The Meanings of Marimba Music
in Rural Guatemala

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the social and ideological process of the marimba musical tradition in rural Guatemalan society. A basic assumption of the thesis is that "making music" and "talking about music" are forms of communication whose meanings arise from the social and cultural context in which they occur. From this point of view the main aim of this investigation is the analysis of the roles played by music within society and the construction of its significance as part of the social and cultural process of adaptation, continuity and change of Achi society. For instance the thesis elucidates how the dynamic of continuity and change affects the transmission of a musical tradition. The influence of the radio and its popular music on the teaching methods, music genres and styles of marimba music is part of a changing Indian society nevertheless it remains an important symbols of locality and ethnic identity. From an economic perspective, music change becomes a cultural strategy in conditions of socio-economic change. And in the politics of social interaction the thesis illustrates how, in a fragmented, "post"-war society, friendship is vital for music making. During fifteen months of fieldwork participant observation was carried out cultivating friendships in a land of mistrust, gossip and vengeance.

From the memory of a dead relative to the sensual imagination of a young love the author analyses the moral and ethic values and judgements about music performed in certain contexts and the transformation of those meanings into emotion which is interpreted by the author as a musical aesthetics of emotion.

Looking at the musical tradition in Rabinal in historical context and the meanings attributed to its music by both audience and musicians in present everyday life and during particular musical occasions an attempt is made to contribute to a contextual approach within the field of the anthropology of music.
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I dedicate this thesis to the memory of Esteban Uanché and to Celestino Cajbon whose music has helped to remember those whose lives were taken abruptly during the violence.

Photograph No. 1: Son marimba ensemble, La Reina Rabinalense
From left to right: Esteban Uanché, Celestino Cajbon and Mencho Uanché
Map of Guatemala with detail of Rabinal

Esca: 1:250,000
Fuente: IGN / E. A. F. G.
Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis examines the marimba musical tradition of the Maya Achi of Rabinal, Baja Verapáz, Guatemala. The son\' marimba is a long (2.16m) wooden keyboard instrument with large resonators played by three musicians (treble/melody, centre/harmony, bass/rhythm), who perform in most musical occasions, secular and religious, to bring people together.

The original aim of the research was to focus on the ways this non-written musical tradition is transmitted from one generation to another. In the process of documenting what I had thought was a fairly straightforward musicological topic, I was overwhelmed by the social experience of being in the field and by the realisation of the social nature of music. My attention soon moved from music as an objectified subject to the social relations, values and interests of musicians, audience. It became apparent that musical meaning arises from the social and cultural contexts in which musical production occurs and that the conditions of its production are also the conditions of the reproduction of the Achi society.

The main objective of this thesis is to demonstrate that music is a form of social practice. I approach the music of Rabinal by defining it as a process of production of social, moral and aesthetic meaning which occurs in and around the interaction between musicians and their audience before, during and after musical performance, that is, in social and musical performance contexts.

1 Please note that throughout the thesis, Spanish words appear in italics K'iche' Achi words are underlined.
THE THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO MUSIC

In this section I present an overview of anthropological work on the music and dance-dramas of Guatemala. This is followed by a theoretic discussion regarding the central concerns and recurrent themes of the thesis, placing them within existing anthropological and mainly ethnomusicological literature on context, cultural change, and cultural meaning. That tradition is a social process and that it is constantly redefined in response to cultural change is taken as a given. My interest is based on the social dynamics of the musical tradition, on the contexts of musical production, and the constructions of meaning of music practice in context.

Anthropological work on the music of Guatemala

With a few exceptions (e.g., O'Brien 1973; McArthur 1977), anthropological research into the music and dance drama of Guatemala has not transcended the descriptive level (see Paret-Limardo 1962; Chenoweth 1964; Castillo 1977; Horspool 1982; Arrivillaga 1990, 1993). The main emphasis of these works still lay in discovery, documentation, classification, and preservation. The influence of main theories and research methods can be detected in some of these works. Earlier ethnographies appear to be inspired by the works of Hornbostel and the Berlin School (Schneider 1991) definitions of the cultural roots of music are based on melodic typologies (Castillo 1977).

More recent ethnographers have taken a functionalist and culturally relativistic approach. They describe the economic and technical production of instruments (Camposeco 1992), their repertoires and occasions in terms of functions (Horspool 1982; Arrivillaga 1990, 1993) with educational purposes (Paret-Limardo 1962).

The literature on dance-dramas is more abundant and mainly focuses on historical and philological analyses of written texts or libretti (Correa and Cannon 1958; Bode 1961; Mace 1966; Montoya 1970; Acuña 1975; Breton 1994), although there are a few examples of musical form analysis (Horspool 1982; Sacor, Alvarez and Anleu 1991; Navarrete 1994). The general situation is of research with a theme and a lot of musicological description but with no analysis or outdated arguments with little articulation of data to support them. The study of Guatemalan music reveals little about
the society that produces it, let alone what the music means to, or how it is interpreted by that society. The thesis builds on the few exceptions to this general rule, such as Chenoweth (1964), O'Brien (1975) and McArthur (1977). Chenoweth's descriptive study of the Guatemalan marimba also provides a thorough organological analysis of the evolution of the marimba with scattered insights concerning musical knowledge and performance practice which have been useful in my analysis of musical cognition.

McArthur's (1977) investigation into the motivations of dancers and dance organisers in Aguacatán, Guatemala, reveals a deep relationship between dance-drama performances and belief in the ancestors. His findings indicate that dance-drama performance is a means of communication between the living and the ancestors. The purpose of dance-dramas is to please the ancestors for fear of retribution and to liberate them from their suffering. Although McArthur's cognitive approach does reveal the motivation and meanings of dance-dramas and agrees with my own findings, it does not explain why the relationship with the dead is so important. In other words, it lacks an analysis of their worldview.

O'Brien's (1975) study of the 'ancestor songs' of the Tzutuhil-Maya of Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala, does, however, incorporate local worldviews and is, from my point of view, the most important contribution to date in the field of modern ethnomusicology concerning Guatemala. Her work refutes the widespread notion that the Maya did not have songs. She has discovered a rich, ancient repertoire of religious songs, accompanied by contemporary ranchero-style guitar music. These songs are deeply bound up with traditional concepts of time and space and her analysis relates them to creation myths. O'Brien concludes that they are petitions to the ancestral spirits and the saints that help to preserve the order of the world.

From my point of view, it would have been helpful if O'Brien had reflected upon the syncretic process that resulted in a combination of foreign music with ancestral song texts. This thesis sheds light on the issue of musical change and the preservation of meaning.
The Contextual Analysis of Music

The first attempt to study music as part of culture and society, fusing anthropology with musicology and attributing both with equal importance, was "The Anthropology of Music" (Merriam 1964). In this influential work, Merriam proposed to study music in its cultural context. At the time of publication, anthropology had not yet liberated itself from the positivistic influences of the sciences and still treated the study of material culture and behaviour according to traits, types, and functions (Herskovits 1974 [1948]). It is therefore not surprising that while Merriam’s proposal attempted to give a processual vision of music as part of the social totality, his method compartmentalised the descriptive study of music and only later was this linked with socio-cultural concepts and behaviours. As Blacking points out, this methodology resulted in separate analyses of cultural context and music (Blacking in Baily 1990:xiv). Merriam’s concept of studying music in its cultural context was also criticised by Stokes (1994:97) on the grounds that “In this formulation, music is simply a ‘thing’ slotted into a static social and cultural matrix existing outside and beyond performance”. From Stokes’ perspective, the concept as it stands completely ignores the role of performance beyond the communication of pre-established cultural messages. Despite these limitations, the core of Merriam’s theory remains valid. This thesis has been inspired by his idea that music is part of the culture that produces it and therefore to study music, one has to focus on the cultural context in which it is produced.

In a general sense the analysis of context refers to the conditions and circumstances that make an event and its interpretation possible. Here I approach the study of music as culture (Herndon and McCleod 1990), where context becomes the conditions for textuality and intertextuality. The study of musical occasions (Herndon and McCleod 1990:154) as cultural performances (Singer 1958) constitute a species of cognitive frame for the study of contexts of musical practice (Herndon 1971).

The theory of performance has been a very useful model for the study of music in context. Qureshi (1982, 1986) is concerned with the importance of musical performance as the place and moment when and where meaning and significance is given. In her study of Sufi musical performances in India and Pakistan, Qureshi argues that music cannot be seen outside its performance context but only during the
interaction between the audience and those who play music. She emphasises the processual character of musical practice, and the role of the musician where, she states, music and performance context converge: the musician who possesses musical knowledge and skill must also have knowledge about ritual context and the behaviours expected by the audience. This is also the case in Rabinal, where musicians' knowledge of ritual practice is specialised because musical order responds to a ritual order of behaviour.

The issue that concerns me here is that the participating audience listens, interprets, makes moral judgements and ascribes value to the music according to the context in which it is played, who by, and for whom. Different evaluation criteria apply to musical performances in cofradías (religious sodalities), wedding parties in private homes, and cantinas (bars). Whether musicians are contracted to play by, for example, a carguero (cofradia office holder), the local leader of a political party, or the municipal authorities also affects participants' evaluation of an event. For this reason, agency can not only be seen from the musicians' point of view but also from the audience's perspective as well. Furthermore, music-making musicians are themselves listeners of what they and other musicians are playing. They are the most concerned audience of all the participants. In fact, all participants are audience, although it is true that, while playing, musicians are expressing and controlling musical ideas associated with certain meanings and, in doing so, determine what participants think about music.

The relationship between daily life experience and musical performance is emphasised by Stokes (1994), who suggests that performance "reorganises and manipulates daily experiences of social reality ... [it] is a vital tool in the hands of performers in social games recognised for their power and prestige" (ibid.:97). Incorporating Goffman's (1959) theory of performance, I postulate that musical performance and social interaction or performance in daily life (e.g., client-patron relations) together constitutes the process of musical production. To this extent, the creation of meaning of music has a place in both types of context.

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2. Stokes studied bicultural performances of Turkish and Irish musicians and audience in Irish pubs.
The attention given here to social interaction in daily life is a way of situating musical practice in social context at the level of the social relations that constitute part of the conditions of musical practice. At the same time, the social strategies of musicians, the individuals who listen to them (including the people who hire them), and those who have the power to influence musical practice (such as the political cultural agents of the government or, in the case of Guatemala, the army), all respond to the changeable social, economic and political conditions of municipal, regional and national society.

Musical Change and Continuity

One of the central concerns of this thesis is to document musical change and Achi musicians’ perceptions and explications of change in a way that takes both into account. The observation of change in the marimba teaching/learning process and in the repertoire and style of marimbistas (marimba musicians) in the context of musical performance is intimately related in a complex way with the social, political and cultural change experienced by Achi society. This has resulted from urban change, modernisation, a generalisation of market relations with consequent commercialisation, and the devastating effects of counterinsurgent war.

In a sense, the history of ethnomusicology has oscillated between a search for cross-cultural musical universals and a posture which maintains that each culture has its own music that is different from all other music (Nettl 1977:2). Cultural and biological evolution theories have strongly influenced comparative musicology and ethnomusicology in the search of universal features in music, but more recently interest has favoured the view that music is a culturally bounded phenomenon that is historically determined by social practices.

The social and musical performance context analysis applied within this work assumes that music is a process as well as a product and that processes of musical change and continuity are intimately linked to the changes in continuity in the wider society. As an example of this, the thesis discusses the potential conflict between generations in the practice of music derived from the changes in material existence.
Merriam (1964) emphasises a processual approach to music, conceptualising music as part of the totality of society and culture. He points out that culture is not static but dynamic and always changing, although there is a tendency towards stability because of the recursive process of enculturation and forms of learning. Change and cultural dynamic derive from the adaptation in practice of learnt knowledge and behaviour to new circumstances. Culture (including music) changes when there is a change in the stimuli and responses arising from social conditions.

Blacking (1977, 1986) proposed an instrumental concept of culture although more as mould or boundary to human musicality. His views about music fluctuated between a functionalist approach and a structuralist one; the latter is revealed by his interest on cognition and musical universals. Later, he became interested in the folk models of music and the role of intentionality in the music making of individual musicians (Baily 1990:xv). Blacking warns the investigator not to mechanically apply sociological models of cultural change to the study of musical change. He makes a distinction between significant musical change and constant adjustments in social interaction arising from new necessities. Blacking’s objections are based on the role played by musicians and their public as agents of musical change. Behind musical products lies a local theory about them. Processes of musical change do not occur in the products but in non-musical factors, that is, in cognitive factors (worldviews) which guide the decisions of the musicians and the appreciation of the audience. Blacking’s idea that a change in people’s conceptual frame or world view is necessary in order for “significant musical changes” or a change of musical system to occur is useful in understanding Achi views about music.

Although Achi people acknowledge that musical styles and genres have changed, they also say that it is the same ancestral music. Musical changes are framed within ancient dual concepts and principles of order, thus preserving meaning. In Blacking’s terms, the content of this thesis would be about musical adaptation and not about musical change. The only major problem with his hypothesis is that the continuity of musical meaning does not mean that music does not change. Music is always changing and even explanations change and adapt too in order to give the same meanings to it. Thus while I agree with Blacking to the extent of accepting that the
preservation of a worldview may indicate that the Achi musical system as cognitive and affective structures may have not changed, I do not ignore musical changes which, I show, are significant.

Bourdieu's (1977) materialistic theory of practice is not too far from Merriam's (1964) position. Bourdieu proposes that the material conditions of existence of a particular social group produce 'habitus'. This is understood to be a system of dispositions or a matrix of "perceptions, appreciations and actions" (ibid.:83) which simultaneously produce practices that tend to reproduce the imminent regularities in the objective conditions of production of the generating principle (habitus). According to Bourdieu, individuals' pragmatic evaluations and spontaneous action strategies arise within a framework of objective possibilities derived from collective past experiences. In this sense the system of dispositions is a principle of regularity, continuity and the transformation of practices (ibid.:82-83).

Waterman (1991) analyses the problem of change and continuity in Nigerian Jùjú musical style from the perspective of music practice, posing the question, "How does a reproduction of a structure become its transformation?" After defining the concept of structure as "the learned configurations of knowledge and value stabilised in memory and guiding human activity" (ibid.:51), Waterman suggests that cultural continuity is not a stasis but a recursive process:

The reproduction of individual representation of cultural patterns is grounded in a flow of activity continually shaped by actor's interpretations of and reactions to constraints and incentives encountered in the world. Practice feeds back onto structure, opening the possibility of transformation when actors are confronted with contradictions grounded in circumstances not of their own choosing, and are thus forced to rethink normally tacit assumptions and values (ibid.).

Waterman sees musical performance as a social practice. From my point of view, this social practice extends to performance during the participants' production of music in everyday life. Extending Blacking's (1977) proposition that changes occur on a cognitive level and in non-musical factors during decisions that precede music-making, I suggest that musical changes transpire in both performative contexts (i.e. musical and daily life performance). In both individuals interact, reproducing and

transforming structures of knowledge and value and displaying strategies of action and judgement motivated not only by conditions remote from their control (as Waterman suggests) but also by individuals' intentions to change or maintain conditions of musical production.

The reinterpretation of musical tradition as part of social and cultural processes of change and continuity is a recursive process. When musical and extra-musical factors lead to changes in the material conditions of musical production two possibilities may result: the emergence of new meaning and/or the preservation of the old. In Rabinal, musical innovation by some skilled musicians within the ancient son genre and its incorporation into the musical practice of other musicians (e.g. all those playing sones) does not change the meaning of music unless the expectation on the part of the participants are turned upside down. While changes within a style are perceptible, the value and meaning of that style remain constant because the final aim is to affirm and legitimise musical practice as part of the same musical tradition shared by all musicians and their public, both living and dead. Thus one hears it said that “The music is the same, everything continues the same as was heard by the ancestors.” The meanings attached to the new musical genres from the urban centres (piezas) that are being introduced into Rabinalense musical life relate to Ladino power: for Achis, participating in an event where piezas are played, whether as musician, organiser or audience, is a means of identifying with that power. In this way urban influences are framed within the old social conflict of a biethnic community.

**Meaning in Performance Context**

Meyer (1956:1) posits that there is general agreement among composers, musicians, and musicologists in all cultures that music has meaning that is communicated to participants and audience alike. However, that is where agreement ends. Some agree that the meaning of music resides in its referential nature, in other words, in the relation between musical sign and the extra-musical world that it designates. Others propose that the meaning of music lies solely or principally within the enclosed context of musical structures in the perception of an established relation within the work of art. Meyer's attempts to reconcile both perspectives by partially negating them and accepting them at the same time. He suggests that the musical stimulus can be a reference to itself, that is, to the past experience of a style or a
musical passage creating expectation and with this, meaning. His interest focuses on
the aspect of meaning, whether it is an intellectual or an emotional state (depending on
the musical competence of the listener), the result of understanding, and the response to
the inherent relations of the musical organisation.

Recent ethnomusicological studies of musical cognition aim to create a
theoretical-methodological model that successfully unites the cognitive aspects inherent
in musical structures with those derived from the culture and society in which they are
produced (Harwood 1979; Koskoff 1988; Tolbert 1992; Moisala 1993). While noting
the importance of cognitive processes derived from the exclusively musical stimulus
and of the theories of gestalt or physio-biology determinants of cognitive processes, my
interest in this thesis is to demonstrate that the meaning of music is primarily referential
and, because of this quality, it may also be affective. The denotative process implies
knowledge beyond that of musical experience alone and that this meaning is produced,
reproduced, and transformed within the context of social and musical interaction. I
address music as a social communicative phenomenon that transmits concepts and
social, religious, moral, and aesthetic values in agreement with specific performance
contexts. Meaning is socially, culturally, and performance context bounded.

In dealing with meaning some works have studied local systems of music
type in diverse cultures such as the Are of the Solomon Islands, the Kaluli of New
Guinea and the Kpelle of Liberia (Zemp 1978, 1979; Stone 1981; Feld 1990 [1982]). In
Rabinal, general concepts and principles of order relating to the social and natural
world are applied to music. Basso (1981) has written about the relationship between
mythical narratives and musical performances in ritual events and argues that myth and
ritual are connected “not simply by thematic homologies, but by their respective ability
to create a particular kind of spiritual awareness, to construct complementary visions of
a comprehensive reality”. This points to the possibility of envisaging a Kalapalo
musical religion (ibid.:291). Similarly, the Achi abogados (prayer makers) and the son
music played by the violin and the adufe (square drum) ensemble and the marimba are
complementary in the ritual process of recreating the world as the ancestors did. From a
musicological perspective, I also demonstrate the relationship between the ritual
structure and the form of the son music cycle.
With regard to meaning and musical occasions, I discuss Rabinalense moral ideology about male domination and power (Ortner and Whitehead 1981). This identifies women with alcohol and son music and the changing meaning of this association depends on the type of musical occasion in which the son music is performed. In particular I describe and analyse the anniversaries of the dead, which are the most important musical occasion for the Achi Rabinalense. One of the main ideas is to show the relationship between the presence or absence of music and the implications of the use of certain types of musical ensembles during the process of ritual mourning. Ritualised mourning aims to change mourners' memories of the deceased from sad to happy memories and to change their relationship with the dead person from one of suffering, need, and potential illness to fulfilment and health. This topic leads to a discussion of the anthropology of the emotions (e.g. Schieffelin 1976, 1995; Rosaldo 1984; Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990).

Musicians' discourses about their musical performance and the emotions they evoke in their audience (Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990) are presented to illustrate the emergent quality of musical performances (Schieffelin 1995). The sones for the souls of the dead (ánimas) are not only an evocation of a mood: they may turn into actual memories and feelings of sadness and into an aesthetics of musical emotions.

FIELDWORK METHOD

My interest in the music of Rabinal developed from my investigation of the annual performance of 'Rabinal Achi' dance-drama, which is also known to Mayan scholars as the 'baile del Tun' (Yurchenco 1980; Breton 1993, etc.) and to Achi speakers as Xajoj Tum. This short period of fieldwork (December 1993–January 1994), which formed the basis of my MA thesis (Navarrete 1994), left me with the desire to know the object of my study in greater depth.

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4 My Master's thesis is based on a comparison between a transcription of the music of the dance-drama published in the middle of the 19th century (Brasseur de Bourbourg 1962) and my own transcription of its music from a recording made by Henrietta Yurchenco in Rabinal in 1945. The work suggests a musical continuity of certain rhythmical forms and melodic design and, based on this, I hypothesised that the written and oral forms of this dance-drama are complementary.
My first visit to Rabinal took place under the auspices of the Mexican institution CIESAS (Centre for Investigations and Superior Studies in Social Anthropology). My project involved videoing preparations for and the performance of the Rabinal Achi dance-drama and recording its music during the fiesta celebrating the town’s patron san Pablo, between 20-25 January. My prior knowledge of the dance-drama enabled me to devise a very precise work plan and I knew whom to approach in order to achieve the aims of my study. The relationships I established with the prestigious representatives of the dance-drama gave me privileged and direct entrance to the Rabinal’s music and dance world. I filmed as much as I could of the diverse events taking place during the main celebration and people came to know me as the man with the ‘big eye’ into their religious tradition. People were surprisingly kind and apparently did not mind my intrusive eye and questioning behaviour. I was unaware at the time of the new connotations in Achi culture of social etiquette in social interaction, especially towards strangers and non-Indians that had developed during and after the height of the political violence between 1981 and 1983. Nevertheless I suffered no obvious repercussions from my ignorance though perhaps I left some people feeling aggrieved.

During the festivities, marimbas were being played virtually non-stop from early in the morning to late at night all over town. Marimbas attracted the largest audiences of children and adults, creating and expanding the festive environment well beyond the house where the event (alegria) was taking place. The omnipresence of the marimba sound reflected the importance people gave to it in their conversations about marimbistas and their musical performances.

I soon realised that Rabinal municipality’s numerous marimba ensembles varied in type and repertoire. During my short stay in the town I was able to observe and listen to a great variety of types, genres, and styles of music during different musical occasions. This situation led me to believe that the best way of studying the social nature of music in Rabinal was to study its marimba tradition. I had also noticed that in all types of marimba ensemble, the musicians were always male, ranging in age from ten-year-old boys to old men in their seventies. Furthermore, some adult musicians were obviously beginners, which encouraged me in my decision to learn to play the marimba.
I returned briefly to Rabinal in June and July 1994 and for a longer period between February and December 1995 with my wife, Judith Zur, to conduct fieldwork for the present dissertation. Judith had conducted work on the exhumation of one of Rabinal’s large clandestine graves during the previous year and had decided to respond to a local need by setting up workshops on mental health with rural health workers.

Our first move was to introduce ourselves to Rabinal’s political and religious authorities and especially to the town’s military commissioner and his civil commissioner assistants. Among the latter I recognised two marimbistas with whom I was already acquainted. I explained my interests to the group and the presence of these musicians seemed to help forge an immediate response. Included in our rounds of the town authorities was a visit to the Dominican priests. During a conversation with one of them, I requested access to the parish historical records to search for musical information. The priest was pleasantly surprised by my interest and joked that I was the first person not to be interested in “searching for bones”.

Guatemala’s 35 years of low intensity war officially ended in 1996. MINUGUA (United Nations Mission in Guatemala) was supporting and supervising negotiations between the guerrilla URNG and the Guatemalan government. In Rabinal, two major exhumations had been undertaken in 1994 and a third, which proved to be the largest yet found in Latin America, began in March 1995, within a month of our arrival. MINUGUA and the Catholic Church were investigating the atrocities and massacres that had taken place in Rabinal between 1981-82, which left 5,000 people dead or ‘disappeared’.

For the first time, the political situation in Guatemala allowed an opening for people to give their testimonies about what happened during the political violence. This was not without its price. Wounds were re-opened and people were again experiencing pain and fear. The situation was tense, given that local perpetrators were still at large. The fear in the streets was palpable. Malicious gossip, which is part of the normal means of disseminating information, proliferated at an alarming rate; many of the dangerous rumours about future retaliation against anyone providing ‘foreigners’ (i.e., MINUGUA) with testimonies probably emanated from the army and from their Ladino
supporters. Nevertheless, the successful exhumation of clandestine graves in the Rabinal villages of Chichupac, Rio Negro and Plan de Sanchez encouraged other grieving villagers to petition for more exhumations; about thirty have been requested of the forensic teams.

Grief resulting from the re-opening of wounds was contained through the celebration of Rabinal’s traditional anniversaries of the dead. We could hear and see these celebrations taking place all over town and in every village almost daily. The expression of mourning coupled with the new threats, especially towards widows who were organising collective events to celebrate the anniversaries of their dead relatives for the first time since the violence, created an overwhelming situation in Rabinal.

The presence of foreigners had been rare in Rabinal until the exhumations began and Judith and I therefore tried to disassociate ourselves from the UN mission in order to lessen the likelihood of evoking fear in others and bringing danger to ourselves (cf. Nordstrom and Robben 1995). I wondered if I was being paranoid when I felt that men fixing a bus across the street from our house were really spying on us. And perhaps it is coincidental that during the festivities of Holy Week (when local Ladinos, doubtless including assassins, return home from other parts of Guatemala) an apparently bloodthirsty motorcyclist tried to run me down. Our Guatemalan and foreign friends in the capital (who were involved in the restitution process) told us we were very brave to live in the quagmire that was Rabinal. Perhaps Judith’s work, which was providing us with numerous and horrendous testimonies of persecution, torture, and killings, didn’t help to quell our fears or the feeling that others were suspicious of us and even avoiding us. On the other hand, Judith’s work and her friendship with several health promoters in the villages allowed me access to places such as Xococ, which was implicated in the violence like no other village. Xococ had become a dangerous place to go, as confirmed by a Guatemalan friend who was held and left tied up for hours during a recent visit. Yet Xococ is a relatively wealthy village with a vibrant musical tradition and, through Judith’s contacts, I was able to conduct research there with people who would otherwise have been inaccessible to me. My previous attempts to make contact through the municipal agents had failed because people did not trust the local government representatives and musicians thought that they were being called to register their musical instruments for taxation purposes.
Because of the general unrest resulting from the investigations of the peace process, I decided to follow the advice of an old teacher of mine, the Guatemalan linguist Otto Schuman. He told me to work with those people with whom I felt most comfortable; bonds based on trust and enjoyment would be created with relative ease with a few people, which in turn would lead me to expand the feeling of confidence among other people. This is precisely what happened; the strategy worked to my advantage in the long run. My collaboration with the young musician Celestino Cajbón, whom I had met casually during a cofradía fiesta during my first visit to Rabinal in 1993, gave me access to his 62 year old maternal uncle, Esteban Uanché. Esteban is considered by most Rabinalenses to be the best and also the most delicado (grumpy) marimbista in town. Knowing his reputation, I had visited him five times to ask him for marimba lessons (for which I offered to pay); he refused to consider the matter. I had to wait until he came to me, which he did once I had begun taking lessons from Celestino; his curiosity had been aroused and he decided to investigate. Once I had established a relationship with a member of his extended family, he gladly accepted the task of teaching me, without pay. I finally ended up taking marimba lessons twice a week, once with the young Celestino and once with Esteban.

Being a foreigner, a man, a musician, a Ladino (non-Indian and non-trustworthy, from the Achi Indian point of view), and a Mexican were all factors that played an important role in my relationship with people in general. Being a foreigner, especially given the situation in Rabinal at that time, was initially a handicap. Only a few people were prepared to open the door to friendship but, once inside, others began to collaborate with me and became willing to be the focus of attention through being associated with my work.

Being a Mestizo and a Mexican had several connotations. On one hand to be a Spanish-speaking Ladino\(^5\) with physical features similar to those of most middle-class (and hence powerful) Guatemalan Ladinos who normally treat Achi people with disdain and as minors, did not help very much. In some instances Judith was also considered a Ladina, although she is more easily recognisable as a non-Guatemalan; her distant link with their Guatemalan Ladino oppressors led some Achís to have
greater confidence in her. Once people knew I was Mexican, they began to react quite favourable towards me; this is because, historically, Guatemalans in general view Mexico as the ‘older brother’ country. Indeed, being Mexican gave me the added advantage of a cultural background similar to that of Guatemalan Indian and Ladino society.

As a man and a musician in a social world dominated by men, I was given the same status as other musicians (who are exclusively male), which meant that they were open to exchanging ideas about their concepts of music-making and especially about the relationship between music and women. Being a musician interested in learning to play the marimba was perhaps the most effective way of helping musicians to feel comfortable with me and to be enthusiastic, co-operative and patient. Musicians have always had a privileged and respected position in Rabinal society, which is recognised by both Achi and Ladino audiences. But to reflect upon their (rarely discussed) personal skill and knowledge, which is the basis of their respectability, and to share it with me led to an effective and pleasant feeling between us.

My attempts to learn to play the marimba (which was by no means an easy task) made it easier for me to gain an understanding of musicians’ techniques and methods of musical practice and an active insight into their concepts about music. This process was mediated in both positive and negative ways by my training as a classical musician. Western concepts gave me a point of reference from which to observe and raise detailed questions about sound, technique, musical form and style. Yet sometimes my approach to what they were doing and saying did not make sense to me. It was hard to ignore my musicological baggage and biases and to start as the true apprentice I was. For example, my use of video to record special musical sessions in order to register techniques and generate musicians’ comments upon musical style (Stone and Stone 1981) did not work as I intended. When I played the videotapes to the musicians, they were captivated by the images of themselves on the screen and it was often hard to get beyond this. There was a mismatch between the focus of my questions and the focus of their attention.

Ladinos are known as Mestizos in Mexico.
A discussion about emic/etic views (Alvarez-Pereyre and Arom 1993; Bauman 1993; Herndon 1993) is relevant here. When questioning musicians I discovered that what I referred to as listening to music implied a way of listening which differed from their perceptions and understandings of music. I found that communication about music-making was far more successful when I played side by side with them, memorising positions, and imitating their movements which I could then replicate in order to illustrate questions or an idea. Only when musicians referred to musical concepts themselves was I able to delve into them, sometimes requesting an example or stimulating further discussion.

Inspired by the ideal of bi-musicality proposed by Mantle Hood (1971), it was not only easy but necessary to become emotionally engaged and to observe through co-participation if I wanted to have any success in playing, let alone in understanding musical knowledge and practice (Tedlock 1991). As with language, the more I could play their music, the deeper my understanding of their musical tradition became.

Most interviews were conducted in Spanish since all male adults and many women are bilingual. In a few cases, such as interviewing older women, another family member translated for me. I took Achi language lessons with Tono Lopez, a local linguist and a member of the Academy of Mayan Languages, who gave me important insights into Achi cosmovision. He also translated and interpreted prayers which I had recorded in context.

I interviewed a wide variety of people in the field. My attempts to interview musicians resulted in a variety of responses, ranging from those who never gave the opportunity to establish a conversation to those who encouraged my visits to their homes. Interviews were not restricted to musicians. Including their wives in discussions threw up interesting family dynamics such as concerning the conflict between a musician’s domestic and public obligations. Interviews with non-musicians – children, women, and men – were also important in order to get their views on such issues as musicians and musical performance. I also interviewed other ritual specialists such as abogados, who lead Customary Catholic rituals, and dance-drama directors.
The types and depth of interviews also varied. Interviews and musical performances were recorded with the participants' permission and proved to be hardly disruptive. These turned out to be the best source of information for planning further interviews to ask specific questions while in the field; during the writing phase, my tapes proved invaluable for organising my data and for providing details to expand my notes.

Formal interviews with guided questions were mostly conducted with musicians who enjoyed conversation and who felt constrained by a detailed questionnaire. I used questionnaires to get a sense of the types and uses of music, the number and distribution of instrumental ensembles and of musicians who were active in the municipality, and to obtain perceptions of musicians by young audiences.

I always explained that my tape recordings of marimba music were only being made to facilitate my study. Musicians did not object, so long as I gave them a copy of the tape, which I was happy to do in every instance. Audiences in Rabinal record musicians' performances in order to relive the occasion and its music at home; some people have even set up small businesses, reproducing and selling cassettes of music recorded at social occasions. Musicians disapproved of this common practice but were powerless to prevent it. The current debate among ethnomusicologists about the copyright of music recorded in the field (Seeger 1992) has no meaning to the Rabinalense, who are unaware of that recordings of 'world music' have become one of the most profitable sectors of the music industry in the United States and Europe.

In Mexico, as in other Latin American countries, governments have institutionally supported anthropology as a means of channelling their cultural and social policies. This situation has strongly influenced anthropological practice, which is mainly concerned with popular organisation, advising and supporting cultural and economic projects, and generally voicing people's needs and demands (Behague 1991). I think that whenever possible, the music researcher should promote the music and the musicians with whom he/she is working and help to create and find funding for music projects that could have economic and cultural benefit.
Finally, the writing of this thesis has made me realise that the material I have collected and the testimonies I have edited only evoke a partial truth concerning Rabinalense musical culture; the whole enterprise of research and analysis entails an enormous responsibility which I must bear alone (Clifford and Marcus 1986).

**THESIS OUTLINE**

The work is divided in two major sections. The first section (chapters 2-6) is mainly historical but includes the basic concepts of music and its place in the Achi worldview; the second section (chapters 7-11) concentrates on the social context of musical practice and on musical change.

Chapter 2 sketches the social and political history of the Achi people from early Colonial times to the present. It addresses the historical role of the cofradías, the process of Ladinoization, the systems of exploitation, and the recent political and religious conflicts in the context of a counterinsurgency war lasting 35 years.

The following two chapters describe the basic Achi worldview. The concepts provide the ideological frame for understanding Achi views of music and musical practice. Chapter 3 focuses on the heart of Customary Catholicism, which is the belief in the dead. An analysis of their myths of creation and their ritual discourses shows the relationship between the living and the ancestors and the role of music and prayers in the continual (yearly) recreation of the world. Chapter 4 presents an analysis of the general Achi concepts and principles of order applied to music, musical instruments, and musical practice.

History is revisited in the following two chapters, although this time the central topic is music. Chapter 5 is divided in two main sections: the first is dedicated to the history and development of the marimba in Guatemala in general and Rabinal in particular; the second is devoted to a historical and ethnomusicological analysis of the marimba son and its structural relationship to ritual. Chapter 6 presents an analysis of Achi ideologies concerning music, alcohol and women, which is rooted in colonial history.
Chapter 7 focuses on the most important musical occasions in Rabinal, which are the anniversaries of the dead. It demonstrates the increasing participation of music during the fourteen-year process of ritual mourning. It also presents a personal experience during one of these family celebrations.

The next two chapters address the topic of social and musical change and adaptation. Chapter 8 deals with the changes in the marimba teaching/learning tradition and the generational challenges that follow with this. The chapter also includes an analysis of Achi æsthetic perceptions of style. Chapter 9 looks into economical aspects of musical change and the musical strategies adopted by musicians musical to cope with increasing penury.

Chapter 10 gives an analysis of daily life social interaction as part of the process of musical communication. Chapter 11 presents the conclusion of the thesis.
The end of the fifteenth century saw the Achi triumphant over their neighbours and rivals, the K’iche’ and the Pokomchis, whom they had expelled from the Rabinal basin in Verapáz, towards the more mountainous areas to the north. The Achi still celebrate this victory as part of the annual celebrations for the Christian festival of the patron San Pablo.

The Rabinal basin is located in the modern province of Baja Verapáz, which is cut from west to east by the Sierra del Chuacús, which rises over 2500m above sea level. The Rabinal valley, which lies to the north of the Chuacús range, is at 972m (the lowest point in the modern municipality is at 400m). Several streams and rivers descend these mountains and irrigate some of the numerous valleys before joining either the Motagua River to the south or, as the Rabinal river does, the Negro River system to the north. The area is cut from south to north by two small tributaries of the river Negro, which today have been diverted to flow into the Chixoy dam on the northern border of the municipality. The main Rio Negro continues to flow east and then north under a variety of different names; serving as the national border with Mexico before eventually debouching in the Gulf of Mexico. As the climate is relatively dry, with a mean temperature of 20-22°C centigrade and rainfall only averaging 750mm a year (although this varies dramatically between the lower, subtropical dry forest and the subtropical, humid forest of the higher land).

The Rabinal basin has been eroded for centuries. The Achi persisted with their slash and burn method of agriculture as their new Spanish masters felled trees for both the timber industry and to create extensive cattle pastures. These practices damaged the thin topsoil, squeezed the land available for subsistence farming and prompted

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6. A K’iche’ lineage speaking a linguistic variant of the K’iche’ language called K’iche’ Achi. The word ‘achi’ simply means ‘man’.

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inadequate fallowing, all of which contributed to the rapid ruination of the forest and accentuated the process of desertification, increasingly erratic and decreasing rainfall, and associated problems.

**COLONIAL RABINAL**

The K’iche’ empire, in the heart of the western highlands, was decisively conquered in 1524, by Pedro de Alvarado. This defeat allowed the Spanish military campaign to proceed to the east into the region inhabited by the Achi, Pokomchis, and Q’eqchis. The Rabinal basin, home of the Achi, was soon under military occupation and placed temporarily under the *encomienda* regime. The area became an outpost for further military campaigns into the vast territory to the north (Bertrand 1987:51), which was still considered *tierra de guerra* (lands of war) over a decade later. The army was removed from the area in 1537 when, following an agreement signed by Bartolomé de las Casas, Bishop Marroquin, and Maldonado, the Governor of Guatemala, the *encomiendas* were cancelled and the Dominican order granted exclusive tutelage of the area baptised as the Verapáz (true peace) which comprised the modern provinces (*departamentos*) of Alta (upper) Verapáz and Baja (lower) Verapáz. They were to control Verapáz for the next 300 years.

Dominican pragmatism led them to turn to the indigenous authorities (*caciques*) who were heads of noble Indian lineages, using them as their local representatives in the Catholic Church’s spiritual, civil, and economic enterprises (Piel 1989:34). As a result of an initiative instigated by de las Casas in 1543, the Spanish Crown recognised, protected, and compensated Rabinal’s *caciques*, restoring their power (Percheron 1981:19). Evangelisation and the political and economic reorganisation of the indigenous settlements in Verapáz under Dominican tutelage were only possible thanks to the active participation of the *caciques*.

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*Under this system, the Spanish crown granted conquerors the tribute of certain towns as a reward for their conquest service. The *encomiendas* did not include rights over labour, which were controlled by the Crown under the *repartimiento* system (see below).*
The caciques were placed under the control of the provincial civil authorities — the Spanish alcaldes mayores (principal mayors) and corregidores (magistrates) who were in turn responsible to the Spanish Crown — and took responsibility for collecting royal tribute every six months; they were also the principal organisers of labour for the repartimiento system⁸ (Sherman 1979). Rabinalense Achis constructed local roads and convents; they were occasionally taken to the colonial capital, Antigua, to help build the city. Later, they were forced to work on local Dominican haciendas (estates) as well as their tropical plantations (Piel 1989:126).

The institution that enabled caciques to retain their authority position following the abolition of its traditional base was the cofradía. These religious sodalities, dedicated to the devotion of a particular incarnation of Christ, the Virgin Mary, or popular saint, were introduced by the Dominicans, probably soon after they assumed control of the Verapaz. There were only three Indian cofradías in Rabinal before the mid-seventeenth century: the Virgen del Rosario, Divino or Santísimo Sacramento, and Santa Cruz (Percheron 1979:61-2), all of which still exist.

Cofradías were part of “that sense of life as drama which is so much a part of late medieval sensibility” (Acroyd 1998) and their fiestas assisted in the diffusion of Christianity by attracting people to the new Indian towns in order to participate in the celebrations of the Catholic calendar.⁹ The cofradía became the medium through which Indians were introduced to the mercantile economy. Royal donations of land to raise cattle and crops were intended to generate sufficient income to meet the costs of the church, its priest, saints’ festivities, and community tribute taxes. The last indicates the link between religious and civil authority that has been an integral part of the institution since its installation. This was achieved through linking cofradía authority positions (cargos) with membership of the cabildo (town council). The main beneficiaries were the elite Indian families, who controlled both in combination with the Dominicans who were responsible for administration and accounts (Percheron 1979:81-86). But the exploitation and abuse of the labour force and the draining of community resources was

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⁸ Under this system, the colonial government granted private entrepreneurs a fixed amount of Indian labour for their plantations and factories.

⁹ See chapter 6 for the denomination of pre-Hispanic religious beliefs.
not solely a Spanish affair. The caciques, who benefited from the control of the town's labour force, the sale of community land to Spanish ranchers, and from their manipulation of cofradia resources, transformed themselves into private entrepreneurs. They also transformed themselves from heads of local lineages into an elite group of families that ruled Rabinal under the Dominican protection.

Thus the cabildo and the cofradias provided the institutional support for the caciques' continued political, religious, and economic dominance (Bertrand 1987:111-3). Caciques preserved their power as gobernadores (governors) in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries within the new Spanish municipal organisation of the Indian towns, even though governors had to be elected by cabildo members and their election ratified by Church and Crown (Percheron 1981: 20-1). The caciques gobernadores and other civil authorities were members of the same group of elite families who held cofradia cargos (ibid. 68-9).

Under the administration of Dominican priests, Rabinal's cofradias became important economic enterprises. The cofradias' wealth and entrepreneurial success peaked between 1776 and 1796, by which time there were twenty Indian cofradias and two Ladino hermandades (brotherhoods) despite the religious authorities' efforts to reduce their number in order retain control of their wealth (Percheron 1979:66-7). During this period the cofradias supported a rich and luxurious cult in the parish church and, among other expenses, could afford to pay for its music. A music school was established in 1783. The cofradias paid for the teacher who taught sol-fa, directed the choir, and played organ; the permanent orchestra with various instruments such as violins, basses, clarinets, flutes, oboes and trumpets; the church's small organ and a large double bellow organ, and a collection of musical scores imported from Mexico (cofradia books, Rabinal parish archive). During the nineteenth century the church orchestra developed into an ensemble of string and brass instrument, remnants of which persisted into the first half of the twentieth century. The marimba is conspicuous by its

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10. The new cofradias developed from family cults dedicated to particular saints. Both Indian and Ladino families had these saint images called uachibales.

11. Hermandades are religious sodalities whose purpose is to spread the expense of masses and funerals incurred by their members' families.
absence from Rabinal's cofradia records; unlike other parts of Guatemala and even other parts of Verapaz the marimba entered Rabinal by a secular route (chapter 5).

In sum, the Dominican Order's businesslike character profoundly influenced the economic life of Verapaz. If it is true that the Dominican haciendas were among the most exploitative of Indian labour, it is also true that they brought the Indian economy into the market economy and served as a model for the wealthy cofradias, which functioned as solid businesses capable of maintaining the sumptuous religious cult and sustaining an Indian privileged class. This, combined with the Dominicans' exclusive control over Verapaz, prevented the advance of Ladino settlers until the eighteenth century.

THE PROCESS OF LADINOIZATION

The concept of ladinoizing indigenous communities developed from Enlightenment ideas prevalent at the end of the eighteenth century. These gave impetus to the colonial government's liberal and social policies directed at transforming Indians into Spanish-speaking, westernised Guatemalans. The ladinoization of Indian towns that took place between 1775 and 1850 was not only an ideological posture but also included policies that were deliberately destructive to Indian cultures and ways of life. For example, the colonial government insisted upon and put more effort into the establishment of schools in Indian towns in order to encourage literacy in Spanish.

The only education the indigenous population had received previously was instruction...

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12. The term 'Ladino' was first used in the 16th century as an adjective applied to acculturated and/or Spanish speaking Indians (cf. Tax 1941:21; Sherman 1979:187); it is this sense which is implied here. Historically, the word also designates people of mixed European and Indian ancestry and poor Spanish peasants. By the early 20th century, the term had disappeared in the rest of Central America (to be replaced by mestizo) but to Guatemalan Indians, 'Ladino' has come to mean "oppressor in the western highlands, and homeless (and therefore permanent) worker in the cities and lowlands" (Smith 1990:86). In Rabinal the term is applied to anyone who is not considered to have an Indian heritage and is therefore labelled an outsider.

13. During the colonial period, the Royal Audience of Guatemala extended royal letters ordering diverse preparations for schools in Indian towns; in places where it was impossible to have a school, the church sacristan should be responsible for the instruction of classes. The creation of schools was also recommended in 1781 but parish records indicate that including girls was not thought to be useful (AGCA: A1.23, leg.1514 fol. 68; A1.23, leg.1515 fol.1; A1.23. Leg.1529 fol.499; A1. 23, leg.4632 fol.44v; A1.23, leg.1531 fol.4; AHA: Visitas Pastorales tomo 41). Today, although girls account for 51% of the school-age population, 60% of pupils enrolled in schools are boys.
in Christian doctrine and liturgy from the Dominicans in their native languages (Bertrand 1987: 145-6). In 1824, the newly independent Guatemalan State signalled its support for this policy by passing a law recommending that municipal and parish authorities implement measures to extinguish Indian languages, thus dissolving their cultures (Piel 1989:294). However, this and later attempts to eradicate Indian languages were rendered virtually ineffective through cash constraints coupled with local level indifference to the education of Indian children. 

The secular ideas of the Enlightenment also had a negative effect on the power of the Catholic Church. After independence in 1821, anti-clerical politics led to the suppression of religious houses and the confiscation of the real estate they controlled. The Dominicans lost their last property in Verapáz in 1829 and the parishes were left abandoned (Bertrand 1987:231). What was left of the cofradas’ property (capital, land, cattle), which had been under their administration, reverted to State control although they remained the legal property of Indian communities (Piel 1989: 246). Rabinal was unaffected by this, for the simple reason that its community lands had already been sold and its cofradas’ property plundered by its municipal authorities working in collusion with the Dominicans, thus accelerating the transference of land into private hands (AHA: Visitas pastorales tomo 41; Bertrand 1987:132-194). This occurred between 1786 and 1809, when the Bishop’s pastoral visits to the towns were suspended.

The loss of land and property left the cofradas poor and undermined the position of the indigenous elite who had manipulated their assets to bolster their own authority. As a last-ditch attempt to hold on to their power, the indigenous elite transformed voluntary offerings to the cofradas into obligatory contributions; they also attempted to forcibly recruit the population into serving this institution, augmenting the number of cargos and thus increasing the cost of fiestas. This situation provoked rebellion among the indigenous population who, in the early 1800s, denounced their own Indians authorities (AGCA: A1 leg. 183 exp. 3747; Percheron 1979:93-4). The contemporary cofradas and their numerous cargos studied by anthropologists are not

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14 There are 266 schools in Rabinal municipality, which testifies to the good relations between construction companies and the state rather than a commitment to education. Teaching is in Spanish.
the product of colonial cofradías but of the necessity to replenish funds and reorganise themselves during the early nineteenth century (Chance and Taylor 1985:1-26).

More damaging to the indigenous way of life were the consequences of the idea that the presence of Ladinos would be a civilising influence on Indians. This was intended to assist them to integrate into Western society and, as the humanist liberals of the first half of the nineteenth century put it, 'restore their dignity'. Ladinos were encouraged to settle in Indian towns through the free transfer of Crown property (including cofradía lands) and Indian community lands. Land records show that a considerable proportion of the growing Indian population was pushed northwards into the mountains whilst incoming Ladinos controlled the best agricultural land on the valley floor (Bertrand 1987:179-182). The resultant spatial separation undermined the ideologues' justification for the Ladino influx. Nevertheless, this means of ladinoization, which gained legal status through the composiciones de tierras (land re-registrations), intensified following the Liberal decrees of 1825 (Piel 1989:225, 309).

At the same time, the threatening dynamism of Rabinal's small Ladino population—which had increased from 128 to 451 between 1769 and 1816 (Bertrand 1987:274 table 7)—resulted in their acquisition of municipal power, gradually replacing the Indian cabildo with Ladino authorities (Bertrand 1987:232). This is the origin of bi-ethnic local government by a Ladino mayor and judge with minor,

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15 In the anthropological literature - beginning with Adams (1959) - the concept of ladinización bequeathed by humanistic liberals involved the transformation of their moral connotations into a natural process evocative of modern capitalism. This suggests a process of lineal progressive transition from Indian 'traditionalism' to Ladino 'modernisation'. Later, Adams (1994) recognised that the process of acculturation does not necessarily imply the loss of indigenous identity.

16 In order of importance, El Chol, Salamá, and Rabinal were the three towns with the largest Ladino population. Between 1767-9 and 1812-6, the Ladino population of Chol increased from 102 to 1150; Salamá from 300 to 1785 and Rabinal from 128 to 451. During the same period, Rabinal's Indian population increased from an estimated 4,500 to 6,118 (Bertrand 1987:274, table 7).

17 This is the Crown and, later, State practice of acquiring land and giving it new titles before re-allocating or selling it. Existing titles had to be re-registered to remain valid. The practice was introduced in the second half of the 18th century and was intended as a means of incorporating peasants' land into the market. The procedure was repeated after the liberal revolution of Barrios starting in 1871.

18 Bertrand (1987:272, 274) does not specify the ethnic and racial characteristics of this Ladino population in Rabinal; he only refers to them as an increasingly mestizo and undifferentiated population.
indigenous authorities beneath them. Until the twentieth century, participation in the cofradias remained the means of acquiring (extremely localised) authority in the indigenous community: only those men who had held one of the lower six cargos in the cofradias could serve as regidores (magistrates) and alcades segundos (deputy mayors) in the cabildo and they could only become cofradia principales once they had served the municipality (Teletor in Percheron1979: 68). In ideological terms, the basic race conflict between Indian and Ladino stems from this period and intensified as the nineteenth century progressed.

With the emerging local power of Ladinos and the lack of church interest once dispossessed of their wealth, cofradias became the stronghold of indigenous power and the bulwark of identity and indigenous separatism (Warren 1992[1978]: 48-64; McCreery 1994:137, 288). One manifestation of this was local cofradias’ efforts to keep their musical tradition. The high turnover of parish priests following the church’s political and economic defeat, and the consequent deterioration of church property, was halted during the ten year incumbency of Father Pedro Avella (1842-52) (AHA: Vicaría de Verapáz 1844-1854:68 Major church organ repairs are recorded, as are frequent adjustments and changes of chords and reeds of the orchestral instruments.

But to reduce local political conflicts to an opposition between Indians and Ladinos (see Warren 1992 [1978]) is over-simplistic, as this ignores the local political dynamics that gave birth to the new configuration of the civil and religious hierarchy which exists within the cargo system. Although the political power of the Indian elite was subordinated to the emerging power of Ladinos, an inter-ethnic alliance was formed to exercise control over the rest of the population. That this persists in the present is reflected in the alliance between Rabinal municipality’s most conservative groups, such as the cofrades of the village of Xococ, and the Ladinos of Rabinal town. From this perspective one can understand the role played by the cofradias in sustaining

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19. See chapter 3 for an explanation of the cofradia hierarchy.

20. Father Avella was also responsible for the silver cofradia staffs, each decorated with the appropriate saint, and other silver church ornaments. Today these treasures are considered to have been left by the Mayan Wise Men before they buried themselves under the church at the beginning of the World of Light (see chapter 3).
Ladino power and the reactionary attitudes of some of the representatives of Customary Catholicism during the period known as *la violencia* (1981-83).

**LAND AND LABOUR**

The creation of enormous private properties in Alta Verapáz and along the Pacific Coast dedicated to export cash crops can be dated to the beginning of Barrios’ dictatorship in 1873. In 1877, it was decreed that all Indian communities’ remaining *ejidal* land\(^{21}\) be ‘liberated’ and sold. Next, uncultivated lands were offered free of charge to national and international investors provided that they were used (Piel 1989:317-9). This is the origin of the large *fincas* (plantations) that still benefit from the seasonal labour and permanent migration of *colonos* (settlers) from Indian communities. Indian labour was obtained through the *mandamiento* (state controlled forced labour) system (McCreery 1994:220-3). By this time, government attitudes towards Indians had changed: according to neo-liberals, who had emerged as a political force following the coffee boom of the 1880s, Indians were an inferior race destined for work (McCreery 1994:172-75).

As the Rabinal area lacked large tracts of national land suitable for export agriculture, the cultivation of commercial crops was small scale and secondary to subsistence agriculture (Bertrand 1987:247). Although Rabinal was only marginally integrated into the new national economic model, its Indian population was obliged by the *habilitación* system (which replaced the *mandamiento* system and reached its peak between 1915 and 1925), to provide the essential labour force on plantations in other regions.

The local Ladino population profited from the *habilitación* system: Indians were contracted by force, given part of their wages in advance, and then taken to the *fincas* to work off their debt over several weeks. The system was usually combined with the alcohol business. Large amounts of the wages earned or advanced to Indians ended up in the hands of Ladinos who opened alcohol shops in the main towns where

\[^{21}\] *Ejido* land refers to all land granted by the Spanish Crown and later by the Guatemalan government as common land for Indian towns.
Indians were contracted (Bunzel 1952; Guiteras 1986 [1961]; Hernandez 1974; Pozas 1977; Taylor 1979; Navarette 1988; McCreery 1994). Most of the working population was reduced to debt servitude. The system also generated new patterns of drinking and serious alcohol dependency problems in the Indian population. The State, however, benefited. Income from alcohol taxes during the 1890s was “the second highest source of revenue after import-export duties” (McCreery 1994:177).

Although Indians had both money and work at the beginning of the twentieth century as a result of the coffee boom, the work was still obligatory and the proliferation of alcohol shops in Indian towns soon separated them from their earnings. This situation, coupled with the scarcity of land in Indian hands, resulted in the systematic expulsion of younger generations to the plantations either temporarily as seasonal work or permanently as colonos.

Debt servitude was abolished in the 1930s by the dictator Ubico and replaced by new labour laws that applied to all working class people, both Indian and Ladino. Under Ubico’s 1934 Vagrancy Law, all male peasants who produced ‘inadequate’ amounts of food for subsistence were liable to work for 150 days a year (McCreery 1994:317). Peasants between the ages of 18 and 55 were obliged to carry an identity card and a booklet (libreta) in which employers marked the number of days served. The system guaranteed the labour force for the plantations and the national road-building programme. To enforce the law, police and military were given the power to control and draft any peasant who had not fulfilled his obligation. Rabinalenses recall how military commissioners hunted men across the fields and into the mountains, regardless of whether or not their libretas showed that they had worked the obligatory number of days, to force them into road-gangs.

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22. Ubico chose villagers from Xococ to carry out police duties in Rabinal municipality. During la violencia (1981-3), Xococ’s civil patrols were selected to carry out several massacres in Rabinal (EAFG 1995:53; 147-153; 174-180).

23. Ubico established the post of military commissioner in 1939; despite their title, they were civilians whose main role was to ensure that all peasants completed their obligatory labour. In 1976, they became directly subordinated to the nearest military base and their role in army recruitment and the provision of ‘military intelligence’ intensified: “They were the eyes and ears of the army” (EAFG 1995:118).
This was the state of affairs prior to the 'revolutionary' period of Arévalo and Arbenz (1944-54). The rule of these democratically elected presidents marked the emergence of a social and political movement that agitated for better life conditions for all Guatemalans.

POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS CONFLICT SINCE 1954

When Dominican fathers returned to Rabinal parish in 1972, the municipal mayor, an indigenous leader of Customary Catholicism, and the town’s cofradía principales welcomed them with the warning that the priests were ‘servants of the town’ and that under no circumstances were they to get involved in ‘political matters’. The warning stemmed from Rabinalense costumbristas’ awareness of Catholic Action catechists’ community organisation work in neighbouring El Quiché, which they saw as a threat to their own power and authority. They also felt threatened by catechists’ campaigns against the cofradías, their fiestas and alcohol consumption (Arias 1990).

The Catholic Action movement attempted to remove the hierarchical power structures based on subordinated participation in the cofradía cargo system (chapter 3). They fought for more direct and egalitarian forms of participation in the community for the younger generation of landless semi-proletariat peasants. This group had virtually no hope of bettering their economic situation and therefore little chance of accessing the cargos that carry the possibility of achieving prestige and influential political positions. In Rabinal, Catholic Action grew exponentially between 1972 and 1981; Dominicans in Rabinal today calculate that at the beginning of the 1980s there were around 200 catechists and delegates of ‘the Word’ working in Rabinal’s villages.

The admonishment of the Dominicans upon their arrival in Rabinal indicates the continuing political influence of the old Costumbrista principales and their domination

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24. The national popular movement of rural workers over the past few decades (Le Bot 1995) led to the politicisation of Rabinalense peasants. Rabinal has had several indigenous municipal mayors whose ethnic origins were exploited by Ladinos in order to manipulate the municipality’s most reactionary groups.
of local government decisions at the beginning of the 1970s. But, in contrast to El Quiché (Falla 1980; Diocesis del Quiché 1994), the struggles between Customary Catholics and Catholic Action had not resulted in irreconcilable antagonism in Rabinal. Under the respected and moderate guidance of Father Mechor Fraj, both Dominicans and Catholic Action catechists promoted the values and customs of traditional Mayan culture, remaining on the margins and giving room to the *cofradía* organisations and their *fiestas*. Father Fernando Suazo reintroduced the liturgy and songs of praise in Achi, accompanied by choirs and a marimba ensemble. This development upset the town’s Ladinos.

Protestants and the very right wing Apostolic Catholics were the most aggressive in the struggle against the power of Rabinal’s *costumbristas* and *cofradía fiestas*. As in other parts of Guatemala, Rabinal’s Protestants had flourished in the aftermath of the 1976 earthquake when they offered programmes to help the civilian population in the wake of the devastation. Customary Catholics and evangelicals (both Catholic and Protestant) on the other hand, interpret both natural disaster (and political violence) as God’s punishment for lack of faith. However, so far as evangelicals are concerned, Customary Catholicism is part of the problem because their pagan practices are remote from biblical texts. For evangelicals, denouncing the idolatrous *cofradía* cult is a sign of faith.

The number of Protestant converts multiplied exponentially during the political violence (1981-83) because it was believed that Protestants had a friendlier relationship with the army. There was some truth in this, particularly after the coup that brought General Efraín Rios Montt to the presidency in 1982. Rios Montt’s conversion to evangelical Protestantism gave a messianic character to military repression. Using the

25. Apostolic Catholicism arose during the anti-Communist campaign and accompanying evangelisation movement initiated by Castillo Armas who ousted Arbenz’s democratic government in 1954. Rabinalense Apostolics are presently concentrated in the village of Vegas Santo Domingo, home to several of the most active local PACs which carried out massacres in Rabinal.

