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Development of the Confraternity in Guatemala in the 16th Century

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We present to our readers the new name of the *Centro de Estudios Folklóricos* (CEFOL) to *Centro de Estudios de las Culturas en Guatemala* (CECEG).

The *Centro de Estudios de las Culturas en Guatemala* was established on July 8, 1967, by resolution of the *Honorable Consejo Superior Universitario* of *Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala* (USAC) under the name "*Centro de Estudios Folklóricos.*" Over time, and in response to the social context of historical events, changes became necessary. After collaborative work between researchers, center directors, and other units of USAC, with the support of Rector Eng. Murphy Olympo Paiz Recinos, the Consejo Superior Universtiario reviewed and approved the new name on July 24, 2019, the new name of CEFOL to *Centro de Estudios de las Culturas en Guatemala* -CECEG-.

The bulleetin you are holding still refers to the *"Centro de Estudios Folklóricos"* because the included article is based on research conducted in 2018. However, we are pleased to announce that our research unit is now officially named *CENTRO DE ESTUDIOS DE LAS CULTURAS EN GUATEMALA.*

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Resumen

El presente trabajo, está enfocado hacia la explicación del desarrollo de la cofradía en Guatemala durante el siglo XVI y, además, pretende dar a conocer algunos pormenores de la forma que adoptó al ser trasladada de España hacia Guatemala específicamente. En el desarrollo del texto, se aportan datos en relación con la manera en que fue implementada en Guatemala, así como las principales funciones que cumplió. También forma parte importante del estudio, el esclarecimiento de los objetivos de la cofradía, tanto por parte de los curas como por los indígenas, quienes a través de dichas organizaciones encontraron la manera de utilizarlas como centro de resistencia, resguardo de su cultura y religiosidad. Otra parte importante es lo relacionado a la utilización de las organizaciones por parte de curas e Iglesia, para mantener todo el aparato eclesiástico. Y, por último, se dan algunos datos en relación con la manera en la que españoles, Iglesia y Corona, emplearon la religiosidad con fines de expoliación del trabajo indígena. Para la elaboración del trabajo se utilizaron los métodos propios de la Historia como ciencia; se consultaron diferentes documentos del Archivo General de Centro América y del Archivo Histórico Arquidiocesano de Guatemala. Fue indispensable también, consultar diferentes autores que han escrito sobre el tema.

Palabras clave: cofradías, siglo XVI, traslado a América y Guatemala, desarrollo, período colonial.

Development of the confraternities in Guatemala in the 16th century

Abstract

The work presented is focused on explaining the development of the confraternities in Guatemala during the sixteenth century. What he intends is to disclose some details of the form he adopted when being transferred from Spain to America and Guatemala specifically. In the development of the text, data are provided regarding the ori- gin of the confraternities in Europe, the way it was implemented in Guatemala, as well as the main functions it fulfilled in this country. Also important part of the study, the clarification of the objectives of the confraternities, both on the part of the priests, as well as the indigenous. Of which, it can be said that while the Church intended evangelization through these orga- nizations, the indigenous people, on the other hand, found a way to use the confraternities as a center of resistance, safeguarding their culture and religiosity. Another important part is that related to the use of organizations by priests and the Church, to maintain the whole ecclesiastical apparatus. And finally, some data are given in relation to the way in which Spaniards, Church

and Crown, used religiosity for the purpose of plundering indigenous labor. For the elaboration of the work, the research techniques of mi- crohistory were used, different documents from the General Archive of Central America and Archdiocesan Historical Archive of Guatemala were consulted. It was also essential to consult different authors who have written about it.

Keywords: confraternities, sixteenth century, transfer to America and Guatemala, development, colonial period.

Introduction

The confraternities originated in Europe, in Spain, it flourished and served functions of mutual aid and veneration of Saints. In Guatemala, it was implemented in the 16th century with the primary purpose of christianizing indigenous peoples. During the colonial period, the confraternities underwent a series of transformations that led to unintended functions beyond the Church's original plans, yet still useful to ecclesiastical governance—particularly regarding economic revenue. This study explains that while confraternities were fundamentally religious, priests prioritized economic matters and business ventures generated by these organizations. For indigenous peoples, however, the cofradía became an opportunity to reclaim their traditional (pre-Hispanic) culture and gain leadership roles within their communities.

It is important to note that indigenous peoples managed to fuse elements of pre-Hispanic religiosity with those of Catholicism, giving rise to what is known as religious syncretism. Additionally, it is mentioned that the Spanish allowed a degree of religious and cultural expression to indigenous peoples in exchange for exploiting their economic resources and forced labor. However, the tenacity of indigenous communities strengthened these organizations, with the tacit approval and opportunities provided by the Church, transforming into strongholds of pre-Hispanic culture.

Confraternities

According to Rojas (1988, p. 41), the word confraternities derives from *cofrade* (confraternity member), originating from the Latin *cum* (meaning "whith") and *frater* (translating to "brother"). Combining these roots, the terms signifies "with brothers." It should be noted that in Spanish, the terms *cofradía* and *hermandad* (brotherhood) have been used interchangeably. The author defines confraternities specifically as:

> a pious, charitable association; an assembly of people united by professional, corporate, or other ties; a congreagation or brotherhood formed by devotes, authorized to engage in works of piety; a guild, company, or union of people for a specific purpose; a neighborhood, or a union of people or towns congregated to enjoy privileges. (Rojas, 1988, p. 41)

Rojas emphasizes that these organizations should not be understood as fixed entities but as constanly evolving into new forms.

