

# SANTIAGO ATITLÁN: TOWN OF GOD?

SUBJECT OF CONTESTED RELIGIOUS MEANING: A CASE STUDY OF THE FOLK SAINT MAXIMÓN



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Photograph Frontpage<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This photograph was taken by Elizabeth Hokke on 11-04-2015 in the *cofradía* Santa Cruz. This is a photograph of Maximón, our case study.

# **Santiago Atitlán: Town of God?**

**Subject of Contested Religious Meaning: A Case Study of the Folk Saint Maximón**

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Figure 1: Map of Guatemala<sup>3</sup>



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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.tropicaldiscovery.com/regional\\_info/atitlan\\_tours/vacations.php](http://www.tropicaldiscovery.com/regional_info/atitlan_tours/vacations.php), last retrieved: 25-06-2015

<sup>4</sup> <http://nl.weather-forecast.com/locations/Santiago-Atitlan>, last retrieved: 25-06-2015





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Sinde



## Glossary

Abuelo	Grandfather
Ajaaw	<i>Tz'utujil</i> Word for creator (referring to God)
Aj'ij	Maya priest or spiritual guide
Alabanza	Worship
Atitecos	Inhabitants of Santiago Atitlán
Bendición	Blessing
Brujos	Witches, also used for Aj'ij who do 'bad' things
Camioneta	Truck
Canciones de alabanza	Songs of Worship
Characoteles	People that convert into animals (at night)
Cofrades	Men and women in the <i>cofradías</i>
Cofradías	Catholic confraternities
Colegio	School
Comadrona	Midwives
Conservador	Conservative
Corre de San Juan	Procession; run of Saint John
Costumbre(s)	Customs
Culto	Evangelical Church Service
Dios Espiritu Santo	The Holy Spirit
Dios Hijo	Jesus, son of God
Dios Padre	God the Father
Dios Trino	Trinity
Evangelicos	Evangelicals
Hermano/Hermana	Brother/Sister
Hijos de Dios	Children of God
Hijos del Diablo	Children of the Devil
Imagen	Statue, picture
Ministerio	Ministry, Task in Church
Ministerio de evangelización	Ministry to Evangelize
Nahuales	Ancestors, spirits of ancestors
Negocio	Business
Neo-Pentecostal	Neo-Pentecostal

Rilaj Mam	Grandfather, also known as Maximón
Sacerdotes	Priests
Santa Cena	The Lord's Supper
Semana Santa	Holy Week
Telinel	Carrier of Maximón, task in <i>cofradía</i> Santa Cruz
Todopoderoso	Almighty
Traje	Regional dress
Tz'utujil	One of the Maya groups in Guatemala
Unidad de la familia	Family Unity
Verdadero Cristiano	True Christian
Virgen Dolores	Virgin Mary (in suffering form; <i>dolor</i> means pain)
Wayeb	Last month of the Maya calendar counting 5 day

## 1. Introduction

*The war for the heart and soul of Santiago Atitlán is no longer a struggle of the town versus the outside. Rather, Atitlán has turned in on itself* ... (Carlson 2011:xvii)

Guatemala is an ethnically diverse country and has one of the highest percentage of indigenous population in Latin America<sup>5</sup>, who are generally referred to as Maya. Despite several violations towards their cultural and religious practices throughout history, the Maya keep on practicing the '*ways of their ancestors*'. However, Evangelicalism has been growing rapidly since the end of the last century. In 2014 one of the country's most read newspaper, *el Prensa Libre*, published an article stating that the number of Evangelicals is almost exceeding the number of Catholics in the country. This is very high compared to other Latin American countries<sup>6</sup>. The emergence of Evangelicalism has a big influence on the daily life of many converted *Guatemaltecos*<sup>7</sup>. Being Evangelical implies a lifestyle that is considered *modern* and very different from an Indigenous traditional way of life.

The indigenous inhabitants of Santiago Atitlán, known as the Maya *Tz'utujiles*<sup>8</sup>, practiced their own cosmology and spirituality before the *Conquistadores* (Spanish conquerors) came to Latin America. In the 400 years that followed they converted to Catholicism, whether that was willingly or forcefully (Hart 2012; Early 2006). Many authors argue that a mixture between the two religions has emerged, also called Popular Catholicism (Sanabria 2007). For an undefinable time the *Tz'utujiles* have been venerating Maximón, who is generally seen as a Folk Saint. A Folk Saint is a phenomenon that is usually linked to the syncretic nature of Popular Catholicism. Currently, with more and more people converting to Evangelicalism the practices around Maximón have become less popular. Folk Saints, such as Maximón, do not stroke with Evangelicalism (Sanabria 2007).

This thesis is the result of eight weeks of Anthropological fieldwork. We conducted qualitative research in Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala from the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February 2015 until the 17<sup>th</sup> of April 2015. Our fieldwork coincided with *Semana Santa* (Holy Week), which was

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<sup>5</sup> Information from <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2013/05/22/pueblos-indigenas-en-america-latina-pese-a-los-avances-en-la-participacion-politica-las-mujeres-son-las-mas-rezagadas-segun-el-pnud.html>, last retrieved on 14-06-2015

<sup>6</sup> When the article was published, 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 2014, 47% of the population in Guatemala stated they were Catholic and 40% said they were Protestants. Article can be found on: <http://www.prensalibre.com/noticias/comunitario/Evangelicos-ganan-terreno-pais-0-1124887528,%20last%20retrieved%202014-06-2015>, last retrieved: 25-06-2015

<sup>7</sup> Guatemalan

<sup>8</sup> The *Tz'utujiles* are one of the Maya ethnical groups in the region. They speak *Tz'utujil* (Carlson 2011)

celebrated from the 29<sup>th</sup> of March until the 5<sup>th</sup> of April. *Semana Santa* is an important religious event that allowed us to gain deeper insights on, as well as beautiful illustrations of the religious and spiritual dynamics in town. Carlson (2011) wrote: '*Atitlán has turned on itself*'. This is an interesting observation and with the popularity of Maximón diminishing, worth of researching. In this research we have done this by approaching Maximón as a vehicle of meaning for the different religious groups in town. This allowed us to gain a better understanding of the religious and spiritual dynamics in Santiago Atitlán. We have done this by means of the following main question: '*How are the local religious and spiritual dynamics in Santiago Atitlán reflected in the meaning the Tz'utujiles give to the folk saint cult of Maximón?*'.

In order to answer the main question we first take a look at who Maximón is and what the praxis around him are. Secondly, we look at how both Maya *Tz'utujil* spirituality and Catholicism are expressed in the meaning the *Tz'utujiles* give to Maximón and his cult. We have use the term syncretism as a tool to see how these two religions are expressed in the meaning given to Maximón. At the same time we also want to find out how Evangelicalism, as a vehicle of modernity, manifests itself in Santiago Atitlán. This enhances our understanding about their relation towards Maximón. Evangelicals tend to take a more radical stand in the debate around Maximón. Therefore, it nowadays forms one of the main challenges in the continuation of the folk saint cult of Maximón.

In order to make this research viable we have made a division between the research groups wherein Elizabeth focused on Popular Catholicism and traditionalists and Ermesinde on the Evangelicals. Elizabeth makes a distinction between the 'more orthodox' Catholics, the *cofrades*, and the traditionalists.<sup>9</sup> *Cofrades* are men (and women) participating in the local *cofradías*. We use the term traditionalists to name a group of locals who claim to follow the traditional Maya *Tz'utujil* spirituality and state that in the *cofradías* syncretism is practiced. The claim that Catholicism and *Tz'utujil* spirituality have blended over the past 400 years was the reason we choose to look at these groups together. The *cofradía* Santa Cruz was a starting point to gain access to the field and *cofradía* life. Ermesinde will focus in this thesis on the Evangelical community of Santiago Atitlán. In this town are many Evangelical churches. Due to their open access it was relatively easy to come into contact with Evangelical *Tz'utujil*. Furthermore, our host family served as an important gatekeeper, as Evangelicals they introduced Ermesinde to their circle of friends, family, and fellow church members. Because

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<sup>9</sup> *Cofrades* are members of the *cofradías*, they have certain tasks to fulfill in the *cofradías*. The concept *cofradía* will be explained later on in the theoretical debate. The term traditionalists is borrowed from Stanzione (2003).

of the strict division we made between our informant groups we decided to write our empirical chapters in the 'I'-form. For the more general statements and arguments we use the 'We'-form throughout this thesis.

During our fieldwork we have used various anthropological research methods such as participant observation, hanging out, informal conversation and several types of interviews such as unstructured and semi-structured interviewing. We believe that a triangulation of methods yields the best results, one can observe things that might not come to the surface by interviewing with a list of interview questions for example. Sometimes there is a difference in what people say and in what people do and doing participant observation and hanging out can show this. That is why we believe that Anthropological methods are valuable in doing research in an area as religion. Being in the field and actually experiencing local life and building up rapport gives a valuable addition to data and allows the researcher to discover new and unexpected information. Moreover, by using triangulation of methods and continuously discussing important topics between the two of us we increased the validity of our research.

Ethics have been an important consideration during, as well as after our research. First of all we have always informed people we spoke to about our purpose in Guatemala; we explained them the fact that we are anthropology students and the central theme of our research. In the case of the *cofradías* we wanted to make sure that they didn't see us as tourists visiting Maximón, and in the case of the Evangelicals that we are not *Evangelical sisters* from the United States as one Pastor mistakenly took us for the first time we visited his church.

We have always used informed consent during our time in the field. When meeting new people we asked if they want to participate in this research voluntarily and made clear that they can withdraw themselves at any time for whatever reason. We always asked if it is okay to make notes or recordings. Making notes during a church service asked for a different approach. During service participants ought to show respect for God, taking notes can seem odd at such moment. Only after a while, when the churchgoers knew our face and rapport was established with some of them, it was appropriate to take notes. In the *cofradías* it was often not appropriate to take notes, which consequently, we did not do.

The key informants that are presented in this thesis know that the information we gathered by talking to them could be used for writing our thesis. However, occasionally we were asked not to use information for our thesis and we have respected this wish. Religion, especially Maya spirituality was a sensitive subject. Not all wished to reveal their knowledge

with us. We are aware that some might have told us incomplete stories because of this reason. This has certainly influenced our data. We resolved this problem by asking as many people as possible about these stories, as well as by hanging around, which sometimes revealed more than what people said. Furthermore, we respect the privacy of our informants and handle information with care by anonymizing names and churches in this thesis.

We have remained respectful towards our research population at all times. In the case of the Evangelicals we dressed neatly and maintained a humble attitude in and outside of church. Additionally, because of certain tensions between our research groups, we did not mingle too much with the informants of our research partner. Especially in the case of the Evangelicals it could have had consequences for the established rapport with informants when hanging around too much in the *cofradías*. As Europeans, the world of our Maya informants was drastically different from our own. Understanding such a different world was sometimes a challenge and we tried to retain an open attitude at all times.

We realize that the results of anthropological research are complex and subject to multiple interpretations<sup>10</sup> (AAA code of ethics). In Anthropological research one is its own research instrument and this had in our case a number of consequences. First of all, due to choices of time access and personal interest, the focus in the first two chapters is more on the Maya spirituality than on Catholicism. While we have tried to gain the most holistic view possible, it was difficult to gain a deep understanding of all groups in such a short period of time. Therefore, we chose to focus more on one of the groups. Consequently, Catholics are not equally represented in this research. We realize that this can distort our main conclusions. On top of that, because of cultural and linguistic factors, we did not build up rapport nor had valuable informal conversations with women in the *cofradías* or among the traditionalists. We are aware this could have created certain gaps in our data.

In the next chapter, Chapter two, we will develop the main theoretical concepts and debates that lie at the basis of our research. Subsequently we relate them in Chapter three to our research context. The thereupon following four chapters describe our empirical findings from our fieldwork. In Chapter four we take a glimpse into the cult of Maximón. In Chapter five we will take a look at the meaning that the Catholics, *cofradías* and traditionalist of Santiago Atitlán give him. In Chapter six, we present the Evangelical community of town and demonstrate how Evangelicalism, as a vehicle of Modernity, manifests itself in Santiago Atitlán. In Chapter seven, we gain a deeper understanding about the curious relation between

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<sup>10</sup> AAA code of ethics: <http://www.aaanet.org/issues/policy-advocacy/upload/AAA-Ethics-Code-2009.pdf>, last retrieved 25-06-2015



Evangelicals and Maximón. Finally, in Chapter eight, we formulate our most remarkable results and answer our central research question. As we will see there exist several *'truths'* about Maximón. We added two appendix: The first contains photographs that illustrate some of our findings, the second contains a summary of our results formulated in Spanish, the language of communication we used in the field.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

In what follows we introduce the theoretical concepts we have worked with during this research. These concepts were our starting point, and we have reflected critically on them during the entire research process. The central figure in our thesis is Maximón, and via him we want to understand the broader religious dynamics of Santiago Atitlán. To demarcate our research field we first present the concept of Religion, wherein we narrow our focus on the topic of Syncretism. Within this realm we discuss the concepts of Popular Religion, Popular Catholicism, Indigenous Spirituality, Animism, and Folk Saints, the trace that brings us Maximón. Ultimately, we discuss the concepts of Evangelicalism and Modernity because of their interaction with the folk saint cult of Maximón. After presenting these concepts we allocate them in the local religious and cultural context of Guatemala, and more specifically of Santiago Atitlán.

### 2.1 Religion and Syncretism

Our research is situated within the Anthropology of Religion, therefore we would like to introduce a working definition of Religion and discuss the research area of syncretism in this paragraph. Many have studied religion and many definitions exist to define what people understand ‘religion’ to be (Connolly 1998). Religion is universal (Kottak 2011) but the question is whether all the things we call religion can be expressed in one denominator; in a single definition (Engler 2007:30) because scholars often disagree about its definitions (Connolly 1998; Swatos 1998)

Durkheim, with his functionalistic approach to religion saw religion as something social. He argues that religion provides social control, cohesion, and purpose for people (Bellah 1973: 191). According to Durkheim: *“A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden -- beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.”*<sup>11</sup> Three problems emerge for our research seeing religion in this way. First of all, the fact that ‘church’ is included in this definition excludes most indigenous people’s religions, which is part of our research. Secondly, while religion can provide social control, cohesion and purpose in human life, this explanation does not include the human experience

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<sup>11</sup> Definition can be found on: <http://durkheim.uchicago.edu/Summaries/forms.html>

and meaning religion has for believers. Last, to see religion as *a unified system of* can be problematic because rarely a unified system exists.

Hence, in our theory we use a definition given by Connolly. He states that religion is: ‘any *beliefs* which involve the acceptance of a *sacred, trans-empirical realm* and any *behaviors* designed to affect a person’s *relationship* with that realm’ (Connolly 1998:4, emphasis added). This definition includes the beliefs and behaviors of people and it leaves room for personal experience. This definition however, is very individualistic and we do see religion as a social and communal practice and we should not forget this important dimension of religion; it can both be individual and communal (Connolly 1998).

Syncretism is a specific area in religious studies, which studies the mixing of two previous separate worldviews, cultural meanings, and in particular, religion (Eriksen 2007:113). Cultures are fluid and no ‘authentic’ or ‘pure’ culture exists (Eriksen 2007:107, Stewart 1999:41). Mixing has always taken place although nowadays the speed and intensity of mixing are higher than before (Eriksen 2007). Said (in Stewart 1999:41) states: “*all cultures are involved in one another; none is simple and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated and unmonolithic*”.

Originally people used to think that a dominant culture, Western in most cases, would eventually convert subordinate or native cultures; this is called acculturation. This term was criticized and nowadays not used anymore. Syncretism, as it was seen in the past, is not a one-way process of acculturation (Brown & Bick 1987, Pérez y Mena 1998). Syncretism is a mutual transformation of cultures, and it is complex (Rowe and Schelling 1991). However, some critics claim that it is a simplistic term, which does not take into account local complexities and focusses on the “item”, or outside, instead of looking at the meaning people give (Pérez y Mena 1998).

Therefore, syncretism is often seen as an etic category, it is not a self-ascribed identity (Droogers 2005, Stewart 1999). It is often a sensitive subject to indigenous who claim to be authentic (Brown & Bick 1987, Romberg 1998) and above that, the mixing of Christian and native beliefs has been condemned by church leaders (Droogers 2005; Stewart 1999). Rowe and Schelling (1991:24) write: “*For Sahagún, a Franciscan friar committed to the extirpation of native religion, this syncretism of native and Christian belief was very dangerous, ‘a satanic invention to palliate idolatry’.*” (Elizabeth)

## 2.2 Popular Religion

Whereas official religion is found in formal institutions, syncretism can be found in the informal and popular spheres (Droogers 2005: 664). Popular religion is an important part of the study of popular culture, therefore we shortly mention popular culture. The popular is on the level of the people or subaltern level, not on the elite or official level (Rowe and Schelling 1991). Rowe and Schelling (1991:52) state that ideas of people are embedded in everyday life and therefore we must look at everyday life to understand how the world is experienced and passed on. Events, actions, and places such as ritual, theatre, music, pilgrimages, etc. are filled with meaning and act as a vehicle for information (Rowe and Schelling 1991:52).

