior lion prostrating under its soles.” (La Baja Verapaz, November 15th, 1901: 4)

The celebration was similar in all the departments of Guatemala, beginning with a dawn with the following characteristics: “On the appointed day, in the early hours of the morning, the band’s members toured the streets of the town, playing cheerful reveries; and at the stroke of 6:00 AM on the public clock, the National Pavilion was raised with the usual honors, hundreds of rockets splitting the air and the ringing of bells.”

Later, the parade participants gathered at the scheduled location. In Salamá the procession of people was organized as follows: “1°. Marimbas, drums, whistles and chirimillas, occupying a block; 2°. Band Corps; 3°. Five heralds as follows: ‘El 71’ Carlos Ordóñez, ‘El Progreso’ Francisco Fajardo, ‘La Paz’ Miss Beatriz Arrué, ‘La Igualdad’ Miss María Paredes, ‘Marte’ Manuel Sanabria. 4°. Minerva’s Beautiful Car, represented by the nice and well-considered Miss Angela Samayoa. 5°. Co-educational schools, directors, and teachers. 6°. The civil and military authorities of the Department...” (La Baja Verapaz, November 15th, 1901: 5).

As can be seen, the participation of society was massive since the chronicle refers to the presence of “...several hundred residents of this and other towns”, “...a competition of spectators that has never been so numerous” or that the musicians of traditional instruments They came from surrounding towns. The “heralds” represented allegories related to liberal thought, since “El 71” refers to June 30th, 1871; or the day of the Liberal Revolution, in the same way “progress”, “equality”... are ideals of this current ideological movement.

The description of the parade route again accounts for the large number of

participants walking the main streets and avenues of Salamá and taking around two hours before reaching the Minerva field. The neighbors also had to decorate the front of their houses as indicated: *“All along the route they had colorful curtains, apart from the innumerable series of posts that, with the national colors and their respective flags, formed a fence on both sides, in the same line as the militiamen of the Department, who, maintaining perfect order and discipline, occupied an area of fifteen blocks”* (La Baja Verapaz, November 15th, 1901: 5).

When the delegation arrives at the aforementioned field (around 1:00 PM) develops the protocol act around the person of President Estrada Cabrera:

“In the place of honor was placed the lithographed portrait of the H.E. Mr. President of the Republic, holding a natural trunk, filled with moss and plants, symbolizing the leafy tree of freedom; and at the foot of the rich framework that adorned it, the memorable Decree 604, as an emblem of his fruitful administration. To the left the tribune was formed with plants and natural decorations” (La Baja Verapaz, November 15th, 1901: 5).

In the same way, the central public administration, the liberal regime, and studious youth are praised. This glorification takes place with the delivery of speeches and poems by civil, religious, professional, and local authorities and students, with the local press being the main instrument of government propaganda, but the fine description of the information allows us to have a vision of this stage of Salamatecan festivities:

“We also congratulate the youth and to the teachers of this departmental capital for the success obtained in the closing of the current school year; not doubting that, by engraving the memory of this date in their hearts, they will later know how to reward the efforts of their determined protector, sculpting, in letters of gold, the clarified name of Licenciado Mr. Manuel Estrada Cabrera” (La Baja Verapaz, November 15th, 1901: 5).

Once the formal ceremony was concluded “... the distribution of sweets and soft drinks among the children was arranged”, “...the lunch that had been prepared” was shared between the teachers and students and finally “...a lively dance was organized among those present to the rhythm of a sonorous marimba alternating with the chords of the band”, concluding the entire event at 6:00 PM.

The Fair of Salamá

By a historical coincidence, the municipality's patron saint's day in honor of San Mateo (September 17th) is celebrated two days after the commemoration of national independence (September 15th), so that these celebrations constitute a continuity at least since mid from the 19th century to the present. In addition, the patron saint fairs of neighboring municipalities such as San Jerónimo (September 30th) and San Miguel Chicaj (September 29th) are intertwined, so that the ninth month of the Gregorian calendar represents for the central valleys of Baja Verapaz an amalgam of religious celebrations and profane.

It is known that as part of the strategy used by the Dominican friars to concentrate the indigenous people of Verapaces in towns, they planted cornfields and celebrated for several days the founding of the new settlement, which had been established under the patronage of a patron saint. In this regard, Ricardo Terga explains:

“The practical way, then, in which the friars moved the indigenous groups was in this way: First, the friars, together with the chiefs and principals of the clans, observed and studied the possible new site, then they planted the cornfields

together next to the new site; while the corn grew and seasoned, they built the houses, and on a designated day, all the inhabitants moved to the new place between dances and parties that lasted several days, so that they would forget about the old homes they left; The religious became great masters in the task of founding towns” (Terga, 1988: 16).