Pinto Soria (1989, p. 114) defiines confraternities as:

> an institution of European origin distinguished by its corporate character, in which two aspects are closely intertwined: the religious and the econonomic. In the religious sphere, it linked popular religiosity with elements of the official religion. For indigenous peoples, in particular

they skillfully incorporated many elements of their traditional religion into these institutions; syncretism finds some of it's finest expressions within the confraternities.

Syncretism

While there are differing views on the meaning of this term, the perspective of Zabaleta (2006) is particularly insightful. He argues that the diversity of beliefs results from syncretism — the formation of a new religious system composed of elements from distinct cultures. In America, Catholicism was forcibly imposed, and subaltern groups ostensibly accepted the new religion, but only as veil to conceal their true *gods*.

Similarly, these subaltern groups lacked the freedom to openly practice their rituals, forcing them to conduct them clandestinely or co-opt Catholic festivities for this purpose. Zabaleta (2006) clarifies that indigenous ethnic groups across America continued practicing their spirituality after the Spanish arrival, albeit under a Catholic facade. In Guatemala, it was the confraternities that became the primary vehicle for focusing pre-Hispanic and Catholic traditions.

Regarding the blending of beliefs, the arrival of the Spanish prompted indigenous peoples to merge their spirituality under the guise of Catholic saints. They identified parallels between Catholiscism and pre-Hispanic religiosity—for example, the four directions of the cross mirrored the four *Chacs*,* rain gods. Concept of gods of good and evil, along with other elements such as baptism, confession, purification, prayer, the use of incense, veneration of the cross and other. These components allowed rituals to go unnoticed by the Spanish (Breme, 1966). It is important to clarify that cultural syncretism is a process of constant change where political dynamics, dependency, and confrontation among involved social groups converge (Rojas, 1988).

The confraternity in America

After the conquest, once the Spanish consolidated their power in America, they sought to establish organizations similar to those in Spain. Among these was the confraternity, whose primary objective was to propagate the Christian faith (Foster, 196 1; Breton, A. y Cazalés, A., 2001; Dary, 2016).

According to Foster (1961; Mon- tes, 1977), these associations served both religious and mutual aid functions. The author mentions that the earliest recorded confraternity was that of San Eloy, established in México in 1537. In the same text indicates how a confraternity in Lima, Peru, organized by its *mayordomos* (stewards) and deputies, provided candles during a member's funeral and financial assistance to his widow. Members were also obligated to visti the sick, support prisoners, and aid those in need. Many confraternities in America were linked to religious orders, primarily tasked with the care and maintenance of hospitals.

*Chacs, chaac: Chaac is one of the great Maya gods, god of water. The cult to this deity, was in the preclassic and classic that is related to agricultural production, rain, lightning and thunder.

Emergence of the confraternity in Guatemala

Confraternities emerged in Guatemala during the 16th century as Catholicism became institutionalized. These organizations played a crucial role in integrating indigenous people into Spanish culture. Initially, they arose as voluntary associations for celebrating and honoring saints, which indigenous communities incorporated into their traditions. Over time, these structures evolved into **rights of ethnic divisions** (*parcialidades*), with elders and *cabezas de cantón* authorized to make decisions regarding festivities (González y Luján, 1994; Breme, 1966). Later, in the 17th century, Popes Clement XIII and Paul V attempted to regulate these organizations due to their perceived anarchic management (Pinto, 1989).

Koechert (2007), argues that the Catholic Church founded indigenous confraternities to advance Christianization while ensuring indigenous communities contributed to the Church's financial upkeep. Stewards oversaw income, expenses, and business operations. As these organizations prospered, they gained significant influence over local governance. Jordán (2014) concurs, stating the confraternities were a key element in entrenching Christian religiosity, as they facilitated the organization of the new religion under priestly control (González y Luján, 1994; Foster, 1961; Montes, 1977).

Initially, the confraternity served to strengthen the primary bonds among men. During periods of crisis—such as the merciless economic exploitation of indigenous groups— these communnities sought to reinforce their social ties to alleviate the pressures imposed by colonial domination. In other words, it was time to seek collective association and group cooperation (Rojas, 1988; Foster, 1961). It was also important to note that in Guatemala, the confraternities emerged as regulatory entity mediating between dominant groups and indigenous people. Indigenous communities leveraged legal frameworks created by colonial authotities to safeguard their cultural identity and traditional organization (Rojas, 1988).

The exact founding date of the first confraternity in Guatemala remains uncertain. González and Luján (1994) suggest it was established between 1559 and 1562 in Verapaz under the patronage of *Nuestra Señora del Rosario.* Koechert (2007) posits and earlier origin in 1533, while Juarros (2000) argues for 1527.

By the 17th century, confraternities had gained significant prominence. No town, mo matter how small, lacked such organizations. Celebrations were meticulously planned far in advance, with dances playing a central role during festivities, involving local leaders (*principales*) and residents alike (González y Luján, 1994).

Prior to the Spanish arrival, indigenous people practiced rituals such as processions, music, sexual abstinence, flagellations, the use of incense or copal soaked in turkey blood, and fasting, often led by religious or political officials. These practices bore striking resemblance to those adopted during the colonial period, when indigenous communities integrated Catholic Saints into their belief systems. (Early, 1964; citado por Rojas, 1988).

Confraternity: A European Organization Transplanted to America or a Pre-Hispanic One?

According to Montes (1977), the confraternity was an organization that existed in Spain before its transfer to America. However, evidence suggests similar institutions existed among indigenous populations in the New World, specfically the Aztecs and Nahuatl people. This familiarity allegedly facilitated its assimilation among indigenous communities with minimal resistance.

