



Syncretisms, culture and Nature in Guatemala

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CONTEXT

In order to give clarity to the *corpus* that makes the title of the essay, and so that what is said later has an acceptable frame of reference, I propose to follow the well-known definition of culture that is adopted in most academic circles: “to understand by (such) that complex of elements that preserves and synthesizes the collective experience that most people accumulates throughout their historical development”.... “collective memory that is transmitted from generation to generation as a social (non-biological) inheritance, and enables individuals, through it, to integrate normally into the community, thus imbuing them with the values, knowledge and skills of the community”²⁸. In this way, it constitutes “the traditional and current legacy, collectivized, which has been transmitted, in a non-institutionalized form, from generation to generation,

and which represents the most important load of values, insofar as in them lies to a great extent, the essence of the national identity and the germ of the popular national culture”.

The foregoing preamble serves as an exposition of the central argument, which is to search for and highlight elements of syncretism in traditional Guatemalan popular culture. It's important to clarify that contextualization is not only semantic, and that it goes beyond the simple pretension of formulating a basic framework of concepts, principles and observations. It is the platform on which the model of interaction and culture-biology interrelation that nurtures the social facts in the framework of the acculturation forged from the moment of the Spanish invasion, and that reaches its maximum expression in the 16th century. Limits have been set³⁸ for the period covered: “The Hispanic period covers from 1524 to 1821. In it, we can notice two stages in relation to the creation of a new local cultural heritage; a first stage of warlike conquest between 1524 and 1542 and another one of ideological incorporation from 1542 to 1821”.

It is possible that the approaches and related reflections may arouse some



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degree of controversy. Although they are inspired by and arise from objective sources, there is a high degree of probability that they will not be generally accepted. In the face of this risk, it is clear that a definite intention is to point out how everyday life conceals the cultural inheritance that underlies our “national culture”. And, in parallel, what does Nature contribute to the syncretized complex and in what capacity.

The reiteration, following Celso Lara Figueroa²⁸, that “culture is the synthesis of material and spiritual values that expresses, with its mere presence, the particular historical experience of a people and represents the results of its peculiar social physiognomy, its collective personality”, it is not possible to fail to see and admire the fusion of four cultural heritages, of so many other peoples, who without having totally lost their identity now only scarcely recognize their individual contributions to the forged syncretization. The natural environment has played its own role, of transcendental impact due to possessing one of the richest biological diversities of the planet, to dispense consequently exceptional resources for human living and to inspire the symbolisms filed in the collective imaginary of the peoples.

I would have liked the title to imply the splendid, glorious, rich,

magnificent and varied character that the world of cultural syncretism seems to me when it is based on a Nature of its own attributes. It is because from it springs another world, the magical one, the one that renounces to fix limits between the real and the unreal, in which each individual appropriates the collective imaginary and makes it his set of customs, traditions, beliefs and personal behaviors to forge alliances and create links between him and the divine sphere, and with the supramund and the underworld. Supernatural earthly dimension, daughter of the daily reality.

For it is found in practically all manifestations and expressions of man’s life and for this reason we must take the syncretic out of the corner of the “common” to affirm its presence, rescue its essence and highlight its meaning. It is in our simple way of being, precisely in that which makes us be. If we start from this characteristic, the everyday, which is what gives it its common character, it is justified that in the same way that for the study of culture, and only for descriptive purposes, it can be divided into material, social and spiritual dimensions, the syncretic is susceptible to be isolated from them and therefore also visualized in these three areas.

Syncretism is a word with Greek roots (*from sinkretismós*) that the Real Academia Española de la Lengua³¹

takes in its original sense to designate a “coalition of two adversaries against a third”, but also a “philosophical system that tries to reconcile different doctrines”. In both cases it emphasizes the presumption of the existence of opposites, “adversaries” or “doctrines”. But it is denotative of antagonism. It is interesting to reconsider the meaning of “two adversaries against a third”, since it supports the interpretation of a struggle of subconscious principles of cultural identity against a new identity product born from their contact.

A general dictionary of La Lengua Española Spanish language³⁵ considers it a “reconciliation or union of conflicting beliefs or opinions, or a movement or effort directed to that end”; and, in the second meaning, as a “confused mixture of heterogeneous doctrines”. The appellative “confused” seems to me ambiguous and imprecise, although it can easily be made “harmonious” by those of us who take the term to the cultural domain. We shall see.

Having brought to us the denotative that underlies the previous conceptualizations, we can contrast them with the criterion contained in the Dictionary of Teoría Folklórica,¹² which defines it as follows: “Syncretism. The cultural trait that has completed the four stages of acculturation (see below). Mixed

product of two or more cultures, and in perfect harmony. Synthesis, result of thesis and antithesis”.

From the same dictionary I take complementary definitions that help to improve the appropriation of the concept. For, following Carvalho-Neto¹², the “cultural trait” is the “cultural unit”. And take for “cultural fact” a “set of related cultural traits”. Cultural fact is synonymous with social fact, and “fact” is defined as “phenomenon, thing, manifestation, whether material or spiritual”. It is stated that acculturation is “a term of cultural anthropology”, which as a social fact occurs “when a contact of cultures operates cultural changes that manage to transform the cultures that participate in such contact. In its process there are stages: 1/ competition, 2/ conflict, 3/ accommodation, 4/ assimilation. A contact of cultures that has gone through these four stages produces syncretism”.

In addition, the meaning of syncretism has made use of very archaic wedges, concepts and definitions. Caro Baroja refers to this when she points out that since Plutarch spoke of religious syncretism (supported in De Fraterno Amor, published in 1970 by Loeb, London) as “union or federation of Cretan communities” or since “syncretism” was used to express the “union of two groups combined, in

order to go against a common enemy” (he uses the *Aetymologicum Magnum* published modernly by Liddell and Scott) “the term has been used in multiple ways, and more in dealing with philosophical and religious questions than with political ones”.

Throughout, there is a certain tendency to maintain the idea of clash. This finds many followers, who unfortunately transform it into a “clash of cultures”. There is no such clash. In my opinion, it is a contact of worldviews that leads to the enrichment of the “third party” in discord; therefore, it is the way of evolution of social behaviors. Every evolutionary process needs a substrate to act and a raw material to progress. Evolution is inherent to the life of individuals and societies, and just as organic evolution leads to the adaptation of organisms and ecosystems, the contact of cultures leads to the enrichment of behaviors and the adjustment of behaviors.

From the general in the field of definitions to terms and words of our language, to its semantic projection to the domains of the social sciences, the concept of syncretism carries implicitly that of fusion, mixture, amalgamation. Philosophical conceptions of different cosmogonic

dimensions are mixed, which is syncretism in pure essence. I will try to show that a philosophical vision of the cosmos can be the basis of facts of collective behavior, not only of the spiritual culture, which is what seems more immediate, but also of the material and social culture. With different ways of seeing the Universe, two cultures that approach each other, that come face to face, unite their social (cultural) practices without losing their identity. The new product, as varied as everyday life, may be represented by an artifact or a craft practice, a conception of collective popular art, a rite, a belief, a myth, a food, an individual behavior or, what matters most for this essay, by a group behavior that provides identity and social cohesion.

This social behavior, with greater or lesser intensity, will be able to show the two cultural legacies that constitute it, or at least traces of them. Because that is what they are, centennial or millenarian inheritances that, amalgamated more than fused, give life to popular expressions and manifestations that soon become a third heritage. This last one, the one that by essence is syncretic, is the central object of the essay. I will give the best arguments at my disposal and optimal examples to show that in Guatemala it represents an exceptional heritage.

FOUR TOWNS, TWENTY-FOUR IDENTITIES

The Guatemalan Nation is formed by four towns¹⁵; Maya, Xinka, Garífuna and Ladino. The first two derive from the socio-cultural evolution of the oldest inhabitants of the territory, the others from human contributions that came with the invasion, conquest and colonization of the territory, actions favored by the Spanish Crown. Iberian blood contributed to the origin of the Ladino people, and Afro-Caribbean to the Garífuna.

As a debatable generalization, in the title of this section I use “identities” to refer to linguistic communities. Controversial certainly, but necessary to emphasize the arguments useful in the search for their ethnocultural contributions to syncretism in such a global framework as that of the essay. The proposition is to see each ethnolinguistic group as a cultural identity per se, a dynamic unit that contains its cultural heritage carved in centuries of common life, a labile social imaginary but deeply kept in the collective conscience.

The State of Guatemala recognizes twenty-four languages spoken daily in the country (listed here in alphabetical order; lowercase to refer to the language, not the people): Achi’, akateko, awakateko, Castilian (or

Spanish), Ch’orti”, Chuj, Garífuna, Itza”, Ixil, Kaqchikel, K “iche”, Mam, Mopán, popti” (jakalteko), poqgomam, pogomchi”, q’anjob’al, q’eqchi”, sakapulteko, sipakapense, tektiteko, tz “utujil, uspanteko and xinka. These languages give their names to the linguistic communities that speak them, except for Spanish, which is the language of the Ladino (mestizo) group.

Apart from this last notable exception, and that of Garífuna and Xinka spoken by the communities of the same name, the remaining twenty-one are Mayan languages. These and Xinka are the oldest. The communities that speak them are considered indigenous, based on the criterion of qualifying as such peoples who descend “from populations that inhabited the country or a geographic region to which the country belongs at the time of conquest or colonization or the establishment of the current state borders and who, whatever their legal status, retain their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions, or part of them”.

An increasingly accepted opinion is that the distant ancestors were the first settlers of the territory, they were here some 30,000 years ago. The known archaeological evidence is still insufficient for chronology, which makes it difficult to fix the first stages of development, although there are

findings that take them to about 9,000 years BC. Of four significant sites in Mesoamerica, Los Tapiales [*archaeological site*], “in the Western Highlands of Guatemala”, is mentioned as one of them, and precisely of this date⁷.

In the period between that distant time and the present, there is no concrete way of knowing from when their descendants can be called Maya or Xinka. In the case of the first ones, there are archaeologists who propose as starting point the oldest date contained in the known material evidence. This has been found in Nakbé, a site of the Preclassic period located in the Mirador Basin, north of Petén. Nakbé is currently considered the oldest Maya city. The oldest structures are its platforms, which date back to 1400 BC, and its ball court, which is estimated to date back to 1000 BC. Since according to the experts this represents the most archaic scientifically dated, even on a Mesoamerican scale, it is such a mark that helps to define the antiquity of the Maya.

This is very close to the results provided by linguistics. I transcribe the following³³: “Linguistics proposes that a Protomaya community existed some years before Christ in an area that could be located today in Huehuetenango, Guatemala. That community spoke the same language, Protomaya, which became

differentiated and forced the inhabitants of those dialectal varieties to emigrate.” // “They were the ones who defined the Mayan area...” // “The linguists call protomaya the Grandfather of the Mayan Languages which, according to Kaufman, separated approximately four thousand years ago into two large groups: the eastern and the western.”

Always supported by linguistics, there is no lack of those who go back to more distant times. Based on two well-known situations, one, that the Maya form a homogeneous group that has occupied the same territory for thousands of years, and two, that they speak a multitude of languages very similar to each other, they conclude that they all have the same origin, a Proto-Maya language that, they assume, could be as archaic as 7000 years old (just at the end of the Lithic Period, 30,000 to 7000 BC, and the beginning of the Archaic Period, 7000 to 2000 BC). If the Proto-Maya split into two branches some 3000 years later, for some it could be due to geographic isolation, the same that would cause the eastern group to subdivide into Protok'iche and Mam and the western group into Protoq'anjob and Prototzeltal, and later give rise to the twenty-one Mayan languages spoken in Guatemala (and others outside Guatemala). The reflection that derives from this is important: the in situ evolution of their

language supports the conviction that the different current Mayan groups share an origin, that they converge in a very ancient ancestor, and that they belong to a primordial genetic line that places them among the original permanent inhabitants of the territory.

An elegant synthesis of paleo-scenarios was proposed by Alfonso Arrivillaga Cortés and Alfredo Gómez Davis, who pointed out that “the richness of the Pleistocene fauna and flora of Guatemala attracted, in early times, small nomadic groups of hunters and gatherers from Mexico and North America. Slowly these settlers, possessing simple technology, evolved towards higher forms of social organization, due to changes that involved the abandonment of the previous way of life and its gradual replacement by economies based on food production. The agricultural revolution provoked notable changes, mainly the appearance of sedentary populations...” Ávila Aldapa⁷ temporalizes the latter by proposing that “during the Archaic period... they took the first steps to achieve the domestication of typical Mesoamerican plants: corn, beans, squash.”

Arrivillaga and Gómez add that “the vigorous Mesoamerican civilizing process, product of an intense exchange between groups, led to the formation of major population centers

that, thanks to their role as regional integration centers, were able to concentrate wealth and socially produced economic surpluses. Thus, between 1200 BC and 900 AD, theocratic states developed, organized on the basis of intensive agriculture, the availability of abundant labor, the forced extraction of economic surpluses from neighboring populations and active participation in the extensive trade networks that linked the Guatemalan Atlantic coast with other areas”. This is close to the definition of the Mayan derived from the “Nakbé point” and from what Ávila Aldapa⁷ gathers about that during the Formative period (or PreClassic, from 2000 BC to 100 AD) “the Mayan culture begins to be defined. The evidence of these settlements is represented by low platforms that surely will support houses built with perishable materials”; he cites as an example Ocós and Salinas La Blanca in the Pacific coast of Guatemala.

The Xinkas, the other people of pre-Hispanic origin, may not be descended from the same primitive inhabitants of Mesoamerica from which the Maya emerged²⁹. Ramiro López Ramírez (2007) says that “they are still an unknown nation, a cultural civilization very characteristic of the Mesoamerican region, probably descendants of some of the Xinka

families that migrated many centuries ago to Mesoamerica". He adds: "the relationship of the Xinkas is more closely related to the cultures of the south. The content of their language, the sustenance of their cosmovision, the practice of their culture and their political organization is more related to the way of life of the indigenous nations of the south based on water". He continues, saying that the term xinka expresses the sacred condition of "created", although he adds that in the village Nancinta, of Chiquimulilla, Santa Rosa, "reference is made to "lineage of bats" or "on bats" "s'ankibshi". He reinforces his vision to this second topic pointing out that "in the cotzumalguapa culture there is a figure of a person carved in stone that represents the bat man".

López Ramírez assumes that the Cotzumalguapa Culture is clearly Xinka. When relating evidence found in their current territory, he states that the Xinkas "share the same cosmogonic features, the same ceramic features and the same linguistic codes; therefore it is probable that the Cotzumalguapa culture, until today unknown, is rather the greatest expression of the development of the Xinka culture... the cultural features of Cotzumalguapa are at the same time cultural expressions shared by communities in the departments of Santa Rosa, Jutiapa, Jalapa, El Progreso and Zacapa".

At present they are distributed in the southeast of the country, in the departments of El Progreso, Santa Rosa, Escuintla (south), Jutiapa (south-east and center), Jalapa (south and center), Zacapa (south-west) and Chiquimula (south-east)²⁹. Before, according to Gaitán Lara, they were there "at the time of the conflict with the Spaniards", and that in colonial times there were "six curates of Xinka towns: Guanagazapa, Tacuilula, Taxisco, Guazacapán, Chiquimulilla and Xinacantán. Orozco et al.³⁰ state that "between the years 1200 to 1524, they settled in a narrow strip that extends through the current departments of Santa Rosa, Jutiapa and Jalapa".

The Ladino people are biologically mestizo and culturally syncretic, but they have an identity of their own that is born precisely from these two conditions. It now needs to raise its head, seek and rescue its values, the identity that many strive to deny it. The origin of the term is said to be an allusion to a cunning and shrewd character (definition found in the Dictionary of La Lengua Española). But ladino was also used during the colonial period to describe the "son of a white man and an Indian". The word, as it is used in Guatemala to refer to a social group, comes from that time, when the indigenous person who had learned to speak Spanish, the language of the invaders, was also called ladino. Such an individual, a bilingual person, was recognized as an "indio ladino",

an “indio ladino en la lengua castellana” or an “indio aladinado”. Being natural that more and more of these characters came to be, all those who reached that category were called ladinos.

It is the case that Ladinos exhibit extraordinary cultural heterogeneity. This is one of the main reasons why many authors see them as a people without identity. A pilgrim position that denies their most delicate traits, since even the powerful syncretization that cements their social behavior is part of an identification that they did not choose to have, it was inherited. Although Ladino is a product of the colony and of the biological and social miscegenation forged since the early days of the occupation, it is much more than a simple artifact of acculturation.

In the evolution of the Ladino people, history cannot take the blame for the fact that, for centuries and millennia, mankind has been subjected to the ambitions of warlords and rulers to expand their domains, expand empires and conquer new territories. In such an insubstantial context, no one has the right in our homeland, as is the behavior of several people, to take the insidious banner of growing a frivolous hatred for the peninsular. From the Iberian comes one of the two ingredients that created our Ladino, to complete the ethno-cultural richness of the Nation.