From this account, the Salamateca patron fair has lasted between 5 and 8 days, with social, sports, economic and religious activities taking place. This time of celebration acquires sacred characteristics because it breaks with the daily routine of people's daily lives (working, studying, household chores...) encouraging the permanence of the tradition that includes religious activities (masses, rituals, processions) and secular activities (parades, social dances, civic events, concerts, etc.). All of the above is theoretically defined as a “sacred movement” that helps to strengthen Catholic-Christian celebrations (García, 2012: 34-35).

The fair program of the last decade of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th has obviously varied with respect to current times, but there are aspects that remain constant in the profane domain: the livestock trade, equestrian and recreational activities,

parades, social dances, marimba and band music, the trade of all types of merchandise and alcoholic beverages, among others. In this regard, consider this note from 1892:

“We already have the fair in the most joyful of its manifestations, everything in a continuous flow: the production of livestock on the one hand, the sales of linen on the other; here, the earthenware, rigging, thread and wool cuts; there a wide variety of fruits, bread, beer, wines, spirits; over there the kitchens and music everywhere; marimbas, accordions, guitars, and in short, all the devices to make the fair a tournament of true relaxation” (March 15th, October 12th, 1892: 1).

Another note from 1908 expands the above mentioned, emphasizing the economic expense that the fair represents for the Salamatecos and the good profits obtained by the merchants:

“...the fair, with its chinamas, roulette wheels, wheels of fortune, chicherías and the great hubbub that always leaves imperishable memories, to those of adventurous conquests, and to those also of unfortunate events; leaving all this exhausted in the pockets of the

passers-by, and an abundance of ratatouille in those of the businessmen who always leave smiling and with the hope of returning next year” (El Progreso, October 25th, 1908: 4)

What is not recorded in the chronicles consulted and which is assumed to have been incorporated over time is the election of local queens⁵ and sporting activities⁶. On the other hand, it is necessary to dedicate a few lines to the relevance that in the past and in the present the productive, commercial and entertainment aspects have with respect to cattle and horses, since in 1908 several issues related to this cultural expression stand out:

“...they are eight days of solemnity and revelry. The town had a great time with the traditional bullfights; where the capeadors and assemblers show off their skills, each task they are forced to do

⁵ Generally, in one evening the election of the Departmental Queen or Miss Salamá, representative of all the municipalities of Baja Verapaz, is carried out. The indigenous queen called Ali Ajaw is also chosen; children's queen or Miss Chiquitita; queen of rural communities or Rosa Silvestre.

⁶ Football, basketball, badminton, handball, free flight, and races of various distances.

gives them new vigor, and they drink... another glass of liquor. There were horse races in which good bets were crossed; little bulls of fire that are the terror of the nymphs, etc.” (El Progreso, October 25th, 1908: 4).

Apparently, this activity acquired a more institutionalized character in the 1930s, during the government of General Jorge Ubico Castañeda, with Colonel Ramón Grotewaldt being the Political Head of Salamá. The cattle and horses were species native to the region and the east of the country, also from Quiché, Honduras, and El Salvador. Sometime later, “breed” specimens or foreign varieties were introduced. On September 17th, the animals were exhibited for sale in streets such as the exit to Rabinal, the Station and surrounding places (Reyes de la Cruz, 2004: 22).

Although with its respective variants the Salamateca 2014 fair program places great emphasis on livestock culture promoting activities such as: milking contest with a prize for the most productive cow, goat milking contest, exhibition of livestock varieties, exhibition of livestock products and inputs by various companies, informative talks by the National Federation of Livestock Breeders, rodeo show,

exhibition of trained Andalusian horses and horse parade.

Currently, the fair field is located in the Agua Caliente neighborhood on a flat property suitable for this purpose; the businesses are well organized one after another along several blocks forming streets. There are sections for different categories of products: traditional sweets (preserves of various fruits, guava colochos, cocadas, marzipan...) traditional breads from the west of the country (shecas, panitos and threads...). Although fast food stands (pizza, garnachas, churrasquitos, tacos...) monopolize the taste of young people and children, traditional food such as chunto, gallina and pinol broth still survives. The latter is the emblematic food of Salamá, prepared with roasted and stone-ground corn, to which chicken or hen meat is added without incorporating any vegetables. Its consistency is more liquid when it is hot and usually thickens when it cools.