Monte's assertion may imply that indigenous organizational and religious structures bore strong similarities to Spanish-style confraternities. Yet claiming that confraternities as such already existed pre-Hispanically is speculative. To clarify: rigorous, detailed studies of pre-Hispanic social organizations are scarce. While fragmentary evidence exists, it is insufficient to conclusively demonstrate institutions identical to the Spanish-imposed confraternity. Montes himself acknowledges this gap, stating (Montes, 1977, p. 63) *"When investigating the roots of communitarianism and cooperativism in pre-Columbian America, one would wish to find as clear a reference for New Spain (Mexico)."*

Schultze (S/A p. 41) further argues that not reliable data suppports the claim that confraternities existed before Spanish arrival. Thus, they cannot be classified as purely indigenous institutions but rather as hybrid entities blending Spanish and indigenous elements.

Therefore, it cannot be definitively asserted that an organization similar to the Spanish confraternity existed in pre-colonial America. According to Flavio Rojas (1988), the confraternity represents a **fusion of both cultures.** Indigenous organizational structures and deities tied to specific locations bore striking parallels to Catholic patron saints. In this sense, saints played a critical role in both Spanish and indigenous communities, personifying protection for inhabitants—much like the deities worshipped by indigenous people prior to conquest.

Roja's argument gains further traction when considering that **shared religious frameworks** between the two cultures facilitated seamless integration. Over time, the confraternities became amalgamated with political and economic dimensions. These elements were strategically exploited by the Spanish, who transitioned from military conquest to ideological domination, using the confraternity as a tool for moral control and economic extraction. For the Church and Crown, it was a calculated strategy cloaked in ambiguous moralizing rhetoric and economic purposes. Conversely, indigenous communities repurposed these insitutions to preserve their cultural identity through outwardly Catholic religious practices.

Diverse Objectives of the Confraternity

It is evident that the establishment of the confraternity in America served multiple objectives beyond propagating Christianity. The conquerors aimed to eradicate pre-Hispanic religiosity and replace it with Christianity, a goal in which confraternity played a key role to achieve it. However, these institutions

also intertwined with **political and economic agendas**, as noted by Larrazábal (cited by Montes, 1977, p. 74).

> These congregations, in the true spirit of their original purpose, are excellent and useful, both morally and politically. They gather the people in turns at the foot of the altars, instill ideas of dependence through piety, and direct their spending toward honest and agreeable purposes.

The text leaves no doubt about the confraternities utility for the colonial system: it ensured obedience, fostered dependence by channeling indigenous labor toward funding masses and celebrations, and secured economic resources for the Church. By co-opting indigenous political structures, the ideological subjugation it engendered facilitated Spanish control and solidified colonial domination.

The Confraternity as an Indigenous Political Organization

it is important to take in consideration that for indigenous people, the confraternity also functioned as **political tool** during the colonial period. Indigenous leaders leveraged these organizations to petition the *Real Audiencia** (colonial high court), particularly regarding land disputes. Common actions included denunciations, acquisitions, usurpations, and efforts to maintain territorial control (Bertrand, 1992; citado por Solórzano, 2018).

The confraternity, in addition to being used by indigenous people to strenghten their religious practices and safeguard ritual autonomy, also became a vital organization for religious celebrations and, more importantly, for addressing communal governance in areas such as agriculture, politics, and economics (González y Luján, 1994). Futhermore, holding a position within the confraternity symbolized power and prestige for indigenous leaders (Saqb'ichil-Copa- magua, 1999; Breton y Cazalés, 2001), offering opportunities for economics gains, such as issuing loans from community funds.

The Confraternity and its use to Compel Indigenous Labor

During the colonial period, the confraternity served not only religious functions—preserving pre - Hispanic rituals fused with Catholicism—but also acted as a subtle mechanism for Spaniards to spur indigenous labor. Indigenous communities were forced to generate funds to cover expenses tied to their rituals, requiring them to work in fields or engage in trade. In this way, the Spanish, Church, and Crown profited indirectly from indigenous labor, as they appropriated the fruits of their work. (Solórzano, 2016).

Spanish hacienda owners secured semi-free labor, the Church profited from charging for masses, candles, wine, and other items (as will be detailed later); and the *Real Audiencia* (colonial high court) consistently sought to audit the confraternities, demanding reports from priests on their assests and funds to extract taxes. Thus, while confraternities served indigenous communities, among other purposes, as a means to safeguard their

*Real Audiencia: audiencia, in the kingdoms of late medieval Spain, a court established to administer royal justice; also, one of the most important governmental institutions of Spanish colonial America.

culture, they simultaneously became a silver mine for the Church and the Crow—a tool to coerce indigenous labor. Documents from the *archivo General de Centro América* (Signatura A1, Legajo 207, Expedien- te 4169, Folio 10; citado por Solórzano, 2016) confirm this:

> Unless legislation uncovers the secret of inspiring desires and needs in this indolent caste, it is well that religious ideas compel them to work […] Without confraternities and tributes, the indians would lack necessities, and consequently contibute nothing to society or the State.

Undoubtedly, the dismantling of pre-Hispanic social structures and the imposition of a new socio-economic order generated contradictions between the dominant and the dominated. Yet a mutual dependency emerged: both groups relied oneach other, the only way to address their respective needs was thorugh social or cultural organizations (Rojas, 1988). Foster (1961) corroborates this, stating that the clergy held power to authorize or deny anything related to confraternities , which can be seen from two different points of view; one, the Church used to confraternity as an instrument of social and economic control (at through morality) and on the other hand, it made possible the exploitation of the indigenous as a labor force.