Religious aspects can be found abundantly in popular culture, for example in festivals such as carnival (Rowe and Schelling 1991). Popular religion can be seen as the ‘religion of the people’ in contrast to the ‘official’ religion taught by the Church (Martín 2009). However, viewing dichotomies such as institutional – popular or official – non-official is tricky and the divides between these oppositions, has been argued, are actually not so strict. Local popular practices, for example, may be adopted in institutional practices (Martín 2009:278).

Again, with the concept of popular religion, just as with syncretism, it must be used critically because of the fact that locals or followers of ‘official’ religion for that matter, would probably not use this term to define their religion. Yoder (1947:6) concludes that popular religion is complex, multilayered and syncretic and no uniform believe exists. This as well is in contrast with Durkheim’s definition of religion, which he claims to be a unified system of beliefs and practices (*in* Bellah 1973: 191) In the next paragraph it will become clear how this popular religion is enacted, experienced and reproduced. This will be done by discussing popular Catholicism in the context of Latin America, the focus area of this research. (Elizabeth)

## 2.3 Popular Catholicism

Today one billion of the world’s roughly six billion people call themselves Catholics (Bamat 1999:6). While [Formal] Catholicism is renowned for its top-down organization, elaborate doctrines, church laws, formalized rituals and tendencies toward centralized control, it is according to Bamat arguably more differentiated than any other world religion (1999:6). This means that it is not only defined by religious professionals but also by ordinary people that are far away from the Vatican. The practices and beliefs of these ordinary people often exist in

ambiguous relations with official Catholicism (Bamat 1999:6). There has been a dramatic shift in Christianity's center of gravity during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and some 70 percent of the world's Catholics live now outside Europe and North America. Furthermore, Bamat writes that '*most of those who identify themselves as Catholics in today's world inhabit lands that were once conquered or colonized by European powers*' (1999: 7).

Religion was an important part of the Spanish identity and worldview in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Early 2006:95). The Spaniards believed they had to spread their religion and this has been one of the main drivers of legitimatization of the Conquest of the New World (Early 2006). This belief was based on Jesus' following words: "*Go therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the same name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*" (Early 2006: 95). With this in mind the Spaniards set out to the New World more than four hundred years ago.

Although medieval Catholicism became solidly entrenched by the early to mid-colonial period, it had not replaced indigenous religious beliefs<sup>12</sup> (Ingham 1986). According to Sanabria (2007) one of the main arguments for this is that the indigenous peoples<sup>13</sup> had polytheistic religious systems, which were flexible enough to accommodate additional supernatural beings. Although Catholicism forms a large part of the blend, Carlson writes that the Maya actually blend the two religions in order to resist Catholicism and preserve their own (1997: 98-99).

Nonetheless, during the colonial period a distinctive fusion of (medieval) Catholicism and local indigenous beliefs and practices emerged (Sanabria 2007:183). According to MacLeod (2000:18) there was a great degree of variability, '*a creation of many Catholicism's at the level of ordinary people, ad hoc mixtures of belief and even, to lesser extent, of ritual*'. All these different forms that have emerged locally from the mixing of Catholic and Indigenous traditions, is commonly called popular Catholicism (Sanabria 2007: 183).

However, as mentioned before, one should always take into account local complexities and the meaning that people give to the events (Pérez y Mena 1998). Therefore, Popular Catholicism is sometimes perceived as an etic category by the Maya, it is not a self-ascribed identity. It can be a sensitive subject to indigenous who claim to be authentic.

The preceding paragraphs made clear that there is a distinction between what we call formal and popular Catholicism, yet it doesn't fully capture the deep continuities and breaks

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<sup>12</sup> Ingham also mentions the African religious beliefs that we don't mention here because this is not relevant for our thesis.

<sup>13</sup> Same remark as footnote 7.

between the two. Therefore it is useful to mention some of the major attributes of popular Catholicism as given by Sanabria (2007: 183-185). First of all he mentions the aspect of religious *syncretism*, on which we elaborated before. Next he mentions *the importance of public rituals and ceremonies*. Apparently they overlap with the Catholic Church liturgical calendar and are sponsored at the same time in devotion to or in honor of deities of the Catholic pantheon and of non-Catholic deities. Furthermore, they hark back to pre-Hispanic and non-Catholic themes. He also addresses *the symbiotic and reciprocal relationships between humans (mortals) and supernatural deities within popular Catholicism*. Mortals could namely harness and manipulate the good will and powers of supernatural deities by propitiating rituals and offerings on their behalf, by satisfying their wants and needs, while in formal Catholicism saints for example are merely mediators between living church members and Christ, and, through him, with God.

In our research we will use the concept of popular Catholicism as a combination of native pre-Columbian elements, Spanish Popular Catholicism of the sixteenth century and the teachings of the official Church (Rowe and Schelling 1991: 68). Since [Formal] Catholicism has already been briefly mentioned, we will make a start with Indigenous spirituality and Animism (native pre-Columbian elements) in the next paragraph. *(Ermesinde)*

## 2.4 Indigenous Spirituality and Animism

Before discussing indigenous spirituality we would like to discuss the term Animism first. Animism, as we see it and Stringer (1999:453) explains it is: the belief in souls and the belief in spirits. Animism has, according to us, nothing to do with backward primitive cultures as is often argued in literature (Bird-David 1999, Stringer 1999). A variety of different definitions<sup>14</sup> exist, and the concept of animism is widely criticized, however this is not a discussion for this thesis. Besides these discussions and critiques we find the term useful in our research. Animism, in the definition we used, is something present in all religions (Stringer 1999).

Indigenous religion or spirituality, as we will call it, is deeply intertwined with indigenous worldviews as Hart (2010) argues. Worldviews are mental lenses that influence

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<sup>14</sup> Animism is defined as: “the belief that inside ordinary visible, tangible bodies there is normally invisible, normally intangible being: the soul” (Harris1983:186 in Bird-David 2000: 67) as “the system of beliefs about souls and spirits typically found in tribal societies,” (Guilei 1992 in Bird-David 2000: 67) or as “the attribution of spirits to natural phenomena such as stones and trees” or “the attribution of life to the lifeless” (Gurthie 2000:106)

the way we see the world, the way we act, they influence our beliefs, decisions, and assumptions (Hart 2010:2). Indigenous worldviews have seven characteristics according to Simpson (*in* Hart 2010). First, knowledge is holistic, cyclic, and dependent upon relationships and connections to living and non-living beings and entities. Second, there are many truths, and these truths are dependent upon individual experience. Third, everything is alive. Fourth, all things are equal. Fifth, the land is sacred. Sixth, the relationship between people and the spiritual world is important. Seventh, human beings are least important in the world. Since the Maya are the indigenous people this research focuses on, a short discussion about their religion and practices will be given.

Today, different language groups of the Maya live in the regions of Southern Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras and El Salvador.<sup>15</sup> Most Maya are Catholic or Protestant, however, some also follow, in one way or another, their ‘ancient’ religion or claim to follow only the ‘traditional’ religion (Early 2006; MacKenzie 2009). This claim to authenticity by these authors is in contrast to the concept of syncretism. What outsiders might see as religious syncretism is seen as authentic or traditional by the practitioners (Brown & Bick 1987, Romberg 1998).

*“The Maya are deeply spiritual people, [...]. Throughout the millennia, their thoughts and actions have been channeled by cosmological concepts of time and space, of the creation of sentient humans, as well as notions of the relation between the agricultural cycle and the supernatural world.”* (Coe 2011:219). The lives, ideas, and practices of the Maya are full of meaning and nature and the spirit world have a central role in this meaning (Hart 2008). As was discussed above: ideas of people are embedded in everyday life and therefore we must look at everyday life to understand how the world is experienced and passed on (Rowe and Schelling 1991:52).

The Maya belief in multiple Gods, they are polytheistic as in most indigenous religions (Kottak 2011) an they have Gods for many things, such as the sun, rain, thunder, maize, death, etc. (Cook 2000). In comparison to Christian notions of God, the Maya do not see their gods as perfect. According to Early (2006:69) humans and gods are in a reciprocal relationship, they need each other for survival. Humans are in need of protection and in return human feed, praise, and thereby sustain the gods (Early 2006:67). *(Elizabeth)*

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<sup>15</sup> Source: <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Mauritania-to-Nigeria/Maya.html>, last retrieved on 19-12-2014

## 2.5 Folk Saints

Now that we have a deeper understanding of the syncretic nature and building blocks of Popular Catholicism, in particular in connection to indigenous religiosity, we will focus on a particular curiosity that requires special attention in our view, namely that of the Folk Saints. We understand Folk Saints as an excellent example of this previously mentioned syncretic nature of Popular Catholicism.

Sanabria writes about this the following: *'The Catholic and broadly Christian notion of Saints – supernatural beings occupying an intermediate position and role between a supreme deity (God) and mortals – made a great deal of sense to Indigenous New World and African peoples whose members also worshipped deities directly responsible for the well-being of household, community, and kin (2007:186)*. With the spreading of the Catholic church during colonial times, Catholic Saints started to merge with local deities and heroes, which is an illustration of the flexibility of the erstwhile present polytheistic religious systems mentioned earlier. However, an important distinction between the formal Catholic Saints and the Folk Saints is that the latter are not canonized, and sometimes even named as *'animas milagrosas'* or miraculous souls (Juergensmeyer 2012: 407).

Another way to distinguish between canonized Saints and Folk Saints is that the latter are actual personages, almost, divine humans with real needs, desires, and temperaments. (Sanabria 2007: 186) This stands in sharp contrast with the Catholic doctrine wherein the lives of canonized Saints are held up as extraordinary and carefully monitored examples of holiness by the official Church (Davis 2007: 118). Although the actions of Folk Saints in life as in death would be sometimes considered as sinful by the official doctrine, Folk Saints still play a more powerful, immediate, and decisive role in everyday life in comparison to the canonized Saints (Sanabria 2007: 187). The importance of Folk Saints is often expressed in and via many rituals and festivities.

An intriguing example of a Folk Saint is Maximón, venerated in several parts of Guatemala. Since he is the main figure of our research project we will introduce him properly in the context of our theoretical framework. We presented above relevant theory for embedding a phenomenon like the Folk Saint Maximón. In the next paragraphs we will introduce the concepts of Modernity and Evangelicalism because of their interaction with our research topic of Folk Saints. (Ermesinde)



## 2.6 Evangelical Protestantism and Modernity in Latin America

Evangelicalism, in its recognizable form, emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Britain and its North American colonies. Several authors have illustrated how in the centuries that followed Evangelicalism was confronted with many splits and revivals (Bebbington 1989; Noll 2004). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century Evangelical missionaries were travelling the world and a trans denominational movement within Protestant Christianity was launched. Since then Evangelicalism has grown dramatically worldwide, today the estimated number of Evangelicals worldwide is 550 million<sup>16</sup>. The fast spreading gospel of Jesus Christ is by many scholars understood as the *globalization of Evangelicalism* (Martin 2002; Miller & Yamamori 2007<sup>17</sup>). In Latin America for example, Catholicism is since the 1980s losing membership to Evangelicalism and ecstatic, vibrant worship is replacing routinized liturgical forms. The Roman Catholic Church can no longer claim Latin America as its own (Stoll 1990). In the light of our research this raises two questions. First of all, what is the appeal of the Evangelical belief? Second, how does Evangelicalism, its values and beliefs, interacts with or even influences local values and beliefs in an area where Popular Catholicism is adhered by most of its inhabitants for the last four hundred years?

While exploring this appeal and interaction we will work with the concept of ‘Modernity’. Modernity is an ambiguous concept; its meaning is a social construct that can differ from person to person. To see Modernity simply as an ineluctable process, a ‘progress’ toward a predetermined goal wherein all societies marches toward the same shining goal, that resembles very closely the societies of the United States or Western Europe, has been criticized and even tackled by many scholars (Tipps 1973; Richards 2003). Nonetheless, argues Richards (2003), a return to Modernization theory has proved to be irresistible in the public arena with the conjuncture of overwhelming American power, centuries-old currents of American thought (e.g. belief in ‘progress’), and grave economic, social and political challenges in non-Western countries.

Economic development and the reduction of poverty are often used as variables to measure the ‘progress’ of a country. Economic development is a notion highly stimulated under the adherents of Evangelicals. (Miller and Yamamori 2007). In relation to the Modernization theory debate our aim is to position Evangelicals in this debate and understand Modernity through their eyes. Furthermore, we want to understand the aspiration for

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<sup>16</sup> Source: [http://conversation.lausanne.org/en/resources/detail/11972#article\\_page\\_1](http://conversation.lausanne.org/en/resources/detail/11972#article_page_1), last retrieved 12-06-2015.

<sup>17</sup> These authors refer in their work mainly to Pentecostalism, a particular denomination within Evangelicalism.

economic prosperity of Evangelicals in relation to the country they live in, and their non-Evangelical neighbors.

In the existing theory on Evangelicalism the relation between Evangelicalism and economic development is stressed by accentuating the more conservative side of Evangelicalism, also known as the *Prosperity Gospel of health and wealth* (Miller and Yamamori 2007). The Prosperity Gospel contains strict codes of behavior that, on the one hand forbids social dancing, gambling, and the use of tobacco and alcohol, and on the other hand prescribes self-control and individual achievement. This orientation is a variant of what Weber has called *the ethic of inner-worldly asceticism* (Swatos 1998). According to Miller and Yamamori (2007: 33) there is substantial evidence that these moral proscriptions cause a ‘social uplift’ because of a competitive economic advantage they generate over neighbors, which frequently is associated with Evangelicalism. Without the social evils of drugs, alcohol, etc., believers may produce surplus capital that can be invested in business enterprises or in the education and welfare of their families. Evangelical youth are also encouraged to delay sexual activities, potentially contributing to higher levels of education.

Considering the *globalization of Evangelicalism* and the *Prosperity Gospel of health and wealth* it is in our interest, as mentioned before, to reflect on possible outcomes of the encounter between Evangelicalism and Popular Catholicism in Latin America. In this stage of the argument we integrate the ideas of two contending schools of thought that emerged in recent years. Dimaggio (*in* Inglehart and Baker 2000) originally describes these schools of thought solely in relation to theory and research on socioeconomic development. We integrate Evangelicalism in this theory since it also promotes economic development. The first school of thought emphasizes *a decline* of traditional values and their replacement with ‘modern values’ when encountering modernization, so in this case promoted by the Evangelical movement. The other school of thought emphasizes *the persistence* of traditional values when encountering modernization.

On the other hand, the result of this encounter shouldn’t be that black or white. Scholars like Miller and Yamamori (2007) for example tend to emphasize other features of Evangelicalism and look further than the stability and social order that Evangelicalism creates in a functional way. According to them we also find in the heart of Evangelicalism worship and music, which touches the emotions, and lyrics that give voice to feelings like joy, pain and hope for new life. Above all they believe in the Holy Spirit who is always present during these activities of worship, prayer, everyday experience, healing and speaking in tongues.

While the *ethic of inner-wordly asceticism* may contradict with certain populist traditions such as ritual intoxication in Latin America, and can even result in a decline of such traditions with each conversion taking place, the other features of Evangelicalism as described by Miller & Yamamori (2007) give an opening to alternative outcomes. This part remains largely undocumented, but one can carefully presume that the Evangelical belief in the Holy Spirit could be for example also appealing to adherents of Popular Catholicism or Indigenous Spirituality. Furthermore, there are examples known showing first signs of blending between for example *Maya* and Protestant worship practices. (Clark 2012; Carlsen and Prechtel 1991). In other words, rather than following the idea of a juxtaposition between traditional ‘popular/syncretic Catholicism’ and modern ‘Evangelicalism’ these first signs suggest that Evangelicalism might enter the complex dynamics of hybridizing religious ideas and practices.

To summarize, thriving on the process of globalization, Evangelicalism caused ‘*the largest global shift in the religious marketplace over the last forty years*’ (Miller and Yamamori 2007: 17). The results of the encounter between Evangelicalism and Popular Catholicism in Latin America, more specifically in Guatemala, have captured our interest. In our research this interest will be concentrated in the figure of the Folk Saint Maximón.

*(Ermesinde)*

### 3. Context

The Spanish conquered the Guatemalan highlands in 1524 bringing Catholicism with them (Clark 2012). This invasion as Hart calls it was aimed at both religious and cultural conversion. The Maya were obligated to watch their temples and religious images being destroyed (Hart 2008). After this Guatemala was Spain's colony for more than four hundred years in which they tried to convert the Maya to Catholicism. Over the past few decades Guatemala went through a series of political upheavals and changes (Hart 2008:4-5). Despite all of this the Maya religion has survived and is even thriving some argue (Hart 2008; Molesky-Poz 2006).