The “classic” mechanical games such as carousels, little trains, kites, and Ferris wheels (also called Chicago wheels) are inevitable, incorporating more innovative and modern ones from the capital city such as “the worm” (a roller coaster for kids), bumper cars, tagada, the galleon, and others. There are also frequent liquor stalls, especially beer and national rums,

which replaced the chicherias of yesteryear. The influx of people is enormous for the main day (September 17), the distance is not an obstacle for neighbors from the different villages and surrounding municipalities to attend, nowadays mobility is facilitated because there are “express buses” that await the passengers. passengers until late at night. Like any cultural phenomenon, the Salamateca fair has changed over time, but traditional elements and sacred spaces continue to be preserved, such as the altars dedicated to the patron saint San Mateo, which break with the bustle and movement of the fair field, since they are usually found there. people dedicated to reflection and prayer.

Traditional music of Salamá

This topic deserves a separate space due to the relevance it has for the municipality, the marimba being the instrument with the greatest historical development in Salamá. There is no exact date regarding its origins, but according to research carried out in 1981 by several Salamatecan professors⁷ based on interviews with

neighbors knowledgeable about the subject, it is known that its origins date back to the end of the 19th century.

According to oral tradition, around the year 1900 there was a steel marimba, accompanied by guitar and accordion, owned by the brothers Santiago, Eugenio, and Coronado Bautista. In fact, in a chronicle about the Minervalias of 1901, he states that the parade was led by “Marimbas, drums, whistles and chirimillas occupying a block” (La Baja Verapaz, November 15th, 1901: 5). Other documents from between 1892 to 1908 give an account of different music schools in Salamá, Rabinal and San Jerónimo (La Regeneración, October 31st, 1892: 3). Likewise, the festivities on the occasion of national independence, the Liberal Reform and the patron’s fair were enlivened with social dances with banda and marimba music (El 15 de Marzo, March 15th, 1892: 4; La Baja Verapaz, September 1st, 1904: 3; Eco de Salamá, June 30th, 1904: 4; El Progreso, June 30th, 1908: 4).

Towards the 1920s the marimba of Antonio Flores and the brothers Bernardo, Luis and Francisco Mexicanos stood out. A musical ensemble was also formed by Rafael Morales, Antonio Guzmán and Mardoqueo Herrera (guitars), Mariano Gómez (violin) and Domingo Rizzo

⁷ The research was titled “History of the Marimba of Salamá”, by Miguel Ángel Herrera San José, Salvador Guzmán Valdez, Francisco Guzmán Valdez, and Elgi Walter Boteo García.

(cello). Around the five-year period in 1925, Mr. Eusebio Guzmán settled in the San José de Salamá neighborhood, a renowned character by trade as a carpenter who stood out as a manufacturer of marimbas or *marimbero*, mandolins, sculptor and of course a virtuoso performer of the Guatemalan national instrument. He is the patriarch of the Guzmán Valdez family, which constitutes a lineage of artists related to the marimba, as manufacturers of said instrument, performers, and composers of musical pieces.

Among the marimbas that we remember made by Eusebio Guzmán between 1918 and 1954, both single and double, we can mention: Diosa del Amor, first double marimba from Flores (Petén), Atlantic Club for Puerto Barrios (Izabal), La Voz del Campo for the Chuacús farm, Amerindia for the Tinajas farm in Panzós (Alta Verapaz), also made other instruments scattered in Salamá, San Jerónimo, San Miguel Chicaj and destined for different places such as Cahabón and Senahú (Alta Verapaz); El Estor and Bananera (Izabal); San Martín Jilotepeque (Chimaltenango) and Morazán (El Progreso).

The nature of the Verapaces region has provided the three types of wood with which the marimba keyboard can be made: hormigo, granadillo and

roxul. The ant is the most widespread species in the region, with around 33 varieties, but only three give the best results for the manufacture of marimbas. These trees grow at a height of 1300 to 1500 meters above sea level in the forests of Chuacús, Vainillas and Rancho Viejo in Salamá and from Panimá to La Cumbre del Soldado in Purulhá (Esquivel Rodríguez, 1996: 3) Another master *marimbero* from In the 1920s it was Francisco Arriola Gómez who manufactured the India Bonita marimba for the owners of a cattle ranch located in the village of Cachil (Salamá) and built by the Sanabria Osorio brothers. In later times, other artisans who made marimbas stood out, such as Celestino López and Víctor Aburcia.