Economic Aspects

Undoubtedly, confraternities represented signigicant sources of income for the Church and Crown. Their financial importance was such that audits of their assets were conducted regularly—not only to maintain control but also to prevent wealth they manage from falling into private hands. By 1770, there were, 1090 confraternities managing 265,088 *pesos** and 45,693 *cabezas de ganado* (head of livestock) (Jordán, 2014). Although the amounts shown were substantial for the time, the actual amounts may have been higher, as mentioned in the same writing, the priests complained about the difficulties in auditing accounts due to missing record books.

As previously mentioned, these organizations were vital to parish operations. However, economic mismanagement remained a persistent issue. Priests accused indigenous communities of hiding funds, falsifying records, unjustified expenses, self-theft, irregular loans, and even drunkenness and dishonesty during patron saint festivals. Each confraternity was obligated to pay 8 - 12 *reales** for monthly mass and 52 *reales* (equivalent to 6 *pesos* = 4 *reales*) for the main festival. Contribution also included ornaments, candles, wine, communion hosts, and other parish necessities.

This raises the question: Why didn't the Church eliminate pre-Hispanic religious practices? Jordán (2014) argues that while confraternities were essential to Christianization efforts, priests could not eradicate deeply rooted pre-Hispanic traditions. Clergy tolerated indigenous practices as long as they founded church operations and maintained temple ornaments. However, they disapproved of rituals like *guachivales**.

*Peso(s): an old silver coin of Spain and Spanish America equal to eight reales

*Guachivales, guachival: were institutions dedicated to a saint that carried out socioreligious activities.

*Reales: the *"real"* was introduced as Spain's national currency in 1474 during the reign of King Ferdinand II of Aragon (1452-1516) and Queen Isabella I of Castile (1451-1504).

Part of the answer is provided by Jordán, who states that economic interest was a driving factor. The author notes that the only practice priests opposed was the celebration called *guachival**, implying tacit approval of all other activities.

It is noteworthy that most confraternities funds flowed to churches—whether for maintaining religious services or financing festivals. As mentioned, indigenous communities were required to pay priests for masses and sermons, with fees varying by location (typically between eight and twelve *reales*). Monthly masses were mandatory, while those during Holy Week, Corpus Christi, Blood of Christ, or for deceased cost significantly more (Montes, 1977).

Cortés and Larraz (cited by Montes, 1977, p. 144) argued that neither masses, sermons, nor processions benefited indigenous souls (claiming indigenous people were unaware of their purpose). Yet priests focused solely on profiting from church services*: "With this, they maintain and preserve purely as a means and right by which priests earn their living, them as mere profane transaction."* These texts suggest priests compelled indigenous communities to perform endless masses and religious services to strip them of their resources.

As evident, the economic aspect was fundamental, as confraternities covered all Church expenses. Due to the substantial payments required, part of the produce from communal lands was allocated to meet the confraternities financial obligations.

Indigenous people worked these communal lands without compensation. Financial control rested with the parish priest, who retained a portion of the income for personal gain. Consequently, Catholic priests were deeply invested in establishing as many confraternities as possible (Pinto, 1989).

Cortés and Larraz (cited by Montes, 1977) acknowledge that confraternities, permitted to conduct religious practices since the 16th century, became entrenched in the colonial system by the 18th century. In other words, this institutionalization occurred from the outset, and the Church's permissiveness—likely due to clerical negligence—shaped the socio-economic landscape. Had such practices been restricted early on, the colonial dynamic might have different drastically.

On the other hand, the priest was aware that indigenous religious practices were different from Catholic ones, and that in the 18th century, they were difficult to eliminate because, to certain extent, they were *convenient and necessary* for indigenous people, Spaniards, the Crown, and the Church. It is clarified that the convenience for Spaniards, the Church, and the Crown was purely economic, while for indigenous people, it had a religious and indentity-preserving character. In Costa Rica, the exploitation of indigenous people by the confraternities also included women; the priest forced men to dye thread and women to weave it, and the money obtained from selling the product was used to pay for masses. Another activity to acquire money was livestock farming; not only meat was sold, but also hides, leather, and cheese. With this activity, some confraternities

manage to accumulate enough economic resources to expand their lands. The acquisition of land, indigenous labor, and salaried workers or enslaved people became the foundation for the prosperity of many churches, reflected in their ornamentation and construction quality (Pinto, 1989).

As is known, the obligation of the monthly mass for the confraternities was unavoidable. But, additionaly, some indigenous people contributed one *real*, other donated two, or gave products like wax candles, which had velue between ¼ *real* and one *real*. Offered fruits, cacao, and products placed on the saint's altar. It is neccesary to clarify that the candles were not lit for the celebration of the mass; instead, at the end, the priest and a confraternity steward collected them, allong with the fruits and money.

Let us see where these offerings went: the cacao and fruits were for the priest's consumption, and the candles were resold for others celebrations. In this way, indigenous people could buy the same candles multiple times, and the priest was always well-fed and obtained money from these dealings Gage, 1958; citado by Hill, 2001).