After the civil war in Guatemala a rejuvenation of the public visibility of the Maya religion is seen. Molesky-Poz (2006) argues this has to do with the recent shift to protestant Evangelicalism and the increased involvement in the international hemisphere. This evoked a new sense of identity for the Maya. The religion has never really disappeared but was practiced in secret and in some cases disguised by syncretism (MacKenzie 2009; Molesky-Poz 2006). This syncretism can be seen in the local *cofradías* for example. *Cofradías* are Catholic brotherhoods, or confraternities brought to Meso-America by the Catholic church. Stanzione (2003:5) writes: “*With the hope of converting the indigenous people to Christianity, the friars replaced Maya deities and lords with Catholic saints and virgins.*” The *cofradías* task were to take care of the saints and virgins and follow the Christian liturgical year (Stanzione 2003).

Now that we have shortly discussed the historical and cultural context in which this research is situated we will now discuss our topic of the Folk Saint Maximón in the town of Santiago Atitlán. Santiago Atitlán is situated in the highlands of Guatemala and is the capital of the *Tz'utujil* Maya nation that lives in the region.<sup>18</sup> Carlson and Pretchel (1991:25) say the following about this town: ‘*lying at the juncture of three volcanoes and the crystal blue water of Lake Atitlán, Santiago Atitlán is a place of rare beauty.*’ In Santiago Atitlán various religious groups live together. First of all, Catholics, who follow the standard Roman Catholicism. Second, a growing number of Evangelical live in town. Furthermore, another group is the ‘*Costumbristas*’ (followers of the customs) (Carlson and Pretchel 1991) or ‘traditionalists’ as Stanzione (2003) calls them. These are the *cofrades*, the man (and women) in the *cofradías*. MacKenzie (2009) however makes a further distinction between the

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<sup>18</sup> Source: <http://www.santiagoatitlan.com/indexeng.html>

antisyncretic ‘*sacerdotes maya*’ (maya priests) and the *Costumbristas* who practice, according to him, the syncretic Maya-Catholic religion.

Maximón, the Folk Saint of this research is very present in Santiago Atitlán. Maximón is adorned in other villages in Guatemala as well, such as Zunil, San Andrés Itzapa, and Chichicastenango (Clark 2012). Santiago Atitlán is interesting because of the presence of the ‘traditional’ religion, due to this our focus lies here. So who is Maximón? Maximón has many names and many origin stories. There is no commonly agreed on version of his origins (Clark 2012). The names break into two groups: names of Maya deities such as *Mam*, *Rajawal Ruchulew*, *Rilaj mam*<sup>19</sup>, and Catholic or Spanish names that include San Simón, Pedro Alvarado, God the father, etc. (Clark 2012:21).

Maximón’s origin stories are just as diverse as his names and thoughts about his origins differ per region and ethnicity (Knowlton 2012). He is a conduit to the Spirit worlds of both Maya and Catholic (Pieper in Clark 2012:23). He is a god who can be lured with tobacco or alcohol (Clark 2012) and has a dark side. He can do both good and do bad (Hart 2008:183). Clark argues that he is a trickster and therefore hard to define; he displays many traits (2012: 27).

The Maya have, broadly taken, two types of rituals, community festival rituals, and private rituals (Early 2006). Most of these festivities appear to be Catholic celebrations such as Easter, Christmas, Carnival, and special days for Catholic Saint. However they are not only Catholic but also Maya, they are syncretic, and the Maya religion and mythology is expressed and enacted in rituals, practices, etc (Cook 2000). A very good example where all of the previous named aspects come into existence is *Semana Santa* (Holy Week). Maximón plays a central role during the whole week. There are ceremonies everyday involving Maximón and actions and happenings are full of underlying and symbolic meaning (Clark 2012) that, according to Rowe and Schelling (1991) are vehicles for information. *(Elizabeth)*

But what holds the future for Maximón considering the religious changes in Latin America we discussed in our framework? Evangelicalism is rapidly spreading through Latin America, and is especially striking in Guatemala. This country has had two Protestant Presidents since 1982, and more than 30 percent of the population has converted to Protestantism by the early 1990s (Sanabria 2007: 197). This is the highest percentage in Central America (Molesky-Poz 2006:19).

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<sup>19</sup> Mam signifies Grandfather in Mayan language, Rajawal Ruchulew is the Lord of the Earth, and Rilaj Mam means venerable Grandchild.

In 1982, Luis Palau, an Argentinian Evangelist came to Guatemala. He believed that Protestantism would provide, after all the pain and hopelessness, a spiritual solution. All eyes of neighboring countries were on Guatemala, it could become the first reformed nation of Latin America (Stoll 1990:2). According to Palau *'the gospel could liberate Guatemalans from the chain of sin, and it could liberate them from the chains of poverty, misery and oppression. Through the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Evangelist promised, the new man could build a new Guatemala'* (in Stoll 1990:2).

But this new Guatemala would require major efforts from all the people, and Protestantism would provide the way. In our framework we mentioned the *Protestant Ethic*. When followed, Palau reasoned poverty could be cut by half in one generation. Consequently, only a mass conversion along these lines could save the country from poverty and chaos (Stoll 1990). This mass conversion to Protestantism would entail a fundamentally different way of thinking about the relationship between personal salvation, poverty and everyday life. (Eber 2000: 217)

It seems that Guatemala was ready for this mass conversion since both external and internal variables were favorable to Protestantism (Sexton 1978). That is, externally the social and political conditions were encouraging as competing Catholicism lacked sufficient facilities, or interest to serve the local population. Furthermore, where Protestant missionaries established good rapport and used effective techniques conversion would enhance as well. However, Sexton writes that Protestantism may not have been thriving unless it also fulfills intrinsic needs that competing religions do not (1978: 280). To name a few he gives the examples of coping with alcoholism, socioeconomic insecurity, frustration due to inconsistent social status, and economic gain. Seen in this light, Evangelicalism is recognized by many authors as a form of cultural agency to combat severe socioeconomic problems (Smilde 2007).

How then should we understand this fundamentally different way of thinking? What does it mean to be Protestant? What follows is a list of major differences between Protestantism and Catholicism as emphasized in Guatemala (Sanabria 2007:197);

- Protestants do not drink, smoke, dance, or gamble.
- Protestants do not venerate Saints, and they flatly reject as idolatry all artifactual representations of saintly or demonic personages.
- They do not participate in any *cofradía*-related ritual.
- They reject ritual god parenthood.

- They reject communal celebration of saint's days (*fiestas*), which involve the parading of religious images through the streets or the re-enactment of Holy drama. Additional, Protestants dismiss spending money on rum, candles, and chickens for healing ceremonies, or on lavish outlays of liquor, food, and other ingredients at traditional *fiestas*. Only by saving money private capital will accumulate and living conditions will be improved (Eber 2000: 217). These proscriptions appear as problematic when seen in relation to the Folk Saint Maximón, its rituals, and *fiestas*. Stanzione (2003) writes in relation to this that along with the *cofradías*, Maximón worship already appears to becoming less and less important in a town like for example Santiago Atitlán. On the other hand, if there are any resemblances between Popular Catholicism and Protestantism in structure, beliefs, and values, new blending is not ruled out. Especially in towns like Santiago de Atitlán, where Maximón has a long history of veneration, it is of interest to do research about his syncretic nature in the first place and subsequently the influence of Evangelical Protestantism on this already much debated nature.

*(Ermesinde)*

## 4. A glimpse into the cult of Maximón

*"A few days ago I walked home late. I entered the alley of my house, a man was standing there in the alley. He wore a hat, I could not see his face and he was smoking a cigarette. When I passed I greeted him. He did not greet me, I only heard 'hummpf'. I keep on thinking about this evening, I know it was him. It was Maximón."* (Roberto).

A lot of stories exist about Maximón and he takes on many roles. People dream about him, see him, smell him and even say they have him 'in their hearts'. He has many names and origin stories and various social scientists have been intrigued by this phenomenon (Carlson 1997, Clark 2012, Cook 2000, Hart 2008, Stanzione 2003). However, there are people who think of him as the Devil or his henchman. In this chapter we explore who Maximón is and the cult and the people around him. The information in this chapter is based on the information that the traditionalists and *cofrades* gave us<sup>20</sup>. We tell their story here and throughout the chapters other stories as well as meanings will become clear.

### 4.1 Who is Maximón?

The names given to Maximón differ per group and per region. Maximón means 'the tied one or man'<sup>21</sup>, this name is used by most people in the village. In his origin story it will become clear why he is called like this. '*Rilaj Mam*', a name used mostly by the traditionalists, means 'great grandfather'. Many say he is the protector of Santiago Atitlán, like a grandfather he watches over his *nietos* (grandchildren). We noticed that this group speaks of *Rilaj Mam* with awe and respect. "*Es una gran persona, una gran persona*" (It is a great person, a great person) Christopher kept on emphasizing.

For others he is San Simón. He is known by this name in most parts of the country. But San Simón is different from Maximón say some Atitecos<sup>22</sup>. San Simón refers to his, according to some, more Catholic counterparts that can be visited in other places of Guatemala such as San Andrés Itzapa and Zunil. However, his names are often used

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<sup>20</sup> We use the term traditionalists for the people who distantiate themselves from syncretic practices which they claim to see happening in the *cofradías*. *Cofrades* are the people involved in the *cofradías*. The *cofradía* system will be explained later in this chapter.

<sup>21</sup> Ma = man and ximón = knots

<sup>22</sup> Atitecos are inhabitants of Santiago Atitlán



interchangeably<sup>23</sup>. Other references made with him are: Judas Iscariot, the traitor of Jesus and Pedro de Alvarado, the Conquistador of Guatemala. We will discuss the link with Judas more thoroughly in the next chapter.

There probably exist even more stories than names about how Maximón was formed. Every group has their own stories and it does not only depend on the religion people have but as well on which region of the country they come from. However, Santiago Atitlán is our focus hence the story told here is a composition<sup>24</sup> made out of all the different stories we have heard from the *cofradías* and the traditionalists. I have made the 'general story with care, only taking the aspects that were named multiple times. I do not claim that this is the real story, it is the more common story I heard among my informants:

Long ago, more or less 500 years ago, a danger threatened the village. The people had to be protected so the elders came together to discuss what to do. They decided to form *Rilaj Mam* as a protector of Santiago Atitlán. Twelve grandfathers and twelve grandmothers, wise elders, came together to form him. They went to look for a type of wood that would be appropriate to be the mask of Maximón. After a long search they encountered the right type of wood. They gathered and in a ceremony they put their energy in him. He had a lot of energy and started working for the people. However, after some time he started doing bad things, this was not for what he was created. The elders gathered and decided to tie him, hence the name 'the tied one', they tied his arms, cut off his legs and turned his face around. This way they had more control over Maximón.<sup>25</sup>

Maximón was formed to protect the people of Santiago Atitlán. He is a Maya God or intermediate according to the traditionalists and *cofrades*. He is the messenger between God and the people. Pieper (*in* Clark 2012: 23) called him a conduit to the spirit world. When they say God, they do not see him as an ultimate and almighty God. The Maya had many intermediates or Gods like the God of corn, the God of the rain. However, only one '*creador*'

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<sup>23</sup> This leads to the annoyance of some traditionalists and *cofrades* who clearly state they are not one and the same and that his one in Santiago, Maximón or Rilaj Mam is the only real one.

<sup>24</sup> I have made the 'general story with care, only taking the aspects that were named multiple times. I do not claim that this is the real story, it is the more common story I heard among my informants

<sup>25</sup> Themes that kept coming back in the stories were: so called threat or danger whether from inside or outside the village; wise elders; that he was formed by 12; the search for the wood he is made of; bad things he started to do; the intervention by the elders; and the change whether it was his arm tied, his legs cut off or his head turned around.

(creator) of the universe exists and that is '*Ajaaw*'. In literature scholars argue that the Maya are polytheistic (Cook 2000, Sanabria 2007). However, our informants and many people we have spoken to throughout Guatemala claim Maya spirituality is not polytheistic. This is clearly an emic versus etic discussion about their spirituality and what it means. While theory claims Maya are polytheistic, the people themselves do not perceive it that way (Hart 2008).

In the theoretical debate and context we treated Maximón as a Folk Saint. Folk Saints are Catholic Saints that started to merge with local deities and heroes (Juergensmeyer 2012). However, this can be seen as another example of emic versus etic use of the term. While he can be counted as a Folk Saint because he does share some important characteristics, the term Folk Saint invokes the thought of Catholic saints. Most of our informants agreed that there is nothing Catholic about Maximón. A first characteristic is the saints (Catholic or Folk) are seen as intermediate between humans and God and often they are '*actual personages, almost, divine humans with real needs, desires, and temperaments*' (Sanabria 2007: 186). Informants told me that if the *cofradía* Santa Cruz does not take care of him properly he will get angry with them. "*You do not want that*" they warned me. In that way he has human needs and desires. Another characteristic is that the Catholic church does not agree with him and 'actions can be seen as sinful' (Droogers 2005; Stewart 1999). This will be discussed in the next chapter.

## 4.2 The cult and the people

Thick smoke fills the poorly lit room, the smell is heavy and sweet. It rises from hot coals in a boil. In the middle of the room, in front of a table, two men sit on chairs. They wear red, purple, black and white scarfs around their necks. In between the two men a figure of about 1,30 m high stands. He wears a wooden mask and a hat with a similar scarf on it. His torso is made from knotted handkerchiefs hanging down. Paper money sticks out of his upper body. His pants and shoes are nearly visible. He has a lit cigarette in his mouth and the two men next to him are looking at him. In front of the three figures various colored candles are burning. Before that two people sit kneeled on the ground on reed mats. One of them is holding the incense boil with hot coals. He talks to the figure in front of him in an unfamiliar language. The other person wears a similar hat as the figure wears and his eyes are closed. Once in a while a familiar word is spoken by the man: '*Health*', '*Good result*', '*Protection*', '*Rilaj Mam*', '*Blessings*'....

A familiar scene when walking into the house of the *cofradía* Santa Cruz (See photograph 1). This was a daily happening I witnessed many times while doing participant observation and 'hanging out' in this *cofradía*. The figure is Maximón and this observation was part of a ceremony (see photograph 2). The clothes he wears are all gifts from people who have received a service from him. He has two hats, one of which is used during ceremonies for the person who has a petition. Every year they carve a new mask for him, it is made out of a special kind of wood named *Tz'ite* or Coral tree<sup>26</sup>. When there is no ceremony he has an unlit cigar in his mouth. The two men who sit on the chairs are part of the *cofradía* Santa Cruz.

*Cofradías* or confraternities are brotherhoods brought to Mesoamerica by the Catholic Church. The *cofradías* are in charge of taking care of the Catholic Saints and everything around them such as their clothes, the feast days and the music, the food and drinks during these days.<sup>27</sup> In Santiago there are about nine 'official' *Cofradías*<sup>28</sup>. The *cofradía* Santa Cruz is always in charge of Maximón. The '*Telinel*' or carrier is the one responsible for Maximón for one whole year, he is the head of the *cofradía* Santa Cruz. Every year Maximón changes house and a new *Telinel* is chosen. The job of the *Telinel* is to sit with him day in day out, dress him, put him to bed and wake him up every day and night<sup>29</sup>. "*During the night he works*" Christopher stated. During the night Maximón goes to his bed to communicate between the worlds and to execute the petitions that were made during the day. Another part of the *cofradía* Santa Cruz is the image of '*Señor Sepultado*' the buried Jesus Christ<sup>30</sup>. He lies in a coffin in one of the corners of the house which is decorated with flickering purple lights. Some days candles burn in front of the coffin as well.

The people involved in the praxis of Maximón have a special kind of devotion. The caretakers of Maximón take very good care of him. They ensure that his handkerchiefs are neat and that the ash of the cigarettes does not drop on him but in the ashtray they hold. Most

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<sup>26</sup> The seeds of the Coral tree (*Erythrina berteroana*), or *Palo de Pito* as they say in Guatemala, are traditionally used in divination according to some of my informants. <http://www.maya-ethnobotany.org/mayan-ethno-botany-tropical-agriculture-spice-flavoring-colorant-food-dye-guatemala-mexico-belize/coral-tree-palo-de-pitos-Erythrina-berteroana-tzite-maya-shamens-religious-rituals.php>, last retrieved: 03-06-2015.

<sup>27</sup> For example Saint Joseph, the *cofradía* of Saint Joseph gave a big feast with Marimba music (traditional Guatemalan music) all night and day on the 19th of march, the Day of Saint Joseph. They take care of music, drinks and sometimes food.

<sup>28</sup> This number differs according who you talk to. According to Christopher these are the *cofradías* in Santiago Atitlán: *Cofradía Santa Cruz*, *Cofradía Santiago Apostle*, *Cofradía de la Virgen de Concepción*, *Cofradía San Antonio Padua*, *Cofradía San Nicolás*, *Cofradía San Gregorio*, *Cofradía San Francisco*, *Cofradía San Felipe*, *Cofradía de la Virgen de Rosario*. There are a few unrecognized (by the Catholic church) *cofradías*: *Cofradía San Jose*, *Cofradía Juan Baubtsita/ San Martín*, *Cofradía San Juan (menor)*.