In the shadow of the phantom of the denial of the ladino, mimics of vindication with high doses of racism have given rise to delicate positions, sometimes confrontational, which on a smaller scale and at an internal level have supported a new “justification” of deceitful modalities of extension of domains, enlargement of “empires” and conquest of lands. It seems to some that the existence of landowners and economic and political power among the ladinos (as if there were none among the other peoples) gives this group an original sin, a vision that denies it and makes it deny the cultures that participated in its formation. This essay, among other things, should help to rescue the image of the local “third product” of the colonial syncretization process as a people with its own identity, which is the Ladino in its most genuine essence.

The Garífuna people, like the Ladino, owe their presence to contingents that arrived as a consequence of the Iberian invasion, although almost at the end of the colonial era. The collective memory of the Garinagu preserves that the first ones that reached Guatemala did it in 1802, led by Marcos Sanchez Diaz, and that they arrived through the Bay of Amatique, in Izabal. (They also recognize that they arrived to Central America in 1797, to the Island of Roatan in Honduras).

According to Arrivillaga and Gómez⁶, “in the last years of the Hispanic

colonial regime, the anti-imperialist struggles of the European powers for the dominion of the Caribbean Sea, unintentionally enriched the ethnic composition of the Guatemalan coastal society. In 1796, after a long armed resistance against the English colonialists, the Garifuna ethnic group was expelled from the island of St. Vincent (Lesser Antilles) and sent into exile in the Bay Islands, off the coast of Honduras. The Crown of England intended to transfer the “Garifuna problem” to the Crown of Spain, in order to create the conditions for the development of a conflict favorable to its interests on the Central American Atlantic coast, the object of the expansionist greed of British capitalism. However, this ethnic group -whose origins date back to the 17th century, thanks to the cultural fusion of the Red Carib Indians of St. Vincent and black Africans brought as slave labor force to the Caribbean- did not antagonize the Spanish authorities, opening the doors for their relocation to the mainland. Between 1796 and 1820, the Garifuna settled on the coasts of the current Guatemalan municipalities of Livingston and Puerto Barrios.”

PRE-SYNCRETIZATION

In a previous publication⁴⁰ I used for the first time as a premise that the life of human communities runs between their past, present and future, and that

in such temporal wandering their collective modes of behavior express and manifest inherent spontaneity. They are spontaneous insofar as they spring from an unconscious that “archived” them after having been learned by each individual even before birth, and then during the course of his or her life. Augmented and reinforced from the early stages of individual development, adults are marked, without being aware of it, by socio-cultural imprints and social behaviors that over time become traditions, customs and behaviors that feel as much their own as innate.

At a certain moment, the socio-cultural impression created independently in each member of society becomes inalienable, no matter how much effort there may be to distance oneself from it. The sum of independent impressions results in the development and spontaneous archiving of a collective imaginary with vigorous sociocultural affiliation and identity of the people. Fernando Urquizú³⁸ calls it immaterial heritage. It is such an imprint that is responsible for the cultural identity to become solid and unconscious, for a conglomerate that shares roots to conduct itself socially with harmony inherent to the whole, intuitively, exposing the behavioral heritage it has received through individual lives. The further one looks into the past,

the more definite the evidence that these marks are part of social history itself.

This has been the case since the earliest times of human life on Earth. In the past, this is how the foundations of the social behaviors that differentiated man from other animals, including his closest congeners, apes and monkeys, were forged. It is their changing character in time and space that leads to distinguishable *social behaviors*. Its evolution imprints changes, achieves transformations, reduces or enriches *individual behavioral patterns*. Seen as the whole that unequivocally defines the behavior of a people, it will only be a matter of semantics to call it culture. And since we will be able to *identify* one or the other from among several, no one will prevent us from calling it *cultural identity*.

Rules and hierarchies of community integration and the totality of facts around spiritual and material cultures are expressions of identity, of belonging to a group formed by similar individuals. Together with the social facts of a particular cosmovision, the set of rites and rituals of spirituality, religiosity and communion with other creeds, mythology and a large part of popular orality, popular art* (dance, handicrafts, religious and spiritual), traditional popular food, music and even language contain many of these

elements of social belonging, of collective behavior that gives them the identity of a people. (*I agree with Enrique Anleu-Díaz? that “although art is part of culture, culture is not part of art”, since “the former, in many ways, reflects the individual attitudes of the artist before the environment”, while “the latter is part of a collective behavior that seeks to identify, homogenize and generalize a nation or ethnic group”; I have taken it in the nature of popular art, which merges in a zone of very diffuse limits between individual artistic creation and collective creation, as he himself expresses it when explaining with historical basis that “painting is a craft that is conceived in the 18th century as other craftsmanship type”, and in this he quotes Jean-Francoise Chabrun: “...at that time, painting was not an ‘artists’ profession but an artisan’s trade like any other”).

The most ancient human communities in the country undoubtedly had lifestyles different from those we live in today. The scenarios were not the same and therefore their needs were dissimilar; their spatial distribution, forms of government, social hierarchies, religiosity, habits and, in general, their cosmovision, differed notably. They lived a more intimate contact with their natural environment, which allowed them to discover questions of extreme importance: what is good to eat? How to eat it? what

animals to hunt? and how to do it? what to use to prepare clothes? what materials to integrate into buildings? and constructions, with what and how to manufacture utensils for better living, where the spirit of Nature? and that of each of the elements of Nature lies, ¿which of these elements have magic or supernatural powers? Discoveries that contain what in the end would be the richest pre-Hispanic contributions to the national syncretism.

But there is much more, of phenomenal richness: after knowing what to eat, it would be necessary to solve the question of how to obtain it, and beyond!... how to prepare it! how to prepare it. But, to have it... Or simply gathered from nature, or cared for and then harvested in the courtyard of the house? Our ancestors made use of both modalities. They learned to gather food, be it roots, stems, foliage, flowers or fruits, from herbs, bushes or trees, and to eat from them. They also developed fishing and hunting gear and caught the right prey. But in the second alternative, an unprecedented event occurred: they invented agriculture, and with it the patterns of social behavior were profoundly modified.

The stage of harvesters precedes that of farmers, but in Guatemala it was

never completely replaced and is still very much alive today. In the country, the nature of the ecological environment and biological diversity determined to a large extent what could be cultivated and what could and should continue to be taken from the environment. The diversity of species and lineages is of such magnitude in the national territory that makes it one of the eight primary world centers of importance as nuclei of origin, variation and dispersion of genetic lines of value in food and agriculture.

The transcendence of this condition was marked by the number of plants that, while maintaining their wild, semi-wild or semi-cultivated status, determined feeding patterns based on the presence of edible species in connection with eating habits defined by their appetite or preference. Such behavior would eventually become part of the collective heritage that pre-Hispanic peoples contributed to syncretism.

Some very well-known and characteristic edible fruits of the country (the list is very short because it only serves as an example, and I do not distinguish at this time between those that come from tropical rainforests and those of temperate forests, not to entangle the discourse),

such as chicozapotes (*Manilkara achras*), zapotes (*Pouteria sapota*), caimito (*Chrysophyllum cainito*), injerto (*Pouteria viridis*), canistel (*Pouteria campechiana*), zunza (*Licania platypus*), matasano (*Casimiroa edulis*), nance (*Byrsonima crassifolia*), anonas (*Annona spp.*), cherry (*Prunus capuli*), chamomile (*Crataegus pubescens*), guapinol (*Hymenaea courbaril*), mamey (*Mammea americana*), ramón (*Brosimum alicastrum*), pataxte (*Theobroma bicolor*), cuajilote (*Parmentiera edulis*) and some avocados (such as the “de mico”), come almost entirely from nature; However, there is now a tendency to plant them near homes or in backyards, home gardens or plots of land with other crops.

From ecosystems with partial or little human intervention also come products that, incorporated as condiments or spices, are of great appreciation in the popular traditional cuisine, among them we can find pimienta gorda (*Pimenta dioica*), apazote (*Teloxys ambrosoides*), chucho (*Renealmia aromatica*), chucho (*Renealmia aromatica*), cordoncillo or mountain anise (*Piper auritum*), hierba de toro (*Ocimum micranthum*), orejuela (*Cymbopetalum penduliflorum*), pericón (*Tagetes lucida*), samat (*Eryngium foetidum*), canaq' (*Chirathodendron pentadactylon*) and elder (*Sambucus mexicana*). The most traditional foods use them, although

sometimes they are substituted by species consciously incorporated in the course of history (what happens to the native samat when it is replaced by the foreign coriander, for example).

A good number of herbs, and their products and foliage that go into Guatemalan cuisine, are part of the collected foods. Studies on the subject are not exhaustive by any means, but among the best known are: bleo (*Amaranthus hypochondriacus*), hierba-mora (*Solanum americanum*), chipilín (*Crotalaria longirostrata*), chaya (*Cnidoscolus chayamansa*), miltomate (*Physalis ixocarpa*), tomatillo de culebra (*Lycopersicon aesculentum* var. *ceraciforme*), gitishnay (*Spathiphyllum phryniifolium*) and water vetch (*Vitis tiliifolia*). The way they are obtained, their use, the dishes prepared with them or the recipes that incorporate them are part of the ancestral knowledge that, syncretized and sometimes in extreme purity, has reached our days.

The contemporary importance of harvesting is such that it has given rise to the emergence of a montería culture in the department of Petén. This is based on the extraction of three forest products: the small berries of fat pepper, a spice as already mentioned, latex from the chicozapote tree, raw material for chewing gum, and leaves

of xate (*Chamaedorea elegans*), a palm tree for ornamental but also ritual use. The monteros constitute, so to speak, an undergrowth society, a caste of men absolutely adapted to life in the jungle. Within an efficient and well-ordered system, they travel long distances, establishing temporary camps during most of the phases of the work.

The invention of agriculture, which occurred independently in different parts of the globe, was a tremendously revolutionary and transcendental event. As should be obvious by now, prior to the development of their own cultivation technology, pre-Mayan societies discovered edible, medicinal and useful species for an infinite number of needs. They must have learned about the life cycles and phenology of useful plants, care and methods of sowing and harvesting, selection of seeds and propagules for replanting, etc. And this led to another wonder: the development of recipes, culinary methods and the complex identity ritual contained in the social behavior of food. This is the origin of an autochthonous cuisine, the germ of a new element for later syncretization.

Everything takes place in the center of origin and diversification of lineages appropriate to the needs of eating and cultivating what can be eaten. Gradually, the biological richness gives matter to a delicious eating

behavior based on the consumption of native species. Later, an everyday meal would be distinguished from a ceremonial meal. In the first one, many native species incorporated to the crops and to the kitchen give sustenance to the birth of the own food, among them the ayote (*Cucurbita moschata*), cacao (*Theobroma cacao*), chan (*Salvia chia*, *Salvia polystachia*, *Salvia columbinae*), chilacayote (*Cucurbita ficifolia*), chile (*Capsicum annuum*), piloy (*Phaseolus coccineus*), güicoy (*Cucurbita pepo*), izote (*Yucca elephantipes*), loroco (*Fernaldia pandurata*), pacaya (*Chamaedorea tepejilote*), pepitoria (*Cucurbita argirosperma*) and many more. Lineages, species, recipes, dishes, rites, behaviors, in general all the fact of eating, are fixed to the pre-Hispanic identity.

The ritual of food in everyday Guatemalan cuisine shows the aura that contains it and the tremendous expressive richness it provides. This is where much of the social heritage that pre-Hispanic culture will contribute to cultural contact from the 16th century onwards is forged. With a similar power, ceremonial cuisine will have been building its own ways of expression and its socio-cultural and spiritual manifestations. From it we learn the symbolic value assigned to certain foods, and the time and manner of preparing, serving, sharing and

consuming them, as well as the sacredness with which they are clothed.

The domestication of lineages was the expected ecological consequence of living in an area very rich in biological diversity. When it occurs, the species subjected for generations to the care of the cultivation gradually becomes dependent on the relationship with the cultivator, in extreme cases to the point of becoming totally dependent on him. A good example is the gijisquil (*Sechium edule*), a cucurbitaceae that originated in paleoecosystems in the country. At present, the existence of wild populations, wild relatives or primitive populations is unknown, and it is unlikely that the plant can still reproduce by itself under natural conditions. This is also the case with maize.

Beyond the food field and all that it contains and represents, the pre-Hispanic spiritual dimension constitutes a source of cultural facts that will later be taken to the local process of acculturation. To explain myself better, I must emphasize a situation that is known to all, but which I will take here as a premise: there are four different cosmovisions, four philosophical entities (Mayan, Xinka, Afro-Caribbean-Arawak and Judeo-Catholic peninsular) that in the end will converge in as many identities (Mayan, Xinka, Garifuna and Ladino).

Their mixture is the syncretic culture whose expressions are the subject of this essay.

Looking towards the Mayan people, we find the definition of their Cosmos¹⁴: “We are three subjects in close relationship. The balance and harmony of existence among the three flourishes in fullness of life. Ajaw-Creator-Forming Creator and Sacred Nature are always in harmony. They are immanent full consciousness. Before humanity appeared, realization was full, all was beauty, joy, peace. Fruit of that state of realization arose humanity.” // “We human beings have to discover and cultivate full consciousness to become one with it. This was what the millenarian ancestors did and then they created cosmogonic systems of life...”

Of their religion they tell³³: “Among the divinities there were some specific for each activity. Deities that presided over fishing, hunting, commerce, suicide, beads, planets and stars, among others.” // “On some occasions, traits of vegetable with animal, vegetable with human, vegetable with vegetable, animal with animal, animal with animal, animal with human and, sometimes, vegetable animal and human were combined in a single representation. In some cases, they were represented with celestial forms, dragons, etc. Maya gods could be dual both in their morphological

characteristics and in their behavior. In certain cases, they could adopt masculine or feminine forms, they could be young or old. Sometimes they were beneficent and sometimes corrective. During the day they had one form and at night they could adopt another. Thi” has been called *‘nahualism’.”

What is known of Maya Q'eqchi spirituality shows the deep philosophical conception of their mystical world. To know it is key to understand something of their religious behavior, and how some facts of their spiritual culture have passed to the sphere of current syncretization. Don Agustín Estrada Monroy¹⁷ exposes this: “*... although Lord Tzuul Tak'a is the God of all creation, who sees everything and the owner of everything in the Hill and in the Valley, he lacks a spirit similar to that possessed by people, animals, plants and even objects...” // There is... an extensive range of objects and beings that possess spirit, which exercises over all people special influence...”

Estrada Monroy continues: (such spirits) “can be classified in three different categories, “Xmuhel”, “Xtiosil” and “Xcuiincul”. The Xmuhel is conceived as the spirit that inhabits people, both living and deceased; the Xtiosil is a benevolent spirit that directly protects and watches over Tzuul Taq'a and that inhabits

corn, beans, cacao, the cross, the harp and especially candles and copal-pom; and the Xcuiincul that basically is a malignant and vengeful spirit that inhabits numerous objects made by man or that are under his dominion”. Xcuiincul possesses farming implements, houses and bridges as well as each of the elements that go into their construction, the fire, the comal and almost all musical instruments, the forest and roads, etc.

The importance of the Xcuiincul, “with enough power to take away the Xmubhel from any person”, is understood by these other considerations¹⁷: “... it appears always ready to punish man if he misuses the object that possesses it..... cause of accidents, occasional blows, suicides, snake bites, and other evils.” // “... is very sensitive and is very easily offended; that is why everyone feels the obligation to respect him. If he should be offended, he must be immediately appeased, and reconciled with him by means of a racwasinkil” (magical-religious rites or ceremonies of appeasement. In essence they are “ceremonies of “feeding” to the Xcuiincul”, which according to Estrada Monroy “are frequently cited as offerings to this or that God, which is a mistake”). This “feeding” constitutes a powerful ingredient of the cultural heritage contributed by the pre-Hispanic world to the current sacro-profane syncretization.

The Xinka are the least known indigenous people to date. It is common that their definition as an ethnic group is based primarily on linguistic criteria, under the threat that their language has been on the verge of extinction and is found almost only in the knowledge of the elders. Perhaps we are now witnessing a vindictive effort, which involves young people participating in the search for the roots of their identity and trying to rescue the history, the language and in general the culture of their people. Orozco et al.,³⁰ citing the Ministry of Education, say that their worldview is related to that of the Mayan people in that there is a deep respect for Mother Earth, and point out that for the expression of their spirituality they have a small number of spiritual guides and healers, all of whom are elders.

But López Ramírez²⁹, who identifies himself as Xinka and has done a magnificent job of rescuing the identity of this people from the oral tradition jealously guarded by the elders, examines their cosmogonic roots and synthesizes them masterfully. He says: “The emergence of the universe, according to the Xinka mythology, facilitates the understanding of the emergence of the universal and solar system, within this the formation of the planet Earth and consequently in this process, the conception of the life of the human being and the system that sustains it”.