There appears to have been an *apparent* rivalry between the *Real Audiencia* and the Church; the term "apparent" is emphasized because, ultimately, the two institutions complemented each other. In 1637, the *Real Audiencia*, concerned about tributes, advocated for the abolition of confraternities in indigenous towns, justifying this action by claiming these organizations caused poverty amoung indigenous communities due to excessive expenses. Meanwhile, priests were interested in establishing as many confraternities as possible, as Pardo (1978, p. 82), indicates, the more confraternities existed, the greater the income flowed into the poket *"of the local priest, who also received a portionof the funds collected through weekly offerings, for the religious services under his charge."*

The assertions of Cortés y Larraz (cited by Montes, 1977) are clear regarding the economic role of confraternities: they sustained priests and the Church as a whole, and the priests prioritized collecting payments from indigenous communities. Given these interests, they maintained, tolerated, and incentivized confraternities, even if they were *profane*, since their religious practices did not align with Christian precepts. Both the confraternities and priests knew this but allowed it.

Of course, there were significant advantages for the Church and priests, as the economic and material income of parishes was at stake. For the confraternities, it was an opportunity to organize around their religious practices, which they had grown accustomed to since the 16th century. Thus, being habituated to this system, they paid without much issue. As previously stated, they were the ones who provided funds for communion hosts, wine, and more; they even took charge of building, repairing, maintaining, and decorating churches (Montes, 1977; Jordán, 2014).

From the tithes collected, priests gave partial accounts to their superiors. According to Montes (1977), priests kept 60% for their maintenance and church operations; the remaining 40% was handed over to Church authorities. Fees for services like confessions, baptisms, and/or marriages were undeclared,

increasing the priests' profits. This enrichment was unquestionable, so much so that in 1681, an ordinance was issued to limit it, which had little effect.

The growth of confraternities produced discord among different sectors of society. Conflicts arose between indigenous people and *ladinos* (non-indigenous locals), as the latter attempted to seize their assets (Pinto, 1989). Conflicts between priests and indigenous *alcaldes mayores* (mayors) stemmed from the latter's failure to explain the source of funds for celebrations—many of them extravagant, despite their supposed poverty as peasants. This lead the clergy to repeatedly attempt to confiscate confraternity funds (Solórzano, 2016). In the early 19th century, the Crown sought to unify confraternity assests, aiming to appropiate money from the sale of land and livestock.

The hard work of indigenous people increased not only their wealth but also the greed of priests and Church ministers, who amassed sufficient resources to enjoy abundant food. In towns where priestly prosperity was glaring, up to four priests profited from everything provided by indigenous people—no longer just agricultural products but also personal services and even labor in artisanal activities. For these reasons, Cortéz and Larraz asserted that confraternities were necessary during the colonial period.

It is worth mentioning the personal services by priests and the food for their sustenance. In some parishes, they had up to eighteen (18) indigenous people for various services and two *molenderas**. Young men attending doctrine school were tasked with gathering firewood and straw.

Additionally, each indigenous person had to bring to the Church: half a *fanega** of maiz (56 pounds) (bushel of corn), a third fo firewood, and four bundles of straw (Montes, 1977). The stewards of the confraternities were responsible for going door-to-door to collect food for the priests, such as eggs, chickens, and other items (Montes, 1977).

As previously mentioned, the economic aspect was always problematic. Priests complained that stewards hid money, falsified account records, made unjustified expenses, and even issued irregular loans to other indigenous people; accusations of theft were frequent. yet, paradoxically, when ecclesiastical authorities audited the priests, the accounts did not balance (Jordán, 2014).

It is also important to note that during the colonial period, there were confraternities of Spaniards and *mestizos* (mixed-race individuals), which owned lands purchased from the Crown. Members of wealthy Spanish families held the highest positions (stewards and deputies), allowing them to lease lands and secure cash loans. These confraternities lent money a *censo (*under a mortgage-like system), charging monthly or annual interest. To access these loans, the organization required real estate as collateral and granted loans equivalent to 5% of the property's value. If the debtor defaulted, they lost their property, and the confraternity claimed it. Once the confraternity owned the land, it was leased out, generating additional income (Pinto, 1989).

*Molenderas: Woman who grinds corn, seeds, etc., by hand on a metate or grinding table.
*Fanega: a unit of dry measure in Spanish-speaking countries, equal in Spain to 1.58 U.S. bushels (55.7 liters).

Legalization of Confraternities

To operate legaly in America, confraternities required authorization from the Church's highest hierarchy. The process began with approval from the local parish priest, followed by a petition to the Archbishop of Guatemala, who granted final authorization. One of the principal requirements was the payment of annual masses, funded through collections from indigenous congregation (Montes, 1977).

Ordinances for Estableshiment

In the compilation of the Laws of the Indies, Title IV (Consejo de Hispanidad, 1946), confraternity regulations are linked to hospitals. *Law J,* in the year 1541, stipulates that hospitals must be founded in Spanish and indigenous towns as a tangible manifestation of Christianity charitiy. These medical facilities were to be built adjacent to churches, prioritizing the treatment of non-contagious diseases. Contagious disease hospitals, were to be constructed far from populated areas. Administration of these hospitals was entrusted to religious orders (Consejo de Hispanidad, 1946).

In 1613, authorization was granted to establish the Confraternity of *Orden de San Antonio.* However, the formation of confraternities was prohibited unless they complied with law XXV (Consejo de Hispanidad, 1946, p. 34) wich states: *"That no Confraternities be founded without the King's license, nor gather without the presence of the domestic prelate and Royal Ministers"*

As outlined in the Laws of the Indies, btotherhoods and confraternities were closely tied to the Church, with their primary obejctives being the establishment of hospitals and medical care for the poor and needy.

A document from the The Archdiocesan Historical Archive of Guatemala (De Paz, 1666) details the process for requesting authorization for confraternities, as well as the royal orders or decrees regulating their operations. The manuscript recounts how the priest of *Santiago Jocotán*, *Hublas de Paz*, petitioned the Archbishop of Guatemala City, *Fray Payo de Rivera*, for authorization to establish the confraternity of *San Sebastián*.