<sup>29</sup> These are a few of the tasks the *Telinel* has.

<sup>30</sup> For the link between Jesus and Maximón see chapter 5.

*cofrades* and traditionalists talk about him and look at him with respect and awe. "He is always with me, here" Roberto said to me, pointing at his heart.

"So, we talked to 'el abuelo' (the grandfather) and said: 'Abuelo', please, your child is trapped at the Mexican - US border. He cannot pass, please help him. [...]. Go from Santiago Atitlán to the border. Here you have liquor for your tiredness, that it might serve you. Here 'abuelo', for your sleep are these cigarettes." (Christopher).

People go to Maximón for many different reasons. Most common reasons are: healing, business or protection (in travels, studies or in general). Maximón does good and bad things. This is one of the reasons he is assigned different meanings by different groups. However, somebody said to me: "He is not good, nor bad." People visit the *cofradía* Santa Cruz every day, when they visit offers are brought. Money, alcohol, cigarettes, copal (incense) or/and candles are most common offers. For official ceremonies all of these things have to be there. For an official ceremony the person who has a petition also needs an *Aj'ij*, a Maya priest or spiritual guide. He will do the prayers and talk to Maximón like described above. It is custom to offer alcohol to Maximón. During and after ceremonies it is also custom to share alcohol, cigarettes and sometimes food between one another. The importance of sharing and spending time together during and after ceremonies is highly valued. Alcohol is drunk for strength as well; 'Here you have liquor for your tiredness' Christopher said. It is not only for Maximón but as well for the *cofrades* against tiredness during ceremonies<sup>31</sup>.

Who are these people? Who come to do ceremonies and ask favors? People come from all over the world to visit Maximón. Some just because they have read about him and pass Santiago Atitlán on their travels, others especially for Maximón. "Once a French man came to me and told me he had come to Guatemala especially to see Maximón during *Semana Santa* (Holy Week). He said that if I would take him to see Maximón he would pay me double for the effort." Pedro (tourist guide) told us in a conversation. People come from all over Guatemala to do ceremonies. However the Atitecos themselves have an ambiguous relationship with him as will become clear in the following chapters. Only a small percentage of the village is actively involved in the *cofradía* system<sup>32</sup> or claims to be 'purely' Maya religiously. While some Catholics and especially Evangelicals see him as an evil spirit or the

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<sup>31</sup> Ceremonies can last for hours. Processions during *Semana Santa* (see later on) can last more than 12 hours. It is said that some ceremonies would last for several days in the past.

<sup>32</sup> In 1997 this was about 2,5 % that was actively involved in the *cofradías* and rituals like *cofrades* and about 10% on a regular base.

Devil, many stories go around that Catholics and Evangelicals also do ceremonies with Maximón in secret.

*Cofradía Santa Cruz* does, besides personal ceremonies for individuals, also ceremonies “for the strength of Maximón” (Roberto). They do these ceremonies in nature, on a volcano or on the cemetery. They do this for contact with the 'nahuales' or ancestors<sup>33</sup>, there places are energetic places. On top of that, Maximón is also involved in *Semana Santa*. We had the privilege to be in Santiago Atitlán during this week. Early (2006) wrote about the two types of ritual of the Maya, community festival rituals, and private rituals. We confirm the importance of these two types of rituals. During *Semana Santa* all that is believed and practiced is shown, lived and enacted as we will show in chapter five. In our experience, observing events closely that week, many things they believe in are shown under a magnifying glass. A big part of the experienced world of the *cofrades* and traditionalists was shown during this week. As Rowe and Schelling (1991:52) argued that events, actions, and places such as ritual, theatre, music, pilgrimages, etc. are filled with meaning and act as a vehicle for information. A case study of *Semana Santa* is included in the next chapter in order to analyze the ideas and meanings of the *Tz'utujiles*.

Chapter written by: Elizabeth

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<sup>33</sup> The importance of the ancestors will be explained in the next chapter.

## 5. Maximón: A subject of controversial meanings

*“It is complicated, you can study this for years and still not know everything... The best thing you can do is sit here and concentrate. I cannot say to you how but if you have faith the nahuales can give you all the information you need for your thesis”* (Hector)

In this chapter we will look at the meaning the Catholic, the *cofradía* and traditionalist Atitecos give to Maximón and the praxis around him. The dynamics between these groups are discussed. First an overview is given of the interaction between the Catholics and the *cofradías* nowadays. Secondly, the praxis that can be observed in the *cofradías* will be discussed through the conceptual lens of syncretism. Next, the praxis in the *cofradías* will be discussed from the perspective of the traditionalists. A case study of a procession during *Semana Santa* will illustrate the perspective of the *cofrades* and traditionalists. Finally we will provide a glimpse of the world of the traditionalists.

### 5.1 Division

*“It is complicated”*, we can definitely agree with that. Many versions and views exist on the unrest between the *cofradías* and the Catholic church. There has been a recent conflict<sup>34</sup> that led to the division between the *cofradías* and the Catholic church. The origins of this conflict where the conflicting ideas about meaning and practices. Originally the *cofradías* are part of the Catholic church and are supposed to carry out certain tasks. They still have these tasks but since three years the Catholic church started their own processions on the Fridays of lent and during *Semana Santa*. The *cofradías* are doing the processions as they have done the past hundreds of years, they claim, and the Catholics just started theirs three years ago. *“They are not supposed to do that”* some *cofrades* and traditionalist told me.

This conflict can be seen in many actions. The music during *Semana Santa* activities for example. Both have their own songs and music and when they meet the Catholic music is louder due to the speakers they have. Bamat (1999:6) wrote that the practices and beliefs of the ‘ordinary’ people, here the *cofradía*, often exist in often ambiguous relations with official religion. We heard people say that the Catholics do not ‘want’ the *cofradías* anymore and this

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<sup>34</sup> About three years ago the Catholic Church and the *cofradías* did not agree with each other and a conflict arose. The issue (we do not know what it was) was brought to court. Eventually the *autoridad Maya*, the Maya governance, won and they were allowed to continue their practices the way they had done for years. This did lead to the Catholic church starting their own processions and activities during lent and *Semana Santa*. (This was told to me by somebody who was part of this Maya governance at the time).

has two main reasons. The first one has to do with certain customs such as smoking and excessive drinking the *cofradías* do in general, and during processions. A Catholic told us that the *cofrades* have no respect and some even have spit on the church floor. Diego (Catholic) said: *“The 'brujos' (witches) harm people, they use their power for bad things. This I do not agree with”*. Some Catholics perceive him as the devil. One of our Catholic informants said she would never go to Maximón. *“It is easy to go to him because you can see him and God you cannot see. But I have faith in God, and he has shown us his powers. I will never go to Maximón.”* (María). It is not all that black and white though. To some extent there is a mutual respect and some *cofradía* members do their tasks with pleasure. Most try to remain friendly and avoid conflict.

The second reason why the Catholics do not ‘want’ the *cofradías*, has to do with the different ideologies of the two groups. In the Catholic church Catholicism is practiced. In the *cofradías* it is not Catholicism that is practiced although they are originally part of the Catholic church. *“Es una mezcla”* (it is a mix), a mix of Catholicism and the Maya spirituality. They practice syncretism here some told me. However Hugo said: *“There is nothing Catholic about the cofradías because God does not approve of drinking, smoking, beating up wives.”* The praxis and the meaning the Atitecos assign to them differ per group as will be shown below.

## 5.2 Syncretism and change : ‘What you see is not what you get’

*The darkness of the night is expelled by the light of the upcoming sun. The volcano San Lucas Tolimán behind the Catholic church is turning pink by the light of the rising sun. More people are gathering on the streets. It is 5am on Good Friday and the procession of Corre de San Juan (The ‘run’ of Saint John Apostle) is coming to an end. On the main street, next to the central park in Santiago Atitlán, a group of people sits on the pavement next to the road. They talk, smoke cigarettes and watch Saint John walking fast back and forth between Virgin Dolores (Virgin Mary) at the one end of the park and Jesus of Nazareth and Saint Nicholas at the other end. Saint John is carried by four men, the men have straight and serious faces. Every time they come to one end of the street they lift the image three times and loudly say: ‘Ay, Marydolor’ every time they raise the image. Copal is burned and three people in white tunics stand by Dolores and sing a Catholic song once in a while.<sup>35</sup>*

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<sup>35</sup> See photograph three

*Cofradía* processions in Santiago Atitlán appear more or less Catholic as can be read above. Catholic images appear in the processions, copal is burned, Catholic songs are sung during some and the heads of the *cofradías* hold Catholic looking staffs. After all, they have been part of the Catholic Church in Santiago Atitlán for almost 500 years. Also in the houses of the *cofradías* you see the Catholic Saints, people burn candles and incense as offers, and make the sign of the Catholic cross on their chest. These practices all stem from Catholic ones and this is obvious and notable for everyone. However, the saying “what you see is what you get” does not really count here.

The first few weeks many told us that syncretism is practiced in the *cofradías*, “*It is a mix*”. However, this was often told in places related to tourism. Tour guides frequently say this in the Catholic church or in the *cofradía* Santa Cruz. However, behind the Catholic layer of the images and praxis lies a whole spectrum of different meanings hidden. Pérez y Mena (1998) claim that in literature the focus, when talking about syncretism, lies too much on the ‘item’ and too little on the meaning. This is the case in Santiago Atitlán. It took me a while to figure out some ideas that lie beneath the Catholic coat so to speak, and many remain unknown. The *cofradía* members and traditionalists are not the people who generously share the meanings behind the things they do<sup>36</sup>.

Syncretism was described earlier as: ‘*The mixing of two previous separate worldviews, cultural meanings, and in particular, religion*’ (Eriksen 2007:113). Focusing on the ‘item’ when discussing the *cofradías* and Maximón, some things can definitely be seen as syncretism. However, the traditionalists and most *cofrades* do not actually see it as syncretism and claim they are still practicing Maya spirituality. Syncretism is often a sensitive subject to indigenous who claim to be ‘authentic’ (Brown & Bick 1987, Romberg 1998). Focusing on the meaning behind the ‘item’, or behind the Catholic coat the answer: “It is a mix” started to sound superficial after some time. This is not what they actually think and can be seen as an easy answer for all the tourists who visit Maximón daily.

Adopting Catholicism was a tactic, a strategy of the ancestors in order to continue their own religious practices in the time of Colonization. My informants have stated this, however it is argued in literature that syncretism has been a disguise (MacKenzie 2009; Molesky-Poz 2006, Romberg 1998). An example of this disguise is the Catholics cross people make when entering the church. It is said the Maya adapted this but in reality they did not make the Catholic cross. They use the cross to honor the four cardinal points, which is of

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<sup>36</sup> This can have multiple reasons. It is not for this thesis to elaborate on these.



central importance in the Maya cosmovision. Another example is the veneration of the Catholic Saints, they actually did not venerate the Saints but they have connected all the Saints to one of their *Nahuales*. They prayed to this energy instead of praying to the Saint.

Culture is not static and especially the traditionalists do not claim that what they do is the same as 500 years ago. “*There is always change*”, Carlos told me. Change, according to some of the traditionalists can be seen in the praxis of the *costumbres* (customs). One can see Western influences, like Catholic prayers, in the *costumbres*. Additionally, problems with alcoholism, the growing importance of money and violence are Western influences as well argues Luis. Money was a returning theme during the many conversations. “*It is all about money nowadays, it is all business, as a Maya you are not supposed to ask for money. [...] It is a shame, it is not a sacrifice anymore*<sup>37</sup>” (Luis). Especially in *cofradía* Santa Cruz it is all about money traditionalists stated. One could speak of the commodification of Maximón<sup>38</sup>, a lot of money comes in through tourism and ceremonies. Although things change, there is a small group that try to live and practice the way their ancestors have done that for many years. They hold on to their Maya identity and use the word Maya to refer to their spirituality.

Despite knowledge that has been lost, the Maya spirituality is still alive. This can be observed when looking and listening closely. Some things were told to me, others I observed in small details, actions and ceremonies or behind the message behind words. For example Christopher said to me: “*See, everything that I told you that would happen in Semana Santa is happening. I did not lie to you, you can see it now with your own eyes.*” Sensing there was more behind his words I replied: “*Yes, you told me everything that I see, but there are a lot of things that you cannot see*”, he knew what I meant “*Come see me tomorrow*” he replied, looking into my eyes and confirming my thoughts. In the rest of this chapter we will demonstrate more of this world behind the Catholic layer.

### 5.3 An ambiguous case: the Maya and Jesus

In the beginning of the previous paragraph a vignette described the *Corre de San Juan*. A procession unique in Santiago. The procession looks Catholic, after all, they use the Catholic Saints *Dolores*, Saint John, Saint Nicholas and Jesus. Why then, is this the only place in the world that they have this particular procession? Why does it take so long, like all the other

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<sup>37</sup> He is referring to having Maximón in your house for a year. In the past it was an honor, a sacrifice, you could not work anymore. Now tourists come and the one who has Maximón in his house earns a lot of money.

<sup>38</sup> Tourists come to visit the *cofradía* Santa Cruz daily. Tours are organized to visit him. To enter one needs to pay 2Q (\$0,25) and to take a picture 10Q (\$1,30)

processions of the *cofradías*? And what is Saint Nicholas<sup>39</sup> doing there? The Catholic story is that Saint John, who knows that Jesus is being held hostage and tortured the day before his crucifixion, runs to inform Mary what is happening to her son on Thursday night. This is why Saint John runs up and down from Jesus to *Dolores* in the procession.

Saint John, according to Carlos, is the Lord of the rain, and in this procession they ask for the rains to come. *Semana Santa* is of big importance for the Maya and not for Catholic reasons. *Semana Santa* coincides with the five days of *Wayeb*<sup>40</sup> and the Maya New year, the end of these five days. Hence, Good Friday is the first day of New year, therefore the night of the *Corre de San Juan* is the year change<sup>41</sup>. In this procession they ask for the rains to come, they pray for a fertile new year a few traditionalists told me after this week. However, others stayed with the Catholic version and did not tell more than that. The procession *Corre de San Juan* starts at midnight of Thursday on Friday and ends at 6am Friday. During the whole six hours the four men carrying Saint John keep on running between *Dolores* and Jesus. I was there all night and asked a few *cofrades* why they run and why the procession takes so long. Answers were: “*It is a sacrifice*”, “*to show devotion*”, “*for blessings*”, “*It is a honor for them*”. The men that carry Saint John are men who will become *Aj'ij*'s (spiritual guides); they do this for strength and blessings. Saint Nicholas, as Carlos and Felipe claimed, is the Lord of the *Aj'ij*, this is why Saint Nicholas is present during the procession.

Various authors (Hart 2008; MacKenzie 2009; Sanabria 2007; Stanzone 2003) have confirmed the overlap between the calendars as well as the mixing of the catholic Saints with local deities. Many examples like this exist in town. The meaning assigned to the practices is totally different from what one might see or what the ‘easy’ answers on questions reveal for that matter. Many do not perceive the practices as a mix like discussed above. However, some kept on telling me the Catholic story. This can have many reasons such as not knowing themselves, not wanting to tell me or they might have a totally different view. Pérez y Mena (1998) argue that people who practice a kind of syncretism, do normally not share the true meaning behind their practices easily. The most interesting relationship, in our eyes, between Catholicism and the Maya spirituality is the meaning and role of Jesus Christ and the relationship between Him and Maximón.

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<sup>39</sup> Saint Nicholas was a Saint who lived in the 4th century. <http://www.stnicholascenter.org/pages/who-is-st-nicholas/>, last retrieved: 24-06-2015

<sup>40</sup> Wayeb is the last month in the Maya calendar that counts 365 days, just as our count. It consists of 18 months of 20 days and one month, called Wayeb, of 5 days. This is the last month before new year starts and these are days of reflection and transition (Barrios 1999)

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.mayancross.com/meaning-wayeb>, last retrieved: 24-06-2015

*“I already told you, Maximón goes in procession behind Jesus<sup>42</sup> because they related him with Judas Iscariot during Colonialism, the traitor of Jesus. That is the relation between the two.”* Héctor states, offended that I did not trust his information. But there was more between the two than that. Answers to questions about this relationship were: *“Jesus is the judge, Maximón the messenger”*; *“Jesus is the maestro (master) and to Maximón you can say boss”*; *“He works for Jesus, does the work, he is the protector”*. Further into the research some informants said that they had adopted Jesus in their spirituality because of the sacrifice he made for humanity. Sacrifices are an integral part of the Maya spirituality as will become clear in the next paragraph. Interestingly, Jesus has actually been adopted in Maya spirituality. This is uncontested syncretism as far as we know.

#### 5.4 A world of dreams, ancestors, and legends

Many different stories and views exist on every aspect of Maximón and the praxis around him. The different groups all relate to him differently, for some of the Catholics he is the ‘devil’, evil, they say he does bad things. The praxis around him are also looked down upon by many. However, traditionalists and some *cofrades* claimed that a lot of Catholics, or others for that matter, do not know the ‘truth’ of their spirituality. *“[Name Social scientist] who has been here longer and has written about our religion knows a lot, but the truth he does not know. Many do not know the truth.”* (Alfredo). They refer to the ‘truth’ in their spirituality, the *sacred* that is at the heart of their worldview. Supposedly, the tension between the *cofradías* and the Catholic church has to do with this ignorance in addition to the different views of these groups.