26. The army manipulated local moral religious concepts such as the idea that illness is caused by sin in order to blame the population for the devastating destruction of its own villages (Wilson 1995:231; cf. Zur 1998).

27. Guatemala’s Protestant sects, many financed by their US headquarters, have been identified with an anticommunist and patriotic ideology supported by their affiliation with sectors of the power elite.
Dominican Order's radio and television stations to broadcast his message, expressing his ideology through the religious morality familiar to the masses; at the same time, Rios Montt launched his campaign of moral reform, which he promised would end the problems of poverty and civil insurrection (Stoll 1990:180-217). In the process, Rios Montt turned the evangelical churches into the army's allies and accomplices. His evangelism unleashed a process of massive conversion as a desperate population sought to evade identification with the guerrilla by seeking refuge in the evangelical churches associated with the military. In Rabinal, even Customary Catholic ritual specialists joined the stampede. Many musicians abandoned their instruments (and their income) to demonstrate the authenticity of their conversion.

Yet Rios Montt has a positive reputation in Rabinal: in a neat exercise in ideological manipulation, he had purged the municipality's paramilitaries. These predominantly Ladino groups, charged with the selective elimination of community leaders, had taken to terrorising the community through committing random killings in the street. Rios Montt's continuing popularity never ceases to amaze almost anyone who has information concerning the atrocities committed by his underlings, including the massacres in Rabinal municipality and elsewhere during 1982-83 (EAFG 1995). Yet despite its brutality, Rios Montt's government had an appearance of 'justice or authority for all', an idea which has strong symbolic meaning for both Indians and Ladinos.

The most important of Rabinal's five evangelical churches is the Church of the Nazareno, which is also the most powerful Protestant sect in the provinces of Alta and Baja Verapáz. Next in importance are the Assembly of God and the Bethesda Church; the congregation of the latter includes both Indians and Ladinos and has chapels in both Rabinal town and its more populous villages. Most congregants are women, which is apparently typical of most religions; in some cases, the congregation is 80% female. In response to this phenomenon and to avoid domestic conflicts, some churches only accept married couples, excluding the many women widowed by the violence and who are already excluded by their widowhood from the Customary Catholic world.

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28. Conversion increased dramatically in the decade from 1975; although the phenomenon stabilised in the 1990s, 40-50% of Guatemalans are thought to be evangelical (Barry 1992).
Politicisation and community organisation

The legal bases for workers' basic rights and organisations were established during the democratic governments of Arévalo (1945-50) and Arbenz (1950-54). The Code of Work was promulgated in 1947; the Law of Agrarian Reform was instituted in 1952. Two years later, with US support engineered by the CIA, Castillo Armas ousted the democratic regime in a coup d'etat. Armas revoked the Agrarian Reform and began persecuting peasant leaders who had established local committees to implement land reform. Some Rabinalenses told me that Ladino employers promptly resumed their authoritarian, low wage regime with a vengeance.

Although Rabinal was largely unaffected by attempts at land reform, the hopes of its landless peasants had been focussed on the coastal *fincas* where large amounts of cultivable land were left idle (Barry 1987). There was no significant change in working class employment conditions between 1950 and 1980, even though the national economy, with its heavy dependence on agro-exports, maintained a growth rate of 5% per annum (EAFG 1995:51-6, 58). Peasants' social and economic experiences on the *fincas* led to the creation of the *liga campesina* (Peasants' League) in the early to mid-1960s.

The exploited peasantry was not the only social sector unhappy with the dictatorship. Dissident young officers, who objected to increasing US intervention in the army, formed the Armed Rebel Forces (FAR) in December 1962, mainly recruiting poor Ladino workers. The participation of some indigenous Rabinalenses resulted in the army's brutal suppression of the town in 1963; I was told there was a big massacre in town in 1965. Several musicians told me that they had lost marimbista relatives at this time. Community organisations faltered with the loss of their leadership.

Rabinal experienced a brief social effervescence between 1976-1980. Various events had led to a rapid process of community organisation. These included the arrival of international funds channelled through both Catholic and Protestant churches, support from various NGOs (non-governmental organisations) for the formation of cooperatives, and the presence of organisations such as AID (*Agencia de Desarrollo*

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29. This gave rise to the thesis of 'desarrollo excluyente' (economic growth which does not benefit the majority).
Internacional) and CIF (Centro de Integración Familiar). CIF, which had an enormous budget and a large infrastructure, inaugurated development projects, especially in education and agricultural techniques. Agency support notwithstanding, these projects depended on the ability of local leaders to channel funds to their communities. Hamlets that achieved the right combination, such as Chichupac, flourished rapidly whilst neighbouring villages were completely ignored. The NGOs’ lack of planning and inequitable distribution of endemically scarce funds resulted in divisions and conflicts between local communities. The army, which had established a post in Pichec in 1976 and another in Rabinal town shortly afterwards, took advantage of these new enmities, exacerbating them further as part of their effort to divide and crush the population. In order to justify its intervention in Rabinal in 1980, the army spread rumours that all members of both external organisations and local co-operatives were also members of CUC and thus guerrilla sympathisers.

La Violencia

The period of intense political violence in Rabinal (1981-83), which was just one small part of the massive military repression of Guatemala’s civilian population, is remembered as la violencia (the violence), ‘the time of silence’, of ‘danger’, of ‘rape’. It has had devastating short and long term repercussions for Rabinal society.

Army repression in Rabinal began in 1980. The first massacre occurred on 4 March in Rio Negro (EAFG 1995:139). However, for most Rabinalenses, the period of extreme violence began in 1981 with the army’s scorched earth policy, which was intended to eliminate the insurgents’ voluntary and involuntary support base. The army

30. AID and CIF: The International Development Agency and Family Integration Centre respectively.

31. The exploitation of inter and intra-ethnic conflicts has a long and ignominious history dating to the Conquest. In Rabinal, the conflict with the most far-reaching consequences is that between the Indian authorities living in town and its northern population living in a vast area called Xococ. Originally Crown land and much larger than the area known as Xococ today, the land was divided in 1758 between a private trader, the people of Cubulco (a neighbouring municipality), and the people of Rabinal; no Xocoqueños were present during these proceedings. Xococ is Rabinal’s largest and most traditional village, and its leaders are strongly allied to local Ladinos and with the army.

32. Rabinalense peasants’ involvement was limited to providing refuge and replacements for the EGP combatants who fought in El Quiché and Alta Verapaz. For details of CUC and EGP activities in Rabinal, see EAFG (1995:82-103).
destroyed crops and livestock and burned homes, obliterating communities' physical base and social organisation. Popular destinations for internal refugees from Rabinal were the provinces of Alta Verapáz to the north and Escuintla to the south, both of which are characterised by plantation economies and familiar to Rabinalenses through seasonal work there. Thousands of landless Rabinalenses chose to settle permanently in the small towns neighbouring the plantations.\textsuperscript{33}

More destructive was the introduction, in 1981, of the Civil Patrols (PAC)\textsuperscript{34} which incorporated all men aged 18-55 into paramilitary units under the indirect control of the army.\textsuperscript{35} By forcing men to patrol the town block or village section in which they lived in 24-hour shifts at least once a week, the army gained direct control over the male population. The system prevented men leaving their homes whether to flee or obtain work whilst simultaneously turning them into sitting targets: it was easy to 'disappear' someone at any time during their patrol duty. Violence soon became generalised. Patrols from Rabinal's two largest villages, Xococ and Pichiec, together with patrols from Vegas Santo Domingo and Ladino paramilitary agents escorted by the army, carried out massacres throughout the municipality. Of the estimated 5,000 Rabinalenses who lost their lives during this period, 2009 were killed in massacres (EAFG 1995:127).\textsuperscript{36}

The army's purpose in imposing this scheme was to make the population directly responsible for the surveillance and massacre of their neighbours. Traditional forms of conflict resolution were replaced by denouncements to the army; the problem was resolved 'once and for all'. Historical or ethnical disagreements between villages, groups, individuals, and even small unresolved family conflicts, became enormously

\textsuperscript{33} For example, there are at least 4,000 people from Cubulco and Rabinal in Chisec municipality, Alta Verapáz, and a similar number have settled on the Concepción finca on the Pacific coast in Escuintla.

\textsuperscript{34} For information about military operations in combination with paramilitary forces (including PACs), see EAFG (1995).

\textsuperscript{35} For an analysis of the civil patrols and their legacy see Americas Watch (1986), EAFG (1995), and Popkin (1996).

\textsuperscript{36} These include up to 500 people killed in the town market on 15 September 1981; 268 in Plan de Sanchez in July 1982; 100 in Chichupac. In February 1982, 82 Rio Negro men were lured to Xococ and slaughtered; a month later, men from Xococ went to Rio Negro and murdered 70 women and 107 children (EAFG 1995:127)
relevant, leaving everyone vulnerable to and afraid of betrayal. Some people welcomed the opportunity to strike their enemies; simple terror forced others to co-operate with the army, betraying their neighbours in order to stay alive. In pitting people against one another, the army transformed them into the vehicle of their own destruction.

Musicians, and especially marimbistas, were particularly vulnerable from both within the community and without. Many Rabinalenses, especially those who had converted to the newer religious sects, were envious of their status in the community which extended beyond the Customary Catholic sphere (chapter 10); they were even targeted by rival musicians. So far as the army was concerned, marimbistas were the most visible symbol of Catholic Custom. The army was particularly incensed by anniversaries of the dead, as these celebrations honoured people they had eliminated as suspected guerrillas. Belief in the dead, which is the core of Customary Catholicism, thus became a subversive ideology that (like Catholic Action’s Liberation Theology) needed to be eradicated. All indigenous gatherings with music were banned in 1981; killing musicians reinforced the message.

The direct participation of local men in the annihilation of their kith and kin ripped the social fabric apart, fragmenting groups, and creating suspicion between relatives, friends, and work companions. Survivors living in Rabinal have to cope with both their own losses and their own forced complicity. The consequences of this forced participation – the atmosphere of fear, mistrust, and guilt – still prevail. Feelings were particularly intense in 1995-96, as these were the years when survivors celebrated the fourteenth anniversary of their relatives’ deaths (chapters 3 and 7).

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37. 'Massacres in Rabinal', researched by the Forensic Anthropology Team of Guatemala (1995) contains abundant testimonies of the ways in which people participated in denouncing and murdering each other. The analysis of the Rio Negro, Chichupac and Plan de Sanchez massacres reveals how the army used local conflicts to facilitate the destruction of entire villages by neighbouring communities' patrols.
CONTEMPORARY RABINAL

Rabinal is one of eight municipalities of the Guatemalan departamento of Baja Verapáz and has an area of 504 km$^2$. Rabinal town is only 178 km north east of Guatemala City by road, yet the lack of paving, particularly between the provincial capital, Salamá, and Rabinal, means that it takes five hours to travel by bus from the town to the City.

An alternative, ancient route to Guatemala City passes through Chol municipality; it is more direct but remains unpaved. The modernisation of the road network gave priority to routes connecting the national and provincial capitals. This has forced Rabinal’s regional market to reorientate its business towards Salamá, the capital of Baja Verapáz.

Photograph 2: Landscape of Rabinal

38 Geographic and statistical information for Rabinal municipality were obtained from Usselmann (1979); Instituto Nacional de Estadística publications (1991, 1993); Arnauld (1993); EAFG (1995).

39 An alternative, ancient route to Guatemala City passes through Chol municipality; it is more direct but remains unpaved. The modernisation of the road network gave priority to routes connecting the national and provincial capitals. This has forced Rabinal’s regional market to reorientate its business towards Salamá, the capital of Baja Verapáz.
Population

According to the 1981 census, taken just before the military violence peaked, Rabinal had a population of 22,733. Considering Guatemala’s high population growth rate, a statistical projection based on this census estimated that by 1992 the population of Rabinal would be 39,741; the 1994 census count was only 24,063. The large discrepancy between projection and census reflects the political violence of the early 1980s, which led to the deaths of a quarter of Rabinal’s inhabitants and the relocation of several thousand more. The birth rate among survivors also plummeted.

The 1994 census registered 82% of Rabinal municipality’s population (nearly 20,000 people) as Achi speakers who referred to themselves as Achi people; around 90% of Achis live in the municipality’s sixty rural villages and hamlets, most of which lack electricity and direct access to water. Some 2,000 Achis live in town. Most Ladinos, including the Ladino controlled municipal authorities, are located in Rabinal town, which accounts for 23% of municipality’s population (over 5,000 people). Ladinos are also to be found in the municipality’s two largest and wealthiest villages, Nimacabaj and Pichec and in the exclusively Ladino village and hamlet of Chirrum and Conculito.

Relations between the communities can be gauged from the fact that Ladinos refer to Indians pejoratively as 'inditos' (little Indians). The Achi, on the other hand, refer to all non-Indians as ‘Ladinos’, the implication being that they are foreigners.

Socio-economic conditions of poverty

Rabinalense Achis are peasants with poor land and little access to it. Their principal economic activities are subsistence agriculture based on maize cultivation.
combined with waged agricultural work on the fincas. They have a myth explaining the origins of the landscape, the illicit appropriation and impoverishment of their agricultural land, and the need to seek work on the coastal fincas. The story tells that the small volcanic cones of Saqacho’ and Chikak’ miloj, situated between Rabinal town and Pichec, were large volcanoes until the creator of the mountains, Zipacná, heaved up the rich volcanic soil and took it to the coast. This is why the coastal plains are fertile and people go there to work. When the volcanoes were in Rabinal, the land was fertile and there was no need for the people to leave in search of work.

The thief Zipacná represents the foreign Ladino plantation owners and those Ladinos who appropriated Rabinal’s scarce fertile lands. Rabinal’s thin topsoil and limited irrigation restrict year round cultivation. It is estimated that only about 200 hectares are available for irrigation (including the river plains) and most are monopolised by a small number of Ladino and Achi families. The majority of the population cultivates indigenous maize varieties in forestry land that is not considered appropriate for agriculture and therefore does not appear in land-use statistics. The forest keeps the thin soils moist and protects the crops from frost, resulting in small but more reliable yields.

Twelve landowners own 15% of all Rabinal’s registered land; about 300 proprietors own another 50%; the remaining 35% is shared among over 2,700 owners (EAFG 1995: 22). Achi properties are divided into small plots of a few cuerdas (1 cuerda = 2.630m²); 68% of all Achi-owned properties are less than 1.5ha and only 10% are over 3.5ha, which confirms the general process of fragmentation in Indian land ownership.

Although the Achi family is a group of patrilineal descendants, the right to land is inherited bilaterally. In contrast to other Mayan groups (e.g., Stoll 1993:46-54; La Farge 1994: 45; Zur 1998:127-9), Achi men and women have equal rights over the land and both mothers and fathers maintain their land or their rights to it, which they pass on as separate properties. Women’s access to land and the general scarcity of residential property means that residence, whilst preferably virilocal, is frequently uxorilocal or neolocal. It is common for a landless man to live on his wife’s family lands or, in the case of couples landless on both sides, to look for a new place to live, often in the town.
Subsistence agriculture

Rabinalense peasants produce mainly maize, which (together with beans) form their basic diet. There are two local maize varieties: long-cycle maize and short-cycle maize. The former is cultivated in the mountains over an eight-month period and the latter is grown in the warmer valleys over fifteen weeks. Some well-off peasants who have irrigated valley land invest in mountain land so that they can grow both kinds of maize and thus avoid having to buy maize for their families over the year; they also sell part of their maize crop on the local market. Peasants with small plots of land, whether in the mountains or in the valley, also sell part of their maize crop to meet other essentials, buying the maize they need later in the year from their plantation earnings (EAFG 1995:24). All peasants with land are self-sufficient in beans; they also cultivate chili, fruit trees, and vegetables in the gardens around their houses mainly for domestic consumption.

According to Sol Tax (1953), a typical salary in highland Guatemala in 1936 for a week’s work (six 10-12 hour days) was US$1 (plus food, which was generally desperately inadequate). At the time, a quintal of maize (45 kilos) cost US$1.10; thus people needed to work for little more than a week to earn enough to buy a quintal of maize. Tax calculated that annual maize consumption for a family of nine members (five adults and four children aged between two and fourteen) was about 39 quintals and 16.4 quintals for a family of four (parents and two girls aged five and fifteen). In 1995, the daily wage on the fincas was 15 quetzales (US$2.50) and a quintal of maize cost 45 quetzales (US$7.50), or three days’ work. However, it would be wrong to assume that labour migrants are any better off: apart from the fact that few fincas provide food for their workers, finca owners and managers have generations of practice in separating Indians from their hard earned cash.

Maize yields increased notably as a result of the ‘green revolution’ of the 1960s. This was a combined package of ‘improved’ hybrid strains of maize, fertilisers, and pesticides into which most Indians initially bought piecemeal, starting with fertiliser. Among Chimaltecos the introduction of fertiliser tripled productivity between 1964 and 1979, reduced the amount of land needed to feed a family by half, and caused the land shortage problem to disappear (Watanabe 1994 [1992]:131-5). Yet Chimaltecos still go to the plantations (ibid.), as do Rabinalenses. In fact, the introduction of fertilisers made...
dependence on waged work an ineluctable reality, especially as "the price of imported fertilisers jumped five fold during the 1970s" (SIECA 1984, in Barry 1987:40). Several Rabinalenses grumbled to me about the ever-increasing cost of fertiliser and its apparent decreasing effectiveness.

‘Improved’ hybrid strains of maize, designed for immediate consumption, also increased yields. For those who adopted the new agro-technology – i.e., most peasants – production became largely oriented towards sale at harvest time because, unlike local maize (maiz criollo), the new hybrid maize is floury and decays rapidly; it is unsuitable for storage and useless as seed corn. Increased yields depend on the annual expenditure of hard-earned cash for new, imported, seed stocks.

Pesticides have also become a popular farming aid among plantation owners and subsistence farmers alike. For the latter, this too has to be paid for from waged work for the former. All in all, the green revolution “has not improved the lot of the peasantry [because] the technical package of seeds, fertiliser, and pesticides is too expensive” for most small farmers (Barry 1987: 169). By 1984, 60% of Guatemalans were unable to meet minimum nutritional requirements and the average calorific deficiency for the poorest half of the population was 39% (ibid.:16, table 7).

Waged agricultural work

Baja Verapaz is one of Guatemala’s poorest provinces and occupies fourth place on the index of extreme poverty – 80% of its population live in extreme poverty (SEGEPLAN 1994:122); the expulsion rate of its work force is therefore very high. Watanabe (1994 [1992]:40) calculates that around two thirds of Chimalteco families send one or more members to work on the fincas. The situation seems similar in Rabinal, although I lack concrete data. Direct observation and local testimonies confirm that most men aged 18-55 (and frequently women and children as well) work on the fincas for one to four months between the end of October and the end of March. Many return to celebrate the fiesta of the town’s patron saint in January, and then return to the fincas. A common destination is the cotton and later sugar growing area around

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42. It is no coincidence that all the Rabinalense peasants affiliated to the CUC in 1979 were migrant workers. That the CUC later became the political branch of the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EAFG 1995:90) is a separate issue of which many peasants remain unaware.
Gomera, Escuintla province in the South Pacific Coast, and the coffee plantations of Alta Verapáz.

In the first four decades of the twentieth century, the labour recruitment for the fincas was, with some variation, as obligatory and compulsive as the work systems of previous centuries. Older forced labour systems had cynically depended on peasants’ ability to feed themselves in their communities; the plantation economy depends on the survival of subsistence agriculture to sustain the labour force when it is not required on the fincas. As a government agronomist remarked, it is “a system made in the cielo (the heavens). The indios can grow corn in the mountains and then pick coffee and cotton during the other parts of the year. It is a system ordained by God” (Barry 1987:10). This idea is so entrenched that questioning its validity is almost seditious. The reality is that the removal of Indian towns’ community lands and the subsequent concentration of land in fewer hands, together with increasing soil infertility and the consequent reliance on ever more expensive fertilisers, have all accentuated peasants’ reliance on paid work.\(^\text{43}\) This is now vital for the survival of the subsistence sector rather than just one strand in peasants’ survival strategy. Their dependence on finca work is such that any international movement in the price of Guatemalan agricultural products has immediate repercussions on their domestic economies. The Rabinalense subsistence economy is completely integrated into an agro-export economy dependent on the international market controlled by just a handful of trans-national companies.

**Socio-economic stratification**

In Rabinal one can broadly identify three socio-economic strata according to access to the means of production. In the top stratum are the principal merchants and transport owners, all of whom are Ladinos who are also large landowners controlling most of Rabinal’s irrigated land and orchards. They produce cash crops and raise livestock for sale.

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\(^{43}\) Smith (1984) on the contrary maintains that the introduction of fertilisers and cash crops reinforced the peasant economy, making them less dependent in waged work. This thesis coincides with the emergence of an indigenous commercial class that overthrew the power of local Ladinos in certain towns of the Western Highlands as shown by Falla (1980). This is not the experience of peripheral Indian towns like Rabinal.
The common denominator in the middle stratum, which contains Ladinos and Achis, is the ability to generate sufficient income to avoid working on the plantations. It comprises small-scale merchants, teachers, and professionals (who are predominantly Ladinos), Achi and Ladino peasants with some irrigated lands and orchards who cultivate cash crops on a small scale, and Achi artisans who supplement their subsistence activities through crafts such as pottery and weaving. One large family of artisan potters in the town, who are also hereditary musicians (the Ordoñez family), used some of their earnings to buy better musical instruments and form a *conjunto* marimba (an ensemble consisting of marimba, bass, and drum set) with loudspeakers. With other Achi artisans and Ladino teachers, the Ordoñez family also invests in Rabinal’s dance-drama culture.

The situation in Rabinal is very different from that in El Quiché (Falla 1980) and Huehuetenango (Brintnall 1979) where the children of indigenous small scale merchants became agricultural entrepreneurs and merchants who broke the Ladino business monopoly, diminishing their power, and to some extent replacing them. The indigenous entrepreneurs, who joined evangelical cults, also mounted a direct assault against the gerontocratic stronghold of Customary Catholicism (Arias 1990). When this movement reached Rabinal in the 1970s, confrontation failed to materialise, partly because the most traditional elements within Customary Catholicism have allied themselves with the municipality’s Ladinos. They in turn have good social and economic connections with the Ladino communities of the neighbouring municipalities of Cubulco and Salamá; they also receive strong and unconditional support from the army, which still has a base on the outskirts of town.

Whilst the top two social strata live mainly in the municipal town or the large villages of Pichec, Xococ and Nimacabaj, the bottom stratum, which comprises the majority of the population, lives predominantly in the hamlets and consists almost exclusively of Achi families with little or no land (less than 1.5ha). This group depends on paid work on the *fincas* or for wealthier Rabinalense peasants, for whom they sometimes work in exchange for a small plot on which they can produce some maize for domestic consumption.
Within the bottom stratum is a sub-group distinguishable by its extreme poverty. These families are direct victims of the violence; among them are survivors of the massacres in Rio Negro and Plan de Sanchez, who now live in Pacux44 and in the Municipal Colony on the outskirts of Rabinal town. One of the survivors of the Rio Negro massacre, who lost every single relative, all his possessions, and was forced to move to Pacux, told me that “violence has left us behind in this life.” To him, the human and material losses he suffered are irreparable. This man and a considerable number of others in the same position remain in dramatic levels of misery.

The majority of Rabinal’s musicians fall in the lowest and largest socio-economic category of poor peasants. Their trade of music is an activity that garners status and prestige as carriers of tradition and custom rather than a regular income that could substitute for labour migration. Like most other peasants, musicians are agriculturists who work periodically on the coastal fincas year after year.

**Health**

Health conditions in Rabinal municipality are deplorable. The town has a State health centre with a doctor and a few nurses who are only able to attend to about 20% of the municipality’s population; it barely covers the urban area itself.45 The State is also responsible for organising health technicians (who are generally community leaders) and voluntary health workers (including midwives). These workers, who receive minimal training, take health campaigns concerning such things as hygiene and the inoculation of children to rural areas, especially during epidemics: outbreaks of dengue fever and cholera occur at least once a year. Cholera is the most dreaded disease and one of the main causes of death through dehydration. The incidence of respiratory diseases, such as tuberculosis, and gastrointestinal illnesses caused by parasites, is also high. The number of cases of measles is also significant (SEGEPLAN 1994:125). Malnutrition plays a significant role in death rates, especially of children:

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44. Built by INDE, the state-owned electricity company, Pacux was designed to house villagers who were to be relocated on construction of the Chixoy dam on the Rio Negro. Villagers were forced to move to Pacux in 1981 after government forces decimated the village.

45. Rabinal health technician; personal communication. In 1995, Rabinal town also had a couple of private medical practices, pharmacies, and an important health project financed by Christian organisations. Most Achis who seek allopathic medical treatment take the advice of the retail pharmacists, who are often unqualified.
1986 in Baja Verapáz, 53% of six to nine year olds suffered from malnutrition (ibid.:123), which is well above average for this age group in Guatemala (37.4%).

The ineffable psychosocial sequelae of the brutal repression experienced by many Rabinalenses are excluded from local health surveys. One of the town’s former parish priests told me of his preoccupation with the marked increase in the number of suicides over recent years, which he attributed to the trauma left by the violence. Within Rabinalense Christian morality, to take one’s own life is equivalent to homicide because it is a human decision alien to God’s will. Collective loss of hope and desperation has shaken the ideological basis that gives coherence and meaning to life like no other event in Rabinalense memory.

The social demoralisation of Rabinal’s population, the high incidence of illness, and reduced access to the health and hygiene education vital to the exclusion of preventable diseases, are all reflected in the frequent references to witchcraft and malicious envy as causes of illness (chapter 10). People believe that they are exposed to malicious envy and witchcraft at the numerous celebrations for the dead and at cofradia festivities. This source of infection notwithstanding, most incidents of witchcraft-induced illnesses seem to be acute gastritis, amoebic dysentery and, in one case, diphtheria, spread through the contaminated water used in the atole (maize based beverage) and poisoning from home-brewed and distilled cuxa (a crudely distilled sugar cane alcohol) served at these events.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown that while being poor the Achi are not all the same but are differentiated in various aspects including the economic. Their recent history has meant that some of this differentiation is permeated with traumatic meaning (e.g., religious conversion, moral behaviour such as betrayal, roles played during the violence). The chapter has also demonstrated that the tension between Indians and Ladinos is the product of a complex national and local history.
The history of the Achi of Rabinal reflects the belief, commonly held by Guatemala’s ruling class and Ladinos generally, that one cannot be a genuine Guatemalan without becoming ladinoized. Admittedly, article 3 of the Peace Accords, signed in 1996, goes some way to address this popular misconception, but it will be some time before attitudes change, if at all.

The situation in which the Achi now find themselves also reflects the contradictions inherent in the agribusinesses on which Guatemala depends for over 50% of its export trade. On the one hand, these industries rely on a labour force that can feed itself outside harvest time. On the other, these companies’ insatiable hunger for land in which to expand their businesses make it increasingly difficult and, in some cases, impossible for their seasonal workers to support themselves for the rest of the year. Despite their contempt for ‘inditos’, the last thing plantation owners want is a literate, ladinoized workforce. Thus the Achi, like other Mayan ethnic groups, find themselves excoriated for what they are whilst simultaneously being denied any genuine opportunity for personal or community advancement.
Chapter 3

The Belief in the Dead

Customary Catholicism (*costumbre*) is commonly associated with the cult of the saints and the hierarchical *cargo* (office holding) system of the *cofradia* (religious sodalities). It is the *cofradia* which gives substance to *costumbre* and, at the heart of this institution and compelling its practice, is the pre-Hispanic Mayan belief in the continuing life of the dead who, over time, become ancestors.

There is striking evidence of cultural similarity and continuity between the beliefs of today’s Maya Achi and the practices of the early sixteenth century highland Nahua. For example, the Nahua categorised their dead by cause of death, attributing each category to a particular god; the dead person became part of that god’s entourage, and his/her death was then celebrated at the annual festivities associated with the deity. People who died of natural causes were celebrated on the great feast of the dead; they went to the underworld and were mainly associated with Mictlantecutli, the lord of the underworld and God of the Dead. People whose death was connected with water were commemorated as a generality at the beginning of the rainy season, in the month known as *Tepeihuitl* (month of the mountains when clouds accumulate and the first rains come), and were associated with *Tlaloc*, the God of Rain. As his servants or members of his court they were considered good intermediaries between the living and the God of Rain, whose goodwill was essential for the success of the subsistence crops on which the living depend for survival. This belief survives among the Achi, as does the practice of calling the dead by type of death in a precise, fixed sequence. Today, the Achi no longer celebrate water-related deaths during *Tepeihuitl*; they have, however,

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46 The ancient Nahuas comprise all the Nahua-speaking groups who lived mainly in the Mexican highlands. They included the Aztecs, who settled in the valley of Mexico during the 14th century and, a century later, were controlling all Nahua groups who had settled there before them.
continued to celebrate the start of the rainy season under the guise of the Catholic festival of Corpus Cristi which falls between 23 May and 25 June.

Another similarity between ancient Nahua\textsuperscript{47} and modern Achi practice is the celebration of individual deaths for a fixed period of time, after which the deceased is only celebrated in community with the rest of the souls on 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} November. Admittedly, the time spans are different but the principle is the same. The Achi say that after the series of celebrations are concluded, they have fulfilled their obligations to that particular spirit. Some anthropologists (e.g., Barbara Tedlock 1992 [1982]; Farriss 1984; Hill and Monaghan 1987; Carlsen and Prechtel 1991) have identified a long list of examples of cultural continuity and this chapter will also illustrate the continuity of certain cultural patterns and structures.

It is important not to underestimate the ongoing influence of Catholic evangelisation on the ways Achi people think and interpret daily life experiences. Many of the narratives I heard concerning the persecution and death of relatives during the height of the political violence (1981-1983) were expressed in terms of the last days of Christ’s life, his betrayal, capture, scourging, and cruel death. The “emphasis on Christ as both victim and saviour of the world” was “part of the broad tradition of late medieval piety” (Acroyd 1998:98). As the rest of Europe was confronting the challenges of Lutheranism, Spain was imposing Catholic orthodoxy. This orthodoxy was pre-reformation Catholicism, complete with saint and holy day celebrations with processions, pageants, religious comedies, music, and the organisations to stage them (cofradias) which also functioned as a mechanism of social and political control. These customs, which survived intact in Spain a century beyond their disappearance in the rest of Europe (Woolf 1980 [1972]), were therefore part of the cultural baggage brought to the New World. What did not survive in Europe (including Spain) was the cult of the dead which had been “so prominent in late medieval worship” (Acroyd 1998:211). The assimilation of Christian practice is an important reality that should not be overlooked (Brading 1990:184-204).

\textsuperscript{47} For Nahua commemoration practices, see the chronicles of the 16\textsuperscript{th} century. Two main chronicles are Sahagün (1979) and friar Motolinia (Nutini 1988:64-65).
The aim of this chapter is, then, to demonstrate how the patterns and structures of pre-Hispanic concepts are presented both in contemporary myths about the ancestors and in the ritual practise of the Achi people as they recreate the ancestors’ primordial actions and provide themselves with a sense of order based on repetition and feelings of stability, belonging, and continuity. To this end, I will analyse Achi myths of the creation of the World of Light (i.e., the coming of Christianity) as explanatory paradigms of local history through which the superimposed Catholic cult undergoes a process of ‘rajawalisation’ that is, in order to provide sequence, continuity, and a sense of historicity to the cult of the ancestors, Jesus is incorporated as an authoritative ancestor (rajawal). The power of Jesus as man and God is similar to that of the rajawales and, according to the elderly musician Eligio Gonzales, Jesus is a rajawal because he is considered a Mayan ancestor. The concept of rajawales links the living to the first ancestors and Jesus in a direct time line; the link is maintained by each generation inviting the animas to participate in a continuous procession of life crisis rituals loosely tied to the endless cycle of calendrical rituals. The linear concept of time in the Christian paradigm, which establishes a beginning and a continuity of life until the final judgement, has been invoked to support the Maya status quo. The main paradigm imposed by Catholicism – the biblical account of Jesus’ life and sacrifice – is incorporated, transformed, and interpreted as a myth of origin and creation that conforms to pre-existing concepts of cyclical time and hence requires the ritual re-enactment of the first ancestors’ mythical deeds in order for life to continue. The body of Christ is identified with the sun (ajaw) which has to be ‘lifted’ every year for life to continue.

Rajawales are not just the powerful ancient ancestors, the mythic heroes of the creation, the first Mayans, and the Lords of the World; they are also the Christian

48. The conversion of Christ, the saints, and virgins into ancestors as a means of incorporating Christian myths into a Maya Achi vision of continuous history results in the surprising idea that the congregation of the indigenous population into new settlements and the creation of the cofradías to celebrate the liturgical calendar, actually enforced by the Spanish in the early colonial era, are the deeds of the ancestors.

49. Similarly, the pagan religions of the classic world re-emerged in the early Christian cult of the saints (Brown 1981).

50. The root ajaw (sun) also means señor, (lord), patron, owner and, as such, the word is used to refer to religious, political, and social authority. Ajaw is also the root of words such as rajawales and kajawxeles (principal bearers of the cofradia).
saints, angels, incarnations of the Virgin, and, of course, Jesus himself. The spirits of
the dead (ánimas) and living elders who have gained knowledge and experience
through participation in the cofradias also have power of a similar order to that of the
first ancestors; they too are deemed raiawales. However, unlike living raiawales
(cofradia elders), ánimas are part of the communion of souls which influences the
destiny of the world and its human inhabitants; what they have in common is their
knowledge and authority over succeeding generations.

The dead are invited individually and as a collectivity to both life crisis rituals
and cofradia fiestas. Common to both types of celebrations is the abogado (ritual
prayer-maker) who summons the dead in a ritual invocation. Finally, I discuss the
impact of belief in the continuing life of the dead on the life of individuals.

THE ORIGIN OF THE 'WORLD OF LIGHT' AND OF THE COFRADÍAS

The first men were the Wise Mayans who lived in remote time in a dark world
and possessed extraordinary powers: people say “they could see into the distance
(future)”, they grew old but never died, and they knew everything. Historically, these
men were the Achi ancestors who attained definitive victories over the K’iche’ and
Poq’omchis at the end of the fifteenth century and who constructed the forts and
temples of Chwitnamit and Kajyup fort in Rabinal.

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51 cf. Mendelson’s (1957) investigation into the ‘owners of the world’ in Santiago
Atitlán, which reveals that the owners of all the manifestations of Nature are thus ‘lords of the world’.

52 Literally, advocates. Abogados are the advocates of the living in their dealings with
God and the dead.

53 ‘Popul Vuh’ (Tedlock 1985) is the most complete record of the Mayan creation myths
of the world and of human life; it is also a history of the origins of; and struggles between, the K’iche’s
and their neighbours.

54 Kajyup, Chwitnamit, and Saqkijel are the most important post-classic archaeological
sites in the Rabinal basin (Arnould 1993:98). Rabinalenses say that Kajyup hill is the residence of the
rajawales or spirits of the kings, princesses, and warriors represented by the masks worn by performers
of the Rabinal Achi dance-drama, which re-enacts the Achis’ defeat of the K’iche’. Oral history also tells
that Chwitnamit was the place of the Poq’omchis who were expelled towards Cobán by the Rabinalense.
The ‘peaceful’ conquest of colonial Verapaz, achieved through the Dominican Order’s exclusive control of the province (Bertrand 1987; Saint-Lu 1968), has left its mark on Rabinalense myths which refer to the conflict between the ancient Maya and Christ and to the whereabouts of the Wise Men. These are myths about conversion, death, and rebirth, in that the sacrifice and death of Jesus set the example for others to follow: the raiawales lost their physical immortality, and the sun (aiaw) was allowed to rise. The first evangelisation is remembered as the ‘coming of the Light’, the time when aiaw rose, when Jesus was born, and when the Wise Maya disappeared or were converted into ‘people’ (Christians).

There are several interrelated versions of this myth. For example, when I enquired about the origins of music, violinist Magdaleno Xitumul told me a story about the creation of musical instruments which is related to the life of Jesus, the envy of the first people, and the sufferings He went through on earth:

People say that the ancestors were Wise Men, they know what is going to happen tomorrow and after tomorrow, they know everything, they know the law of our eternal Father because they are sajorines (Wise Men; soothsayers). When these first sons of our Father went before the altar, they say they did not have anything to offer Him, because they were Wise Men (i.e., pagans) they did not use candles, they made their holy images but out of materials unbeknown to us. They were worshippers, but they did not use candles.

Then Jesus Christ knew everything since an early age and the Wise Men did not like that, the first people were upset. The elders said, “What does He know? How could He be a Wise Man if he is so young?” They were feeling very uncomfortable with Him. Whatever they spoke with little Jesus, they went to check in their books but nothing of that was in them.

Then they became very angry with Jesus. Then they said, “Where is He going to put us? If other people are going to be His sons, then we are nothing.” That is why they accused Jesus of being a thief and a killer. The ancestors thought of giving a poison to Jesus, something to drink so that He would die. They all

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55 Sajorines, also known as ajq’i’i (healers, diviners), are the most powerful prayer-makers (abogados). They are believed to be descendants of the Mayan Wise Men who kept the day count and could predict the future (Colby and Colby, eds., 1986). As healers, they cure with prayers and plants; as diviners, they identify the source of witchcraft. People say Rabinal no longer has any diviners but stories about practices performed on nearly Kamba hill to forecast the coming year’s rainfall persist. Prior to the political violence of 1982, the Ixils were well known for their numerous healers and diviners (Colby and Colby 1986). The word sajorin or sahori (greeter) is traditionally used in Spain to refer to people who are born with the gift to heal (Foster 1985).

agreed to give Jesus a poisonous [alcoholic] beverage. First they tested it on one of themselves to see if it worked. Once all the little animals were inside the body of the man who drank it, he felt heartburn, he was very ill and was about to die. So, what did they do? They searched for a remedy. They made the marimba, they made the *adufe* (square drum); they made the drum to cure him. They thought these instruments were good as a remedy, so they began to play the marimba, the violin, the drum and so on. Then the little animals inside said, “What is that noise outside?” So they came out to see. The people saw the little animals; there was a male and a female. Later on, when the day came, they prepared the beverage for Jesus, but they say that Jesus never drank it, and so that is why alcohol remained with us.

The myth demonstrates the ancient Mayas' knowledge and their dual power of giving and taking life. They created both musical instruments and alcohol, which can cause illness and death or effect cures and give life. The First Mayas, the Wise Men, were *aq’ mes* (healers); they were *aq’ iij* (*sajorines*) (Nash 1970; Wilson 1995); they were *aq’ itz* (evil sorcerers, witches): they possessed the dual forces of good and evil.

The power conflict is explained in terms of a generational opposition which threatens one of the main principles of order, that of seniority (chapter 4). By recounting the historical-mythical confrontation between the two religions and cosmic heroes, the Achi address the ongoing conflict between old life resisting death and the emergence of new life and a new order. The aspirations and ideas of the younger generations conflict with the status quo and the authority of the older generation, which is legitimised by the dead: the contemporary conflict between *Costumbristas* and Protestants (chapter 2) is an extreme example of an age-old contest.

Generational conflict extends beyond life: it exists between the living and the dead. The symbolic role of music, as stated in the myth, is central to this relationship. Music is a call and an offering of sustenance from the living to the dead. People say music helps the souls by temporarily releasing them from suffering; it also re-establishes a relationship of goodwill between the living and the dead. The way life continues depends on how this conflict is continually negotiated and resolved. This generational challenge to seniority applies to all aspects of social life and it is one of the important social forces of change in music (chapters 8 and 9).

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57. Also known as *curanderos*, these healers work with prayers and medicinal plants.
Victor Tum, a well-known abogado (prayer-maker), musician, and former kajawxel (head) of the cofradía del San Pedro Apostol, told me a different version of the conversion of the Wise Men:

When Jesus was born the three Wise Men, the Black Men, came to see. These three wise Kings are the Mayas, they are people just like us, but they have a lot of money; they have their work, they are rich, they have land, horses, mules, bulls, and so on. In those times, there was no sun, nothing, no light, no stars, but, when Jesus was born, all of a sudden the sun was lit, the moon too, and they have stayed that way ever since. The ancient Mayas were people of the darkness, there was no sun so they never saw the sun. The Mayas did not know anything, but they were the first people. Then, when Jesus came, they heard the sun was coming, the morning star was coming, and the dawn was coming, so they stopped working and went to see. They took the tabor (drum) with them, they made it to play for the child Jesus. The kings worked on the tabor to play with happiness, they made it, they created it to bring happiness to the place where Jesus of Nazareth was to be born, when the sun raised, when the morning star emerged. They looked for the yellow flowers in the mountain and brought them on horses, they went to see the child that was going to be born, they brought roses, incense, and white Madonna lilies. They left the work, the Kings, the Mayas left it, and they became like saints because they made their offering, they went to see Jesus and Jesus blessed us as Maya people, we became people [Christians] because Jesus arranged it.

The cumplimiento (act of devotion) realised by the Wise Mayas when they took their musical offering to the child God turned them into saints and they became Christians. Following this logic, the saints and virgins (in the initial instance, the Wise Men’s wives rather than the various incarnations of the Virgin Mary celebrated by the cofradías dedicated to them today) are the first Maya ancestors who converted to Christianity and followed Jesus’ path. They are the ‘first mothers and fathers’ (ka nabe chu ka kaw) of the men and women who left Rabinal, the centre of the world (uxmut kaj uxmut ulew), in order to populate the earth. The first founding ancestors are particularly identified with the Virgin of the Sacrament (ixoc ajaw; literally, female lord) and the Holy Sacrament of the Altar, the body of Christ (achi ajaw; literally, male

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58. The Black Men are usually identified with the Three Kings in the Bible story (Matthew 2) though only one is Black according to Catholic legend (chapter 4).

59. Literally, the umbilical of the earth, the umbilical of the sky.
lord); the Achi terms express the duality of ajaw in its male and female manifestations.\(^{60}\)

In another myth concerning the end of the World of Darkness (the remote, pre-Hispanic times) and the emergence of the sun (the beginning of Catholicism in Rabinal), the Wise Men appear as Pharisees who fought against Jesus' wisdom and succeeded in killing him. Before dying, the first ancestors used their extraordinary powers to bring masonry from the ruins of Kajyup (their temple in the 'dark ages') through the air to construct the church, which they equipped with staffs, a lectern, censer, processional candlesticks, the cross – all made of silver.\(^{61}\) They also bequeathed incense, candles, and the organisation of the cofradías to serve God, thus giving light to the world. They then buried themselves under the arches of the church walls. Since then all generations have carried out the costumbre (custom), becoming the 'dead who participated in the service of God' mentioned in every abogado's prayers (see below). The living remember and pay respect to the living spirits of the dead because their experience and knowledge permits them to communicate with God about people's needs on earth. The myth says that:

The patzka (humble elders)\(^{62}\) came from Jerusalem, journeying by land. Arriving here [Rabinal], they encountered the divine [sacrament] that was sitting, immobile, in front of the church. Everything was in darkness... Although no one had succeeded in raising up the divine [sacrament] onto the altar, the patzka, exerting so much force that they became ill and grew goitres,\(^{63}\) managed to lift the divine [sacrament] and fulfilled the request. This is how the first dawn of the world arrived and how the sun rose. When the patzka saw the day had broken, they buried themselves under the church (Breton 1987).

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\(^{60}\) Today the cofradía of the Divine Sacrament is the largest of Rabinal's sixteen Indian cofradías whereas the cofradía of the Virgin of the Sacrament is the second smallest.

\(^{61}\) These actually date from the 1840s.

\(^{62}\) This is another name for the Wise Men. It expresses their junior relationship in relation to Jesus/God. They are also known as Ueuechos or 'goitre men'.

\(^{63}\) The most common cause of goitre is iodine deficiency, which is still a recognisable health problem in Guatemala (Barry 1987:15). The celebration of this deficiency could be a form of normative behaviour, representing conditions of the past. I was told that there were still cases in Xococ, the most traditional of Rabinal's villages.
Thus the first ancestors raised the sun and buried themselves. As birth requires death, so the ancestors ‘planted’ themselves under the church.\(^\text{64}\)

The myth and ritual of the lifting the Holy Sacrament, which identifies the body of Christ with the sun (\textit{ajaw}), is re-enacted every year at the festival of Corpus Christi which coincides with the start of the rainy season and the planting phase of the annual agricultural cycle. Corpus Christi also marks the beginning of the ritual year\(^\text{65}\) and is the most important festival in the Achi ritual calendar.

The Holy Sacrament is brought out in procession and the \textit{Patzka} dance-drama is performed. Participants dance in front of the \textit{ajaw} (Divine Sacrament) to the music of the flute and \textit{tum} (slit drum),\(^\text{66}\) wearing masks with goitres and carrying planting rods in the form of serpents (which symbolise rain and lightening). The Achi say that the dancers are asking for rain and their performance and paraphernalia symbolise Earthquake, who announces the change in the weather, the lightening, thunder, and rain necessary for the fertilisation of the land (Breton 1979:181). The dancers’ symbolic actions evoke the act of sowing and the fertilisation of the land and are the vital forces that produce the rising of the sun (\textit{ajaw}) and its movement along its annual path. The annual performance of the \textit{Patzka} dance-drama not only marks the arrival of the rains and the start of the planting cycle which is understood as a rebirth and the beginning of a new cycle, but makes it happen.

The act of creation, when the world was lit, was the birth of Christ, and His sacrifice created the new world order. The ancestors who constructed the church and sacrificed themselves echoed Christ’s deeds; the annual ritual repetition of these acts recreate and maintain the world. In other words, the Christian paradigm has been transformed and reinterpreted in a cyclical time frame that requires re-enactment to maintain cosmic order and the continuity of life in the World of Light. It is a ‘plausible structure’ (Berger 1967) that allows continuity and justification of the cult to the

\(^{64}\) Here the sacrifice of the \textit{patzka} who represent rain and the fertilisation of land may be taken as an act which regenerates life (cf. Bloch and Parry 1982:1-40; Harris 1982:45-73).

\(^{65}\) The annual calendar of festivities is mostly comprised of \textit{cofradia} celebrations.

\(^{66}\) This drum is known in the Nahautl language as \textit{teponaztle}. It is not actually a proper drum but an idiophone (an instrument that produces sound by the vibration of its own primary material).
ancestors, accommodating itself in a discourse which is compatible with the dominant Christian religious structures.

Breton (1987) maintains that structure and dynamics of myths of creation and maintenance of the world are homologous to the sequence of life crisis rituals. He explains that the terms used to designate the status and roles of men and women in the different stages of their lives are projected into the religious dimension of ritual and myth as categories of the order and movement of the universe. In Berger’s (1967:25-51) terms, ‘cosmisation’ takes place where the social construction and establishment of a divine order in the cosmos guarantees and legitimises the social order.

The role of the ancestors operates in both cyclic and linear notions of time. The former requires the sacrifice and burdening of the first ancestors, the rajawales (including Jesus), and of the following generations to maintain the order of the cosmos and the continued movement of the sun on its path throughout the year. Simultaneously, a local concept of historical time is present, in that the Achi trace their origins in a linear succession of generations, starting with the first ancestors in the World of Darkness in the following sequence:

Wise Men of the Dark World
Jesus, or ajaw, the sun; Jesus' birth was the origin of the World of Light Saints and Virgins
Illustrious ancestors: kajawxeles; musicians; everyone who served in the cofrarias
Ancestors in general (q’ati q’amam; literally, grandmothers and grandfathers)
Recent dead
Living Achi

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67. The first stage is marriage, which transforms the couple into adult men and women (achi and ixoc respectively) capable of procreation. The second stage is that of biological reproduction, when the couple assumes the roles of father (qaw) and mother (chu). The third stage is the role of grandparents, called ati (grandmother) and mam (grandfather). The word mam is applied to older people in general, including established and respected musicians; it also means ‘ancestor’. The common element is knowledge.

68. Farriss (1987:566-593) presents a similar analysis of cyclic and linear concepts of time among the Maya during pre-Hispanic and Colonial times.
All the dead who, in life, served in the cofradía, whether by founding them or maintaining them through holding cargos, are illustrious ancestors and form part of the rajawales. They are invoked first, each one by name, in the abogado’s prayers. But the dead are also an indivisible collectivity known as ánimas q’ati q’amam (the souls of our grandmothers and grandfathers); hence to call one is to call all. The abogado nevertheless calls all the spirits of the ancestors with or without authority, whether or not their name or whereabouts is known, to join the living when they are called, so that no one is left out. Forgotten ánimas are dangerous to the living.

Local interpretations of the Christian paradigm and of Catholic institutions—such as the cofradías—are based on older mythic models and profound cognitive structures (Breton 1987:np). The body of Christ in the consecrated offering is the sun (ajaw) itself. If the concept of primordial exchange, of sacrifice in order to permit the sun to rise and life to begin, is framed in the context of Christian discourse, then the story of the rising of the sun (ajaw) and the awakening of the world has also been used in Maya texts of the early colonial era as a metaphor of settlement, of the construction of their forts and temples and of Rabinalenses’ control and power over the region (Breton 1994). The same metaphor was used to describe the settlement of both the K‘iche’ and Achi people, as can be seen in the Popul Vuh (Tedlock 1986:181-6) and in the Annals of the K’aqchiqueles (Recinos et al 1967:83).

In relation to the concept of space, the metaphor of raising the sun and the new dawn of the world makes reference to the inauguration of the political power of the government that cares for and protects both land and people. The birth of light and the raising of the body of Christ (ajaw) by the old and humble patzka ancestors are founding events homologous to the foundation and inauguration of Achi political and military power over the territory of Rabinal at the turn of the sixteenth century. This in turn is overlapped by the foundation of the town of Rabinal with its church under Dominican dominion after 1537. The elision of these two political events is celebrated through the performance of the Rabinal Achi (Xajoj Tum) dance-drama during the festivities celebrating the Conversion of San Pablo, the patron saint of Rabinal, in

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69 The union of all souls conforms to the Achi idea that regardless of people’s behaviour or religious belief on earth, after death they all live together under the earth and then after a time, in heaven, thus negating the Christian concept of heaven for the good and hell for sinners.
January. This dance-drama is a re-enactment of the establishment of the Rabinalense territory following their victory over the K’iche’ (Breton 1994).

THE COFRADÍAS

The cofradías are religious sodalities organised in a hierarchical system of annual religious responsibility positions called cargos (literally, burdens) that serve and care for the saints. After marriage and thus becoming complete persons, men and women in the towns, villages, and hamlets are not only encouraged to participate in the cofradía throughout their lives but also to adopt cargos of increasingly greater prestige and social and economic responsibility in the service of the saints. The aim is to attain, if possible, the seven cargos in one or more cofradía.

The seven grades in the cargo hierarchy are divided into two groups. The secondary group contains the lowest grades (seven to four) who are known as mayordomos (servants of the saints) or achi (men); their main function is to clean and decorate the different sites where ritual action takes place. Their wives are known simply as ixok (woman). The primary group contains grades three to one and the first is known as kajawxel (father/owner/lord); his wife is known as the chuchuxel (mother/mother superior/female head). This husband and wife team is the ‘father and mother’ of the cofradia and bear the main responsibility for all aspects of the festivities for one saint over one year. Their ‘arms’, the second and third achi and their wives assist them in this. The kajawxel is responsible for the organisation and costs of the saint’s fiestas. The chuchuxel controls the labour of all female cargo-holders and is

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responsible for organising, calculating, and preparing the food for all the festivities of the saint; in addition, she has to prepare the meals for the cargueros when they visit other cofradias. Upon completion of these burdens, they reach the position of principales pasados (past principals) who integrate into la asamblea del pueblo (the people’s assembly or council of elders who only have advisory role). As they no longer hold a cargo, they are diminished (menores) and subject to the new authorities in turn. It is thought that some principales pasados do not take kindly to this demotion and put their knowledge to evil use (chapter 10).

As principales pasados, men’s legitimate authority base moves sideways. They are also known as raiawales (town lords);\(^7^4\) they may become ritual specialists known as abogados, tenientes\(^7^5\) or padrinos (names for prayer-makers according to occasion). Abogado is the general term for the ritual specialists who address appeals and prayers to God and the ancestors on behalf of the living; they are known as tenientes when praying in cofradías and as padrinos when praying during life crisis rituals. This is only an option for those former kajawxeles who excel in memorising all the prayers that constitute ‘the tradition of the Lord’ and can improvise within the structure of these prayers. Serving kajawxeles who have this skill are likely to have served as abogados before becoming cofradia principales.

Within the cofradía, each group of cargueros has an abogado teniente who has specific ritual duties and has to be able to perform his work effectively. One abogado teniente leads the prayers of the kajawxel and his second and third achís and another leads the prayers of the mayordomos. For the three cofradía which have them – San Pablo, San Pedro Apostol, San Sebastián – another abogado teniente leads the prayers of the men who are in charge of decorating the processional altar with feathers (plumeros).

From the participants’ perspective, service in the cofradías is both a right and an obligation. In the tradition of Customary Catholicism, assuming a cargo is seen as a

\(^7^4\) Kajawxeles (and raiaweles) are ‘lords of the town’ because the ancestors held cargos. For the relationship between civil and religious authorities, see chapter 2.

\(^7^5\) During Colonial times the person substituting a priest in a given parish was called teniente de cura (an assistant who substituted a priest in his absence).
sacrifice for the community's well being which brings prestige to the carguero. Prestige accumulates as he progresses through his career, assuming greater responsibility as he occupies increasingly important cargos; he is remembered for his patronage in every prayer said in the Customary Catholic community. Participation in cargos is, then, an investment that brings social capital (Bourdieu 1986[1977]:171-183) that transforms into authority and influence. Until recently, the acquisition of social capital, which is proportionate to the ranking of the cargo held, was only available to wealthier peasants: only they could afford the most prestigious and expensive cargos and accordingly candidates were selected from this small group.76

Most Customary Catholics can only afford to participate in minor cargos in minor cofradías and do not pursue higher positions; they are satisfied with having fulfilled the basic moral obligation to serve. However, I encountered some exceptions. One wealthy kajawxel participated in the cargo system in order to leave poverty behind. As he related his continuous efforts to save and buy land, he seemed to be justifying his accumulated wealth as a reward for serving God. Yet this kajawxel also explained that excepting a few traditional villages such as Xococ and Pichec, it is the poorest people who are most disposed to assume cargos because those with the most resources (whether Ladino or Indian) have a more commercial vision and refuse to invest their saving in the 'service of God'. Thus he placed himself on the side of the righteous and distanced himself from people who accumulated wealth while disregarding their religious obligations.

There are sixteen Indian cofradías in Rabinal (see Appendix I.), plus two Ladino ones.77 Following the dualistic principle of order which structures Indian notions of the world, most cofradía images are organised in pairs and celebrated twice that is, on their own and their partner's saint's day. Those images which are not paired – San Sebastián, Santo Domingo, San Pedro Martires, San Francisco, and San Miguel78

76. Cancian's (1965) analysis of the Zinacantan cargo system reveals that it reflected social stratification. Twenty years later, the system not longer reflected this: the community had been opened to the market economy and alternative economic and political interests had emerged. Nevertheless, those who held the more prestigious cargos were wealthy people (Cancian 1992).

77. These are the cofradías of the Virgin of Patrocinio and the Virgin of the Conception, in which Indians have taken cargos because of Ladinos' growing disinclination to do so.
— are accompanied during their festivities with a minor, or junior, image of the same saint. Cofradias are also divided into a group of ‘big’ cofradías and a group of ‘small’ ones, as can be seen from Appendix 1.

Rabinal municipality is divided into four quarters, with the church in Rabinal town as the centre. Two quarters fall in the higher part of Rabinal to the east (San Pedro Apostol quarter to the southeast is the most important of the quarters on the upper land), and the other two fall in the lower part of the territory to the west (San Sebastian quarter to the northwest is the most important quarter on the lowland). Most of the villages and hamlets of the municipality belong to San Pedro Apostol quarter or to San Sebastian quarter. Apart from those cofradías that are dedicated to the saint of each quarter, the cofradía of the patron San Pablo—which is imagined at the centre of the town, in the church—rotates annually from one quarter to the next (in an anti-clockwise direction) and its cargueros should be chosen from the quarter that has ‘possession’ for the year. Most of the kajawxeles of the five largest cofradía — together with their second and third achis — are chosen from the most traditional villages in the lower, western half of the municipality, namely, Xococ and Pichec. This has enormous relevance to political and religious conflict in Rabinal because the main opposition to Catholic catechists during la violencia came from these villages, as did the civil patrols that participated directly in the biggest massacres in Rabinal (chapter 2). Since then, the people of Rabinal town, the municipality’s primary bastion of Customary Catholicism, have not been welcome in Xococ, costumbrismo’s second stronghold, because of the latter’s continuing support for the army.

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Santo Domingo, San Pedro Martires and San Sebastián are the cofradías of three of Rabinal’s four quarters.
ABOGADOS AND THEIR PRAYERS

_Abogados_ and musicians[^79] are the most important ritual figures in all Customary Catholic celebrations because they are the intermediaries between the living and all the dead ancestors and God. As intermediaries, _abogados_ participate in all ritual activities that seek the intervention of God and the ancestors for the benefit of the living; they lead the ritual activity and, with prayers and music, they request permission to enter the sacred world, opening the path of communication with the spirits.

_Abogados_ are also commissioned to perform 'devotions' comprising prayers that either aid the repose of the _ánima_ of a client's deceased relative or solicit protection for the client from the _ánimas_ or other powerful spirits.[^80] _Abogados_ perform similar rituals of permission and protection every Monday.[^81] Early Monday morning, one can see most of Rabinal's _abogados_ laying their candles before the saints in the town's principal church or on their way down to the Calvary Chapel where they pray and carry out petitions of protection for the _ánimas_. As _curanderos_ (aik' mes), _abogados_ perform _promesas_ (pledges) which are prayers promising further _devociónes_ (offerings) to a certain spirit or saint in exchange for helping someone to recover their health; they also bless new constructions of houses or chapels, request that businesses go well and so on.