It is worth nothing that the priest's initiative stemmed from the devotion of indigenous people of Jocotán had already organized an unauthorized brotherhood prior to the request. Their aim was to formalize this brotherhood into a legally recognized confraternity. Authorization was granted the same year. (De Paz, 1666, F. 5).

The following rules governed indigenous participation in the confraternity (De Paz, 1666): only priests were permitted to celebrate mass; all activities required supervision by the parish priest; a locked box with two keys was mandatory for safeguarding funds and a ledger was required to record income and expenses; a monthly mass had to be celebrated and elections for stewards or livestock sales were to occur on festive days. These were among the many stipulations regulating the confraternities operations.

Another document provides information about the regulations confraternities had to follow. According to a c*edula Real** dated on October fifteen, 1805, found in the *Archivo General de Centro América* (Porcel, 1805) it announced that all confraternities, brotherwoods, and congregations were required to operate under the same rules.

Ordinances for the Position of Steward

Among the positions that were exercised in the confraternity was the steward, which, apparently was not clearly defined until 1865. That year, the King of Spain issued a *cedula Real* to regulate the election of stewards and confraternities (Martínez, 1805). The text states the vice-pratones were responsible for supervising, approving, and appointing stewards for confraternities, charitable deeds, and charitable foundations.

The statutes mandated: no security deposit was to be charged from stewards; only honorable individuals were to be elected, the tole was unpaid. Election required only the presence of a secretary, meetings required the designated priest's attendance, financial accounts had to be presented to the board for approval and all payments had to be made without exception. Additionally, confraternities could not relocate, treasurers were elected for two-years terms and the cash box requiered three keys (one for the priest, one for the steward, and one for the treasurer).

Confratenity as Resistance, Safeguard of Indigenous Culture and Religiosity

The Spanish conquest aimed to strip and destroy the culture of the vanished: indigenous peole. The imposition of Catholicism became the visible symbol of occupation, yet ir served as a subterfuge for economic interests. In this context, the confraternity legitimized the colonial system. For indigenous communities, however, it held a different meaning—the association was for them a way to safeguard their religiosity and preserve their identity, deemed "barbaric" and "primitive" by the colonizers. (Rojas, 1988; Montes, 1977). Thus, the confraternity played and ideological role in domination while simultaneously becoming a bastion of resistance.

Over time, the supposed integration of indigenous people into Spanish Catholicism slipped beyond priestly control, transforming into an effective form of resistance and communal organization. It evolved into a socio-political association, unsubordinated to priests, ideal for resisting Spanish harassment. Within these groups, indigenous *principales* (leaders) held leadership roles (González y Luján, 1994).

Evangelization was undeniably a pivotal in consolidating the colonial system. Indigenous people appeared to collaborate by adopting Catholicism, but this was merely a survival mechanism, whithin the Spanish worship they

*Cedula Real: Was an order issued by the King or Queen of Spain between the 15th and 19th centuries . Its content resolved a legally relevant conflict, established a standard of legal conduct, created an institution, appointed a royal office, granted a personal or collective right, or ordered a specific action.

they found similarities to their own rituals, such as image veneration. Above all, they exploited the Church's concessions to carry out ancestral practices (CEUR, 1995).

Accordin to González and Luján (1994), confraternities served more to preserve pre-Hispanic beliefs and customs than the entrench Christianity. Celebrations featured elements rooted in pre-colonial traditions such as: dances, processions, traditional attire, copal incense, food, rituals, and excessive alcohol consumption.

It should be understood that the rituals and celebrations provided the indignous people with moments of relaxation and recreation to forget for a moment the adversities caused by the Spaniards with their excessive exploitation, and on the other hand by natural phenomena such as diseases, epidemics, droughts, and storms. In this sense, the confraternity became a integrative force, strengthening indigenous religiosity and social organization while functioning as a local political entity. Pre-Hispanic spirituality endured under a Catholic facade, as indigenous communities subtly and astutely reclaimed and safeguarded their worldview (CEUR, 1995).

According to Breme (1966), the rituals performed by indigenous confraternities, as well as their dances, did not align with the canons established by the Catholic Church. Thus, it can be inferred that confraternities primarily served to preserve religiosity rooted in pre-Hispanic traditions rather than Catholicism. Regarding the acceptance of Chatolicism, Gage (as cited by Montes, 1977, p. 78) states that, outwardly, indigenous people professed Christianity, buy inwardly, there was more than could be physically observed.

The author's point is that, although they listened to what the priests taught them, they viewed Christian beliefs with skepticism—that is, they neither accepted nor shared them. In other words, they accepted the imposition of a new religion and its demands out of convenience (and likely fear), but continued practicing their rituals in disguised forms. They feigned compliance with Church mandates because it allowed them to clandestinely sustain their own spirituality.

In their eagerness to impose Christianity, the Spanish destroyed indigenous sacred places and built churches on the same grounds, believing this would erase pre-Hispanic beliefs. The opposite occurred: these places remained integral to indigenous religous identity. While the physical form changed, they continued to serve as spaces of worship for pre-Hispanic rituals. Though indigenous people attended Catholic masses and other celebrations led by Spanish priests, afterward, the church transformed into a pre-Columbian sacred space dedicated to their deities, where they directed their prayers, petions, and offerings (Breton, A. y Cazalés, A., 2001).