The development of their cosmovision is impressive: when there was still no creation, “what really existed was the form and the spiritual space, the meaning of the essence and the sense of the divine word”.

Then he explains that “according to Xinka mythology, before the creation of light what existed was darkness, darkness is the expression of divine intelligence, it is the expression of God, represented in the energetic spirit of the word, this is what the Xinka call the law of origin”. He continues: “The law of origin... as the spirit of the divine intelligence, expressed in the energy of the word, is not arbitrary, is not punitive, does not punish, does not repress, does not limit the fundamental freedoms, such as life in all its splendor, because this is the harmonic expression of the unity of the three primary elements, water, fire and air, where each energy is complementary in the very unity of the spirit that moves them”.

Under a philosophy hitherto unknown to us, “in the beginning what exists is darkness... and in this one is *huy winak* = spirit of water and *uray winak* = spirit of fire. These two spirits live and communicate in transformative dimensions, through their energetic essences in potentially different dimensions of life.” // “The communication levels of the primary energetic substances produce a third

element known as *yo'wa winak* = spirit of air. These three primary energies are reversed, water can be fire and fire can be water, but what enables the relationship is the breath of life that drives the energetic fluid from the heart of the universe through the air or wind.” // “After the gestation of the intelligence of the primal energies, there is a shift from a spiritual to a material state. Contemporary scientists call it a big bang.... In a process of materialization of the creative spirit there is the beginning of quantifiable historical time... that is why scientists can measure times and spaces in the galactic system”.

The Garífuna cosmogony is understood, in Guatemala, from a previous mixture of cultural behaviors brought from other places. Its population is located in Izabal, particularly in the municipality of Livingston and partially in Puerto Barrios, also in Belize and along the Atlantic coast of Central America. The establishment of kinship and cultural and economic links between different villages, beyond national borders, is normal. Thus distributed and linked, they keep elements that distinguish and identify them historically and culturally without losing consciousness of nationality.

Given that they do not form purely national population nuclei, they

establish interactions with other ethnic groups settled next to them. The Guatemalan Garínagu have them especially with the Q'eqchi'es and Ladinos, to whom they are a minority, and with other minority groups, such as the Culíes (of Hindu descent), Chinese and Mopán Mayas from southern Belize. But the Garinagu have been able to maintain their traditions, customs and language. Although at a low intensity, they maintain traditional economic activities, fishing and agriculture. Because fishing puts them in contact with the sea, this has been an element that has contributed to form their vision of the world⁶ Agriculture has been an important form of subsistence for a long time, with harvests of yucca, rice, corn and pineapple, especially.

It has been said⁶ that “they are black slaves brought from Africa, and as a result of their stay in the smaller Caribbean islands, elements of Arawak origin are added to their cultural identity, where their language, Garifuna, the cultivation of cassava, the elaboration of “ereba” cassava and other Amerindian aspects stand out, without forgetting that they have manifest African elements, which characterize the group in a decisive way. Such is the case of the cult to the ancestors, African expression par excellence”.

In synthesis, the Garífuna people are not direct descendants of Africans

brought in the advances of the European invasion, but of mestizo groups that, with African and American ancestry, first settled on the island of St. Vincent and later moved to the coasts of the continental Caribbean, as happened in Livingston. With social dynamics marked by their link to the sea, the coconut (a primarily coastal palm tree) and marine resources are the basis of their culinary identity, and fishing and sailing are daily activities integrated into their cosmogony. The *chiigú*, one of their highest cultural expressions, is a cult to the spirits, and around it revolves a large part of their vision of the cosmos and much of their social behavior. Their cosmovision really clings to a deep spirituality, which sinks roots in ancestral African and Araguaca religions; the cult to the ancestors is powerful, as well as the belief that death is only a transit to another dimension, in which those who have already passed through that part of the life-death cycle are found, because death as such does not exist. The Earth, the Sun, the rivers and mountains, Nature, are objects of worship. Communicating with all of them can be achieved through music and dance. There is also a rich oral tradition that, almost without exception, revolves around the sea.

To provoke the interbreeding of the Ladino people, Europe brought the

principles of the Christian religion. Christianity was founded by Jesus of Nazareth. The believers consider him to be the son of God and Messiah (Messiah is a Hebrew term translated as Anointed One, from which the Greek translates it, with the same meaning, to *Christós*), whose coming had been announced by the prophets in the Old Testament. This part of the Christian writings corresponds to the Tanakh of Judaism, which is why Christianity is considered an Abrahamic doctrine, on a par with Judaism and Islam. In its beginnings, which go back to ca. the year it was taken as a Jewish sect and became the official religion of the Roman Empire in the 4th century.

One of the basic beliefs is that the ultimate deity is God. However, the Holy Trinity is recognized, a creed that establishes that God is unique and eternal, existing as three distinct and indivisible persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Son is incarnate in the person of Jesus the Christ, Jesus Christ. Jesus was conceived by God through the Holy Spirit, in the body of Mary, a virgin. Another basic creed, embraced in mainstream Christianity, is the duality of Jesus Christ, a being who is divine, fully God but also fully human.

Other postulates of faith revolve around the forgiveness of sins and

salvation from death, all through Jesus Christ. He is considered the way to the Father, whose example was set for believers through his death on the cross and his subsequent resurrection, proof of eternal life. Closely linked to this is the creed of the ascension of Jesus Christ to heaven, the establishment of the Kingdom of God and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to Earth to judge the living and the dead. In such a case one must also believe in the resurrection, in which the dead are to rise at the end of time, to be judged by Jesus Christ.

Its sacred text is the Bible, a compendium of philosophical and moral principles, which is considered the only valid doctrinal source. Another important doctrinal source is the creeds, but they are not universally accepted since they can be accepted totally or partially, or rejected in their totality, depending on the Christian current (the main branches are those of the Catholics, the Orthodox and the Protestants). Almost all Christian churches follow the authority of the Bible, made up of two large sections called the Old Testament and the New Testament, although the biblical canon, especially the first, differs in different churches by the books they include. Catholicism includes the so-called Deuterocanonical books since the 4th century, which were removed by Protestants due to the Schism of the Church. The sacredness of the Bible

varies; thus, in Catholicism and the Orthodox Church, the text itself is usually considered an object of worship, and is carried in procession and placed in altars or dignified places, while in Protestantism only the content and its interpretation.

Christianity arrived in Guatemala in the 16th century, in its Catholic denomination. This synthesizes its worldview in the following terms³: Jesus Christ is the “only Son of God, sent by the Father, made man in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit, to be our Savior. Dead and risen, he is always present in his church, particularly in the sacraments; he is the source of faith, the model of Christian action and the Master of our prayer” // “The holy Church, our mother, maintains and teaches that God, the beginning and end of all things, can be known with certainty by the natural light of human reason from created things” // “Man has this capacity because he is created in the image of God”.

The seven sacraments recognized by the Catholic Church are³: 1/ Baptism, the sign of initiation and introduction to Christianity; it recalls the baptism in the Jordan by John the Baptist. 2/ Confirmation, the sign that ratifies faith in Jesus Christ. 3/ Eucharist, liturgical sign that recalls the Last Supper. 4/ Penance, sign of

forgiveness, repentance of sins. 5/ Priestly ordination, practice by which priests are initiated and which is expressed by the washing of feet. 6/ Marriage, celebration of the union of a man and a woman before God and the community. 7/ Anointing of the sick, sign of assistance to the indisposed.

The acceptance of Christianity, key piece of the existence of social behaviors syncretized in the magical-religious, was facilitated because the indigenous cultures could assimilate with simplicity the facts that surrounded the life of Jesus of Nazareth under the perspective of their own cosmovision!S: the death of a man (Jesus Christ in Christianity, Junajpu' at the hands of executioners of Xibalbá in the Maya K'iche cosmogony"). Jesus, man who was born of a virgin (Jesus Christ of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Junajpu' of the Xqui'k princess) and the subsequent resurrection of Christ-God, which also happens to the hero of the Popwujian indigenous cosmovision (Jesus and Junajpu' come back to life at a certain moment of the episode in which they are the protagonists^{3.5}.

FROM PROFANE TO SACRED

The only thing that truly differentiates man from other animals is the use of symbols, and by extension perhaps

also of graphic signs. In the approximately 6 to 7 million years of existence of our lineage, since the first hominid recovered in the Sahara of north-central Africa, Republic of Chad, a skull discovered in 2002 and baptized as *Sahelanthropus tchadensis*, cultural evolution has unfailingly accompanied biological evolution. Both have led to portentous bodily and mental innovations.

The organism of those distant pre-humans underwent profound changes, some of them in the volume and structure of the cerebral cortex. As if so many millions of years could be synthesized in a score of words, I can obviate time and space to point out that, among many, one radical consequence was the human capacity to perceive that he was moving in two worlds, the ecological and the supernatural. A further step was to discover interdependencies between them. The metaphysical, the magical, could become as frightening as the biological. But this world could be dealt with in a different way, from the depths of the self and through overwhelmingly thoughtful acts.

Individual, group, collective, social... the nebulous conception of the existence of divine beings in the metaphysical world takes hold in the subconscious. Could they be animals

or plants, or something else? And the need arises to develop ways to be at ease with them, to talk to them, to give them gifts and placate them. Time would come when man would develop conscious ways of expressing these needs of communication with the supernatural dimension, and even of creating conflicts between the self and the us, between the individual self and the collective self, and even between the self and the self.

Master Anleu-Díaz² masterfully addressed a subject that sheds light on the apparent conflict between the physical and the metaphysical, at the beginning between the ecological and the supernatural. Although he exposes it in relation to art, his principles transcend such field. He stated: "... it is to be considered that, within the personality of some individuals, the two times cited (Anleu-Díaz refers, in another part of the essay I quote, that he is starting from the concepts expressed and sustained by Elíade regarding the existence of a sacred and a profane time) are reflected in complex attitudes during their existence." // "Thus, in the same individual during his sacred attitude he may "recognize" the existence of a divine power or superior being that governs the existence of everything known, while during the profane he will question his interference in the normal or common existence of life, without considering extraordinary or

divine any non-normal fact that happens to him, but as part of a simple natural order, that is, he will find himself between the pugnacity of religious and scientific belief, spiritualism and materialism."

As I discussed earlier, the Q'eqchi'es resolved the conflict by creating ways to balance the manifestations and needs of the *Xmuhel*, *Xtiosil* and *Xcwiincul* through appropriate *racwasinkil*, directed particularly to the latter. In the appeasement rites converge a series of steps that carry individual meanings. These rituals are "gifts of food" to the spirits of the objects or things to be appeased. An example is the *racwasinkil* al *Xcwiincul* de caminos y veredas¹⁷: "... candles are lit, copalpom is used, broken cocoa is sprinkled all along the path while certain prayers are recited. The purpose of this ceremony, apart from appeasing the spirit of the road, is to make all those who pass or transit through it 'cool down' and arrive at the village well disposed. The k'ekchí (Sic.) will make this offering with the firmest faith that this will avoid any danger that may arise both on the way there and on the way back, by the work of that offended *Xcwiincul*."

This Q'eqchi' Maya behavior does not contradict the generalized human apprehension to approach the

overworld. That eagerness to ingratiate oneself with divinity, to seek the blessing of God (or gods), to enter into contact with the sacred world from the platform of the profane world. Creating links between the sacred and the profane leads to sacro-profane forms of social behavior.

Under the artifice of dividing culture, in order to systematize its study and knowledge without doubt, into material culture, spiritual culture and social culture, I perceive their separations with such imprecise limits that many times one gets lost in the other. It also creates mutual interdependence between them. I would like to propose that the one we call spiritual culture is the axis on which the other two move. That is why traditional folk dances are, in reality, a means of communication of man towards the divinity, by means of movement, music and deep individual and group conviction. The same reason why popular traditional food is based on a subconscious spirituality, which unconsciously rescues mystical values in food and turns them into dishes that “seem common”; for this very reason there is no social difficulty in transforming a part of the daily food into sacralized food, in making it a message to the divinity. And kitchen utensils that equally “seem” only utilitarian, have a symbolic charge that can only be understood in the spiritual dimension. Similar considerations are

valid for arts, crafts and popular industries, they are evidenced in textiles and in the oral tradition, social organization and even mercantile activities (the example of Esquipulas that is offered below will be of excellent clarity) have those glimpses of the spiritual culture that so much marks in the life of the communities.

Barrios Figueroa⁹ gives an invaluable example of what I am saying, simple and clear, when he points out: “One of the most important aspects that unite craftsmanship with faith is the manufacture of the famous

“Esquipulas Hats”, which are made of palm...” In other words, material culture at the service of spiritual culture, ¿or does this handicraft belong to spiritual culture? The researcher ends by indicating that “... there are of all sizes, and they are adorned with colored worms, the so-called chichitas and other objects of strong colors, which according to Vitalino Fernandez, have their origin in the crowns of paxte that were placed on the head of the pilgrims that for the first time touched Esquipulteco soil.”

// “However, another source mentions... (that) they are reminiscent of those used by pilgrims traveling in Spain to visit the tomb of St. James the Apostle, which apparently, in turn, recalls the pilgrim's hat used by the Patron Saint of Spain in his wanderings and preaching in the

Iberian Peninsula". If the peninsular origin of such hats is valid, they would represent one of the Spanish contributions to the syncretization in Guatemala.

If the conceptual "problema" launched in the preceding paragraph seems bland and futile, I anticipate the criticism and explain myself: my proposal in this essay is that, in the matter of traditional popular culture, the "load of most important values" is articulated to the primary eagerness of man, subconscious and collectivized, to overcome the barriers that separate him from the supramund. To overcome the conflict created by the sacred-profane duality and to forge a sacred-profane cosmos. His actions in this direction, eventually clash with equivalent desires of different peoples, with different philosophical-cosmogonic principles that converge in the same space-time. In the best of cases, such a clash is "the germ of the popular national culture", which sooner or later will have to enter the same cycle until it creates its own sacral-prophane world... The highest syncretism!

What I am trying to do now is to link this set of social facts, which end up manifesting themselves in expressions of material culture, in an ethnographically logical series: once the capacity to create and handle

symbols appeared, man discovered the existence of a supernatural, magical world, parallel to his biological world. Once this is discovered, and the beings and objects identified as possessing supra-ecological, and therefore magical and supernatural powers, capable of controlling life and the way of being and behaving of the "defenseless" human being, the peremptory need arises to communicate with them in order to appease or please them. Such communication leads to the use of appropriate codes that make use of rites, behaviors, behaviors or tangible creations.

The possibility arises of breaking the paradigm of denial of spirituality by the preeminence of materialism. Such a break means magnifying the non-physical world, subordinating the material to the uncontainable forces coming from the supernatural world and giving preeminence to the dictates of the nascent spirituality. Nature is rediscovered as present in the creation of the magical world, where it is the axis and heart of particular cosmogonies as well as a source of resources to support all forms of human communication from profane to sacred time.

THE SACRED-PROFANE RELATIONSHIP IN THE CULTURAL DIMENSION

Having taken up all that has been said up to this point, it is important to emphasize what each people has as a

referent of its cosmogony. From the pre-Hispanic Maya, the cult of Nature, the belief in different gods that govern different spheres of human life and can punish or reward man according to his behavior, the existence of an underworld and an overworld, the presence of a supreme deity, of a nahualism that can be protective or punishing and of the simultaneity of spirits in the maximum god, in the group of divinities and in the elements of Nature stand out. The communication with the divine world adopts different forms, all of them in elaborated rituals that are part of the subconscious patrimony of the people, in collective imaginary. The communicational codes can be located in the fields of food, dance, music, painting or in sacrifices and offerings.

In the Xinka cosmogony “the life of the cosmos is synthesized in the life of the human being, so the human being is the faithful reflection of the universe. If the reason for the being and doing of human beings were understood, we would learn to value and respect the harmonious coexistence of the cosmos, the interplanetary system, mother earth, its nature and logically human life”.²⁹ The Xinka Universe has six dimensions, which in a deeply rooted vision of dualities may be twelve. However, a

thirteenth dimension is considered, constituted by the space and historical time of evolution. For López Ramírez, its cosmovision “unifies cultural life with the universal navel, making the Xinka civilization a nation dependent on cosmic energies. This expresses the sacred word of the creative energies and constitutes the sustenance of the spiritual life of the Xinka. The foundation is the noblest feeling of the spirit of the universal god, whom they call *Tiwix*.”

The post-Hispanic Garifuna does not disregard the respect and worship of Nature. However, it does so to a lesser degree than in pre-Hispanic cultures. For them, the fulfillment of rituals oriented to the cult of ancestors and the worship of spirits is more important. More than food, here it is music and dance that mainly form the communicational link. The rhythmic sounds and body movements are the preeminent codes of communication.