The ritual activity during _cofradia_ celebrations is structured around the 'entry discourses' (permission to enter the altar) of _abogados_ and the music that accompanies these prayers (big drum and flute and a marimba ensemble). These discourses are repeated each time any group of cargo-holders requests permission to enter the

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[^79]: Musical ensembles, their repertoire and the occasions on which they play are shown in Appendix 2).

[^80]: For example, the spirits represented in the ritual dance-dramas: performers require the permission and protection of the _rajawal_ spirits whose masks they wear in order to avoid failure during the re-enactment of the myths.

[^81]: The likely origin of this practice can be found in the rules and statutes of the choir of the metropolitan church of Santiago de Goahtemala, drawn up circa 1770 by its archbishop, Cortés y Larras. The choir's duties included singing the mass for the dead for the souls in purgatory on the first Monday of each month (Lemmon 1990).
sanctuary of the house where the celebration is being held (Example number 1 in cassette: soundscape of cofradia with music and prayers.)

Once all preparations are completed, the abogado begins chanting in archaic Achi\(^2\) to the accompaniment of both musical ensembles who play independently of each other throughout the ritual. He begins his parlamento (literally, speech) with a prayer of thanks to God and the saints for a new dawn over the world's four corners. This first part of the proceedings refers to the dawning of the sky and to the four cardinal points of the earth, commencing in the east, then the west, then north and, finally, south. This accords with the course of the sun in a horizontal terrestrial plane, so that north is identified with the zenith and south with the nadir and night.\(^3\)

When referring to the four 'corners' of the world, the abogado gives examples from each direction such as the temple of the Lord of Esquipulas, where the sun rises, Cobán City church to the north, and so on. Each abogado makes his own particular selection. Then the abogado mentions the awakening of Rabinal from the summit of the surrounding hills down to the church in the centre of town. He then proceeds to awaken the four quarters of Rabinal, describing a circle which begins in the upper part of town to the east and north (San Pedro Martir), proceeds on to the lower part of town to the Northwest (San Sebastian) and then to the Southwest (Santo Domingo) and finally to the Southeast in the upper part of town (San Pedro Apostol).

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\(^2\) The archaic language of the prayers and the abogado's mumbling chant (not to mention the noise of the marimba) make these prayers virtually unintelligible and so I was unable to make a full translation of the discourse at the time. What follows is an abogado's explanation of the content of the prayer in a recording I made.

\(^3\) A possible explanation for the association between north and zenith, south and nadir may be that during the period of the year when the days are longer and hotter, the sun changes its emerging position, moving towards the north-east. During the time of year when the days get colder and shorter, the sun moves, appearing in the southeast. See Gossen (1979 [1974]:55-57).
Next, the *abogado* mentions the dawning in the realm of the dead. The discourse follows an order based on the ‘underworld’ (night-time) course of the sun which passes through Rabinal’s cemeteries from the western, lower part of the valley, through south, to those in the eastern, upper land. The journey begins at the Calvary Chapel at Rabinal’s oldest cemetery on the western margins of town. Next is the second and more recent town cemetery, the Tamarindo, which is in the same direction. Then the *abogado* mentions the awakening in all the cemeteries in the low-lying land to the west: the cemeteries of Chitucán, Pajales, and Raxuj above Xococ village; Xococ’s own cemetery; those of Patzún, Patzité; and the cemetery of Chiatzum, close to the village of Pachicá. After the dawning in the western cemeteries, the speech journey moves to the south-eastern and upper lands of Rabinal, to the cemeteries of Chuatioxché, close to Concul, and to Palo Hueco, close to Chuategua.
The dawning in each of these places is described in metaphoric language referring to the natural environment – the birds that sing, giving thanks to God for the awakening, for example. The speech of the dawning, that is, of the creation of the World of Light, ends with the mention of the crucifixion of Christ and how his death represents the death of the first ancestor in the new World of Light.

The second phase of the ritual is the ‘roll call’ of the spirits. The spirits are called in hierarchical order, beginning with God the Father and his child, then the saints and virgins, and Mayan Wise Men who founded the church and left the silver staffs in service of the cofrías, as is related in the myths of the beginning of the World of Light. In family life crisis rituals, family ancestors are slotted in here, beginning in the case of death anniversaries with the name of the deceased and continuing with his more illustrious ancestors. For cofradía festivities, the abogado emphasises all the dead raiawales (deceased cargueros), calling them in order according to their town quarter which are named in an anti-clockwise direction in the order Northeast-Northwest-Southwest-Southeast. This is followed by the names of all the deceased abogados and the musicians who accompanied them, the kajawxeles and their wives (chuchuxeleks), and the fourth to seventh mayordomos and their wives. Then a general call is made to those ánimas of the dead who did not hold a cargo and all the souls of the whole municipality.

Special mention is given to the ‘truant souls’ whose misery is considered to have a negative impact on the living (cf. Zur 1998). This category of ánima is particularly important in Rabinal because of the thousands of deaths that occurred during la violencia, when it was impossible to perform remembrance rituals even for those who died of natural causes. Gatherings with music were banned for three years from 1981.

Truant souls fall within one or more of three categories: people who are not buried ‘properly’ (in Rabinal’s cemetery), which means that no one holds vigil for

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84. cf. Revelations 3:5: “He who is victorious...his name I will never strike off the roll of the role of the living, for in the presence of my father and his angels I will acknowledge him as mine.”

85. In this instance, kajawxeles refers to the head of the cofradía and his deputies, the second and third mayordomos.
them; people who died in common accidents; and people who died at the hands of others. Deaths resulting from human action are considered 'unnatural', as God did not send them. “All these are the blessed souls”, says the abogado, who then lists the souls by their type of death in time honoured fashion:

The poor ánimas of those massacred in the time of violence; those who were tortured, hanged, poisoned, or murdered by machete, knife, or bullet; those who remains were dumped in the hills, thrown in ravines, or buried in clandestine graves;

Those who died on a journey (ánimas caminantes), whether on a romeria (pilgrimage), in hospital, on the coastal plantations, away on business, or doing military service. This category includes people who lost their way, such as Protestants;

Those taken by the waters of the rivers and the sea, those who fell from trees, or into ravines;

People who are not ‘complete’ (unmarried and/or childless) are also called, as are single mothers, “all those who have no family [children] and no-one to remember them”;

The blind, the crippled, lepers, the children who died during that ‘evil time’ and still-born ánimas – “the small innocent angels who did not know the world and hence are also ánimas in pain.”

The invocation concludes with a summons to all ánimas “wherever they are”: the abogado commands each and every one to come because the offering is for all of them, rich and poor, Indian and Ladino, because everyone is equal in the afterlife. I was told that “Even though their blood drenched other places, their soul knows where their town is and they will come.”

The abogado’s discourse, which has the same structure and content whether the event is a betrothal ceremony, wedding, cofradia fiesta or death anniversary, is simultaneously a restatement of the origin myth and a recount of genealogical testimony which defines the group and its territory (Breton 1980:210). In a more broad

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86 In death anniversaries there is only one abogado, but he repeats the prayers twice: one in front of the grave at the cemetery and again in front of the altar in the Calvario cemetery chapel (chapter 7).
sense, this type of rite is a recreation of the cosmos as related in the myths of origin of the World of Light (Eliade 1987). Recounting the generations from first ancestors to the present day orders the world in time; it confirms the social order, which is portrayed as unchanging since ancient times. In other words, it is a discourse of empowerment that accumulates all previous authority and legitimises the status quo.

This is never more the case than in cofradia fiestas, where the second part of the parlamento (the roll call) is repeated each time different groups of cargueros arrive with their abogado. The entrance rite begins when the cargueros' abogado leads the way to the patio of the house where the cofradia celebrations are being held. Reaching the centre of the patio at the front of the house, the cargueros' abogado begins the blessings of the four cardinal points (cumplimientos). During a second set of blessings, the group proceeds to the porch. Finally, during the third blessing, they arrive at the door to the entrance of the sanctuary. In each blessing, the abogado mentions that the blessings are being made in the same way as in the past.

Once at the sanctuary entrance, the visiting groups greet one another and then their abogado hails the host kajawxel and his abogado who are situated just inside the door to the sanctuary; they come out to greet their visitors one by one, and then go in again. The visitors' abogado requests permission to enter to give their offerings and contributions and to pray the misterio (a set of Catholic liturgical prayers, recited in Spanish) and then launches into the parlamento as given above. He then performs three more blessings and gives thanks to God and the ancestors. From inside the sanctuary, the host's abogado signs his approval by making gestures and an aaaaaa sound. This gesture is known as chineando, which means, “Yes, everything you are saying is true, it is right.” He then responds with a similar long speech (to which the visiting abogado starts to chinear), after which he gives permission for the visiting abogado and his group of cargueros to enter. During these prayers, alcohol is poured on the ground as an offering to the sacred earth; then the abogados offer drinks to visiting group to the right and left of the door. This entrance rite takes about two hours. Once inside the sanctuary, the visiting cargueros and their abogado fall on their knees before the main altar and pray a misterio and thus conclude the entrance rite; the order of the world is confirmed, as is the men’s place in it. This is emphasised by the change in the music played on the marimba outside on the patio: each time a group of cargueros arrives to perform this
entrance rite, they interrupt the cycle of sones to play a son de entrada (entrance son) (chapters 5 and 7).

Photograph No. 3: Achi Woman at gravesite on the Day of the Dead

THE LIVING AND THE ÁNIMAS OF THE DEAD

These invisible entities from the actual, historical, and mythical past are omnipresent in the consciousness of the living; the relationship between them can be delineated in three important Achi concepts which not only place an individual’s life in direct relation to the past but also link it to the future:

1. The justification and legitimization of human survival is based on recognition of the experience, knowledge, and social practice of previous generations. “To follow custom as our ancestors did” is, as the Achi boldly say, a “burden and responsibility” during their time on earth. Fulfillment of this brings happiness to the dead and may aid the survival of the present generation.

2. The omnipresent idea that life is in God’s hands, is transient, and that death can occur at any moment.

3. The notion that the living have a soul (ánima) which continues to exist after death, joining the congregation of ánimas. The ánimas hope that the living will
remember them by performing *costumbre*, that is, by inviting the *ánimas* with *son* music and prayers to join and celebrate festivities with the living on earth. This is a requirement for the continuation of life.

Living humans have a body and a soul or spirit (*ánima*) which resides in the heart, which is also the site of memory, emotions, and will; the heart, together with the mind (*mente*) is the centre of knowledge. Among some Mayan groups, such as the Mam of Santiago Chimaltenango (Watanabe 1994[1992]: 89-105), the *ánima* is seen as something that is acquired and develops during the socialisation process: individuals internalise culture during social participation and interaction, forming criteria and values that guide and sanction behaviour.89

In Rabinal it is said that when someone dies, only the body dies. After death, the person is then remembered as an *ánima*. The *ánima* passes to the other life, where it joins the communion of souls of the dead. Continuity of life after death is founded in the immortality of the soul. I frequently heard people say, “The dead are more alive than the living.” Abogado Pedro Morales Kojom explained:

What dies is the body but not the spirit. They continue walking. We are the dead ones because we cannot see them; they can see us. They are able to look at us but we are unable to look at them, we lack that power. Fortunate is the one who can see a deceased person. They walk in the air. They do not tread on the ground. The spirit never dies. It will be judged but not until the last day, until the world ends, when all the living and the dead will be judged.

According to ancient belief, *ánimas* reside within the sacred earth; it is only as a result of Catholic influence that the ground in which they live has become synonymous with Christian cemeteries. Catholic influence is also responsible for the idea that once

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87. Immortality lies in remembrance and this is prolonged into personal eternal life granted by God. Where there is no remembrance, there is no hope for immortality. The origins of this belief can be found in Revelations, a very popular text in late medieval Europe: “Wake up, and put some strength into what is left, which must otherwise die. For I have not found any work of yours completed in the eyes of my God. So remember the teaching you received, observe it, and repent” (Revelations 2-7).

88. See López Austin (1996 [1980]: 207-208) for a similar concept among the ancient Naha. For explanations of memory in relation to music, see chapter 5; for emotions, see chapter 7.

89. Among the Maya Tzotzil of Chiapas, Mexico, an individual’s strength depends on the ‘heat’ produced by his or her *ch'ulel* (soul, in the Tzotzil language). This energy varies according to age, sex, and the individual’s participation in civil and religious positions (Guiteras Holmes 1986:229-236). López Austin (1996 [1980]: 223-237) analyses the animic entities known to Nahuatl-speaking Aztecs as *tonalli* (shadow) and *tevolia* (soul), which are related to the concepts of *ch'ulel* and *ánima* among the Tzotzil and Achi respectively.
the spirits have passed through the cemetery, they join God in the sky.\textsuperscript{90} Like God, the \textit{ánimas} are omnipresent and “see and hear everything we do and say and even know what we are thinking.” Their omnipresence and their closeness to God make them both witnesses to and guardians of the moral order and His law; their presence in all aspects of life are reminders of behavioural ethics and moral values which serve as a reference for the living in both their actions and thoughts. These roles grant \textit{ánimas} an additional moral weight in addition to the respect they deserve as older generations.

Maintaining good relations with the \textit{ánimas} is of ‘vital’ importance; ‘forgotten’ ancestors are believed to cause economic and (sometimes fatal) health problems for their living kin. To avoid this frightening prospect, people organise rituals to remember them, calling them with music and prayers to have a moment of ‘relief and rest’ in order to mitigate their suffering and to enjoy once more the various ‘flavours’ of offerings of ‘food’: more music, \textit{guaro} (locally distilled cane alcohol),\textsuperscript{91} \textit{Candelas} (candles), and incense. All these offerings are seen as having been created by the ancestors to celebrate the World of Light. \textit{Sones} music is the most important offering as it has been played since the first primordial events, both as an offering and a remedy, whether in celebration or as a plea for the preservation of life. Indeed, the \textit{son} is a symbol of life. In exchange for these offerings, the living invoke the knowledge and experience of the ancestors in order to obtain their blessings so that their prayers may reach God. By willingly inviting the dead with music and prayers to participate in all religious celebrations, the living attempt to placate them and control their unwelcome attentions; they say that they can feel the \textit{ánimas}’ presence while listening to the music and that in these circumstances their presence is not frightening. Fulfilling one’s obligations to the dead is, then, a form of self-protection, particularly against other people’s envy and thirst for revenge (chapter 10).

\textsuperscript{90} According to \textit{abogado} Pedro Morales K’ojom, the recent dead become ancestors (\textit{mam}) when some generations have passed and they are considered to have been judged and are rightfully with God in heaven.

\textsuperscript{91} Among the Maya Jacaltecs of Huehuetenango, the dead are considered to be chained and suffering because they are separated from their living kin. The living therefore invite the souls to join them, temporarily releasing them from bondage and for fear of harmful retribution from them (McArthur 1977).
Individual contacts between the ánimas' and the living can be interpreted as a good sign or a bad one, depending on what is being communicated, how, and by whom. The dead communicate in several ways: they may appear in the form of butterflies, which have been seen as manifestations of the soul since pre-Hispanic times (Furst 1995:28). The spirits may also make their presence felt during the night, producing noises in different parts of the house, making animals restless; people say that the white-clad spirits are nearby, moving rapidly through the air just above the ground, prospecting for souls to collect during the midnight rounds. Such visits give rise to fears that there will soon be a death in the household. Several people told me that their parents or grandparents had had conversations with the spirits as they lay dying in their homes, receiving them as guests, and causing great worry to others present who were not able to see them. The most common time for spirits to appear to individuals is late at night on the streets and dirt tracks when people are on their way home from a fiesta, drunk and vulnerable. At night the streets, mountains, and roads are all dangerous places where evil-intentioned spirits may appear (Watanabe 1994 [1992]). Particularly dangerous are the ánimas of people who, for one reason or another, were not properly buried in the cemetery and wander in pain because they have no one to look after them (cf. Zur 1998).

A common form of communication is through dreams when the sleeping person is unable to exercise conscience or will. Marimbista Julián Ordoñez pointed out that since dreams are beyond an individual’s control, it is the ánimas who remember the living and decide to visit them:

It is as if one were dead and not in control. Suppose that someone in your family had died thirty or forty years ago. You will see them in your dream like a portrait [painted] forty years ago. It is we who are lost, and not their spirits. Why do we still dream of them thirty or forty years later? We are the ones benefiting here on earth, not them. They are in another life and perhaps suffering there; but they know they have family, so they come and we dream and see them here after thirty or forty years.

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93 In the Catholic belief of the Maya Trixanos, the town is God’s realm; the rest of the world – cities, valleys/mountains – is the domain of the devil. Their guardians are his armies and may penetrate and influence the town. This opposition embodies other concepts concerning the subordination of the Indian world to the Ladino sphere (Warren 1992[1978]: 46-48). For other descriptions, see Siegel (1941:67), Oakes (1951:93) and Adams (1952:31).
The appearance of dead people in dreams is of particular relevance to costumbristas and is frequently reflected upon and subjected to considerable interpretation. Although some people told me that the ánimas can simply give counsel, many others said that they appear in dreams to admonish some fault in the living. It is generally thought that the dead should not need to visit a person’s dreams, especially if that person has fulfilled his/her obligations to that ánima. According to abogado Victor Tum, if the visiting soul speaks, the dreamer is in mortal danger; silence means that death is close to a relative or friend.

Regardless of this ambivalence, such dreams are valued for their premonitory and normative quality; their significance is a theme that often appears in conversations between parents and children who learn to interpret them as admonishments, omens or warnings of misfortune. Fears and anxieties about conflict, illness, and death are released unwillfully through the presence of ánimas in dreams. These dream visits are invitations to make personal and family reflections about morality, social obligations, and responsibilities when conflicts occur. As the moral conscience of the collectivity, each time an ánima appears to an individual, it creates an instance of moral judgement about that person’s wrongdoings and inappropriate thoughts.

Within the contemporary religious context with its religious divisions, where Protestantism has gained substantial ground and thrown belief in the dead into question, testimonies to the ánimas’ existence constitute acts of faith and belief. Testimonies serve both as self-reflection upon behaviour and morality and as a position of loyalty to, and respect for, the ancestors.

The sudden appearance of ánimas in dreams can be frightening however, especially if the visiting spirit was a victim of la violencia. These ánimas not only pass judgement on the living but also haunt them with tales of their own suffering; they are considered malicious. Research into mental health undertaken by Judith Zur with the assistance of local health workers and myself revealed that the appearance of the

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95 Envy and revenge are included under the rubric of illness rather than conflict.
murdered and massacred in their relatives' dreams was one manifestation of survivors' fear of persecution and survivor guilt. Zur's (1998) work on K'iche' war widows echoes Rabinalense ideas concerning the appearance of these souls in dreams: their malice stems from the fact they have been denied entry to the afterlife. Their visits cause great fear. Widows turn to sajorines to interpret their dreams and their physical and emotional afflictions; according to local belief, the latter stems from the former. One sajorin told a widow that her physical pain related to the grief in her deceased father's heart. She had been unable to 'remember' him because his body had not been found; abandoned and suffering, his spirit became a vengeful presence. And not just to her: such wandering souls roam the places where they died, scaring passers-by. The selective murders and disappearances in Rabinal and the massacres that followed in 1981-82 (EAFG 1995) transformed the municipality into a landscape of terror as dangerous places multiplied. For example, the area close to the Pachalum elementary school was haunted by the soul of the teacher accused of owning communist literature and hanged from a tree. Other victims' souls haunted the Pantulul and Pachalum bridges, from which many people were thrown to their deaths, and so on. The fear generated by these sites, which are found all over town, in the cultivated fields, and in the bush beyond, is one of the reasons behind the drive to exhume the inappropriately buried dead. Recent changes in Guatemala have opened up political space and allowed its population to speak for the first time about the atrocities they suffered for almost four decades; thirty exhumations have been requested in Rabinal alone and the forensic anthropology teams which have been working in Guatemala hope to be able to oblige (Rolando Alecio, personal communication).

CONCLUSION

Belief in the immortality of the ánima is perceived as being fundamental to the continuity of existence from the time of darkness to the present: 'carrying out the custom in the way of the ancestors' assures that continuity in the present. Customary Catholics are thus morally compelled into the cyclic task and duty of maintaining the world through their demonstrations of faith and devotion to God; they do this by

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Among the K'iche' of Momostenango, a visit by soul during a dream is a positive experience (Barbara Tedlock 1992 [1982]).
remembering and calling together their dead. In return, the dead remember the living by assisting with their appeals to God. But the *ánimas* are much more than a conduit to God. They are the carriers of society’s moral values; they are the witnesses to the actions and thoughts of the living, the monitors of their descendants’ behavioural ethics. They are the guardians of morality and of God’s law, the collective memory of the living and a reminder of what people forget, that is, they are manifestations of the collective unconscious.

The re-enactment in prayer and ritual of myths about the ancestors’ deeds at the beginning of time creates and maintains a dynamic order of the world; the metaphor of dawning, of the lighting up of Rabinal, and the following of the sun’s path through the day and through the year, sets the beginning of a new cycle and is simultaneously a genealogical account of the ancestors. These two spatial-temporal elements, the recognition and definition of the territory familiar to dead and living Rabinales and the hierarchical recount of their descent are the foundations on which Customary Catholics remember and reconstruct their history as a discourse of identity, legitimisation and social continuity.
Chapter 4

Concepts and Classifications of Music

Achi concepts of music, music-making, and musical instruments are organised and operate in the same paired categories used to explain the order of the natural and social worlds. That world is governed by the principle of dualism that is manifest in an order of hierarchical (non-equal) pairs with distinct characteristics: the elements of the pair are some times opposed but intrinsically complementary (Lévi-Strauss 1995:33542; Tedlock 1986:77-82). The principle of duality is applied to all categories of order: senior/junior, right/left, feminine/masculine, and so on.97

In this chapter I will illustrate the pairs of categories used in relation to the conceptualisation of music and show how these categories are related to each other in such a way that they establish correspondences with the human and cosmic order. The sound images and shapes of music and musical instruments are heard and seen as manifestations of the dual quality of nature and of human beings.

Classifying the spiritual, physical, and social world in hierarchical category pairings predates the conquest and seems to be the aspect of Indian life least affected by 500 years of Christian proselytisation. It is a system of thought which has been virtually impervious to the European concept of contrasting or oppositional pairings. This is most clearly indicated by an absence of that most basic of Christian oppositions, good and evil. Whilst ideas of good and evil are common currency among the Achi, they are subsumed under traditional category pairings. The European idea of a struggle between good and evil does not exist (except as a metaphor for Ladino-Indian relations); rather, it is the context and personal intentions that make something good or bad (see chapter 6).

97 cf. the binary categories of the Maya Zinacantecos of Chiapas, Mexico, analysed by Vogt (1976:31-34). To Vogt, the most important ‘binary discriminations’ (which he calls ‘general operators’) are: rising sun/settng sun; right/left; senior/junior; hot/cold. Gossen (1979 [1974]) presents a similar analysis of the Maya Chamula worldview.
THE PRINCIPLE OF DUALITY

An analysis of the concept of twins as a principle of duality, unbalanced in the cosmos and in society, led Lévi-Strauss (1995) to the conclusion that duality is one of the philosophical principles ruling Amerindian societies. The explanation of the world is derived from this dual principle in permanent disequilibrium and equality.

The structures of mythic characters are correlated with each other; they are not symmetrical or identical but opposed. The fundamental notion of duality in perpetual imbalance not only exists on an ideological plane but also in the organisation of society itself. This principle is clearly manifest in Mayan mythology in relation to the continuous succession of pairs of mythic heroes in ‘Popul Vuh’ (Tedlock 1985): creation proceeds from an ever-widening dialogue between the gods, in which the concept of duality is treated as the “very nature of the primordial world and of anything that might be created in that world” (Tedlock 1986:81). In Mesoamerican thought, creation proceeds from opposed but complementary dualities and occasional quarternities. When a trinity occurs, it is complemented with an aspect or image of one of the other three, thus transforming it into four or reducing it to two. For example, when I asked why all three kings in the biblical nativity story are Black, I was told that one had an ash-blackened face because while he was wondering if the baby really was Jesus, he did not notice the incense smoke blackening his face; another had his face blackened because he only knelt on one knee; the remaining two fulfilled their obligations correctly. In the Black Men dance-drama performed on Christmas Eve, two dancers represent the three kings.

The concept of the physical world is also conceived in twos: for example, sky and earth, mountains and plains. The creation of human beings occurs in fours: four men first, representing the four tribes in the world and the first mothers and fathers; their four women appear later in the story (Tedlock 1986). All of them were created from food, the white corn and the yellow corn.

As ‘Black Men’, the biblical Magi are transformed into ancient Mayan Wise Men (chapter 3) who, needless to say, brought their wives in their retinues.

Tedlock (ibid.) does not mention that female and male qualities were inherent to the first four men.
Achi people conceive the order and qualities of the world and of all living things in the same way. Pairing is a cognitive strategy used to order the world and society; all categories of hierarchy, gender, and genre operate in dualities. This, then, is the underlying principle behind the division of Rabinal described in chapter 3: first the municipality is divided into higher land to the east and low lands to the west; each section is then divided into two, thus creating the four quarters of the town with the church as the centre of the universe.

The saints are also conceived of in pairs (Appendix 1) and dual principles of seniority (the ‘older’ takes precedence) and gender determine their relationships. Most of the saints of Rabinal’s sixteen cofradías are organised in pairs in such a way that whenever one is celebrated, its pair is also celebrated. For example, San Pedro Apostol is celebrated with his ‘younger’ twin (San Pablo) on their shared saints’ day on 29 June and again on the festival of the Conversion of San Pablo on 25 January. As Jesus sits on the right hand of God, so San Pedro Apostol occupies the right side and his younger brother occupies the left. The image of San José is paired with the image of the Virgen del Rosario, and so on.

Even children are thought of in pairs. Once, when Tono Cajbón’s wife was telling me about the large number of children she had had, she counted them off in pairs, classifying them as ‘older’ or ‘younger’ as she went along. At one point she said, “Bernabé [her eldest son] isn’t really the brother of Celestino [her second surviving son] because another son died after Bernabé. Celestino is the brother of Miguel Angel [her fourth son]...”

DUALITY AND MUSIC

Everything in this world is dual, existing in complementary pairs. Of the many pairs of categories applied to music, the principal ones are:

- q’ojom (percussion instrument) and su’ (wind instrument)
- Indian and Ladino
- female and male
- first and second
- senior and junior
- right and left
Su' and q’ojom

The Achi classify their musical instruments by the way in which the sound is produced. The classificatory system distinguishes two instrumental families: those on which sound is produced by striking the instruments (q’ojom), and those instruments which one has to blow (su’). Most of the instruments played in Rabinal fall into the q’ojom or su’ categories. (Stringed instruments such as the violin, the violon (double bass) and the guitar do not have names in the Achi language, even though the violin, accompanied by a square drum (adufe or tupe), is used to accompany ritual prayers.) The q’ojom category includes all types of percussive instruments such as drums, tumes (slit drums), and every kind of marimba; the su’ category includes flutes, shawms, and trumpets.

Most instrumental ensembles are formed of a pair of instruments, a q’ojom and a su’. The ensembles for son music (the music of the ancestors) are shown in Appendix 2, together with ensembles for pieza music (non-‘traditional’ music).

All percussion instruments have some kind of primacy over wind instruments as can be seen by the fact that all musicians are called ajq’ojom (workers of the drum). Furthermore, musical ensembles comprising a q’ojom and su’ instrument pairing are named after the percussion instrument. The violin and adufe or tupe ensemble is called ajutpe mam (musicians of the tupe); the little flute and big drum ensemble is called ajinima q’ojom mam (musicians of the big drum), and the trumpets and tum ensemble is called the aj tum mam (musicians of the tum), and so on. Yet within the q’ojom and su’ ensemble, the general rule is that the wind instrument is considered the first, or leader of the two. The only exception to this is the big tum (slit drum) ensemble, in which the drum is considered the first or leader within its own musical ensemble.

Musicians say that the sound effect produced when the musician articulates with his tongue while blowing through the tube of the wind instruments is the sound “su”. In effect, when Victor Tum, the first or treble trumpet player, whistled (in fact, more like whispered), the melodies of the first son of the Rabinal Achi dance he blew the five musical phrases or fanfares without the instruments producing the following sounds: shiuuuuu, shiiiiiiii, shiiiiii, shiuuuu, uuiiii, shiuuuu uuiiii.

Some of the names of the percussion instruments are also considered onomatopoeias. An example is the adufe, which is called tupe in Achi. Whenever I asked about the tupe, people smiled and moved their hands as though they were playing the instrument and repeated, “tupe, tupe.” The onomatopoeia clearly amused them. Victor Tum told me that the idiophone called tum got its name
This general primacy of percussion instruments may be derived from the fact that these instruments are more difficult to manufacture and are therefore considered more valuable than the su' instruments. Big drums and tumes are made from a single piece of hollowed tree trunk and are therefore more hardy and durable than wind instruments which used to be made of cane but are nowadays made of copper or steel. Because of their durability, percussion instruments can be inherited down the generations – I saw drums dating back to the nineteenth century. Ancestor musicians had played them and this gives them their greatest value, leading to their being treated with the most care of all instruments. In fact, ancestor musicians’ souls are said to reside in these old drums and their knowledge, skill, and seniority helps to make the music sound good. Francisco Cortes, a drummer from Pichec, told me how he took care of his big drum:

We hang [up] the drum, and give it alcohol [pointing at the hole where the air comes out] because we are not the only ones who play it. Many others have passed [through life] playing it. When we die, others will play the drum. We have to remember those players who have died. We put the alcohol in it to remember them, because they are here inside.

"because that is the way they sound." He added, "the beat of the first son (in the Rabinal Achi dance) starts like this: tulum tum, tulum tum, tum; tulum tum, tulum tum, tum."
**Indian and Ladino**

The basic distinction between Indian and Ladino populations which characterises Guatemala’s social composition and organisation has its origins in the country’s colonial past (Warren 1992 [1978]; Smith 1990; Adams 1994; McCreery 1994; Wilson 1995). From the early conquest period to the middle of the eighteenth century, settlements were divided into Indian towns and Spanish cities. In the latter lived Spaniards, their American-born descendants, Spanish-speaking Indian, Ladinos, African slaves, and Mulattos. Rabinal was established as an ‘Indian town’; today both Indians and Ladinos live there, albeit separately.
The Achi consider themselves descendants of the ancient Mayas and thus the first inhabitants of the area;\textsuperscript{102} they view Ladinos as foreigners because they arrived later with a distinct language and culture that emanates from the cities. The opposition between Indians and Ladinos contains a distinct ethnicity which is primarily expressed in the distinction between the rural culture of the majority Achi population dispersed in settlements with no services and the urban culture of Ladinos who live in towns where all the services are concentrated. These differences are also applied to make distinctions between cities and Rabinal municipality as a rural area.

\textsuperscript{102} This way of presenting themselves side-steps the fact that they had to conquer the area's previous inhabitants before settling in the Rabinal basin, an event which they celebrate annually in the Rabinal Achi dance drama.
The *son* and the *pieza*

In terms of musical genre, Achis establish a primary distinction between the *son* and *pieza* music;\(^{103}\) these are the musical categories used when referring to the distinction between Indians and Ladinos. The classification between *sones* and *piezas* has a historic and ethnic background that takes precedence over any other way of classifying music and it is the most general distinction made by the people of Rabinal.\(^{104}\) The classification derived from empirical concepts utilised by Guatemalan society itself is a clear and simple opposition between indigenous and Ladino culture.

*Son* music and the instruments to play it are the musical heritage of the *rajawales*, the first Maya ancestors of the world of darkness, and that is why Rabinalenses consider it the musical genre of the ‘Indian race’\(^{105}\). The musical repertoire of most of the musical ensembles in Rabinal are exclusively *sones* which are played for the annual ritual cycle in *cofradias*, dance-dramas, life crisis rituals, and other occasions (*son* music example, number 2 in cassette).

In contrast, *pieza* music, like Ladinos, is generally considered, at least in classificatory terms, as ‘foreign music’; so, too, are all newer musical genres including popular radio music. Yet when I rephrased the question on separate occasions, I found that people did not find the *pieza* music they heard on the radio alien at all (chapter 5). The *pieza* repertoire includes waltzes, foxtrots, *cumbias, corridos* (polka style), *boleros, pasillos, merengues, guarachas* and other popular rhythms. *Piezas* are Rabinalense Ladinos’ favourite musical genre but as they do not play music themselves, Indians play *piezas* for them at their festivities and ballroom dances. *Piezas* also attract the younger generation of Achis who prefer to contract *conjunto* marimbas

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\(^{103}\) The term *pieza* means ‘piece’. In 17\(^{th}\) and 18\(^{th}\) century Europe, the term referred to a small, often instrumental, composition. In German the term ‘stuck’ (piece) implies a composition which forms part of a set of compositions (Randel 1986) similar to a set of dances. Although *sones* are used for social dancing in *zarabandas* and for dance-dramas, all *piezas* are considered to be dance music. In fact the oldest *piezas* are dances.

\(^{104}\) Smith (1987:197-217) has emphasised that this opposition implies a class struggle expressed in ethnic terms. In my opinion this empirical social classification may be useful so long as it is accompanied by explanations of the context and conditions in which these musical types are practised; it is necessary to subordinate musical analysis to historical and ethnographic analysis of context.

\(^{105}\) For myths about the origins of music see chapter 2; for a history of the *son* see chapter 5.
(pieza marimba, double bass, and drum set) for dancing at the groom’s house at weddings. Ladinos say that pieza music is more decente and that Indians who hire conjunto marimba ensembles that play piezas are more ‘civilised’ (pieza music example, number 3 in cassette).

Photograph No. 7: Son marimba in cemetery on the Day of the Dead

Pieza music is also very popular in arrangements for both new dance-dramas and new versions of old ones. The same phenomenon occurred in the late nineteenth century when what are now known as Ladinos introduced ‘old’ piezas for the new dance-dramas of the time. That dance-dramas frequently portray Achi history may explain the acceptance of these piezas, which seem to have acquired the status of quasisones. Generally speaking, sones are equated with Indian history while all musical
genres and styles introduced (since the nineteenth century) by Ladinos and ‘foreign’ Indians are *piezas* and equated with the foreign Ladino culture. The comparison can be drawn in the formula:

\[ \text{Indians} : \text{Ladinos} :: \text{son} : \text{pieza}. \]

Thus, the classification contains other oppositions such as rural (hamlet) : urban (town), uncivilised : civilised, and ancient : modern.

*Son* music is further classified according to context: there are *sones de baile* (*sones* for dance-dramas) and *sones de cofradía*. *Son*es de baile are only played for dance-dramas (which are performed at *cofradía fiestas*)\(^{106}\) and *cofradía sones* are played for *cofradias* and on all other occasions, both religious and secular. Generally speaking, most musical ensembles participating in *cofradía* rituals, dance-dramas or *zarabandas* use the same musical repertoire. For example, the *sones* played by the flute and big drum ensemble for each dancer in the *Moros Tamorlán* dance-drama are the same *sones* that the ensemble plays at *cofradía* rituals. The difference lies in the order in which the music is played. In the *cofradía* context, *sones* are grouped together by the number of mallets used by the centre player and the playing order within each category is unimportant as the *sones* accompany neither dancers nor dancing order. It is the introductory formulae which are important here, as they act as markers for entrance rituals. In secular *zarabandas* as well as in the *surtido sones* (requests) played at the end of the ritual cycle there is no order whatsoever. In brief, the importance of order according to context makes music to be of a different kind.

**Female and male**

To form a couple and have children are the indispensable conditions for an Achi man and woman to be considered complete, a notion that refers to the complementary quality of the husband and wife relationship in terms of biological reproduction and social and economic responsibilities. If people die before achieving these goals it is

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106. During certain *cofradía fiestas*, dance-dramas are performed four times a day by anything up to 25 different dance groups, each with their own musical accompaniment. On particularly important and popular festivals such as *Corpus Crísti*, two or three dance troupes can be performing at the *cofradía* house at once whilst the musicians contracted to play for the *fiesta* continue to play as if nothing was happening on the other side of the courtyard.
believed that their souls will suffer because they left no family on earth to take care of them; they are therefore called especially to receive prayers.

Traditionally wedding rituals bring a series of economic, social, and religious obligations and rights between the married couple and their parents (especially the groom’s parents) as well as with the rest of the community through participation in the cofradías. Tradition and modernity meet in wedding rituals and the social value of these forces is reflected in the types of music chosen: son marimba in the bride’s house, a marimba conjunto in the groom’s.  

In theory, from a Customary Catholic perspective, a person may only serve God and the souls by taking on religious obligations in a cofradía after he or she marries.

The son marimbistas at the bride’s house are hired for 24 hours, whereas the marimba conjunto ensemble at the groom’s house is only hired for 4 to 6 hours.
Some musicians explained that the difference between the types of music played at the two parties was due to the fact that men are accustomed to hearing *conjunto* marimba music everywhere they work outside the community while women, because they stay at home, are not. This explanation reflects general perceptions of the historical role which Indian men and women have played in the capitalist system. While men have been extracted temporarily but periodically from their communities by Ladino authorities and contractors to satisfy the labour needs of the plantation economy and to build the national infrastructure, women have remained in their communities, frequently facing the entire responsibility of their family's needs. But this is an extremely stereotyped view. Women are not isolated from external cultural influences even though it is true that as children, girls often spend more time working in the household than do boys. This results in intermittent school attendance and sometimes prevents girls from going altogether. But as they grow up, girls mix with others in Rabinal's weekly market and some also go markets in nearby municipios; they are likely to be part of a work group preparing food when a relative organises a *fiesta*; they listen to popular music on the radio. Women are being increasingly drawn into the labour market: young single women go on their own to other urban areas including Guatemala City to work in *maquilas* (assembly plants) or as servants; young married women accompany their husbands to the plantations.

The difference between the musical genres played at the bride's and groom's *fiestas* is a way of reiterating and maintaining the ideal of traditional gender roles. The nurturing and domestic role of woman contrasts with the negotiating or political role of man, which implies greater exposure to the novelties of the Ladino world. Women's nurturing and predominantly domestic role turns them into a living symbol of Achi culture. This reification of women as the incarnation of local culture serves to maintain and preserve the cultural identity of Achi society; it also imposes limits and norms for correct female behaviour which operate as a mechanism of male control over women who are affected by this from an early age. At the same time, the *pieza* music played by the *conjunto* marimba at the groom's house symbolises his wealth and higher social status because it identifies the groom with the popular culture emanating from the wealthier urban Ladino world. Ladino Mario Valdizón Ayala remarked:
In the weddings of *inditos* (literally, baby Indians; a pejorative expression) who are more civilised, they use the *pieza* marimba at the groom’s party because the young man already has had relations with Ladino people.

Among the tasks assigned to women and men within daily domestic life, the woman’s role of daily nurturing and feeding the family is undoubtedly the most important. Within Catholic Custom, this female role is extended to ritual activity for it is women who prepare the food for all the guests. The preparation of food to be offered is a powerful symbolic act of sharing between family and community. Men are the negotiators, the *abogados* and musicians who make the symbolic offerings of food; however, the offerings themselves, such as music, are generally female symbols.

Music is considered female as it is symbolic sustenance that is shared between the living and the dead. During *fiestas* its voice calls the people and the spirits of the dead to participate in and enjoy this and other offerings which have been specially prepared for them. Music is a food that nurtures sociality among the living and between the living and the dead. The violin and the *tupe* accompany the *abogado’s* prayers to wake the souls of the dead to participate in anniversaries of the dead. Pipe and tabor music is a devotional or Marian call inviting people to contribute alms, maize, beans, candles or money for the images of the *Santos Reyes* (Three Wise Kings), and the Virgins of *La Natividad* and *Rosario* (see pipe and tabor ensemble in photo below and its *son* music example, number 4 in cassette). The big drum and flute calls people’s attention by announcing the arrival and departure of processions and entrances and exits to the *cofradia* altar (example number 5 in cassette: flute and big drum *son* music). The marimba calls the people to the ‘four quarters of town’ to participate in the festivities and to eat the *tamales* and other foods. When marimba music is played in *zarabandas* at *cantinas* or when a festivity continues beyond the *sones* of farewell to the *ánimas* late at night and *surtido sones* are being played, the instrument’s female voice calls for dancing and drinking with women, in other words to sexual interaction and evil.

The female spirit of the marimba has a dual character. It may take a Marian and nurturing (motherly) role or the young female call of sexual pleasure (chapter 6).
Among the Maya Atitecos, the younger form of the Mams’ wife\(^{109}\) is called Maria Castellana, a Ladino woman associated with all the delights of love. She transforms into Maria Zarabanda, the many breasted marimba woman (Tarn and Prechtel 1986:177).

Calling the people is a female role, as pipe and tabor musician Eligio Gonzalez explains:

\(^{109}\) Mam is one of the images of the Atitecos. The twelve-men Nahual, ancestral heroes, created Mam to watch over their wives and to prevent them running off with another man (O’Brien 1975:152-61).
This drum (tabor) is a woman because she is the one who calls everyone to the *fiesta* with a lot of love (devotion). When the saints come [in procession or when visiting houses], people cross themselves when they hear the drum, waiting for the saint to pass, wondering which saint it might be. Then the people bow when the saint arrives. Even when people are in the middle of eating, they stop and go to see the drum coming... The flute is the same, *suri* is its name, it is a woman because it calls the people; it accompanies the drum.

Music making is defined in terms of male and female complementarity: the female nature of the musical call, which is the offering itself, complements the exclusively male role of playing the music and delivering the offering. Complementarity can be further illustrated in the relationship between musicians and their instruments. For instance, the pipe and tabor is the only ensemble in which both musical instruments are considered female. The apparent anomaly is resolved by the fact that it is the only ensemble in which one man plays two instruments. The female and male categories operating here refer to the complementary relationship between the male musician and his female instrumental ensemble. The opposite situation is found in the simple marimba ensembles where three or four musicians play one single instrument that is considered female. Young musicians also make sexual commentaries on the interaction between themselves and the female voice and bodies of their instruments (chapter 6).\(^\text{110}\)

Female and male duality is also used to describe the complementarity of instruments in musical ensembles of two instruments. Female and male attributes ascribed to instruments and parts of instruments were for the most part defined as follows:

\[
\text{female} : \text{male} :: \text{high} : \text{low}
\]

The same principle is also used to describe the differences between the two sounds of double-headed drums. The skin of the head that is played is tightened for tuning purposes to a high pitch tone, and is considered the female side. The opposite side produces a lower pitch tone and is considered masculine. The female or high-

\(^{110}\) There is a similar relationship between the sacred Earth, which is female and the provider of sustenance, and men who traditionally plant the main corn crop. Here, the act of making the hole in earth with the hoe and planting the seed carries sexual connotations (see Wilson 1995).
pitched tone is preferred because musicians claim that it produces “more sound”; in other words, it can be more easily heard from afar.

Musicians also justified male and female qualities in other ways. In the pipe and tabor ensemble, for example, the reasons for assigning gender also relate to sound properties but in a quite imaginative way. Both sides of the tabor are tightened together so that they are tuned to the same high pitch tone. The difference between them is a snaring sound produced by small pieces of wire attached to a string which extends across the drum skin on one side; this is the female side because it has a ‘necklace’. The side played is the ‘male’ side but the characteristic sound of the drum is produced by the resonance of the female side. The layer of tripe applied to the holes of the marimba’s resonators (which is what gives the instrument its unique buzzing sound), must come from a sow.

Female and male categories were sometimes related to other pairs of categories such as first and second, right and left, but musicians rarely make these associations explicit. For example, it is rare for musicians to mention female and male categories when talking about leading and following. Analysed from different points of view, my data suggest that female instruments (or parts of instruments) have a leading role but I preferred not to take this further. Stating the association between leadership and femaleness presents a contradiction with male dominance in daily life; it is not an issue which musicians feel comfortable with and their silence speaks volumes. Nevertheless, the implications of not only giving leadership to the female instrument, but also primacy through its occupation of the right side – which is the sun side – are topics which require further investigation.

The most important ensemble in terms of ritual practice is the violin and adufe ensemble, as it accompanies the abogado’s prayers to call the souls to anniversaries of the dead (music example, number 6 in cassette: violin and adufe son). Before being replaced by the marimba about thirty years ago, this ensemble used to accompany abogados in cofradías and weddings as well; a generation before this it was also the musical ensemble played at zarabandas. In this ensemble, it is the violin that is regarded as the female instrument. This is the only ensemble about which musicians
make the following associations, which I am inclined to think are valid for most instrumental ensembles and their music:

female : male :: first : second :: high : low :: right : left

The primacy of female over male is also found in the order of naming their ancestors: q’ati q’amam (grandmothers and grandfathers). This primacy contrasts, at least at first glance, with the generally subordinated position of women in relation to men in everyday life. Despite their central economic and educational role in the functioning of the family compound, cultural norms imply that women lack the requisite knowledge to negotiate with both living outsiders (Ladinos) and dead insiders (ancestors). These roles, and the authority accruing from them, are left to men.
The conceptualisation of music cannot simply be seen as a direct reflection of social relationships. Cultural systems as moral and value systems are deep structures that do not interact in a mechanical way with social process. Female as first refers to certain social and religious values derived from the central role of women as nurturers and providers of the sustenance that makes life and sociality possible. This primacy is a reversal of male domination in daily life which occurs in ambiguous situations such as festivities where music is played, changing moods, triggering memories, eliciting emotions, and changing perception.

First and second

This pair of categories is used to define leadership. The local terms for leading and following are to ‘pull’ and to ‘tail’ behind. Leadership is a highly valued quality of people who have the courage to take a social responsibility for the benefit of the community. Cofradia cargo holders, abogados, musicians, civil town hall authorities or community project leaders are all respected for the ‘burden’ they assume in creating consensus, voicing the interests of the community, organising and conducting tasks and projects for the common good.

Leadership is essential to music making. All musical ensembles have a first and lead musician who ‘pulls’ the other musician(s), and second musician(s) who coleán (tail behind) the leader. In son music ensembles, first and second voices correspond to the melodic part or instrument and to the rhythmic instrument or parts (including the harmonic part in the case of the marimba) respectively. The only important exception is the son music played by the big tum and two trumpets ensemble for the Rabinal Achi dance-drama where primacy is given to the percussion instrument. The big tum has primacy over the trumpets because each son is distinguished by a different rhythmic pattern played on the tum and because the tum starts and finishes each son with a particular musical formula called alto (stop). José León Coloch, drummer and director of the Rabinal Achi dance-drama, defined the instruments’ different roles: “the instruments that have music changes in the sones are the tum with different rhythms and the lower trumpet. The first trumpet is the same.” The second (lower pitch) tone trumpet has a rhythmic supportive role; the first (higher pitch) tone trumpet plays the same fanfare por puntos to indicate specific points in the proceedings such as when the warrior dancers make their war cries four times in the direction of the four corners of
the world, or to separate the dialogues between the two main characters (K'iche' Achi and Rabinal Achi). The musical parts of each instrument are relatively autonomous, coordinating at points - like *altos* and war cry *puntos* - where musical patterns change (music example number 7 in cassette: tum and trumpets son). Both Jose León Coloch and the older, experienced first trumpet player Victor Tum told me that the tum leads the music but in practice Victor leads the ensemble by signalling to the tum player. This is because his usual tum partner, Jose León, is otherwise occupied performing the most important role of the K'iche' Achi and younger apprentices who take his place on the tum are "no good."

In the violin and adufe ensemble, the violin is considered female and first. Here the violin takes the lead because it carries a melody, begins and ends the sones and, when both change rhythmic pattern, the violin leads and the drum follows.

In music, leadership is defined according to the voice that changes more often or changes first. With this in mind and considering the musical repertoire of most ensembles and instruments' positions within each ensemble, instruments with a predominantly melodic role which also produce higher pitch tones are first, and are positioned to the right (from the musicians' perspective). These are the treble section of the marimba and all su' instruments (except trumpets as explained above) and the violin. The second and 'follower' parts and instruments, positioned to the left, are the q'ojom instruments. These are all percussion instruments: the harmonic and rhythmic sections in the marimba, drums and tunes (except the big tum as explained above).

The formula for consistent correspondences is:

\[ \text{first} : \text{second} :: \text{su'} : \text{q'ojom} :: \text{high} : \text{low} :: \text{right} : \text{left} \]

The first/second category pair is also applied to the subordinate role of music in relation to the dance-drama performers.

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\[ ^{111} \] These features of music structure are common in the son music of other ensembles (except for the marimba where the voices or parts are harmonically – in the western sense – related).
The different order between cofradia sones and sones de baile outlined above stems from the first and second relationship established between music and dance-drama or religious ritual. Music 'follows' the ritual or dance-drama actions. When no ritual activity is performed or when music is played on non-religious occasions, then son music is played with no particular order known as surtido sones.

First and second is often related to senior and junior, for example when apprentice musicians learn to play from older musicians. Traditionally, senior musicians play the leading, high pitch tone instruments because their melodies are the most complicated and require the most experience (chapter 8). I have already suggested that despite the fact that q'ojom instruments are considered second, they have a kind of primacy at a general level which stems from their senior position as physically older instruments which have been played by ancestor musicians.

**Right and left**

In music, right and left are important categories of order which are always used in association with 'first and second' (above): the leading and high pitch tone instruments are to the musicians' right; and it is the right hand which has the most work and changes.

Christian ideology visualises Jesus as sitting to the right of God the Father in heaven, thus giving primacy to the right side. According to Tono Lopez, an Achi linguist and member of Academy of Mayan Languages in Rabinal, the right side is also associated with East, North, and up orientations, which are believed to be the path taken by the sun during the day, while the left side is associated with the West, South and down orientations of the sun’s path under the earth, closing the entire cosmic circle (chapter 3). The path of the sun is reproduced in ritual prayers and actions that are organised in hierarchical order beginning from a conceptual right orientation.
High and low

In the dual description of the world, high and low represent sky and earth, mountains and plains or east (sunrise) and west (sunset). In ritual these categories are associated with first and second, right and left. Cargueros' and abogados' ritual crossing to the four corners of the world in religious celebrations moves to the right and is performed first standing up facing the sky and then again kneeling facing the earth.

In music, high (alto) and low (bajo) refer to high pitch tone low pitch tone respectively, although no direct associations are made with up and down directions. Rather, alto and bajo are associated with right and left, which are related to up and down directions as previously explained.

Senior and junior

This is one of the most important category pairings to be applied to relations between living generations and between the living and the dead. Values and behaviour are learnt from older generations whose knowledge and experience serve as a guide that younger generations are meant to respect and follow in order for life to continue. Senior and junior are by nature an oppositional duality and the authority of the elders is always a contested ground as soon as the younger generation feel that they have gained enough knowledge from their own experiences to vie for position. Senior and junior categories are not related to a specific number of years; age differences between people always indicate a senior or junior position.

Learning music in the traditional way follows the principle of seniority in that teachers are older and more experienced musicians. For instance, in the music learning tradition of the big drum and little flute, apprentices learn to play the drum first and then the flute. As drummers gain experience accompanying the flute, they eventually begin to play the flute, which is more difficult. When flautists are too old to fulfil their obligations as musicians, drummers start to look for someone who is willing to take up the drum and switch to the flute themselves. The senior/junior relationship between flautist and drummer guarantees the transmission of skills, knowledge, and style from one generation to the next.
A similar procedure is adopted for learning the marimba, although today it is often youngsters who teach their elders the new music (chapter 8). Achis find it conceptually difficult to separate experience from age or maturity, as can be seen by the myth built around the twelve year old Jesus confounding the elders in the Temple (Luke 2) cited in chapter 3.

**CONCLUSION**

Duality is the main principle of order under which all other categories operate. It is a cognitive strategy that orders the world (both natural and social) and explains its qualities in terms of relationships between binary symbolic categories. Every form has its complementary form, which may be related to other pairs of qualities. When musicians talked to me about music, musical instruments, and music making, they usually made only one association with a pair of categories. Reference to a second category pairing was generally only made to explain further the properties defined by the first pair. They rarely made abstractions of all the possible associations simultaneously.

Those categories that directly address the social order (Indian/Ladino, female/male) receive more attention for they explain how views about society (in this case ethnicity and gender) give meaning to music. And in turn, musical sounds, musical instruments, and music making become symbols or images of the dual and complementary order of social relations.
Chapter 5

The Marimba and the Son

Marimba music is part of the ‘soundscape’ of all Guatemala’s hamlets, villages, towns, and cities. Historically, its repertoire has incorporated *son* and its diverse music forms such as the zarabanda (the same music, but for dancing),\textsuperscript{112} the contradanza (performed as a quadrille dance), the bolero and many other nineteenth and twentieth century dance music – mainly waltzes, known as ‘semi classical’, and classical music from the piano repertoire. More recently the marimba repertoire has boomed with the adaptations of a whole variety of urban popular radio music.

In this chapter I will focus on the historical origins and development of the marimba and the music genre known as ‘*son*’. The first section is a broad review of the social history of the marimba in Guatemala from its arrival in the sixteenth century to the present. The African origins of the marimba and the European provenance of most of its repertoire suggest that the marimba music tradition developed during the colonial era in towns with multi-ethnic populations – Spanish, Ladino, Mulatto, and Indian. It was therefore born as a Mestizo tradition.

The second section examines the way people remember the introduction of the marimba in Rabinal, where it is exclusively played by Achi musicians. The marimba began to be incorporated into Achi ritual life some two generations after Achis began playing for Ladino festivities and other Ladino-organised events at the turn of the twentieth century; I describe the types of marimba found in Rabinal. The third and fourth sections are dedicated to the historical and musicological analysis of *son* music; I will discuss the relationship between the musical structure of the *son* and the historical and social context in which it is played.

\textsuperscript{112} The term zarabanda refers to a social gathering where men and women drink and dance to marimba *son* music. It also refers to a specific dance. See below.
The final section takes a brief look at the introduction of radios and tape recorders, which have revolutionised marimba playing in Rabinal. This has been included here because the bombardment of non-indigenous music presents many of the same issues as Indians faced during the early colonial era and between 1750 and 1850, when the State promoted Ladino settling in Indian towns.

A HISTORY OF THE MARIMBA IN GUATEMALA

The passionate nationalistic discourse that arose during the first half of the twentieth century and continues into the present provided the context for Guatemalan musicologists’ interest in the origins of the marimba. Marimba music had been part of the daily life of all social groups and classes in Guatemala’s bigger towns and cities for several generations and it is therefore not surprising that intellectuals such as Jesus Castillo 1977 [1941], David Vela (1958), and especially Armas Lara (1970) claimed a pre-Hispanic origin for the marimba and glorified it as an ancient national treasure. As such, the marimba has been employed as a symbol of the cultural identity of all Guatemalans.

That Guatemalans do not have a shared or common heritage is evidenced by the controversy which arose in the national press during 1977-78 concerning the poetic inscription which had been selected for a national monument to the marimba in Quelzaltenango City. One participant in the debate – Rafael Ixcot, an Indian intellectual who took the pre-Hispanic origins of the marimba for granted – pointed to Ladino society’s attempts to legitimise and authenticate ‘national’ culture through the ideological manipulation of Indian cultures. Ixcot remarked on the actual separation and conflict between Indian and Ladino societies in Guatemala and bitterly criticised the erection of monuments and the composition of poetry glorifying the indigenous race which were designed merely as a facade for foreign tourists. According to Ixcot, the monument and its inscription also served another purpose: they are, he says,

113. A similar claim was made by Mexican musicologists regarding the marimba tradition in Chiapas (Kaptain 1992:10-12).

114. These newspaper articles were collated and published in book form by López Mayorical (1978).
“cathartic expressions of the Ladino who needs exorcism to alleviate himself from their shameful feelings of their collective subconscious” (López Mayorical 1978:334; Monsanto 1982:61-72).

Although the origins of the marimba had been known to academics for over a decade, the debate about the instrument’s use as a national symbol (which simultaneously veiled the country’s multiethnic nature) brought the knowledge to a wider public. The marimba’s origins are African (Chenoweth 1964:53-77): the word itself, or its variant ‘malimba’, is a Bantu term which refers to an idiophone with gourd resonators played by people living in coastal Mozambique; the construction of the Congolese madimba and the Bantu Chopi timbila is very similar to that of the arc marimba of Guatemala. The linguistic and organological data are supported by historical findings demonstrating that during their journey to the Americas, great numbers of African slaves of Bantu, Congolese, and Angolan origins (that is, south of the Sahara from east to west), were taken to Seville and Lisbon in the sixteenth century where they had a strong influence on the Hispanic dance music of the time, predating the transculturation which transpired in the Americas (Perez Fernández 1990:28).

Garfias’ (1983) comparison of Central American marimbas with those found in Africa from Senegal to Mozambique supports and substantiates Chenoweth’s conclusion. Garfias found strong similarities between African xylophones and the arc marimbas with gourd resonators of the Guatemalan Highlands, Guanacaste, Costa Rica, and in Mayasa, Nicaragua. He suggests that the African marimba could have been introduced to the Americas along the Pacific coastal areas of Costa Rica and Nicaragua (ibid.:206). Garfias has no explanation for the diffusion of the marimba, which did not reach other regions of the Americas inhabited by Africans yet extended to regions, such as the Guatemalan Highlands, populated by indigenous peoples. Indirect proof of his theory can be found in the colonial archives: documents attached to a 1769 prohibition (Chaclán 1993) mention the marimba being played in Santiago de Apastepeque: now in El Salvador, Santiago de Apastepeque is in the Pacific hinterland and forms part of the

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115. To satisfy expectations among visiting tourists, marimba musicians are hired to play in luxury city hotels wearing traditional Indian costumes. Much of 20th century cultural nationalism is motivated by the need to construct an external image of a colourful and attractively distinctive indigenous Guatemala to attract tourists.
cultural corridor through which he suggests the marimba travelled to the Guatemalan highlands from the slave settlements on the coast between Costa Rica and Nicaragua\textsuperscript{116}

The earliest extant references to marimbas in Guatemala originate in the Western Highlands and indicate that the marimba had been played by Indians in the towns bordering the old capital of Guatemala (now known as Antigua) since 1680. The historian Juarros recorded that during the dedication and inauguration ceremonies of its new cathedral, Santiago de los Caballeros, music was played on "military drums, kettle-drums, bugles, trumpets, marimbas and other instruments used by the Indians" (Chenoweth 1964:74). In a 1928 news article, Victor Miguel Diaz stated that the marimba was widely used among Guatemala's Indians by 1737: "in those days, some marimbas could be seen in various Indian communities as well as in the regions of San Gaspar and Jocotenango, each instrument is played by one individual."\textsuperscript{117} Later the same year, when describing the Santa Cecilia procession, Diaz comments:

...and here is added the noise made by players of chirimias (shawms), reed whistles, drum in confusion, marimbas de tecomates (gourd marimbas) and many other instruments which the natives played simultaneously, producing noise enough to be heard from a great distance (Chenoweth 1964:75).