Interestingly, there is a difference in thought and meaning between the *cofradías* and the traditionalists as well. Whereas in the *cofradías* you can see a lot of Catholic elements, the traditionalists claim to use no Catholic elements in their practices and prayers. A small group of people claim that they are still in contact with the cosmos and the *nahuales*. Through the *nahuales* they have access to the ancestral knowledge unknown for others as they say themselves. They regularly do ceremonies for protection, health, rain or strength for example. Sometimes they go to powerful energy places in nature. Hart (2010) confirms this, saying that nature and ancestors are of central importance for indigenous worldviews. The traditionalists see and know things without learning, when I asked a healer how he knows what plants to use and how to prepare them he simply said: *“I just know, they tell me.”* *“We are born with the*

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<sup>42</sup> For an illustration see photograph 4

don (gift), *we do not learn it, we know.*” These are Atitecos who work as *Aj’ij*, seers, healers, *comadronas* (midwives); professions that stem from the long ago.

“*You know, this is not my world.*” Roberto said. “*Then what is your world?*” I asked. He gestured with his head towards the sky. “*The world up there?*” “*Yes it is.*” he replied

It is another world they live in and access to it, as well as understanding this world was not easy. One day Roberto told me he had done a ceremony on the Volcano San Pedro, and on the way back he encountered three people. “*It were my parents, they spoke to me. The other man must have been Maximón, he did not say anything.*” His parents have been dead for a few years now. He said he would go to the cemetery to do a ceremony to show his gratitude because they showed themselves. Like said above, the *nahuales* have all the knowledge. “*It is complicated, you can study this for years and still not know everything... The best thing you can do is sit here and concentrate. I cannot say to you how but if you have faith the nahuales can give you all the information you need for your thesis*” (Héctor).

Information can, for example, be revealed in dreams. Dreams are an important part of the daily life of the *cofrades* and traditionalists. Some kept on asking me about my dreams, when I told them I had a dream about Maximón they told me I was blessed and that he protected me. Dreaming about Maximón is a very good sign more informants confirmed.

Sacrifice is another theme that is of major importance in the daily lives of these people. Being a *cofrade* for example, or having a *cofradía* in your house is a sacrifice<sup>43</sup>. Being in procession, for sometimes hours, is a sacrifice. Jesus was adopted in the spirituality “*because of the sacrifice he made for humanity*” (Felipe). Reason they make sacrifices is to show devotion, to get blessings, or for honor. “*Before the Spaniards came, the Maya used to sacrifice humans or animals. They do not do this anymore*” Héctor emphasized. These are few examples to show how the Maya spirituality is still lived and practices today.

According to some traditionalists the veil between this world and the ‘other’ world (spirit world) is very thin in Santiago Atitlán. A lot of stories, myths, and legends about ghosts, *brujos*, *characoteles* (witches that can turn into animals), animals, spirits and ancestors exists in town. These stories do not just circulate between the traditionalists but in the whole village, everybody has stories like that. The people who practice Maya spirituality have certain powers such as healing or seeing, which they can use to help people. Others use

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<sup>43</sup> or it used to be according to some informants, before it became a business.

power for bad things. *Characoteles* or *brujos* can do you harm, as well as people who go to Maximón for the ‘bad’ reasons. However, if you have faith in Maximón, if you have him in your heart, nothing will happen. “*Nothing will happen, because I have faith*” Alfredo told me while walking home after midnight. This faith however, can be in anything. Not only the traditionalists or *cofrades* said things like this. I have heard people say: “*if you have faith in the natural medicine, it will work*”, or “*Santiago Apostle is with me, I have faith in him*”. I have heard Catholics say: “*I have faith in God*” or “*I have faith in Jesus*”. Whereas the Evangelicals will tell you about the light of the Holy Spirit that protects them from bad spirits.

## 6. Evangelicalism in Santiago Atitlán

The folk Saint Maximón, or *Rilaj Mam* depending who you are talking to, has a long history of veneration in the town of Santiago Atitlán as we demonstrated earlier. It also became clear how his presence and his meaning have been challenged several times throughout history<sup>44</sup>. With the emergence of Evangelicalism in Guatemala his presence and his meaning become questioned once again. In the next two chapters we will submerge ourselves in this religious and spiritual dimension that claims to be very different than the one presented above. First of all we want to understand what is in the heart of Evangelicalism. We believe that once we have a clear understanding of this it will be easier to analyze and understand the opinion of *Evangelicos* about Maximón later on in Chapter seven.

### 6.1 The presence and visibility of Evangelicalism in town

*While eating tacos at a local taco stand we can hear them sing in a fierce way. Near the taco stand are three Evangelical churches holding their Sunday evening service. After dinner we stop at the entrance of one of the churches and listen for a while to a priest that is shouting the sermon. - It was our first night in Santiago Atitlán and we already became overwhelmed by the loud adoration of their beloved God the Father.*

After the establishment of its first Evangelical church ‘*Iglesia Alfa y Omega*<sup>45</sup>’ in 1922, the number of Evangelical churches grew steadily in the course of the years in Santiago Atitlán. The exact number remains unknown; there is no official register and almost all of our informants told us something different. Answers vary between thirty and fifty. Pastor Adán read in a report of SEPAL<sup>46</sup> from ten years ago that in that time 47% of the inhabitants of Santiago Atitlán were Evangelical. According to him, this number has probably passed the 50% by now. Some (non-evangelical) tour guides claim that it is about 40%. Nonetheless, all of this numbers indicate a significant expansion of Evangelicalism in town over the last decades.

Evangelical churches are easily recognized by a signboard, paintings or steel letters of their name on the facade. A church can be a building especially build for having services, but

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<sup>44</sup> The emergence of Spanish Catholicism in the 16th century could be considered as the most important example of this.

<sup>45</sup> I used the real name of the church, since this is factual information generally known in Santiago Atitlán.

<sup>46</sup> *Servicio Evangelizador Para America Latina*, [www.sepal.org](http://www.sepal.org)

we also saw average houses of families that use their living room for the same purpose. The first type of church can welcome up to two hundred people (more or less). The biggest church of Santiago Atitlán, *La Palabra Miel*<sup>47</sup>, offers seating for at least a thousand people and has two levels. ‘House churches’ are much smaller and only offer room for a limited number of people (depends on the size of the living room). One informant explained that most of the time these are new churches, initiated by a group of Evangelicals who have left their denomination to start one of their own. This confirms the split and revival tendency of Evangelicalism.

According to Pastor Adán there are at least eighteen different denominations in town. Every denomination is Evangelical because of their belief in and knowledge of the Bible, and their belief that Jesus died for our sins. On top of that, all the denominations consider a spiritual rebirth as the most important ambition to strive for in this life (see later). The difference between the denominations can mainly be found in the form of worship. There exists a continuum that goes from ‘*conservador*’ (conservative) to ‘*neo-Pentecostal*’ (neo-Pentecostalism). I have participated in both type of services. The service of the *conservadores* is modest, they sing and pray but in a peaceful way. Neo-Pentecostal churches are loud; people scream, cry, and pray like their life is depending on it. Hands are in the air waving to God while singing and dancing on rhythmic tunes.

I have visited four churches from different denominations regularly<sup>48</sup>. Independent from the denomination, the interior of these churches looks more or less the same; a hall filled with firm chairs that have a cushion seat facing a podium. During the ‘*culto*’ (service) the churchgoers take a seat on the chairs, while the podium is occupied by musicians, choir members and the pastor. The podia of the churches are always decorated with large bouquets of flowers. Particularly striking is the fact that all of these churches are equipped with a high-tech sound system and that musicians play on brand new looking instruments like electric guitars, drum kit, saxophone, synthesizers, and trumpet. These attributes look and are probably quite expensive. Evangelical churches look far more advanced, organized and clean when comparing them to the modest Catholic Church<sup>49</sup> that is filled up with old wooden benches and the mishmash of decorations and attributes in the *cofradías*.

Although believing is a matter of the heart and has according to an informant nothing to do with your physical appearance, I did see some clothing differences that divide

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<sup>47</sup> I used the real name of the church, since this is factual information generally recognized in literature.

<sup>48</sup> Up to four times a week.

<sup>49</sup> Although the Catholic church also uses since 2013 television screens in the church so that people can follow the mass from close by.

*Evangelicos* from their non-evangelical neighbors, especially on days when there is service. While evangelical woman wear in general a typical ‘*traje*’<sup>50</sup> like almost all *Tz’utujil* women, for service they tend to wear a fancy handbag and high heels. This looks a bit odd in combination with their *traje*. With the men it is even more obvious; a lot of men wear a suit with tie for church service. The older generation of Evangelical men sometimes combines the pants of the *traje* with a neat shirt and tie. Outside of the church, on the streets, it is more difficult to distinguish between *Evangelicos* and non-Evangelical *Tz’utujil* since the woman are not walking around on high heels with fancy handbags and the men are not wearing their suit. Another important marker though can be the bible that Evangelical men sometimes wear under their arm when walking in town.

Overall, Evangelical churches and Evangelicals are highly present and visible in town. In one street you can find up to three Evangelical churches. Their services are held with doors wide open, for everyone to hear. Furthermore, after living in town for a while you can also notice the presence of Evangelicals in other ways. Santiago Atitlán counts many little drugstores<sup>51</sup>. In a drugstore with Evangelical owners you will most likely not find cigarettes and alcohol. Nowadays you have to walk a couple of blocks extra for that. Another good example is *la camioneta* (truck) that delivers water bottles and gallons to the shops and restaurants of town; while driving around Christian worship songs are blasting through its speakers.

## 6.2 The manifestation of Evangelical religiosity in town

Service is about to start and people are walking in bit by bit. While taking a seat I hear them saying to their neighbor “*Buenas noches hermano/a*”. Evangelicals address each other most of the time as *brother* or *sister* since they believe that God is their spiritual Father. Therefore, they see themselves as ‘*hijos de Dios*’, children of God. Who is this God? My informants refer to the Bible that mentions that God is a ‘*Dios Trino*’ (Trinity) which consists out of ‘*Dios Padre*’ (God the Father), ‘*Dios Hijo*’ (His son Jesus) and ‘*Dios Espiritu Santo*’ (the Holy Spirit). Each of them has its own specific role within this Trinity, this will become more clear throughout these chapters. The Evangelical churches that I attended hold a *culto* three

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<sup>50</sup> See photograph Six

<sup>51</sup> A store that contains a pharmacy and also sells products such as toiletries, cosmetics, household goods, and snacks (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/drugstore>).



times a week, which are organized in honor of Him, *Dios Trino*. They honor Him with *canções de alabanza* (songs of worship):

<i>‘Te alabaré</i>	<i>‘I praise you</i>
<i>Te glorificaré</i>	<i>I glorify you</i>
<i>Hay nadie como tu</i>	<i>There is no one like you</i>
<i>Eres grande</i>	<i>You are great</i>
<i>Y majestuoso</i>	<i>And majestic</i>
<i>Mi única verdad está en ti</i>	<i>My only truth lies in you</i>
<i>Mi único amor eres tu</i>	<i>My only love are you</i>
<i>Eres fuerte</i>	<i>You are strong</i>
<i>Invencible’’</i>	<i>Invincible’’</i>

The *alabanza* is always followed by a sermon, given by the pastor. The teachings of the sermon are based on the bible. Subsequently, the idea is that *Evangelicos* administer these bible teachings in their daily life (see later). The most important lesson however comes down to making a choice in life: either you accept Jesus in your heart or you don't. When you accept him you will be born again, this is your spiritual rebirth. From then on you live *the truth* by following the footsteps of Jesus, like John 14:6 says: *‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’*. People who do not accept Jesus as they do will go to hell according to all of my informants. These people, *‘hijos del Diablo’*<sup>52</sup> (children of the Devil) are reined by the Devil, who is ruling the earth at this moment. Therefore, other religious groups in Santiago Atitlán are faced with a destiny of burning in an eternal fire.

Following the footsteps of Jesus means for Evangelicals to evangelize and to give the good example in life. One informant mentioned how they are raising the future leaders of this nation, and that we have to teach them well. The churches I went to are for example engaged in all sort of social projects: cleaning the neighborhood from trash, planting trees, building schools and houses, investing in water purification installations, taking care of orphans and

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<sup>52</sup> Sometimes my informants also called him *Satanás* (Satan).

poor kids, sharing a church car for emergencies, and so on. Furthermore, some churches are systematically organized into groups that have a program organized especially for women, men, adolescents or children wherein they receive biblical advice and sometimes practical aid.

Giving the good example as demonstrated above can be seen as a form of evangelization; you hope to convert people by means of your behavior. Nonetheless, there is also a strong belief in the power of the word. Some churches have a *ministerio de evangelización*, this is a group of people that have the task to approach people and inform them about the bible. The media also plays an important role in this. Santiago Atitlán has for example its own Evangelical TV channel, *Canal 28 signal de esperanza* (Channel of hope). On this channel various priests from local churches can hold a live<sup>53</sup> sermon. Furthermore, Emmanuel, who is a craftsman, told me how he was converted after listening to a national Evangelical radio station. Every time I was at his work place, this radio station was spreading the word of God on the background.

### 6.3 Daily life; the Bible and Modernity

While living and doing fieldwork in Santiago Atitlán I noticed that, despite differences in age, occupation or family situation, most of my informants try to implement the word of the bible in their personal and professional life. In the theoretical framework it was mentioned how economic development<sup>54</sup> is a notion highly stimulated under the adherents of Evangelicalism (Miller and Yamamori 2007). While analyzing the lifestyle of *Evangelicos* in this chapter it will become clear how the bible plays a prominent role in this.

We also mentioned in the theoretical framework that Modernity is an ambiguous concept and that its meaning is a social construction that can differ from person to person. To see Modernity simply as an ineluctable process, a ‘progress’ toward a predetermined goal wherein all societies marches toward the same shining goal, that resembles very closely the societies of the United States or Western Europe, has been criticized by many scholars (Tipps 1973; Richards 2003). However, in Santiago Atitlán I noticed how the focus among Evangelicals on economic progress and prosperity and their disapproval of all sorts of *costumbres* (customs) resonates a lot with the belief in a march toward a shining goal; a modern and prosperous Guatemala. With the bible in one hand, his other hand pointing towards the sky and his dark eyes looking right into mine, Emmanuel formulated it like this;

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<sup>53</sup> ‘*Algunas veces. No siempre, cuando deben de recolectar alguna ofrenda económica pues si trabajan en vivo*’. (‘Sometimes. Not always, they work live on television when they have to collect money contributions’ (Isaac).

<sup>54</sup>In relation to the so called Prosperity Gospel of Health and Wealth.

*“Guatemala will become a nation of prosperity. The previous generation, that of my father, was still occupied a lot with the cofradías, but the current generation is spreading the word of God, and together with that his blessings and prosperity. Because of this the next generation, that of my daughters, will know prosperity, a blessed life, and tranquility”.*

In what follows we elaborate on several aspects of the daily life from an *Evangelico* such as; economic activities (gaining money and status), education, relationships and marriage, free time and recreation, and the position of Evangelicals in the community<sup>55</sup>, in order to illustrate its intertwinement with the Bible and the concept of Modernity as argued above.

First of all, Evangelicals highly value hard working. When one counts his blessings, being able to work is almost always the most important one. God gave us hands to work<sup>56</sup>, and if we don't work we simply don't eat. When you don't find work, you reschool yourself to find another type of work or you simply invent work based on needs of people in town. Tabitha, owner of a small enterprise and a strong advocate of these ideas, showed me during her working hours a little notebook that she is very fond of which she gave the title '*Código de vida*' (Code on how to live). She writes down quotes in it that she finds very inspiring;

*'La nación necesita de servidores de ella y no que ella le sirva a las haraganas'*  
( 'The nation needs people who serve her and not that she serves those who are lazy' )<sup>57</sup>  
– Jorge Ubico

*'Trabajo, constancia, ahorrar, y buenas ideas es aprovechamiento'*  
( 'Work, determination, saving, good ideas is to obtain benefits' ) – No name

*'Disciplina y orden, además de un registro fiel del deber y el haber'*  
( [My philosophy is] discipline, order, and faithful account of all credits and debits' )  
– John Rockefeller

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<sup>55</sup> I gained these insights via a triangulation of methods such as; hanging around, participant observation, informal conversation and semi-structured interviews.

<sup>56</sup> This idea is expressed in the book of Genesis. When Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden of Eden, men became condemned to work for his food as he could no longer eat from the fruit of Eden (Tabitha, 19<sup>th</sup> of March).

<sup>57</sup> All English quotes are my own translation from Spanish.