And in the Catholic Christian world, the main axis is the acceptance and adoration of the dogma of the Holy Trinity, with Jesus Christ as the central figure, even though the Father (God) is the supreme divinity. Fulfilling the liturgical rituals, accepting the creeds and fulfilling the sacraments are fundamental pieces in the manifestation of faith. Along with this,

the existence of exemplary, virtuous and sanctified characters complete the divinized icons that help to articulate the profane and sacred dimensions. Saints can intercede between man and divinity to achieve the benefits of sanctity. Populations have been placed under the invocation of the saints, to have their permanent blessing and intercession. The “official” rituals of the liturgy are enriched by the incorporation of beliefs from pre-Hispanic times, and to a lesser degree from the Garífuna culture.

At the present time, neither the pre-Hispanic, nor the Afro-Caribbean nor the Catholic Christian manifests itself in the theoretical purity I have outlined so far. Everything responds to the amalgam of apparently “antagonistic” social facts that make up the Guatemalan national identity. Hence, the clash of cultures has created a product full of syncretic facts, which are not evident because they are common and everyday. Even the incorporation of elements of Nature, which in such a way are sacralized, seems to belong to a habitual and ordinary social behavior. But that is the social environment of the Nation.

GREAT EXAMPLES OF SYNCRETISM IN GUATEMALA

I do not pretend to discover what is known. About the great field of syncretisms in Guatemala, remarkable

essays have been written, and also masterful contributions that sometimes are covered in rich arguments taken from the oral tradition. To this second field belong several publications of the master Celso A. Lara Figueroa (see, as an illustration, Lara Figueroa, 2003) that concentrate a profuse series of examples.

But not only in the field of orality. In general, it is worth highlighting examples to bring out the hidden existence of amalgamated cultural values. Determining their origin is a subtle way of strengthening national identity, invigorating communal cohesion and learning about the historical roots of the people to which one belongs. Faced with the monumentality of the task, in order to try to do so I have arbitrarily divided the universe of study into three dimensions: 1/ the syncretic in the three great cycles of sacredness and popular religiosity, such as Christmas Eve and Christmas, Holy Week and Lent, All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day, 2/ in popular fairs, and, 3/ in social facts proper to popular tradition, customs and geography.

It is clear that they are taken only as spatio-temporal references, and to take selected examples from them. It will not be my intention to make an analysis of the social behavior of

Guatemalans during such moments of the expression of their Peoples, but in the syncretisms contained and in the incorporation of elements of Nature. From the first dimension I recover relevant characteristics in each cycle and typical of our cultural identity; from the second, a mosaic of outstanding facts; and, from the third, ideas expressed when considering the cult of the Lord of Esquipulas and the legend of the Stone of the Compadres, as well as the meaning of syncretized toponymies.

What is exemplified by the fairs is undoubtedly outstanding and conspicuous if we consider that as a sacred-profane celebration of massive social participation and dynamism, they have a multitude of culturally linked facts that make them vast manifestations of popular religiosity with syncretized community behaviors. Conjugating the balance between the sacred and the profane, they almost always revolve around a Catholic religious fact: commemorating the patron saint under whose invocation the community has been placed, or segments of it, as it happens in the big cities where there are neighborhood fairs and cantonal fairs. The cult is surrounded by numerous and varied “social, cultural and Sporting” activities, without missing the commercial ones⁸.

The analysis of a fair provides an incredible amount of ethnographic

elements^{19.37} for in a certain way it is a reflection of the total society, which allows us to know quite a lot about it in a finite space and time. By showing how acculturated social behavior leads to multitudinous festivities, it exposes the expressive cultural richness of spontaneous actions and fixed beliefs, received through inherited behavioral inheritances. Thus armed, let's go to the examples.

CHRISTMAS EVE AND CHRISTMAS

The birth of Jesus was fixed by the Council of Nicaea (8th century) on December 24. That day would henceforth be called Christmas. It was a masterful strategic move of the church to take advantage of the celebration of the ancient peoples of the “birth of the new Sun”, the winter solstice, December 21-22. Until the 16th century, but with more strength from the 17th century onwards, Christmas and Christmas Eve celebrations began in Guatemala. In this country there were also solstitial celebrations. To think that here the solstices are not marked and that consequently they are little observed, is to underestimate the importance of the astronomical knowledge of our ancient peoples, perhaps superior to that of contemporary medieval Europe. Uaxactún, to the north of Petén, is a silent witness of that cognitive splendor. Pre-Hispanic native

civilizations relied on astral movements, on the solstices and equinoxes, to govern their individual and collective spiritual development. They worshipped the four peak moments of the Sun in the ecliptic. To their ceremonial of the winter solstice they could overlap without major difficulties the Christmas and Christmas Eve just come.

When Christianity and the birth of Jesus arrived, the Mayan trunk had differentiated into peoples with their own identity. But their spirituality, simple in the best sense of the term, grandiose in its philosophical foundation, would maintain common principles, with a Creator, Heart of Heaven Heart of Earth as the preeminent figure. Furthermore, a cosmic order in which men, special natural resources and the totality of the elements of Nature would be endowed with individualizable souls. Maintaining the harmony and concord of man's spirit with those of others represented living to the full, living well.

This was contributed to the new celebrations. The celebration of the Nativity of Jesus is based on Judeo-Christian philosophical principles, and the Posaditas, Nativity scenes, Cribs, Nativity scenes and a certain gastronomic tradition are part of routines brought by the Castilians, who took them from even more distant

times and spaces. But the integrated pieces, from the materials used to the food and beverages prepared, are the result of syncretisms derived from the assimilation of a doctrine that until then had been foreign.

In ancestral customs and millenary traditions of the indigenous peoples, corn, pacayas, manzanillas, cacao, chiles, pines and oaks, among others, were incorporated. Their integration into the celebration has resulted in Christmases full of their own spiritual charm. At the present time, the Catholic Christmas protocols, of manifest traditional solidity, are externalized with a rich series of expressions of popular religiosity. It is only necessary to let oneself be carried away by the divinity of Christmas Eve to be filled with the colors, sounds and smells of the season.

It is the time when homes smell of the forest, because the forest smells of pine, moss, "fireworks", chamomile, pinabete and freshly cut pacaya leaves. Smell the flame of the candles, the wax of the candles and the resins of the incense burners. From the nearby mountains comes the sweet aroma of the nectar of "flowers of conception" and from the kitchens the aroma of Christmas Eve delicacies: tamales, hot pineapple, punch, chocolate, chuchitos, tamalitos, buns and sweets. In the Nativity scenes, the colored sawdust imitates small roads, plains or

meadows while spreading scents that it did not have before, different from those of Easter, although their origin is the same. Moment in which the houses exude smoke of storax, incense, pom and myrrh, when between prayers, litanies and carols the nostalgic distant rhythm of a tortoise shell hammered by a child who defies the cold of the night percusses.

Syncretism is solidly anchored. At one point in history, the divine lineage of Saint Anne, the Virgin Mary and the incarnation of love in the body of Christ emerged in other lands. For the pre-Hispanic spirituality it was not difficult to assimilate Christianity, since the philosophical principles in both doctrines did not clash, besides the religious concept of the native peoples is of exquisite logic. Some of the first evangelizers noticed this, and for this reason Christianity was enriched with the incorporation of sacred pre-Hispanic elements, which maintained their powerful symbolic charge.

The Guatemalan Christmas Eve dinner, *par excellence*, is the tamale, accompanied by “hot” pineapple or fruit punch, chocolate or milk punch in a more select tradition. In rural communities the undisputed ritual drink is chocolate. In addition to dinner in the family nucleus, the rite of sharing must be fulfilled, giving this food to others as a token of

appreciation and affection. It is not difficult to notice the ancestral trait of ceremonial food, thus, chocolate is drunk not only to resist the intense cold of the season. In pre-Hispanic times, offering chocolate or its substitute, *pataxte* milkshake, was a sign of friendship, an act of intense affection whose meaning is still maintained.

Under the hegemony of more Castilian customs, spread mainly by Santiago de Guatemala and Nueva Guatemala de la Asunción, the fruit punch, of colonial origin, was imposed as a drink. In smaller towns, especially in the western area, it is called “caliente” or “caliente de piña” and incorporates native fruits, such as chamomile. Meanwhile, the tamale retains the preeminence of food-offering that it acquired before the conquest. In its essence, it represents a magical affiliation, the cosmic union of Nature (through corn) with man (the central meat of the tamale) in the presence of the Sun (the “sauce” that envelops them).

The significance of the Christmas Tree is often minimized and Nativity Scenes are said to be more traditional. But before the conquest none of them were, they are later incorporations. While the use of images and shepherds has a corresponding in pre-Columbian spirituality, in the elaboration of figurines that were used as “doubles”

to communicate to the overworld, trees, as a symbol of the incarnation of life by representing the point of union of heaven, earth and water, had a divine hierarchy among the ancient peoples. It is no coincidence that the custom of the Christmas tree began in one of the most spiritually vigorous regions, the q'eqchi, at the same time an emporium of German immigrants who brought it at the beginning of the 20th century. It is neither a coincidence nor a simple ecological coincidence that the first Christmas trees were pine trees. The pine is one of the most sacred trees of local antiquity. Its leaves, centuries before the arrival of the Castilians, were already watered with great religious fervor. In certain regions they gave way to the pinabetes, also of deep mystical significance. And as in a celestial recommendation, how pleasant that in Guatemala an unexpected hybrid arose: Nativity scenes under the Christmas trees.

Mosses, fruits and flowers continue, as in the past, to link the soul of Nature to a Catholic practice nourished with pre-Christian religiosity. Thanks to such sublime syncretism, the Poinsettia, which now universally represents Christmas, should mean more to us than the incorporation of the colors red and green to the glorious feast. The practice of sacralizing it is millenary, which is why it was so easily

incorporated into the Guatemalan Christmas Eve. And if that were not enough, it is one of the gifts we have given to the world to glorify the birth of Jesus. It is native to our ecosystems.

It is evident that the Christmas season, by its own character impregnated with love, in its expressive apotheosis exposes cultural facts articulated to the identity of the people, to Nature's goods gathered for the case, and to the influence they provoke until triggering the latent social behavior in the collective imaginary. The ties that unite people with their environment merge with resources that give Guatemalan character, in syncretized incorporations (although in tradition and customs there are deep abysses between the capital of the country and its towns). As already mentioned, some "relatively recent" customs, such as the Northern European Christmas tree, is filled with artificial mist, frost and snow to remind the atmosphere of the icy boreal latitudes where it originated, but in Guatemala it alternates with white pashte, chamomile threads, crow's feet, pacaya leaves, christmas decorations, Easter flowers, pine worms and a Nativity scene with a manger. Such a particular mixture of the boreal and the tropical, of the snowy and the temperate, of icons associated in loving religiosity, is one of the most precious material

syncretisms at the service of the spiritual culture.

There are about a dozen species of pine trees in the country, and unless one is acquired from a plantation, the one that is closest at hand is used. A matter of opportunity. The pinabete (*Abies guatemalensis*) is a beautiful tree of high, cold and cloudy mountains. It is widely used as “christmas tree” for its stately and exquisite aroma, able to distinguish itself among many others. The chamomile (*Crataegus pubescens*), the chichitas (*Solanum mammosum*), the crow's feet (several species of the genera *Bromelia* and *Tillandsia*), the white pashte (species of *Tillandsia*), pacaya leaf (*Chamaedorea elegans*), the poinsettia (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*) and several species of mosses, finish giving the festive note to the place where the Nativity is placed, with or without tree. A classic Nativity of the interior populations consists of the manger, most of the times in high, surrounded of leaves of pacaya nailed in X, with red or orange alternating rooster's feet, flowers of pascua, pashte strategically arranged, chamomile in long rosaries and “worms” of pine, formed with trimmed leaves and artistically fastened in a cord of rigging dyed in green with anilines. Add the same elements in the surrounding walls, pine leaves sprinkled on the ground, a smoking incense burner and the food of the case.... What amazing aromas!

And one cannot overlook the flavors, smells, socio-cultural characteristics and ethnobiological relationships of Christmas foods and beverages. Thinking about them, it is obligatory to remember how the houses smell of dough and then tamales on Christmas Eve. The incomparable aroma of tamales wrapped in banana leaves and mashan (*Calatea lutea*), boiling in a pot that has been “bedded” and covered with kanaq' (*Chiranthodendron pentadactylon*) leaves. The tradition of sharing tamales, or chuchitos de carne, either for midnight dinner or in the posaditas that precede it, is part of rituals fixed in the social behavior of Guatemalans. Between tamales, “caliente”, fruit punch and the cold of the winter atmosphere, a prodigal Nature contributes to make the syncretisms of Christmas Eve more characteristic. Our food, drinks, nativity scenes and cribs make us coexist with species of the homeland, with which we forge unique cultural facts in a time of peace and love.

EASTER OF RESURRECTION

During Holy Week, Christianity reconstructs historical facts inherent to the life, passion, death and resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ. For the Catholic Church it is an important and significant manifestation of faith and spirituality. With great social, cultural

and value meaning, Catholicism gives rise to a popular religiosity with its own forms and styles of the collective imaginary, which assimilated rites arrived by the European invasion and created syncretized expressions from the individual needs of offering for deep-rooted and profound beliefs.

Particular ways of expressing faith, devotion, dedication and the need to obtain blessings emerged. The Guatemalan managed to do it, among others, with the elaboration of temporary icons. Another was the handling of food and its great load of symbolism (which is carried out with equal intensity during Christmas Eve and Christmas, and for All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day). In Holy Week the classic icons have been carpet, Platforms, Bows, Orchards and Steps, and among the meals the dried fish and chickpeas or jocotes in honey, in addition to a rich cuisine that with the passage of time has become characteristic of the time.

Along with the development of a true sacro-profane culinary rich in syncretisms, with an equivalent mixture of beliefs, creeds, superstitions, customs and facts of popular knowledge and orality, the material culture found expressive ways and emerged in the icons that great popular art that often lasts only fractions of the time it took to make

it. It is the symbolic world that links the popular with the sacred through a message of codes that not only unites and gives identity to the Catholic community but also elevates the believer to sacred spheres.

The orchards are temporary altars made inside temples and occasionally in homes, especially on the occasion of wakes but also at particular moments of the liturgy. A simple variant are the small adoratories that, particularly in villages, alternate with the orchards. Both begin with a carpet, which can be made of pine leaves, many flowers, fruits, sometimes vegetables and legumes, pacaya leaves, pots with wheat or oat seedlings, candles and the inevitable aromatic resins. The Pasos are small altars outside the houses of the faithful, before which the processions of the Via Crucis, in particular, stop. They integrate the same material elements of the Orchards but in naturally smaller quantities and in more reduced spaces. In front of them a small carpet is made, almost always of flowers and pine.

Carpets are the supreme example of popular art in Nueva Guatemala de la Asunción, Antigua Guatemala and Quetzaltenango, although they are not lacking in other communities. However small they may be, in the smallest villages and made with the

simplest materials, they are part of the search for the divine sphere from the earthly dimension. Expression of a syncretism that sacralizes goods of Nature to enhance popular Catholic traditions.

As has been said repeatedly, the deity is also exalted with food. Symbolically, the food of the inhabitants of the world is shared with him. Food is prepared, offered and given to all the spirits, to those of the living beings and those of the inanimate, to the immaterial of all that exists, because it pleases the beings that inhabit the spiritual cosmos. The K'iche' cosmogony points out as foundation and principle of its religion the existence of the divinity, *Uk'u'x Kaj Uk'u'x Ulew*, Heart of Heaven and Earth, present in each one of the elements of Nature. *Uk'u'x Kaj Uk'u'x Ulew* likes to eat the same food that Tzuul Tak'a eats, fire and smoke.

By substituting Heart of Heaven and Earth, or Señor Cerro Señor Valle, for a Judeo-Christian divinity, the Guatemalan Catholic brings together two cultural heritages to express his religiosity according to the identities that these, separately, have contributed to syncretism. That is why the good Jesus is honored in the passing icons of Holy Week with the best of the land, the most delicate fruits are offered to him, some of

which (such as cocoa and pataxte) carry a socio-cultural meaning of admirable transcendence, of very strong pre-Hispanic symbolism.

And so, it turns out that besides feeding the divine beings, men eat to please them. To them and to the other spirits of the Cosmos. Without disregarding other ritual cycles, the point is that during Easter, foods and beverages that under another point of view would be seen daily, spirituality makes ceremonials, surrounds with codes and food is sacralized. If in the pre-Hispanic cosmogony cocoa and corn were considered foods of very high sacramental hierarchy⁴¹, fruits such as pataxte, zapote, pacuché, chincuyas, etc. had the same, although on a smaller scale. But they are still good to be offered to Jesus, and that is why they are offered to him. And for the people to celebrate it by eating it themselves, in the sacred cuisine the matter transcends the material and is embedded in the spiritual sphere, it becomes a link to forge the alliance between the mundane man and the divine space.