**The marimba and the zarabanda**

It is my belief that the early adoption of the marimba by indigenous societies is a testament to the early cultural and racial mixing between African, Spanish, and Indian populations. The numerous decrees forbidding the presence of Mulattos and Mestizos in Indian towns\textsuperscript{118} indicate that this was a common occurrence. The records also

\textsuperscript{116} The General Archives of Central America in Guatemala (AGCA) contain several 17\textsuperscript{th} and 18\textsuperscript{th} century documents referring to the importation of large numbers of African slaves to the Audiencia of Guatemala to provide the labour for indigo production. Some documents indicate the need to divide them between small towns in Nicaragua province and contain resolutions and information on their Organization and behaviour (AGCA: A1.23. leg.1527, fol. 439; A1.2.4.leg.2199 exp.15755 fol.50; A1.24 leg.2197 exp.15751 fol.313; A1.23 leg1540 fol.54; A1.23. leg1513, fol.676; A1.23.leg.1514 ff.22, 37; A1.1. exp.25leg.1, ff.1, 13; A1.23.leg.1516, f.57; A1.23. leg.1517, f.108; A1.23, leg.1518, fol.211).

\textsuperscript{117} This would have been the diatonic gourd marimba with an arc to hold the keyboard against the player; these constitute the African prototype of the Guatemalan marimba (Chenoweth 1964:26, 75). Garfias (1983) gives illustrations of American and African arc marimbas with gourd resonators.

\textsuperscript{118} For 16\textsuperscript{th} and 17\textsuperscript{th} century decrees forbidding the settlement of Africans, Mulattos, and Mestizos (Ladinos) in Indian towns, see AGCA: A1.23. leg 4575, fol. 433v; A1.23. leg 1513, 557r; A1.24. leg 1558, fol. 198v.
illustrate that the different ethnicities shared a musical culture and the ritual customs essential to their religious life. Zarabandas were common among Indian, Spanish, Mestizo, and Mulatto populations in the Indian towns of Zapotitlán province (the contemporary provinces of Retalhuleu and Suchitepequez) in the early 1600s (Ordoñez 1989:13:97-104). In 1769, according to Archbishop Cortes y Larraz, zarabandas were common throughout the diocese of Guatemala (Alejos 1992:243).

The term zarabanda is of Arabic origin and was doubtless introduced to Spanish by the Moors who lived in southern Spain until 1492. The term originally designated an irregular ternary rhythm (Stanford 1980). It is plausible but not provable that in Spanish the word carried connotations of paganism; this can be inferred from the contexts in which it is most commonly found in early colonial texts – in other words, prohibitions. These texts ascribe two meanings to zarabandas. It is a social event, where people drink and dance to sones music within cofradía fiestas, at children’s wakes or in cantinas; it is also a particular dance which was also performed during

119. The same applies to the term fandango, which was used to refer to a social gathering where dance music was played (Perez Montfort 1994:31-43).
cofradia celebrations and, by extrapolation, the music of that dance. In other words, the colonial authorities' use of the term represents the denial or rejection of any religious element to what was being performed; it is in this sense – a non-religious social event with music dancing and alcohol – that the word is used today in Rabinal.

'zarabandas' originated as dances within Ladino cofradia celebrations in which other colonial castes participated. These became popular among the newly introduced Indian cofradia celebrations. Colonial religious and civil authorities issued prohibitions against musical and dance events such as zarabandas where the mingling of the races and high alcohol consumption deviated from colonial civil and religious authorities' ideals of religious devotion.

The personal and financial interests of local Spanish authorities often led them not only to turn a blind eye to the presence of fellow Spaniards, Mulattos, and Mestizos but to open taverns in Indian towns close to Ladino plantations, ranches, and unauthorised dispersed settlements (pañuides) (Alejos 1992:252). These conditions fostered the development of local cultures and it was in this fertile ground that the marimba began to develop, spreading throughout the country from those towns with the largest multi-ethnic populations – the capital, Quetzaltenango, Totonicapán, and Huehuetenango.

Indigenous societies' adoption of the marimba guaranteed its survival and the development of local characteristics in terms of both the instrument and the music played on it. Similarly the popular musical repertoire and other musical instruments introduced to Indian towns by the Spanish in the sixteenth century survive today, in this case, mainly amongst Mayan groups. In addition to the African marimba, new instruments included the vihuela (a sixteenth century Spanish guitar), violin, harp, chirimia (shawm), and drums of different types: all were initially played by Indian, Mulatto, Mestizo, and Spanish populations but gradually left to Indian musicians.

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120 For a description and interpretation of this dance, see chapter 6.

121 AGCA: A1.23 leg.1515 f3.

122 In the late 19th century Arts and Crafts schools, which included carpentry shops, were created in these provinces; this suggests that the production and sale of marimbas was extant in these areas. These provinces are the main centres of marimba production today (Camposeco 1992).
Whilst hardly unfamiliar with the revelries surrounding European Catholic festivals, the colonial authorities were appalled by the presence of what they considered to be secular music, profane dancing, and alcohol consumption within the ritual sphere. So far as they were concerned, this evidenced Indians’ continuing faith in their pagan cults, with their disorderly behaviour and excesses, and indicated a lack of respect for God. Hence the application of the word *zarabanda* to both these events and particular elements of it which they abhorred.

Priests complained about the practice of holding *zarabandas* at children’s wakes. In 1769, Archbishop Cortés y Larras pronounced anyone performing them would be excommunicated, although it seems that there was some tolerance of these events if they took place in daylight. The evidence collected for the Archbishop by the deputy parish priest of Santiago de Apastepeque about childrens’ wakes makes no mention of dancing. It does, however, give direct information about the ethnicities of participants and the instruments they played (Chaclán 1993:83-87). Guitarists included a free Mulatto who played *sones*; a man from León, Spain, and an Indian, each accompanied by an Indian playing *caramba*, and another Mulatto accompanied by a stranger from a neighbouring town playing violin. It is noticeable that by 1769, some instruments – the marimba and *caramba* – were already seen as being played solely by Indians.

Other records show that Indians’ and poor Mulattos’ use of music in children’s wakes was also common practice in Verapáz. A royal provision sent on 18 April 1799 to the provincial mayor, then resident in Salamá (now the provincial capital of Baja Verapáz), asks him to persuade Indians and Mulattos to limit the number of festivals and *zarabandas* held to celebrate the saints and children’s wakes. Unfortunately, this...
document does not include information about the music played and danced. However, a manuscript dated 1847 from the Indian town of Cajbón, Alta Verapáz, reveals that six Indian musicians played the marimba at children's wakes and another three or four played violins; they also played the harp which, through striking the resonating box, was also used as a percussive instrument (Morales 1983:62).

Another possible reason for the relative scarcity of musical information in the colonial record concerning children's wakes is that music at these events was too commonplace to remark upon: music was an integral part of children's wakes in Spain:

Children's wakes are considerably different from adult wakes. According to catholic dogma, children die without mortal sin, therefore proceeding directly to heaven without traversing the purgatory. Thus the death of an angel, not withstanding the pain and selfish grief of the parents, is a joyous event. Previously friends and relatives, particularly the young, gathered with guitars and castanets to express their happiness singing and dancing all night. This dance for the angels was particularly characteristic, at least in recent history, of the Mediterranean region, in the South from Castellon to Murcia; in Extremadura and the Canary Islands (Foster 1985:253).

In sum, it is safe to say that, in Guatemala, the history of the marimba is closely related to the history of the zarabanda, and especially the zarabanda as social event. Even as late as 1802, when the Catholic Church was rapidly losing its political grip on the country (chapter 2), the religious authorities were still railing against them: a document from Suchitepequez province denounces the celebration of zarabandas among Indians and mulattos, men and women, every Saturday and Sunday. The multi-ethnic origins of the marimba support the claim that it is a national instrument and its music is a national tradition. However, the marimba's role as a cultural symbol of nationalism during the first half of this century, has more to do with the Ladino elite's exotic and romantic views of the country's Indian heritage, which have provided powerful ideological messages concerning the ancient culture of the Guatemalan State.

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127. A similar tradition exists in Ecuador, where contemporary Quichua play the harp at children's wakes (Schechter 1992). Apart from a comment that "one of the goals of the runa harpist's performance during the vigil is precisely to draw the [child's] mother into the dancing, out of her grief—even momentarily" (ibid.:155), Schechter makes no comment on the emotions of the participants or about what harp music means to the Quichua.

128. AGCA. A1 leg 2815 exp. 24823. Zarabandas are still held every Saturday night in Cubulco.
The marimba and dance-drama

Marimba music was also incorporated into Guatemala’s rich repertoire of dance-dramas (Mace 1981:83-136). Some dance-dramas of pre-Hispanic origin are accompanied by simple marimbas with wooden resonators for one musician called tenor: examples include the Kiei (deer) dance-drama of the Ixil towns of San Pedro Necta, San Juan Ixcoy and San Francisco de Cotzal in the province of Quiche (Paret Limardo 1963:18) and the famous El palo volador (the flying pole) dance-drama of the towns of Cubulco and Joyabaj (the municipalities to the west of Rabinal). The music of other versions of these ancient bailes (dance-dramas) in other towns used to be – and in some cases, still is – played on pre-Hispanic instruments or European string instruments (Paret Limardo 1963; Montoya 1970:26). This situation suggests flexibility in the adaptation of bailes to local musical traditions.

Most of today’s dance-drama repertoire in Guatemala is a re-elaboration of colonial dances and dance-dramas written in Spanish by clerks and Ladinos living in Indian towns in the nineteenth century (Mace 1981:83, 111-13), that is, when the ladinoization of Indian towns was at its height (chapter 2). The dance-dramas were written for the celebrations of Ladino cofradías and were often based on Indian oral tradition which, to some extent, they replaced. Two of today’s most popular dance-dramas – La conquista (the conquest) and the Toritos (bulls) – were written at this time; the Rabinalense version of the latter is known as El costeño (the man from the coast). El Costeño is Rabinal’s most popular dance-drama, performed by many dance groups at virtually every religious fiesta.

For the purposes of this discussion, the most important element of these nineteenth century dance-dramas is the accompanying music: European dances adapted to the diatonic marimba. The main theme of El Costeño is a contradanza (French contredanse). The musical example of the contradanza shows the basic characteristics

\[129\] Mace (1981:83) asserts that there are at least seventy different dance-dramas in Guatemala.

\[130\] Rabinalenses call tenor to small marimbas. There are two types of tenor marimbas: one is chromatic and forms part of the double marimba ensemble, and the other is a smaller one player diatonic marimba.

\[131\] This type of marimba can also be found forming an ensemble with a flute and accompanying the Mexicanos dance-drama in Totonicapán (Arrivillaga 1993:86)
of the European contredanse which is a 2/4 metre with four 1/8 notes on the bass, a local rhythmic variation on the melodic line which resembles the tango rhythm of the Cuban contradanza, and the same form consisting of two sections of eight measures each repeated twice or in variation form (Fernández 1989:116-134):

*El costeño* rhythm:  
Tango rhythm:

Los animalitos (the little animals), another nineteenth century dance-drama, includes a slow bolero called *danza de la muerte* (death dance) in triple metre which has preserved its steps. These dance types are considered ‘old piezas’ and are certainly valuable examples of the rich dance repertoire of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (see musical transcriptions of these dance-dramas in Appendix 3, and musical examples numbers 8 and 9 in cassette).

The development of the marimba

The earliest marimbas were arc marimbas with gourd resonators played by one musician; the instrument was either strapped to the body or resting on one leg. The arc held the keyboard against the player. Over time, the gourd resonators were replaced with bamboo and the instrument acquired four legs, although it was still played by one man; bamboo marimbas, known as *tenores*, were 1.20m or 1.50m long and had 22 or 32 keys, giving one tone over three octaves or four tones over four octaves respectively. The sound quality of the diatonic marimbas progressively evolved as the material of their resonators was changed from bamboo to wood and the length of

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132. La Farge (1994 [1947]:112) mentions that in Santa Eulalia, Huehuetenango, the Bull dance-drama has a gigue style of music (a fast baroque dance in binary form).

133. Small numbers of arc marimbas with gourd resonators and marimbas with bamboo resonators were still being made for the tourist market in Escuintla municipality in 1960 (Chenoweth 1964). These instruments can be found today in Guatemala City’s craft stores.
the keyboard was extended, finally reaching the five terminos (octaves) plus five tones of the simple marimba used today.\textsuperscript{134}

Photograph No. 12: \textit{son} marimba of Xesiuán

The technical improvement that divided the Ladino and Indian marimba traditions was the creation of the chromatic marimba at the end of the nineteenth century. This development is credited to Corazón Borraz of Chiapas, Mexico, and Sebastián Hurtado, a Ladino from Quetzaltenango (Eyler 1993:48; Kaptain 1992:19) where, as in Guatemala City, there was a vibrant musical life based on the marimba at the end of the nineteenth century (Eyler 1993:48-54).\textsuperscript{135} The chromatic marimba was first played in public in Guatemala by the Hurtados in 1899 (Kaptain op.cit.).

The Hurtados had begun their career playing “native Indian music” (Eyler 1993:48), that is, the \textit{son} repertoire, but once they had constructed the chromatic keyboard (which is longer than that of the \textit{son} marimba and requires four players), they

\textsuperscript{134} Kaptain (1992:14-15) presents a chronology of the history of the Chiapan marimba where marimbas with wooden resonators were made in the 1840-50s.

\textsuperscript{135} Other well-known marimba playing families in the same era included the Ovalles, Barrios, and Betancourts.
turned to 'piezas' – the 'semi-classical' repertoire of popular European dance music, Latin dances, and the 'classical' works readily available in reduced score versions for the piano, all of which can be played on the chromatic marimba. The chromatic marimba, with its increasingly diverse repertoire, became an urban phenomenon. Chromatic marimba ensembles were soon competing successfully with orchestras and bands for contracts in ballroom dances, cafes, restaurants, night clubs, and hotels, providing the cities and the nascent tourist industry with entertainment.

The Hurtados were also responsible for the identification of the marimba with Guatemala. They introduced the instrument to the United States: starting in New Orleans in 1908, they toured the country, progressed to playing nightclubs, and made recordings of their music. Yet despite the Hurtados' success on both the national and international stage, the musical training of Ladino and Indian musicians continued to begin, as always, in the local wind bands or marimba ensembles of the rural towns. The only option open to talented music apprentices who wanted to continue their musical education is to move to Guatemala City. Students from better economic backgrounds studied at the Conservatory of Music; the homeless and the poor had a choice between the orphanage (Hospicio) and the School of Substitutes linked to the Martial Band. Musicians then had a chance to join one of the many orchestras and bands that existed in the city during the first half of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{136}

The \textit{son} marimba continued to expand in Indian towns, where a wide range of marimbas was being played in various contexts in the 1920s and 1930s (Teletor 1945, 1955; La Farge 1994 [1947]; Wagley 1949; Tax 1953; Schultzze Jena 1954; Bunzel 1952). In the side-track town of Panajachel in Atitlán, Tax (1953:97, 177) found only one gourd marimba, which was played at \textit{cofradias} and in taverns during \textit{fiestas}; its modest importance is indicated by the fact that it was cheaper to hire this marimba than a drum and flute ensemble. In the same period, the marimba tradition was well established in the Q’anjob’al town of Santa Eulalia (La Farge 1994 (1947):112, 114), where there were various marimba ensembles, including a one-man marimba and a drummer for the Bull dance-drama, a 'full' marimba for five players for the music of the \textit{cofradia} celebrations, and a municipal marimba. A marimba was played in church

\textsuperscript{136}. For the musical life of the capital and some rural towns where famous musicians began their training during this period, see Almorza (1994).
in the Mam town of Chimaltenango (Wagley 1949:86, 106) to accompany the prayers, responses, and litanies (some in Latin) chanted by the choir; another, played by two musicians, was hired for the Bull dance-drama at a cost of US$30, a price which suggests that these were outside musicians, probably from Totonicapán;\textsuperscript{137} ‘marimba companies’ – most likely simple marimbas for two or more players – were hired to play in Ladino \textit{estancos} (temporary booths for the sale of illegal \textit{aguardiente}, or alcohol). These were the so-called \textit{zarabandas}.

\textbf{THE INTRODUCTION OF THE MARIMBA TO RABINAL}

Indian traders from the Western Highlands introduced the \textit{tenor} marimba to Rabinal, which had no previous marimba tradition, at the end of the nineteenth century – that is, at roughly the same time as the chromatic marimba was being introduced to the cities.

The one-musician \textit{tenor} is no longer played in Rabinal town although they can still be found in the more remote villages and hamlets. By the 1930s it had become a teaching aid; like other \textit{marimbistas} in their sixties or above, Esteban Uanché learnt to play on one. His father rented it for him from Chipuerta hamlet before apprenticing him to his own teachers, Cayetano Lajuj of Vegas Santo Domingo, Pichec, and José Leon Alvarado of Xococ; these men owned the bigger, five octave, forty key, contemporary \textit{son} marimba, three man marimbas made in Quetzaltenango and Totonicapán. Few families owned such instruments. Julián Ordoñez, who is 67 and lives in Rabinal town, still plays the simple marimba which José Leon Alvarado helped his father to buy some sixty years ago in the mid 1930s. He remembers going to Totonicapán, where the merchant who sold it to them said, “You know lads, the mother of the marimba is Totonicapán,” implying that the marimba originally came from that town and that his marimbas were the authentic instruments.

\textsuperscript{137} Totonicapán is where dance-drama costumes are made for hire. See García Escobar (1992:37) for an historical overview of these shops \textit{(morerías)}, which date to the 18th century.
Paulino Jerónimo, 72, of Rabinal town, proudly told me that his great-grandfather, Mariano Jerónimo, had introduced the simple marimba to Rabinal in the 1890s. He continued:

My grandfather, Cirilo, a marimba player himself who has just reached fourteen years,\textsuperscript{138} died at 98 years of age. When they were players, he and his brothers, Justo, Santiago, Goyo, and Daniel could hardly be found in Rabinal. Since there were no marimbas in Salamá or Cobán\textsuperscript{139} and only one here, they took it with them. They carried the marimba on their backs because there were no roads then. They were requested at Salamá, from there they would travel to Tactic, Cobán, and so on. And because then there were many German plantation owners, they went to play there. Sometimes they would be gone for a month at a time. They would finish a celebration somewhere and would then be taken somewhere else. But as I mentioned, they had a simple marimba.

The ladinoized Jerónimos are the only Indian family to insist that there have been marimbas in Rabinal for at least a century – even though the collective memory of Rabinalense Achis dates marimba music to ‘the beginning of time’. Esteban Uanché was emphatic when he assured me that there was not a single marimba in Rabinal when he was a child in the 1930s. According to him, every cofradia festivity, anniversary of the dead, and wedding was celebrated with the violin and adufe (square drum) and the only marimbas in town belonged to contract musicians brought in by Ladinos to play pieza music at their festivities.

In the past there were no marimbas in this town [Rabinal and its neighbouring villages], there was only the violin and adufe; that’s all. There was nothing [more] for there was no money; you know very well that the only people that want (marimba) are the rich, not the poor. The poor have to work. They go to work without food, and many die of hunger. And the poor are working in their maize-field (milpa); [military] commissioners come and take people to work on the roads, hitting, kicking, and whipping us, they have no pity on the poor.

The apparent contradiction between the old men’s testimonies is resolved by the fact that, so far as Esteban is concerned, the Jerónimo family plays ‘foreign’ music for ‘foreigners’ in ‘foreign’ places: that is, piezas for Ladinos outside the Indian community. But there is more to this argument than a disagreement about the introduction of the marimba: namely, local rivalries and inter-ethnic relationships.

\textsuperscript{138} That is, the family had just celebrated the fourteenth anniversary of his death.

\textsuperscript{139} The capitals of the provinces of Baja Verapaz and Alta Verapaz respectively.

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Esteban’s contemporaries confirm that there were very few marimbas in the municipality in their youth and that these were located in Xococ and Pichec. The Jerónimos are seen as ladinoized Rabinalenses with close ties to the powerful Ladinos and the army, and not followers of the Achi tradition. Paulino Jerónimo himself told me:

My family only played pieza music; they were the ones under the military commander’s orders, they only played for the great (powerful, wealthy) men. The zarabanda is a separate thing for those who play sones. Those who play sones cannot play piezas.\(^\text{140}\)

After buying their first chromatic or double marimba in the 1920s, the Jerónimo family—Paulino’s father and uncles—expanded their repertoire with more complex pieces (which included sections in a minor tonality) in order to keep up with the tastes of their Ladino clientele; this marimba, which they named ‘La Predilecta’ (the favourite) acquired by the municipality for Sunday concerts held next to the parish church, festivals, Ladino ballroom dances, and other events for military officers stationed in Rabinal town. Paradoxically, Paulino never learnt to play the chromatic marimba himself and continues to play the simple diatonic son marimba.

By 1935, according to Paulino, cantinas were hiring marimba music for zarabandas held during the major festivals. This indicates that despite the small number of son marimbistas at the time, their music had been accepted for certain occasions. During those years marimba music accompanied new Spanish versions of two nineteenth century dance-dramas: El costeño and the Caman Chicop, which is known today as Los animalitos (Teletor 1945:52). Although Paulino says that the Indian population did not hire marimbas for their celebrations in his grandfather’s day (i.e., the early 1900s), clearly the process of substituting the ‘little music’ of the violin and adufe with sonorous marimba music in the communal, public aspects of Indian cofradia celebrations was getting under way in the 1930s. A rapid increase in the number of cantinas in Rabinal town in the early 1950s helped spread the marimba tradition. Paulino remembers that there were up to 24 zarabandas in permanent and estancos (temporary booths selling alcohol),\(^\text{141}\) each with their own marimba, during major

\(^{140}\) This is not strictly true; some piezas can be adapted for the son marimba.

\(^{141}\) Temporary cantinas were set up on chinmas (long wooden planks) around the plaza.
By the end of the decade, the marimba was the instrument of choice for most religious and life crisis celebrations and only the most die-hard traditionalists were resisting the change. Magdaleno Xitumul, himself a violinist, still resents his parents' insistence on violin and adufe music at his wedding in the 1960s.

Zarabandas were held in Rabinal's cantinas during religious festivals until 1981 when, at the height of the political violence, the army imposed a curfew and banned all gatherings with music. The 'great silence' began. Marimbista Tono Cajbón blamed the collapse of the zarabanda tradition on la violencia and its after-effects:

Before, well, in truth there was not such violence, all people were respected but now it is no longer possible, because now in the cantinas you will always find someone carrying a gun or a knife, a machete, it is not possible, before it was happier. The zarabanda stayed [until] about fifteen years ago, you see, there was no room, there was a state of siege, that's when the carrying on stopped, neither firecrackers or fireworks, there is nothing. When things were like that, even to kill a hog or a chicken you needed a license. That's what they did to the zarabanda, you needed a license, but nobody needs it now because there is no more zarabanda. Now even in the cofradías there is freedom again, there are firecrackers and marimba music. Because there was a time when there was no marimba. That prohibition lasted about three years, without racket, without anything. Now is rather merrier, but there is no zarabanda, definitely no more.

Mario Valdizon Ayala, the Ladino owner of Rabinal town's premier bar, El Motagua, which was located in a prime position just off the plaza, gave me strictly economic reasons for the demise of the zarabanda:

I used to be one who hired the marimba for dancing, it used to be set here in the cantina to attract people, to play music, hence people follow the music and there is the business. Later I did not continue because for the town celebrations they set cantinas on the street, right? Then the marimba is playing here and as the son would end all the people would pour out to drink at the street cantinas and they would come back to dance. So I said, "Why should I continue being such fool" on the one hand, and on the other, the marimbistas kept rising the price. It is no longer possible... I contracted for every major celebration but everything was inexpensive. The marimba player would earn 3 quetzales (then equivalent to US$3) from six in the evening to six in the morning, the whole night. A quart of guaro (alcohol) would be provided by midnight and then a cup of coffee and bread and that was all. Today they charge 20 quetzales per hour (equivalent in 1995 to US$3.50).
I asked him, “Up to which year were there zarabandas?”

There still are sometimes, the custom is there, it exists, the will is there, but the cost is out! Here at that corner a young man contracted for one or two days of the celebration, but I wouldn’t risk my profit. How much can he make? If he pays 20 quetzales per hour, it is 240 quetzales per night and if he sells a whole box of guaro, he might have about 30 quetzales left for profit. No, it is no longer possible. The inditos complain to me, why don’t I have marimba if it is so joyful? Yes, it used to be joyful when it was inexpensive, when it was possible to give it away, but now is no longer conceivable.

MODERN MARIMBAS

The diatonic simple marimba (also known as the marimba sencilla or marimba de sones) is the most common type of marimba both in Rabinal and within the Indian population as a whole. There are about forty simple marimbas, mostly son but also a few pieza marimbas in the municipality. Rabinal town and the larger villages have a concentration of marimbas and the rest are scattered in the smaller villages. Some are not played publicly and others, like livestock, are kept solely to be sold in times of need. In addition, there are ten conjunto marimba ensembles (marimba de pieza, bass and drum set) all of which are located in the town and larger villages.

The simple marimba

There are two types of simple marimba: the son marimba and the pieza marimba. They are structurally similar, being distinguished by the different ranges of their keyboards, the number of musicians required to play them, the type of music played on them, and the kind of events at which they are played.

The son marimba has 40 keys or five and a half terminos (octaves) and is played by three musicians. As their name indicates, these marimbas are used to play the sones repertoire. The range of son marimba is:
The *pieza* marimba has 42 keys and is played by a set of four musicians; the extra player, who embellishes the main melody on the highest keys, is known as a *requinto*. Although mainly used for playing *piezas*, *sones* can be played on them by three musicians. The *pieza* marimba range is:

The marimba *de pieza* is also known as a *conjunto* marimba because, on occasion, it may become part of a musical ensemble that includes a counter-bass and a drum set. An extensive repertoire of popular urban music can be played on the *pieza* marimba. Once the preserve of the Ladino population, this music is enjoyed by Rabinalense Indians for whom it is now the music of choice for weddings, dancing, and modern dance-dramas.

Simple marimbas are tuned in major keys, usually C Major, but it is common to find them set to F Major and G Major and occasionally to other Major keys. Esteban's two *son* marimbas, for example, are tuned to E major and A flat Major respectively. These diatonic marimbas may also be transposed to a neighbouring tonality by
applying small amounts of black wasp wax to the keys occupying the seventh scale degree of the major scale with the purpose of lowering the tone half a tone (semitone). For instance, if the marimba is tuned in G Major, and wax is applied to the F keys, the marimba will be transposed to C Major. The change of tonality is only practised for the four mallet sones (see below). The tones of the marimbas are not tempered in equidistant tones and semitones; the intervals vary between 1/4 to 3/4 of a tone, producing, as a result, unequal octaves of a peculiarly rich sound which is different from the tempered scale of the piano.

**Marimba production, maintenance, and repair**

Marimba production (both diatonic and chromatic) is an almost exclusively Indian craft. According to Camposeco (1992), workshops producing marimbas in Guatemala are chiefly found in San Juan Ostuncalco in Quetzaltenango province; San Marcos, San Marcos province; Santa Eulalia, San Miguel Acatan and Jacaltenango in Huehuetenango province; in various places in other provinces such as Totonicapán, Chimaltenango, Tecpan, Villa Canales, Salamá and Guatemala City. I visited two marimba workshops in Cobán and Carcha in Alta Verapaz which supply the whole region down to Baja Verapaz. Some Culbulco traders make a limited number of marimbas but were not producing when I visited them. I was unable to visit marimba workshops in the Western Highland towns.

There are no marimba producers in Rabinal, though Esteban Uanché remembers that in his youth there was a carpenter, Julio Sis, who used to make them. Today, Esteban is the only person in town who repairs son marimbas; he can replace broken parts but not make or tune keyboards, which he has to contract out. Esteban frequently buys broken or simply abandoned marimbas which he renovates for resale. He also receives marimbas on consignment from merchants in San Miguel Acatan and Cubulco, which he calibrates, redecorates, and resells at 30% above cost; he is the only marimba trader in town. No one travels the markets selling marimbas any more; Julián

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142 Paulino Jerónimo boasted that his grandfather and great grandfather developed this practice: “They alone transposed,” he claimed. “They had the ability to change its voice, applying wax quickly and thus modifying it. The double marimba came later.”

143 For detailed descriptions of marimba craftsmanship, see Chenoweth (1964); for photographs of the construction process, see Camposeco (1992).
Ordoñez gave up the business following the outbreak of violence in neighbouring El Quiché province in the 1970s. He explained:

We sold marimbas for about five years. It would take three days from here to Toto [Totonicapán] as we took them by foot. Nowadays you cannot trade, because if you carry money there is no way you can avoid the assaults on the road.

Watching Esteban work gave me detailed knowledge of the structure of the marimba. The keyboard of the simple son marimba rests on a trapezoid frame called a 'mesa' (table) which measures 2.16m in length and 15cm and 62cm respectively on each side, and has four legs. The railing where the resonator's 'ears' rest is held in its interior. The hanging resonators are trapezoid structures whose bottom end is an inverted pyramid. Throughout the length of the table there are several slots for pegs that sustain the keyboard: a cable runs through the holes in the pegs and the keys themselves.

Different types of wood are used for different parts of the marimba. The table and legs are generally made of pine. A better quality, harder wood is used to make the keys and pegs; cypress, hormigo (Pltymiscium Dimorphandrum Donn) or granadillo (ebony; Amerimon granadillo) are ideal for the 'puro acero' (pure steel) sound when struck. The resonators must be constructed from mahogany because "it allows the best resonance and does not break easily."

Calibrating entelarlas (replacing the membranes of each resonator) is the most important and specialised aspect of Esteban's repair and maintenance work. Each resonator has a hole at the bottom surrounded by a ring covered in black wasp wax which serves as an adhesive to attach a very fine membrane made from the interior layer of pig tripe. These waxed rings with thin membranes form the mirlitones that produce the marimba's characteristic buzzing sound (charleo). The size of the rings varies according to the size of both resonators and keys. The malleability of the wax allows the calibration of the size of the holes, achieving the appropriate aperture for the required resonance. The resonators are arranged from largest – for lower bass keys – to

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144 A vibrating membrane that modifies a sound produced in some other way, adding a nasal or buzzing quality (Randel 1986).

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smallest – for higher treble keys. Starting with the bass keys, the first thirty have resonators containing a hole; five of the remaining ten or twelve keys have resonators with no holes; the rest have no resonators. There are only five different calibres for the thirty resonators bearing holes, resulting in five different groups of six resonators each with the same calibre.

![Drawing No. 2: Lower part of a resonator with its ring hole covered with pig tripe membrane](image)

Tripe membrane is so soft and fragile that it breaks after a few performances. To apply the membrane correctly, it is necessary to stick it with the ball of the little finger so that it adopts the curve of the fingertip and avoids stretching too much when it sticks to the wax. This allows it to vibrate without breaking when the air is pushed out of the resonator each time the key is struck. When the wax hardens, many musicians add more when replacing the tripe membrane, reducing the size of the holes. This results in the alteration of the correct diameter corresponding to the tone of the key on the top of each resonator. Consequently proper buzz is lost and with it the magnitude of sound of the instrument. Esteban complained about musicians who do not replace membranes regularly or calibrate the rings, which results in the muteness and poor appearance of
their instruments. Sneering at the marimbas brought to him for calibrating, he told me: “Look at the amount of wax, they resemble a child’s ass, full of excrement.”

The bolillos (mallets) used to play the marimba are made in different sizes of various materials. The heads of the mallets used for the lower register are the biggest and are relatively soft. Those used for the middle range are slightly smaller and hard. Both are made of local rubber. The heads of the treble player’s mallets are the smallest and hardest; they are generally manufactured from pork tripe and are only available in the capital.

The double or chromatic marimba

The double marimba comprises two chromatic marimbas, a ‘big’ marimba for four players and a tenor marimba for three. The leader of the group is the tiplista (treble) player of the ‘big’ marimba who develops the main melody; the other three musicians are the requinto, who embellishes the main melody on the higher keys of the keyboard, and the bass and centre players who together are responsible for rhythm and harmony. The tenor marimba has one bass, one centre, and one requinto player who play in counterpoint with and segundean (follow in parallel motion) the ‘big’ marimba parts. Like the conjunto ensemble (diatonic marimba de pieza), the chromatic double marimba ensemble includes a counter bass and drum set, which add modern sounds and rhythms.

The keyboard on both marimbas is chromatic (by semitones). The ‘big’ marimba has a range of six whole octaves and a variable number of extra semitones. The tenor marimba’s range is three whole octaves and various numbers of semitones. There have only ever been very few double marimbas in Rabinal [municipality], largely because chromatic keyboard playing techniques are vastly different from those possessed by local musicians. Only a few ladinoized Indians, essentially the Caballero and Jerónimo families plus one or two other individuals, have learned the

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145. There are two chromatic tenor marimbas in Rabinal which are dedicated solely to playing hymns and prayers for the Catholic parish services.

146. For more technical information about the double marimba, see Chenoweth (1964).

147. The Caballeros family has produced several generations of musicians. Fifty years ago they formed a brass band and an ensemble of string instruments (violin and counter-bass).
necessary skills to play the chromatic or double marimba. The popular pieza repertoire can be played in its original key and by modulating to minor and other keys if required without having to adapt the pieces as simple marimba players have to do. The repertoire includes corridos, cumbias, guarachas, mambos, boleros, pasillos, fox trots, 6/8, blues and especially waltzes such as the old 'Carmela' or the famous 'Flor del Café' composed by Herman Alcantara and other waltzes inspired by the Rabinal landscape such as 'Naranjales de Rabinal' by Julio Antonio Perez (musical example number 10 in cassette).

Musicians' precarious domestic economy limits the spread of double marimba ownership as this ensemble is expensive to buy and it is difficult to keep such a large number of musicians together in a very limited and uncertain market. Today Rabinal's only double marimba in town belongs to the municipality and is played by members of the two families mentioned above at Ladino festivities such as weddings, fifteenth birthday celebrations, baptisms, school events, and other weekend events financed by the municipality. Demand is scarce in Rabinal and it is generally necessary to look for contracts outside the municipality in places such as Salamá, San Jeronimo, Purulha, Granados and El Chol. With the exception of Purulha, these are Ladino municipalities able to pay 1000-1500 quetzales (up to US$250) for a night of double marimba music.

SON MUSIC

Bartolomé de las Casas and his close companions, the friars Rodrigo de Ladrada and Pedro Angulo, began to penetrate K'iche' territory and the adjacent Verapaz in 1537. They composed songs in the K'iche' language based on the life of Christ and taught them to four Indian merchants who became cantores de trovas (troubadours). These merchants carried the Christian message to Indian towns through sung stories, accompanying themselves with rattles and tum. In 1540, King Charles V of Spain ordered the Franciscan provincial authorities in Mexico to send Indian singers and musicians, trained in their monasteries, to assist de las Casas in the evangelisation of Guatemala (Lehnoff 1986:77-78). They arrived in 1542, when Father Luis de Cancer
brought Indian musicians to Verapáz; they were most probably from the Franciscan convent of Tlatelolco (ibid: 69-71).

Music, dance and drama became the vehicles of Christian education. Tocotines (villancicos, poems set to son music) were composed for the autosacramentales (a type of religious comedy) to the Virgin. Comedies, nativity scenes, loas or alabanzas (short dramatic poems and praises with musical interludes), dance-dramas such as the Dance of the Conquest and the Dance of the Conversion as well as the processional music of the cofradías were composed for performance during the fiestas of the Catholic annual calendar. The discovery of late sixteenth century musical codices in Huehuetenango in Northwest Guatemala illustrates the rich repertoire of polyphonic music sung and played in remote Indian towns during that time. The codices include diverse musical genres from plainsong, antiphons, masses, and villancicos to instrumental dances composed by renowned European maestros. Sixteenth-century Indian chapel masters, such as Thomas Pascual and Francisco de León, also composed, copied, and gathered similar musical collections. Many of these compositions were also found in the Archivo Historico del Arzobispado (Archives of the Archbishopric) in Guatemala City, which suggests the performance of a common repertoire in both the cathedral and its smaller parishes (Lehnoff 1986:78-82).

Whilst introducing European music for religious services to the Indian population, the friars discovered a rich vernacular musical and dramatic tradition and adapted it to the needs of the Christian religion. The theatre of evangelisation created a rich cultural legacy that is still enjoyed today. Verapáz, and especially Rabinal, has a rich repertoire of music and dance-drama owing to the control and isolation imposed on the region by the Dominicans (Mace 1966, 1967).

148 Franciscans were the first friars to arrive in New Spain following the conquest of 1521. In 1536, they established the first secondary school for Indian nobles at their convent of Tlatelolco and this became the most important centre for the religious indoctrination and musical training of the indigenous nobility. The syllabus included reading, writing, Latin, rhetoric, logic, philosophy, and indigenous medicine (Ricard [1947]1992:336).

149 See pre-Hispanic dances in Mace (1966, 1967); Tedlock (1985: 45, 149-150); Acuña (1978); Breton (1994).

150 For the theatre of evangelisation in Guatemala, see Correa and Cannon (1958).

151 My investigations revealed that Rabinal has twenty-six distinct dance-dramas (appendix 4) some of which are still performed as an offering and entertainment for the saints and the
By the early seventeenth century, 'son' was a general term referring to popular songs and dances which was also commonly used to refer to the instrumental part of the music as well (Saldivar 1987 [1943]: 249; Stanford 1984a: 19). Nowadays Ladinos use the term to refer to whatever Indians play preserving the low class strata connotation of the colonial term. For Indians, 'son' refers to all ancestral genres of music.

Analytically speaking, *son* music can be divided into two main groups: the Indian *son* and the non-Indian *son* (O'Brien 1980; Stanford 1984b). The Indian *son*, whilst influenced by European and African music, obeys forms and patterns alien to European music and is exclusively played by indigenous people in all Indian regions of Meso-America (Kurath and Marti 1964:177-8,197; Boiles 1966:71-73; O'Brien 1980; Horspool 1982: 267-269; Navarrete 1994:90-91). The non-Indian *son*, known as the Mestizo (Mexican) *son* or the *Chapin* (Guatemalan) *son*, despite its noticeable African and Indian influences, basically obeys the forms and rules of European (and especially Spanish) music. It proceeds from models of European dances which have been developed and practised in particular ritual contexts and conditions within indigenous society, adopting forms, styles, and sonority which gave it a distinctive style of its own.

**The Mexican son**

Stanford (1984a: 10-11) argues that in Mexico the term 'son' has three aspects: musical, literary, and choreographic. From a musical point of view, the *son* rhythm is based in the proportion 3:2 or *sesquialtera* (that alternates with six; the metre sign is C3); in other words, the rhythm is played in alternating measures of three 1/4 notes with measures of two groups of three octaves as:

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public during *cofradia* festivities. Teletor (1955) describes eighteen dances that existed during the first half of the 20th century.
This proportion also appears in contemporary writing as the alternating of simple triple metre 3/4 and compound duple metre 6/8. With respect to the musical form, it has a strophic structure, with a refrain and an introduction that can be played between verses of the song. The literary component is the *copla* (stanza), usually consisting of four octosyllabic verses or lines with a love and picaresque theme. The choreographic aspect is a couples’ dance with *zapateo* (foot stamping).

An analysis of the structures and rhythms of the string instruments and music of the Zinacanteco Maya and Chamula Indians of Chiapas indicates that in sixteenth and seventeenth century Mexico harps, guitars, and violins were very similar to the instruments, musical groups, tuning techniques, and rhythms common to Spain and other Western European regions (Harrison and Harrison 1968). The Harrisons claim that the *zarabanda* (as dance and music) originates in the sixteenth century in the fusion of Spanish instruments and musical structures with the structure of the pre-Hispanic erotic tickle or itch dance (*cuecuecheueycatl*).152 From this they extrapolate that both the *San Sebastian son* and the *Bolonchon Zinacanteco* and *Chamula* (secular-themed songs among the Chamulas, accompanied by string instruments) are *chaconas* (a sixteenth-century dance originating in New Spain) and that their basic rhythms correspond to that of the *zarabanda* (as *son* music) with its characteristic *sesquialtera* proportion 3:2 (op.cit.). Stevenson (1986:28) also argues that *zarabanda* and *chacona* dances appeared first in Mexico in the middle of the sixteenth century,153 later gaining popularity in Spain (cf. Van der Lee 1995:216). To close the circle, Stanford (1984a:10-11) believes that the *zarabanda, jarabe, pavana*, and other dance pieces are variations of the *son* type.

In early colonial times, people danced to songs of one or more verses. The most common form was the *seguidilla* (a stanza of four or seven lines) which was widespread throughout Spain. The *seguidilla* had a strong influence on some types of

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152. Frank and Joan Harrison (1968:13) rely on the testimony of chronicler Diego Duran who describes the *cuecuecheueycatl* dance as a *zarabanda*. They also refer to a text of a *zarabanda* sung and danced in 1569 on Corpus Christi at Patzcuaro Michoacan. Although no reference is given, they may well be referring to the text of a song composed in New Spain by Pedro de Trejo in 1569 where the word *zarabanda* is mentioned (Stevenson 1986:28).

153. Hudson (1980) says that the *zarabanda* existed in Panama as early as 1539.
son in different parts of Mexico (e.g., the jarabe, jarana, and huapango). Saldivar (1987:246-257) traces elements of the contemporary Mexican son to Spanish cancioneros (songbooks) and believes that sixteenth century popular Mexican love songs were sones.

This Spanish tradition was re-interpreted and transformed by African slaves into idiosyncratic dances which in turn were a source of inspiration for church musicians such as the Portuguese organist and chapel master of Guatemala Cathedral, Gaspar Fernández to write four and ten part pieces which were used in church services. When living in Puebla, Mexico, Fernández compiled a cancionero between 1609 and 1616 (Lehnoff 1986:124:132). The songbook includes many guineos, which are learned musical interpretations of popular music with Spanish lyrics imitating the pronunciation of Africans and Mulattos. One guineo is entitled 'Tururu farara con (with) son', indicating an African-Spanish text accompanied by son music. The word 'zarabanda' appears in another guineo in this songbook (Stevenson 1986:29-34) in which the music presents a sesquialtera proportion (3:2) in the melody but not harmonically; the rhythmic patterns are long but not complex and keep varying (musical example number 11 in cassette: zarabanda).

By the end of the eighteenth century, popular sones were already part of the programmes presented at the Coliseo Theatre in Mexico City under the name of sonecitos de la tierra (literally, little songs of the land; folk songs). These alternated with sainetes (Spanish comedies) and with the famous tonadilla escénica which were short plays including picaresque songs and dances performed during the intermission of a larger comedy and evolved into short comic operas.

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154. For information on the Cancionero of Gaspar Fernández, see Tello Aurelio (1990) and Lezama and Traffano, eds., (1998). Music from this cancionero can be heard on the CD Mexican Colonial Music from the 16th and 17th Centuries, performed by the Ars Nova ensemble. Copyright: Claudio Valdés Kuri, 1993.

155. The 18th century Spanish sainete (comedy or one act farce) resembled the ancient Maya farces and was immediately incorporated into the dance-drama repertoire, becoming one of the Achis' favourite genres. See Mace (1966).

156. Mendoza (1984:12, 13, 58-61) and Carmona (1984:11-120) give a central role to the tonadilla escénica in the development of 19th century popular music in Mexico.
The Guatemalan son

The Guatemalan son (son Chapin) is, according the New Harvard Dictionary of Music, a dance-music genre which accompanies dancing in couples with characteristic zapateado (foot-stamping) patterns. The son is played at a moderate to rapid tempo and combines simple triple and compound duple metres. Both Chenoweth (1964:79-81) and O’Brien (1980) define the characteristics of the son Chapín as a homophonic texture, major tonality, diatonic melody, triadic harmony, and a moderate to rapid 6/8 metre. In Rabinal, the sones repertoire for the marimba corresponds to the Chapin son. The term ‘son Chapín’ had become the generic name applied by non-Indian Guatemalans to all Indian music played on the marimba.

By the end of the 19th C famous Guatemalan marimbistas relegated the low class and popular son Chapín to second place. Their preference became the new dances arriving from Europe especially the waltz which they found more appropriate for the refined ears of the urban middle class. An important difference between Mexican and Guatemalan Chapin sones is that the latter lacks text. However, as sung texts do exist for some sones played with string instruments, it may well be that zarabandas and other sones may have all once had a literary component. Texts survive in Guatemala in the b’it (wake) songs of the Q’anjob’al people of Santa Eulalia (La Farge 1994 [1947]: 69), the ‘Songs of the Face of the Earth’ of the Tzutujil Maya of Santiago Atitlán (O’Brien 1975), and the welcome and farewell songs, of the violin and adufe ensembles, to the souls of the ancestors of the Rabinalense Achi. In all instances, the words are sung to the accompaniment of string instruments; in the last two, the music may also be played on a marimba, in which case there is no singing (O’Brien 1975:35-36). These songs are performed on the marimba as instrumental pieces and, although the Achi consider both interpretations to the same son, the characteristic polyrhythms and faster tempo of the marimba transforms them to such an extent that, to my ears, in the first instance there was little resemblance between them. Nevertheless, it is likely that the violin son repertoire is the ancestor of those played on the marimba. A closer analysis revealed that the violin and adufe sung sones contain a sesquialtera rhythmic pattern in the melody and the drumming which relates them to the son Chapín tradition:
Until about thirty years ago, *sones* were danced individually in circles in a peculiar dancing step style; people danced with a meditative attitude, gazing at the floor. This ancient Indian style differs considerably from the today’s Ladino mode of dancing in couples, swaying from side to side. This style may have been introduced to Rabinal at the same time as the marimba became popular among the Achi for their religious celebrations.

**Rabinalense *sones***

According to Achi musical classifications there are a variety of existing *son* types, which reveal different degrees of European influence. For example, the Rabinalense music of the marimba's *son Chapin* has substantially more in common with the violin and *adufe son* than it does with the *son* music of the *pito* (cane flute) or *chirimia* (shawm) and *tamborón* (big drum) ensembles; At the same time, the *son* music of these drum ensembles illustrates greater Hispanic-Arabic influences than the music of the trumpet and *tum* ensemble which shows little European or Arabic influence (Castillo 1977[1941]:81-111; Navarrete 1994).

In Rabinal, the *sones* repertoire for the marimba corresponds to the *Chapín son* and as such is closely connected to the popular learned European music of the colonial era. The marimba *son* in Rabinal has its own characteristics of performance style (chapter 8), but shares some rhythmic patterns, horizontal and vertical harmonic structures, and its general form with the marimba *sones* of many Indian towns. In Appendix 3, I present transcriptions of three *sones* to illustrate certain characteristics of rhythm, harmony, and musical form). The following rhythmic patterns in the melodies show the great variety of rhythms found in Rabinal:

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157. The harmonic and formal analyses presented here are only descriptive guides and the transcriptions of Rabinalense *sones* in appendix 3 are modest supportive descriptions of these analyses. In no way are they intended to represent how the Rabinalense *son* sounds nor do they refer to prescriptive transcriptions, for the objective is to study an unwritten, oral tradition. Sound examples of the Rabinalense *son* can be found in the cassette accompanying this thesis.

158. The *sones* and *piezas* were transcribed by the Brazilian guitarist Roberto Castellarin.
Some of the rhythmic patterns in these *sones* were also found in the rhythmic patterns of the Solola marimba *sones* recorded by Chenoweth (1964:81-82), thus demonstrating a common musical tradition.

The harmonies are open triads and common progressions are:

The form of the son varies greatly and is always an open-ended structure; their length depends on the ritual context. Sones may have two, three or more sections. Each section has an eight-measure theme. Sometimes the theme is repeated with varying rhythms and at other times the theme is alternated with other themes *ad libitum* until the treble cues, with a slight *rallentando* (slowing down), to end; a final cadence (*terminación*) is then played. For instance, the *entrada son* played at the beginning of celebrations and in rites of entrance to the main altar of the house where the event takes place has a short version of the following form:

\[A - A2 - B - A3 - B2 - C - C2 - A4 - \text{cadence or terminación}\]

This lasts 10 minutes but may be extended up to 15 minutes, alternating and repeating, depending on the particular time, during the development of the event, of the performance of the rite of entrance at the domestic altar. At the commencement of the celebration, sones usually last only a few minutes; as the event develops, the themes reiterate over and over and the sones become longer and longer. Along with this ever increasing duration of the sones, the tempo is increased ranging from I. = 80 to I. = 120.

**PERFORMANCE ORDER**

As with many folk traditions, performance practice depends on the development of the musical event. Analysis of the son repertoire and the sequence in which it is played confirms that social context, that is, the structure and process of ritual occasions where music is played, determines the type, performance style, and form of music.

In Rabinal, marimba sones are categorised by the number of mallets used by the centre player. In ‘four-mallet’ sones, the treble leader, centre, and bass players respectively hold two, four, and two mallets. In ‘three-mallet’ sones, the most popular and thus most frequently played sones, all three players hold three mallets each; and in ‘two-mallet’ sones, while the treble may play with two or three mallets, the centre and bass have two mallets each (musical examples 12,13,14 in cassette: Four, three and two mallet sones)
The performance of the *son* repertoire is arranged in a fixed order forming a day cycle of *sones* which begins early in the morning and ends late at night. During celebrations lasting more than a day, such as *cofradía* festivities, each day has a whole musical cycle with its own beginning, development, and end:

- Entrance *sones* (four and three-mallet *sones*)
- First cycle of four, then three, then two-mallet *sones*
- Second cycle of four, three and two-mallet *sones*
- Set of requests for dancing
- Exit *sones* (four-mallet *sones*)

This sequence is interrupted by entrance-exit *sones* whenever the rite of entering and exiting the domestic altar is performed. It may also be interrupted by participants’ requests (chapter 7).

All celebrations where marimba music is played begin with a short set of four and three-mallet *sones de entrada* (entrance *sones*) to welcome the ancestors, which usually takes place around 6am. These entrance *sones* evoke happiness because they are inviting and welcoming the souls of the ancestors. Entrance *sones* are followed by the first cycle of four, three, and two mallet *sones*. The three-mallet *sones* are dedicated to the women preparing food for the festivities. Traditionally, these *sones* are played at dawn when activity quickens; one of the first of these three-mallet *sones* is called *Amanecer* (dawn) or *Amanecido* (after dawn), a reference to the time of day it should be played although it is usually mid-morning before they are performed. The last group of each cycle is the two-mallet *sones*. Then the cycle repeats.

The first cycle is called *primer sonido* (first sound) and the *sones* are called *sones con cera* (*sones* with wax) because wax is applied to all seventh scale degree keys to lower them half a tone. The second cycle is called *segundo sonido* (second sound), and the *sones* are called *sones sin cera* (*sones* without wax) although only the four-mallet *sones* are played without wax. The *sones* are played in the same order as the first cycle. Within each set of *sones* the repertoire varies depending on the knowledge of each marimba ensemble although the sequence, in terms of mallets, remains the same. Nevertheless, there is a basic number of very popular *sones* that all marimba ensembles must play. There are also certain pairs of *sones* that are always
played one after the other, such as the three-mallet *sones Palo seco* (dead tree) and *Amanecido* (after dawn).159

At the end of the main ritual activity a set of *surtido sones* (requests) is played for those who wish to dance and express their happiness and sadness. By this time, participants are generally in varying degrees of inebriation. The lack of structure in the order of the *sones* played in this set reflects the heightening of individual emotions at this time.

Finally, around midnight, the *sones de terminación y despedida* (*sones* for the end and farewell) are played. These are in fact the same *sones* as those played as entrance *sones* – mainly *Costa Chiquita*, *Costa Grande*, and *Barreño*. However in this ending context these are *soon bis’ab’al* (*sones* of sadness) because they bid farewell to the ancestral spirits. Musicians say these *sones* are also a reminder for drunken participants to get up and leave!

**RADIOS AND CASSETTE PLAYERS**

The buses travelling between the country’s capital and its rural areas lack basic comforts and security but are well equipped with powerful stereos. These blast music throughout the landscape to the enjoyment of the fearless Ladino drivers and their assistants who risk their passengers’ lives at every curb and steep drop as the bus winds round the mountains. Travelling the roads between the urban world of Guatemala city and the rural world of Rabinal, more often than not squeezed between (largely Indian) passengers and their chickens and other goods, I was almost deafened by ear splitting music – *canciones rancheras* (country songs), polkas and *corridos norteños* (ballads originally from the Mexican-American border region), *cumbias*, *merengues tropicales*, and *boleros romanticos*. These songs are also the staple of popular music stations in Mexico and Central America and of some radio stations for the Hispanic community in the USA.

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159. See discussion about duality in chapter 4.
The music on the bus spoke to me of the hegemony of the popular music produced in Mexico and Miami. This is broadcast throughout the Latin American and Hispanic communities of Central and North America thanks to private radio stations and TV networks such as Univision; local announcers provide minimal local colour. Without exception Rabinalense Achis listen to this popular music on the radio. Both men and women have a positive opinion of the radio; they said it breaks the 'sadness' of silence and isolation, keeping them company at home. Local people do not consider this popular music an alien or imposed sound; on the contrary, it has been welcomed and appropriated (to form part of the pieza repertoire for the conjunto marimba) together with the connotations of power that Ladino and foreign culture represent. The musical journey on the buses to and from Guatemala City is a passage of transformation from straw hats to caps to straw hats, a prelude and coda of a powerful 'trip' to and from the mecca of the Ladino culture.

Guatemala's first radio station was the state owned TGW; transmission began in 1930 (Almorza 1994:11); a private radio station commenced broadcasting a year later, but soon closed down. At the time, there were only about 250 radio receivers in the country, most of which were in Guatemala City and belonged to large stores or wealthy radio enthusiasts. Programming consisted mostly of music: live popular and traditional marimba music alternated with operatic arias and other classical compositions. The dictator Ubico (1934-44) was very interested in developing radio and gave it his full support – so long as it remained under his control. The democratic regimes between 1944-1954 ended the state radio monopoly and private radio stations multiplied rapidly. Radio has revolutionised the soundscape in Rabinal.

The most important foreign radio station was the popular Mexican station XEW, which broadcast on the AM band. According to Rene Augusto Flores, a radio producer

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160. Cojti (1986:87-104) argues that the use of the Spanish language and the content of the messages transmitted by commercial radio are unfamiliar codes for the indigenous population and for that reason, as it stands in the present, radio cannot be considered a suitable medium for communication and social development. He acknowledges that the only exception is music, which is the most important 'language' heard on the radio by indigenous communities.

161. For a discussion about processes of change and the relationship between soundscape and social meaning, see Leyshon, Matless, and Revill, eds. (1998).
during the short democratic period, urban marimba ensembles could be heard in remote places by the end of the 1950s even though the number of radio receivers had only increased to 20,000. I believe this is unrealistic because large areas of the country were without electricity at the time. Rabinal town’s electricity plant was only installed (in the neighbouring village of Chiac) in the late 1950s and forty years later, many of the municipality’s villages and hamlets are still without electricity. Even after electrification, there were few places to hear urban music in Rabinal – one or two cantinas or the homes of Ladinos or wealthy Indians. An alternate source was the records relayed over loudspeakers during the festivities for the town’s patron saint and other fairs.162

The situation changed dramatically when ownership of transistor radios became common among the rural Indian population in the 1960s. Some sones popularised by the radio were added to the repertory of rural marimbistas throughout Guatemala; to a certain extent, radio created a common repertoire that influenced, albeit to a lesser degree, local playing styles. Even Esteban Uanché admits to reproducing sones originating from places such as Nahuala from the radio.

Radio’s biggest influence has been in the dissemination of commercial urban popular music. This had an immediate impact on the growth of the marimba repertoire and transformed the practice of marimba music in Rabinal. Young marimbistas started adding bass and drums to their ensembles and adapting the melodies and rhythms of tropical (Afro-Caribbean) and Norteña (Mexican-US border country) music to create new versions of traditional dance dramas, and to delight guests at Ladino and Indian weddings and baptisms (musical example number15: pieza cumbia performed by conjunto marimba).

Broadcasting popular music to rural areas has created a demand for urban music. The spread of radio-cassette recorders in the 1970s163 has led to the creation of local cottage industries to meet the demand for musical tapes. There are two permanent stalls in the local market, supplying mostly bootleg cassettes of Rabinalense

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162 Loudspeakers were installed to announce lottery and sports results during fairs, a practice that continues today.
marimbistas and popular music, making music affordable (Manuel 1991:189-204).

There is a down side to this however, so far as musicians are concerned: live son music at zarabandas in cantinas has been largely replaced by juke boxes and cassette players, thus reducing the amount of work available. Nevertheless, musicians are among those who tape marimbistas in order to learn new sones, piezas and playing styles (chapter 8). Esteban’s solution to this intractable problem is to make recordings of his playing for sale. This way, he gets some financial compensation for the potential loss of income represented by other musicians learning either his repertoire or his playing style.

Also popular on the market stalls are tapes of evangelical religious songs – alabanzas (praises), hymns, and choral music. Following a 500 year old precedent, evangelical groups aim to create a sense of communion with their target audience by adapting and playing ranchero and norteño music, to which participants sing and clap, in their religious services. These recordings are made by evangelical groups in Guatemala City and the towns of the Western Highlands, copied by local merchants and offered for sale at low prices.

The Catholic Church has also benefited from this powerful media. In recent years the Dominicans in Cobán City have set up their own radio station, Radio Tezulutlán. This station transmits religious messages and cultural programmes in vernacular languages about the ritual and musical traditions of the Q’eqchi’ and Achi people. In my most recent visit to Rabinal in 1998 I discovered 3 radio stations in Rabinal. One of them operates locally without a license and taking a band from another radio station. The other two are legal. One is an evangelical station and the other is a highly popular commercial radio station called Superestereo de Rabinal which according to my friends most people prefer not only because it has good popular and traditional music but because they talk about people and problems of the municipality.