Towards the 1940s, one of the most popular groups of marimba of the mid-20th century emerged, made up of the brothers Francisco, Erasmo, Victoriano, Isidro and José Bautista Ochoa who, in addition to being performers, were composers. This musical group was so popular that they were hired to entertain parties from house to house for up to eight consecutive days.

For the decade from 1950 to 1960 there were other marimbas such as those mentioned below: Velkis and Chapinlandia owned by Gerardo Leal; The Salamateca by Bartolo Rodas;

The Palme d'Or for Luciano Sánchez; Chemical Soul by Augusto López; Josefita and Ángeles del Cielo by Félix Bautista; Alma de la Raza by Gabriel Vásquez, among many others. The marimba has permeated the identity of the Salamateco in such a way that it has become part of institutional education, with children and young marimbists (marimba players) being trained between 1960 and 1985 at the Federation Type School, Rural Normal School No. 4, the former Mixed Prevocational Institute of Salamá, the National Institute of Basic Education and other public and private educational centers.

Currently, Professor Francisco Guzmán Valdez is a person who for several decades has systematized the teaching of the marimba, training dozens of young people in this art. Professor Guzmán Valdez and his students have had national and international presentations, many of these young people have even achieved their professional development at the National Conservatory of Music. Today the aforementioned professional continues to teach classes in his house, converted since 2006 into Casa del Quetzal y de la Marimba.

Finally, we cannot fail to mention a list of marimba artists rescued from oblivion by those who investigated

this topic at the time, namely: Mariano Gómez Samayoa, Eusebio Guzmán, Isidro and Carlos Mejicanos, Isidro de La Rosa, Francisco Bautista, Fermín Rodas, Francisco Guzmán, Erasmo Bautista, Felix Arnoldo Guzmán, Eduardo Guzmán, Bartolo Rodas, Federico Sandoval, Víctor and Francisco Arriola, Rafael Morales, Toribio Marroquín, Adolfo Guzmán, Mariano Ramos, Juan Guzmán, Carlos Fernández, Esteban Mejía, Joaquín Mejía, Antonio López, Domingo Rizzo Monzón, Miguel Ángel Rizzo, Margarito Soberanis, Ángel Daniel de Los Santos, Adolfo Ramírez, Rubén Monzón, Rafael Arriola, Roberto Narciso Chavarría, Enrique and Felipe Mejía, Abilio Moya, Eder Sandoval, Miguel Ángel Herrera San José, Miguel Ángel García Guillermo, Arturo Soto Alvarado, Guillermo de Paz García, the brothers Bautista Ochoa and Fulvio Alirio Mejía Milián. Likewise, among the few women marimbists are: Josefa Guzmán Valdez, Celia López Salvatierra, Amalia Turcios, Elida Mexicanos, Elia Nívea López, Guadalupe Morales, Luz Marina Molineros and Gloria Abigail Alvarado.

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View from the Santa Cruz hill where you can see the valley of the city of Salamá.



Entrance to Salamá around the 1930s Courtesy: photo Alex



One of the main streets of Salamá



“Caminos” staff tracing one of the access routes to Salamá. Mid-20th century Courtesy: photo Alex



Salamatecan queens around the 1950s
Courtesy: photo Alex



Women's soccer team, mid-20th century
Courtesy: photo Alex



Bajaverapacenses athletes, 1920-1930s
Courtesy: photo Alex

Boys Scouts male group,
mid-20th century
Courtesy: photo Alex



Javelin athlete, mid-20th century
Courtesy: photo Alex

Female group of Boys Scouts,
mid-20th century
Courtesy: photo Alex



High school students,
1960s-1970s
Courtesy: photo Alex

Elementary school
students in the late 1950s
Courtesy: photo Alex





Marimba “Salam Ha” performed
by women, in the background
Professor Francisco Guzmán
Courtesy: photo Alex



Salamatecan musical band
Courtesy: photo Alex



Parade for the visit of General
Jorge Ubico to Salamá, 1940s
Courtesy: photo Alex

June 30th parade in Salamá
Courtesy: photo Alex



Social event in the San José
neighborhood in
the mid-20th century
Courtesy: photo Alex

Funeral in Salamá around the 1940s. It is
probably a public official due to the
presence of Guatemalan army troops.
Courtesy: photo Alex





Another example of Salamatecan social culture:
funeral in the 1940s
Courtesy: photo Alex

Family photograph of Salamatecos
neighbors in the 1930s.
Courtesy: photo Alex



Salamanca pharmacy from the end of
the 19th century and beginning of the
20th century, at that time Farmacia
“Camboa y Cia” owned by Andres
Izaguirre was in operation.
Courtesy: photo Alex