The processions of Holy Week. One of the most powerful manifestations of the popular religiosity of Holy Week are the processions. Their spiritual significance goes hand in hand with their diversity. They belong to several classes although they can be considered in two great categories: *Via*

Crucis and processions that recall passages of the life of Jesus. The first ones remind us of the painful road to Golgotha, in fourteen stations each one with its Step so that the procession stops and the corresponding prayer is fulfilled. The *Vía Crucis* have been established for the Fridays before the Major Week.

In the other type of processions are staged, as it was said, certain high moments of the liturgy. Among them are those of Silence, Of the Palms (or of La Borriquita, as it is also called; that on Palm Sunday recalls the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem), Of the Capture (Holy Thursday night, dramatizes the moment of the Kiss of Judas on the Mount of Olives and the capture of Christ by a Roman party), the Holy Burial (Good Friday afternoon; the carrying of the Recumbent Christ), De la Soledad (Holy Saturday, which represents the deep sorrow and profound feeling of loneliness of the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus) and others. In spite of the fact that the dioceses take care to ensure uniformity in the liturgy, there are significant differences in the processional pattern.

The most evident dissimilarities are observed between the big cities and the towns of smaller population. In the first ones, such as the case of Nueva Guatemala de la Asunción, as prototype, and then Antigua Guatemala

and Quetzaltenango, the *Vía Crucis* have been losing alarmingly that meaning. And since they usually consist of more than one parish, each one with its respective Nazarene, which is the central image, they seem a kind of competition between parishes to show, on alternate Good Fridays, their relative greatness in front of the others. Then, the *Anda* and the work of brotherhoods, laicoreligious organizations, and devotees in personal dedication, monopolize the attention, relegating to second place the fundamental act of reconstructing the passion linked to fourteen stations.

Another characteristic of the towns is that generally the same image is used with the personification of the Nazarene, Crucified or Recumbent. It is not unusual for the sculpture to be of the articulated type, a constructive artifice that allows the image to change its position. Small towns and their single parish have few images, sometimes divided between the church and the confraternities. The Nazarenes led in *Vía Crucis* are surrounded by a ritual where the most important thing is the recreation of the way of the Passion; the associated icons acquire particular relevance, such is the case of the step coordination (those small temporary altars arranged outside the houses of the faithful, which support the prayer with the procession stopped in front) and awaken in the

devotee the faith and the hope of receiving the blessings of the passing Christ.

According to the size of the town and its parishioners, and the number of parishes that comprise it, the rituals of the processional liturgy depend on the richness and quality of the material religious patrimony they have. Subject to such variables, the quantity and type of processions that are organized and practiced will be specific to each community, although the ecclesiastical cult seeks to maintain uniformity. With abysmal differences between the three largest cities, and other large cities that frivolously boast of copying their style, and the small towns, in general the processions of Holy Week are completed in remarkable care and devotion with the construction of "Andas", Carpets, Bows, Orchards, "Steps" and other associated ephemeral icons.

By such means, Jesus Christ is offered a rich variety of flowers, fruits, foliage and several other vegetable derivatives, as well as music, pyrotechnic devices, fire in the flame of candles and smoke from the combustion of aromatic resins to ingratiate with him and obtain his blessings. And, through such symbols that transfer magical-religious and faith reminiscences, linking sacred and profane times.

Each Lenten processional procession, and each of the pieces that form it, responds to cultural mixtures. The harmonious union of cosmovisions gives foundation to the selective incorporation of products of the earth that gives body to the iconography of the case, and the fusion of social behaviors leads to individual behaviors that integrate the great demonstration of popular religiosity. Pre-Hispanic roots are observed in the symbolic ritual of offering food through the addition of fruits, flames and smoke. And if the use of flowers and foliage is a partially imported practice, the selection of species responds to ancestral fixations of the native cosmogony. As far as music is concerned, the wind bands are of tremendous tradition in the processions; they constitute a Hispanic element, but the pieces performed belong mostly to national composers, in a school so characteristic that the Funeral Marches, as they are called, belong to the social imaginary of Guatemalan Catholics and fully identify their Holy Week.

The carpets that are associated with the processions, as personal or family offerings, rarely group offerings, symbolically offer the Lord a way to put there his divine feet, to wait for him to walk through them and thus bless the one who builds them. It has

already been studied and said enough of the temporary religious carpets of the Guatemalan Holy Week, some of which acquire the category of jewels of popular art ephemeral. It is not the case to reiterate what scholars have already said. Within the framework of the essay the important thing is to take out of the unnoticed by common, the syncretism that gives them added value.

And for this, we need only recall the most significant substratum of the pre-Hispanic mesabales (shrines), made with pine leaves sprinkled on the ground. On top of such a fragrant and green surface, the other objects of worship, such as flowers, candles, symbolic or real food and drinks, incense burners, immolated animals, etc., are placed in emotional spiritual meditation. It is significant that little has changed in the use of this type of carpet since pre-Hispanic times. However, the sublimation of the art of carpet making now leads to products of structured symbolism in semiotic codes of high aesthetic quality. A vivid example of this is the carpet made on March 15, 2008, Palm Saturday, on First Street and Ninth Avenue (to the east of Isabel la Católica Park) for the procession of Jesus Nazareno del Consuelo, from the temple of La Recolectión. The Carpet was a paragon of art, of spiritual dedication, of faith and devotion, where sawdust, bark and leaves were united as

derivatives of those conifers. The Carpet, a rectangle of c. 4 x 6 meters, had for base uncolored sawdust, perimeter drawn by a band of c. 30 centimeters wide, of pine leaves sprinkled between two lines made of pieces of bark of the same species. The sober interior decoration was limited to a large cross made with fragments of bark, and included flowers of different species. This icon was of intense aesthetic quality, exceptional symbolism and penetrating aroma of forest evocative of emotional and deep religiosity.

Such distant extremes in time, from pre-Hispanic times to the present, cannot hide the sacralized presence of pine trees in the spirituality of Guatemalans. With remnants of Christianity in the mesabales, and reminiscences of ancestral pre-Hispanic uses in today's Catholicism, the Alfombras are an expressive jewel of religious syncretism. Because those features and these uses are unified in the same purpose, which is to glorify, serve and celebrate the Lord.

The Orchards do not have such an intimate link with the processions as the carpets and the bows, but they are a very important part of the sacred celebration. They are, in fact, temporary altars that are built inside the temples, mainly to accompany

prayers. Unlike carpets and bows, they are the product of the devotion of brotherhoods, confraternities or lay groups associated with the church. But they have in common with those the basic structure, with the powerful floral-fructescent element that so much symbolism contributes as ritual offering of food, the candles and the aromatic smokes that carry signifiers indicated and foliages that are associated by their spiritual load. The Orchards are completed with images or other sacred symbols, and in this they are similar to the Steps but on a much larger scale in the constructive material sense. The biological species used vary quantitatively, but not qualitatively.

Easter Bows. They are expressions of faith and pleas for blessings, displayed in rich offerings. They unite the sacred and the profane and bring the believer closer to God by building relationships that elevate and sanctify him. They are erected for the processional processions to pass underneath. It is to open for Jesus a worthy door, through which he is to pass in glory and majesty. The reward is the hope of the builder and his family that they will receive blessings from the Most High, to live in grace with God, to forge an alliance with the spiritual world through the delivery of personal or family honors. Only rarely do they belong to confraternities or brotherhoods: their construction signifies the maintenance of the family

tradition. Each incorporated element has a meaning, has its own symbolism, to make it represent “the offering that is given to the Lord in memory of the homage that was done to Him when He entered the town of Jerusalem”, in the words of a devout builder from Panajachel, Sololá.

In general, the use of bows in Guatemala, as a magical-religious feast or flattery of personages, seems archaic. An old known reference is that of the historian of the evangelization, Fray Antonio de Remesal (*Historia General de las Indias Occidentales y particular de la Gobernación de Chiapa y Guatemala*, 1617; ed. Tip. Nac. Guatemala, 1932), as quoted by Mr. Agustín Estrada Monroy¹⁸: “... when he arrived to the land of the Cacique, there were great celebrations with arbors and triumphal bows...”. It happened somewhere between mid-July and the end of September 1537, due to the arrival of the friars Pedro de Angulo and Juan de Torres, the first Spanish missionaries who began to approach the Q'eqchi'es lands to force their conquest by means of “evangelization”, a subtle method of conquest by denial and demonization of magical-religious values of the native cosmogony, to the Señorío de Sacapulas. From the presence of bows in the K'iche (Sacapulas) people, their current use represents a pre-Hispanic

contribution to the current religious syncretism.

In the second half of the 16th century, Catholicism was enriched with socio-cultural facts of the Mesoamerican cosmogony. While the amalgamation of the American with the European was being forged, the spiritual syncretism would look towards the sacred from expressions of the profane world. That is why in the Easter Bows and food is an element of great symbolism. Pre-Hispanic cultures offered "food" to the divinity: in the Q'eqchi' world, the main deity is fed with candle flames and drinks copal-pom smoke. Far from being offerings, they constitute gifts. In the Arcos-ofrenda there are fruits and sometimes vegetables and legumes. At the beginning the selection of fruits other than cacao and pataxte was for their resistance to the weather, particularly to the strong sun of the time. Gradually they would become "traditional" and as such should be those of the bows.

The sweet peach, juicy, sugary and the stuff of homemade sweets, is rarely consumed but is a classic Lenten icon. Besides being resistant, its red color provides other chromatic symbolisms. The custom has already fixed also coconuts and pacaya berries as well as coralillos. The fruits of the bows form a defined and traditional set: in

addition to cocoa, pataxte, pacaya, coralillo (kuu'l, pacuché) and peach, they go, pineapple, banana, plantain, mango, sapote, orange and tangerine. It is these, in particular, that come to represent the gift of food to Jesus Christ. It arises, as a parallel hypothesis, that from the fact of sharing it with Christ is born the custom of sharing one's own food in festive and ceremonial occasions. People have made it a tradition to give each other dishes, for example, pan de recado, honey and chickpeas in honey during Holy Week (or "a little taste of dried fish"), tamales on Christmas Eve or cooked giisquiles on All Saints' Day.

In addition to fruit, leaves are added to the Arcos. Especially white pashte, cypress twigs, maguey, amate, pacaya, pine ("gusano") and palm tree. All of them have references in pre-Hispanic cultures. The cypress in funeral rites and mortuary rituals (do not forget that in addition to sanctifying the resurrection of Christ, it alludes to his passion and death). For the ancient Maya, the maguey was an esteemed species in religious rituals of self-sacrifice; the leaves of pacaya also had an intense ritual sense (ceremonial sites were "adorned" with species of high spiritual hierarchy): pacaya leaves, pine leaves, twigs of liquidambar, cypress, muj - a holm oak, pinabete and wild flowers); pine leaves sprinkled in the form of a carpet

were the earthly platform in the shrines of sacred sites; of the amates is recognized the tremendous respect in which they were held for belonging to the supernatural magical world; palmettos are used in the Ramos of Palm Sunday and to produce the ash of Ash Wednesday.

And in the domain of flowers, of diverse scents, colors, shapes and textures, deep symbolisms and mystical or emotional meanings are found, as signs and codes in a communication between man and divinity. Very traditional flowers are corozo, chilca, staticia, bouganvilleas, queen's necklace, carnation, "cartridge", "Decorations". Pine cones ("guinea pigs", not flowers in the botanical sense of the word) are added. With all the symbolic power they carry, they have a special place in the Arcos and the power to awaken magical-religious sensations, which makes them means of evocation of deep feelings and precious offerings for holiness. They bring to the realm of reality the symbolic world that is lived in the sacred events of Holy Week Catholicism, linking the popular with the sacred and as a way to reach the magical-religious dimension created by man. They acquire the category of offering in material rites that carry a message, express a devotion, embody a commitment. On the symbolic level, they awaken in man his own nature and that is why he uses them to

express beliefs as a solid link in the duality of religion - symbolism...". In the dimension of sensorial spirituality, their scents become part of the religious passion, articulating the mystical moment that is lived, invigorating convincing cults close to the sensibility of believers. That is why they are incorporated into the cultural features, give identity, express and communicate the language, dissolved in the minds, which is part of the spiritual imaginary and externalizes the objective reality of religious life caused by a tradition. In the long run, with reasons to incorporate flowers to the Arcos and to seek communication with the sacred world, what seems no more than a form of popular art, is an offering erected on beliefs that the knowledge of the people recreates and that are born in a fused culture.

There is no craft that exhibits with such vigor its syncretic nature as the bows. It starts since the erection of triumphal bows was an important practice in the social life of pre-Hispanic cultures. In them, the profusion of food offered through the fruits recalls ancestral feeding rituals to gods, divinities and magical beings. Also incorporated are foliage that have a definite symbolic and significant value; and flowers, to which pre-Hispanic cultures gave high sacred value. Everything is in an

Arco de Semana Santa, like those of the department of Sololá.

ALL SAINTS AND DECEASED SAINTS

On November 1st and 2nd, another great ritual is celebrated within the context of the spiritual culture of the people. The first day corresponds to the commemoration of All Saints, and the second day to the commemoration of the Dead Saints. The link between the two is so close that, in practice, there seems to be no distinction between one and the other, and they are even colloquially called the Day of the Saints (although this is not entirely correct, it is very common). The historian Miguel Álvarez Arévalo¹ gives us valuable information to discern the chronological issue: “.... when Christianity arrived and prospered, Saint Odilon instituted in the year 998, the Day of the Dead Saints, as part of the commemoration of the Catholic Church to remember with joy the memory of the deceased, a feast that came to America, with the Spanish colonization, together with many others, among them the Feast of All Saints, instituted by Pope Gregory IV, in the year 835, these festivities are celebrated on November 1st and 2nd, the saints and the deceased respectively”.

The history of the celebration does not fail to show great intercultural

relations. It is known that already in the 4th century the Syrian Church had consecrated one day of the year to commemorate All Martyrs. As time went by, in the 7th century Pope Boniface the fourth dedicated to All Saints a Roman temple that long before had been erected for "all the gods". Formerly the celebration took place on May 13, until Pope Gregory I changed it to November 1, to make it coincide with the Day of the Dedication of the Chapel of All Saints in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. The order for the Feast of All Saints to be celebrated worldwide was given by Pope Gregory the fourth in 840, and it was from there that the Abbot of Cluny, St. Odilon, fixed it in 998 as it is today.

In Guatemala, tradition has been in charge of linking the two dates, although in terms of popular manifestation, the 1st date seems more like a foretaste of the Day of the Dead. The birth of its rich syncretisms was also exposed by Álvarez Arévalo¹, when he reminds us that “the commemoration of the faithful departed, on November 2, is a festivity established by the Catholic Church.... (and although) it is a Latin holiday, in Mesoamerica there was a cult of the dead, so that from this fusion arose a religious syncretism that still manifests itself today, in a diversity of traditional events”. // (which) in Guatemala have become a very rich cultural expression

that responds to the multiculturalism of the country, where it flourishes among diverse samples that go from visiting the cemeteries and decorating them peculiarly according to each region, as well as gastronomy and oral tradition...”.

As I have said repeatedly in other sections, food maintains its validity and preeminence in spiritual manifestations and popular religiosity. A good detail to understand why, in the particular case of the cult to deceased ancestors, comes from a c. 2,500 year old tomb of Tak'aliq A'baj, on the Pacific coast (department of Retalhuleu), where food remains were found contained in funerary vessels. The point is that since the first times of death awareness, it has been considered that, after death, humans will need food and drink in their transition to the other world and candles to light up in the midst of darkness. Food and drink can be symbolic, under the use of a defined range of elements of Nature. And, as C. Táran³⁶: “In Guatemala, the activity for November 1st begins several days before, when flower sales are set up near the cemeteries. The stiff must be ready for lunch on All Saints' Day, when family and

close friends gather. It is also customary to take it as a gift to relatives or Friends”.

In the gastronomic domain, the cold meat has become the most significant dish of the time, but particularly for the Ladino people. In the indigenous groups the same relevance, and therefore placed at the same level of cultural significance, are the cooked gúisquiles and the cooked corn. Acculturation has ensured that all social conglomerates consume both culinary preparations as part of a subconscious national identity proper to this festivity. They are not the only foods. Chickpeas in honey, ayotes in honey and jocotes in honey are also enjoyed with particular delight.

Of the stiff, which is a true national culinary institution, the master Celso Lara said: “With the process of miscegenation and hybridization of cultural elements, the colonial Guatemalan population of the late sixteenth century created a special cold dish to be eaten during the first and second of November during the annual mortuary celebrations...”. To point out its antiquity, Lara added that “it is already mentioned in early convent recipe books from the beginning of the 17th century and Friar Tomás Gage refers to it in his famous chronicle of travels to

Guatemala between 1625 and 1638". It was also the object of attention by the delicate national writer, Don José Milla y Vidaurre, in his well-known Cuadros de Costumbres. Today it is a dish of great tradition and identity, whose fundamental characteristic is the mixture in a single preparation of three large groups of food: a base of vegetables and legumes, a complement of meats and sausages, a supplement of cheeses.