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163. Many homes now have radio-cassette recorders, although use is restricted by the owner’s ability to buy tapes and batteries, which are luxury items.

164. In 1995 I had the opportunity of producing a radio programme of the music and text of the ancient Rabinal Achi dance-drama for this radio station.
It was too early to assess the impact of this commercial local radio station but at a first glance it was fascinating to see people recognising and identifying themselves with their favourite music, with news about people they knew and references to familiar places.

CONCLUSION

The history of the son and the marimba illustrate a fluidity of social relations and an intermingling of cultures which is only broadly recognised by the Indian classification system which categorises the universe in terms of complementary and often oppositional pairs (chapter 4). The most relevant here are Indian/Ladino, rural/urban, son/pieza. This chapter shows that the borders between the two elements comprising a category pair are, in reality, often very blurred. Furthermore, despite Achis’ insistence on keeping to the ‘ways of the ancestors’, it is clear that the music they play for them has been in a state of flux since the conquest. Ultimately, this is not important; it is the message that stays the same. It is the retention of the message that makes music work.

At the moment, the simple marimbas remain the favourite instrument and ensemble for son music during Indian celebrations while the chromatic double marimba is preferred by Ladinos, who consider its music more sophisticated. In between is the marimba de conjunto ensemble, consisting of a single simple marimba de pieza plus double bass and drum kit which is becoming increasingly popular among the Indian population for the latest dance-dramas, the groom’s party at weddings, and other social events. But even here it seems that the new music is subordinate to its social context that, as in all folk music traditions, has a central role in performance style and form. The sequence and timings of the son cycle correspond and are subordinated to the sequence and timings of the ritual occasion as is the pieza music accompanying modern dance dramas that are performed during cofradia fiestas. The structure and sequence of the day’s events, which depend on the structure and process of ritual, remains but music changes.
Chapter 6

Good and Evil:
Music, Alcohol and Women

Although music, alcohol, and women have a positive symbolic role in terms of nurturing and sociality, they also have negative roles that are considered the embodiment of evil. As such, this trilogy makes people – especially men – vulnerable to a loss of ‘will’ (control). This in turn leads to transgressive and potentially dangerous behaviour, which may lead to madness and death. Singly or together the symbolic attributes of music, alcohol, and women are both life-affirming and death-threatening.

This chapter explores the history of these ideas, beginning with colonial civil and religious authorities’ views on festivities in Indian towns. These show a Catholic manichean discourse in which attempts to prohibit these festivities in which Indians (and others) played music, danced and drank within a religious context rather than outside it as was the European custom, were understood as a struggle between good and evil. The second and third sections give contemporary evidence of the influence of this manichean discourse in Maya Achi views about the relationship between marimba music, alcohol, and women as they relate to local means of representing and understanding sociality, social conflict and male domination.

RELIGIOUS FESTIVITIES AND EVIL

The spiritual conquest of the Indians was perceived by Spanish missionaries as a battle against the devil, whom they felt they knew well and blamed for tricking Indians and keeping them in the dark. The initial enthusiasm of the Franciscan and Dominican missionaries in Mexico and Guatemala evaporated as they began to suspect that Indians were continuing to worship their own deities. The missionaries’ success – which they gauged by Indians’ ability to learn, perform, and enjoy the stories of saints with song, music, and drama – was an illusion. Perhaps massive Indian ‘conversions’
had led the missionaries to be overconfident about the imminent defeat of the devil and his minions; perhaps they just wanted to give a successful impression of their evangelisation efforts to the Spanish crown.

The copious church decrees prohibiting Indian celebrations (Acuña 1975:127-156) give the impression of a violent and irrevocable policy against Indian celebrations, although it has been claimed (Cervantes 1994:34) that, in practice, provincial religious authorities were tolerant of them. Whilst the religious authorities were guided by Bartolomé de las Casas' famous dictum that “Indians are fundamentally good and their religiosity predisposes them to acquire the Catholic faith”, they simultaneously doubted Indians’ intelligence and capacity to be pious. Paternalistic attitudes led the Spanish to describe Indians as being ‘like children’, a view which still prevails among Ladinos (non-Indians) who refer to Indians in a diminishing way as ‘inditos’ (child Indians). Indians were considered to be inherently weak and easy prey for the devil; Indian drunkenness at their numerous fiestas was commonly cited as evidence of this. On the other hand, the Spanish judicial authorities believed Indians were naturally prone to drinking and the law considered drunkenness as a mitigating factor in homicide cases (Taylor 1979:104). This idea has served to obfuscate violence and its real foundation in the communities – exacerbated by the introduction of sugar cane spirits and its illegal sale to Indians by other Spanish authorities – attributing it to the devil's work.

The religious and royal authorities stressed the need to reduce the number of Indian festivities for economic, political, and religious reasons. The nascent economy of the Audiencia of Guatemala was hamstrung by what seemed to be an almost permanently drunken labour force. Both local Spanish civil authorities and the Dominicans who administered the wealth of Rabinal’s cofradías (chapter 2) tried to

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1. Some of the prohibitions of dances and dance-dramas within Indian celebrations during the colonial era (16th to early 19th centuries) can be found in the General Archive of Central America and in the AHA: “Decree prohibiting the Tum dance, year 1593”, A1.39.1751. f.46; A1.68.3 exp.48127 leg.5555; "Se prohíbe el baile de la zarabanda en los pueblos de la provincia de Zapatitlán año 1669" (Ordoñez 1989:97-104). “Decree prohibiting dances and zarabandas in the Guatemala valley, year 1749”, A1.22.1508.5221. Other bans of dances in Guatemala include A1.68-3 leg.2589 exp.21110 f.1; “Royal provision to the Verapaz mayor on the excesses ensuing from celebrations, year 1799”, A1. leg.4659 exp. 3986; “Prohibition of zarabandas in Suchitepequez, year 1802”, A1.68-24.823-.2815. Acuña (1975) offers an analysis of church decrees and prohibitions against the Tun dance-drama, which he identifies as the predecessor to the Rabinal Achi dance-drama.
prevent these festivals in order to protect their own economic and political interests. They insisted that these celebrations were the root cause of neglect of work, excessive spending and poverty among Indians. A royal provision to the mayor of Verapáz in 1799 which prohibited music, alcohol, and dancing during children’s wakes (chapter 5) and vigils for the saints during cofradía fiestas complains of:

The daily feasts and continuous spree lasting nine days and the profane dances performed in front of the saints during the wakes at their homes and the many days of missed work by the whole town, with great harm to the public, are consequences of these obligations whose purpose is the ruin of the participants (AGCA:A1.leg.4659, esp.39868).

The document also discloses the conflict between the provincial civil authorities and the Dominicans who had the economic and social control over the Verapáz region. The local authorities wanted to share the royal privileges of the missionaries over the Verapáz and took any opportunity to discredit the Dominicans blaming them for the great expenses of the Indians during religious festivities; they also criticised the music of the Indians as inappropriate ways of celebrating them. Fiesta participants priorities were wrong, their attitudes were wrong, and so too was their music:

...it is not only the church expenses that ruin these wretches (Indians), but also the amounts of lights, fireworks, and music, commonly in terrible disarray and of a style foreign to the majestic depth of those august performances. Far from inspiring tenderness, devotion and a healthy dose of respectful fear, these excite instead delinquent memories and passions (AGCA:A1.leg.4659, esp.39868).

This complaint gets to the crux of the matter: having incorporated Christ as a Mayan ancestor, Jesus became an Achi; he is inside the spiritual system, not outside, beyond, or above it. He is therefore celebrated in the same way as other founding ancestors, with music, dancing, and alcohol. Admittedly, after the conquest, both the music played and the alcohol drunk changed, the latter with disastrous effects.

But whilst the royal authorities railed against Indian behaviour, local Spanish authorities were more concerned with their own short-term interests. They turned a blind eye to the settlement of other ethnicities in Indian towns, opened clandestine alcohol shops and cantinas (bars), and hosted zarabandas (social events drinking and
dancing) selling cane spirits to Indians. Indians’ inability to withstand Ladino entrepreneurs’ invitations to drink the new spirits may well have been another element feeding into negative views about alcohol on the part of both Indians and higher Spanish authorities. Drinking alcohol in cantinas came to be identified as another evil brought by rural Spanish and Ladinos. In the 1670s, Archbishop Cortes y Larras wrote that rural Spanish and Ladinos, were responsible for introducing evil to the Indians. The Indians are evil because they were deceived by the devil; the rural Spanish and Ladinos were evil because they were dedicated to vice and evil habits (Alejos: 1992).

Attacks on the rural population whether Spanish, Indian or Ladinos Indian morals continued throughout the colonial period. The 1799 provision mentioned above makes a moral distinction between the ‘folk’ music played by people in their celebrations at their houses (which, by this time, included weddings, cofradía fiestas and anniversaries of the dead), and the ‘cultured’ music performed by orchestras and choirs in the church. This attack on Indian culture also reflects the loosening of the religious authorities’ control over the local population and their festivities as their own position weakened when Enlightenment ideas crossed the Atlantic.

What really upset the higher Spanish civil-religious authorities, then, was the fact that Indians and Ladinos celebrated supposedly Christian festivals in a thoroughly inappropriate manner. One such inappropriate behaviour was the involvement of women dancing inside the sacred sphere; to make matters worse, they appeared to be dancing, if not competing, for money from men. A 1669 document prohibiting this dance in the Indian towns of Zapotitlan province (where it was performed in Ladinco cofradías) includes testimony from Spanish witnesses living in the towns of Cuyotenango, San Francisco Zapotitlan, Masatenango and San Antonio Suchitepequez. One Spaniard’s testimony reads:

...[he] knows and has witnessed that in all the celebrations in the towns of this province the Ladin women captains of the cofradías of Our Lady of the Rosary and St Nicholas, organise the dance they are accustomed to dancing and they call zarabanda, and they all dance, mostly women, for this is their purpose,

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2. As early as 1617 provincial civil authorities were running taverns in Indian towns (AGCA:A1.23.leg.1515f3). Several centuries later, roughly between 1850–1930, the alcohol business was formally recognised in the habilitación system (chapter 2).

3. ‘Captains’ were cargo-holders of cofradías (chapter 3).
and that in such dance there is a contest of men who, once a woman starts dancing, they approach her and set a real (Spanish silver coin) or more on her front, and then throw it in a dish that they have set for this purpose (Ordoñez 1989:99).

Other testimonies in the same document state that this dance had been performed for a long time and that only the prettiest mulattas or mestizas were chosen to perform it. After the men had made their donations, men and women were permitted to dance in couples. The reales went to the cofradía funds:

...that which is collected helps to pay the expenses of the celebration as well as the blood-procession which that cofradía organises for the sake of the penitentes (penitents) in order not to dip into the cofradía's principal (capital) since upon leaving their charges they have to deliver every cent not spent with detailed accounts and explanation to the cofradía treasure, deposit it in the box and sometimes they even add some jewellery as charity and they take care of the sick, after all that is their purpose (Ordoñez 1989:102).

These testimonies portrayed women as agents of evil and to give weight to the edict, which concludes that these celebrations are offensive to God as they are only a means whereby the devil pretends virtuous actions to cover up mortal sins, mainly of sensuality. The women's dance attracted the worst sort of person: Indians, Ladinos, Mulattos, Mestizos, Muleteers and foreigners "who had no home". Such negative Spanish views of women, found in the historical record, influenced Indian perceptions of women.

A version of this dance survives in the modern provinces of Alta Verapáz and El Quiché. The Q'eqchi, for example, perform a dance accompanied by the zarabanda son music of harp, violin and guitar in their cofradía celebrations in front of its saint image to collect funds for the cult: a cash offering to the saint entitles the donor to one glass of alcohol and the right to dance as a devoción to the saint. The substitution of alcohol for female sensuality as a reward for pious donations resonates with a contemporary myth about the origins of mankind and alcohol among the Maya Tzeltal of Chiapas, Mexico. The myth tells how the Virgin Mary transforms her blood into alcohol, seduces the Anti-Christ through dance, and gets him drunk in order to trap him.

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4. Another version survives among Ladinos of Retuhuleu province. Known as the zarabanda de lazo, this is a social dance in which a lazo (ribbon) is tied across the dance hall to separate couples who make a donation for each pieza they dance.
and prevent him from continuing his destruction of mankind (Navarrete 1988:151-2). In this instance, the female call to drink the Virgin Mary's own blood and to dance with her serves the purpose of eliminating the devil. Thus the dangers of alcohol and female seductiveness are inverted and become an instrument for the common good.

The demonisation of Indian society was not only an ideology imposed to justify domination; it was also a Manichean notion of the world which was part of the rationality of sixteenth century Spanish society (Cervantes 1994:1-4). This was transplanted to a multi-ethnic colonial society, where it took hold and became part of contemporary society's heritage. The clash for power and resources between Ladino 'outsiders' and Indian 'insiders' and vice versa became for both a struggle between good and evil. Certainly part of Indian subjugation has been an assimilation of a negative view of themselves and their past, which reinforces their subordination to Ladino society. The conquest and subjection of Indians has, in their eyes, transformed Ladinos into the devil's allies. Ladinos' greed for money and personal gratification, the accumulation of illegitimate wealth obtained from activities other than working the land, the exploitation and ill treatment of Indians by Ladino bosses on the plantations, are all manifestations of evil (Cabarrús 1979; Warren 1992 [1978]).

MUSIC AND DRINKING

All social musical occasions celebrating family and community life are called alegrias ('happy' occasions). During these events music, food, and alcohol are the most precious gifts exchanged among the living and between the living and the dead; they 'open the path of communication' and express mutual recognition, a willingness to be sociable and to maintain reciprocity within community and family ties. Men make these offerings, though the gifts themselves are considered female.

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5. See Warren's (1992 [1978]) discussion on mythology as the separatist ideology of a bi-ethnic society.

6. Strictly speaking, Achi discourse does not ascribe a gender to alcohol (sugar cane spirits), although it is not uncommon for alcohol to be spoken of as a personified agent.
Marimba music is a female and ‘Marian’ call to people and to the spirits of their ancestors to share the expression of *sentimientos* (sadness) and *emociones* (happiness). In a religious sense this emotional channel is particularly intended to release feelings in an appropriate context, outside the daily realm. The extroversion of feelings, desires, and intentions of multiple people during *alegrias* also exposes participants to symbolic violence such as envy, jealousy, and vengeance through witchcraft or to physical violence and accidents resulting from drunkenness. Even though music is immediately associated with gaiety, people also associate *alegrias* with drunkenness and fights because “music invites drinking and drunkards provoke fights.” Alcohol’s unbinding and anxiety relieving function (Horton 1943) contributes to the vulnerability generated in this social context. It is participants’ perception of music and alcohol (Taylor 1979) which transforms the social event into a dangerous situation which promotes conflicts and accidents.

Social drinking at *alegrias* not only mediates communication but is both a moral obligation and an expression of good will. To share alcohol is a gesture of trust between the person offering it and the one who accepts it and, in time (on this or other occasions) returns the offer. To refuse indicates an absence of confidence in the donor, who is likely to take this public rejection as an insult and may seek revenge. As ritual specialists, musicians and *abogados* (prayer makers) are very clear about this principle. This is reflected in their constant acceptance of the drinks offered to them by the event’s host and participants as a gesture of gratitude and in exchange for their prayers and musical offerings during every celebration. Consuming alcohol is essentially a challenge for musicians for they have to balance their obligation to be social and accept the offered drinks with their ability to perform and conduct the celebration until it ends. Musicians who frequently express their pleasure in the effect their music has on people also speak, often with annoyance, of the drunks who follow them everywhere they play, creating conflicts. Many are also concerned about their own and other *marimbistas’* alcohol consumption: they are aware that the constant pressure exercised by friends and other *fiesta* participants to socialise and share drinks contributes to their own drinking problems.

But there is more to drinking in ritual contexts than relations among the living: drinking large quantities of alcohol often to the point of unconsciousness is a
declaration of trust in the communion of souls, alive and dead. This ‘apocalyptic’ pattern of drinking (Pages Larraya 1976) as part of the ritual celebration of the annual life cycle can be interpreted as a symbolic form of sacrifice. Individual will is delivered into the hands of the ancestors as an affirmation of the ties of reciprocity between the living and the dead. Collective drunkenness is, then, an affirmation of community spirit that is maintained during the communal celebrations of cofradías.  

It seems that this ancient form of drinking is coming under increasing pressure as people try to balance their views of marimba music and alcohol as a religious and social offering within an alegria with their experiences of conflict while enjoying the music and sharing drinks.

Perceptions of music and alcohol form part of a moral view of the world where sociality and conflict are interpreted as a battle between good and evil. Conflict is explained as being the result of evil; all elaborations of this concept concerned the differentiation of the narrator’s family or community interests from those of ‘others’ who are considered ‘outsiders’. The evil intentions of other participants, stemming from conflicts between neighbouring families with affinal ties over such things as land and water access, is a common explanation. But even then, the story is told obliquely: for example, Bacho told me a long story about a fight he’d had over a girl, only telling me at the end of the tale that he was already in dispute with the man over water access.

Others saw alcohol personified as the devil himself. Blind marimbista Lázaro Cauec told me:

The marimba is a joy. It is like this [pointing at my tape recorder], you have your cassette there, and you are listening to the sones; it depends on how you deal with it. There it is, not causing you a problem, instead the problems one has stem from the dammed drink. That is what causes the best man to lose his senses at the last hour, the mind is lost, the mind gets tangled to be more exact...

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My personal experience with alcohol among the Maya Tzeltales of Chanal, Chiapas, led me to the conclusion that surrendering completely to drunkenness is a means of expressing trust. The minute I started drinking in the same manner as the Chanaleros, falling into a stupor with them in the places where we drank, people began to have a friendlier attitude towards me (Navarrete 1988).
Older people explained that evil worked through encouraging alcohol consumption outside the places and times prescribed by ritual. From the older generation's moral and religious point of view, one has to drink in 'God's name'; that is, within the social and religious aims of the community while thinking of God and seeking His protection. They criticise young men for taking marimba music during cofradía festivities as an excuse to gather outside in the street which, at night, is the domain of the devil (cf. Warren 1992 [1978]: 46-48), to drink and look for trouble; they accuse them of drinking 'por puro gusto' (only for pleasure) like Ladinos, becoming evil in the same way. Cantinas have been identified as one of devil's favourite haunts and it is here is one of the places that the evil spirit of the marimba, la Sianaba, appears.

Some people, and especially evangelicals, blame the marimba for the evil taking over in alegrias. When discussing musicians who, under Protestant persuasion, have abandoned their destiny, marimbista Francisco Ixpata said:

Here the evangelicals say that it is forbidden to play sones, forbidden to play pieza. Then they sell it [the marimba] because some say the marimba is a devil that imperils the person. So they say, that's why they sell it.

'THE MARIMBA IS A WOMAN'

Whilst playing the marimba is an exclusively male activity, the instrument's spirit and sound are female. The symbolic construction of music as a female manifestation has many aspects but I shall cite only two of Achi women's social roles that are closely associated with the different uses and meanings given to music. The first is the female role of food preparation, which is women's primary contribution to the family group and to the community during festivities: women's nurturing role is identified with the nourishing quality of food. Corn, the Indian staple, is viewed as a symbol of femininity. Cubulero Achis say, "A 14 year old girl and corn are alike because they don't tire of serving us day and night" (Neuenswander 1986:7). The supernatural beings are also nurtured by women: in the rites of entrance during cofradía celebrations, the wives of the second and third highest cargo holders carry the offerings
of wax and lard candles on their backs. These are the food for God, the saints, the spirits and the holy Earth.

The musical instruments and their sound acquire female attributes because music is a part of the offerings that nourish the spirits of God, the saints, the ancestors, and the Earth. Music is not only an offering in itself but its female voice is a summons to others to gather and make their own offerings. The female attribute of music is also more specifically assigned to the leading voices of the instrumental ensembles because as first voices they ‘pull’ the others. It may be said that the perception of music as female permeates its concept of structure. The feminine representation of the marimba also derives from its relationship with the Earth, which has the female attributes of providing food and goods. As marimbista Esteban Uanché remarked:

The marimba is like a woman because it feeds us, provides sustenance like mother Earth. We thank mother Earth with cuxa (domestic alcohol beverage) covering the three spots [where musicians stand to play]. We also offer it to the marimba because both provide food for us. We walk on Earth and she supplies us with provisions. The marimba also feeds us and provides cuxa and cigarettes.  

Half a millennium of Catholic instruction has been unable to rid Achi culture of the association between music, alcohol and fertility. The marimbista Lázaro expressed a similar idea, although for him the relationship between Earth and marimba is not only imitative or iconical but causal or indexical: “...we offer guaro to mother Earth because she produced the tree which provided the wood to build the marimba, that’s what I do.”

Musicians illustrate the fundamental relationship between music and women in their discourse, in which music and instruments are referred to as though they are talking about women. This was brought home to me when Esteban and his nephews helped me buy a second hand marimba in Kanchel village in Cubulco. As we returned to Rabinal town, Esteban began calculating the amount of work the marimba would

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8. Participants give musicians alcohol and cigarettes as an expression of their thanks for the music.

9. Many Catholic calendrical celebrations also relate to the fertility of the Earth and include prayers and dances performed for the mountain spirits so that they will send rain (Percheron 1979:74-5). Examples include Rabinal’s two main Christian celebrations, the festival of the Holy Cross (3 May) and Corpus Christi (June/July).
need before I could play it. I explained I had no money to pay for his work and that anyway it didn’t need fixing as I wasn’t going to perform in public but only wanted to learn to play on it. Esteban was so appalled he offered to do the work for free. He said that marimbas are like women and one has to keep them properly dressed:

...look, both have chichis [women’s breasts; the resonators that hang underneath the marimba]. The cost of properly dressing a woman today is 1500 quetzales for her corte (Indian skirt), her faja (cotton belt), her huipil (smock top), the ribbon for her head, her necklace with a cross and the bambas (silver coins) and chibolita (head-dress), her earrings and sandals. And the marimba? The same, it is expensive to keep it tuned, well decorated, clean, and with new entelada (resonator membranes) every time it is played so people can appreciate how beautiful she is.

After this convincing argument I realised that I was behaving indecorously towards my marimba and that I should treat it properly. I therefore left it in Esteban’s care so he could bedeck it as well he would a woman. The days went by and with them my impatience to start playing grew, but Esteban refused to hand over my marimba until it was totally renewed. It was during my visits to see how work was progressing that I discovered the amount of attention put into a marimba’s appearance.

Women’s valued role as conservers of tradition, passing their customs, beliefs, and language to their children, has been transferred to the marimba. Equating the marimba with women’s role as living symbols of Achi culture provides another conceptual link between this somewhat recently introduced instrument and the ancestors.

One manifestation of women’s identification with Mayan tradition is the wearing of traditional dress which Esteban describes above (men were prohibited from wearing their traditional garb in the 1920s, possibly in an attempt to give the country’s labour force at least a more modern appearance). Most women, except the younger generation who live in town, show pride in the dress particular to their municipio

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10. A ‘good’ husband buys his wife a full outfit including all these items for a fiesta such as that in honour of the municipio’s patron saint.

11. I did not realise that he was putting his work ‘on top’ of the marimba, which later served him to claim rights over it (her), when I sold it.
(municipality) and as well as their own distinct embroidery and brightly coloured patterns of their own *huipiles* (smock top), some of which they weave themselves.

The *huipil* is one of the markers of tradition and social identity for all Indian Rabinalenses if not all Indians. This is especially the case for women involved in market trading who travel with their menfolk to regional markets such as Cubulco, San Miguel Chicaj, and Salamá. When Celestino explained the differences in performance style between Rabinalense musicians and those of neighbouring towns, he used women's dress as a metaphor for the different *son* styles, making a gendered construction of local tradition and its music:

Those from Cubulco play the *San Pablo* (*son*) and the *Mixito* (little cat *son*) too but in a different way, just like the women dress otherwise, different from Rabinal. Those from San Miguel wear yet a different uniform. Likewise with the *son*, they have changed the *son*.

The marimba also elicits certain ideas men and women have regarding their sexual roles. On the one hand a woman is valued and appreciated because she provides for, and satisfies, the needs of the stomach; on the other, she is feared because she 'calls' and 'pulls' a man towards sin and the pleasures of the flesh, endangering his will. Consequently man tries to control her frequently through violence, including sexual violence. Men and women's perceptions of their sexual relationships not only reflect but justify male dominance.

Sexuality is a sensitive subject among Achis. Groups of men or women (rarely both) refer to sexuality through jest, making oppositions and reversals in their stories. Similarly, in neighbouring El Quiché province, K'iche' women avoid speaking of sexual desire in a direct manner and generally faced this theme with giggles and embarrassment. Yet they could talk openly about sexual relations as part of their reproductive function (Zur, personal communication); they also spoke freely of men's sexual desires but considered it sinful to talk of their own. Catholic proselytisation over the centuries has taught men and women that lust and sexual pleasure are sins,

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12. Zur (1998:145) describes the harsh criticism of a young woman widowed in the political violence who remarried quickly because her peer group believed she enjoyed sexual relations.
which may be punished with temporary madness and sometimes with death. They therefore abstain from expressing their own desires.

This expressed sexual modesty contrasts sharply with men’s behaviour towards women. Men from puberty besiege Achi women. This sometimes begins at home with advances from their own male relatives and even their own fathers. Fear of sexual assault corrals women into the company of female relatives; a girl or woman out on her own is considered sexually loose, an idea that had disastrous consequences for women who lost the protection of their menfolk during the period of political violence through death or flight.

The pursuit by male relatives continues after a girl marries, in which case children become their mother’s protectors in their father’s absence. This too works to keep women away from the world of men. This overt and aggressive sexual surveillance of women is coupled with extreme jealousy on the part of their husbands, which has been identified by health workers in Rabinal as a major cause of domestic violence. Men working away from home for extended periods are mistrustful and suspicious towards their wives and blame them should any form of extra-marital relationship occur while they are away. A man’s tendency to hold his wife responsible means that he easily feeds on neighbours’ gossip about his wife’s supposed activities and male visitors during his absence. Together with a group of Rabinalense health workers my wife Judith and I have produced radio socio-drama programmes addressing the most important social and health problems of the community. The workers chose to dedicate the first programme to alcoholism and gossip. The story line they created revolves around a man’s reaction after hearing the rumour that his wife had received another man in his house while he was away working on the coast. Malicious gossip, which is often fuelled by relatives who wish to weaken marriage alliances in favour of blood ties, promotes conflict between husband and wife by raising doubts about fidelity. But it would be naive to think that men and women are merely passive victims of neighbours and relatives: gossip is utilised by both spouses to call attention to the

13. Harvey (1994:73-78) discusses the conflicting nature of kinship in the indigenous societies of the Peruvian Andes, where the balance in the husband/wife relationship depends on the man’s ability to show his maleness and wield dominance and control over his woman.
faults of the other and to negotiate positions of advantage in their personal relationships and in relation to domestic tasks.

There is more truth to women's suspicions of their husbands' infidelity, which leaves them feeling threatened and afraid of abandonment. Men acknowledge that they may establish transient relationships with other women and even have other families in the places where they migrate for work, although this indulgence is usually only for those who can afford it. A man's freedom of movement and his search for better living conditions outside his social sphere contribute to his access to other women. For their part, women assume that they are less likely to be abandoned if they continue to have sexual relations with their husbands, believing that their sexual disposition and ability to produce valuable offspring will persuade a husband to continue supporting the home. In other words, women justify and repeat a male-dominant discourse that is reflected in their sexual relationships.

In contrast to the expansive gossip surrounding more conventional extra-marital liaisons to which a woman is perceived to have given her consent, strict silence is the norm concerning rape. This is in order to avoid a multitude of negative consequences, such as threats from the rapist, the victim's ostracism by her family, and her husband's rage and abandonment. Female consent or provocation is generally suspected and the victim is therefore burdened with the blame for the attack, becoming an object of scorn and disapproval. Nothing could better illustrate the prevalent ideology in Rabinal society, that is, machismo, in which every woman is considered a potential prostitute.

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14. Guatemala's counter-insurgency war separated men from their women -- either as fighters or civilian victims. Many men formed liaisons in their place of refuge; sometimes when a man failed to return after the war, their wives were unsure if their husbands were dead or had abandoned them for another woman (Zur 1998).

15. PAC chiefs who raped women in their husbands' absence maintain their victims' silence through threats (Zur 1995).

16. cf. Esteban Uanché's reaction to the 'rape' of his marimba (chapter 10).

17. Women were blamed even for the rapes committed by the army and PACs during the 1980s (Zur 1998).

18. Some young Rabinalense widows who had formed a widows' group supported by CONAVIGUA (National Co-ordination of Widows in Guatemala), stated that they were constantly accused of prostitution, particularly by men who had colluded with the army's repression of their own people or had participated one way or another in local massacres. This expression of the local practice of controlling women through sexual harassment and threat results from the men's fears concerning...
Men also consider that part of their sexual role is to satisfy women's unexpressed needs and desires and this achieved by proving their virility through the assertion of control over them, which includes violence. Thus men justify male domination and conceal their own (sinful) lust which is projected on to women who are attributed an active sexual role which is not only demanding but also sinful and corrupt.

These attitudes are only made explicit through the perpetual comparisons men make between the marimba and women: for example, marimbistas refer to the activity of playing their instrument as 'jodiendo' (fornication). Celestino told me that in order to control 'her' it is necessary to play 'her' frequently because, "The marimba is a woman and she gets jealous if one does not touch her. One must touch her at least once every five days." Through this metaphor, Celestino indicates not only the need to practice frequently to master the marimba but also alludes to the necessity of maintaining frequent sexual relations with his wife in order to exert control over her and keep her satisfied; he never mentions his own desire. Sexual discourse has a machista (male dominance) content for both men and women, in which sexual relations appear as an instrument of persuasion for the women and an expression of power and dominance for the men.

In the battle to dominate women, sexual relations become an extension of the domestic violence women suffer from childhood at the hands of their fathers and/or other male relatives including brothers and uncles as a method of imposing respect. When men have been drinking for an extended amount of time and have then hit and raped their women upon returning home, women may respond by neglecting their duty as food providers or, in extreme cases, by abandoning their home and taking refuge with their parents or other relatives. Drunkenness relieves men from the responsibility of their actions and their violence and, while not condoned, is justified as a man's right...
to secure respect. Under the influence of the Christian belief that women, like Eve, not only tend to succumb more easily to temptation, and especially sexual temptation, but have the power to tempt men into following suit, men instil fear in their women in order to dissuade them from giving in to other men. Women generally prefer to tolerate a husband’s drunken bouts and violence rather than being despised in their social environment.

Machismo focuses on the negative aspects of femaleness. The attribution of an almost feral sexual power to women links them with the dangers of alcohol; their siren voices, like the marimba, call people to drink and dance away from the supposed safety of the ritual sphere, which is the domain of men. Thus women, alcohol, and music form an evil trilogy which make men vulnerable, causing them lose their senses and self-control, creating the circumstances which destroy the safety implied by the concept of communal affirmation of communion with the spirits. In other words, women are blamed when men become drunk and start fighting.

This is reflected in a favourite Achi myth about La Suanaba, which is retold throughout Guatemala (Falla 1986:67). La Suanaba is a personification of death disguised as a desired beautiful woman who seduces men and then eliminates them. Details common to the many versions of this story are that the woman appears at night, during or after a drunken spree, taking the guise of a lover or a desired woman other than the man’s wife. Other details vary, particularly regarding La Suanaba’s appearance: these change according to the narrator’s taste in women. She roams dangerous, liminal places where she may bestow great amounts of easy (unearned) money on her victims; alternatively she tries to kill them by guiding them into ravines through making them look like a wide road. She may also scare them to death by transforming herself into a skeleton or the devil at the point the man begins to embrace her. People describe La Suanaba as very well dressed and groomed but if she shows her

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19. This idea seems to be a direct descendant of the early colonial judicial authorities' views mentioned above.

20. Achi mythology is rich with interpretations of Bible passages, particularly from the Genesis where Eve’s disobedience to God transforms her into a sinner or transgressor of the human’s finite freedom (Ricoeur 1969:252-260) and a vehicle of lust and the creator of man’s misfortunes.

21. Social pressures make staying single an unattractive alternative for women, which becomes even less appealing as they get older; questions of character failure arise.
face, which is covered, with her long hair, she appears to be a horse head or a skull. The easiest way to identify her is by looking at her legs and feet, which are turned backwards.

One of la Siuanaba's favourite haunts is the cantina, which is considered an evil space because people drink with no sense of respect and devotion to God, trouble originates constantly, prostitution is rife, and drinkers squander the money which should be spent on family necessities. Thus the marimba's summon to a zarabanda (a social event organised solely for drinking and dancing to the marimba de sones) in a cantina is not a call to homage but an invitation to vice. In consequence it is believed that the marimba's spirit under this circumstances is none other than the Siuanaba.

Celestino related an incident that took place when he was playing at a zarabanda in El Motagua cantina, where a great number of people were drinking and dancing; suddenly a fight broke out, resulting in many injuries. He connected this incident with the apparition of la Siuanaba:  

I did not notice it but I was told that a patoja (young woman) arrived dressed as a Cobanera and began dancing and drinking with everyone all night. The man that reported it to me said that he had stepped outside to urinate when he saw a woman leaving the cantina and call him. He was a little tipsy and approached her. The woman made small talk and they started walking together towards the border of town around Pachalum. The woman was dressed like a bride wearing elaborate necklaces and a beautiful belt. When they walked by a huge tree on the side of the road, she invited him to go into the forest. Then this man said that he realised she was no woman but la Siuanaba because he noticed her feet were backwards. So he circled around her seven times and he whipped her over and over again, the woman disappeared leaving her clothes on the ground. The next day some people from Pachica went to the municipal authorities to report a bridal ensemble apparently stolen during the night from its bridal trunk. This man upon hearing the news of the vanished clothes went back to fetch them from the spot where the Siuanaba had disappeared. He returned the clothes and told the people what had happened to him and the people rewarded him with gratitude.

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22. What follows is my recollection of his story.

23. A Maya-Q'eq'chi woman from Cobán, Alta Verapaz. Q'eq'chi women are considered beautiful and desirable partners, just like the princess mother of the character greenfeathers of the Rabinal 16C Achi dance-drama. This categorises the woman not only as an outsider but someone out of place and time.
Celestino's story clearly illustrates the male perspective on sexual relations: in order to survive, a man has to exert control and dominance over woman's desire, which in fact is his own sinful desire and lust for a woman other than his own. By mentioning la Siuanaba, Celestino also implies that a woman caused the fight among drinkers and dancers. Invariably in this story, the intended male victim's faith triumphs over the evil seductiveness of woman and thus man reigns supreme over womankind.

CONCLUSION

Offerings to God, the saints, and the spirits of the dead are female symbols that share the attributes of being mediators and generators of social life with living women. These offerings are shared between the living and between the living and the dead and there does seem to be an unspoken, even unthought, association between the sharing of music and alcohol and the presumed sexual looseness of women. And the marimba is a 'promiscuous' instrument. It is played in religious and secular contexts, for Indians and Ladinos. Its music is food for the spirits and a call to the devil.

Customary Catholics believe that faith and devotion are the only means of maintaining control, keeping one's will, and avoiding becoming the devil's victim. Cross-cutting this is the surviving pre-Hispanic practice of communal drunkenness at religious fiestas, which is seen as an expression of trust between the living and as a form of communion with the dead. The balance between the two has been subverted by the introduction of late medieval Catholic attitudes towards women and sexuality. The negative connotations of music, alcohol and women are firmly focussed on the sinful sexuality of living women (as can be seen in Achi men's attitudes and behaviour towards them), overwhelming the value placed on them as actual and symbolic nurturers and positive emblems of fertility.
Chapter 7

Musical Occasions

To the Rabinalense, all social musical occasions pertaining to family and community life are known as 'alegrías' (happy occasions); the music is the 'call' which invites people to come and celebrate the event with the bulla (bustle) of their presence and conversation. Alegría is synonymous with music and sociality; its equation with social gatherings contrasts starkly with those triste (sad) moments of loneliness, silence, and isolation. Furthermore, sociality has a spiritual dimension because the spirits are included in all social events. Violinist Magdaleno Xitumul explains:

We are happy because we are now a true gathering, and so are they (the dead). Where there is alegría, there is revelry and they are there. Where there are people there are alegrías because they are always with us [then]. When there is music, that is, marimba, when there is adufe (square drum), when there are drums, in a cofradia, a cabo de año (first anniversary of a death), a wedding, the souls are always there, watching.

Rabinalense Achis differentiate alegrías by context: they can be either secular or religious (see annual calendar of festivities in appendix 5). The principal difference between them is that in the latter an abogado – the religious specialist who 'speaks' through prayers to God and the souls of the dead (ánimas) on behalf of the living – formally invites the souls of the dead to participate in the event. However, the ánimas are not invited to participate in secular alegrías such as zarabandas in cantinas during major festivities, the national celebrations for Independence Day (14-15 September) and the Day of the Revolution (20 October); nor are they invited to local events such as school celebrations or election campaigns because these recently introduced events are associated with the Ladino world (chapter 10) and not part of Customary Catholicism. In this chapter, I shall focus on anniversaries of the dead, addressing

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24 During election campaigns, the various political parties try to win support by simulating alegrías, contracting marimba de sones, and distributing free drinks and small gifts to attract voters.
certain issues about the social context, ritual organisation and structure of the occasion. I will recreate the activities, timings and use of space and the kind of social interactions between musicians and the rest of the participants in order to immerse the reader in the social dynamics of a ritual context. To this extent, the reader may get a sense and understanding of the conventions, social significance and symbolisms in the organisation, procedures and structure of a musical performance.

Alegrias are understood as specific pre-established contexts where music and sociality occur and in which musical performance takes particular meanings which evoke, shape, and incorporate participants’ memories and emotions into social life; indeed, musical occasions inform participants what and how to feel. The conventions, social significance and symbolisms of the organisation, procedures and structures of alegrias aim to create sacred time and space in which to communicate with the dead and God.

**OCCASION AND PERFORMANCE**

As a concept, ‘musical occasion’ bears close similarities to the concept of ‘cultural performance’ proposed by Singer (1958, 1972). ‘Cultural performances’ are secular artistic cultural events and religious rituals defined as the more concrete, observable units of culture that take place within a pre-established place and time: they are bound by a timetable, have a programme of organised activities with a beginning and an end, and a group of participants (performers and audience). The main difference between musical occasions and cultural performances is that some musical occasions are not formally structured; there may be no programme or sequence of organised activity, as is the case with zarabandas. Nevertheless, most musical occasions in Rabinal are cultural performances.

From the behaviourist perspective, it has been argued that “an organising principle in the ethnography of performance is the ‘event’ (or scene) within which performance occurs...[it] designates a culturally-defined bounded segment of the flow of behaviour and experience that constitutes a meaningful context for action” (Bauman 1977:27). An interest in defining performance leads to ‘event’ being identified with
context which in turn is defined in terms of behaviour and experience; performance is defined as behaviour "situated within and rendered meaningful with reference to relevant contexts...in terms of settings for example, the culturally defined places where performance occurs" [op.cit.]. Place and time are defined in terms of significant behaviour.

The concepts 'occasion' and 'event' both define context (although 'occasion' can imply one or more 'events') but they are not equivalent. The term 'event' has a more behavioural connotation, making reference to 'what happens', but it does not necessary imply a distinction from the behaviour of daily life in which performance events also occur. Bauman's definition is generalised to accommodate all performance contexts. I have chosen 'occasion' over 'event' because it gives more immediacy or emphasis to the pre-established time setting as a context frame separated from normal, daily life. This demarcation between ordinary life and the celebration of life crisis rituals or the specific dates of the festivity calendar is central to the study of alegrias: the time frame provides information about the type of occasion, what is meant to be happening during it, and how participants should behave and feel.

Cultural performances have also been described as modes of 'performative reflexivity' (Turner 1984): "cultural performances are not simple reflectors or expressions of culture or even of changing culture but may themselves be active agencies of change, representing the eye by which culture sees itself and the drawing board in which creative actors sketch out what they believe to be more apt or interesting 'designs for living'" (ibid:24). Following Van Gennep's (1960) three-stage concept of rites of passage (separation, transition, incorporation), Turner places special emphasis on the transitional or liminal stage:

Liminality itself is a complex phase or condition. It is often the scene and time for the emergence of a society's deepest values in the form of sacred dramas and objects – sometimes the re-enactment periodically of cosmogonic narratives or deeds of saintly, godly, or heroic establishers of morality, basic institutions, or ways of approaching transcendent beings or powers. But it [can] also be the venue and occasion for the most radical scepticism – always relative, of course, to the given culture's repertoire of areas of scepticism – about cherished values and rules. Ambiguity reigns: people and public policies may be judged sceptically in relation to deep values; the vices, follies, stupidities, and abuses of contemporary holders of high political, economic, or religious status may be
satirised, ridiculed, or contemned in terms of axiomatic values, or these personages may be rebuked for gross failures in common sense (Turner 1984:22).

Reflexivity and liminality are useful concepts in terms of understanding the alegria as ‘staged time’ where behaviour and opinions about behaviour are enhanced performances. Through æsthetic means, such as the setting, music, prayers, offerings, and brief stylised behaviours ranging from tears to mockery, a collectivity of participants communicate meanings and feelings about belief, daily life situations, and behaviour. Alegrias are the context which highlights behaviour. It is a liminal time in which certain participants - the ritual specialists which includes musicians - have to meet the ideal standards of behaviour in order for the occasion to be successful; they have to maintain the measured politeness which is an esteemed trait of everyday Achi interaction, refraining from expressing a direct opinion or feeling as this is considered bad mannered and disrespectful. I was always struck by marimbistas’ formal and serious manner of playing what they considered happy and playful music. They almost seem unaffected by their own music and oblivious to other participants’ pain and pleasure, their happiness and drunkenness; they appear as if they are not really attending but in fact they are, for their music is very much in tune with what is occurring around them. The remaining participants are under licence, if not duty-bound, to mock the norms of sociality and express opinions and feelings more openly - although not freely - under the assumption that during the festivity, participants take a performative role. The collective ‘as if’ attitude of participants during alegrias gives people the opportunity - to a certain, ambiguous extent - to be direct without being considered offensive.

The ambience of an alegria stimulates communication and condones the expression of feelings which Indians usually try to control because displaying affection, affliction, or personal conflict is believed to make people weak and susceptible to gossip and illness resulting from malicious envy and gossip (chapter 10). The feelings that the Achi prefer to leave unexpressed are classified into two categories: sentimientos (sentiments) and emociones (emotions), both come from the heart. Sentimientos are all forms of suffering such as sadness, melancholy, worry, pain, love, hate, fear, jealousy, envy. Emociones include happiness, desire, satisfaction, and any activity related to these emotions such as laughing, singing, whistling, running, shouting, and
Thus the licence to express feelings granted by these occasions is not without danger as everyone is exposed to everyone else's intentions and feelings; hence the ambiguity. This is particularly the case when the souls of the recent dead are invited to the celebrations commemorating their own deaths, as their presence fills the atmosphere with emotional memories which in the best of times generate public self-reflection, liminality and communitas between the living and the dead (Turner 1979). 1995-1996 was not the best of times: it was the fourteenth anniversary of the massacres of 1981-1982 in which many local men had participated.

Through musical performance, prayer, and dances, alegrias accommodate the disposition to serve - the cofradia, the community living and dead - and the opportunity to socialise and communicate feelings in comparative safety. Elaborate preparations for the event begin the separation from mundane daily life. The place where the event takes place is decorated, abundant food and drink and other offerings are organised and prepared and, finally, people turn their attention to their personal dress and appearance. The concentration of all social and material wealth on predetermined dates and sites displays the boundaries between everyday life, with its measured behaviour, and the extraordinary world of abundance and full expression of the alegria, in which the participants' behaviour is different but no less pre-established.

Religious alegrias present an ordered sequence and highly patterned behaviour. I heard music breaking the silence of the town at least twice a week, day or night, occasionally punctuated by fireworks to announce different phases of a cofradia fiesta or a procession. Listening from afar, people can tell what the celebration was for and provide details of the rites being performed. Date, time, type of music, fireworks, all define an occasion and highlight each phase. Thus merely by listening, people can 'see' what is happening. Musicians' knowledge is more detailed: because the sequence and timing of sones depends on ritual sequence, they recognise the phase of the ritual according to the sones being played. Furthermore, the musical groups, repertoire, and

Some feelings and actions are classified as both sentimientos and/or emociones depending on the context. Examples include sik'inik (shout) which can be an expression of happiness or sorrow; rajb'al uk'u'x (a heart's desire, enthusiasm for work, expression of love); kak'un chu k'u'x (to remember, longing) with joy or sadness. Scheper-Hughes (1993 [1992]: 433-445) discusses the limitations of translation in relation to the concept of saudades, which roughly translates as 'bitter-sweet longing and sorrow'.
performance style are determined by the type of musical occasion. When I questioned *pito* (cane flute) and drum player Eligio Gonzalez about the occasions when his instruments were played, he began his reply by saying, “This drum, when it’s time, because everything has its time, it’s just like the fiesta, right? it has its day...”. He then named every occasion on which his instruments are played, naming the appropriate *sones* for each and describing what happens as they are played.

The creation of a time order with its own rhythms, spaces, and behaviours which has its own formalised structures and conventions is intended as a means of communicating with the supernatural realm; this is the main objective of religious rituals. Prayers and music are part of the ritual behaviour which creates ‘sacred’ time, establishing an orderly and safe ‘path of communication’ which pleases the dead and assures a favourable response from them and God, the saint spirits, and the sacred Earth. During this sacred time, the feelings, desires, needs, and intentions of participants are momentarily fulfilled and released from everyday silence, anxiety, frustration, and scarcity. Music is the call to devotional participation, the path to sacred time and space, and the marker of the different stages and diverse activities of the celebration. But more importantly, music makes the sacred felt in the social body; some people say that music is the very body of the ancestors.

Religious rituals in Rabinal have a fixed sequence of actions that are followed (with varying degrees of strictness) in order to achieve the required communication between the living and God, ancestors, and the sacred Earth. According to Bloch (1989), the efficacy of the ritual depends not so much on the semantic or propositional force of symbolic action but on the forms through which participants are restricted to certain orders and procedures and on the way in which the ritual is performed but I believe it is an error to separate, oppose and especially to exclude content from form. Nevertheless, it is true that in Rabinal, as in other highly formal societies, much of efficacy of ritual lays in the repetitive performance of formulaic discourses, actions, and gestures. Tono López, a former sacristan and presently a linguist who helped me to translate my recordings of Achi prayers, explained that not only are they highly repetitive in themselves but they are considered exact repetitions of the prayers the

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ancestors used. The repetitiveness, which follows the order established by the ancestors, is said to emphasise their appeals to God — "Like a child crying and crying until he is fed" as a blind marimbista Lázaro said. Whenever there is an interruption in ritual prayers abogados resume as assuring God that they have not lost the path of communication and that they are continuing in the same vein as the ancestors. The orderly repetition of the prayers is a prerequisite to God's acceptance of them. The emphasis on ritual formulae and gestures rather than content probably stems from early colonial evangelisation practices — Indians were taught Catholic ritual formulae such as benedictions, psalms, and hymns and liturgical gestures such as kneeling and the sign of the cross before they knew the purpose of the ceremonial or the content or doctrine of Catholic dogma (Breton 1979:182).

Bauman (1977, 1992) acknowledges the referential aspect of performances as a baseline but emphasises the form. He is not particularly concerned with the order and structure of performance; rather, he looks at the relationship between performers and audience. To him, the performers' competence (skill and knowledge) and the response of the audience to the expressive acts of the performer are key aspects of performance. Bauman explains that the relationship between them implies the performers' responsibility or accountability to the audience for a display of communicative competence above and beyond its referential content on the one hand and, on the other, the audience's evaluation of the performer's knowledge and skill. Both Bauman (op.cit.) and Schieffelin (1995) centre their attention on the interactional credibility between performer and audience as a main condition of cultural performances. This is also valid for the social performance or sociality in daily life (Goffman 1959, 1976).27

The interaction between audience and performers found in Rabinal is not exactly what normally comes to mind when thinking about audience/performer relationships. Behind this lays two other types of relationships: a face to face patronage and religious advocacy relationships which go beyond musical performance. Apart from their musical professionalism (knowledge and skill), one has to bear in mind that musicians have an enormous moral responsibility towards the community helping

27. Goffman's theory of daily life performance is used to demonstrate that music, as a process of communication, depends on social interaction during both musical performance and the performance of daily life (see chapter 10).
people's appeals to reach God. The destiny and gift of musicianship places them in the position of moral guides which determines much of the relationship with their audience. The audience expects them to be amenable to accepting contracts, to play for devotion and not only for money, to exhibit modesty, respect and restrained behaviour during musical performances. They also anticipate that they will accept their copious alcoholic beverage offerings, to endure playing with energy throughout the long celebrations and maintain awareness and sensibility. The musicians' musical and social ability is at its peak as they simultaneously respond to people's emotions with turns and more elaborated performances and contain them with their restrained and accepting stance. All these elements impinge on the credibility of musicians in the eyes and ears of the other participants; this judgement not only depends on the performance of the musician but also on the perception of the participants, both of which vary from performance to performance.

Provided that a favourable social image of the musician and friendly relations between participants are maintained in daily life, the success and efficacy of musical communication during musical performance rests on fulfilling the social expectations of music and music-making of the participants. This is brought about by musicians' skill, knowledge, restraint behaviour, endurance which in turn set the aesthetic, moral and psychological conditions for the other participants to play their part. Within the frame of religious alegrias, each group interprets and expresses the moment in its own way and interacts with and responds to the other with an intensity and complexity brought about through the general development of the occasion. The acknowledgement of the ancestors' presence, the irrefutable proof of communication with them, is evidenced by the impact of abogados' and musicians' performances on participants' sentimientos and emociones. These sentimientos and emociones experienced in the ancestors' presence and their shared togetherness are the emergent quality of successful and memorable ritual occasions.28 Music is the audible evidence that the spirits have joined the celebration, instigating the flow of feelings between the living and the dead and the bond or attachment between them. The expression of emociones and

28. On this matter Schieffelin (1995) analyses the creation of spiritual presences in the seances of Kaluli society and suggests that the emergent quality and success of these sessions depend on the medium's ability to perform, transforming the participants' perceptions to convince them of the presence of spirits during the seance.
sentimientos and communion with the dead are inextricably linked with each other and with sones music.

Recent work on the anthropology of emotions is helpful when thinking about emotions in the context of music but perhaps it is important here to deviate slightly into the development of anthropological thinking about this theme before returning to the meaning of emotional expression during musical occasions. It took about 50 years from the time when Bateson began his work on ethos for the idea that emotions may be socially or culturally constructed to enter into the anthropological literature. Up until this time psychological and biological models influenced the approach that emotions are considered as purely subjective experiences of physiological events; meaning of bodily feeling is just an afterthought. There is now a large body of anthropological literature on emotions from the 1980s to the present ranging from relatively simple works on emotions and feeling words as indicating different types of feelings in different cultures (hyper- and hypo-cognised emotions) to more sophisticated work that discuss affects as strategic social postures in relation to situations; the latter concern simultaneously self-creative impression management and personal individual identity feeling. An approach represented by cognitive and cultural anthropologists, sustains a social view of emotion as a cognitive construction that is part of culture-specific meaning (Leavitt 1996). For example, Schieffelin argues that:

Kaluli emotions, however privately experienced are socially located and have a social aim. To this degree they are located not only in the person but also in the social situation and interaction that...they help to construct (1985:180).

This view is useful in that it links feelings and occasions of feelingfulness (including performance) with cultural views, strategies and contexts and therefore is apt for discussing special performative occasions. The fact that musical occasions when the dead are brought back are occasions when it is appropriate that people should feel most deeply moved and display themselves at their most emotional (in contrast to the normal daily emotional restraint) indicates that this is a time when these emotions are not only brought out, but they are looked at, mutually shared and given meaning. Given that this stance of emotional display makes participants vulnerable also implies that the display of emotions here is equivalent to an emotional exchange, not only among the living but between the living and the dead.
Alegrias provide the cultural setting and the sound symbols representing emotions which are interpreted and embodied in the memories of participants; they are the contexts for public reflection and affection. While interpretations may be individual they are of something which holds collective meaning. For example, in death anniversaries, the memory of the deceased is embodied in the violin and, through the sones played on it, emotions are embodied in the audience. These are the embodied thoughts, the emotions described by Rosaldo, thoughts seeped with the apprehension that "I am involved" (1984:143). She states that “through ‘interpretation’ cultural meanings are transformed. And through ‘embodiment’ collective symbols acquire the power, tension, relevance, and sense emerging from our individuated histories” (Rosaldo 1984: 141). Rabinalense violinist Magdaleno Xitumul views echo these ideas:

The violin means a lot because if one dies, the violin takes the signification that this instrument is going to play a son for the dead, the body will never come back again to us. Then one compares the dead person with this instrument.

ANNIVERSARIES OF THE DEAD

Remembering and celebrating the dead by following ‘custom’ is essential in order to understand and ensure the continuity of life. This is because, according to Customary Catholicism, the dead remain in the world as the memory of the living (chapter 3) and vice versa for the living remain on earth as memorials. Abogado Pablo Camo expressed this in his prayer to the souls of the dead (ánimas):

Revel in this alegría, in this blessing for all of you, since we are but your memories. We are your reminiscences, your children. We stayed here, we are a remembrance of you, to beg God the Father once more for your well being, for the necessary rest of your souls, since in your time you were our grandparents in this world... we know that you also played music, you were great musicians and because of this we are here celebrating this memory of you.

The purpose of life for the followers of Catholic Custom is firstly to please the ancestors by remembering them and acknowledging what they did to serve God and preserve life, and secondly to ensure the continuity of this teaching so that in their turn, the dead will receive the blessings of the living. Victor Tum, abogado and musician,
assured that “The dead want to see a continuity and they rejoice when they see other people dedicated to the same.”

Invoking the dead is an invitation for them to rest and enjoy the offerings prepared for them. The offerings of music, prayer, candles, incense, and flowers ‘feed’ the souls and fulfil the living’s obligation to acknowledge and thank them for their protection, help, and blessing, and their intercessions with God, the master of life. Prayers to the dead are also prayers to God on behalf of the living, as can be seen from the way Pablo Camo begins his prayer:

We invoke our dead to ask for their blessing so we may have a new day here [on earth] with happiness, to thank our Father who is in heaven... Thus we have reached the end of a year and are grateful to our God the Father.

Gatherings to commemorate the anniversary of a relative’s death are the most frequent musical occasions; they sustain musicians throughout the year. As with all other religious alegrias, these gatherings are characterised by sociability and abundance — of food and drink, music, conversation, prayers, dancing, and finally, drunkenness — which contrast with the drabness of daily life.

Music and the ritual process of mourning

The series of mandatory rituals commemorating a family member’s death begin with the wake held on the night the person dies and continues as long as there are relatives who remember and can continue to celebrate the deceased’s soul (ánima). There is no music during the wake; silence prevails. Wrapped in a straw mat (petate) and placed on the floor, the body receives the holy Earth’s blessing; it is then displayed in a coffin on a table for people to view it for the last time. Together with the ánimas, mourners pray the three mysteries for the well being of the deceased’s soul. The ánimas are invited to accompany the deceased’s corpse to its resting-place in the cemetery and the funeral takes place the next day.

The family devotes time every day during the next seven or nine days to praying novenas for the departed soul. They choose an abogado (known as a

29. Unlike all other prayers, novenas are said in Spanish. The novena practice is also observed by the Ladino population.
'padrino' in this context) to lead the prayers and a violin and *adufe* (square drum) ensemble to accompany them; ideally, the same team of ritual specialists should be used throughout the fourteen years of commemorations. On the seventh or ninth day, and again on the fortieth day after death the family gathers for prayers; the music of the violin and *adufe* ensemble 'follows behind' the *padrino*'s prayers, as it does on all subsequent death anniversary celebrations. The deceased's soul is invoked and welcomed together with all other *ánimas* and invited to pray the three mysteries and to enjoy the offerings prepared in their honour. This implies a degree of separation and distance and it is for this reason that it is necessary to invite the dead with music. The 'little music' of the violin and *adufe* ensemble respects the deceased's transitional condition and it's suffering: it is still “fresh; it is soul not yet judged and is therefore in sin.” This suffering on the part of the soul is manifest through the overwhelming pain of the relatives' memories. *Marimbista* Lázaro Cauec explains the grieving process:

The first days after a person dies, it is very hard because he has just passed on and the family is sick in their mind and in their heart just feeling the pain and lamenting his departure, but after one year, the family is more or less calmed, time has gone by and it is acceptable to celebrate with violin and marimba. Because, as you may have noticed, the marimba speaks of many things traditional to the mind, that is in spirit, because the *sones* bring *alegría* (happiness), emotions and you are going to have some drinks.

Only after a year has passed will the soul be welcomed and remembered with the merry *bullas* (bustle) of marimba music at a happy social gathering – unless the mourners’ grief is such that they defer the marimba music and social *alegría* until the seventh year celebrations. The celebrations for the first, seventh and fourteenth year anniversaries all follow the same procedure. Celebrations are repeated on the seventh year after the person’s death and finally on the fourteenth year (although they may be celebrated on different dates by different family members in order to obtain personal

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30. I was unable to obtain any explanation as to why some families pray for seven instead of nine days.

31. Some families hire a marimba for the fortieth day celebration. Choices such as the absence or presence of music and of different groups of musicians represent distinct attitudes towards the deceased.