People who don't work are wasting their time according to Tabitha. Every minute is valuable, but you need to have order and discipline to make most out of it. Laziness is seen as a sin. Like this, *cofradía* members are seen as the sinners of town. According to some of my informants the *cofradías* only make easy money; they don't work but receive money from people (mainly foreigners) who are offering this to Maximón. Furthermore, they spent this money on alcohol which is seen as another sinful act. Within the Evangelical community there is strong rejection of alcohol. Alcohol is the '*road to perdition*' according to Pastor Jacob; "*it is detrimental to your health, highly addictive and a waste of money while your children are in need of food*".

Overall, all *Evangelicos* I met are engaged in relative successful business or paid employment and spent a lot of their time at work. Most of them work six days a week, and some even combine their work with studying at the university in Sololá. Working hard pays off; I didn't see any of my informants suffering from poverty or malnutrition. Most of the Evangelicals I met live in big (sometimes new build) houses equipped with modern technology. In one house I saw a giant and brand new pickup in the garage. In general they are proud of their accumulated wealth and see this as '*una bendición de Dios*' (a blessing of God).

Evangelical children work hard as well; most of them go to an Evangelical school and follow all kind of after school activities. They don't hang around on the streets, they look clean and healthy. Until the 1970s Santiago Atitlán had only one school with seventeen teachers for all children of town. The quality was so bad, that parents rather send their children to work to earn money than losing their money to a school that didn't generate the promise of a better future. In 1981 the Evangelical church *Alfa y Omega* built the first Evangelical *colegio* (school) with funding from Dutch Evangelical churches. While building this *colegio* they had two goals in mind; helping the community and being an example on the one hand, and giving their children the opportunity to become professionals (what can result in higher income and status) on the other hand. Today Santiago Atitlán has three Evangelical *colegios*. To me it seems that the Evangelical youth of Santiago Atitlán has an active, organized and disciplined live.

Children that are raised in an Evangelical family will most likely look in their adult life for an Evangelical partner. According to Pastor Jacob the Bible mentions how only two bulls of the same size can carry on the cart in a stable way. Subsequently, a marriage can only work for an Evangelical if the partner has the same ideas about respect towards the other and the children and a strong belief in '*la unidad de la familia*' (family unity). A marriage is for

life and partners can only be separated by God. I asked some of my informants if they would like to have for example a *cofradía* member as a partner, all of them said resolute no to that. Former *cofradía* members shared with me their experiences of drinking fathers who would beat up their mothers and fathers who left their children alone or had several women. This attitude is not compatible with Christian ideas about marriage.

I noticed how the Evangelical community is a keen promotor of the nuclear family. For structural-functionalist thinkers like Talcott Parsons there is a structural fit between the nuclear family and the industrial society; these kind of families are best fitted to meet the requirements of the industrial system<sup>58</sup> (Janssens 1993: 4). Therefore, in the structural-functionalist view it is argued that nuclear families will do better, career wise, and that they are best equipped to reach the higher placed positions in life (Janssens 1993: 6). This argument I consider relevant since it supports the wish of Evangelicals in town to become a modern an prosperous nation.

Before we continue with any conclusion it is important to note that the aforementioned Evangelical belief on how to live can sometimes differ from how it is practiced. During my fieldwork I observed how some Evangelicals deviate from what the bible teaches them. While there is for example a strong rejection of alcohol in the Evangelical community one informant told me how it actually helps her when having stomachache, or while it is expected to visit church regularly, some informants feel excused when they are too tired from working all week. This behavior should not come as a big surprise since it is not atypical for participants of grassroots religions such as Evangelicalism to navigate between the rules and set up new ones that are more convenient to them (or even new churches for that matter). Nonetheless, within the Evangelical community there is what I call a ‘core group’ that rejects this kind of deviating behavior. Matthew 22:14 says; ‘*For many are invited, but few are chosen*’, according to this core group many are sitting in church (‘many are invited’) but don’t practice in their life what they have learned (few are chosen). Nicolas, who has an important function in church, explains that it is sometimes very hard to live a Christian live and that many give up; “*Ellos no son verdaderos Cristianos*” (They are not true Christians).

Now that we have an impression of the lifestyle of *Evangelicos* we have some substantial evidence that these moral proscriptions cause a ‘social uplift’ because of a competitive economic advantage they generate over neighbors (Miller and Yamamori 2007: 33). Now what does this mean for a town like Santiago Atitlán? Locals can testify how the

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<sup>58</sup> I will not elaborate on the reasons of this fit since this discussion goes beyond our thesis.

town has had a drastic makeover in the last fifteen years; new roads were constructed, houses were rebuilt, people became more mobile and connected because of owning a car and having access to internet, people go to university, and so on. According to my informants this didn't happen by coincidence. Before the signing of the Peace Accord in 1996<sup>59</sup> it was too dangerous to go to a church because of the gathering ban<sup>60</sup>, but after the signing Evangelical churches experienced a boom in its amount of members. Miguel, engaged in several small *negocios* (businesses) stated that this economic and social welfare growth is intertwined with the boom of Evangelicalism in town during the last fifteen years; “*As an Evangelico I make sure that I work hard for my family and that I invest my money in them. Others spent their money on rum and drugs. With the growth of Evangelicalism Santiago Atitlán has prospered*”. This prosperity is according to my informants *una bendición de Dios* and of great attraction to the outer world.

Finally, to become a prosperous nation Evangelicals believe Guatemala is in need of God. According to Eber ‘*The mass conversion to Protestantism would entail a fundamentally different way of thinking about the relationship between personal salvation, poverty and everyday life*’ (2000: 217). Although our data confirms his line of reasoning, we argue that one element is missing. Converting to Evangelicalism requires also a shift in identity perception. In the words of Francisco: “*We are not Maya, we are Guatemaltecos. The Maya were solely our polytheistic ancestors*”.

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<sup>59</sup> Guatemala went through civil war from 1960 to 1996.

<sup>60</sup> Where people came together, there was the risk of being accused of planning subversive activities according to Miguel.

## 7. Evangelicalism and Maximón

Now that we have a deeper understanding of what is in the heart of Evangelicalism, we unfold in this chapter the dynamics between Evangelicals and their religious and spiritual counterparts, such as Maximón, the related *costumbres* and the *cofradía(s)*. Before our arrival in Guatemala we assumed that *Evangelicos* consider Maximón as nothing more than a piece of wood, a souvenir from ancient times. While this is not completely untrue, we will see in this chapter that also for them Maximón is full of meaning. However, the fact that not one of my informants never named him as *Rilaj Mam* or ‘*el Abuelo*’<sup>61</sup> already gives us a hint that this meaning is very different than the meaning that is assigned to him by the *cofradías*.

### 7.1 The Devil in Maximón

*‘A long time ago there was a war going on and the men of town had to leave and fight for their country. But they were afraid that when they left, their woman would not be safe or that other men would come after their wives. Therefore, they asked the brujos (sorcerers) of town to invent something that would protect their wives. The brujos created Maximón out of sacred wood and gave the statue the power to transform itself in a real man. A bit later Maximón appeared in town as a good looking and well-dressed man. Initially he fulfilled his task as protector, but a bit later he turned into the man where the men of town were afraid of; he seduced the women of town and slept with them. When the wise of town found out they punished him by turning the head of the statue and cutting of his arms.’*

This is the origin story of Maximón as some *Evangelicos* told it to me. Some details clearly differ from the origin story as told by the *cofradías*<sup>62</sup>; wise elders for example are addressed here as sorcerers. Other elements appear in both origin stories; a perceived danger by the inhabitants and the creation of Maximón for protection. Particularly intriguing in both stories is the part where Maximón does the opposite of what is expected from him. If he did something bad, I asked my informants, then why do people still venerate him today?

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<sup>61</sup> See Chapter 4

<sup>62</sup> See Chapter 4

Apparently, being able to do bad things is part of his force of attraction; people do not only go to Maximón to petition beneficial things like money or good health, a lot of people also go to Maximón out of revenge. They can bring him a picture of their enemy and ask Maximón to do something bad to that person, most of the time in the form of an incurable disease. During the first contacts I asked my informants if they believe this kind of stories. I assumed they would say no. However, a lot of them shared testimonies of people they know or heard of that became cursed by Maximón. But if you believe in God, then how can you believe in the power of Maximón as well? To explain this, Marcos, who is a biblist, read to me the following bible passage, Matthew 8: 30-31:

*‘Some distance from them a large herd of pigs was feeding. The demons begged Jesus, If you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs’ .*

In this bible passage Jesus freed two possessed men from their legion of demons and sent them in a herd of pigs. This passage demonstrates how also the bible speaks about the existence of bad spirits (demons in this case). These bad spirits are originating from the Devil. This bible passage is a proof for *Evangelicos* that there is a world of spirits and that they are operating on earth among human beings. Only God is *todopoderoso* (almighty), but the Devil has power as well until the day that Jesus will come back to the earth. When Jesus comes back the Devil will be defeated and locked up in hell. The Devil doesn't want to be alone there, so he uses his time on earth to tie people to him that will join him in hell later. According to most *Evangelicos* Maximón is a wooden statue that contains a bad spirit which operates as an accomplice of the Devil. First he will give you what you ask for, but in the end he will leave you with nothing; *‘Maximón es la camina de perdición’* (the road to perdition) according to Marcos. Tabitha exemplified this with stories of people who became in the end bankrupt instead of rich after pleading Maximón for more money.

In Chapter four we have seen how the traditionalist and *cofrades* perceive Maximón as a Maya God that is an intermediate between *Ajaaw* (creator of the universe) and the people.



My informants on the contrary believe they do not need mediators in order to communicate with God. It is generally known that Evangelicals for example disapprove the veneration of Saints in the Catholic church. Furthermore, they flatly reject as idolatry all artifactual representations of saintly or demonic personages (Sanabria 2007: 197). Consequently Maximón is not only rejected because of his demonic character as a ‘folk Saint’, but also for his function as a mediator (whether that is for a good or a bad petition).

## 7.2 Maximón and his evil companions vs. the Holy Spirit

During our fieldwork in Santiago Atitlán we realized how also Evangelicals, just as many non-evangelical inhabitants of town, have a strong belief in the spirit world as we heard many stories and legends. One day Tabitha told me the following story about her uncle;

*“My uncle was living in the house next to me. One day he became very ill. He was convinced that this was the work of Maximón. He knew this because of strange things that were happening around the house at nighttime. My uncle and his wife could hear for example a child crying in their backyard the whole time and several kind of animals like goats and wolves<sup>63</sup> came to their porch and kept staring to them all night. One night I went to their house to find out myself, but I couldn’t hear or see anything. A bit later my uncle died from his incurable disease. After his death his children converted to Evangelicalism.”*

While many inhabitants told me these kinds of *stories* as if it was the most normal thing in the world I was dealing with feelings of curiosity and skepticism at the same time. Every time I saw the occasion I brought up the topic. One night a group of locals, some foreigner friends we made, and Liza and I were walking on the street. It was around ten in the evening, it was full moon and a strong warm wind was chasing us. At one point we started to

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<sup>63</sup> See also chapter 4 on *characoteles*, human beings that can transform into animals.

talk about *La Llorona*<sup>64</sup>. A minute later we felt stones that were thrown on our hips. When we looked around there was no one around who could have thrown them. We went home confused. For the first time I realized what all my informants were talking about; *mysterious circumstances with an undefined cause*, spirits maybe? Suddenly it hit me that it would be a comforting thought to be protected by the light of the Holy Spirit as many of my informants claimed to be. Once you have accepted Jesus in your heart your body becomes a temple for the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit is within you, there shines a light in you, and light always wins from the darkness. ‘*It is like a natural law*’ Tabitha claimed, ‘*in this way the bad spirits cannot harm you*’. In Tabitha’s point of view this ‘natural law’ explains why she could not see or hear the bad spirits in the backyard of her uncle. People can go as much as they want to Maximón and ask him to hurt you, when you are a *verdadero Cristiano*, nothing will happen to you. When something does happen, God is probably testing your faith.

Subsequently, Evangelicalism and its belief in the Holy Spirit could be seen as a proper way of dealing with the bad spirits of town. Arguably, it could be even one of the reasons why Evangelicalism is thriving in Santiago Atitlán. However, earlier, in Chapter 6, we discussed how the Prosperity Gospel and the belief in a prosperous nation could also be understood as one of the driving forces of Evangelicalism. These two findings actually reinforce each other in a way. Some *costumbres* that enforce drinking, being lazy, and so on are seen as contra productive regarding the ‘shining goal’ of prosperity. Our study reveals that in their view these *costumbres* are driven by bad spirits such as Maximón. We argue that demonizing Maximón and the *cofradías* can be seen as a strategy to break with the *costumbres* that are standing that progress in the way. In order to break with the *costumbres* and bad spirits, *Evangelicos* have to protect themselves and beat them with the same weapon; by means of a spirit, in this case the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>64</sup> The weeping woman; a famous Hispanic legend about a woman who long time ago killed her own children, but soon felt regret of doing so. Until today it is believed that she still appears at night, wandering, crying and looking for her children. It is believed in Santiago Atitlán that when you encounter *la Llorona* that you will be sick for the three following days. (Samuel, 5<sup>th</sup> of March; Isaac 11<sup>th</sup> of March)

### 7.3 Evangelicals and Maximón: Reactions and Reality

*'And Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men."'*

(Mark 1: 17)

*Evangelicos* have the important task to spread the word of God<sup>65</sup>. The more people hear about God and accept him, the bigger the community becomes that is fighting the evil and bad spirits in this world. I asked my informants if they also try to convert the people of the *cofradía*. I received several answers on this question. Some try to convert them in a passive way by praying for them and asking God to change their hearts. However, most *Evangelicos* wish to leave them in peace; they know that problems or conflicts can arise when talking with them (see later). They state that these members know the word of God but wish to ignore it.

Interestingly enough, it seems that today almost every Evangelical church in Santiago Atitlán contains former *cofradía* members. I met elderly as well as younger Evangelicals who were former *cofradía* members. They converted because they saw how the *cofradía* and Maximón were bringing them nothing. One senior remembers how his father came home from the *cofradía* completely drunk and beating up his mother afterwards. He decided he didn't want to follow that example. Pastor Adán told me how converted people who used to spend their last ten Quetzal<sup>66</sup> on drinking beer with a friend, would now spend that last ten Quetzal on buying bread for their family.

Nonetheless, rumors go around of *Evangelicos* who are secretly visiting and venerating Maximón. In the beginning people were not really talkative about this. I think this is very normal, since visiting Maximón is considered as committing a sin. When the truth comes out, this can have consequences for one's social and church life. I was not able to encounter an *Evangelico* who confessed me of visiting Maximón. Though, after a while my informants started to open up more about this this topic. I gathered two specific stories from informants who know someone<sup>67</sup> personally that is Evangelical and went to Maximón. In both

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<sup>65</sup> As mentioned earlier in Chapter 5.2 The manifestation of Evangelical religiosity in town, on evangelization.

<sup>66</sup> Local currency

<sup>67</sup> I would like not to mention any specific details of these cases in order not to reveal the identity of this people.

cases it were parents who secretly went to Maximón to ask him for help for their sick child. In both cases the truth came out because the child could not keep this as a secret and told someone else about it.

I asked Pastor Jacob what would happen if the church knows about this kind of behavior. He told me that this person would be ‘disciplined’. This means that he or she cannot participate for two or three months in his or her ‘*ministerio*’<sup>68</sup> (ministry). Furthermore, this person is not allowed to take part in the ‘*Santa Cena*’ (the Lord’s Supper). During this time this person needs to think about his acts. Pastor Jacob added that the church cannot judge this person because only God can look into one’s heart. When asked sincerely, Jesus will even forgive this person. Though the church cannot judge these people, Evangelicals do have a strong opinion about their *hermanos* or *hermanas* who secretly visit Maximón. These people are no longer seen as *verdaderos Cristianos* because they cannot let go of their roots, they lost their patience with God or they needed revenge which God cannot give them since the bible preaches to love your enemy.

Anyhow, one of the Ten Commandments in the bible forbids the worshipping of *imagenes* (pictures, statues) and forbids putting other gods before God. Therefore, according to the bible a *verdadero Cristiano* can never believe in God and venerate Maximón at the same time. Especially during and after *Semana Santa* my informants confirmed this commandment. Most *Evangelicos* kept their distance from the Catholic and *cofradía* processions wherein several statues (including Maximón) are carried around town the whole week. Evangelicals organize their own activities in church during this week. I went for example to an *obra de teatro infantil* (children theater play), wherein the children of a *colegio* performed the life story of Jesus on stage. All *cultos* I participated in during and the week after *Semana Santa* focused on the message of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Besides that, an anthropologist<sup>69</sup> I met in Santiago Atitlán told me how he saw members of an Evangelical church working very hard during *Semana Santa*, wearing a T-shirt with the

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<sup>68</sup> ‘[Ministerios] work in the interest of the church, so that the church can function well in a spiritual, economic and social way’ (Nicolas, 14<sup>th</sup> of April 2015).

<sup>69</sup> As an anthropologist he worked and lived in Santiago Atitlán for many years and is very familiar with the religious dynamics of town.

church logo on. According to him this could be interpreted “as a manner of differentiating themselves from their neighbors who are wasting their time in the processions”.