From here one can trace the roots of the syncretism it expresses. The base of vegetables and legumes, with the addition of spices, undoubtedly represents the pre-Hispanic heritage, although in itself it integrates native foods and crops brought from outside as a result of the Iberian invasion. Meats (beef, poultry, fish, pork) and the sausages derived from them are additions from Spanish cuisine. Cheeses, olives, capers and certain spices are Moorish (Arab), which also arrived with the invasion or as a consequence of it. As much as their components, the recipes and final products reach unthinkable variations. Still following Lara (op. cit.) one can speak of a purple cold meat, based on beets and pickles and typical of the big cities and the Kagchikel area; of the sweet cold meat, of the K'iche' and Q'eqchi' regions (especially Quezaltenango and Cobán), seasoned with honey; and the

"fiambre divorciado", from Guastatoya, Jalapa and Jutiapa, in which the pickles and vegetables are served in one dish, the meats in another and the dairy products in another so that the consumer can mix them according to his own taste at the time of eating. Some call colored cold meat the one rich in beets, and contrast it with a white cold meat that contains very few beets.

According to José Milla, during the visit of the living to the cemetery to honor the dead, the custom is to decorate the tombs with flowers, Chinese paper motifs and wreaths. Regarding the feeding of the dead and their survivors, tradition dictates that the sacrosanct food be placed on a small pine carpet that has been sprinkled with "flowers of the dead" (*Tagetes erecta*), and candles. Among the food, guisquiles and cooked corn are obligatory, which are placed on the carpet (perhaps with orange halves in addition) as an offering to the deceased. The same food is enjoyed by the living to share with the dead. The aguardiente is a ritual drink, which is poured over the carpet and the gullet itself. This symbolic set is the one that is usually called "main course meal". To complete it between family, the women often bring "cocido", perhaps cold meat and the sweets of the celebration (ayote, jocotes, chickpeas).

In all this there are powerful manifestations of syncretism.

Such fusion can also be seen with great clarity in the sweetest gastronomy of the time; that is, in the desserts that have been referred to. If the custom and some ingredients are Spanish, other components are native, and the recipes, procedures and socio-cultural signifiers are Guatemalan. The most European of the three is chickpeas in honey, since the grain, sweeteners and seasonings are European; but ayotes in honey (a dish that also incorporates corn) and jocotes in honey fuse the central element with Mediterranean components, or at least those that came with colonization.

The wreaths also bear their syncretic trace. The most traditional in them is the hoop prepared with cypress twigs bent on themselves, and their adornment with flowers of the dead. Both elements are native. Both have a powerful symbolic charge for the case: the cypress has been used since pre-Hispanic times with a deep funerary sense, the cosmovision of the primitive peoples gave it to them long ago and to the same extent as the golden and fragrant flowers of the wild asteracea. Their artisanal evolution has made them go through many changes, modifying their base and the attached flowers. The current extreme extreme

is the use of multicolored plastics for the frame and ornaments, culminating in cold, odorless and depersonalized artifacts... but many times it is the taste of the living that imposes the “Fashions”, in this case as an empty ostentation that will probably please the dead much less than if a wreath is offered in which simplicity carries a tremendous flow of tradition and affection towards the deceased.

In the spiritual realm, the death - anima duality is a concept inherent to the end of a person's existence. It does not matter if it is called soul, breath or spirit, the fundamental process for their constitution is death²⁶, When a person dies, his anima leaves the inert body and can go to heaven or hell, which in the future will be his final place of habitation. Around its existence an orality of immense expressive richness is woven, that sometimes is projected in the form of social facts of intense traditional roots, like that of those night parties of children that ask for “alms” with the expression of “We are spirits, from heaven we come; alms we seek, if not given, doors and windows will pay us.” (of certain equivalence with the “Hope springs eternal” the 1 and the 2, of cultural contributions xinkas that Aníbal Chajón points out)¹³. To delve deeper into this rich field, I refer the reader to the specialized work of the

master Lara Figueroa (*op. cit.*); I limit myself to expose the enormous wealth of syncretism found in all these expressions of popular culture.

It is possible to talk to the souls in many ways: through music, food, prayers, abstinences, kites.... The kites, since they link heaven and earth by a thread, make a tangible link between the two worlds and create the intangible feeling of communication with the deceased ancestors. And even “telegrams” can be sent to the deceased with appropriate messages, which are written pieces of paper that are made to rise through the thread, by the effect of the wind, to make the communication more “real”.

And following a quite generalized feeling, people like to remember their dead with music²⁴, in particular the one they liked before they went to the afterlife or the one they liked for those who stayed here. Not being entirely a matter of taste, also that which evokes pleasant moments in life or that which can awaken feelings of spiritual recollection. That is why you can hear from *responso*s to the most current music, with traditional musical ensembles such as wind bands or mariachi groups or their equivalents. All with the syncretized accompaniment of cold meats, head food, flowers, wreaths, pine, cypress, drinks and more.

A synthesis of what is seen, in general terms, is gathered in the words of M. García and G. Hernández²¹ when they said that “The celebration of the Day of the Dead is a mixture of mystical devotion, where the religious and the pagan, fear and satire are combined throughout the country. Songs are sung to death and food is prepared and eaten at the foot of the cemeteries”, and pointed out that “each region of Guatemala took different influences from the Hispanic culture”, an undeniable fact because the pre-Hispanic cultural base was equally diverse in terms of the elements it contributed to syncretism.

THE FAIR

In the most popular documentation available to me, I find a suggestive definition, from someone who, upon introducing himself, says⁸ he has worked “for more than 21 years as part of the trade of the fairs that take place in the four cardinal points of the country”. It is Don Carlos A. Bailon, who explains that “it is an event (Sic.) of popular tradition, born of the union of Spanish and indigenous cultures and whose expression is realized by means of manifestations of tradition and custom of the settlers of each locality in which.... they are performed.” In another part of his contribution he draws it as “a pictorial stamp typical of each locality, and in whose celebration both men, women and children are

manifested and projected with their best finery, since it is during that period of time that the tranquility and monotony of the population is totally altered.”

Mr. Bailón distinguishes four categories of fairs: patron, titular, cantonal and satellite. He calls patronal to those that are held in honor of the Patron Saint of the locality; titular to those that commemorate the founding of the locality, cantonal to “those of tradition that take place within the perimeter of the neighborhoods and colonies of the metropolitan area”, and satellite to those that, “without apparent reason for celebration are held within the neighborhoods and colonies...” In the patronal celebrations the conjugation of the religious celebration with one of a more profane character stands out; perhaps it is also the case of the cantonal ones, perhaps there are glimpses of it in the titular ones and something, possibly in the last ones.

Given the nature of this essay, I will concentrate on showing examples of syncretic facts of sacred-profane balance evident in the fairs. But first I must point out that the two major dimensions that stand out in them are the spiritual and the mercantile, and that from their balance derives the sacred-profane balance. So, in a fair, the liturgy, its rites and rituals, are surrounded by the mundane

represented by the “social, cultural and Sporting” activities that provide recreation for the people. The religious is expressed in acts such as alboradas, masses, prayers, wakes and processions. I have the audacity to include popular traditional dances, whose spiritual charge is such that the dancer, with movements assisted by music and preparatory rituals, performs true acts of faith, of homage to the divinity or of worship to the ancestors.

Beyond the spiritual, a fair concentrates the essence of a village festival, with many commercial and recreational opportunities. The stores are, therefore, the other part of its soul and are represented by the premises for the tasting of food and drinks, markets, second-hand stores and facilities dedicated to popular amusement and recreation. Such facilities include all the activities that typify the “non-religious”. It should be borne in mind that, in many cases, a sharp demarcation between the sacred and the mundane is a mere descriptive device. Food and beverages are axiomatic examples, since they can distinguish between those of ritual consumption and those of daily consumption, although it is not uncommon for the same dish to fulfill both functions.

The fair processions. Or better said, the processional processions, are in the

fairs the most important part of the activities of the popular religiosity. Their purpose is that the saint or the virgin under whose invocation the community has been placed blesses the people, and by extension the streets, houses, squares and any human building that composes it. It is a prayer of faith and the rejoicing that the divinity, through its saints, descends to the abode of man. To this end, they are entertained through actions and gifts that may please them: aromas, colors, textures, eating together, and also offering food.

It is a titanic task to try to particularize the manifestations of social fusion encompassed in a patronal procession. Except for the message of the occasion, they have innumerable features in common with the Easter processions. On this account, since the syncretisms expressed by popular religiosity are of similar equivalence, the considerations made for the Lenten ones do not deviate us too much from the central argument as far as the fair processions are concerned.

But, perhaps the occasion is propitious to recall why pre-Hispanic spirituality was able to adopt processions with relative ease, and therefore why they are also a key element to understand how Catholicism and native cosmogonies could acculturate without

insurmountable difficulties: it was a usual practice of pre-Hispanic peoples to carry their Lords, chiefs, chiefs, priests or nobles on their shoulders, to carry them in parihuelas or litters that, in this case, are the equivalent of the litters. For social behaviors in full gestation of syncretized referents, probably there was not much difference between Lords and Saints to carry out processions.

In the contemporary fair processions, we have already said that the music bands are one of the peninsular contributions. Now then, a colossal paradigm of actuality, as far as they are concerned, is a consequence of the living character of culture. This condition, that favors changes of collective behaviors by evolution and consequent adaptations, has incorporated to the processions, again in the great cities with the New Guatemala of the Assumption to the head, the calls "bands of war", constituted with students of average level that participate with great stridency and little or no religiosity. Such outrages produce a depressing and aberrant spectacle, dissonant for militaroid and to top it all with vulgar cadences that contribute nothing to the spirituality of the occasion. In fact they are ostentations typical of sectors of population that lack cultural sense, that only manage to contaminate the spirituality of the people with high

doses of mental poverty in participants that the only thing that they look for is to exhibit themselves, to be seen although for it they forge an uneducated atmosphere.

Fair meals. This section does not attempt to provide an exegesis of the foods typical of a fair. I am not even trying to prepare a list of them, although a detailed catalog could be a delicious contribution to the knowledge and appreciation of Guatemalan gastronomy. The objective, now, is only to show how the syncretization gives us a series of foods and dishes that, after its cultural amalgamation, have become an unavoidable part of the hustle and bustle and the classic heritage of the festival. Their abundance and common characteristics hide their syncretic quality, which of course does not reduce the magnetism they exert on us.

Depending on the size, type and location of the fairs, the nature of the places where something can be eaten varies tremendously. In our usual language one can name food “stalls”, canteens, cafeterias, restaurants, garnacherías, taquerías, churrerías, outlets of foreign dishes (Chinese, South American or Italian, including sevicherías, e.g.), junk food (such as hamburger joints and those of the big

fried chicken stores). Regardless of such a classification, the essay should indicate the culinary composition where pre-Hispanic elements are distinguished together with peninsular and Caribbean ones.

Among the former, corn is omnipresent in any of its forms: atol de elote, atol blanco, cooked or roasted corn, tamalitos (with or without chipilín, loroco, “Ripe beans” chaya), chuchitos, tamales, tortillas, dobladas, toast, enchiladas, tacos, etc. Of manifest pre-Hispanic purity is the white atol, which can be enriched to the consumer’s taste, once served, with black beans, salt and chili. Its sibling, atol de elote, is a paragon of syncretizations: the base is corn, but its preparation includes at least sugar and cinnamon, two elements brought by the European invasion.

Of pre-Hispanic heritage are the tamalitos, tortillas, chuchitos and tamales, but the dobladas and toast are syncretic products, due to the added components and the preparation as frying, a definite Hispanic custom. Enchiladas, whose base is a rigid corn tortilla on which a delicious cold meat is prepared with vegetables, spices and condiments from different parts of the world, are even more syncretic. Many people’s eyes are drawn to an enchilada, oblivious to the wonder that

it is a true showcase of ingredients in the form of a culinary product with a very Guatemalan taste, preparation and consumption. There is a great structural similarity between enchiladas and garnachas. The latter consist of a corn base in the form of a tortilla, although not toasted as in the former, but fried together with its ingredients, among which ground meat, tomato sauces, onion, cheese and cilantro predominate. Garnachas are also masterpieces of the pre-Hispanic-Spanish cultural amalgam.

Classic Hispanic cultural heritage are the breads and their derivatives, which make a rich series of wheat flour products. The maximum Spanish expression of floury foods in the country are churros, while its own adaptations are the famous “rosquitas de feria”. It has been said⁸ that “the sales of churros in the fairs were introduced to Guatemala by Mr. José Frías, who is a native of Málaga”. Among the snacks found at a fair, a very Spanish preparation is the bread with baked leg; similar meat but placed in the middle of a tortilla represents a syncretic snack, while the tortilla, if consumed with beans is pre-Hispanic. Such is the delicious game of popular Guatemalan cuisine.

The Spanish dowry is also the confectionery, now locally called

“typical”. The use of sugar, whether refined, brown or panela, is Hispanic. The contribution of certain fruits and seeds is native, as when it comes to guava, zapote, manzanilla, chilacayote, sweet potato, pepitoria, bledo or coconuts (the latter constitute the Caribbean and, in general, coastal marine presence). I only speak of the components of such sweets, not of the sweets that are prepared from them nor of the recipes, procedures to achieve them nor of the ways to present them. It can be seen that the amalgamation of cultures is not only material, if this is how you qualify the ingredients, since in this case everything else is part of different expressions of syncretism.

As was the argument when talking about the magnificence of a humble enchilada, “niguas” or “bledos” embody the sublimation of syncretism made sweet. The base is made with bledo seeds, a native herb that is among the most valuable genetic lineages in the country, best known for its soups, a pre-Hispanic food reputed to be extraordinarily nutritious. The sweet tablets, which are made from seeds and panela, are among the most traditional yet rare products. It is a culinary form in danger of extinction because the demand has fallen and due to the informative and communicational Mexican aggression they rob Guatemala of its identity and the

patrimonial property of its rich biological and cultural diversity (among many other things, they are more aggressive in claiming as their own the *bledos*, these sweets and other dishes of it).

Among many other sweets that come out, by culinary craftsmanship, from the national cuisine, equivalent considerations of syncretized richness can be made when talking about the delicious *chilacayotes* (generic name of the semi-crystallized sweets of this native *cucurbitaceae*), *zapotillos*, *guava colochos*, *chamomile jellies*, *elderberry*, *quince*, *guava*, *chamomiles in honey*, *coconut preserves and snacks*, etc.

In the dining rooms, which are of diverse types and specialization, the variety of dishes usually reflects the most common meals of Guatemalans. Except for the most typical of the indigenous antiquity, such as *pinoles*, *puliques*, *jocones* and some others, which practically disappear in the big cities, the menus offer the most deeply rooted dishes within the general population. Seen one by one, the recipes, ingredients, ways of preparing and serving them as well as the consumption protocols, that is, their role within the anthropology of local food, reflect the tremendous syncretism that is inherent to them. It

is so intense that, being the Ladino people a product of cultural and biological miscegenation and therefore a derivative of the amalgam of their identities, we can say that this is Ladino food with a more distinguished identity.

Traditional folk dances. The majority of traditional folk dances, although not all, are performed during the patron saint fairs as an essential part of popular religiosity. The *Baile de Los Negritos de Panajachel*, which culminates on Thursday of Corpus Christi when the celebration of the Patron Saint, San Francisco de Asís, takes place on October 4; or the *Tabal de Sololá* which takes place on December 8, day of the Blessed Virgin of Concepción but the Patron Saint, the Virgen de la Asunción, is celebrated on August 15, are two notable exceptions to that generalization. And there are more. But, within the framework of this essay, what interests us is only to point out the syncretic facts in the dance ritual.

As I stated above with some timidity, I see the traditional folk dances as components of the spirituality of the people, and therefore their execution is a ritual in the strictest sense of the term (even in the war dances, pastoral and festive dances one can simply see their spiritual charge). All the individual and group preparation that precedes them, the apotheosis of the execution and the

final reward are nothing more than rites in a series of magical-religious, individual and collective deliveries, whose purpose is to enter in contact with the divinity. A good example is the ludic ethnodrama of the flying stick, in which there are “rituals related to the choice of the tree that will serve as flying stick, its cutting and preparation, its bringing to the population...”, and that different species of pines are used according to particular geographic areas.²² There is a lot of syncretism in all of them, tangible and intangible. That its origin is pre-Hispanic is undeniable.