32. Families who lost kin at the height of la violencia were unable to celebrate the first anniversary as *alegrías* were banned for three years from 1981; in the case of "the disappeared" celebrations did not take case because relatives were uncertain if death had occurred.
blessings from their dead relative). This ends the family’s responsibilities to that particular dead relative.³³

Musicians (violin and *adufe* ensemble and marimba *de sones*) are contracted because the event is a reunion between the souls of the dead and the souls on earth. Although people grieve when they remember the dead – because they cannot be seen any more and their death reminds them of the brevity of life on earth and the imminent presence of death – they are also happy because this is a reunion and because they enjoy the things of this life. The ambivalence between feelings of sorrow and happiness are clearly expressed by the *sones* of entrance and farewell, which are the same. At the beginning they may evoke happiness and at the end sadness. But for some people, these four-mallet *sones* are always *sones* of sadness, whenever they are played. For them, it is the merrier three- and two-mallet *sones* that evoke happier feelings of sociality during the event. The feelings evoked by a *son* depend on the context in which they are played, the musicians’ performance, the individual’s state of mind, and the sentiments evoked within them by the living and the dead who surround them (chapter 3).

*Marimbista* Bonifacio Jerónimo explained:

We receive them with a *son* of sadness because they come and say, “Ah! Look at this place I left.” That is why we receive them with their *sones* of sadness. Once inside (at the altar inside the house), then we begin with the joyful *sones* so they can listen and share with pleasure, right? Then when they leave, we play again with sorrow, because maybe in one year, who knows who will or will not be still here?

People rejoice listening to *sones* of happiness indicating the *ánimas’* entrance to the house where the celebration is being held and cry during *sones* of sadness when they leave to return to the cemetery; these *sones* are called ‘*soon re okib’al keri qati’ qamaam’ (*son* for the entrance of our grandmothers and grandfathers) and ‘*soon releb’al ke ri qati’ qamaam’ (*son* to bid farewell to our grandmothers and grandfathers). Other *sones* for the souls of the dead, such as *Costa Grande, Costa Chiquita*, encourage people to express their *sentimientos* and recall past events and memories. Such *sones*

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³³ First, seventh, and fourteenth anniversary celebrations currently cost between US$150-200, or over 1,000 quetzales each. This is equivalent to a continuous period of three to four months’ work on the plantations.
are known as soon bis'ab'al, which literally means sones which evoke memories which generate sadness and nostalgia.

Celestino explained the relationship between his way of playing and the feelings of people listening to him: “I play the son more beautifully, with more vueltas, to make people cry and express their desires.” Another musician from the Lajuj family of La Ceiba village made a comment about the musician's feelings: “Let’s suppose a marimbista is performing a son, he will make more vueltas to ornament the son, he will then be putting something else into it, he puts feeling into it by making a vuelta.”

The Celebration of a Fourteenth Year Anniversary

The fourteenth anniversary celebrations for massacre victims\(^\text{34}\) fell between 1994-96, keeping violin and adufe players marimbistas very busy. Violinist Magdaleno Xitumul complained that he and Felicano, his adufe companion, had not been able to sleep because of the many obligations to the souls murdered in 1982.

The souls have many engagements now. All those who died in '82 are celebrating their fourteen years. You saw how it was in Nimacabaj [village] last night – there were many festivities because there were many who died in that dangerous time.

I asked Magdaleno if I could attend one of his compromisos (commitments) and he agreed gladly. We arranged to meet at the Calvary Chapel the following Monday when there would be a fourteenth year celebration by the Pantulul bridge. Later I met marimbista Esteban Uanché who told me he was also playing at the event and he agreed to meet us at the same place.

As I walked to the Calvary Chapel the following Monday morning, I met padrino abogado Felipe Sis and Cristobal Gonzalez, the hostess’ brother. Felipe had just finished lighting candles and incense for the saints in the main church. As we walked, Cristobal explained that this was the fourteenth anniversary of the death of his father, Juan Gonzales, who had died of a heart attack caused by fright upon witnessing

\(^{34}\) The massacres were committed by the army, Ladinos from Rabinal town and the villages of Pachalum and Pichec who were acting as 'judicial police', and civil defence patrols from the village of Xococ.

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the massacre in the town plaza on 15 September 1981. This was the last obligation Cristobal had to perform in order to commit his father’s soul to God: “This is the end of our duty.” Cristobal had celebrated two weeks earlier and now his sister Maria and her husband had organised this fiesta a few days after the end of the novena prayers.

Musicians were waiting for us to arrive before entering the Calvary cemetery. We were the only people there; in the silence of the morning mist, it looked beautiful, with bushes and wild flowers overrunning the plain Indian graves; only the big colourfull mausoleums of the rich Ladino families towered over the greenery. Esteban searched among the graves for a flat surface on which to set up his marimba; Magdaleno and Feliciano sat on the gravestone next to Juan’s grave. As they tuned their instruments, Felipe cleaned around the grave and decorated the stone with pine and cypress branches. He then knelt in front of the cross on the gravestone to initiate the ‘awakening’ of the souls of Julián Gonzalez, his deceased kin, and the rest of the souls from Rabinal. As Felipe began the prayer to invoke the souls, both musical groups began playing, independently of each other, their own versions of the Costa Chiquita son, which is the son played to begin the celebration and summon the souls. The marimba broke the silence of the cemetery, overwhelming the murmur of prayer and the ‘little music’ of the violin and adufe.

As an offering to the saints and souls, Felipe then placed several bouquets of basil between two rows of candles – seven yellow wax and seven white tallow – on the grave; a bottle of guaro (cane spirits) was sprinkled around the candles, which were then lit. Waving incense (another offering) over the four corners of the world, the corners of the space we all occupied and in front of the musicians, Felipe began chanting a prayer of thanks to God and the saints for a new dawn over the world’s four corners. Kneeling in front of the candles, he began a ‘roll call’ of the spirits. This general call is accompanied by the son kotzij (flower offering), and four more sones to summon the souls, played mournfully by the violin and adufe; the marimba simultaneously begins its repertory of sones grandes (‘big’ sones; entrance sones). The summoning of the souls lasted as long as it took the candles to melt, approximately one hour.  

35. For the spirits called in these prayers, see chapter 3.
At the end of this general summons, Esteban packed up his marimba and the three musicians carried it to the house where the celebration was being held. The rest of us entered the Calvary Chapel where a second invocation of the souls took place. Because it was a Monday, other abogados were also there praying on other people's behalf and some were also accompanied by groups of violin and adufe musicians. Felipe approached them with the salutation, "Good morning, compadre (ritual kinship between abogados) alcalde (mayor), kaiauxel, principal" and proceeded to search for a spot at the altar on which to deposit his offerings for Señor de la Misericordia (Lord of Mercy), who is the guard of the cemetery souls, and Señor del Cabildo (Lord of Town Hall). On this second instance, the abogado padrino lit four candles at the four corners of the chapel- representing the world - for those souls who died in pain at unknown locations and placed some others at the center for the general congregation of souls. Finally he put again two rows of seven candles each in front of the altar where he knelt to pray until the candles were totally "consumed". The musicians played sitting behind the padrino on one of the few benches available in the chapel. The violin and adufe sones were repeated accompanying the prayers. They echoed across the incensed darkness of the chapel bringing the sacred place to life (example number 16 in cassette: prayers and violin and adufe son music).

Upon ending this event, the padrino told me:" Now all the spirits are coming with us to the celebration". Thus "feeling" (I could only imagine) the great procession of spirits behind us, we walked to the house to celebrate the fourteen years of the deceased, Julian.

The house was a hive of activity. About thirty-five relatives, friends, and neighbours were busy preparing for the event's guests (which includes the dead). Men had been assigned to killing and jointing the pig. Women were preparing maize-based foods (chilate, a drink often flavoured with chocolate; atol, (maize gruel) tortillas, (corn pancake) frijol, (beans) chilmol, pinol de gallina (stews) and tamales de cerdo (maize dish filled with pork) etc. Many of them had been there since very early in the morning to decorate the domestic altar in the main room of the house. The floor of this small room is covered with juncia (pine needles); fruit, a glass of water, candles, white

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36 These are titles given to all elder abogados (prayer makers) for having served God in cofradia cargos in the past and for having served the community in higher municipal positions.
Madonna lilies, basil – the ánimas' favourite herb – have been added to the crucifixes and saints' images on the altar). Benches are set against the walls of the room and along the corridor of the porch.

In the midst of this bustle, the marimbistas remained almost aloof, behaving as if they knew no one there. Dressed, like everyone else, in their best clothes, the marimbistas appeared very formal and elegant behind their colourful instrument. Carefully coiffed with cowboy hats tilted stylishly forwards and wearing clean shirts and trousers, machetes in hand-tooled leather sheaths hanging from their waists, their faces stern, they were an austere presence. They stood for hours, straight-backed, heads down, eyes on the keyboard, their bodies taut except for their arms, wrists and hands, which were constantly moving up and down in parallel and contrary motion, with two, three or four mallets tangled in their fingers, their index fingers protected from blistering by pieces of plastic or leather. All marimbistas complain of great pains in their 'pulmon' (lungs), by which they mean in their backs at the level of their lungs, and no wonder! Musicians' moderation, restraint and general austerity indicates respect, dedication and care for the work they do and for the people and spirits of the dead for whom they are performing. Other than responding to a request for a particular son, they did not interact with the rest of the participants. They conversed with each other with reserve; from time to time they would disappear behind the house to relieve themselves. During more than 18 hours of playing, the principal performers only had short breaks when other players replaced them temporarily so that they could rest on a small bench behind the marimba (where they discreetly drank the guaro offered to them and ate the lunch brought to them).

The marimba began playing the son de entrada (entrance or welcoming son) as soon as we arrived on the patio with the padrino. Felipe, accompanied by the violin and adufe musicians, then performed three blessings as a respectful greeting and petition to visit the altar inside the house: one at the patio, another at the gotera (entrance on the porch corridor), and the third at the entrance of the room housing the domestic altar. This room holds only a few people at a time to join in the prayers, to listen to the violin and adufe, to rest and sleep, and to eat and drink with the ritual specialists and the

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37 This is the common way of entering an altar during any fiesta. Breton (1980) describes it in detail as part of the entrance rite during the cofradía celebrations.
spirits, while the rest of the participants are outside the house, working or chatting, eating, drinking and enjoying the big sound of the marimba, whose purpose is to promote feelings of happiness. Thus the division of space between the sacred (the altar indoors) and the secular (veranda, kitchen, and patio) is reinforced by sound differences. Both sets of musicians, one inside the house, the other outside, continue to play independently, sometimes simultaneously and sometimes alternately.

Once inside, the violin and adufe players sat next to the altar and the padrino prayed for a moment. Later, the women brought lunch, which was served by Cristobal, the host’s brother in law. After lunch, Magdaleno and Feliciano resumed playing while Felipe sat beside them to rest. Thus several hours went by. At one point, a young man tried to play the adufe under the Feliciano’s guidance but he could not get the rhythm and Magdaleno, the violinist, kept laughing discreetly.38

Meanwhile, outside, the marimba played for the men and women who were still preparing; guests begin arriving in the afternoon. Cristobal approached the marimbistas with an eight of a litre bottle of guaro and offered them a drink, which they accepted, each one in turn drinking straight from the bottle. Esteban sprinkled what was left over the edges of the marimba keys to share it with ‘her’ and to make ‘her’ play better; he also offered some to the holy earth by tracing a cross on the three spots where his players and he were standing. By blessing the three spots where they stood, Esteban conferred sacredness to the space and obtained the holy Earth’s protection during the event.

Towards 11.30am, Celestino pointed out that the marimbistas had begun to play three-mallet sones. This faster and merrier type of sones is dedicated to the women working in the kitchen and is intended to encourage them to work happily and energetically. Considering how much they have to do before the guests arrive, it is probably just as well that three-mallet sones constitute the majority of the marimba son

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38 This is the only time I saw a young person express an interest in this most ancient instrumental ensemble. The reason I was given for this lack of interest is that younger people do not like to be indoors when long prayers are said and this type of music is played; they would rather be outside next to the marimba with everyone else. Youngsters say that the music of the violin is ‘little music’ and not so exciting and, therefore, they rarely listen to or observe these instruments nor do they go to the Calvary Chapel or the cemetery to ‘raise’ the ánimas and bring them to the fiesta.
repertoire in Rabinal. Every so often, someone approached the marimba with a request, and the musicians interrupted the *son* cycle to play it. Esteban’s son Mincho said, “The most requested *sones* are *Amanecido, Zacualpa, San Pablo, Palo Seco, Mixito marcado.*” Later, when I asked Celestino whether it mattered that the order of the *sones* had been changed to accommodate requests, he replied, “It is definitely acceptable; that is why we are there, to serve the people.”

Most of the guests arrived by mid-afternoon, bringing offerings of small amounts of sugar, beans, salt or a couple of quetzales,\(^\text{39}\) which they delivered to the *padrino* in front of the altar before going outside to listen to the marimba; their children gathered around the marimba as usual. By this time the *marimbistas* were playing two-mallet *sones* to finish the first *son* cycle. They immediately proceeded with the second cycle (chapter 5). As the number of people grew, Esteban extended the length of each *son*. The more people gathered to share the meal, to drink and enjoy conversation the greater his embellishment of the *sones*.

Julian Ordoñez a *marimba* playing friend of mine, arrived among the guests and we had a long conversation related to the *cabos de año* (the celebration after one year of death). Generally during my conversations with people on the subject of the souls, they would always begin with the statement that many people do not believe in the souls nowadays perhaps due to the evangelists’ influence. The evangelists say that death is the end of life and the end of the relationship with the deceased and therefore no more expenses and celebrations are required.\(^\text{40}\) But they would proceed to relate an event which had allowed them to verify the existence of the spirits, as if to assure me of their faith in the souls. In this same manner Julian told me that during a recent lengthy *cabos de año* he had seen, through his dreams, the spirits drinking and dancing at the celebration.

I was playing the *marimba* exhausted, carrying a full day, one day and one night I had been playing, then a player friend of mine came and said: ‘I will help you’. ‘Very well’, I said. ‘Come inside, are you going for a drink?’ ‘Fine’. So I

\(^{39}\) There were six quetzales to the US dollar in 1995, so these offerings are about 25 cents.

\(^{40}\) Despite this belief I did see evangelists remembering their dead during the general celebration to all saints and dead on the 1\(^{\text{st}}\) and 2\(^{\text{nd}}\) November at the cemetery. This spoke to me of the ambiguous religious position of some evangelists.
went inside by the altar and he and the others stayed playing outside. I felt sleepy and you should see, as you and I are here alive, the souls swallowed me, absolutely as one is here, I found myself there (I slept), look, just as it is in this world so I am looking at them, some are dancing, others almost overturned the candles by the altar. Look, but it is full of people everywhere and they are dancing and others are drinking guaro, just as is done in this world. I saw it but in dreams. I alone was inside the house, everyone else is dancing in the porch corridor, I went to take a cuajito (a nap) when I saw, they are coming, some overturning the flowers, but look, it is like this [full] with people, they are souls, they are spirits. They are there, but invisible. We cannot see them directly anymore, but I have been in awe of this. That is what I saw. When I woke up I asked: ‘and the people that were here?’ Mmmh! they were souls, they were the spirits that came because they were invited!

In his story as in other stories one notes the purpose to hold on to personal experience or the experience of others who testify to the existence of the souls and their presence especially on those occasions in which they are invited to share with the living. Julian's intention was not only to demonstrate that souls exist but also to create a psychological disposition to accept and feel their presence at that particular moment. His account was preparing me for what was going to happen during the late hours of the night.

The first recitation of the ch’abal or misterio (rosary prayers) began about 8pm. The room containing the altar filled with people, spilling out onto the corridor. The padrino and the violin and adufe musicians summoned the souls again so that they might receive the prayers. The marimba played the son Costa Chiquita once, to call the souls; then the violin and adufe sones were repeated in the same order as the morning performance at the cemetery and the Calvary Chapel – the son Costa Chiquita, the son kotzij, four more sones, and finally the son Costa Chiquita again and with that the prayers end. At the end of the misterio, the padrino, carrying a censer and followed by everyone who had been in the altar room, emerged onto the patio. By then the Costa Chiquita son had also been played on the marimba to indicate the exit from sacred time and space and the marimbistas were continuing with their repertory of sones while guaro was distributed to everyone present.

41. The mysterio includes several repetitions of the Lord’s Prayer and Hail Mary, the Confession of Faith, the Glory Be and concludes with a hymn to the Holy Father.
The misterio, the music and associated ritual was repeated at 10pm and was followed by the distribution of tamales. Some people left after eating their tamales. Esteban disapproved, as the ‘prayer’ – that is, all three recitations of the misterio – had not ended. He told me a story about a person who had been stoned by the spirits on his way home because he had not remained until the last prayer had been said.

The third and final misterio was performed at midnight, after which Felipe thanked the spirits for sharing the joy and wishes of Maria Gonzalez and bade them farewell. He asked the violin and adufe musicians to play the rebix son (singing son), that is, the Costa Coban son commanding them to dance. I was reminded of something Magdaleno Xitumul had said some days before:

Sometimes when we sing, people start crying, they are overcome with emotion, with sadness. I really feel emotional, I am filled with sadness because even if they stay, one knows that one way or the other one dies too.

Bread was distributed at the end of this prayer and the guaro continued to go around. Many guests were still enjoying the marimba music that was still being played for the guests. The more inebriated participants began dancing, some by themselves as if in meditation, others more merrily in couples in Ladino style. 42

Although people had requested a few favourite sones during the day, it is at this stage of the celebration, after 1am, that most requests are made. The cycle of sones is completed and people’s requests for their favourite sones can be played in any order. It is time for surtido sones (any son). By now, most participants were fairly inebriated and this influenced their requests. They asked for sones of sadness, the farewell sones: Costa Chiquita, San Miguelito, Joyabateco, Barreno. Some people cried as their request was played, others ‘danced’, tumbling this way and that. The musicians responded to such expressions by prolonging and rearranging the sones. It was then that marimbista Julián Ordoñez told me:

On the matter of sones they tell me, “Play my one son, the son Chiquito, I will give you your one drink.” And then! He died within the year. It’s as though the

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42 The old way of dancing is individually in a circular pattern and in a reflective attitude or as if in penance looking down. But today many people dance Ladino-style, which is in couples holding each other’s hand, waist and shoulder respectively.
body feels it, as if it is commanding you to go. And when they are leaving, they will cry in front of you, tears will come because you are requesting the souls to come and visit. That's what he told me, “Please do me a favour, play me the son Chiquito to bid the souls farewell, to command them to return to their place, then play me that son because only God knows if we will be alive next year. Some of us do not know who is and who is not.”

Esteban and his companions were also drunk and surely tired, but they kept playing with considerable energy standing still even though they had already played for more than 18 hours. In a drunken scene they looked majestic! They seemed proud of themselves: they had fulfilled their commitment without failing. Cristobal, by then drunk and obstinate, begged them to stay and paid for a few more hours and, as there was enough drink to go around and they did not have a commitment for the next day, they continued playing. They were still partying when I left, intoxicated and exhausted, at about 3am. Esteban told me the following day that there had been a fight after I left: a drunk had collapsed on top of the marimba, breaking some of the instrument’s pegs. Visibly annoyed, he regretted having stayed longer for the sake of a few quetzales.

**CONCLUSION**

_Alegrias_ provide the social and cultural contexts for musical activity in Rabinal. In behavioural and temporal terms, these occasions announce a ‘staged time’. The literature on performance has been helpful in looking at diverse performative aspects of musical occasions, especially with regard to musical performance as stylised behaviour to communicate meanings and feelings between players and ‘audience’ (both of whom are in fact participants occupying different positions).

As cultural performances, _alegrias_ are organised to celebrate important dates and events of family and community life. I have emphasised anniversaries of the dead to focus attention on the ritual process through which Achi Customary Catholics make a controlled exchange, offering devotion for protection and working through their grief and disengaging from the involuntary painful and threatening memories of dead kin. The concept of reciprocity and exchange of blessings between the living and the dead is also a means of transferring the needs and feelings of the living onto the dead.
Cognition and the Aesthetics of Music

Musical expectation and recognition are based on the repetition of a musical order from previous experience that gives meaning to music. Achi people say that son music does not change (which is clearly untrue) and that its performance is a continuation of the practice of the ancestors (which is true). Yet despite their claims that son music and its teaching methods have always been the same, the Achi do recognise change in both music and learning techniques.

The aim of this chapter is to illustrate how the traditional discourse concerning the transmission of the musical tradition from generation to generation echoes cultural values as much as if not more than actual teaching/learning practice. One of the purposes of this discourse-cum-teaching method is to reach consensus by repetition both within society as a whole and within the marimba tradition.

These discourses are by their nature oral traditions and their constancy is therefore difficult to validate. Generally speaking, the historian has to be aware of the potential within oral tradition for variation, selectivity and indirect evidence (Vansina 1973, 1985). But repetition and order are not simply a means of learning, of ensuring the accuracy of transmission or of absorbing the internal structure and sequence of tradition. They create or re-create the world. Among the Achi, the performer is more than a carrier of oral tradition; he has the freedom to be creative within the format. In fact, within the limits imposed by structure and sequence, creativity is admired and appreciated. Musicians recognise that the participants respond to it releasing their sentiments and emotions which maintain the link with the past (chapters 3 and 7).

I also demonstrate the ways in which both son music and learning methods are actually changing. Here my concerns are to address issues of creativity which assist in
the adaptation and recreation of roles affected by social and musical change, thus preserving meaning.

This chapter is divided into four parts. The first section introduces my aims in seeking out the musicians of Rabinal and describes the problems of different approaches to music. The second section concerns how the Achi of Rabinal learn, understand, and contextualise music. The third section describes and discusses material and social change and its effects on the traditional Indian musical form – the son – and the introduction of ‘Ladino’ piezas. The fourth section discusses perceptions of style in terms of the actual instrument, identity, and innovation.

MEETING THE MARIMBITAS

When I first met the marimbistas (marimba-players) of Rabinal, I told them that I was writing a history of the music of Rabinal and was interested in knowing, recording, and playing their music. My desire to learn to play proved to be the key to their interest.

Before I learnt to play the marimba, my exploration of Achi concepts and ideas about music and music practice was hampered by my attempts to frame the questions in terms of the European theories of music in which I had been trained. This resulted in conceptual difficulties of translation when I began to concentrate on the specifics of organology, style, technique, and theory. The main obstacle was that the musicians had never been questioned or made to reflect on their music and music practice in the way I was expecting them to do. When I attempted to get them to use concepts related to my theoretical tools, their answers to my questions became segmented and fragmented; their knowledge is based purely on musical practice. Fortunately, we sang along to the marimba and I was able to use my own instrument (the transversal or orchestral flute) to illustrate my questions.

I often felt that using concepts of western music analysis in my questioning were often not understood or misleading, and in many cases I found them irrelevant.
A further complication arose when I attempted to discuss the technical aspects of the music they played: Rabinalense musicians’ vocabulary regarding musical concepts is sparse. A prime example is the word ‘vuelta’ which has many meanings in conventional Spanish including a turn, twirl, gyration, circuit, circumvolution, repetition, rehearsal, etc. Rabinalense musicians use the word to refer to different aspects of sones music which a good marimbista must be able to perform. Firstly, vuelta simply means melodic ornamentation; in contrast to the ancient, simple and plain way of playing the melody of the sones, today’s style is elaborate and sophisticated with ornaments which require considerable agility. Secondly, vuelta means section, or strophe, and refers to the son’s musical form. There are sones of two, three, and four sections or vueltas. The two-vuelta son, such as the son San Pablo, is the simplest; three-vuelta sones such as the Amanecido are more difficult; and four section sones such as the Cubulero and Coyotillo are not only the most difficult but also the longest. Thirdly, vuelta means a variation within a section; this is also known as a coro (chorus). These variations, which are generally rhythmic changes to the melody, are used frequently because the sections of a son are repeated over and over again; repetition is an important feature of son music, as it is of prayers. Son musicians assured me that repetition is the best way to gain the attention of God, the saints and the souls of the dead: “All the repetition makes the son reach God’s ears”, explained marimbista Lázaro. Hence musicians who make more vueltas are more convincing in their supplications and expressions of gratitude to God. Furthermore, creative musicians who can vary the rhythms and play different ornaments give more colour and movement to the son. Finally, vuelta can also refer to an improvisation of melodic phrases secondary to the main melody. The musical styles of the towns, villages, and individual musicians depend very much on the ways the vueltas are performed.

My problems diminished when I began to take marimba lessons myself as I was constrained to limit my overly verbalised curiosity to following their explanations – that is, to listening to their music, observing their movements and positions, and then copying them. I not only learnt to play but also learnt how embedded the process was in Achi beliefs and attitudes to life and bodily behaviour.

I was taught to play the marimba de sones by two marimbista families. One was headed by Esteban Uanché and the other by his nephew, Celestino Cajbón; with their
distinct personalities and almost forty-year gap in their ages, each was an excellent representative of the different ends of the continuum of contemporary marimba music. Esteban is currently the greatest exponent of son music in Rabinal; he is an old man who remains faithful to the traditional repertoire, despite being the principal innovator within the genre. Celestino, who is in his mid-twenties, was also taught to play marimba music the traditional way; most of his contracts to be play sones are as a mozo (hired worker) for his uncle, for whom he plays centre to Esteban’s treble. Celestino also plays the marimba de pieza and the electric organ; he temporarily joined a short-life tropical music group in Rabinal. Whilst he agrees with his uncle’s discourse about tradition, Celestino's experience of experimenting with musical genres unrelated to a religious function allowed him to simplify the learning process for me. Celestino is a talented young musician who generously shares his musical knowledge.

Celestino was also one of the few Rabinalense musicians to understand my theoretical interest. I had been curious to know how much they knew about European music theory, considering that the marimba de sones is constructed in major diatonic scales (chapter 5). The short answer is that musicians do not know European musical theory, though some use a few of its concepts correctly. For example, they recognise that the marimba de sones has five octaves (términos) but they do not name the notes of the keyboard, nor do they divide the keyboard into octaves or refer to the tonic as tonality centres. The mallet positions of the harmony (centre) and the bass players are learnt not as chords but as a number of keys located one or more keys apart. The performers may learn to play different and alternative positions when they become experienced musicians but all play open tonic, subdominant, dominant and sometimes mediant chords.
I was particularly interested to know whether a discourse existed about marimbistas’ concepts and ideas about music and music practice, especially at the level of teaching/learning music. Conversations with different groups of marimbistas (which took place in the homes of the musicians who house and maintain the ensemble’s marimba) revealed that not only does a discourse exist but that it is primarily a discourse about tradition and ethics: it is a statement of continuity and order.

Learning to play the traditional way

Rabinalenses are familiar with traditional music virtually from birth. They hear it at the frequent festivities celebrating annual or seasonal rites, life-crisis events – principally memorials of the dead (cabos de año), weddings, inaugurations and blessings of houses, chapels, and other buildings; in the cofradía (saints’ brotherhoods) – and, until 1981, at zarabandas (social gatherings to drink and dance to the marimba de sones). When a Rabinalense male (child, adolescent or adult) aspires to become a
marimbista, he will go to such events specifically to listen to the rhythms and melodies of the sones and observe the movement of the mallets across the keys of the marimba.

To “have the sones in mind” is very useful. It enables him to concentrate on the positions and movements he is taught, allowing him to arrive at an overall understanding of the son in its entirety fairly rapidly; soon he is able to think strategically in terms of the execution of the son rather than merely play his part mechanically. The advantages of life-long familiarity with the music were brought home to me when I began to learn myself: I felt like a blind man, feeling my way in the dark.

Any Achi male in Rabinal can learn to play the marimba at any age. There is a proviso here: in terms of traditional concepts, becoming a marimba player is a matter of fulfilling one’s destiny. It is believed that God mediates and determines everyone’s individual fate. The will and the application of the individual are indispensable attributes but the crucial determinant is ‘the will of God’. Esteban Uanché told me that it had been his destiny (fate) since birth to become a marimbista and that he achieved this through ‘the grace of God’. As a little boy, he had lined up corncobs as though they were the keys of the marimba and played sones as an adult musician does. On seeing this, his father had remarked to his mother that their son was a marimbista.

One learns to play the marimba much as one learns to do any other task. I had observed how people learn work skills in daily life: they learn by watching for a while and then entering directly as a participant in the actual work itself and, if it is a group task, then they participate as part of the group from the start. My first lesson proceeded in the traditional way: Celestino and his brothers played an abbreviated version of the simple, two-mallet son San Pablo so I could observe the movements and positions of the bass and to listen to the rhythm and its changes. When the son ended, they pointed with their mallets to the different positions the bass had played to orientate me across the keyboard and, with no more ado, we began to play the son San Pablo.

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44 The pre-Hispanic idea that a person’s destiny is determined according to the day on which one is born persists. Each day has its nahual (day owner) or saint which helps people born on their day, orientating them and giving them knowledge. Unlike some indigenous groups such as the Momostecos and the Ixiles, Achis are generally unaware of the Mayan calendar.
Behind this 'watch and copy' method of instruction are assumptions about, among other things, the optimal time to learn any skill (childhood) and where to learn (in the family). Thus the basic conditions for becoming a marimbista are having marimba-playing relatives – father, grandfather, uncles – and ready access to a family-owned marimba. These ideals are reinforced by the fact that it is generally extremely difficult to get an unrelated marimbista to teach one to play unless the teacher can see some way of incorporating the apprentice into his marimba ensemble. Adult apprentices face other difficulties: they have little time to practice as they are kept busy with survival tasks and can only play for a couple of hours after the evening meal. Adults learn the repertoire one by one, learning maybe twenty to thirty sones, whereas a competent lad can learn double that amount in a year. Another problem for adults is that they are less flexible than children are and, perhaps, more conscious of the learning process; it can be years before they are ready to play in public. These factors make the adult beginner unattractive as an apprentice. There are many obstacles that may lead to failure and the eventual abandonment of the marimba, especially when a man has no sons to take up the skill.

Another difficulty for adult apprentices is that the three-stage process of teaching/learning the sones of the marimba incorporates the traditional principle of respect and subordination to the authority and seniority of one's elders who have progressively accumulated experience and knowledge (chapter 4). An adult faces the disorientating situation of being taught by someone younger than he is. The traditional order in which the three increasingly complex positions are learned also corresponds with the hierarchic construction of Achi society.

In the idealised schema, boys in marimbista families begin to learn by playing with the marimba as though it were a toy, at an age when they are too young to play in public. By the time they are old enough to go to school or to work in the fields (around six or seven), some boys spend all their free time playing the marimba, practising at any time of the day or night. Tono Cajbón remembered the time when his sons were small:

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45. It is a 'toy' because, for a child, there are no responsibilities attached to playing the marimba.
They played the marimba every day; you would find those ‘naughty’ kids playing at any moment. They learnt by themselves, only by observing what their elders did and by copying them. The *sones* remained in their heads (minds). For instance, on a Saturday or a Sunday when I went out to gather wood, I would hear the marimba from a distance and they would be practising and playing and that’s how the *sones* would remain in their heads.

Tono’s wife interrupted:

The children have heard the others playing and then they would play the same. There was no need to teach their hands because they learnt by watching other people’s hands playing. This is how the *vuelta* (sections) of the *son* remained.

This is rather disingenuous. Marimbista families specifically send their young sons to *fiestas* to listen to the music of other players so that they can learn the positions, their styles and repertoire (older apprentices and established musicians also do this, taking their cassette players with them). This behaviour, which is part of the development of the musicality of marimbista family, can cause resentment among established players.

Soon the marimba ceases to be a ‘toy’. Playing it soon becomes a serious responsibility to the family, the community, the ancestors, and God. The education of Achi children is full of responsibilities linked to family survival and they are expected to contribute to the household economy from the age of six or seven. Marimbista parents look to their boys to learn quickly so that they can be integrated into the family marimbista pool, making the family less dependent on *mozos*. Even relatively wealthy and ladinoized marimbista families, such as the Jerónimos (who used to own a marimba *doble* – see chapter 5), subscribe to the concept of a family ensemble. Paulino Jerónimo told me, “When the older ones left home to study [in Guatemala City], the number of players decreased but the younger sons began to join in, only those from the family, only the family.”

Sometimes, when a boy is unwilling, a father uses coercion to force him to learn. Tono’s son Celestino may have learnt by himself as his parents claim, but his memories of his first proper lesson are very different:

I was ten years old when my father began to teach me the marimba. He used to beat me when I began at the bass. He tried to teach me but I was unable to
recognise the keys he pointed to, so he would grab my hands and hit them with the mallets. I would yell and run and hide in the kitchen but he would come and take me back to the marimba. According to him, the task was to learn. In the end, after he repeatedly beat me with the mallets, I learned. At first I only learnt the bass but then I kept on playing and playing until I began to try the centre position. From there I learned everything and then I moved finally to the treble. I only learned *sones* then. After that we started to play *Costeno* and from there we learnt *piezas*. That is how all of us in the family learned – it was a continual struggle until we learned everything.

Such treatment is quite normal in Rabinal. Education among the Achi is based on following pre-established procedures and actions and not in the development of abstract thinking, questioning, or looking for causality; the emphasis is on knowing the form rather than the deeper process of comprehending the content (Watanabe 1994[1992]: 87-89). Children below the age of twelve receive no explanations about anything because they are not thought to possess the ability to think; instead, they are given instructions and blows. A young primary school teacher complained bitterly to me about his pupils’ parents, who sought him out after school to encourage him to use corporal punishment and threats to discipline the children and make them learn; he preferred the technique of positive reinforcement.

In *marimbista* families it is customary to learn the bass position – the first and simplest stage of learning to play the marimba – before one is old enough to ‘think’ for oneself. Boys often begin to learn when they are too small to reach the keyboard (they are given a little stool to stand on). They learn one of the two basic forms of playing bass known as the *corrido* (both hands together) and the *marcado* (marking the notes). The *corrido* is the simplest and is accomplished by playing a triad chord, striking the keyboard to a determined rhythmic pattern with both hands simultaneously. In the *marcado* form, the bass plays a rhythmic pattern, striking the notes of a chord separately (an *arpeggiatto*) with alternating hands, the left hand playing the stronger beat. Internalising the rhythms at the bass position is one of the first skills an apprentice develops.

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46. The music accompanying Rabinalenses' favourite dance-drama.

47. I did see fathers marking keys with pieces of paper in order to help apprentices memorise mallet positions. However, their sons found this superfluous and it seems to me that this simple technique is better suited to adult apprentices such as myself as it provides a means of remembering the keys in the teacher’s absence.
The ritual function of the music and not ease of learning determine the teaching/learning process. This is ‘the way of the ancestors’ and involves learning the marimba by practising the *sones* in the same order as they are played at religious festivities and other events (chapter 5). It is important that the apprentice learns this and the purpose of the *sones* being played and it is the way Esteban taught me. Thus, instead of progressing from simple to complex rhythms (Celestino’s teaching method), the apprentice learns the four-mallet *sones* (*sones de cuatro baquetas*) which open festivities and are the most complex before learning the three-mallet *sones* (*sones de tres baquetas*) and finally the two-mallet ones (*sones de dos baquetas*). At the end of the learning/playing cycle, they return to the four-mallet *sones*, this time without using wax. In fact there are only a few basic types of rhythm on the bass and *sones* of the same type (that is, four, three, or two-mallet *sones*) have similar endings. It is because the rhythms are practised while playing each complete *son* together with the other two players that an able young apprentice can learn the basic repertoire within a year. With experience, the bass player acquires the skill to follow the rhythm flexibly, according to the treble player’s interpretation of the beat of the *son*. Some of the difficult challenges are the internalisation of the syncopation and the changes from a simple ternary to a complex binary measure, which are required within some *sones*. Once an apprentice learns the *vueltas* of the *sones*, he is ready to play in public.

Bass players’ first public performances are as stand-ins for their weary brothers, to allow them a couple of hours’ rest. As engagements are rarely for less than 12 hours non-stop marimba music, fathers’ insistence that their sons join the family pool as soon as possible is completely understandable. Celestino’s brother Bernabé was seven years old when he played first six day *cofradía fiesta* with his father. He was overwhelmed by the contrast with daily life, the abundance of food, tobacco, alcohol and the noise, bustle and emotions of scores of people. He found it exhausting and terrifying:

I was playing standing on a chair, and the last day I was crying I could not bear it any more and I had to fulfill my obligation. I was worried and fearful of the elders because they drink [including musicians], and I was crying also because there was no one to take care of me and the drunkards fight.

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48. This changes the tonality of the marimba. See chapter 5.

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Few boys of Bernabé’s age are expected to cope with such a heavy commitment. Most learn the difficult task of building up the stamina required for such long periods of playing by standing in for the principal marimbistas when they take a break. There is always someone willing to brave the marimba as a stand-in. Many young men play as temporary substitute bass players. Some play the rhythm of the one or two sones they have learnt by observation alone, others taking the opportunity to demonstrate their skills, all of them ask permission to play a piece as an offering to the saint whose day is being celebrated.

Thus music is not all the boy learns. Apart from gaining sufficient strength to fulfil the obligations of their commitment in order to avoid shame and criticism, they also learn how to handle people, especially the inebriated, to prevent themselves being drawn in to fights.

From the outset, a boy is taught the correct attitudes towards playing. A player must always be careful not to flaunt his skills for fear of awakening the malicious envy of other players, as this can lead to witchcraft attack. He must always display a humble attitude as a sign of respect towards others; a lack of humility is potentially dangerous. Eustaquio, an able treble player, explained:

And if a player tells us, “Puchica mucha! (Wow, guys!) You can really play better than me”, then one replies, “Well, look, actually I have little skill.” Even though I am able [a skilled musician], I would not reply, “Ah, because I can play, I am better than you.” No! One shouldn’t say that, as it would undermine the other person’s feelings. As the army puts it, one would lower the other’s morale. It is better to say, “I am able to do it a little bit”, even though one can actually do it a lot more; that is the way to play it.

The idea that humility, as a sign of respect, is a virtue derives from the concept of mankind as just one kind of being among others within the cosmos and, like other beings, subject to God’s will. As a virtue, the humble stance profoundly influences the way one learns any task as well as the way one appreciates it. A disposition to learn and an appreciation of the teacher’s skill are greatly valued among the Achi; demonstrating such respectful behaviour can be of great benefit to the apprentice, as I discovered myself. My teachers had to have endless patience with me and repeat their instructions over and over again; fortunately they appreciated my interest, desire to learn, and the value I placed on their work, musical ability, and individual styles. Tono told me:
Thank God you have a great love of learning; there is nothing that one can learn overnight but if you have love you can learn. Everything is learnt; there is nothing, which comes without it. If you have learnt [to play], there will always be someone who asks, “Who is that playing?” And someone will be admiring the fact that one has learnt. It is great to learn because there are always more occasions at which to play.

A related concept also internalised during childhood is the stoical Indian attitude to life, which is essentially a submission to destiny and the ‘Law of God’ (arrangements for the future are always provisional: “Dios mediante (God willing).” I found it exasperating). Living is a serious matter for the Rabinalense which requires deep respect and care for all the ‘living’ objects, plants, animals, people, spirits, saints, and gods they interact with, the work they do, and the instruments they use to do it. Musicians express their respect for and dedication to the commitments they undertake on behalf of the living and the dead through the lack of movement in their bodies. Young musicians learn to contain bodily expression without thinking too much about it. This is not so much a matter of ‘impression management’ (Featherstone in Csordas 1994) as a stylised behavioural habit that is incorporated into learning practice. In other words, musical culture is grounded in the body (ibid.:6). Bodily movement reveals as much about a performer’s musicianship as his knowledge of the repertoire and keyboard skills do.

On one level, this lack of movement, the apparent separation from what is happening around them, is only a façade; marimbistas are quite aware of people’s responses to their playing and may expand or ornament the sones to allow people to expand their feelings. In this respect, as I explain below, musicians -and the audience too- need to know what the music means and when to play each son (chapter 7). On another level, their physical disengagement serves as an energy-saving device. The stoical attitude of marimbistas (and indeed, of Rabinalenses in general) enables them to sustain the enormous physical effort involved in playing for long hours without rest.

Boys learn all these things before making the transition to the second stage of the learning process: the centre position where the harmony of the son is played. By then, he will have learnt the ensemble’s entire repertoire; he will also have learnt the movement and position of the centre player’s left hand, as that hand has been his point of reference and guide at the bass.
The centre position presents a major musical challenge because the player has different and more complex positions and movements in each hand. The centre player’s left hand guides the right hand of the bass and both move in parallel movement. His right hand frequently plays in parallel movement with the treble player’s left hand and both together carry a melody, at the interval of a third apart. At other times, the centre player’s right hand moves in parallel movement with the treble player’s right hand at the interval of an octave. Sometimes the centre player’s right hand carries a short melody which repeats constantly in counterpoint with the melody of the treble. Above all, a centre player has to have the flexibility, ability, and dexterity to adapt and follow the personal style of the treble player.

If a centre player is unfamiliar with the treble leader’s personal style or is not of comparable dexterity, he may fall into the common error known as *encadenarse* (to play out of beat). The chords played to give harmonic and rhythmic support to the main melody are played a step behind and no longer correspond; there is a discordance between the notes of the treble and the notes of the centre and bass. Centre player Marcelo Ixpátá remembered an occasion when he had been unable to follow the melodic evolutions of skilled treble player Esteban Uanché. Even though it is inadvisable to abandon a commitment, the humiliation made him feel so uncomfortable that he took the first opportunity to pass his responsibility to a *marimbista* friend, and left:

The *vueltas* (ornamentations) were what made me go into *encadenamiento*. Yes, because when he makes his *vueltas*, I remained behind and the *marimba* didn’t sound at the same time, but if I can go with the *vueltas*, then we are together; the marimba does not sound in *cadenas*. The sound is even. When the bass or the middle position is *encadenados*, the first goes alone, the others are left behind and the voices change. One has to know with whom to play; it is not merely a matter of playing with anyone like, for example, *Don* Esteban, as I did, because he already has his group and they know how he plays.

The third stage of the learning process corresponds to the treble position. The treble player is the most experienced and, normally, the eldest player; it is he who carries the melody, and it is he who teaches and guides or ‘pulls’ (*jala*) the second player who not only plays harmony but simultaneously ‘pulls’ the youngest player learning bass. The treble player carries the principal melody of the *son* and its variations. He directs the changes of section, its repetitions, and makes simple or
complex improvisations with many *vueltas* (ornaments) depending on his ability; he also indicates the tempo, intensity, and rhythmic changes, and plays the characteristic tremolos of marimba music. Celestino defined the position as follows:

The treble commands the rest; when he starts, we, the centre and the bass, begin as well. When he ends, we end as well. The first position is the most difficult because he is the one who has to make the most *vueltas*. He directs everyone, the centre and the bass.

It takes more to reach this position than long experience as a centre player: the aspiring treble player has to have the possibility of having a marimba in his house — he will not necessarily own it himself; it may be joint owned or rented — and two reliable musicians. Apart from his musical prowess, the treble player's most important role is as an ensemble leader. Since the marimba is kept in his home, he has the last word about the rehearsals. It is at this stage that his dexterity or ability is developed into a personal style and he has to ensure the other players' subservience to that style. As leader, the treble player represents the group and has to obtain contracts for it; he also has to ensure that the other players will meet the commitments he arranges for them. The treble player's sociability is an important aspect of his success on both fronts (chapter 10).

**Concepts of Memory**

Learning to play the 'way of the ancestors' involves traditional concepts about mind and memory, heart and soul. In the Achi language, the words for memory (*k'u'xtal*) and remember (*k'u'xtaj*) are derived from the word *k'u'x* which means heart, will or the centre or essence of something (cf. Zur 1996,1998). It is thought that the spirit or soul that controls a person's will is seated in the heart. A patient person, who does not rush and carries out activities 'thinking well', is said to have a 'big heart' (*nimaal k'u'x*). *Marimbistas* learn patiently and remember from the heart.

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49 When my partner Judith and I held a going away party, I was surprised when our closest friends gave speeches expressing their gratitude for the friendship we had created and enjoyed. Then the rural health workers, with whom Judith and I had worked in a mental health workshop, also made their speeches. All the speeches were formal and ordered, their presentation articulate, clear, and fluent; everyone had obviously 'thought well' and proceeded with their task calmly. I was totally unprepared for this and had nothing ready to say when the time came for me to respond. By then, I was so moved that I could hardly speak; I spoke in a totally disorganised way, from my heart. At the end of my speech, our friend Gilberto approached me and said, “You failed, but there is nothing to worry about, ch’uti’n ak’u’x (your heart is little).” According to Gilberto, I had the heart of a child or of an old man.
Feelings also reside in the heart: when a person is suffering, he or she may say, “My heart hurts (k’ax nuk’u’x).” The notion of the heart as the centre of feelings, the will of the spirit, and of memory is vital for understanding the unitary relation between feeling and thinking. The word na’o (feeling, perception, understanding) is linked to the expression na’bal, which means ‘way of being’ or ‘way of feeling’; the related term n’ooj can be employed more widely to mean wisdom, memory, comprehension, consciousness, idea, and significance. When a person has a good memory and a capacity to learn, it is said, “He has a good memory (lik k’o una’ooj).” Again, this expression reflects a unitary conceptualisation of the way of being and thinking.

There are two ways to use memory when learning the marimba or any other instrument. One is the employment of memory as a cognitive action and the other is effecting repetition or habit. Connerton (1992 [1989]: 6-40), following Halbwachs 1980 [1950], defines it as a social memory incorporated in performance practice. Achi people never spoke to me about a memory of the body, but did express the notion that the body has its own will. Apprentices’ struggles with their untrained hands were expressed as though their hands had a will of their own. Despite their previous memory of a good part of the son repertoire, acquired though listening and watching, the challenge facing apprentices is to ‘accustom’ their hands to moving and playing in accordance with the positions and rhythms of each son. I asked marimbista Francisco Lajuj whether he had the sones in his head before he actually began to play the keyboard; he answered:

Exactly, because they say that without the memory of the sones you will not be able to play. However, there is more to this: even if you have memory, if you can’t play with your hand, then you can’t play. It is most difficult to make the hand learn. Memory is first because unless you know the sound of the son, you won’t be able [to play]; how can you do it [without the memory]? You can’t!

Some musicians, when remembering how they learnt to play, say that they only went “to listen to the vueltas and these remained in their mind”; other players, however, insist that the most important aspect of learning was dependant on their hands and their sight. Celestino’s father, marimbista Tono Cajbón, told me that his sons’ only inheritance was their hands and their sight.

(as they become ‘like children’) because I had lost control of my emotions and been unable to express myself with the mind, with patience and calmness.
When an apprentice learns a son, he remembers its familiar sound (the memory of the mind); sight is important because he has to observe the movements that have been shown to him so that he can remember and imitate them. As he is doing so, he feels the transformation of his own movements into sound. The marimba is a long instrument with big resonators and the sensation of sound vibration is a powerful bodily experience shared by the three players standing side by side, striking the marimba. Practising as a group, repeatedly going over the movements and positions of each son for hours on end several times every week until every son can be played without error, is the only way to accustom the hand and to internalise the rhythms in the body. To do this and enjoy it requires abundant patience, a ‘big heart’.

Musicians say that once they have learnt to play, they never forget; they liken this to any other practical task. This is a way of saying that the body always remembers the acquisition of any physical skill. The ‘memory’ of the hand is not only as important as the ‘memory’ of the mind, but seems to be a more persistent kind of memory. Again, musicians imply that they ascribe autonomy to their hands, each of which has its own will. But the older one is when one learns, the harder it is to ‘educate’ the body: it was pointed out to me that the older a man was when he began to play, the more his body moves when he strikes the keys. The loss of physical flexibility which comes with age, together with a lack of internalisation of the rhythm of the sones, make it difficult for adult apprentices to follow rapidly striking the keys without much control effort resulting in whole body movements. Celestino remarked:

Because I was little [when I began playing], I learnt to move my hand but my father did not learn well until he was thirty years old so he moves his whole arm. His body is obviously stiff. He plays with his whole body and he moves a lot. I have another uncle from Xesuan village and he plays with his whole neck [laughed]. Yes, there are some that play with their whole head. That’s because their hand gets stiff.

The distinction Rabinalense musicians make between ‘mind’ memory and ‘body’ learning and the autonomy they attribute to their hands is not so distant from my own experience. I learnt to play the flute by reading musical scores; I noticed that my (mental) memory of the melodies became dependent on my capacity to sight-read whilst my fingers seemed to remember where to move without erring by themselves. When I let my fingers do the playing, the music flowed better than when I concentrated
on it: my mind seemed to have a way of blocking my fingers. I found it interesting to compare the teaching method I experienced in western music schools with the method applied in Rabinal. Each has a different starting point: the western method uses music notation as a constant reference for the memory whereas the Rabinalense method depends entirely on observation and listening, imitation and repetition to memorise the music.

Initially, I found it hard to play the *marcado* bass style. My inexperienced hands tended to move together rather than independently. I therefore concentrated on reproducing the rhythm and positions with one hand without moving the other and then I used the other hand to play its part before trying to use both hands at the same time. When I felt I had mastered the basic movements, I lifted my head and realised that a lot of children were watching; they were most amused by the way the *gringo* was playing. They laughed hardest whenever I made a mistake. When we completed the first *son*, Celestino told me:

> You are very able but what you did with your hands is no good. The hands learn bad habits so you must play with both hands from the start. If you are unable to make the different movements of each hand at the same time, then practice the movements slowly with your hands knocking on the table. This is what will help you.

Celestino was not only trying to prevent me from acquiring bad playing habits; implicit in his suggestion about how I should improve my technique is the belief that to play one voice of the marimba means playing all voices. This is such a basic concept that on several occasions my teachers refused to begin a lesson when one of the members of the group failed to turn up. I had come across this notion before when I attempted to record the melodies (the treble part) of the oldest *sones*. The musician protested, “In my opinion, if you only play the treble, it will not come out prettily.” The melody is not the *son* and there is no value in a tape of one its parts.

Musicians see the *sones* as complete cycles which begin and end in the same way, forming part of major cycles which comprise the whole repertoire which constantly repeats like the continuous cycle of seasons which rule daily life. To think of *sones* (let alone the parts played at the three positions) as separate entities implies removing them from their context and separating them from their content and function.
Hence the practice of all three players rehearsing each son in its entirety. With or without repetitions, in their long or short versions, sones are always played all the way through from beginning to end. When I went to Celestino’s house for my first lesson I was rather daunted by the fact that I would be taught while playing the repertoire as a member of the marimba group. Unlike the western method of dividing a musical piece into melodic phrases, sections or difficult passages, Rabinalense musicians make no allowance for apprentices and continue playing, regardless of errors or temporary pauses such as those created by my inability to keep up. This strategy of non-stop playing is used in western methods only when the apprentice musicians playing in a group are already familiar with a piece or are practising sight-reading. I soon discovered this method of learning is one of the most useful characteristics of the traditional teaching process: practising in a group allows the apprentice to learn bass and rhythm in an integrated way, with harmony and melody.

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Material change
Social and material change over the past forty years has influenced the music played in Rabinal. One of the most important influences has been Ladino-controlled, Spanish language radio stations that broadcast mostly urban popular music (piezas).

Until the late 1960s, when radio ownership became common among the indigenous population, the division between Indians and Ladinos was clearly expressed in terms of their respective musical repertoires, types of instruments, and the contexts in which they were played. In Rabinal town and villages traditional sones played on the diatonic marimba were expanding from cantinas to Achi ritual celebrations; piezas, interpreted on the marimba doble, by only two ladinoized Achi families and by foreign musicians, were played exclusively for the town’s Ladino population.
This separation has become blurred by modernisation and its effects on folk-urban interaction. Many marimba musicians play both sones and piezas for Achi and Ladinos as well. The pieza genre and styles of playing it have greatly influenced the son and its playing style. Nevertheless the meaning of both sones and piezas remain as representations of Achi/Ladino interaction in Rabinal’s ethnically divided society. This social opposition can be analysed in terms of the interrelationship among three non-exclusive categories of opposition:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>the ancient son</th>
<th>the modern pieza</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>villages</td>
<td>town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indians</td>
<td>Ladinos</td>
</tr>
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These categories are related to each other but the third encompasses the first two. People make a distinction between traditional music (the son) which has been transmitted for generations among the indigenous population and the newly adopted pieza music with its diverse musical forms.

People make an opposition between villagers and town dwellers. This category refers to population distribution and the social and cultural interaction between indigenous and Ladino communities. The settlement pattern tends to group the indigenous population in the villages and the Ladino population in the town. The two previous categories are included in a major social and cultural opposition between Indian society and Ladino society.

Within the indigenous community, people recognise a difference between towns and villages in terms of musical genres and personal styles. The small populations of most Rabinal villages support only one cofradia, dedicated to Santa Cruz; apart from Xococ, Pichec, and Nimacabaj, there are virtually no Ladinos to create or promote demand for piezas. Village marimbistas therefore have few opportunities to play in public and develop their skills and little incentive to extend their repertoire. Village musicians do play in town every so often and it is not the case that they have nothing to offer their more sophisticated fellow marimbistas; the significant mutual influence of

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50. Theories of a folk-urban continuum suggest unilinear cultural development. Although these theories have been proved erroneous today, they can be used to illustrate cultural oppositions and influences between folk and urban traditions (Singer 1958).
personal styles between town musicians is enriched by the contributions of village marimbistas.

Marimbistas from Rabinal town have always been in more demand because there are many more festivities there, including the vast annual festivity cycle organised by the sixteen cofrías (chapter 3). The competition for work intensifies the urge to develop musical skills and personal style. Celestino told me that unlike the villages where only 'naturales' (indigenous people) live and play sones, there is great demand from town Ladinos who like marimba de pieza music for their weddings, baptisms, and other events but don't like playing the instrument themselves. His comments reflect his personal experience: he was born in the village of Plan de Sanchez, fleeing with his family to Rabinal town at the age of ten following a massacre perpetrated by the army and local vigilantes in 1982. There were two marimbas in Plan de Sanchez, but only his family's was used; with few opportunities to play, their repertoire was small, their style simple. All this changed when they moved to town and began to hear other marimbistas, particularly Celestino's maternal uncle Esteban. Soon the Cajbóns were asked to play for the cofradía de San José, where Celestino's brother got his first opportunity to play a six-day fiesta; later he learnt the music of the traditional dance-dramas, piezas, and other musical styles.

The development of musical styles and genres in Rabinal can be explained as a process of folk-urban interaction in which notions of time, space, and ethnicity interrelate with each other. The process of cross-pollination was slow until radio ownership became common among Indians in the 1960s (chapter 5). As indigenous marimbistas began copying and adapting the melodies of famous composers from the capital and other cities such as Quetzaltenango, Totonicapán, and Huehuetenango from the radio for their simple marimbas, the musical exclusivity of Ladino dance halls disappeared. Audiences began to demand piezas, as they too listened to them on the radio.

It tended to be boys and youths who, in the mid-1970s, began incorporating this new repertoire into conjunto marimba groups. Youngsters' openness to new rhythms and their ability to copy melodies attracts them to the treble position. This openness, together with their greater free time, allowed boys to experiment with pieza tunes at the
treble. The decision to incorporate *piezas* into the repertoire modified the traditional relationship between the adult treble player and the younger partners at centre and bass; the teaching/learning process became more reciprocal. Ten years later, after *la violencia*, youngsters were involved in the resurgence of marimba music; in both instances, the knowledge and leadership they obtained from playing the treble position gave them increased respect and power and hence privilege in the family, overriding the traditional value of seniority. Younger players became their own masters and exercised the power of their position as treble players over the centre and bass players, who were sometimes their elder brothers, father or uncles. One can see such youngsters calling the tune within the family in aspects that go beyond the melodies played.

I knew two family ensembles with an established tradition of incorporating *piezas* into their repertoire that dissolved when the younger generation decided to buy *pieza* marimbas. A power conflict arose between the generations. The elderly fathers made their opinions known by continuing to play *sones*, and only *sones*, on their family's *son* marimba, employing *mozos* in order to do so. But it was not simply the power conflict which caused the split; older people found it difficult to learn to play in a completely different way, on a different type of marimba, risking to make mistakes in public and to put in danger their reputation as good marimbistas.

**Bootleg tape-recording**

The spread of tape and radio-cassette recorders in the 1970s\textsuperscript{51} accelerated the process of incorporating urban music into local repertoires. Musicians, who have always listened and learned from each other, now began to use tape-recorders, hastening and reinforcing the exchange of melodies and styles. As a *marimbista* of the Lajuj family put it, "We do not play the same as others, they are teaching us and they always record what we are playing; they are always taking from us as well." Esteban feigns rejection of these new methods of learning the *son* repertoire. He complains that there is always someone taping him wherever he plays; listening and watching is one thing (it is respectful) but, so far as he is concerned, flagrantly using a tape recorder is quite another. On the other hand, the bigger and more obvious the cassette recorders or

\textsuperscript{51} Many homes now have radio-cassette recorders, although use is restricted by the owner's ability to fund the purchasing of tapes and batteries, which are luxury items.
ghetto-blasters people use, the more Esteban actually likes it, because he sees them as a blatant symbol of how he good he is.

Of course Esteban himself surreptitiously tapes other marimbistas, but he proudly claims that he had never been caught. This is not as surprising as it seems because he never tapes other Rabinalense players and he always records from his customary long-distance listening position. He dare not do otherwise, because this would place him at the same level as everyone else and he would thus lose his status as a master teacher. To protect his reputation, he prefers to travel to Cubulco town to listen to their sones:

I copy from the Cubuleros. Before I didn’t have such good sones, they were OK. But then I heard the sones of Cubulco which consisted of four [sections or mallets] and they stayed [were memorised]. But I am not a copier. I listen while I am there without them knowing it.

Copying Cubulco musicians is acceptable in Esteban’s eyes because he does not live with them and so is not subject to their criticism. This does not stop him being criticised by Rabinalenses. The distinct playing styles of these adjacent municipalities are but one manifestation of the age-old rivalry between them. Celestino, who has learnt much from Esteban’s personal style and admires his flexibility when playing, believes his uncle’s ability does not relate to the origin of the sones he plays. According to him, Esteban’s creativity lies in his improvisations of sones from both Cubulco and Rabinal:

The people from Cubulco play their own sones, they are different, and Esteban goes there to record them. Esteban plays the sones from Cubulco but he plays them better than the Cubuleros. His hand plays beautifully, unlike the hands of the Cubuleros. Yes, they play the Cubulero son but they do not play it beautifully. He puts something else in it, he invents and that is why it is beautiful. I do not invent like he does. I can play as he does but I do not invent, I don’t know how to. But he does, he can invent. It is his destiny to play beautifully.
Social change

When I asked individual musicians how they themselves had learned to play the marimba, I discovered a large gap between the purported norm and their own experience and empirical knowledge of learning to play. Although I did come across marimbistas who had begun to learn in childhood, I knew others who had not taken up the instrument until they were in their twenties or even their early thirties. To some extent, this pattern of learning reflects external influences such as that of Catholic missionaries in the 1950s and, decade or so later, of Protestant evangelicals: both tried to dissuade Indians from playing their traditional music for various reasons (chapter 6). Another important factor was the repression of Indians and Indianness following the political violence of the mid-1960s and early 1980s. The resurgence of interest in marimba music following the end of la violencia can be seen as a statement of identity. It is also, considering that many of the younger generation do not see anything non-indigenous in pieza music, a statement of change. The adoption of piezas as the musical accompaniment of new dance-dramas (or new versions of old ones) manages to be both at once: new music, old meanings.