Evangelical churches disapprove the veneration and carrying around of *imagenes* during *Semana Santa*. It would not be illogical to assume that Evangelical churches would strongly denounce all the ‘sinful activities’ that the town goes through during *Semana Santa*. Notwithstanding, I noticed how the congregations were mainly focused on their own audience. I am not aware of any public confrontation between the Evangelicals and Catholics or *Cofradía* members during this Holy week.

The reason for this ‘soft approach’ is that they want to respect their neighbors, how different they may be. Although the majority of my informants are very critical about Maximón and the *cofradías*, they do not wish to undertake actions that are detrimental towards Maximón or the *cofradías*. Miguel explained me that since the end of the civil war the people of Santiago Atitlán are living peacefully together, and that they will do everything to keep it that way. As written before, Evangelicals wish to leave *cofradías* in peace because they know problems or conflicts can arise when confronting them with their opinion. They prefer to set a good example and hope to convert them with their good behavior.

This attitude or ‘soft approach’ is also maintained by the municipality. The current mayor of Santiago Atitlán is Evangelical. I was not able to talk with him, but I have spoken to two Evangelicals with an important political function in town. Ernesto and Emilio both explained that Guatemalan law nowadays forbids the discrimination of any religious or cultural tradition<sup>70</sup>. Therefore, the municipality, although 75% of its employees are Evangelical, has to support the *costumbres* of town. During *Semana Santa* they support for example the festivities of the Catholics and *cofradías* financially<sup>71</sup>.

Although Evangelical politicians carry out the ‘soft approach’ towards Maximón and the *cofradías*, and even accept Maximón as a part of history of town, I could sense that they personally do not entirely support the *costumbres*. It is well known for example how certain

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<sup>70</sup> In contrary to the violent past; government forces of Guatemala have been condemned for perpetrating genocide against Guatemala’s Maya indigenous people and their supporters during the civil war. (Roth-Arriaza 2006: 207)

<sup>71</sup> See photograph Five

years the Evangelical mayor was absent and replaced by a non-Evangelical vice mayor during *cofradías* ceremonies at the town hall during *Semana Santa*. Despite stating that he respects every religion since he needs everyone's support as a politician, Ernesto is convinced that this town is in need of God. He mused about how beautiful it would be if everyone would live a life according to the bible and how only good things would come out of this.

#### 7.4 Santiago Atitlán: town of God?

Although most Evangelicals are not fond of Maximón, some hold an ambivalent position towards the continuation of his presence in Santiago Atitlán. Isaac for example doesn't want Maximón in town as a spiritual leader. On the other hand he thinks that Maximón, as a wooden statue, is a cultural symbol that is part of the history of town. Furthermore, Maximón attracts many tourists, this generates extra income for the town residents. Others, like Pastor Jacob, are more straightforward; "*The day Maximón disappears, we will have a big celebration*<sup>72</sup>".

Fact is, the importance of Maximón is diminishing in Santiago Atitlán. Miguel explains this as follows; "*Santiago was the town of Maximón, today it is the town of God*"<sup>73</sup>. It seems like the outer world is not yet ready for that kind of town. Every day tourists come to Santiago Atitlán in the assumption that its *Tz'utujil* inhabitants are still worshipping an idol as they did for hundreds of years. Many books have been published about *the grandfather* of town. Many of my informants told me how happy they are that someone like me is finally writing about *'the truth'*.

Nonetheless, Maximón is still surviving. According to several people because of the money and gifts from foreigners. Also organizations like *INGUAT* and a Norwegian NGO that supports cultural traditions worldwide invest money in him. According to Miguel this is

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<sup>72</sup> "*El día que va a desaparecer, vamos a hacer una fiesta!*"

<sup>73</sup> "*Santiago era el pueblo de Maximón, hoy Santiago es el pueblo de Dios*"

sad, he sees it as a way of withholding the town from progress, about the diminishing of Maximóns presence he says: *‘It is not losing our culture, but progressing our mindset<sup>74</sup>’*.

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<sup>74</sup> *‘no es perder la cultura, pero es crear la mente’*.

## 8. Conclusive Remarks

### 8.1 Discussion

Before formulating an answer on our central research question we want to elaborate on some remarkable parallels and differences between our research groups that we have discovered in our data. These results are of central importance to the religious dynamics in Santiago Atitlán and therefore contribute to our discussion.

Although the religious/spiritual groups that we discussed have very different opinions about Maximón's meaning and its related practices, all groups relate to a 'truth' in a certain way. According to the traditionalists and the *cofradías* there are many who do not know the truth of the *Tz'utujil* spirituality. People might know a lot, but the actual 'truth' is known by little. However, they do not claim they have 'the only truth'. One of the characteristics of indigenous worldviews is that indigenous often believe in different 'truths' (Simpson *in* Hart 2012). In the meantime, Evangelicals derive their convictions from the Bible which contains the word of God and therefore the 'only truth'. In order to separate themselves from other religious groups in town, many Evangelicals claim that Evangelicalism is not a religion because it is 'the truth'; it is the only way towards eternal glory.

Despite adhering to a different truth, an interesting observation we made is that Maximón plays an important role in the belief of all of our informant groups. Before arriving in Guatemala we assumed that *Evangelicos* would see him as nothing more than a remnant of the past. Our fieldwork revealed that he does not only have a meaning for the traditionalists and *cofradías* but also for the Catholics and Evangelicals. However, this meaning is a very different one. The fact that he has a meaning for everybody shows that he is actually still quite present in Santiago Atitlán.

Another remarkable observation we made is the belief in a spirit world by all inhabitants of Santiago Atitlán, including the Evangelicals. We did not expect this beforehand. Although animism is a widely criticized term, as we discussed in the theoretical debate (Stringer 1999; Bird-David 1999), we consider the term valuable since it is applicable to both our research groups. The belief in the spirit world was expressed in different ways though. For the *cofrades* and the traditionalists the presence of the *nahuales* (ancestors) is of central importance in their daily lives. From the *nahuales* they get the knowledge, they help them and in ceremonies they always thank them. The existence of *characoteles* (human that can change into animals) is commonly accepted and tons of stories circulate the village. The belief in the spirit world for the Catholics is expressed in stories about bad spirits and



possessions by these bad spirits. Interestingly, Evangelicals also believe in the spirit world wherein they make a strict division between bad spirits and the Holy Spirit. Maximón is categorized by them in the group of bad spirits. While for the *cofrades* Maximón and the *nahuales* function as protectors, the Evangelicals consider them as something to be protected from.

The different meanings that are given to Maximón can also be related to differences in identity perception of each group. While they all see themselves as *Tz'utujil*, the Evangelicals perceive themselves as *Guatemaltecos* and not as Maya. Whilst most Catholics, the *cofradías* and the traditionalists call themselves Maya, and some even very proudly. This difference in identity perception resonates with the earlier mentioned juxtaposition between traditional 'popular/syncretic Catholicism' and 'modern Evangelicalism'. Most Evangelicals do not want to be associated with the Maya because this reminds them of their colonized past on the one hand and a past wherein God was not yet present on the other hand. The traditionalists, on the contrary, are very proud of their roots and are keeping the 'old' ways alive. Subsequently, we argue that religion, identity perception, and lifestyle are very much intertwined in Santiago Atitlán.

Finally, a last important theme throughout our research is that of money. The traditionalists have a strong opinion of the *cofradías* and *sacerdotes Mayas* (Maya priest) that ask money for their services. They think it is a shame and disapprove asking money for services. Maximón brings a lot of money to Santiago Atitlán and especially to *cofradía* Santa Cruz. Some were also critical towards the Evangelicals saying that for them as well, everything is about money. However, according to the traditionalists '*life is not about money*'. We conclude that in most of the religious groups that we have discussed money is a thriving factor that should not be underestimated; it attracts people and therefore it is of crucial importance for the continuity of the groups .

## 8.2 Final Conclusion

*'The war for the heart and soul of Santiago Atitlán is no longer a struggle of the town versus the outside. Rather, Atitlán has turned in on itself' ... (Carlson 2011:xvii)*

In Santiago Atitlán various religious groups define themselves through their belief and lifestyle. Catholicism has been around for a long time, and this resulted in syncretic beliefs and practices. However, the claim that syncretism is practiced in Santiago Atitlán is not

commonly accepted and even condemned like argued in the empirical chapters. Difference in thought and lifestyle has even led to a breach between *cofradías* and the Catholic church.

Recently as new player entered the field; the Evangelical church. The emergence of Evangelicalism is quite recent and caused a big shift in the lives of many Atitecos. This led to the reshaping of the local religious dynamics, and nowadays Evangelicalism has a central role in them. Indeed, it seems that *'Atitlán has turned on itself'* (Carlson 2011: xvii).

These local religious and spiritual dynamics are reflected in the meaning that these groups attribute to Maximón. Vice versa, we argue that when taking into account all religious groups in town, a better and more embedded understanding of Maximón can be achieved. This resonates with our central research question:

*'How are the local religious and spiritual dynamics in Santiago Atitlán reflected in the meaning the Tz'utujiles give to the folk saint cult of Maximón?'*

When studying Maximón we discovered that different religious groups give him a different meaning. While most Evangelicals are very critical vis-à-vis Maximón and the *cofradías*, *cofrades* and traditionalists respect him greatly. The reason Evangelicals are critical has to do with the idea that Maximón, as an accomplice of the Devil, and the 'traditional' practices in the *cofradías* stand in the way to become a prosperous nation. According to them, abandoning such practices will result in an economic progress. The Catholics distance themselves from the practices as well. This is particularly visible in the division that happened between the *cofradías* and the Catholic church. While Catholics take a milder stance toward Maximón, they do not want to be associated with him. The *cofradías* and traditionalists on the other hand give Maximón an important place in their lives, some more than others but all respect him for what he does.

The discussion on syncretism, or on etic and emic terminology for that matter is not so much a local discussion as it is a theoretical discussion. While scholars might view Maximón or the praxis as syncretic, few locals will. Although, anti-syncretic traditionalists do label many *cofradía* related practices as syncretic, they strive for 'purity'. The term syncretism, we argue, can best be used as a tool to describe a phenomenon instead of seeing it as reality. The term did not resonate with emic views of our informants. Syncretism indeed focusses on the "item", or outside, instead of looking at the meaning people give (Perez y Mena 1998).

The different meanings the groups hold towards Maximón originates from different lifestyles and values. Despite their differences, the religious groups seem to live together in a

relative peaceful way. Nonetheless, who looks deeper discovers tensions underneath the surface; there is a constant delicate balance between showing respect or disapproval towards one another. We gathered several examples that underpin this delicate balance. Although there has been a conflict between the *cofradías* and the Catholic church for example, the *cofradías* have to work together with the Catholic church because they still have tasks to perform like changing the clothes of the Saints in the church. Evangelicals for example don't feel urged to undertake detrimental action towards Maximón, despite their strong disapproval of him. They know conflict can arise when doing that. Some Evangelicals explained they will do everything to keep peace in town because of memories of the civil war. Besides that, the Guatemalan law nowadays forbids religious and cultural discrimination. It seems that the *Tz'utujiles* live together in the same village largely beside each other without too much interference. One might expect that with such differing opinions, the town would be in conflict. However, this is not the case.

Nonetheless, the importance of Maximón in town is diminishing and Evangelicalism is thriving. Many former *cofrades* have converted themselves. Some authors (Carlson 2011; Stanzione 2003) already mentioned in their work and we can confirm this trend. Despite many tourists who come to visit this cultural sensation of Santiago Atitlán, and despite the traditionalists who keep on practicing Maya spirituality it seems less and less *Tz'utujiles* are involved in the traditions. Some claim Maximón is only surviving because of sponsoring by the tourist industry or NGO's. However, a core group, although small, is still practicing the traditions and they will not easily leave the way of the ancestors. They realize that a lot of ancestral knowledge is already lost with less and less people practicing the *Tz'utujil* spirituality. Evangelicals, in turn, also do not automatically believe Maximón will disappear, they know that the Devil (and bad spirits) will only be defeated when Jesus comes back to this earth.

Despite their critical opinions there are rumors of *Evangelicos* secretly visiting Maximón. Only recently a lot of people converted themselves. Subsequently, should we interpret these secret visits as a *liminal stage* wherein some converted Evangelicals cannot let go yet of their past? Or do these secret visits open the way for a new local syncretic form of Evangelicalism? Can both groups exist next to each other; is hybridization ruled out or necessary? (Clark 2012; Carlson & Prechtel 1991). Although these questions remain unanswered for now, several arguments point in different directions. On the one hand we suppose that Evangelicals will not easily be seduced into the process of hybridization. We learned that Evangelicalism has a tendency towards fundamentalist behavior; they are well

aware of their boundaries and fiercely protect them. They also have a strong conviction of being the only 'righteous' religion. Furthermore, there are less similarities between Evangelicalism (absence of Saints as mediators for example) and Indigenous Spirituality than for example Catholicism and Indigenous beliefs (Sanabria 2007). Culture and religion do not have an essentialist character though, and as anthropologists we are inclined to believe in the change of boundaries. However, crossing religious boundaries can have severe consequences in the case of *Evangelicos*. Secretly visiting Maximón is a taboo, that is why this topic is so hard to study. As a researcher we are sometimes confronted with limitations in the field; we cannot expect our informants to reveal this kind of information with ease. Nonetheless, their version of the events could be of crucial importance for a deeper understanding of the local new dynamics. On the other hand we think a new wave of hybridization is not ruled out when seen from the 'Maya perspective'. Maya religion has proved to be resilient for hundreds of years and is still practiced; we find it unlikely that with the emergence of Evangelicalism they will 'suddenly' disappear. Arguably they find again a way to continue their practices despite Evangelicalism gaining more and more popularity.

While we looked at the local religious and spiritual dynamics in Santiago Atitlán it is important not to forget that the town is connected to broader dynamics in the world. We cannot view this town as if it were isolated from the outside. Influences such as tourism and NGO's that promote cultural heritage are all quite recent developments that have contributed to the shift in dynamics in Santiago Atitlán.

Concluding, meaning and lifestyles in Santiago Atitlán differ among groups, and through observing how the *Tz'utujiles* relate to Maximón we discovered the broader dynamics in town. The dynamics are reflected in the way that Maximón is contested by these different groups, just like the practices of 'the other'. While this causes unrest between the groups, relative peace is held in town. We perceive Maximón as an intriguing figure which functions as a symbolic boundary between different groups as well as a mirror reflecting wider society.

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## Appendixes

### Appendix A: Illustrative Photographs

#### Photograph One



Photograph taken by Elizabeth Hokke on 10-04-2015 in *Cofradía* Santa Cruz. This is the typical scene when one enters the *cofradía*.

Photograph Two



Photograph was taken by Ermesinde de Strijcker in the *cofradía* Santa Cruz, Santiago Atitlán, during Elizabeth her ceremony to officially ask permission to do research on Maximón. It was taken on 16-03-2015.

Photograph Three



Photograph taken by Elizabeth Hokke at 6am on the morning of Good Friday, 03-04-2015 in Santiago Atitlán. The photograph shows the *Corre de San Juan*, with *Virgen Dolores* (Maria) and Saint John.

Photograph Four



This photograph was taken by Elizabeth Hokke on 03-04-2015 in Good Friday in Santiago Atitlán. Maximón is carried on the shoulders of the *telinel* behind the procession of Jesus who lies in the lightened coffin in the middle of the photograph.

Photograph Five



This photograph was taken by Elizabeth Hokke on 01-04-2015 in the municipality of Santiago Atitlán. Maximón is brought to the municipality for two hours on Wednesday during *Semana Santa*. This has been a tradition for many years.

Photograph Six



Photograph was taken by Elizabeth Hokke on 29-03-2015 in Santiago Atitlán. On this photograph you can see the traje típico (regional costume) of the female inhabitants of Santiago Atitlán.



## Appendix B: Research Summary – Resumen en español

### B.1 Summary in English

Summary of the Thesis written by Elizabeth Hokke and Ermesinde De Strijcker:

Hokke, E. and E. De Strijcker.

2015 Santiago Atitlán: Town of God? Subject of Contested Religious Meaning: A Case Study of the Folk Saint Maximón

This thesis is the result of eight weeks of research in Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala and was conducted from 23<sup>rd</sup> of February until the 17<sup>th</sup> of March. We have used Anthropological fieldwork and methods to get a deeper understanding of the local religious dynamics in town. Our aim was to include the multiple perspectives of different groups. The groups presented in this thesis are Catholics, *Cofrades*, traditionalists (who distance themselves from syncretic practices) and Evangelicals.

In this research we have looked at Maximón as a vehicle of meaning for the different religious groups. This allowed us to gain a better understanding of the religious dynamics in town. We used the following main question to do this: *'How are the local religious and spiritual dynamics in Santiago Atitlán reflected in the meaning the Tz'utujiles give to the folk saint cult of Maximón?'* We started the research by dividing the question in two main themes. First of all we looked at Maximón himself and the practices he is involved in as well as the meaning he is given by the Catholics, *cofrades*, and the traditionalists. The claim that Catholicism and *Tz'utujil* spirituality have blended over the past 400 years was the reason we choose to look at these groups together. The other group and theme we included in our research is Evangelicalism and their opinion on Maximón and practices related to him.