Delicate memories of pre-Hispanic dance art come from very distant times. Two polychrome vases from Altar de Sacrificios, Petén, are genuine jewels. One is from the Classic period and has been known³⁴ as the “Master of Altar”, in clear recognition of the sublime plastic beauty achieved by the artist. It embodies, in a delightful pictorial composition, six human figures, two dancing with a cadence as magnificent as the mastery with which they were represented. One, in smooth movement frozen in time, carries his mask in his right hand. Two of the remaining characters are musicians, one plays a flute and the other, it seems, a snail.

In the other vase, from the Late Classic, another complex scene of what seems to be a ritual dance in

prayer to the gods (rain?) was drawn. The small vase, finely polychrome, with yellow in the background and brick red in the figures, is known as that of “The Dancer”. In one of the first descriptions³² of the beautiful composition it is noted: “the main characters are two dancers, one wearing a jaguar skin and mask and the other a snake skin and mask, both at the moment of executing their dance. The delicacy of the gestures and rhythmic movement, both of the hands and of the body and feet, form, undoubtedly, the most admirable note of this vessel. There are four other dancers completing the scene, two of them seated in the Mayan style, that is to say, with their legs and feet intertwined and carrying mollusk-like offerings in their hands. Of the other two, one appears at the moment of jumping into the air and the other at the moment of offering a pitcher to the gods, which together with the glyphs of the date are aligned in the upper part of the vessel”. Jaguars, snakes, mollusks, feathers (green, perhaps quetzal) and the materials of musical instruments are part of the natural resources that appear in the exquisite scene.

As far as I and dance are concerned, I accept the words of Ana Sofía Villar (dancer, currently part of the Ballet Modern and Folklórico de Guatemala; pers. comm, 30.05.2004) who sees in the body proportions of the dancers, in

their gestures, the handling of the positions (it is possible, she assures, to identify and describe postures and steps of academic dance), articular rotations, contexture of the bodies and the studied alignment they adopt, grace of the movement transmitted and similar questions, evidence that the dancers represented were artists trained in their art. They speak for themselves to let us know that the Mayan societies of the Classic period cultivated the art of dancing and that in their executions they enjoyed costumes specially made for the case. Nothing prevents us from believing that in their communities they were part of professional elites dedicated exclusively to the complex art of communicating, through the aesthetic movement of their bodies, messages for themselves, for the inhabitants of the overworld, for their fellow human beings, etc.

There is also evidence of the antiquity of the dances in more recent indigenous literature, as well as in Hispanic chronicles from the time of the invasion and conquest. I bring again the example of annotations that in such sense contains the Pop Wuj, considered the text of greater indigenous cosmogonic hierarchy. They are examples taken at random, from which I incidentally suggest to reflect that the inclusion of birds and other wild animals is because they were part of the magical-religious

sphere of antiquity, and perhaps also served as a sample to inspire movements. More than just a simple pleasure, as some frivolously claim, the dances were communications between the profane and the sacred through the dancer's surrender to the divinity through bodily mobility.

It is written in the Pop Wuj, for example, in reference to Junajpú and Xbalamque': "And it was little what they did. They were only busy dancing the dance of *Puhuy*, the dance of *Cux and Iboy*, and they also danced the *Ixtzul* and *Chitic*"⁵ (Pujuy, owl; cux, weasel; iboy, armadillo; ixtzul, hundred-feet; chitic, "moreover, the one who walks on stilts", stilt-walker, heron?). The story continues: "The news of their dances immediately reached the ears of Lords Hun-Camé and Vucub-Camé. When they heard it, they exclaimed: Who are these two orphans? Do they really cause you so much pleasure?" / "- Certainly their dances and everything they do are very beautiful, answered the one who had brought the news to the Lords".

Living beings different from man appear early in the dances. But, as the only thing that matters to us now is to see evidence of the antiquity of the dance activity, let us recall from the Memorial of Sololá⁴ this passage of when "the first fathers and grandfathers" of the Kaqchikeles were elected Ahauh Ahpop and Ahpop

Oamahay. In such an important celebration, as a tribute of good will, the Poqomames “put all their presents before them and danced their dances”. And in another account of the Memorial, when the Kaqchikeles encountered a party of Poqomames in the mountains, without them seeing them and glimpsing them from a distance, they sent a spy, a weasel, to get news of what was happening to them. With the signal of the “sound of a gourd and a flute”, the weasel communicated what was seen in the poqomam camp: “great indeed is their power and they are dancing a magnificent dance”.

It follows a warlike action in which they capture and ritually sacrifice the Poqomam warlord, identified as Tolgom. The text says: “the execution of Tolgom began. He dressed and covered himself with his ornaments. Then they tied him with his arms outstretched against an ilamo to roast him. Immediately all the warriors began to dance. The music with which they danced is called the song of Tolgom”. Then it is passed to a relation of facts of great interest, that reaches its apotheosis when the rest of the Kaqchikel warriors “arrived and finished distributing (their pieces) among all the warriors of the seven tribes that took part in the offering and sacrifice, and their death was commemorated in the month of Uchum”. This last passage is valuable in the permissible interpretation of the birth of a dance motif in reproducing the “offering and sacrifice”

that ended the life of the enemy leader: “They gathered every year for their feasts and orgies and they arrowed the children, but instead of arrows they shot them with elder branches, as if they were Tolgom”. The evident eagerness to point out the change from arrows to soft elder branches, in an act in which a kaqchikel passage is recalled, arrowing children “as if they were Tolgom”, clarifies without a doubt that it is not an immolation but a representation. The invaluable Memorial presents us with the name of two dances in the passage: *Oakba'tzulu*, “dance of the arrowing”, and *Che'tzulu*, “dance of the tree”.

The existence of ancestral indigenous dances, which in the mid-sixteenth century retained great purity, was also mentioned by Castilian chroniclers. Mr. A. Estrada Monroy¹⁸ quotes Fray Gerónimo de Mendieta (*Historia Eclesiástica Indiana*) who would have said: “One of the main things that in all this land there were, were *the songs and dances*, as well to solemnize the feasts of their demons that they honored as gods, with which they thought they did them great service, as well as for rejoicing and their own solace” // “And for this reason, and because it was something they made much account of, in each town and each Lord in his house had a chapel with their singers, *composers of dances and songs*, and these sought in their way of meter or couplets that they had.” .. // “On the day they were to dance, they would place a large mat in the morning in the middle

of the square where the atabales were to be placed, and everyone would dress up and gather in the house of the Lord, and from there they would go out singing and dancing”.

These other paragraphs are also pathetically beautiful: “All this multitude brings their feet as well coordinated as some very skilled dancers of Spain. And what is more, the whole body, as well as the head and the arms and hands, bring so concerted, measured and ordered, that they do not discrepancy or leave each other half a beat, but what one does with the right foot and also with the left, all do the same, and in the same time and beat. And when one lowers the left arm and raises the right, they all do the same and at the same time” // “So that the atabales and the singing and the dancers, all do not differ one from the other a jot: of which the good dancers of Spain... have in much the dances and dances of these natives, and the great agreement and feeling that they have in them” // “In these dances they take many signs and signs in which those who have been brave in the war are known...”

From another space, from another time, but always referring to ancient peoples, Estrada Monroy gathers new annotations of great richness. He does so, he says, from the manuscript entitled *El Cacique* Mr. Juan, by an anonymous author of the 17th century

who “must have been guided by the stories that survived about the primitive life of the Quichés (Sic.) in their festivities”. In between some lines, here is the testimony: “In that land (Sacapulas) there was a powerful Cacique, who was like the King of the Shire, to whose wills all the reyezuelos of the neighboring provinces bowed...” // “There gathered in the house of the Cacique-King, they celebrated that day with wild enthusiasm the glorious anniversary of one of those memorable days.” // “In the midst of all that *hubbub a company of dancers made room...* a little drum placed in the center of the group governed the movement.” // “The men form a semicircle around the music and the women another one symmetrically. The people crowd around. The dance begins...” // “And the voices grew louder and the furies redoubled and the earth sank under the weight of their dances...”

It is a daunting task to summarize the value of traditional folk dances. Even more to give full measure to their historical, ethnological, ethnographic and anthropological aspects. In addition, in all fairness, they have already been treated in great depth and authority with a multiplicity of approaches. The obligatory reference is the master Carlos René García Escobar, and you can also read A. Arrivillaga Cortés, C. Dary, H. L. de León Pérez or C. Lara Figueroa, among others. This essay only intends to

point out attributes of syncretism in the dances and the presence in them of selected elements of Nature.

This can be seen in the very fact of their survival, with a definite articulation to the liturgy of Catholic Christianity, the only current capable of preserving and understanding them. Although the common observer can perceive the syncretic phenomenon in the costumes, the plumage, the masks and, in general, in the attire and in the music, what happens long before the presentations and next to them, but in another space, is the maximum expression of syncretism. Behind the scenes, understandable events take place in the light of collective spirituality. The mystical self-preparation of each character and their individual dedication within the confraternity, the veiling of costumes and masks, the preparatory rituals, the food and drinks to be consumed, the rehearsals, the management of the parliaments, in short, what is truly a traditional folk dance, is the maximum expression of the fusion of the pre-Hispanic and Iberian cultural heritages.

It would be too long to take dance by dance and make the pertinent analysis of them. Moreover, there are those who have already done so, and on the basis of their authority on the subject (see García Escobar in his multiple interpretations of the matter, and a

delicate synthesis in his *Atlas Danzario*", for example).

VENERATION OF THE LORD OF ESQUIPULAS

The cult of the Miraculous Lord of Esquipulas, or Cristo Negro, is a deep-rooted tradition in Guatemala, which also transcends national borders. Being a manifestation of powerful religious fervor, it has been shown that its origin is rooted in syncretisms that can be evidenced with certain ease. Its worship and pilgrimages to its temple in the department of Chiquimula have been richly described by Aracely Esquivel Vásquez¹⁶. The contribution that she makes to its knowledge and the message of the work that contains it are such that I have not resisted the temptation to transcribe it in this: "This cult is related to merchant networks and seems to have pre-Hispanic origin as a superimposition of the God Ek' Chuah, who was patron of the Mayan merchants. According to Lara (in C. A. Lara Figueroa: *The Pilgrimages to Esquipulas on January 15*. *Diario La Hora*, Guatemala, 13.01.2006), the pilgrimages to the temple of Esquipulas.... to venerate Cristo Negro constitute one of the social movements of greater profusion in the south of Mesoamerica since pre-Hispanic times (Sic.) until today, which is a perfect symbiosis between the ancient pre-Hispanic beliefs and the Christian faith".

Esquivel Vásquez continues: “In the Postclassic period, the present-day Esquipulas was inhabited by the Ch’orti people, whose main pilgrimage center was a hill called Esquisuchitl in Nahuatl. It had a shrine where Ek’ Chuah was venerated, a black deity known as Lord Narigon and who was the patron saint of merchants, shippers of southern Mesoamerica. Ek’ Chuah blessed the merchants, particularly those who transported black salt. The great shippers of feathers, textiles, obsidian and jade came to him to make offerings and from there they were distributed throughout Mesoamerica and even reached the Andean area.... According to Lara (op. cit.), the Spaniards used the context of this pilgrimage center as a support for evangelization after the 16th century and built a Catholic temple over the ch’orti’ shrine and asked the Portuguese sculptor Quirio Cataño, in 1595, to make a Christ in cedar wood. With the passage of time the pigmentation of the image became darker, which turned it into an image of great transcendence among the population because it acquired a dark color (Mirna A. Barrios Figueroa⁹ states that “... it was sculpted by the artist Quirio Cataño, who at the request of the clergymen Bishop Provisor and Vicar Cristóbal de Morales, made it a rod and a half high, dark brown color, considering that in this way it would be better received by the indigenous population...”). The syncretism

generated by the veneration of Ek’ Chuah and Christ represented in an image of Cristo Negro made that, from the 18th century, the Lord of Esquipulas also became the Lord of the merchants, and one of the most miraculous images of the Mesoamerican world...”.

THE LEGEND OF THE PIEDRA DE LOS COMPADRES

A curious rock formation in the municipality of Esquipulas, department of Chiquimula, is called Piedra de los Compadres, a product of the weathering of the parent material. They are two large rhyolitic blocks that erosion eroded, and that at the moment form a pair that persists in solid equilibrium, one above and the other below. It is located west of the village of Esquipulas, on the edge of the dirt road that connects it with the municipality of Quetzaltepeque, the old road to reach Esquipulas well known by pilgrims and pilgrims from the mid-twentieth century.

With variations in form, the legend that revolves around them tells that they were two compadres who were petrified by divine punishment, for having sinned by succumbing to the desires of the flesh when they were forbidden to do so. Some versions are adorned with much poetry to give the scenario a bucolic character, others use

the content to whip the weak in spirit, etc... What is certain is that when descending from the mountains, prior to entering the valley of Esquipulas, the first contact that the penitents had with the holy place was the Stone and its legend, enough reasons to fill the faithful with recollection and respectful fear.

Now with a new access highway made by different places, La Piedra has partially ceased to be one of those mythical places united by the tradition of the pilgrimages and has been made to fall to the vitiated level of folklorized tourist destination. But this has not overcome what is of greater cultural transcendence, which is the fact that the monument continues to maintain its validity as a popular adoration, through which it maintains all the greatness of the Mayan-Ladino religious syncretization that gives the Guatemalan people their identity as a nation. Identity that now is expressed as a centennial heritage that makes the site a sacred space, even within one of the most deeply rooted facts of the popular Catholic religiosity. A place where Mayan and Chiman priests, believers, faithful and apprentices come to participate in ancestral ritual ceremonies that preserve the richness and purity of the fused native and Christian cosmogonies.

The existence of the Piedra and its legend is so deeply rooted in

Guatemalan society that it maintains a definite link with the cult of the Cristo Negro. With more or less strength depending on the age, origin and socio-cultural self-identification of the pilgrims, it is an essential part of the pilgrimages and visits.

SYNCRETISM IN TOPONYMIES

In the names of many towns, large or small, and even in the names of places and other spaces of the Guatemalan geography, it happens that the Catholic name precedes a word of indigenous roots. That is to say: in its current designation, Spanish-indigenous words are syncretized. Almost a quarter of the total of 334 municipal capitals manifest this condition, which represents an idiomatic fusion of great expressive richness. It is not unusual, moreover, for the native voice to be the result of the superimposition of foreign terms, particularly Pipil or Nahuatl. The presence of these in the mid-sixteenth century as an indispensable feature for daily life, helps to explain their persistence in many geographical names²⁰.

In this matter, in order to achieve a better understanding of the meaning of the indigenous term, the inherent difficulty in the interpretation of etymologies is the existence of a high degree of arbitrariness, which causes different people to propose different meanings for the same compound

word. Nevertheless, here are some examples taken at random:

San Agustín Acasaguastlán. From the department of Progreso, it is located 290 meters above sea level from El valle del Rio Motagua. The Church celebrates Saint Augustine, bishop and doctor. Acaguastlán is a Nahuatl term that has been derived from *acatzau* and *aztlán* (*acatzau* = torditos [little thrushes]; *aztlán* = Lugar de Garzas [place of herons]). It will be Lugar de Garzas y Torditos of the Bishop Doctor San Agustín.

San Andres Xecul. In the department of Totonicapán, at 2,435 meters of altitude in the Volcanic Mountain Range. The Patron is Saint Andrew the Apostle. In K'iche' the etymology of Xecul may derive from *xe* = bajo (low); *cul* = Chamarra [wrap], but in Mam, the primitive language, *cul* means *cerro* (Hill). It is possible to recognize it as Town of the Saint Andrew the Apostle to Pie del Cerro, which coincides with its location.

San Antonio Palopó. Municipality of Sololá located at 1,590 meters above sea level, in the Volcanic Mountain Range. It was placed under the patronage Saint Anthony in the mid-sixteenth century. The voice Palopó is kagchikel, from *pa* which is [locative particle] and *pop* names the esteras [mats] or petates, [kind of carpet] as well as the tul (emergent aquatic plant) with which they are made. In the

Tulares de San Antonio. By extension, it could be the closely neighboring town of Santa Catarina Palopó, could be called Tulares de Santa Catalina.

San Francisco Zapotitlán. Town of the department of Suchitepéquez, at 640 meters of altitude in the Coastal Plain of the Pacific Ocean. In the Title of the House Ixquín-Nehaib, Lady of the Territory of Otoyá, it is mentioned with its ancient name of *Xetulul*, which in K'iche' language means "under the place where there are zapotes [fruit]", that the Náhuatl converted in *Zapotitlán* with the same meaning, since the voice is composed of the abundant ending *tlán* and *zapotl*. The Zapotal of San Francisco.

San Gaspar Ixchil. Municipality of the department of Huehuetenango. Its altitude is 1,400 meters, in the Sierra de los Cuchumatanes. The Church celebrates the Epiphany or Adoration of the Saints Kings (The wise Men). The name San Gaspar is taken from the river of the name, which is geographically related to it. In the Mam *ixchil* language it is equivalent to chilares, the plants that produce chili peppers. It can be called San Gaspar de Los Chilares.