Most men who learnt to play as adults did not come from marimbista families. Some had had access to a neighbour’s marimba as children and had learnt to play a little by visiting the neighbour’s house. This childhood knowledge encouraged them to acquire a marimba and/or become apprentices as adults. It is, for instance, fairly common nowadays to find soldiers in their early twenties who are marimba enthusiasts saving to purchase a marimba. They get together with relatives and marimbista friends to make a cuchubal (a business or work-related partnership) to buy a marimba collectively.

Other men began to learn following the deaths of marimbista kin during the two periods of political violence. Like Tono and his late father, they had not learnt to play as children. Tono was nearly fifteen years old when his grandfather and great-uncles, who were renowned marimbistas, were killed by the army in 1965; it was only then that his middle-aged father bought a marimba so that they could continue the family tradition as a means of remembering their murdered kin. All Tono’s sons have been incorporated into the family marimba pool; they learnt to play on the same marimba in
the traditional way. It has taken three generations to recover the technical level and restore some of the family’s prestige as marimba players.

This is a common story. Many marimbistas were among the hundreds slaughtered in local massacres. Musicians’ testimony reveal that almost a complete generation of older musicians disappeared virtually over night; with them went a good part of the musical repertory. As families disintegrated, so did marimba groups. Some marimbas were abandoned as people fled for safety; others were partially or totally destroyed during the army’s scorched earth campaign (chapter 2). Some marimbas were sold quickly and cheaply in order to generate income: I met a young man whose dreams of becoming a marimbista were thwarted when his mother was forced to sell the family marimba following the murder of his father and uncle during la violencia. He is only now beginning to achieve his goal.

The periods of intense violence in Rabinal resulted in generational breaks and ruptures in the musical traditions of several marimbista families. In some, the tradition has been lost for ever; in others, there has been a regeneration of marimba groups, led by surviving players who lost their partners to la violencia, young adults or even enthusiastic children whose non-playing fathers have bought or rented a marimba for them to play.

Another reason for renewed interest in the marimba is that acquiring an instrument represents social capital; it serves as a nexus for maintaining and extending social networks, an important factor in a society fragmented by la violencia. Traditional musicians say that playing marimba music perpetuates costumbre (custom) as the sones they play are the music the ancestors left to the living and like to hear at community festivities; imitating their ‘forefathers’ who once played the instrument as they do now is to acknowledge, respect, and please them. Both incentives are considered an optimal means of generating, maintaining, and expanding good social relations with both the living and the dead. The marimba is also a vehicle for potential work (chapter 9).

\footnote{It will be recalled that only 72-year-old Paulino Jerónimo can claim a grandfather who was a marimbista. This common statement reflects the acceptance of the marimba in local custom.}
PERCEPTIONS OF STYLE

When people refer to a ‘good marimba’, they are judging two aspects: the sonority of the instrument and the competence of its performers, particularly the treble player. People prefer not to be asked their opinion of, or preferences for, different marimba groups or marimbas and only gave one when I insisted, an act of great rudeness on my part in local terms. Even then they took great pains to avoid comparing or undermining marimbistas or marimbas.53 Perhaps it is not so surprising that I found very similar opinions about music among children and adults, male and female, musicians and audience; the only difference was the more elaborate discourse of marimba players.

‘The good marimba calls to the four quarters’

I learnt what constitutes a ‘good’ marimba during the long search for marimba of my own. Esteban, Celestino and his brother Bernabé tested several marimbas in different towns and villages on my behalf. Each test consisted of playing several sones; they then gave me a detailed analysis of the marimba’s qualities. Their evaluations encompassed aesthetic aspects such as its decoration, colour, and name;54 they looked at the woods used and its construction; they assessed its weight, ease of handling, and decided whether or not it would fit in the various places they wanted to use it or would be stable on uneven ground; and, of course, whether the marimba gave a good sound and was balanced between the ranges. Provided the price was reasonable, the marimba's sonority or loudness was their most important criterion.

There were two key issues. Firstly, that the marimba felt soft to play while having a big, full, and solid sound. Secondly, that the three positions sounded balanced and of equal loudness; it is often the case that the centre position has a fuller sound than

53. The expression of an opinion (even as the result of persistent enquiry by an outsider) is a direct and personal communication and, as such, exposes the person to vengeance through witchcraft (chapter 11).

54. The marimba they chose for me was named ‘Marim Balam’ which is a contraction of marimba Balam (jaguar marimba) or Maria Balam (jaguar woman).
the bass or treble. The sound of a good marimba can travel long distances and so the best test is to listen to it from afar, as Esteban always prefers to do.

Little is ever said about the skilfulness of the players who make the marimba’s voices sound the way they do. This does not mean that people never evaluate a player’s capabilities but that their skills are often judged by the quality of the marimba they play and not the other way around. For example, Bacho, who comes from the Ladino-dominated village of Nimacabaj, considers himself one of the municipality’s best marimbistas because his marimba is the ‘sister’ of one owned by the best player in town, Esteban Uanché (it is one of two which Esteban had bought in Totonicapán).

The sonority of the marimba is of great value because the instrument is used to call people to participate in the alegria [joyous occasion] that is being celebrated. For example, Esteban told me that Ladinos pay for ‘notas de duelo’, that is, broadcasts of funerary music by classical composers over private loudspeakers announcing the death of a relative and inviting people to participate in the vigil for the dead. Achís prefer to let the marimba reach people’s ears:

The marimba is the announcement itself. When the people hear it, eeee! People come from the four quarters and from the villages. They come to celebrate, to drink rum, eat tamales (corn bread stuffed with pork), see the body of the deceased, and listen to the sones.

For players, the ‘softness’ of the marimba is as important as its loudness. ‘Softness’ refers to the lightness of the keyboard; players should not have to strike the keys too hard in order to obtain a loud sound and nor should the audience hear the keys being struck. The relationship between the greatest volume and the least effort is very important, especially when considering the twelve or more hours performances involved in many celebrations and the exhausting cofradía fiestas that are a test of endurance for any marimbista. Lasting six days, they comprise four twelve-hour performances and two twenty-four hour performances over the third and fifth nights.

People say a good player is one who has the endurance to play with the same sonority during an entire musical event; they drink alcohol in an attempt to keep up their energy levels, although this tactic often has the opposite effect (chapter 6). It is
common for the volume to fade as the event progresses. At the beginning of a festivity in a town house, the music can be heard at least two blocks away (about 100 metres) but, little by little, the volume diminishes so that by nightfall, the music can barely be heard from two or three houses away. People say this is evidence of a bad marimba and they make oblique remarks about the marimbistas’ drinking habits.

**Style and identity**

Marimbistas often compare their styles with those of players from other municipalities, especially Cubulco. The municipalities of Cubulco and Rabinal, which are both in the departamento (province) of Baja Verapáz, are the main centres of Achi culture. The towns of these municipalities are only 18 kilometres apart; an active market and cultural exchange exists between them and their surrounding villages. Although each municipality has its own repertoire of sones, many are common to both areas: I saw Rabinalense marimbistas playing in festivities in Cubulco villages, indicating that there is a fair amount of exchange of musical styles. The sones may be the same, but differences in playing style are important, as Celestino explained “Although the same sones are played, they have changed; the sones vary in the same way that a woman's clothes vary from town to town.” Son playing, like women’s traditional clothing, incorporates style elements peculiar to their municipality. The stylistic differences between the son music of Rabinal and Cubulco are connected to their inhabitants’ sense of identity or, to put it the other way around, the differentiation between municipalities is part of the process of style and identity formation. Local styles evoke a sense of belonging to one’s municipality and its distinctive cultural style, which is comforting to Indian musicians and audience alike.

But there is also an ambivalent attraction to the inherent power of the other, a simultaneous attraction to and rejection of the dominant Ladino culture and the power it represents. Some people with less traditional tastes admit that they are attracted to the Cubulero style because of its similarities to modern popular music. This is hardly coincidental: Cubulco’s Ladinos are more powerful than Rabinal’s and exercise greater control and dominance over the Achi population. One result of this is that pieza music has had more influence there and this is reflected in the faster tempo at which

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55. This comparison has an important symbolic connotation (chapter 6).
Cubuleros play *sones*, imitating the fast rhythms of the *piezas* favoured by Ladinos and young people of both ethnicities.

Rabinalenses criticise Cubuleros because their playing style is ‘too fast’ and ‘choppy’; they say that listeners cannot distinguish the *vueltas*. But a certain amount of envy is detectable in Rabinalense criticism and rejection of Cubulero players: it takes skill to play so rapidly and few Rabinalense players can duplicate their speed and dexterity. Rabinalenses explain their slower and simpler style in terms of pleasing their ancestors: they always make comparative references to the way their ancestors played because they believe that the *son* repertoire was the ancestors’ creation. They want to play the way their ancestors did because the ancestors long to hear the music; they believe that if one changes the way the *sones* are played, the dead will not be able to recognise them.

The contrast between Rabinal’s simple, slow, and peaceful musical style and Cubulco’s fast and violent one is reflected in their iconographic interpretations of their respective patron saints. Rabinalenses say their patron, *San Pablo*, has a peaceful stance as he holds his sword pointing down at the floor whereas Cubulco’s patron saint, *Santiago*, is mounted on a horse like the cattle-raising Cubulero Ladinos, with his sword held ready for battle.\(^\text{56}\) This metaphor speaks perspicaciously of the violence meted out to Indians by Ladinos. Implicit in Rabinalense criticism of Cubulero *son* players’ style are their historical disputes concerning other aspects of life and livelihood such as race and land.

It is not that all Rabinalense *marimbistas* play one way and all Cubuleros play another. Villages adjacent to Cubulco (especially Pichec) boast that their fast-playing neighbours influence their playing and some have converted their marimba *de sones* into a marimba *de piezas*. Juan Ordoñez, who actually plays the marimba *de pieza*, recalled playing with a *marimbista* from the Juarez family of Pichec:

\(^{56}\) *Santiago* (St James) was the patron saint of Spanish soldiers even before the conquest; known as the ‘killer of Moors (*Matamoros*)’ during the long war to expel Muslims from Spain, the saint became known as the ‘killer of Indians (*mata-indios*)’ in the New World (Wright 1985:201). *Santiago* and *San Pablo* are identified with the twins Hunahpu and Xbalanque of the "*Popul Vuh*" and hence with the *son* and the *moon* respectively (Tedlock 1985:341-2, 368-9).
Oh, that guy played with us but he left us behind once and for all. One doesn’t understand his playing. Everyone has his own level. I was intimidated because he is a musician. You should have seen him; he grabbed the mallets and kept on striking, kept striking, kept striking! Yes, everyone has their own way, but those who work fast always make mistakes. Those who work with calm play with more security.

Rabinalense marimbistas also make comparisons between their playing style and that of other neighbouring municipalities such as San Miguel Chicaj (in Baja Verapáz) and Joyabaj (in El Quiché). They identify with the towns of these municipalities because their players’ slow paced style is, they say, similar to their own. I never had the opportunity to hear San Miguel marimbistas and so I cannot say if there is any truth in Rabinalense musicians’ claims. As Rabinalenses came from the Joyabaj region in the fifteenth century and San Miguel Chicaj developed from lands belonging to Rabinal’s cofradías, this statement could be an allegory for their recent, common ancestry.

**Personal style**

When people want to compliment a marimbista, they say he is ‘mero travieso’, a very playful or ‘naughty’ performer. This positive character attribute can also be applied to a whole population. For example, when I asked about the musical life of the coastal fincas where Rabinalenses work for a few months every year, Tono explained that people who live there do not have marimbas because they are not playful people.

The joyous spirit of the marimba is, to the Rabinalense, an expression of their cheerful and happy character; the epitome of this is the ‘naughty’ (playful) treble player who can perform all the vueltas (ornamentations and variations) of each section of a son. Judgements about his personal style are based on these abilities. This is not to say that the Achi do not recognise the important roles of the centre and bass players; it is just that they give more attention to the director of the ensemble, the treble player.

The marimbista whose character, ideology, and personal playing style raise the most controversy is Esteban Uanché. Both Ladinos and Indians acknowledge that he is the best sones player in Rabinal; yet he also generates more change within this genre than anyone else does. This combination of tradition and innovation provokes both admiration and contempt. Esteban boasted:
The people know me; it is true that I am unique. Our God, our Lord and celestial Father gave it to me and that is why the people tell me that I am a good teacher, the best among us, the *naturales*. "If you die," someone told me, "will there ever again be someone like you in this town of Rabinal? There is no other treble. We have gone to listen to everyone and they are not the same."

Esteban’s life history may partly account for his prickly nature. He was born and raised in the Ladino-dominated village of Pichec, which is closer to Cubulco town than to Rabinal. Pichec Ladinos have the same attitudes towards Indians as their urban neighbours, viewing them as inferior and treating them with contempt; they are in perpetual conflict with the village’s Indian population.

Esteban epitomises the contradiction between identification with tradition and attraction to power. He is antipathetic towards Ladinos and has a clear understanding of the repressive role of the army. Yet Esteban refers with pride to his four years as a soldier, serving in the special presidential battalion in the democratic Arbenz era; his stories are full of references to the army’s power and clearly reflect the militarised mentality that pervades Indian life. He constantly refers to his friendships with the powerful. Despite his claims that he would never play for any political party for fear of being identified with it, he can always be found playing for the richest and most reactionary parties. His ideological ambivalence, saying one thing and doing another, brings him many problems. While admiring his playing skills, many musicians keep their distance because he is seen as such a difficult, selfish, mean, and grumpy character (summed up in the term ‘*delicado*’). Many marimbistas were surprised that he had been generous enough to give me classes and I had been tolerant enough to accept them!

Most Rabinalense marimbistas do not make changes to the tempo of the *son* other than to slow down just before beginning the final cadence or coda; they maintain a constant tempo within the *son*. The style is continuous *fortissimo*, although they might add or subtract double notes of the chord to give a richer or simpler sound. Only a few ‘playful’ marimbistas (such as Esteban) use dynamics and constantly change the tempo, bringing contrast and expressiveness to the *son*. Lázaro, an experienced *marimba* player, explained:
The *son* has a limit. At the beginning one has to play loud and slow, then the rest goes slower, and at the end one plays low in volume. There are *sones* with two strophes, others have three and four strophes, and then in those sections, wherever less is required, one has to do it less and when loudness is required, one can do it louder. The end has to be played low and slow because it is the end.

It is always interesting to compare what people say with what they do. Lázaro’s concept of *son* tempo is one of progressively slower movement and yet he is one of the fastest *marimbistas* in town. His ideas concur with the general concept of the ancient, slow style whereas his playing is influenced by the fast beat of other musical genres played on the radio.

Esteban is innovative because he improvises. He insists that many people play the *sones* in the old style but he likes change, to introduce new *vueltas* all the time, to experiment with new things. This is why he has difficulty in finding centre players who want, or are able, to play with him besides his nephews, Celestino and Bernabé. He complained about his previous centre player, who abandoned him:

Not anyone can [play with me]. Francisco Alvarado behaved badly, that fucking man was with me. He wasn’t such a good player but because I am the real naughty man, I told him, “This is the way we are going to do it and this is the way you are going to play.” And while I was teaching him this, he started to get upset with me. He didn’t like to be taught the *vueltas* I was teaching him. I said, “I don’t like the *vueltas* that you are playing because they are the old ones, so stop doing them. Let’s make new ones. Let’s make a business, because this is a business.” I only make new *sones*.

Esteban takes an innovative approach within the traditional genre and his success resides in combining the musical form of the traditional *sones*, which people recognise and like, with the introduction of many variations, including the improvisation of *vueltas*. Whilst it is true that the transformations he makes to the *sones* are novel, people question is whether he is creating new material or merely mixing and re-combining old material. Lázaro, who told me that he likes to ‘invent’ (compose) new melodies adapted to pre-established harmonic and rhythmic patterns, was scathing about Esteban’s style:

There are invented *sones*; the mind invents some of them. First one has to qualify if what one is playing is alright; then, if it is good, one keeps adding and
adding until the son has three strophes. Then one leaves it there. Then one looks
at the repertoire to look for names that do not already exist and finds a new
name for the son. But there is this man whose name is Esteban Uanché. He puts
six sones on top of every son he makes. No, he doesn’t play well, because if one
plays one over the other, it is not doing any good. One has to make them so they
are independent, without material from others.

Another marimbista from the Ordoñez family criticised Esteban’s playing for
similar reasons, claiming that he only makes arrangements (composturas) and that he
introduces sones from other places: “People like to listen to the old style, not those
sones that who knows where they come from.”

The suspicion for purists is that Esteban’s innovations are derived from popular
music and there does seem to be some truth in this. Within the pieza repertoire there are
certain pieces which have an improvisational section (monton) just before the pieza
ends. In this section, the fourth marimba player, the piccolo who accompanies the
higher range of the marimba de pieza, stops playing to let the treble player improvise
on the theme and show his ability and dexterity. The monton is a kind of cadenza in the
way that cadenzas were played in classical music concertos of the late eighteenth
century: here the musician showed his improvisational abilities just before ending the
movement. Esteban’s playing style does resemble the improvisational form of the
monton.

Esteban’s innovatory style separates him from what he most wants to protect,
that is, the traditional concepts that underpin son music. Some people say the dead will
not recognise or understand his music any more than they do piezas. This is a terrible
insult to a man who rejects the idea of dedicating piezas to the dead, saying that piezas
are for Ladinos:

Pieza is not allowed at the cemetery. I can’t imagine my son playing pieza with
counterbass for me when I die. Has anybody seen me dancing pieza? That
music is for the people with money! If I die I want the players to play a pair of
sones on the top of my grave so I can listen to them. Some people say that the
dead do not listen, but I am sure they do!

Juan Ordoñez has a more conciliatory attitude: “They did not hear them when they
were living here but nevertheless they appreciate them if the alegria celebration is for them.”
There is also the danger that the living will not recognise Esteban’s music either or will at least be distracted (as some people claim to be) from its purpose as a form of communion with the dead. It is not just musicians who need to learn the sones but the audience too. Bacho explained:

People who know the sones can hear their sadness, and those who do not know do not hear them as sad. For example, you will not hear a particular son as sad if you do not know the sound of that melody, but for those who know the sones, it makes them cry. Haven’t I told you about the time when my brothers and I went to pick up the marimba Esteban sold us? He told me,

“Go and get the marimba, guys, but before you leave play for me a son of sadness.” “O God! Of what?” Back then I didn’t know anything. “Sorry, Don Esteban,” I said, “but which are the sones of sadness?” “Don’t you know?” he said, very surprised. “Well, there are several of them like Costa Grande, Costa Chiquita, Joyabateco, San Miguelito, eeee! There are many.” “Which of those do you want to hear?” I asked. “Any of them,” he replied.

Then we put down the marimba under the big morro (gourd) tree he has at the entrance to his house and we played one. Suddenly he started to cry and at the end we took the marimba and left.

It is only through knowing the context, name and purpose of each son that the listener (player and audience) may understand their meaning and to participate in an exchange of emotions. This tends to limit the degree of change found acceptable within the genre and changes, especially to the son genre, are highly criticised (even though they are also admired, often by the same people). Esteban keeps his public in a state of uncertainty, their normal expectations of the sones and their vueltas thrown into disarray. In his attempts to distinguish himself from and place himself above other musicians, Esteban stretches the boundaries of acceptability and expectation, distancing himself from his friends and jeopardising people’s preference for his music and placing himself at risk of criticism. Concerns over the validity of Esteban’s playing style give some musicians an acceptable reason for not playing with him; to be forced to admit that one does not have the ability to play to do so would be unforgivable and socially dangerous. Criticisms based on envy of his ability to obtain the most and the best contracts are, of course, completely unacceptable.

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58 Society seems to impose limits on stylistic innovations that become too abstruse and complicated. cf. Herndon and McLeod’s (1990) description of a traditional folk guitarist in Malta who was rejected by his musical colleagues for these reasons.
Ordinarily, the will of the audience is transferred to the musician and to the music but Esteban tends to impose his will on both music and audience. Nevertheless, he subscribes to and indeed is a strong advocate of traditional principles concerning musical performance: *son marimbistas* consider themselves servants of the people and that it is their duty to please them with their favourite *sones*. *Marimbistas* become surrogate agents, liberating people's emotions (while holding on to their own as a sign of respect to the audience, both living and dead); together with the violin and *adufe* (square drum) players, they are intermediaries, communicating the feelings that flow between the living and the dead.

**CONCLUSION**

Thus times change, the music changes, but the discourse about music and music practice remains the same, at least for the time being. The Rabinalense musicians I met were at their most confident when discussing the ritual aspects and procedures of traditional *son* music; the long-established discourse on the subject gives their work a sacred aura, a sense of usefulness and satisfied purpose. It seems that all marimba music (so long as the audience likes it) comes under the rubric of serving the community. This probably helps to account for the survival of the traditional discourse about music in the face of a dwindling support base of Customary Catholics and new methods of learning which turn the traditional authority structure upside down. Thus traditional concepts of a religious and social duty survive innovation within the traditional genre, the introduction of *pieza* music, and the increasingly business-minded attitude of musicians themselves.

It is noticeable that most critics of innovation are of Esteban's generation, that is, grandfathers in their sixties. As elders (*mam*), their traditional social role includes reinforcing the boundaries of the acceptable. They tend to forget that as young men themselves they too were at the forefront of innovation, bringing the marimba into ritual practice. Esteban was a part of this but, unlike his contemporaries, he has never stopped learning and experimenting with the genre. His music is, then, the antithesis

\[\text{That Esteban fails to conform in other ways also affects attitudes to his music. See chapters 9 and 10.}\]
of the much-valued concept of 'repetition' through which consensus is reached and the ancestors/God appeased and, as such, is considered disturbing – perhaps more disturbing than the introduction of something completely new. The assimilation and transformation of the new is one thing; genuine creativity is clearly another.
Chapter 9

The Economy of the Son and the Pieza:
Changing Strategies, Genres,
And Musical Instruments

One of the factors driving musical change over the past few decades has been a shift in musicians’ survival strategies in response to changes in social and economic conditions in general and the death and destruction at the height of la violencia (1981-83) in particular (chapter 2). As ritual specialists with an essential role in community celebrations, the celebration of community life, musicians are highly visible and many were killed. Surviving musicians were faced with a demoralised and impoverished population whose ability to invest socially and economically in fiestas had been dramatically reduced. They were therefore forced not just to seek new ways of supplementing their income but to address what this meant to them in terms of their identity, their perceptions of the value their work and the effect on their reputation and prestige within the community.

THE MORAL ECONOMY

The ways in which Achi musicians manage their involvement in the commodity economy while retaining their social and religious roles as moral obligations to the community recalls discussions on the moral economy in both the anthropological and historical literature (Thompson 1991 [1968]; Scott 1976; Parry and Bloch 1989; Harris 1995). For some writers this distinction is nothing more than the political economy in capitalist and non-capitalist societies (Sahlins 1977; Brocheux 1983; Parker 1988).

\[60\]. Other factors include the radio (chapter 5) and population movement as a result of la violencia (chapter 2).
Discussion of moral economy has often focussed on a false dichotomy between capitalist, market economy rationality and the pre-capitalist economy centred on peasant subsistence with its moral constructs based principles of safety and reciprocity. For example, Taussig’s (1980) work has been criticised on the grounds that market ‘rationality’ is always influenced by ideological conditions, political interests, and moral, social, and religious values, thus giving a much more complex rationality to economic practices of production, exchange, and production (Trouillot 1986; Turner 1986; Englund 1996).

The impact of commoditisation in Rabinal is not a new phenomenon. The inhabitants of Rabinal, like those of all Indian societies, have been integrated into the market economy through wage relations with the capitalist sector for at least fifty years, that is, since the ‘revolutionary’ (democratic) period when compulsory work was abolished and minimum wages were established. Older musicians remember plenty of paid work in local road construction during the mid-1940s, which pushed the municipality’s economy towards the monetary: “When that President came to power, then there was money for the poor.” People had the money to go to the cantina, to zarábandas, where they listened to the increasingly popular music of the marimba de sones. Others bought marimbas, which were rapidly being integrated into Achi religious life, adopting other musicians’ traditional attitudes of service to the community whilst seeing an opportunity to increase their income by providing the music for zarábandas. The marimba soon became so embedded in Achi life that it can be a surprise to realise that the way musicians juggle moral obligations with financial opportunity is nothing new.

The strength of these moral obligations should not be underestimated. It is the price musicians pay for their gift from God, and they take their responsibilities seriously. Violinist Magdaleno told me,

Sometimes my wife gets upset because I work too much, but what can I do? If I refuse to play the dead will punish me too. The dead will come to knock at my door for not obeying, for not going. It is an obligation to the ánimas and, like he [Feliciano] says, if somebody comes to ask me to play what am I going to say? I can not say I am ill if I have nothing [wrong with me]. They may even think I am going to die.
Felicano, his *adufe* [square drum] playing partner, agreed: “You have to go because otherwise the dead will think you just do not want to work. That is why I do it too, for my work.”

I frequently heard explanations like these, particularly from musicians and *abogados*. These men's deference to the demands of their work reflects the social responsibility of having to mediate between people and God and the spirits, keeping both parties happy. From a religious perspective, maintaining good relations between the community of the living and the community of the dead (and God) prevents failure and illness and promotes community well-being; people have high expectations of their musicians and *abogados* (prayer-makers). Ritual specialists' God-given talents determine their destiny and whilst this is a privilege, it does have its price.

Because musicianship is seen as God-given talent that determines a man's destiny, musicians understand their profession as an obligation to the community, which is ruled by, sanctions and punishments should this responsibility remain unfulfilled. They view their work as a duty and social obligation to the living and the dead who may take revenge if they refuse a contract, a request for a *son* (the 'music of the ancestors') or fail to complete an obligation to play.

Failing to meet one’s responsibilities (or making errors while doing so) is also fraught with dangers. *Marimbista* Filemon Lajuj told me:

If you make a mistake then you will have bad dreams. The spirit owner of the marimba (*la Siuanaba*) appears in your dreams. She will ask you, “Did you do such and such? You did not carry out your obligation.” It is the marimba spirit owner who talks to you, because this instrument (the marimba) is not like one of us. If you make an error you may go mad or something will happen to you for not fulfilling your obligation. A player in La Ceiba hamlet did not meet his obligation. At the last minute he decided to go to the plantation to work and his arm shrunk. It happened because of his error. You look and think this (the marimba) is just wood but we are not the same to her. She has an owner who will punish you for not doing it.

When *segundero marimba mozo* Marcelo Ixpata walked away from a commitment to play a *cofradia fiesta*, he lost Esteban's sympathy for good; the incident provoked enmity between them. Although Marcelo did find someone to finish the gig for him and Esteban himself could be said to share some responsibility for the affair (in
that he hired someone he should have known couldn’t keep up with him), these are minor considerations. What is at issue here is a breach of faith, not only with Esteban, the cofradía for which the ensemble was playing, and the participants, but with the ancestors and God and, for some musicians, with the spirit owner of the marimba, the female Siuanaba. Although nothing untoward has happened to Marcelo yet, he has lost his most precious asset – his reputation, which has dented his earnings capacity.

The connection between duty, status, and ‘wealth’ is an old one. The Rabinalense have an economic view of religiosity and devotion, which is most evident in the traditional, hierarchical prestige structure of the cofradía cargo system (chapter 3). Individuals express their religious devotion by taking cargos (positions) of progressively greater religious and economic responsibility. The greater the economic expense, the greater the devotion to God and the saints and, therefore, the greater the carguero’s prestige and status in the community. From this economic view of religiosity, musicians who play as a devoción at a cofradía fiesta gain considerable prestige (and more work). The blind marimbista Lázaro takes pride (ki’koteem; jorob’eem)\(^{61}\) in playing for ‘the sake of God’ and charging modest fees.

I do people favours because I like it more that way. I do not charge big amounts of money. What for? I know whoever hires me will serve me, will give me food, because it is God we are serving. I put a little bit of devotion, a little collaboration.

Lázaro is regarded as a good person because his modest charges make his work affordable for everyone.

Musicians oscillate between a devotional attitude towards their work, which brings spiritual benefit and social prestige, and a pragmatic stance of valuing their music as a commodity. As a commodity, music is tied to a different, Ladino, prestige system centred on economic and political power (this does not, of course, stop musicians negotiating their wages for playing at religious events as hard as they can within the bounds of politeness). But musicians who clearly and systematically opt to play within the Ladino sphere are considered ambitious, which is not a virtue within Achi society. They may be labelled itzel winak (evil people), no different from Ladinos

\(^{61}\) Ki’koteem or jorob’eem refers to positive pride related to happiness and admiration.
whose social interests centre on making money and their own interests ("ku' an nim che riib"). It is to avoid this that *pieza* musicians occasionally play for the modern dance-dramas as a *devoción*.

Despite the weight and importance of traditional values and beliefs, financial considerations are becoming increasingly important. Most peasants' incomes are relatively as modest today as they were during the revolutionary period. But musicians, like other Indian peasants, were less dependent on waged work fifty years ago because the subsistence sector was stronger then and their expenses lower (chapter 2). Musicians claim that they could afford to play as a *devoción* (as an offering) to God, the saints, the holy Earth, and the souls of the dead, that is, free of charge. Today's economic circumstances make it impossible for them to dedicate an entire performance as an offering. *Devoción* has been reduced to extending the contract by one hour to show good will to the people who hired them and to God and the spirits, from whom they hope to obtain protection in return. Only a very few *marimbistas* (such as Lázaro) will agree to play an entire event as a *devoción*, and then only when a collective prayer is needed to ask (for example) for rain or a similar community request to God. It is not that Rabinalenses are less religious, just that their *devociones* have been simplified to reduce cost. The same applies to their *fiestas* and dance-dramas, which have been scaled down and are performed less frequently for lack of funds. Rabinalenses themselves say that the number of fireworks thrown by children and young people on Christmas Eve is a good indicator of the health of the community economy. Scarce fireworks and silent streets after midnight simply indicate a poor crop, a lack of waged work or a combination of the two and not any loss of religious faith.

In other instances, the simplification of ceremonial life has been interpreted as a result of a process of secularisation encouraged by the commoditisation of society. Sociologists interested in this phenomenon, which is generally understood as a decline

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62 Someone described as ‘*ku’ an nim che riib*’ only wants things for himself (negative self-pride).

63 During the boom of *cantina zarabandas* in the fifties a *son* marimba ensemble charged US$ 3 for a 24-hour gig. A 24 hour gig today oscillates between US$ 26 and US$ 40, depending on the prestige of the marimba ensemble.

64 Many evangelicals confessed that one reason for their conversion was to avoid the expense of participating in the *cofradía cargo* system.
of religion (Hamilton 1995), have found that it tends to be closely related to modernisation and industrialisation (Wallis and Bruce 1992), in other words, to the development of capitalism, which again places modernity in opposition to tradition. But Guatemala’s peasants have been incorporated into the capitalist system for several generations, though modernisation and/or industrialisation seem to have passed them by. It would also be reasonable to suppose that the politicisation of Indian societies before, during, and after the political violence of the 1980s accelerated the secularisation process, but this has not been the case. The Catholic Church, which took a leading role in political consciousness-raising prior to the violence, has adopted a similar role in the human rights movement of the last decade.

Yet despite the social change and political upheaval of the past forty years, the practice of music still constitutes social and political capital that can be transformed into income to supplement subsistence agriculture. Musicians therefore consider the social and political benefits as well as economic advantages before accepting an obligation to play. For instance, a musician who plays for a religious ritual as a devoción receives food but no cash income yet his gift of his music makes him look generous and pious in the eyes of the living and the dead: he gains prestige. When the musician plays for a political event, such as FRG’s election campaign, he knows he will be paid handsomely but he worries that he might be identified with the party’s political agenda or its representatives who are the living symbols of the dreaded army. The benefits and dangers associated with any commitment to play are not necessarily mutually exclusive, although I have set them in opposition to illustrate extreme considerations. Musicians striving for a larger market balance playing for money with the occasional performance for devoción, which protects them from malicious gossip and justifies eventual prosperity (which, for most musicians, never arrives). Musicians’ decisions to expand and transform their repertoire and/or change their instruments are similarly beset with advantages and risks: this strategy opens up their

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65. The FRG (Republican Front of Guatemala) is the political party of Rios Montt, the dictator who presided over the height of la violencia

66. Indian voters are cynical about democracy saying that local candidates want personal power within the existing status quo and a chance to plunder the municipal budget.

67. In Malawi, the market economy is already a given and people see nothing wrong with looking for prosperity through involvement in it. However, arguments about how that prosperity is achieved are expressed through reference to witchcraft (Englund 1996).
market and generates greater income in less time but requires a bigger investment, both in cash and commitment. Men who make this gamble gain additional prestige and status as musicians “who can [play] sones and piezas.”

Again, it would be reasonable to assume that these new economic strategies, which increase income at the expense of the devotional aspect of performance, are a product of an expanding market culture and the consequent secularisation of social interactions. I observed neither loss of piousness, nor any substitution of religious devotion for money. Flautist and drummer Eligio Gonzalez explained the nature of money, its procurement, and value from a religious point of view:

People ask for pisto (money) with their candle. Or ask for their life, to be able to earn pisto on a job already started. Or if their pisto has no remedy, it means, pisto earned and gone, which bought nothing, nothing done with that pisto, then it’s necessary to make a devoción to God. That’s why I set a devoción to be encouraged, to be working, to have corazón pisto (never ending money). Always the name of God is behind the work and the pisto. The heart of pisto is never to lose sight of God. Never leave God for anything. Because He is the owner of everything. The owner of the pisto and of our lives.

‘Corazón pisto’ is money invested in God’s name. Doing this guarantees a return, which may be health or more money. From this perspective, there is nothing wrong in an individual accumulating money so long as it is done in God’s name. And even if the money is spent on alcohol, so long as it is drunk in the ‘name of God’, He will ensure that one drinks con medida (with moderation). In other words, God can mediate the potential opposition between individual and collective interests in relation to the use of money. Catholic morality concerning money, which Taussig (1980) incorrectly interpreted as a critique on capitalism, is understood by Rabinalense Achis as a need for reciprocity; there is no trace of the idea that seeking money, let alone money itself, is evil. It is a lack of reciprocity which is behind the frequently heard complaint that the goods and labour which used to be offered as a free contribution to community or family fiestas now have a price tag: “Today everything is money (ahora todo es pisto).”

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68 As the Achi believe that one person’s gain is another’s loss, this implies that an individual who accumulates money, goods, or land ‘in God’s name’ has been given God’s blessing to do so.
The Work Ethic

The notion of *compromiso* (a verbal commitment to play music for an event) and the fulfilment of that *compromiso* are moral values which have religious origins.

When a marimba apprentice has sufficient knowledge and experience to play in public he acquires not only social capital but also responsibilities: he is at the service of and accountable to the people, the spirits, and God. Having learnt the craft, he is morally compelled to play for others and to refuse or leave a performance unfinished because of some disagreement or drunkenness is a sin which exposes the musician to punishment by God and the spirits, the wrath of the people, and possibly failure in life. With these values in mind, the musician assumes his *compromisos* from beginning to end, honouring a contract out of respect for their mutual word and friendship and also for fear of the evil consequences of the vengeance and punishments which failure would bring. Nevertheless, as these ideas are not behavioural norms but moral values, which suggest or encourage sociability, *marimbistas* can and sometimes do look for indirect ways of refusing contracts if they do not want to play.

The economic aspect of a contract is thus immersed in moral concepts of respect and sociability. Although contracts to play *pieza* music are better paid, musicians keep their word if they have already committed themselves to play *son* music because credibility, friendship, and new contracts depend on the fulfilment of their obligations. Bacho, a *marimbista* who has adopted new musical and economic strategies to generate more income, remarked:

We can do both things, we can play *piezas* and *sones*. Now, when they come to ask for so many hours of *pieza* music and we already have an obligation for *sones*, I reply, “I’m sorry, go search for another because we already have a *compromiso* for *sones*.”

Some Indian musicians have told me that they do not play *pieza* music nor will they change their *son* marimba ensemble to a *conjunto* ensemble because that is not the music the dead want to hear. They say that musicians who change their music become

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69. These themes are closely related to envy, social conflict, and witchcraft as mechanisms of social responsibility (chapter 10).
evil like Ladinos, because that is the music they like (Ladinos, on the other hand, think pieza ensembles play the only ‘decent’ music). The purpose of these musicians’ statements is to identify themselves with their ancestors and to demonstrate their devotion to the souls of the dead, in other words to ethnically differentiate themselves from the Ladino world. But the statement also masks the technical, social, and economic difficulties they encounter when attempting to incorporate the new music genre and its musical instruments.

**CRITERIA FOR CONTRACTING A MARIMBA**

Son marimba groups usually contract by shifts of one day (12 hours), or one day and one night (24 hours); they also play by the hour or by the son. A wedding celebration at the bride’s house is a 24 hour contract; a cofradia fiesta contract is for six 12 hour days and two nights. Ladinos tend to contract son marimbas by the hour for their family gatherings and for institutional events. Marimbas are only contracted by the son at the cemetery during All Saints’ Day and All Souls’ Day celebrations on 1 and 2 November.

The price of hiring a son marimba and musicians depends on the men’s place of origin. Village marimbistas charge 30-35 quetzales (about US$5) for one day but marimbistas from the municipal town or its largest villages charge 70-120 quetzales (up to US$20). Village marimbistas, ‘los de la montaña’ (those from the mountains), are considered less competent players than those of the town because they have fewer opportunities to play and thus less musical experience. I have met groups in the villages close to Rabinal town who often play there and are as good as, if not better than, the groups in town yet because of their place of origin, their price is lower. A marimba’s history and quality also translates into different prices and thus into different clienteles. Socio-economic differences between poor and not so poor Indians or Ladinos are also expressed in terms of quality of performance in the music market.

It is more expensive to hire marimbistas by the hour as they charge double for an event of only a few hours in order to guarantee a minimum income. Village and town son marimbistas charge 10 and 20 quetzales respectively. Conjunto marimba
ensembles [six musicians] charge 30 quetzales an hour and double marimba ensembles [nine musicians] charge 100 quetzales; individual musicians earn 5 and 10 quetzales an hour respectively (see below). The price also increases if the client is a Ladino.

Rabinal’s leading marimbista, Esteban Uanché, sets the maximum prices annually when all [son] marimbistas are gathered at the cemetery to play for the dead on All Souls’ Day. His nephew Celestino explained:

Don Esteban is the director of all marimbas, he sets a price and everyone will ask him how much should they charge. This year a short melody costs one quetzal. He is the head chief because everyone recognises that he plays the son beautifully. They do not play beautifully in the villages. If compared with Esteban’s son, they do not measure up. There is a difference. Don Esteban embellishes the melodies, playing the cycles where others can’t. There are some who may try and play the Amanecido (son) without caring if they make the turns or not, they do it clumsily. Esteban instead does it complete.

The primary selection criterion when contracting a marimba de sones is price. When explaining the different prices and options, Bacho, a marimbista, said, “If people are poor they don’t call on Don Esteban, because Don Esteban does not compromise, he demands his price without question. He is the most expensive.” Customers are willing to sacrifice a little in terms of the quality and trustworthiness of marimbistas in order to better distribute their limited resources on food and other essentials for their celebrations.70

Different criteria apply if people want to create prestige by staging a memorable event. Encompassed under the concept of the marimba’s ‘sound’, these include the instrument’s resonance, the personal style of the tiplista (soprano player), the players’ stamina, and the extent of their repertoire. Last but not least, the duty performance of the marimbistas is also considered, in other words, their ability to play as long as possible before abandoning their instrument in order to drink.

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70 The choice of marimba ensemble can increase a cofradía’s annual music expenditure by 10-15%. If there is an obligation to perform a dance-drama, where the major expense is the marimba ensemble, then costs climb another 5-7% or more.
A MARIMBA'S ECONOMIC VALUE

Apart from being their means of earning a modest income to supplement subsistence agriculture, the marimba also serves as a domestic savings and emergency fund. Like livestock (usually one pig or a cow), the marimba can be sold when the family or a fellow member of the cuchubal (partnership) needs to raise cash to pay for a funeral or other unavoidable expense such as an illness in the family. These are frequent occurrences because of the poor health conditions, especially in the villages (chapter 2). Esteban Uanché told me that when his father was dangerously ill, some Ladinos wanted to buy his marimba and coaxed him, “Sell your marimba, Don José, you will get cured with that marimba.” Many marimbistas stressed that if it were not for illnesses in the family, they could have built better homes or bought land. The possible disintegration of a group is a very real threat, which deters many men from investing in a marimba.

A good second-hand marimba sencilla (son or pieza marimba), unrestored but in fair shape with a good sound, can be obtained in Rabinal for between 800-1200 quetzales (US$133-200) which is equivalent to a season’s work on the plantations (fincas). Tono Cajbón’s relief when he managed to recover his marimba following his escape from Plan de Sanchez after the massacre there on 18 July 1982, is understandable: he had his most precious asset and a means of earning a living for his family in their new landless home in the municipal colony:

The marimba was left in Plan de Sanchez and my brother-in-law returned to get it, he returned at night to rescue the marimba and came back with it by eight the next morning, but that was all. Everything else was lost, kettles, bed, tape player, hoe, cane-knife, grinding stone, dishes...we came with our hands crossed, not even clothes, we had nothing.

The circulation of marimbas and players

According to my census of Rabinal municipality, there are forty son marimbas and eight conjunto marimbas for pieza music in the villages, and five son marimbas and two conjunto marimbas in town. The bigger villages – Xococ, Pichec, and Nimacabaj – have more than three son marimbas. Conjunto marimbas are found in Ladino-dominated areas: there are five in Pichec alone. The musicians I interviewed not only knew the number of marimbas in their own and neighbouring villages but their final
destination when they were sold. They also knew the reason for the sale: for example, the separation of the group, or the owner's need for cash. Players' cohesion or mobility affects the circulation of marimbas that, with the exception of some better quality instruments, make the rounds of marimbistas and apprentices. The history of ownership becomes its provenance, its pedigree, and affects the price musicians can charge to play at an event.

The most stable and also the oldest marimba groups are those formed by relatives; the ideal is a father and his sons. Family solidarity helps maintain cohesion in a group but when sons marry and acquire new economic responsibilities, they often leave the group temporarily and sometimes permanently. In such cases, the father usually employs marimbista friends to work as mozos (daily paid workers) until his son returns which he usually does, at least occasionally; sometimes, however, the son works as a mozo for someone else or creates his own group.

The least stable groups consist of unrelated and often landless young men who form a marimba group for secular motives – the former conscripts, for example, who buy a marimba between them and learn to play simply for something to do. For them, playing for the ancestors or earning money is not always the prime consideration. Such young men will withdraw their investment in the marimba should a better employment opportunity arise. They can earn more on the fincas where the work is regular and the day shorter; they can also meet girls from other communities away from the censorious eyes and gossiping tongues of village elders. As they move around as young men do, they hear marimbistas from different communities and learn new music and styles as they listen, sometimes playing as mozos in marimba groups wherever they happen to be.

'EQUALITY' OF INCOME

A son marimbista group's income is equally divided between the three players and the marimba: each gets a quarter of the contract fee, as Celestino explains:
Esteban says how much we will earn. If it is a day, he charges 120 quetzales and
tells us immediately, “the price is 120 quetzales divided by four [which] is 30
quetzales each” because the marimba earns a salary too, no more no less.

Just as a marimba is treated as a living creature whose spirit or dueño is la
Situanaba (chapter 6) with whom drinks are shared to entice it to play better, so it
receives a salary for its participation in the performance. The transferred value for wear
of the instrument results in an extra salary for the owner but, instead of understanding
this as a productive investment by the owner in the common work tool, the apparent
inequality between owner and mozo is concealed. The extra payment is not the natural
right of the marimba owner but of the female marimba. Once each musician has
received a quarter of the income, what remains of the added value produced by the
marimba mozós is appropriated by the marimba owner as rent and in recognition of his
rights over their labour during the term of the contract. Exploitation takes the cultural
form of an extra wage because the marimba (a living agent) is also a creator of value.
Whenever musicians are given a round of drinks, alcohol is poured over part of the
marimba to make her happy and sound better, so why not give her a wage too? This
idea is reinforced by notion that marimbistas’ competence is a quality of the marimba
herself. However, these practices can also be seen as a way of making the private
ownership of the marimba culturally and socially acceptable to ensemble members.

For all the above, owners make no profit from the marimba’s share. Marimbas
require little maintenance except for the replacement of the membranes (tela) at the
bottom of the resonators (chapter 5), preferably each time the marimba is played at an
event. Few marimba owners can afford to do this, as a set of membranes (muda) costs
10 quetzales; as a result, the marimba sounds muted and thus reduces its players’
modest income. Parts like ropes, pegs, and mallets are changed infrequently; only the
tiplista’s mallets are expensive, involving a trip to Guatemala City.

Despite these expenses and low earnings, economic motivation is significant for
son marimba owners and musicians. Esteban is the only marimbista to refuse to play
piezas to make a living from his music; the rest rely on subsistence agriculture and a
couple of months’ work on the fincas every year. Pieza musicians tend to be more

71. Rabinalenses believe that all things have a spirit or dueño (keeper) who has control
over them.
business minded, augmenting their repertoire and their income by playing the latest piezas on the conjunto marimba. They play more often and are considerably more expensive, some earning enough to avoid going to the fincas. The Jerónimos even managed to send the youngest generation to secondary school in Guatemala City on the proceeds.

THE ANNUAL CONTRACT CYCLE

The annual cycle of marimba contracts relates to the annual cycle of religious celebrations, the agricultural cycle, and plantation work. The busiest season is the dry season between November and May (summer). People begin leaving for the fincas after the Day of the Dead on 2 November. This is marimbistas’ biggest work opportunity of the year; there is work for everyone and because they charge by the son, musicians earn as much over the two days as they do over a six-day fiesta. Others leave after the maíz criollo maize harvest in December, returning for the celebration of the town’s patron saint’s fiesta in January. Most labour migrants are home by Easter and all are back for the festival, which marks the end of summer: the three-day fiesta of Santa Cruz on 1-3 May. This is the only cofradia fiesta, which is celebrated in every village and as such is marimbistas’ second biggest annual work opportunity. Young people save their finca earnings and marry between January and May, before the rainy season starts and corn planting begins, providing marimbistas with fairly reliable income.

Marimbistas estimate that musicians who only play the son repertoire work about twice a month; at maximum rates, a musician averages 60 quetzales (US$10) a month for 24 hours’ music, plus travel, etc. Members of a conjunto ensemble (four marimbistas, bass-player and drummer) who can play up-to-the-minute piezas may have contracts to play each week as they can meet Ladino and Indian demands for popular music, thus generating a maximum monthly income per musician of 80 quetzales for 16 hours work. The increase in monthly income and less hours of work does not compensate in the short term for the high price of the instruments and the cost of their transportation. Only a few families can afford to swap their son marimba ensembles for marimba de conjunto ensembles or, alternatively, consider the change too much of a financial risk.
MUSICAL STRATEGIES FOR SURVIVAL

In Rabinal the marimba has acquired greater importance than other instruments because the popular urban music Rabinalenses listen to on the radio and cassette can be incorporated in its repertoire. The commercial music industry has opened up a labour market for marimbistas to which other traditional instrumentalists have no access. The market for son music in Rabinal is constant and diverse, but the combination of many marimbistas and limited opportunities to play can and does lead to envy and conflict. The market for pieza music is growing but, as yet, only a few marimbistas have changed to conjunto ensembles and incorporated the pieza repertoire. Some reasons for this is the cost of establishing a conjunto ensemble; another is the difficulty of keeping such a large group of musicians together and the continual threat that some domestic crisis will force a musician to withdraw his investment and the ability to learn a new repertoire and music techniques.

Marimbistas have adopted two different strategies in order to increase their income: personal mobility or changing to marimba de pieza. Experienced players often prefer to be as mobile as possible, hiring themselves out to marimba owners as marimba mozos. In this way they avoid the cost and responsibilities of buying and maintaining a marimba themselves whilst at the same time granting themselves the opportunity to obtain work with various marimba groups and thus increase their repertoire of music and styles. A successful marimba mozo has to be skilled and adaptable enough to work easily with any tiplista; he also has to have the type of personality, which can build and maintain good relations with other marimbistas (chapter 10).

The second strategy is more suitable for groups comprised of family members as it requires a great deal of group cohesion and solidarity. The family buys a marimba de pieza or, if it already has one, upgrades to a conjunto marimba by adding a drum kit and double bass, and learns the pieza repertoire. This strategy involves considerable risk because of the large investment in terms of money and time required. It also offers the best financial rewards: conjunto ensembles can charge more and, with only ten of these ensembles in the municipality, there is little competition for work. Additionally, there are opportunities to play for Ladinos and Indians every week. The gigs are shorter
too, though more intense: people expect conjunto marimbistas to play continuously in 90-minute sets so that they can dance for a long time in a western style in couples. Musicians consider playing pieza music much more difficult and challenging than son music where the sets are shorter and danced by older people who can only manage one or two sones. The exception to this general rule is weddings (the party at the groom’s house), where they are only required to play for four to six hours, but then they charge even more for their work.

It is a paradox that son marimbistas who wish to maximise their earnings potential do so with minimal investment whereas conjunto marimbistas, who no longer play the ‘music of the ancestors’ maximise their earnings potential by exploiting their domestic resources – in this case, sons – in the traditional manner. The family relationship facilitates the organisation of collective work, including the co-ordination of frequent rehearsals. The authoritarian structure of the family also maintains the necessary group cohesion as the father or elder brothers control the younger boys (even in those cases where a younger child takes the leading in the pieza-learning process), keeping the group together and guaranteeing the fulfilment of compromisos. This ensemble may remain stable for years, until the sons begin to marry.

Switching to a conjunto marimba is not an attractive proposition for he son marimba owner who hires marimba mozos. The larger number of musicians he would need to hire would threaten his control and authority over the group, jeopardising his prestige in the eyes of his clients and hence his investment. A related reason for not playing piezas is the loss of face involved in being forced into a subordinate position to other, younger musicians, who find it easier to learn the new music. Although some men do find playing piezas difficult, social difficulties far outweigh technical ones. Such reasons mean that men will think twice about changing to a conjunto marimba, for all that it seems a good idea in financial terms.

72 Sometimes the family authority structure is turned upside down as the boy on whom the family’s economic future depends takes on the social roles of the first player. See chapter 8.

73 See chapter 4.
CONCLUSION

Musical change is a culturally acceptable means of confronting challenges resulting from the effects of market economy expansion on a debilitated subsistence economy. The consideration of socio-economic musical conditions and the calculations musicians make in terms of market and prestige economies indicate that rational economic thinking – as defined in western capitalist thought – is only one part the issue. The urgent need to increase income presents musicians with an apparent choice between profit and devoción, that is, between self-interest and a generally strongly felt obligation to serve community needs. Most musicians solve this problem more or less successfully. The other is whether one can capitalise the purchase of a marimba conjunto or, if choosing the alternative, whether one has the requisite social and technical skills to succeed as a mozo. Both options can be financially and socially risky and the Achi are not known for their risk-taking.
Chapter 10

Music within Social Interaction

Music is a fundamentally social phenomenon because it is a form of communication\(^\text{74}\) whose messages are constructed and interpreted constantly in the social interaction. The process of musical communication during social interaction occur in the experience of music playing and listening as well as outside the musical performance in the performance of daily life. It thus occurs when speaking about music and in the playing and listening to it, in historical and social time and in the space before, during and mainly after the musical experience.

A comprehensive definition of performance given by Goffman (1959:32) includes every situation in which an individual engages in social interaction: "I have been using the term 'performance' to refer to all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers". Once the individual's daily interaction is included as a performance it is possible to bridge this with musical performance and establish a link of interpretative continuity between social interaction during musical performance and social interaction among musicians and between musicians and the public in the performance of daily life. While it is necessary to determine the specific frames in which both types of performances occur (Bateson 1972; Goffman 1974) there is a close and constant relationship between them.

The evaluation and interpretation of a musical performance impinges directly on the prestige and status of musicians and clients affecting their social roles and social relationships within daily social interaction. At the same time, cultivating social relationships among musicians and between musicians and their public has a direct

\(^{74}\) I am referring here to communication as defined by Feld, that is, as "a socially interactive and intersubjective process of reality construction through message production and interpretation." (1984:15)
impact on musicians' access to contracts. It also affects the open disposition of musicians to play and the coordination among them while doing so and the receptivity and perception of the audience in relation to their expectations of the musicians and their music. This is owing to the fact that it is during the course of daily interaction that agreements and disagreements are in constant negotiation influences the ways of appreciating musicians' work.

Coming from this point of view, I propose that the interpretation and meanings given to musical performance transcend the ritual times and spaces of cultural performances; they are in a state of permanent flux constantly open to negotiation and renegotiation and adjusting to the musicians performance of social relationships in daily life interaction, depending very much on their sociality and their capacity to project certain desired images and intentions. There is a correspondence and continuity between the technical skills and the aesthetic evaluation of musical practice and the social skills needed to create and maintain certain impressions on the audiences and the other musicians inside and outside the musical performance. The highest value is assigned to those musicians who are committed, respectful and aware and sympathetic to the public's and musicians' needs, capacities, and preferences.

In this chapter I will focus on the "extra-musicality" of social interaction considering it as part of the process of musical communication.\textsuperscript{75} I will talk about the role of friendship and social conflict and discuss a series of feelings towards, and attitudes, motives and intentions between musicians and public in daily life which may influence the ways people perceive interpret and give meaning to musical practice.

Marimbistas seek friendships and patronage not simply to obtain more contracts but to acquire status and prestige through playing for Ladino audiences as well as serving the Achi community fulfilling their social and religious obligations, and to protect themselves from exposure to envy, and witchcraft. Envy, vengeance, and witchcraft are expressions of the sources and consequences of social conflict and mechanisms of social accountability. Friendships are seen as a means of preventing potential conflict and gaining greater access to and control over the conditions of music

\textsuperscript{75}. I consider the process of musical communication to be synonymous with the process of the production and consumption of music.
production/consumption (whilst simultaneously blocking others from such advantages). Discourse on friendship is usually expressed in terms of idealised family relationships; the subtext is the connection with the ancestors.

THE FAMILY

The family is the social base of Achi society and provides an idealised model for social relations, including friendships and patronage. The family is viewed as providing the ideal conditions of cohesion and loyalty as well as the hierarchical authority structure necessary for the success of any enterprise from subsistence agriculture to forming a marimba ensemble. In the latter case, the ideological emphasis on the family (as opposed to individuality) encourages a family’s male members to stay together, develop competency, and acquire prestige as a group.

In real life, things are not always so simple. Esteban Uanché, Rabinal’s premier son marimbista, bitterly regrets that he has only one son, Mincho, and so has been unable to achieve his ambition of organising two marimba ensembles within his immediate family. For most of his performance career, he has had to hire at least one marimba mozo every time he played and, now that Mincho has married and set up his own marimba ensemble, Esteban is back where he started. Esteban moans constantly about the mozós he has taught and who, once competent to accompany him, began giving excuses for not playing with him and eventually abandoned him. Certainly his improvisational style (chapter 8) produces great difficulties for his apprentices, as they have to be constantly attentive to his movements and ornamentations; competent but uninspired mozós need not apply.

After losing several mozós, Esteban found apprentices among his extended family and began training his nephews, Celestino and Bernabé Cajbón, who had begun their musical training with their father, Tono. By the time I arrived in Rabinal, Celestino and Bernabé had been playing for Esteban for two years and he had finally achieved a degree of stability in his ensemble. The young men have great respect for their uncle as their teacher and he in turn admits that they were talented young
musicians, saying, “They are good lads, with good heads and ears (Son buenos los muchachos, tienen buen oído y cabeza)”. They are, however, getting fed up with his demanding nature.

Tono has the much desired and envied ‘marimba de hijos’ (literally, a marimba-full of sons) but has lost his older sons’ respect because of his alcohol problems. When drunk, he becomes verbally and physically abusive, fighting everyone in sight and hitting his sons whenever they play together at fiestas. Although Tono claims his sons do not play with him because they are busy with other commitments, the truth is that he himself destroyed the trust and solidarity between them.

The conjunto marimba ensemble (marimba, counter bass, and drum set) depends even more on family relationships because it requires the unity and loyalty of a larger number of musicians. Economic co-operation is also more likely when all the instruments are owned by the family: the threat of ensemble collapse through one member’s withdrawal of his investment or claimed personal ownership of an instrument does not arise. Common storage of family-owned instruments gives a greater guarantee that they will not be stolen, roughly handled, or destroyed. Lastly, rehearsals are easier to organise within a family context. All the conjunto marimbas I knew were formed by extended families although they hired marimba mozos now and again when a family member was unable to play.

Cross cutting the emphasis on hierarchy within the family is a strong notion of equality between families. This may derive from a sense of ethnic community (common language and descent) which is also imposed negatively through the dominant Ladino ideology and reinforced by the social attitude expressed in the phrase, ‘all Indians are the same’; alternatively, it may derive from a cultural inclination to conform. Reality is given to this concept by the sharing of limited resources in generalised conditions of poverty, where everyone faces the uncertain outcome of seasonal subsistence agriculture and annual epidemics. These are palpable facts to most Indians (and poor Ladinos) and provide the basis of the belief that one the improvement in one person’s lot results in the deterioration of others’ and therefore someone’s

76 I heard of two incidences of this, both among conjunto marimba ensembles created by non-kin who had bought the instruments together.
success actually accounts for others’ misfortunes (Foster 1965). Musicians’ God-given
talents and their role as ritual specialists set them apart, as does their ability to buy and
hold on to what is, in local terms, an expensive piece of equipment. It seemed to me
that musicians’ discourse on the family was partly influenced by this negative view of
their social position and was, to some extent, a means of downplaying their activities
by placing them within a frame of complete ordinariness.