### Context

In the revised version of his book *'The war for the heart and soul of a highland Maya town'* Carlson remarks an interesting shift in the religious dynamics of Santiago Atitlán; *'The war for the heart and soul of Santiago Atitlán is no longer a struggle of the town versus the outside. Rather, Atitlán has turned in on itself' ...* (Carlson 2011:xvii). Before presenting our most important research results we give a brief outline of the context wherein this shift has taken place.

Guatemala has faced several waves of ‘outside’ religious interventions. The emergence of Spanish Catholicism and its distinctive fusion with local (Indigenous) beliefs and practices during the colonial era is now generally called popular Catholicism (Sanabria 2007: 183). This designation indicates how Catholicism is already integrated in the local religious landscape. Nonetheless, this integration doesn’t necessarily mean acceptance. We noticed for example how in Santiago Atitlán Catholics, *cofradías* and traditionalists redefine their boundaries and how even a conflict arose between the first two.

Since the end of the 20th century there is a new player in the field. Although the emergence of Evangelicalism in Guatemala is quite recent, Carlson argues that also they can no longer be treated as outsiders; the biggest Evangelical church of Santiago Atitlán became a ‘native church’ that serves as an example for Evangelical churches based in the United States (Carlsen 2011: xvii). This implicates that as a former outsider they gained sufficient support in town to reshape once again local religious dynamics. Overall, Carlson is correct when he writes ‘*Atitlán has turned on itself*’. These broader dynamics are also reflected in the meaning that our informants have about Maximón.

### **Interstring parallels**

During our fieldwork we discovered some interesting parallels in our research data. These results are of central importance to the dynamics in Santiago Atitlán. We mention in this summary two of them. First of all, our fieldwork revealed that Maximón does not only have a meaning for the traditionalists and *cofradías* but also for the Catholics and Evangelicals. However, opinions differ greatly. For the traditionalist and *cofradías* he is like a ‘grandfather’ that needs to be respected. Some *Evangelicos* see him as nothing more than a wooden statue, but most *Evangelicos* we encountered are convinced that Maximón contains a bad spirit that works as an accomplice of the Devil. The fact that he has a meaning for everybody shows that he is actually still quite present in Santiago Atitlán.

Another remarkable observation we made is the belief in a spirit world by all inhabitants of Santiago Atitlán, including the Evangelicals. We did not expect this beforehand. The belief in the spirit world was expressed in different ways though. For the *cofrades* Maximón and the *nahuales* (ancestors) function as protectors. The belief in the spirit world for the Catholics is expressed in stories about bad spirits and possessions by these bad spirits. Interestingly, Evangelicals also believe in the spirit world wherein they make a strict division between bad spirits and the Holy Spirit. Maximón is categorized by them in the group of bad spirits.

## Main findings

We discovered that the different groups give Maximón a different meaning. While most Evangelicals are very critical towards Maximón and the *cofradías*, others respect him greatly. The reason Evangelicals are critical has to do with the idea that ‘traditional’ practices in the *cofradías* and Maximón himself stand in the way to become a prosperous nation. On top of that, they perceive him as a bad spirit or the henchman of the Devil. Many Catholics distance themselves from the practices as well. This can be seen in the division that happened between the *cofradías* and the Catholic church. The *cofradías* and traditionalists on the other hand give Maximón an important place in their lives and have a lot of respect for him and his work. The term syncretism is more a theoretical discussion than a local one. Few actually think they are practicing some kind of blend although it is used by some inhabitants to relate to *cofradía* related practices.

The different meanings the groups hold towards Maximón originates from different lifestyles and values. Despite their differences, the religious groups seem to live together in a relative peaceful way. Nonetheless, who looks deeper discovers tensions underneath the surface; there is a constant delicate balance between showing respect or disapproval towards one another. We gathered several examples that underpin this delicate balance that are presented in our thesis. It seems that the *Tz’utujiles* live together in the same village largely beside each other without too much interference. One might expect that with such differing opinions, the town would be in conflict. However, this is not the case.

Nonetheless, the importance of Maximón in town is diminishing and Evangelicalism is thriving. Many former *cofrades* have converted themselves. Despite many tourists who come to visit him in Santiago Atitlán, and despite a small groups who on practicing Maya spirituality it seems less and less *Tz’utujiles* are involved in the traditions. This core group who is still practicing the traditions of the ancestors do realize that a lot of knowledge is already lost. However, Evangelicals do not automatically believe Maximón will disappear, they know that the Devil (and bad spirits) will only be defeated when Jesus comes back to this earth.

Despite their critical opinions there are rumors of Evangelicos secretly visiting Maximón. Should we interpret these secret visits as a *liminal stage* wherein some converted Evangelicals cannot let go yet of their past? Or do these secret visits open the way for a new local syncretic form of Evangelicalism? Can both groups exist next to each other; is hybridization ruled out or necessary? Although these questions remained unanswered, several arguments point in different directions. On the one hand we suppose that Evangelicals will not

easily be seduced into the process of hybridization. We learned that Evangelicals are well aware of their boundaries and fiercely protect them. They also have a strong conviction of being the only 'righteous' religion. Furthermore, there are less similarities between Evangelicalism (absence mediators) and Indigenous Spirituality than for example Catholicism and Indigenous beliefs. Crossing religious boundaries can have severe consequences in the case of *Evangelicos*. Secretly visiting Maximón is a taboo, we cannot expect our informants to reveal this kind of information with ease. Nonetheless, their version of the events could be of crucial importance for a deeper understanding of the local new dynamics. On the other hand we think a new wave of hybridization is not ruled out when seen from the 'Maya perspective'. Maya spirituality has proved to be resilient for hundreds of years and is still practiced, we find it unlikely that with the emergence Evangelicalism they will 'suddenly' disappear. Arguably they find again a way to continue their practices despite Evangelicalism gaining more and more popularity.

While we looked at the local religious and spiritual dynamics in Santiago Atitlán it is important not to forget that the town is connected to broader dynamics in the world. We cannot view this town as if it were isolated from the outside. Influences such as tourism and NGO's that promote cultural heritage are all quite recent developments that have contributed to the shift in dynamics in Santiago Atitlán.

Concluding, meaning and lifestyles in Santiago Atitlán differ, and through observing how the *Tz'utujiles* relate to Maximón we discovered the broader dynamics in town. The dynamics are reflected in the way that Maximón is contested by these different groups, just like the practices of 'the other'. While this causes unrest between the groups, relative peace is held in town. We perceive Maximón as an intriguing figure which functions as a boundary between different groups as well as a mirror reflecting wider society.

## B.2 Resumen en Español

Resumen de la tesis escrito por Elizabeth Hokke y Ermesinde De Strijcker:

Hokke, E. and E. De Strijcker.

2015 Santiago Atitlán: Pueblo de Dios? Maximón: Sujeto de un significado religioso impugnado

Esta tesis es el resultado de ocho semanas de investigación en Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala. Estuvimos acá a partir del 23 de febrero hasta el 17 de marzo. Hemos utilizado el trabajo de campo y los métodos de antropología para obtener una comprensión más profunda de las dinámicas religiosas del pueblo. Nuestro objetivo era incluir las múltiples perspectivas de los diferentes grupos que viven en Santiago Atitlán. Los grupos que presentamos en esta tesis son los católicos, los cofrades, las tradicionalistas (los que se distancian de las prácticas sincréticas) y los evangélicos.

En esta investigación vimos Maximón como vehículo de significado para los diferentes grupos religiosos. Esto nos permitió obtener una mejor comprensión de las dinámicas religiosas del pueblo. Utilizamos la siguiente pregunta principal para descubrir estas dinámicas: "*¿Cómo se reflejan las dinámicas religiosas y espirituales en Santiago Atitlán en el significado que los Tz'utujiles dan al culto de Maximón?*". Empezamos la investigación al dividir la pregunta en dos temas principales. En primer lugar nos fijamos en Maximón y las prácticas en que está involucrado. Además, queríamos saber el significado que se le da por los católicos, los cofrades y los tradicionalistas. La afirmación de que el catolicismo y la espiritualidad maya han mezclado en los últimos 400 años fue la razón para observar a estos grupos juntos. El otro grupo y el tema que está incluido en nuestra investigación es el evangelismo y su opinión sobre Maximón y las prácticas relacionadas con él.

### **Contexto**

En la versión revisada de su libro *'La guerra por el corazón y el alma de un pueblo Maya del altiplano'* Carlson observa un cambio interesante en la dinámica religiosa de Santiago Atitlán; *'La guerra por el corazón y el alma de Santiago Atitlán ya no es una lucha del pueblo contra el exterior. Más bien, Atitlán se ha vuelto sobre si misma'* ... (Carlson 2011: xvii). Antes de presentar los resultados más importantes de nuestra investigación, damos una breve descripción del contexto en que este cambio ha tenido lugar.

Guatemala se ha enfrentado a varias oleadas de intervenciones religiosas "externas". La aparición del catolicismo español y su fusión con las creencias y prácticas locales (indígenas) durante la época colonial se llama generalmente 'Catolicismo popular' (Sanabria 2007: 183). Esta designación indica cómo el catolicismo ya está integrado en el paisaje religioso local. Esta integración no significa necesariamente una aceptación. Nos dimos cuenta, por ejemplo, cómo en Santiago Atitlán católicos, cofradías y tradicionalistas redefinieron sus límites y cómo un conflicto surgió entre los dos primeros.

Desde finales del siglo XX hay un nuevo actor en el paisaje religioso. Aunque la aparición del evangelismo en Guatemala es bastante reciente, Carlson sostiene que tampoco ya pueden ser tratados como forasteros; la mayor iglesia Evangélica de Santiago Atitlán se convirtió en una "iglesia autóctona" que ya sirve como un ejemplo para las iglesias Evangélicas en los Estados Unidos (Carlson 2011: xvii). Esto implica que como ex-forasteros ya obtuvieron un apoyo suficiente en el pueblo para influenciar de nuevo las dinámicas religiosas locales. En general, Carlson está en lo correcto cuando escribe '*Atitlán se ha vuelto sobre sí misma*'. Estas dinámicas más amplias se reflejan también en el sentido de que nuestros informantes tienen de Maximón.

### **Paralelismos interesantes**

Durante nuestra estancia en Santiago Atitlán hemos descubierto algunos paralelismos interesantes en nuestros datos de la investigación. Estos resultados son de importancia decisiva para entender la dinámica religiosa en Santiago Atitlán. Mencionamos en este resumen dos de ellos. En primer lugar, nuestra investigación reveló que Maximón no sólo tiene un significado para los tradicionalistas y cofradías, sino también para los católicos y los evangélicos. Sin embargo, las opiniones son muy diferentes. Para los tradicionalistas y cofradías Maximón es como un 'abuelo' que debe ser respetado. Algunos evangélicos lo ven como nada más que una estatua de madera, pero la mayoría de evangélicos que encontramos están convencidos de que Maximón contiene un mal espíritu que funciona como un cómplice del Diablo. El hecho que él tenga un significado para todo el mundo muestra que Maximón está en realidad todavía muy presente en Santiago Atitlán.

Otra observación notable que hicimos es la creencia en un mundo de los espíritus por parte de todos los habitantes de Santiago Atitlán, incluidos los evangélicos. No esperábamos esto de antemano. Sin embargo, la creencia en el mundo espiritual se expresa de diferentes maneras. Para los cofrades Maximón y los *nahuales* (antepasados) funcionan como protectores. La creencia en el mundo espiritual de los católicos se expresa en historias de

malos espíritus y posesiones por estos malos espíritus. Curiosamente, los evangélicos creen también en el mundo espiritual en el que hacen una división estricta entre los malos espíritus y el Espíritu Santo. Ellos clasifican a Maximón en el grupo de los malos espíritus.

### **Principales hallazgos**

Descubrimos que los diferentes grupos dan a Maximón un significado diferente. Aunque la mayoría de los evangélicos son muy críticos hacia Maximón y las cofradías, otras como los cofradías y las tradicionalistas le respetan mucho. La razón de porqué los evangélicos son críticos es porque piensan que Maximón y las prácticas "tradicionales" en las cofradías se interponen en el camino de convertir Guatemala en una nación próspera. Además, lo perciben como estatua de madera o un mal espíritu (un ayudante del Diablo). Muchos católicos se distancian de las prácticas también. Esto se puede ver en la división que ocurrió entre las cofradías y la iglesia católica por ejemplo. Para las *cofradías* y las tradicionalistas, por otro lado, Maximón tiene un lugar importante en su vida y tienen un gran respeto por él y su trabajo. El término sincretismo, que muchos usan en las teorías antropológicas, es más una discusión teórica que local. Pocos realmente piensan que están practicando algún tipo de mezcla o sincretismo. A pesar de que es utilizado por algunos habitantes para distanciarse de las prácticas en las cofradías.

Los diferentes significados que los grupos mantienen hacia Maximón se originan en diferentes estilos de vida y valores. A pesar de sus diferencias, parece que los grupos religiosos conviven de forma pacífica. No obstante, debajo de la superficie se pueden descubrir tensiones; hay un delicado equilibrio entre mostrar respeto o desaprobación hacia los otros. Encontramos varios ejemplos que sustentan este delicado equilibrio que presentamos en nuestra tesis. Parece que los *Tz'utujiles* viven juntos en el mismo pueblo uno junto al otro sin demasiada interferencia. Se podría esperar que con tales opiniones diferentes, el pueblo estaría en conflicto. Sin embargo, este no es el caso.

No obstante, la importancia de Maximón está disminuyendo y el evangelicalismo está prosperando. Muchos ex-cofrades ya se han convertido. A pesar de que muchos turistas vienen a visitarlo en Santiago Atitlán, y a pesar de un pequeño grupo que todavía está practicando la espiritualidad maya, parece que menos *Tz'utujiles* participan en las tradiciones. Este pequeño grupo que todavía está practicando las tradiciones de los antepasados se da cuenta de que están perdiendo mucho de los conocimientos. Sin embargo, los evangélicos no creen que Maximón desaparecerá automáticamente. Ellos saben que el diablo (y los malos espíritus) sólo será vencido cuando Jesús regrese a esta tierra.

A pesar de sus opiniones críticas, hay rumores sobre evangélicos que en secreto visitan a Maximón. ¿Hay que interpretar estas visitas secretas como una etapa intermedia en que algunos evangélicos ya convertidos todavía no pueden dejar su pasado? ¿O es que estas visitas secretas abren el camino a una nueva forma sincrética local del evangelicalismo? ¿Pueden existir ambos grupos uno al lado del otro; se descartó la hibridación o es necesario? Aunque estas preguntas quedaron sin respuesta, varios argumentos apuntan en diferentes direcciones. Por un lado, suponemos que los evangélicos no serán fácilmente seducidos en el proceso de hibridación. Aprendimos que los evangélicos son muy conscientes de sus límites y los protegen ferozmente. También tienen una fuerte convicción de ser la única religión 'justa'. Además, hay menos similitudes entre evangelicalismo y espiritualidad indígena que por ejemplo el catolicismo y las creencias indígenas. Cruzar fronteras religiosas pueden tener consecuencias graves en el caso de los Evangélicos. Visitar secretamente a Maximón es un tabú, no podemos esperar que nuestros informantes puedan revelar este tipo de información con facilidad. No obstante, su versión de los hechos podría ser de vital importancia para una comprensión más profunda de las nuevas dinámicas locales. Por otra parte creemos que una nueva ola de hibridación no se descarta cuando se ve desde la 'perspectiva maya'. La Religión maya ha demostrado ser resistente durante cientos de años y todavía se practica, nos parece poco probable que con la aparición de evangelicalismo vaya a desaparecer 'de repente'. Podría decirse que se encuentra una vez más una manera de continuar sus prácticas a pesar de evangelicalismo ganando más y más popularidad.

Mientras miramos las dinámicas religiosas y espirituales locales en Santiago Atitlán, es importante no olvidar que el pueblo está conectado a dinámicas más amplias del mundo. No podemos observar a este pueblo como si estuviera aislado del exterior. Influencias como el turismo y las ONG's que promueven el patrimonio cultural son desarrollos recientes que han contribuido al cambio en las dinámicas en Santiago Atitlán.

Para concluir, el significado y los estilos de vida en Santiago Atitlán son muy diferentes, y por medio de la observación de cómo los *Tz'utujiles* opinan sobre Maximón descubrimos las dinámicas más amplias del pueblo. Estas dinámicas se reflejan en la forma en que Maximón es impugnado por estos diferentes grupos, al igual que las prácticas 'del otro'. A pesar de que esto causa malestar entre los grupos, se existe una paz relativa en el pueblo. Percibimos Maximón como un personaje intrigante que funciona como un límite simbólico entre los diferentes grupos, así como un espejo que refleja la sociedad en general.