San José Chacayá. Municipality of the department of Sololá, at an altitude of 2,210 meters above the Volcanic Mountain Range. Under the patronage of Patriarch Saint Joseph. Chacayá comes from kagchikel *ch'ka* = caída (fall); *ya'* = agua (water) which gives

the sense of Caída de Agua. It coincides with the different waterfalls or cascades of the region. In quasipoetic translation it will be Pueblo de Cataratas of the patriarch saint Joseph. San José Ojetenam; From the department of San Marcos, it is a town located 3,050 meters above sea level, on the Volcanic Mountain Range. The patron saint is the Patriarch Saint Joseph. The etymology of Ojetenam may come from the Mam *oje*, from *ojtx* or *ojtxa* = antiguo [*old*]; and *tenam*, *I'nam* = Pueblo (town). It could be read Pueblo Antiguo of the Patriarch Saint Joseph.

San Mateo Ixtatán. Municipality of the department of Huehuetenango, at 2,540 meters above sea level on the Sierra de los Cuchumatanes. The Church celebrates the Apostle and Evangelist Saint Matthew. Regarding the etymology of Ixtatán, it has been said that the word is of Mexican origin and that it is possibly a translation of the ancient Mayan name (*chuj*), which indicates its abundant salt springs.²⁰

San José Pinula. Municipality of the department of Guatemala, located 1,752 meters above sea level on the Volcanic Mountain Range. The church commemorates the feast of the Patriarch Saint Joseph. According to diverse authors, like Antonio de Fuentes y Guzmán, Pinula is a Pipil voice that comes from *pinul* that designates the pinol (red beans), and *á*,

from *já*, that is agua (water). An equivalent interpretation comes from the Nahuatl radical *pinolli*, which also names pinol. In one or the other case it would give “tierra del pinol”. The interpretation is applicable to San Pedro Pinula (Jalapa) and Santa Catarina Pinula (Guatemala).

San Juan Tecuaco. From the department of Santa Rosa, it is located at 475 meters of altitude in the southern slope of the Volcanic Mountain Range. The Church celebrates the apostle Saint John the Evangelist; it also commemorates the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist. The etymology of Tecuaco may come from the corruption of the Nahuatl voice *tecoatlco*, from *con* = place name; *coatl* = culebra [snake] and *tel* = Piedra (Stone). If so, the hyperbolic name could be Lugar de la Culebra de Piedra de San Juan, or even Lugar de Piedra de la Culebra de San Juan.

San Juan Sacatepéquez. Municipality of the department of Guatemala. It is located 1,845 meters above sea level on the Volcanic Mountain Range. The church commemorates the Nativity of the town's patron Saint John the Baptist. Sacatepéquez is a *Pipil* term composed of two words: *sacatl*, which is cerro (Grass), and *tepet*, which is a cerro (Hill). It gives the sense of “Cerro de Zacates”. It can be the Cerro de Zacate de San Juan. San Lucas Sacatepéquez, of the department of Sacatepéquez, may have equivalent considerations. San Martín Jilotepeque. Town of the

department of Chimaltenango, to 1,786 meters of altitude. The Patron Saint is the bishop and confessor Saint Martin of Tours. It has been assumed by some authors that the etymology of Jilotepeque is from the Nahuatl *xilotl* = Elote (corn), and *tepetl* = cerro (Hill). Since the cornscobs are ears of tender corn, the designation can be oriented to an ancient consumption of the unripe grain. In this way, we can refer to the Cerro de Elotes of the bishop Saint Martin. However, in Guatemala the meaning of *xilote*, or *jilote*, is different, and refers to the dry and empty axis of the cob that has supported the development of the corn kernels. From this derives an unimaginable scenario of semantic interpretations... based on linguistic syncretisms!

San Miguel Chicaj. Town in the department of Baja Verapaz, at 940 meters above sea level in El Valle de Chicaj. It has been placed under the invocation of Saint Michael the Archangel. The meaning of Chicaj is found in the K'iche' language, which uses *chi* with a locative sense and *caj* which translates as cielo (heaven). According to a local tradition the image of its patron descended from heaven. It is Lugar del Cielo of Saint Michael the Archangel.

San Pedro Carchá. In the department of Alta Verapaz, at 1,282 meters above sea level on the Sierra de Chamá. The Patron Saint is Saint Peter the Apostle. Already in the indigenous cosmogonic

texts it is designated with the terms *Carchah*, *Carchaj* and *Carchá*. It is a q'eqchi' voice coming from *chaj*, which names the *ocote* or *pino* [pine trees]. It can be, then, El Pinar of Saint Peter the Apostle.

Santa Ana Huista. Town of the department of Huehuetenango, at 740 meters of altitude in the western foothills of the Sierra de los Cuchumatanes. The Church commemorates Saint Anne, mother of the Blessed Virgin. Huista seems to come from the Nahuatl, *huitztli* = espina (thorn), and *tlán* is used as a suffix of proximity or place. With poetic dispensation, as Lugar Cercano a Espinas of the Virgin Saint Anne.

Santa Catarina Ixtahuacán. Town of the department of Sololá, now on the summit of Nahualá in the Volcanic Mountain Range. The Church commemorates Saint Catherine of Alexandria, virgin. Ixtahuacán is a Nahuatl term that may come from its roots *ixtli* = llanura (cultivated plain); *ua* = qualifier of place, and the locative *can*. Could it be Llanos Cultivados of the virgin Saint Catherine? By extension, the town of San Miguel Ixtahuacán, in San Marcos, can be called En los Llanos Cultivados of Saint Michael the Archangel.

Santa Cruz del Quiché. Head of the department of Quiché, at 2,021 meters above sea level in the Sierra de Chuacús. The patron saint of the town

is *Santa Elena de la Cruz*, and the term Quiché comes from two roots of the K'iche' language: *k'i* means quantity, grouping, multitude, while *che* is árbol (tree). The figurative name would be *Arboleda de Santa Elena*.

Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa. Municipality in the department of Escuintla, at 370 meters above sea level on the Coastal Plain of the Pacific Ocean. A probable etymology of Cotzumalguapa is derived from the Nahuatl or Mexican, from the roots *cotzamallotl* that designates the Tacuazines [oposums] and *apán* that has been translated by río (river) or agua (water). It is also said that it comes from the Kaqchikel *co*, tener (to have); *tumalk*, ubre (udder); and *guaquex*, ganado (cattle). The Patron Saint is Saint Lucy, virgin and martyr. Will it be the Río de los Tacuazines de Agua of Saint Lucy; virgin?

Santo Domingo Xenacoj. Town in the department of Sacatepéquez. At 1,830 meters above sea level in the Volcanic Mountain Range. The Patron, protector and friend is Saint Dominic, founder of the Order of Preachers. The Kaqchikel word *Xenacoj* is derived from *xena*, "abajo del cerro" (below the Hill), and *nacoj*, where the "Puma Ruge" (Puma roars). So it is "Abajo del Cerro de Santo Domingo donde el Puma Ruge".

We could go on analyzing all the names that manifest this particular type of syncretism. But, for purposes of

illustration, the proposed examples already represent a good sample to exalt the matter at hand. We reach a poetic level that is deeply embedded in the national identity, so much so that we are not even aware of its existence. The everyday, the commonplace, hide its greatness. So we leave it at this point.

EPILOGUE

Almost all social events of Guatemalans show the acculturation that has been forged around them since the sixteenth century. Cultural syncretism is so ingrained that it marks the national identity without being fully conscious of it. For the common inhabitants it is, simply, their way of being. Even so, it is possible to distinguish the elements that constitute it, and thus understand the nature and character of the contributions that constitute it. In doing so, it becomes evident that the pre-Hispanic Mayan cultural heritage is the one that has given more contributions to the mix, very little the Garifuna and less so the Xinka.

In peoples with low-intensity Ladinization, the balance still leans toward the native, the indigenous. This characteristic supports a proposition that the rich national syncretism is the distinctive element of the Ladino people, whose members are the result

of the biological and cultural crossbreeding that occurred after the Iberian invasion. Far from denying a Ladino identity, syncretism reinforces and defines it.

Recognizing the roots of acculturation, that is, differentiating the cultural heritages that made it possible, allows us to value it, exalt identity, nationality, establish pride and, a small step further, live in greater harmony with Nature and the socio-cultural environment, and less with the massive tendencies of capitalism, neo-liberalism and the negative dogmatism of fundamentalist religious currents. Sometimes it can even be reflected in a certain propensity to an ecologically friendlier coexistence.

The following example may be significant to understand these last points. I begin by transcribing that²⁵: “Since 1987 an ethnobotanical and distribution study of an endemic species of Guatemala, the *orejuela*, [*small handles*] whose dried petals were a common condiment among Mayas and Aztecs at the time of the conquest, ... still used by Mames, Quichés, Kekchíes and Pocomchíes to season traditional drinks, such as atol blanco, pinol, shakes or cocoa and atol with [fermented drink]. The quichés spice with *orejuela* the black

sauce... It also has a place in religious magic ceremonies. As for its presence in markets, it was found for sale only in small quantities in very important indigenous markets for kekchíes, mames and quichés... It is possible that Jacaltenango was an area of domestication and cultivation of a highly valued species in pre-Columbian times and that today it is on the verge of extinction”.

We ask ourselves: what will happen to the culinary tradition of black sauce, atol blanco, pinol, shakes, cocoa or atol with *súchiles* in these regions if the *orejuela*, the tree native to these areas, becomes extinct? It is a certain culinary identity that is being undermined, and this is transcendental from an ethnological perspective. The point, in this vacuum of conservation, is that having tasted in Mames, K’iche’es, Q’eqchi’es and Poqomchi’es communities such foods with *orejuela* offers a different vision of belonging to societies that have their own referents, which are about to be lost forever, and that probably a different perspective than the current one can ensure that the species survives, that with it very special foods are maintained in the gastronomic heritage of the social groups that possess them, that conservation has a higher meaning and Guatemalan cuisine the preeminence that is sometimes denied to it.

To wonder about the intrinsic values of syncretism is to philosophize about the value of beauty. It is like sublimating the grace and smoothness of the Velvet Flower. It is to see in the imagery an art that transcends the spirituality of its conception. It is to be able to understand how bee honey enriches the flavorfulness of traditional cuisine; in short, it is to observe our own identity in its pure essence.

In summary, we would like to close by recalling with F. Urquizú³⁸ that “the history of our country covers three periods in its evolution: pre-Hispanic, Hispanic and Republican; each one has fructified in the creation of a material and immaterial cultural heritage that reflects the living conditions of each moment that we must examine carefully to understand the origin of such manifestations and detect the threat they face for their survival”. That is my intention with the present essay. To point out the syncretism of our social life, how it is fixed in a collective imaginary and becomes intangible heritage, which cultural inheritances create it, the elements of Nature that feed it and the great challenges it faces to continue being an identity accumulation of traditional popular culture.

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A pine carpet, on it a soft embroidered tablecloth and on top of it a wine cup, bread, twelve glazed ceramic bowls, a sack with coins, a chalice and grapes. Some *jacaranda* flowers. The complement are some *corozo* flower spikes. In a supreme and divine example of syncretism, the symbolic sublimates its nature: it represents the Last Supper, the foundation for the Catholic Holy Eucharist. The bowls evoke the twelve apostles and the money bag recalls Judas Iscariot. The bread and wine are the body and blood of Christ, while the vine, embodied in the grapes, is "the fruit of man's labor". The sacralized pine carpet is a pre-Hispanic contribution of great antiquity, just as the incorporation of corozo and ceramics are native legacies; of Hispanic heritage are the tablecloth, the embroidery on it, the bread and the grapes. The jacaranda was brought from South America and has already been incorporated into the ritual. Sober and beautiful, the syncretic load centuplica the symbolic load, Although it constitutes ephemeral Lenten art, it is a concrete case that exemplifies the fusion of spiritualities, traditions and customs. (Photograph: Guillermo Alfredo Vásquez Gonzales; as all those that illustrate this essay).



If it seems to be part of a pre-Hispanic religious ritual, it is not, although all the elements illustrated are. The carpet of pine leaves is an ancestral tradition with deep roots and symbolism, as well as the incense burner with aromatic resins taken from native trees. The incense burner is of pre-Hispanic evocation. The ensemble was part of a Holy Week and Lenten carpet in Nueva Guatemala de la Asunción on March 16, 2008 (Photo GAVG).



Guatemalan carpets, especially those of Holy Week, have become supreme samples of the handling of a variety of religious syncretism facts due to the materials they integrate, the symbolisms they carry and the human environment that surrounds them. Cucuruchos [person who participates in Nazarene processions], Romans and faithful are only a part of the splendor that merges the whole set in a procession of the time (Photo GAVG).



In an Orchard of Saints the pre-Hispanic Maya and Catholic Christian spiritualities are combined. Each one with its social, cultural and material contributions to enhance popular religiosity. The massive offering of fruits to the divinity is the result of an archaic ceremonial to link sacred and profane times through food. Flowers, colors, smells, textures, fire and smoke, sounds, are some of the elements that complete the great ritual.



In the cult of the dead, of the days of All Saints and All Souls, a multitude of syncretized facts are conjugated. The festivity is adopted from what is established by the Catholic Church but the ceremony is done remembering many indigenous customs. In this image you can distinguish the decoration of the tombs with Flores de Muerto, watered pine leaves, flower pots; the incorporated custom of the kites is added... and you can smell the smell of the traditional main courses (Photo GAVG).



The raising of kites in or near the cemeteries on All Saints' and All Souls' Days is a deeply rooted custom. It is a way of uniting the world with the overworld, the profane and the sacred, a link to communicate with the divinity and with the souls of the deceased (Photo GAVG).



The peaceful Christmas Eve and Christmas season unites the native and the European in a very characteristic explosion of spirituality. The native flora provides several species that, manipulated according to ancestral customs, result in chamomile threads, pine worms, pine leaf nets, moss mats, paxte, straw and wheat ears (Photo GAVG).



The Christmas Eve ritual arrived in Guatemala in the 16th century, but since its incorporation into native cultures it has been transformed into very characteristic ceremonies within the Guatemalan national identity. Here, for example, the clay dove comes from the Chinautla school of pottery and alternates with culturally imported images (Photo GAVG).



Mesoamerican banana, Hispanic fried food, Guatemalan food. A single casserole can contain all the tastiness of the culinary syncretism that gives us our identity (Photo GAVG).



Molletes [*similar to muffins*] concentrate many elements of fused cultures. The central raw material, wheat flour, sugars and bread are Hispanic heritage; the mead that contains them is a sweet mixture where panelas, cinnamon and other Mediterranean condiments can be found, and the appetite is equally Iberian. But the clay pot, the recipes and procedures to prepare them, the occasion, the place and the company to eat them are as Guatemalan as the taste for them (Photo GAVG).



Guatemalan snacks are a rich syncretism to the eyes, to the palate and to the cultural identity. Tacos, enchiladas, tostadas, breads with beans, ham or stuffed chiles, tomato sauces, cheese.... They are tasted by the faithful, the passers-by, the cucuruchos [*person who participates in Nazarene processions*] (Photo GAVG).



A ceremony of masks, prior to the performance of a traditional Guatemalan folk dance, is a display of pre-Hispanic symbolism and spirituality expressed in contemporary times (Photo GAVG).



Few social events can amalgamate the cultural heritages that form the Guatemalan nationality as much as the Amatlán Fair, whose spiritual axis is the cult of Jesus Christ Child. The water procession of the *Zarquito* is a central part of the community ceremonial (Photo GAVG).



The cult of Maximón has always been recognized as one of the most powerful expressions of religious syncretism in Guatemala (Photo GAVG).



Contemporary electronic technology competes with the iconography carried by the skirt of a marimba; perhaps some of the melodies performed also compete with more traditional musical pieces. The social act that integrates it can be enormously varied, but the ant keyboard, the rubber of the drumsticks and the master performers speak for themselves of the syncretized magnificence that is embodied in what has been declared the national instrument (Photo GAVG).



The Garífuna people have contributed invaluable cultural expressions to the Guatemalan totality. Their music and dances, as in this image, are manifestations of a deep spirituality, but also of their more profane social way of being, in an exclusive reservoir of traditions and customs (Photo GAVG).



In the processional processions, the music bands have played a preeminent role. The musical style of the Funeral Marches has taken root and has become a real school that gives as much identity as the Carpets, Orchards, Platforms, Arches, Steps and other expressions of popular religiosity. The syncretic has given way to cultural identity (Photo GAVG).



Black corn cobs in the baskets and bicycles in the back, candles and ornaments of a wild solanaceous plant, little crosses and ornaments in the Pilgrim's Hat, the little girl who wears the clothing of her People and covers it with pieces of modern fabrics... so many syncretisms in the cult to the Lord of Esquipulas (photo GAVG).