Severo Martínez (2001), discussing indigenous spirituality, asserts that they never abandoned their pre-Hispanic beliefs and continued to

worship their deities, whether secretly or publicly under a Catholic facade. It must be understood that religious worship temporarily shielded indigenous people from the exploitation and harsh conditions imposed by the Spanish (temporarily). The indigenous response was to blend Catholic and pre-Hispanic elements, giving rise to hybrid religiosity—religious syncretism.

Reflections

The establishment of the confraternity in Guatemala primarily served the Crown's objective to Christianize indigenous people. Over time, however, it deverged into multiple directions, creating spaces with aligned interests in some aspects and conflicting ones in others. It is critical to note that the Crown formulated policies for the New World, deploying friars to achieve its goals. These friars, in turn, exploited the opportunityto enrich both the Church and themselves.

The Church, for its part, found a way to generate income and maintain its ecclesiastical system. Its primary interest was economic, indifferent to the activities of the confraternities, even when they contradicted Catholic doctrine.

Initially, mutual aid flourished among members, and these organizations aimed to disseminate Catholic doctrine. Over time, however, their functions expanded beyond social roles and evolved into political structures with influence over most community issues.

Although the religious function was primary—specifically the veneration of a saint—indigenous people outwardly displayed images of Catholic saints. In reality, however, they worshipped their pre-Hispanic deities under a Christian guise.

The Church granted indigenous people limited autonomy in confraternal activities while exploiting them economically. When it later treid to dismantle these groups, it could no longer do so. Indigenous communities, for their part, seized the opportunity provided by the Church to sustain their rituals and keep their spirituality and culture alive.

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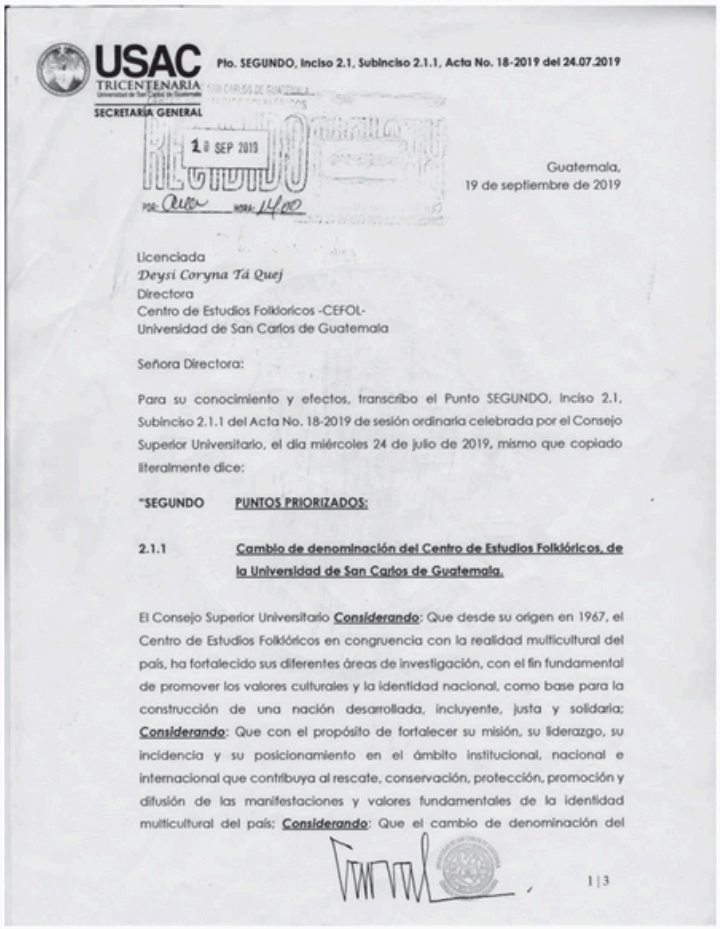

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Señora Directora:

Para su conocimiento y efectos, transcribo el Punto SEGUNDO, Inciso 2.1, Subinciso 2.1.1 del Acta No. 18-2019 de sesión ordinaria celebrada por el Consejo Superior Universitario, el día miércoles 24 de julio de 2019, mismo que copiado literalmente dice:

"SEGUNDO **PUNTOS PRIORIZADOS:**

2.1.1 **Cambio de denominación del Centro de Estudios Folklóricos, de la Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala.**

El Consejo Superior Universitario **Considerando**: Que desde su origen en 1967, el Centro de Estudios Folklóricos en congruencia con la realidad multicultural del país, ha fortalecido sus diferentes áreas de investigación, con el fin fundamental de promover los valores culturales y la identidad nacional, como base para la construcción de una nación desarrollada, incluyente, justa y solidaria; **Considerando**: Que con el propósito de fortalecer su misión, su liderazgo, su incidencia y su posicionamiento en el ámbito institucional, nacional e internacional que contribuya al rescate, conservación, protección, promoción y difusión de las manifestaciones y valores fundamentales de la identidad multicultural del país; **Considerando**: Que el cambio de denominación del

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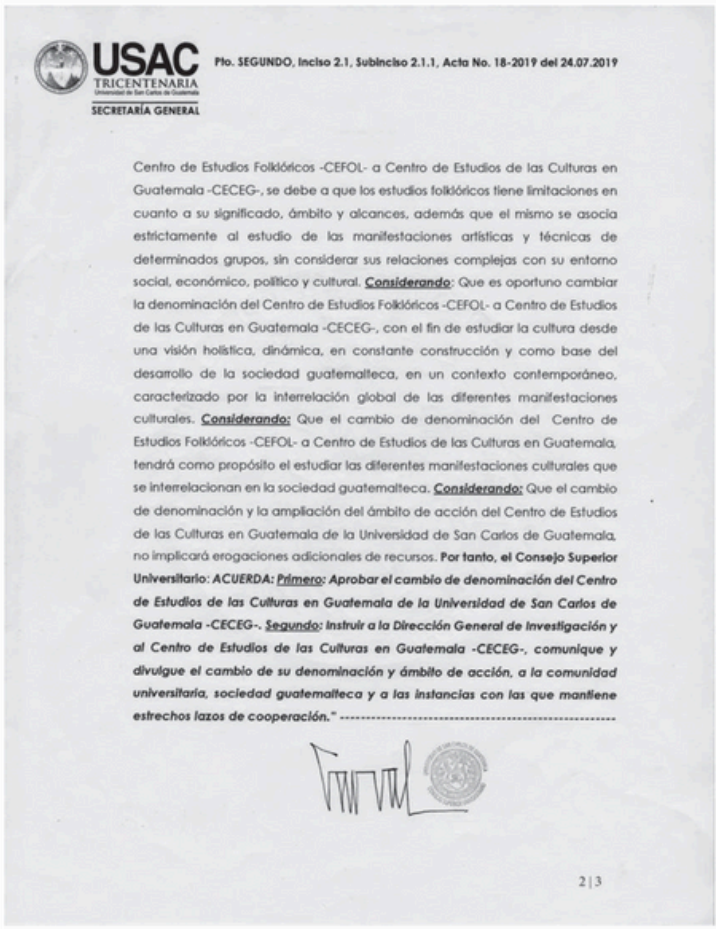

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Centro de Estudios Folklóricos -CEFOL- a Centro de Estudios de las Culturas en Guatemala -CECEG-, se debe a que los estudios folklóricos tiene limitaciones en cuanto a su significado, ámbito y alcances, además que el mismo se asocia estrictamente al estudio de las manifestaciones artísticas y técnicas de determinados grupos, sin considerar sus relaciones complejas con su entorno social, económico, político y cultural. **Considerando**: Que es oportuno cambiar la denominación del Centro de Estudios Folklóricos -CEFOL- a Centro de Estudios de las Culturas en Guatemala -CECEG-, con el fin de estudiar la cultura desde una visión holística, dinámica, en constante construcción y como base del desarrollo de la sociedad guatemalteca, en un contexto contemporáneo, caracterizado por la interrelación global de las diferentes manifestaciones culturales. **Considerando:** Que el cambio de denominación del Centro de Estudios Folklóricos -CEFOL- a Centro de Estudios de las Culturas en Guatemala, tendrá como propósito el estudiar las diferentes manifestaciones culturales que se interrelacionan en la sociedad guatemalteca. **Considerando:** Que el cambio de denominación y la ampliación del ámbito de acción del Centro de Estudios de las Culturas en Guatemala de la Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, no implicará erogaciones adicionales de recursos. **Por tanto, el Consejo Superior Universitario: *ACUERDA: Primero: Aprobar el cambio de denominación del Centro de Estudios de las Culturas en Guatemala de la Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala -CECEG-. Segundo: Instruir a la Dirección General de Investigación y al Centro de Estudios de las Culturas en Guatemala -CECEG-, comunique y divulgue el cambio de su denominación y ámbito de acción, a la comunidad universitaria, sociedad guatemalteca y a las instancias con las que mantiene estrechos lazos de cooperación."*** ----------

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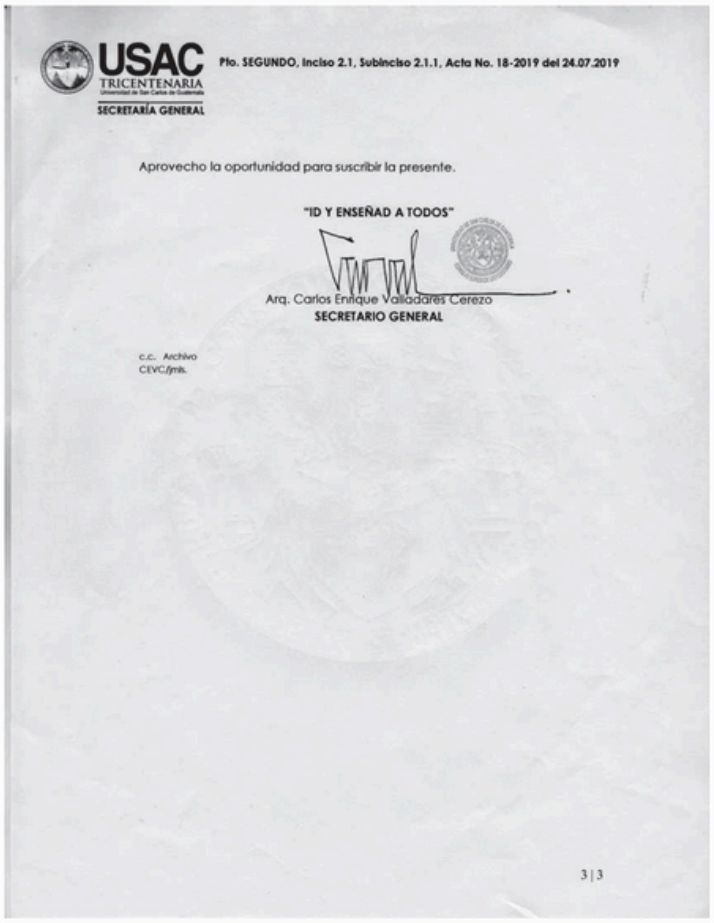

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"ID Y ENSEÑAD A TODOS"

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