THE MARIMBA MOZO

A mozo de marimba is a musical contractor, an individual with experience and
knowledge of the musical repertoire who offers his services to marimba owners missing
a player for an event. Mozos generally work for friends or with groups with whom they
feel comfortable. Marcelo Ixpata boasted of his skills as a mozo segundero/centrista
(second/centre player who carries the harmony) in a way which is most uncommon
among the Rabinalense Achi:

Because I am a professional player I can play with anybody.77 As long as there
is someone who can jalar (lead; literally, to pull) in the first position I go
behind, following as second, tailing, tailing.

Celestino, who is a much better musician than Marcelo, explained why he liked
being a marimba mozo:

I play with the Mendoza family and with Mincho Torres and I always play with
Matilde Castro from Chiac. I have played in many marimba groups, like Ecos
del Valle (Echoes of the Valley) from Pachica. They are a family group of
children. Another group I play with is the Juarez family from La Ceiba and with
Esteban here [Rabinal town]. I keep myself busy with all of them. There are
times when compromisos don’t come from this side but that side, and that one
will come to me in advance and give me a date [to play] and they say, “a gig is
coming up on the 30th and I record it, and if Don Esteban seeks me out for that
day I refuse him because I already have an obligation, so then he has to hire
another mozo. I am not tied to anyone.

When I asked if that was best way or working for him, he answered:

77. Except Esteban Uanché. See chapter 8.
Oh yes, because there are always opportunities any day. There are not always opportunities for everyone, only once every few weeks. But I work with whoever because each of them has an opportunity coming up.

It is usually experienced treble players who own their own marimbas who are responsible for hiring the mozo to play with the ensemble. It is uncommon to find a marimba owner who plays second or third position hiring a mozo to play the treble, or first, position because this position assumes the musical leadership of the ensemble and as such has greatest decision making power. It is socially confusing, not to say risky, for a marimba owner not to occupy the musical position with the greatest say in marimba matters. Nevertheless, a successful segundero mozo has to have sufficient experience to follow the treble leader and many have greater skills than the tiplistas who employ them. Marimba mozos who take the third position, playing rhythmic bass at the left side of the instrument do not need this level of experience.

It is essential for a mozo to have an extensive knowledge of the son repertoire and, in the last decade or so, at least some of the public’s favourite piezas. Although marimba groups share a common repertoire, each has some sones and piezas that they say only they can play and which they sometimes claim as their own creation. These claims help to explain why when marimbistas told me that the sones repertoire contains some 150 sones, they either could not or would not name them all. They certainly avoided naming sones they played themselves and I recognised this that this secrecy concerning musical knowledge is a means of self-empowerment. By avoiding other musicians to know the name of uncommon sones they played, those musicians could not respond to the requests by the audience of those particular sones even if they learnt to play them. As mozos work around the different marimba groups, they learn and transmit these allegedly exclusive sones and piezas as well as the personal style of the treble leader of the ensemble that claims ownership of them. As mozos pass on different ensembles' knowledge, skills, and styles, they become the medium through which Rabinal’s repertoire is both expanded and homogenised; they are generating source of Rabinalense style. Mozos’ mobility, which has become an important aspect of social

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78 I found that their counts fell far short and that they tended to repeat the same sones. They explained that there were more that they could not bring to mind, that some are sones sin nombre (without names), and some were simply named after their place of origin (there are four Cubulero sones for example). There were also other sones whose name they did not know, which is a great disadvantage for marimbistas.
interaction particularly in terms of musical practice, may explain the present dynamism of Rabinal’s marimba tradition.

A mozo has to have good technical skills and a developed æsthetic sense. Of greater value than individual dexterity is a mozo’s skill in co-ordinating with and adapting to other musicians on a personal level, for this encourages lead marimbistas prefer one mozo to another. Whilst all musicians need the social ability to form friendships in order to integrate into the group, achieve unity, obtain public recognition, and develop a clientele, this ability is even more essential to the marimba mozo: he has the additional challenge of forming friendships with a variety of different marimba owners in order to remain in work. As the marimba mozo is a bystander in several ensembles, his interests and intentions can be different from and conflict with those of marimba owners and thus the forming of friendships is a daily task. No matter how good a musician a mozo is considered to be, he will not be asked to join an ensemble unless the other treble players find him congenial. However, the better the marimba mozo is considered an accompaniment, the greater power he will hold in negotiations with the marimba owners who contract him. They will try to keep a good marimba mozo as a permanent part of the ensemble. The favourable relationship between the treble leader and the second player who carries the harmony and part of the rhythm section is essential and must be demonstrated beyond the musical performance. When the second player is a marimba mozo this relationship turns into the most delicate matter of personal consideration.

Becoming a mozo gives a musician the opportunity of learning new music and playing styles that, once mastered, increase his reputation and his earnings; it also allows him to extend his personal social network (and conversely, avoid identification with any one group or faction). All he needs is his mallets; he avoids the financial expenditure of buying and maintaining a marimba, which is an expensive and cumbersome asset in times of political turmoil. Celestino is a case in point: clearly a musical man, he has developed a reputation for himself while playing for Esteban and has created a network with other musicians who regularly ask him to play.

Bauman (1977) says that competence among performers is a central criterion for eligibility and access to performance; he explains that this criterion varies from culture to culture.
Face to face type of relationships are still the main mode of communication and social interaction in Rabinalense society. Nevertheless, conversations are oblique to the point of incomprehensibility in order to avoid arousing the envy of others or falling victim to gossip, both of which are all too easy to do.

Social interaction always has a moderate, respectful, and benign appearance because of strict behavioural norms concerning conflict avoidance. Avoiding direct confrontation in social interaction is an important ethical principle of Achi society and conversations are indirect. When conflict or disagreement occurs in a face to face encounter, people attempt to reach consensus in a circumlocutory way; this can be a protracted process. If this fails, people try to avoid further contact. They physically withdraw to allow things to calm down, or if this is not possible, they keep their opinions secret through silence, accepting the terms and conditions of the other party to the interaction, however unjust these might seem to be.

When people told me myths, legends, and stories, they nearly always began with the cliché 'they say' – or, if there is a particular interest in identifying the individual who gave the information, 'they say he says' or 'he says they say' – in order to avoid responsibility for a direct accusation. The information is attributed to public knowledge, to an anonymous collective subject, and because of this it is considered a true fact more than a questionable one. This form of communication is particularly useful when the aim is to criticise or to gossip maliciously about someone against whom one feels resentment or envy. Gossip is a main trait of communication; it is an indirect form of communication about diffuse ideas and beliefs and the need to conform, and its origins are unattributable. People who malign others are said to be 'evil people', with 'bad hearts' (itzel winak); the phrase derives from the Achi word for witchcraft (itzib'al). Fear of witchcraft, like gossip and rumour, operates as a mechanism of self-control and as a means of enforcing observance of the rules of social interaction.

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80. Here I use the term gossip as conversation about absent third parties. Haviland (1977) discusses gossip among the Maya people of Zinacantan as indirect ways of evaluating people's behaviour.
behaviour, ensuring that no one stands out, either above or below anyone else. The omnipresent politeness in all social relations is a form of self-protection.

In conversation, mistrust and envy are constantly present, if veiled, and never revealed directly to the person(s) towards whom one has these feelings: “Nobody knows precisely where they come from, but they’re always there.” Schulze Jena’s (1954) description of personal relationships among the neighbouring K’iche’ at the end of the 1920s could easily have been written about the Achis in the 1990s:

...a secret envy awakes in the less fortunate and drives him to premeditated action, just requires someone to be successful in an enterprise, to wear better clothes, to buy a piece of land, or to restore family happiness in a broken marriage. The Indian takes the happiness and good fortune of others as a personal and direct damage because his lack of fortune is interpreted as having been set against the ancestors. To defend himself from this, he consults a diviner begging him to put him in contact with the ancestors and to request punishment for the fortunate person in the same way he has caused the damage on him. In these situations relationships develop mistrust, and envy may turn into a satanic hatred when the less fortunate feels degraded by other person. The person who suffers misfortune desires the greatest suffering which is death for the fortunate enemy and misery to his wife and children. He firmly believes that the witch’s curse can cause illness, sadness, poverty and death to his enemies. In this way vengeance is diverted from direct violence...(my own translation from Spanish edition 1954: 43-44).

It is an awareness of these dangers which drives to do their utmost to convey a friendly and favourable impression when addressing someone directly: it is a safety measure with which they attempt to protect themselves. The friendly treatment I received throughout my stay in Rabinal was a subtle and effective way of neutralising and avoiding the potential danger of interacting with a stranger and reducing the differences between us arising from my status as a foreigner. They use the same mechanism to avoid conflict with their more powerful Ladino neighbours and thus protect themselves from harm.

Collective representations of envy and vengeance as a cause of failure and death are lived and interpreted daily through reference to the lives and fates of saints. The

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81. Rabinal’s recent history is a testament to the army’s effective use of gossip and rumour in order to divide society, pitting the population against itself, generating mistrust and terror among neighbours and even within the family. See chapter 2.
martyrdom of the saints functions as an archetypal model that is re-enacted in the fate of the Achi people (cf. Eliade 1987 [1974]). Midwife and aq’ mes (healer) Vicenta explained:

The saints did not die by natural illness but by envy. Yes, they died because of people’s envy, they killed them. Isn’t it written in the sacred book? All the saints died in that way. Just like us, we have resemblances with the saints and with Jesus here in life.

Musicians are the object of envy simply because of their fortunate fate in being chosen by God as the recipients of knowledge and musical ability; they are also exposed to the dangerous consequences of the growing competition for contracts, which, if not scarce, are limited. Each marimba ensemble and its musicians present a potential enemy, from whom revenge can be expected, especially if the ensemble and musicians come from another village or town. Marimbista Filemón Lajuj explained:

That is what happens with this instrument, it has envy, it creates envy. To play is dangerous, and sometimes it is a shame to play because there are evil people who are envious. There are other people who can play but perhaps they are not invited to come out to work. Perhaps they do not call them to play and one is selected to play, that is why they are envious.

Julián Ordoñez told me about the great envy emanating from another family of conjunto marimba players who were considered ladinoized because some members of the family had become professionals (lawyer, photographer and accountant):

It was my son Juan who began to learn the pieza music. That is why the Jerónimo family don’t like us – because we learnt that music and bought fine instruments from Guatemala [City]. We bought a good drum set and some other things... We went and played in other places and they started bothering us because they stopped playing while we started playing more. When the drum set arrived by bus, they heard and came to see.

"Hello guys, did you come from Guatemala [City]?"
"Yes," I said.
"What did you bring?" they asked
"Bread," we replied.
"Bones!" they said. "You are liars."

Later they came home to see and said, "Now you really kicked us well guys!" and I responded, "You have your work, you are professionals, and us, what do
we have? We only have hoes. We are just doing a little bit.” That is why they don't like us.

This is typically disingenuous. The Ordoñez family is actually a wealthy Indian family: apart from having land and cultivate it, they are craftsmen potters as well as marimbistas. The Jerónimos, on the other hand, have been marimbistas for a century. The Ordoñez family’s acquisition of a conjunto marimba made them competitors in an arena that the Jerónimos felt was theirs. In an attempt to avoid conflict, Julián Ordoñez responded humbly to the Jerónimos and did so again when they visited his home. But this time he could not resist adding a little criticism: by calling the Jerónimos ‘professionals’, Julián implies that they have adopted a Ladino lifestyle. His reference to hoes indicates that the changes within his own family are ‘only those of peasants making a little improvement’. Both parties to this interchange are well aware of the other’s circumstances; however, this formalised self-abasement is essential in order to avoid conflict.

The Ordoñez family fell victim to the envy and vengeance of the members of another conjunto ensemble. Juan said, “We went to play at a party, and look what they did to us.” “Who?” I asked.

The Double M group. They had played for that family before but this time they wanted the payment in advance so the organiser of the party did not give the contract to them. Instead, he came to see us. And you know what they did because of that? The house was full of people, it was very happy, but they threw fireworks behind the marimba. Do you think people could stand that? eeeeh! It was like chilli! But we did not stop playing although it was unbearable; I did not take a breath. All the people went outside the house. They did it because the party was going so well, that is what they did to us.

Son marimbista Esteban Uanché’s antisocial and distant nature is also ascribed to envy. According to Tono Cajbón, Esteban never comes to pay his respects or chat with him when he is playing – which is not surprising, considering Tono is soon drunk and abusive. However, Tono is convinced that Esteban is envious of his playing:

Esteban is not a friend, because he is only watching us from afar in front of the church, he does not come to visit. The truth is that he feels uncomfortable if my marimba mozós play well and if my marimba has a good sound. He does not like it.
Because of the belief that one man’s gain is another man’s loss (cf. Foster 1965), envy can lead to retaliation through witchcraft. For example, I asked violinist Magdaleno Xitumul if he had feared being exposed to witchcraft in his early years when he learnt to play. “No,” he answered, “because how could I know if someone felt envious of me? In my thoughts, this instrument was only a toy.” The responsibilities of musicianship do not apply to music apprentices and so Magdaleno felt there was nothing about himself that people could have envied at the time; nor did he have any reason to suspect anyone harboured envy towards him. But once musicians acquire knowledge, older people are always challenging them with their musical requests: “It seems they only do it to screw us and to see if we can play them.”

Envy can also lead to allegations of witchcraft, as Victor Tum’s experiences illustrate. Both an abogado and a musician, Victor was held responsible for a severe drought that caused crop failure in the valley lowlands. This was clearly witchcraft because Victor, who planted on higher land at the foot of the mountain, had a bumper crop that year. This naturally created envy. But what generated the accusations of witchcraft was not simply that as an abogado Victor knew how to contact the spirits and direct rainfall his way; rather, it was that Victor and his crop partner did with their surplus, which was to stage the Xajoj Tum (Rabinal Achi) dance-drama. They were seen as paying their respects and expressing gratitude to the ancestors for their generosity, making a public and cruel celebration of others’ misfortune. A related but slightly different interpretation from Customary Catholics was that the drought was a punishment from God and that staging the dance-drama was inappropriate whilst the community was in disgrace. People were not taken in by Victor’s assurances that the intention had been simply to show the younger generation that the dance-drama had survived, despite not being staged for a long time.

Witchcraft and vengeance

In their Sunday sermons, Catholic priests always choose exegeses from the Bible that exalt a life of sacrifice. But beyond the official discourse of the Catholic Church, Achis position themselves in the world through re-elaborating myths that give meaning to their lives. An example of this is the creation myth in which Jesus avoids becoming a victim of the Maya Wise Men’s witchcraft (he ignores them) (chapter 3). During and after la violencia, these stories enabled many religious-minded people to
explain the persecutions and killings of community leaders and then whole communities.

Local words used to refer to witchcraft include [zebralal (to make evil), bruvar, hacer brujo, maléfico, hechizo (to practice witchcraft) and mal hecho (evil thoughts thrown into the air). Witchcraft is a means of taking secret revenge on people towards whom one feels envy, jealousy, hate, and ‘bad feelings’; it is a deliberate act which is believed to cause its victims genuine harm. The secrecy of the deed means that people fear awakening others’ ‘bad feelings’ and hence being exposed to witchcraft. Thus witchcraft operates as an explanatory frame for potential or actual misfortunes.

People who perform witchcraft are known as ajq’ itz (the evil one). Their identity is kept secret, but people know where to find one if they want to. Achis say there are witches among the principales pasados (past principals) of the cofradías who work as abogados: such men know how to call and address the spirits. Two abogados were identified to me as witches because they had abused other mayordomos’ women during cofradia festivities and were considered evil. The evil ajq’ itz is opposed to the good abogado, the ajq’ mes (healer) and ajq’ ii (diviner).

Vicious forms of witchcraft against musicians include secretly ruining their musical instruments. Esteban Uanché told me that there are still many witches in the neighbouring town of Cubulco; one of them is a fellow marimba repairer named Raymundo, who ruined a marimba that Esteban had taken to him to tune because he had been unable to repair it himself.

He has done [witchcraft] to me. Some time ago I had a marimba and we were rehearsing the Costeño dance in Palimonix hamlet. I realised that one of the keys was not tuned properly so we played the music, jumping that key. The next day I took the marimba to Raymundo in Cubulco to repair the key. When I arrived I asked him to fix the key, and you know what this man did? He planed

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82. *Mal hecho* different from other forms of witchcraft in that it is neither deliberate nor directional.

83. *Ajq’ mes* cure through prayers, which may be combined with the use of medicinal plants. *Ajq’ ii* also heal with prayers and plants and are also diviners who can also identify witchcraft.

84. What follows is a brief reconstruction of Esteban’s account of the affair.
all the keyboard and when I returned to test it, neither the *sones* nor the *Costeño* dance could be played, only the *piezas* and one or two *sones* like the *Zacualpa* and the *Mixito Marcado*. I was furious so I only gave him 4 quetzales (then equivalent to US$4) because I had not asked him to tune the whole keyboard. But what could I do? I returned with the marimba on horse back at one o'clock and by four I arrived home. That night I tried to play again and nothing, it was worse! It sounded like knocking on a piece of wood board. That man Raymundo had done *brújo* because I had not paid for his work because I did not ask him to plane all the keyboard. I was very sad, crying. The marimba had cost me 80 quetzales and now I had nothing. I wanted to burn it, to get rid of it once and for all but my wife did not allow me to do so. As you know we have our patron [an *aq’ítz*] in Cimayac Mazatenango. They are *chingones* (excellent) at carrying out witchcraft there. Then we wrote a letter to him and sent it. I was desperate, but in two weeks we got a letter back saying that I should not worry, he was going to get the voice of Huehuetenango [a town famous for making good marimbas] for my marimba. I only needed to send 40 quetzales to do a mass, to make a devotion (to pray with candles), a responsory and a *novena*. He said that I should not worry because what they had done to the marimba was to tune-up in B flat. The following day I played the marimba and it sounded beautifully. But I did not like it anymore. The marimba is like a woman and it seemed as if it had been raped so I did not want it knowing that someone else had already abused her. I decided to sell it to Gaspar, the marimba merchant from Huehuetenango. In the end Gaspar sold it to Raymundo from Cubulco.

As Evans Pritchard (1967:25) explains, “the attribution of misfortune to witchcraft does not exclude what we call its real causes but is superimposed on them and gives to social events their moral value.” Esteban knew that the reason some of the *son* repertoire did not sound properly was because Raymundo had planed the keyboard, although he did not know the technical details of changing the tuning by that procedure. Instead he thought the change in sound was due to an angry Raymundo’s revenge for not receiving proper payment. It was not until Esteban received a written response from the *aq’ítz* from Mazatenango and read his words of power and authority that he started to hear that the marimba sounded better — although in a different key.

A similar connection is made when a musician falls ill: it is believed that someone who wants to harm to a particular musician causes his drinks to be poisoned. The *atol* or *chilate* (corn based gruel) or *trago* (sugar cane spirits) given to musicians during festivities may be laced with something deadly. A case of witchcraft by poisoning was related to me by Maria, violinist Magdaleno Xitumul's wife. She claimed that her father was poisoned and killed because people were maliciously envious of him for being a musician.
This case reveals not only the conflict arising out of envy for musicians but the conflictive relationship between the Evangelicals and Customary Catholics within families. Maria told me:

My father died because he played [music], they poisoned him [because of this]. He played the violin and they killed him because of that. Back then my father was living with my evangelical brother in town and people were constantly begging him to play for them. On one occasion, he went out to play and he says that their first stop was the cemetery where they went to bring the souls of the dead; it was only a 40-day celebration. When they returned to the house he said they were waiting for him with a tasty looking gourd, filled with atol and cacao (corn beverage containing cocoa). Because he was thirsty he took it and drank it, but soon discovered that it did not go down [well]. He felt like his heart, his stomach was full. So he went out of the house to vomit it all up, but not everything came out. The atol came out but the poison remained inside.

My father did not tell us anything, he only said he was dying. Then he told me that somebody had given him something to drink, he did not tell us [before] because of my brother. My brother gets angry and scolds us. He used to say to my father: “Why are you going out to play? Leave all that nonsense [referring to the musical performances of catholic custom]. You go to play but when you get sick the money you earn will not be enough to cure you.”

Perhaps the exposure to the potential harm during every social occasion where musicians perform contributes to their obsession about fulfilling their obligations with both the living and the dead. Believing they have behaved in the proper way according to their special role gives them a sense of protection (see section on the moral economy in chapter 9).

FRIENDSHIP

In this situation, the daily cultivation of ‘friendship’ – musicians’ political strategies to prevent social conflict, expand their social networks and gain greater access to and control over music production/consumption while blocking others’ access to these advantages – is a crucial survival technique. Musicians then, not only have to create and maintain friendships among themselves but also with the people they serve.

Acting respectfully is essential to procuring friendship: generating confidence in the social interaction is best achieved through being courteous and reliable in all
commitments and other dealings among the musicians concerned and with the people who hire them and those who listen to them. Again, the family is considered the best model as relationships within them – at least among male family members – are based on trust and respect, which is why the marimba should be taught/learnt within the family. The important principle of hierarchy and a concomitant respect for seniority within the family is duplicated in both the learning process and performance. Yet despite the cultural emphasis on the respect due to elders and their knowledge, an overly hierarchical relationship (where seniority means authoritarianism) can lead to the failure of an ensemble. The treble-leader has to approach his centre and bass players, including mozoz, with modesty and humility, as though he is asking a favour and looking for their companionship. This is a general social rule among adults, and contrasts strongly with the behaviour meted out to boys. Tono Cajbón was not the only impatient father who mistreated his sons to such an extent they lost interest in playing with him. Nevertheless it was Tono who told me that ‘friendship is everything’. I was looking for a marimba to buy at the time:

There is a marimba in Chiticoy hamlet. Julio Oxlaj just bought it in March this year, but he is selling it because he could not find compañia (friends; musical companions). He could not find compañia because friendship is everything. If he does not have friendship, he will not have compañia. If you have friends you can go wherever.

A lack of respect for the principle of seniority can have the same result: in two cases, fathers left the family group because they could not bear the loss of authority resulting from being taught the latest piezas by their sons.

The creation of trust and respect are of the utmost importance at rehearsals when musicians from outside the household, especially mozoz, share the intimate life of the marimba owner: his family might gossip about them, which would have a negative impact on the owner’s opinions of them. Celestino and Bernabé temporarily stopped playing with Mincho Torres because he accused Bernabé (who like Celestino is married with children) of courting one of his daughters; he even went so far as telling Bernabé

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85. For the treatment of female family members, see chapter 6.

86. Children below the age of 12 are not believed to be able to think and so parents hit them to make them learn. (Chapter 5).
that a member of his family had seen the couple together in the fields. Bernabé flatly
denied the accusation and he and Celestino promptly left the group.

Friendships among young men, whether related or not, facilitate the conditions
of trust and sociability essential to sharing the cost of buying a marimba and invest the
time to learn to play. Marcelo Ixpata told me:

I learnt when I was twenty-two. I became interested in playing because my
friends pushed me to learn. They said, “Play, man, play; it is easy to learn.” That
was in the hamlet of Nimacabaj; I learnt to play there. I have friends there and
in Xococ.

But for Bonifacio Jerónimo’s father, joining a marimba ensemble was an excuse
to socialise and get drunk among friends:

My father tried to play, he bought a marimba with two other friends, they were
kin, but not brothers, and so they gathered to play and play but they developed
the vice of drinking while playing, so they were learning more to drink! My
grandfather did not like it and admonished my father, then he decided it was
better to stop playing.

Friendship (networking) gives musicians access to contracts and thus increases
their opportunities to play. Musicians are keen to point out that they have friends (social
contacts) all over the place. Success is measured by enumerating all the different places
where they have played; the inclusion of remote hamlets and villages is taken to
indicate that their reputation extends far and wide. Musicians often say, “We have been
all over Rabinal municipality”, by which most musicians mean those settlements which
correspond to their sense of community. Only a few son marimbistas and members of
conjunto ensembles whose reputation extends beyond Rabinal mentioned performing in
nearby municipalities such as Ladino-dominated Cubulco or predominantly Ladino El
Chol and Granados.

ACHI-LADINO RELATIONS

The common Achi assertion that the marimba was the creation of the ancestors
should be understood as a metaphorical statement describing the instruments'
acceptance in Rabinal’s ritual life. As I have shown (chapter 5), the marimba was first introduced into the municipality one hundred years ago and was primarily played by Indians for Ladino social occasions, moving slowly into the Achi social sphere.

In fact, the marimba only became widely accepted for Achi religious celebrations in the 1950s. The changes instituted by Arbenz’ reformist government – the abolition of the old labour laws, the institution of a minimum wage – meant that many Achís had small amounts of money to spend. Some invested in marimbas; others went to the cantina, where Ladino cantineros hosted zarabandas to attract business. Several new cantinas were opened in the early 1950s.

The second impetus for change came from an unexpected quarter: the Ladino mayor. In 1951, municipal mayor and teacher Mario Valdizon, together with a group of teachers from Rabinal, tried to boost civic education and culture within a nationalist frame. Knowing the enthusiasm with which Indians celebrated anniversaries of the dead and recognising the impact of the recently introduced marimba on these events, Mario and his friends decided to inculcate civic virtues by organising the same kind of celebration for the anniversaries of the Revolution (20 October) and Independence (14-15 September). To enforce marimbistas’ co-operation, the municipal authorities decreed that marimba ensembles could only play in the cemetery for the celebrations of the dead (1-2 November) after obtaining a licence from the municipality. This licence was exclusively granted to those groups agreeing to play in the plaza on the national holidays, performing for 12 hours on each occasion, free of charge. This much-resented decision actually gave Rabinal’s nascent marimba tradition a large boost.

Musicians performing in the plaza during national holidays are fully aware that it is an unrewarded but necessary obligation to the municipality that they must fulfil in order to obtain access to the cemetery during the festivities of the souls and saints (1 and 2 November). During national holidays marimba music serves as background music for the public who stroll in the plaza, watching the schools’ military parade and sports competitions taking place in the town’s main streets.

Two years later in 1953, Mario Valdizon put his observation to his own use and opened what became Rabinal’s most famous cantina, El Motagua, just off the plaza. Until 1981, two marimbas were hired for zarabandas.
The alliance between Rabinal’s teachers and the municipal authorities continues to the present. They are still trying to determine the practice of the marimba tradition and attempting to manipulate, adjust, and adapt the Indian community’s conventional symbols and meanings to serve as a symbol of national unity. They are party to the State’s systematic exploitation of the socio-political power of the musical tradition, which is achieved mainly through its ideological institutions for education and culture and geared towards the hegemonic interests of the powerful elite. Ladino and Indian teachers in Rabinal with self-serving political interests promote Indian folklore as part of a national identity and as the cultural heritage offered by Indians to their fellow countrymen. They have, for example, occasionally taken both *son* and *pieza marimbistas* to perform at folklore festivals in Salamá, Cobán, and Guatemala City.

Participating in these folklore festivals is ambiguous and problematic for musicians. One the one hand, ‘friendship’ (patronage) with these teachers gives musicians prestige and legitimates their playing; on the other, the price musicians pay for this is submission to the odious manipulation of the Ladiños who organise these regional cultural events for their own political and economic ends. To add insult to injury, marimba music is portrayed as a Ladino tradition.²⁸

Well-known musicians are also hired by ladinoized Indians and Ladiños to give credibility to the events they sponsor. For instance, during the 1995 election campaign, local Ladino political campaign managers hired Rabinal’s most respected *son marimbistas* to play for them. Almost every political party used *son* marimba music to identify their political agenda with Indian tradition and to suggest that both shared the same ideological interests. Hiring the best Indian musicians was also intended to imply that the political party was the best too. Election time is also the only time (outside periods of political unrest) that Ladiños show any interest in marimbistas’ many friends and extended social network. They relied on these friends and fans to come and listen to the music of the marimba which was set up by the entrance to the political party’s offices (sometimes outside, sometimes just inside the door). Party workers expected to

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²⁸ There is some truth in this, as the marimba is not an indigenous instrument; however, if it had not been adopted and adapted by the Indian population, there would be no marimba tradition. See chapter 5.
be able to invite the people attracted by the marimba music into their office, give them a promotional talk, and sign them up.

The party whose policies came closest to Indians' interests so far as I could see was the *Comité Cívico de Mejoramiento Municipal* (Civic Committee for Municipal Improvement); it expressed an unusual amount of social sympathy but lacked political and economic power. It too hired *marimbistas*, but of the kind that likes to play for *devoción*, which can also be read as playing for poor people. The choice of these *marimbistas* was not simply dictated by lack of funds; it was a rejection of those *marimbistas* who gain their prestige by playing for 'wealthy' Ladinos and a statement that their *marimbistas* played for everyone.

During these elections, I travelled to Cubulco with Esteban Uanché. Walking down the main street, we heard marimba music emanating from the PAN (National Advancement Party) stand. "Hey, listen, that's my marimba," exclaimed Esteban, who dashed in to make enquiries. He greeted everyone present, hand by hand, and then asked if they knew who was playing.

"I don't know, but I think the tape comes from Rabinal."
"Well, yes, it's me playing."

Esteban then asked who had supplied the tape and appeared satisfied with the answer. As we continued on our way, Esteban remarked, without hiding his pride, "Everyone here knows me." Although he remained suspicious about the tape's origins, he was extremely pleased to know that a powerful party in Cubulco – a musically respected town – was using his music to attract people. He was equally happy that he had proved to me just how famous he was. I could not tell him that these Ladino politicians were unlikely to know that *son* styles vary from *municipio* to *municipio*, let alone understand what these differences represent. In fact, it was highly incorrect politically to play the marimba style of Rabinal in the land of prestigious Cubulco musicians.

**Ladino patronage**

Economic, social, and political power in Rabinal is generally in the hands of ladinoized Indian merchants, teachers, and town Ladinos generally. The Achi
population regard them as the ‘other’ part of Rabinalense society because their cultural and social interests are different from their own, an attitude which reinforces the gap between them. Because of the power Ladinos hold, Indians try to bridge the social distance between them by forming ‘friendships’ in order to obtain benefits from those with more power, thus empowering themselves through this identification (Tumin 1952).

In search of profit, prestige, and a higher status, musicians certainly identify with Ladinos and their power. The prestige gained from performing for Ladinos has its greatest currency among Achis. Most musicians who play for Ladinos actually revere their own cultural heritage. They do not want to become Ladinos; they merely want the benefits that accrue from their power.

Musicians who enjoy the prestige of having Ladino clients would never substitute them for their Indian clientele; it is the latter that provides them with their main source of contracts. It is simply that playing for Ladinos gives them higher status and recognition as good players; this in turn provides them and their playing styles with authority over other musicians, and they thus become the de facto representatives of – and often the innovators within – Rabinal’s marimba music tradition. From the Ladino perspective, playing for Ladino celebrations grants Indian musicians a special place as representatives of the Indian tradition which absorbs and encompasses a popular repertory and is their festivities’ source of joy. There are very few instances in which Indian knowledge and tradition exert such definite power in a Ladino context and where Ladinos, sometimes grudgingly, have no alternative to accept their skill, central role and power over the celebration.

With the requisite air of modesty but nevertheless making sure I understood that his group played for Ladinos, Julián Ordoñez told me how Indians wearing caites (the Indian sandal) responded overcoming the Ladinos' despising attitude towards Indians. They did this through endurance, playing throughout the celebration while the audience got blind drunk.

Somewhere in Chol, we went to play and one of them [a fat man] told me, “This is the Indian who is going to play here.” He said, since he was already drunk, “These are caitudos (wearing caites - a derogatory reference to Indians) I know
them, those who come to play.” Ha! son of a ..., I thought. Then the companion of the man who was talking came and embraced him [in order to overwhelm him] and said, “Look here, Alpidio, stop talking, he’s caitudo but you never know. You are full of yourself, but this caitudo is going to trash you later, remember,” he said. “Balls,” said the fat man. By nine o’clock people started to dance. Ah! the fat man was thrown on the floor and there he lay once and for all. Where was all that he was talking about? He couldn’t even hear what we did [played] anymore. Well.

Julián adopted a subordinate, humble, and controlled posture when recounting the derogatory remarks made by the Ladinos about Indians to indicate that he responded to their provocation without aggression. He modestly indicates the Ladinos’ preference for his group, their acknowledgement of and respect for his talent as a musician, and their acceptance and enjoyment of his music. He also demonstrates his greater strength compared to the Ladino. Through endurance, his humble and subordinate identity turns into an identity of the powerful, enhanced as a result of the consensus achieved by the Ladino public.

Ladinos’ general ignorance of son marimba music increases the prestige value of piezas so far as Indians are concerned. Some musicians cultivate relationships with Ladinos not just to expand their work opportunities but as a means of identifying with them; learning piezas to accommodate Ladino musical preferences makes musicians more versatile and is a form of social capital which gives them power and authority.

**The military**

Some musicians’ friendly relations with army officers, paramilitary police, military commissioners, and PAC chiefs initiated at the height of the political violence (1981-83) still give rise to suspicion, even though they were essential to both literal and economic survival at the time. The possession of an army-issued written safe-conduct not only spared musicians’ lives but also allowed them to move around to get contracts. This gave ‘approved’ musicians an advantage over others who for one reason or another could not or would not play; they were particularly advantaged compared to musicians from the remote mountain hamlets. Included under the rubric ai paq’ees’ (mountain people), hamlet dwellers fell victim to the phrase’s symbolic meaning, that is, someone who lives outside God’s realm and hence, by extension, a devil, a savage, pagan or a rebel. This association hampered mountain marimbistas’ attempts to secure
contracts, as people ran as fast as they could from anyone or anything the military considered subversive.

As the army banned social gatherings with marimba music at this time, contracts had to be approved by the military authorities. This frequently meant playing for the army. For example, a few weeks after the massacre of everyone [including marimbistas] in Rabinal’s plaza on Independence Day (15 September) 1982, the army co-opted marimba ensembles to play for twelve hours on market days (Thursdays and Sundays) to provide a faux sense of normality and encourage people to come out of their homes and shop. In return, these marimbistas were exempted from patrol duty.\(^89\)

Tono Cajbón was one of these privileged musicians:

When we settled in Rabinal after escaping from the massacre up there in Plan de Sanchez. The first gig we got was in the cofradía of San Jose. During the first day the judiciales (paramilitary police) came looking for us. They were following us again. But because I knew Don Lucas, the chief [military] commissioner, I rang him from the military headquarters and asked him to tell the soldiers and judiciales not to kill me because I was already fulfilling my obligation to perform in the town square, that is, my Sunday shift playing the marimba at the square every week. Yes, every Sunday I was forced to play there and that is why I am still alive. Otherwise ugh! I would be dead. I am friends with all the military commissioners and the chief, so they know me and that is why they gave me a safe-conduct, which they presented at the military headquarters and then they released me.

These safe-conducts retained their ability to bestow some of the army’s prestige and power on the holder long after they ceased to be necessary. It is only since the army itself lost some of its power and prestige that these pieces of paper lost their symbolic potency.

The general public responded to the position in which musicians found themselves with ambivalence. They envied musicians’ privileges, which were derived from their musical knowledge. They also saw them as the army’s allies and, as such, treated them with the same respect and distrust as they did the military. To the musicians who felt this identification this ambivalence produced a sense of power in

\(^{258}\) This mixture of privilege and compromise echoes the 16th and 17th century practice of exempting church musicians and singers from the taxes and community service imposed on the entire population (AGCA: A1.23.leg.1514, fol.64).
the same way that the people feel the protection and power of the military by wearing camouflage suits, army boots, or belt buckles made from bullets.

**CONCLUSION**

The local concept of ‘friendship’, which extends to and overlaps with patronage and protection, permeates this chapter as it does the musician’s world. However the concept is defined – and Achiis define it in terms of family attitudes and feelings of respect and trust – friendship has gained increasing importance in the aftermath of la violencia as people regroup their families and social relationships in the face of (often huge) personal losses.

Friendship is particularly important for musicians whose position in the social structure has always been ambiguous. Whilst they are agriculturalists and migrant workers like virtually everyone else, their musicianship sets them apart. Musicians have always been envied by some simply because of their fortunate fate in receiving the special gift of musicianship from God; it is almost as though the concept of ‘limited good’ also applies to the destinies God can distribute among the living. Musicians need good social skills to manage their personal relationships to prevent the harmful effects of envy emanating from those who blame them for their less fortunate fate and who may therefore seek revenge. Their respect for and acknowledgement of other people’s needs is seen as an effective preventative measure in terms of avoiding envy and witchcraft.

People are also envious of musicians’ instrumental role in communication with the supernatural world and the fact that their music instigates the expression of emotions that are usually suppressed in everyday life. *Marimbistas* are particularly vulnerable to envy because, unlike other musicians, their music has a wider audience, outside the ritual context. This situation means that their personal behaviour and social relationships come under closer scrutiny than that of other Achi musicians. It also means that marimbistas’ ability to form the relationships so essential to the gaining of contracts with people outside the immediate community can and does come under suspicion. For example, some people still harbour resentment against marimbistas for
what they deem to have been a misuse of the very social and musical skills that enabled them to survive *la violencia*. This resentment is a complex phenomenon: it includes, for example, the fact that army-accredited *marimbistas* were excused from participation in the civil patrols and were therefore not forced to kill anyone.

Sociality and musical competence are, then, interrelated if not indivisible. Prestige is not simply vested in a musician's musical technique or in the breadth of his repertoire but depends on visible evidence of his social skills, namely, his ability to obtain contracts and his capacity and disposition to satisfy other participants' demands. The satisfaction of participants' intentions and desires extends from the performance of daily social interaction to the musical performance and from the social interaction in musical performance to performance in daily life.

Friendship understood as musical patronage emerges in full force in the conflictive context of Indian Ladino relationships. I have shown how Achi marimbistas look for friendship within the Ladino population as a way of gaining power and legitimacy as prestigious and competent musicians especially within their own social/ethnic group. Without a doubt they also value the respect and recognition gained from Ladeinos in the process for with this not only comes a greater sense of self-affirmation and safety, but also the hope of additional contracts.
Chapter 11

Conclusion

"Who am I to know better than the ancestors?"

For the Rabinalense Achi, the *son* marimba music tradition is the ancient tradition of the ancestors which goes back to the dawning of the sun and the beginning of the World of Light (the introduction of Christianity). In fact, the municipality's marimba tradition is a twentieth century phenomenon.

Drawing on historical sources, life histories, myths and rites, this thesis has endeavoured to shed light on the emergence, diffusion, adoption and transmission of an oral musical tradition that is locally understood as a way of maintaining the world; the knowledge which transmitted through this means comes from the ancestors. “We cannot do anything more or create anything different from that which already exists,” said Juan Manuel Jerónimo. “Who am I to know better than the ancestors?” Musician Eligio Gonzalez was even more explicit:

Everything we are doing now was already done before by the Lord, it was done by the Mayans. We are not doing anything other than that which God left for us, than that which was left by God. We cannot make anything just like that. Not us, not even the United States [can].

‘Maintaining the world’ becomes even more important during periods of rapid and sometimes extremely violent change. Continuity is provided by the belief in the dead, which is the heart of Customary Catholicism. Past generations of Achis have passed down *el costumbre* (the custom or tradition) which ‘allows the world to continue’, so long as subsequent generations continue to perpetuate its practice. For the Rabinalense Achi, *son* music and prayers ‘open the path’ to communication with God and the omnipresent ancestors (who include Jesus, the saints, the spirit owners of the world, and the dead). Men whose God-given fate is to be musicians or *abogados*
(prayer leaders) have the life long burden of guiding ritual activity with their offerings of prayers and music. Enacting and re-enacting the deeds of the ancestors 'helps make tradition'; this pleases the ancestors who, as a gesture of the good will thus generated between the living and the dead, assist the living with their appeals to God.

Colonial and national authorities have a long history of trying to suppress or at least reduce the number of Indian celebrations on the grounds that they were a major cause of social disorder (and especially sexual license) and contributed both to Indian poverty and their reluctance to work. One of the difficulties facing the authorities was that these celebrations largely took place within the framework of the cofradia system, which they had themselves introduced as a means of encouraging Indians to celebrate the festivities of the Catholic ritual calendar. Another difficulty was the conflict between central and local authorities for the control of the Indian labour force and commercial businesses. This led to ambiguous policies, such as the central authorities’ ban on the sale of alcohol to Indians at the very time that local authorities were establishing cantinas to sell it to them. Thus on the one hand, celebrations were being prohibited and on the other, local business interests were encouraging them for commercial reasons. These opposed positions are reflected in the Achi’s moral ideology, which differentiates between the positive connotations of male music making and female nurturance and the negative connotations of male drinking and female sexuality. These associations identify women with the Marian or demonic voices of the marimba; they are both the living carriers of Mayan tradition and the cause of men’s selfishness, loss of will, failure, and death. This latter association legitimises an ideology of male domination within the social world, both within ritual and everyday life. Female sexuality is still seen as potentially disruptive to social life. Yet there are limits to this: self-interested behaviour is more commonly associated with Ladinos, who are seen as being devoid of community values and therefore evil.

Music is a metaphor for women, just as women can be a metaphor for music. Both the son and the marimba have a common origin in the cofradia celebrations and zarabandas (son music for dancing) of the colonial era. The central authorities’

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90 Two aspects of Achi life should be considered here: firstly, music making is a male prerogative (chapter 5); secondly, each gender projects its own sexual beliefs on to the other (chapter 6).
numerous attempts to control the former and ban the latter have been internalised in terms of the positive and negative associations of womankind.

In the last forty years the *cofradias* and its *cargo* system have gradually lost their role as the main institution through which Achis gain status, prestige, political and religious influence and justify individual economic differentiation. Victor Tum, an elderly *abogado*, once told me that Protestantism\(^1\) and school education were the two main forces that were 'finishing off the Achi race.' Victor believes that religious conversions and a Spanish-language, Ladino oriented education were the most tangible ideological reasons for people's reluctance to speak Achi or to 'make the service of God' (hold a *cofradia cargo*). So far as he is concerned, neither the economic repercussions of the generalised capitalist market economy nor the political violence is directly responsible for the decline of the *cofradia*, because these events were beyond people's control. These events have influenced participation in and economic support of *cofradia* ritual activity, resulting in reduced and simplified celebrations; religious belief seems unchanged. Anniversaries of the dead are not in decline at all -- or at least not during the time when Rabinalenses were living with the exhumations of clandestine graves. *Abogados* and musicians were in constant demand, celebrating the fourteenth and final celebrations for relatives who had been assassinated or disappeared during the violence. During this period, *son* music, played on marimba and by violin and *adufe* ensembles, played their customary religious role adapting to especial circumstances of mourning during the celebration of collective anniversaries of the dead.

Most of the Achis' politically conscious leaders supported the organisation of these collective celebrations for exhumed massacre victims. Belief in the dead, which is central to Achi identity, was brought to the forefront of political action. It occurred to me that even if the *cofradias* are in decline, there will continue to be demand for the services of *son* musicians and *abogados* to maintain the world and keep the dead within it through the celebration of anniversaries of the dead and other rituals.

The simplification of ritual practice has also affected the variety of instrumental ensembles and repertoires, resulting in an increasing emphasis on the marimba. For

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\(^1\) In Rabinal, Catholic Action never directly opposed the *cofradia system*.  

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instance, the reluctance of the younger generation to learn the ‘little music’ of the violin and *adufe* suggests that this ensemble could disappear. The marimba is already playing alongside this ensemble in invocations of the dead (though not yet in front of the altar), and allegedly playing the same *sones* for the souls. It has also taken over its position as the music of choice for *zarabandas*, weddings, modern dance-dramas and, more importantly, in the cemetery on the Day of the Dead.

Performance of Rabinal’s rich dance-drama repertoire has also been simplified and reduced. Nowadays, only a handful are performed, although the most popular one (*El Costeño*) is staged by several groups simultaneously at virtually every *cofradia* fiesta. The marimba is now the most popular instrument for this genre and it is also proving to be the means through which the urban popular music (*piezas*) associated with Ladinos is infiltrating the musical tradition.

This situation echoes the introduction of the marimba to ritual practice around fifty years ago. The new music and styles of dancing are popular with the dancers who, with a few exceptions are boys and young unmarried men to whom *piezas* represent sophistication and knowledge of the outside world – just as the marimba was thirty years ago. Nevertheless, the roles they perform, the choreography they follow, and the iconography of their costumes are all part of the oral tradition of *el costumbre*. This merger of new trends with traditional dance-drama forms and ritual practice allows the rising male generation to learn and participate in *el costumbre* whilst enjoying themselves and without losing face by being associated with the old fogies of the Catholic Customary world. It gives them a protagonistic role in social and religious events without the need for much knowledge or skill (at least in the minor roles) and without having to participate in the economically onerous *cargo* system. Participation is attractive to boys and youths as it provides personal benefits, providing a platform for social interaction and a means of gaining admiration and prestige; for the young participants, the dance-dramas’ religious function is a secondary consideration. Nevertheless, for children and young people, dance-drama functions as a playful, dynamic and creative link with the ways of the ancestors; drawing the younger
generations of men into the *cofradia*. As dance director Domingo Alvarado told me, "without dances there is no *cofradia*."

The introduction of *pieza* music into ritual practice is, on an ideological level, quite revolutionary. *Pieza* music is associated with Ladinos and interpreted within the framework of the conflictive dynamic of Ladino power and Indian subordination. Thus on the one hand, the music is associated with Ladinos' lack of (Achi) social values and on the other it is seen as a source of empowerment that stems from an identification of *piezas* with urban Ladino power. This does not necessarily indicate aspiring to a Ladino identity; these days, being Indian has acquired greater positive value - even a Ladino taxi driver in the capital refer to Guatemala as 'GuateMaya'! Rather, this empowerment can be considered a form of appropriation – since *piezas* are produced by Achi musicians for both fellow Achis and Ladinos – invested with connotations of power-challenging. At the same time, musicians hope to meet the expectations of the majority, especially the older Achi generations and the dead –beginning with the recent dead, who heard the music during their time on earth!

That so many people (including the dead) are familiar with *piezas* is largely due to technological modernisation. For example, feeding the 'green revolution' with fertilisers and pesticides assured modern dependency on waged work and commodities and hence increased population movement, with many people heading to the cities where they heard *pieza* music while they worked. For others, the introduction of transistor radios and cassette recorders brought *pieza* music to their communities.

These and other forces of social and cultural change have provoked significant changes in the Achi musical tradition. Within a decade of the introduction of radios and cassette, the political violence of the early 1980s wiped out almost an entire generation of *marimbistas* in Rabinal; with them went some of the older *sones*. Perhaps this gave an added impetus to the current, almost compulsive practice of taping music, whether live or from the radio; there is almost a hunger for music. The death and destruction of the time has certainly led to changes in teaching/learning methods, with many young men learning from the radio and tapes. These and other changes in teaching/learning

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92 According to conventional wisdom, however, "if people stop believing in the *cofradia*, they will stop believing in dances."
methods, the innovations within the tradition, and the incorporation and adaptation of new instruments (such as the marimba de pieza or the marimba conjunto), styles and repertoires into Rabinal's ritual life indicates that musical change is not only welcomed but rapidly assimilated into the sacred realm of exchange between the living and the dead. In other words, it is interpreted within the framework of what is still the most important source of Achi identity, the belief in the dead. By bringing the innovation within this framework, continuity is assured.

Modernisation and the incorporation of the marimba and its son and pieza repertoire into the ritual life of Achi people has proved not to result in westernisation but in a syncretism which has adapted and appropriated new instruments, repertoires and styles and transformed them into what Achi people believe is an ancestral tradition. Once accepted, these new cultural elements are deemed to have existed since the beginning of the world of light. In other words, meanings are ascribed according to pre-existing concepts.

For decades anthropological studies in Guatemala have been concerned with ethnicity and cultural change (Watanabe u.m.). For example, anthropologists (e.g., Adams 1959) once believed that, as a consequence of the rapid and violent modernisation of Guatemala during the mid-twentieth century, the nineteenth century dream of ladinoizing (assimilating) and integrating Indian societies into the western ways of the national Ladino society was finally taking place. Discreet changes in clothing and language were seen by social scientists as major cultural indicators and interpreted as a tendency towards loss of Mayan identity. Whilst the massive population movement to the major cities, particularly the capital, during the 1980s might seem to support this view, the current analysis of the indigenous marimba music tradition indicates that change is not necessarily a precursor to loss of identity.

Indeed, the contemporary emergence of a pan-Mayan cultural movement and the increasing protagonism of Mayan leaders in the national political arena contradict the prognosis. Adams (1994) has retracted his linear view of social evolution and, realising that despite 'civilization', the ladinoization of Indian identity is not taking place, now proposes the co-evolution of Ladino and Indian cultures. Other anthropologists (e.g., Warren 1992 [1978], 1993; Watanabe 1994 [1992], u.m.; Wilson
1995) have also attempted to explain the revitalisation of ethnic movements and the continuity of Mayan identity within the context of deep and rapid and social changes. Warren (1992 [1978]) has studied the endurance of Maya ethnic ideology in the contemporary Kaq’chikel concepts concerning Ladino domination. Wilson (1995) has documented the new attitudes of Q’eqchi’ urban catechists who have revitalised ancient myths and turned them into political and cultural symbols of Q’eqchi’ ethnic identity. The symbols they utilised in their struggles against the traditional power structures of Customary Catholicism in the 1970s have now been re-oriented to support the search for a unified Q’eqchi’ identity in opposition to Ladino society.

Among the Achi, as for most Mayan groups, identity is based on descent and hence social and material change in the conditions of musical production must continue to please the musical taste of the ancestors, which is portrayed as being static and unchanging. It may be argues that the musical changes analysed here do not amount to a change of musical system; rather they are adaptations to new material and social circumstances. This is because the musical strategies continue to be framed within the paradigms of ancestry and of a conflictive bi-ethnic society.

The argument that musical communication is not reduced to the moment of musical performance but, rather, extends to the social performance between the participants, including the musicians and audience relationship, in daily life interaction, springs from Achi’s pervasive preoccupation in their discourse with making friends. Friendship (and/or patronage) is essential to maintaining a good image and hence gaining contracts; it is also vital in order to avoid gossip, envy and witchcraft. Musicians’ views about their own music include what other people say about them and their musical practice; in other words, their views include the views of the community as audience and their evaluation of musicians’ behaviour as members of the community with certain rights and obligations. This argument goes beyond the analysis of musical performances. Although contextual analysis is essential to that approach, it is limited to the musical performance itself. It also goes beyond Feld’s idea of musical communication, which is limited to the context where music is heard.

One of the main contributions of this thesis has been the development of Achi concepts of music into a theoretical proposition for the anthropological study of music
as part of social processes – and not its relationship with social processes. From this point of view music-making, or more precisely, social interaction in musical performance, is only a stage of the social relationships of musical production.

Photograph No.14: Flying "souls" over Cemetery
GLOSSARY

Abogado. Advocate, Prayer maker; also called cabezante or devocionista (head or leader and devotion maker). When prayer makers lead a cofradia ritual he is called teniente (lieutenant); he is called padrino (godfather) or tz’onowel’ (petition maker) when praying at weddings and anniversaries of the dead.

Adufe. Square drum, called tupe in Achi language.

Alegria. All Rabinalense social musical occasions.

Animas. Souls or spirits of the dead.


Cabo de año (end of year). Anniversary of the dead. Achi people commemorate the death of their family members. A series of commemorations which help the souls of deceased family members rest in peace take place seven or nine days and forty days after death has occurred. Subsequent commemorations occur on the first, seventh and fourteenth anniversaries of the death. After the fourteenth-anniversary relative’s obligations to the dead cease.

Cadence. Close; melodic or harmonic progression which leads to the ending of a phrase or musical piece.

Calvario. (Calvary). Chapel of the Lord of mercy built at the entrance of the main cemetery situated at the West end of town and facing east towards the entrance of the main church in town. It is mainly used by prayer-makers on Mondays when they pray for the souls of the dead.

Canción Ranchera. Mexican country songs.

Chord. Three or more pitches played simultaneously.

Chromatic scale. A scale which includes the twelve different pitches in an octave. The distance between each adjacent pitch is of a semitone.

Chromatic marimba. A marimba built with a chromatic scale keyboard.

Coda. Tail; ending melodic phrase or cadence.

Cofradia. In Latin America the cofradías are sodalities or brotherhoods which take care of the saints including the organisation of their festivities. There are 16 Indigenous cofradías in Rabinal.

Colear. To follow; in marimba music the harmony or centre player and the bass player follow the leading part of the treble player.
**Conjunto marimba.** An ensemble formed by a pieza marimba for four players, a double bass and a drum set. The conjunto marimba plays all the urban popular repertoire. A few conjunto marimba ensembles have a chromatic marimba instead of a diatonic pieza marimba.

**Contradanza** (contredanse). A ballroom dance of the late 18C. and first half of the 19C. The structure has two parts. Each part has an eight-measure theme which repeats with variations including different endings. The dancers form two lines, one in front of the other. Each dancer takes his turn and turns alternate between the two lines. Each dancer makes the same figures crossing to the other line. This piece is the theme played in the Costeño dance-drama.

**Corrido.** (1) A popular musical piece of the pieza genre. It is derived from the polka dance music of the border between Mexico and the United States. (2) A style of playing the bass voice of the marimba consisting of playing a chord simultaneously with both hands.

**Costeño.** The favourite traditional dance-drama of Rabinal. It is danced to the marimba music.

**Counterpoint.** The combination of two or more melodies played at the same time.

**Cuchubal.** Partnership in a task or business.

**Cumbia.** A popular Afro-Caribbean dance music piece considered a pieza in Rabinal. It originates in Colombia.

**Danza.** An 18C dance piece called danza de la muerte (death dance) played in the Animalitos dance-drama. It is a bolero dance in triple metre, with an ABABBA structure.

**Diatonic scale.** A major or minor scale comprised of seven different pitches out of the twelve pitches in an octave. The pitches are arranged at intervals or distances between adjacent pitches of whole tones and semitones. The son marimba is always tuned in a major scale. The seven pitches or notes of a major scale are arranged in the following pattern of intervals: tone, tone, semitone, tone, tone, tone, semitone; i.e. C major: do, re, mi, fa sol, la, ti, (do).

**Dominant.** Fifth position of a note or pitch in a major or minor scale. In tonality each position has a function in relation to the other pitch positions. Chords rooted in the note which occupies the fifth-degree or position of the scale are called Dominant chords.

**Double Marimba.** A set of two marimbas, a large one called the marimba grande for four players and a smaller one called tenor for three players. Both marimbas have chromatic scale keyboards and can therefore be used to play any musical piece composed in more than one key or tonality.

**Dueño.** Spirit owner of the world, and of all things on earth.
**Encadenarse.** An error in musical performance which happens when the bass and/or the middle marimba musicians play behind and not simultaneously with the treble player as it is expected.

**Guaracha.** A popular dance music considered part of the *pieza* genre in Rabinal. This was originally Puerto Rican and Cuban dance music.

**Intensity.** Loudness of a sound.

**Interval.** The distance between two pitches or the sound frequency difference between two pitches which may be measured in a number of whole tones and semitones.

**Jalar.** To pull; as a musical term this refers to the treble player 's leading a marimba ensemble; the complementary response to this is the *colear* or following by the remaining two players.

**Ladino.** Non Indian, or person who does not follow the Indian tradition.

**Mestizo.** Equivalent to *Ladino*.

**Marcado.** A style of playing the bass part of the marimba. As an *arpeggio* or as a melodic formula, alternating hands.

**Mediant.** The third position of a pitch in a minor or major scale. In tonality each position has a function in relation to the other pitch positions. Chords rooted in the note which occupies the third-degree or position of the scale are called Mediant chords.

**Merengue.** A popular dance music piece considered a *pieza* in Rabinal. This originated in the Dominican republic.

**Metre.** The pattern in which a steady succession of rhythmic pulses is organised.

**Modulation.** A change from one key or tonality to another key.

**Mozo.** A contracted worker. A marimba *mozo* is an individual with experience and knowledge of the musical repertory who offers his services for an event to marimba owners missing a player.

**Octave.** Interval between two pitches with the same pitch name; i.e. from C to C'. The distance or frequency difference between the two pitches is a 1:2 ratio.

**Parallel movement.** Simultaneous movement of two parts in the same direction keeping the same interval between the two.

**Pasillo.** A popular dance music piece of the *pieza* genre.

**Pieza.** A term used by Achi Rabinalenses to refer to all popular urban music as a genre.

**Pieza Marimba.** A diatonic marimba used for the repertoire of *piezas*. It has 42 keys arranged in a diatonic scale and is played by four musicians.
Ritardando. To diminish the speed of playing.

Section. Part of a musical piece. In son music these are 8 measure melodic themes. According to its musical form the son may have two, three or four parts, strophes or sections.

Simple marimba. A diatonic marimba with 40 keys for three players in the case of the son marimba or 42 keys for three or four players in the case of the pieza marimba which is also used for the conjunto marimba ensembles.

Siuanaba. A female evil spirit who appears before drunken men, especially young men, who have a strong sexual desire for women other than their wife, partner or bride. She is the devil or the death disguised as a beautiful woman. She lures men into their death.

Son. A traditional dance-music genre which is believed to be the music of the ancestors. It may be played by different types of musical ensembles but the largest repertoire of sones is played on the diatonic marimba at a moderate to rapid tempo combining elements of compound duple and simple triple metres. The form has two to four 8 measure sections which repeat in different order.

Son de dos baquetas (two mallet son). A type of son classified according to the number of mallets used by the middle player who carries the harmony on the son marimba. The middle player may use two, three or four mallets depending on the complexity of the harmony, accordingly there are two, three and four mallet sones.

Son con cera (Son with wax). A type of son played in the key adjacent to the original key of the diatonic marimba. Musicians place little balls of wax under the keys of the seventh degree of the diatonic scale keyboard of the diatonic marimba. This device lowers the pitch of the keys where the wax balls are place by approximately half a tone thereby changing the keyboard scale to a neighbour tonality, e.g. C to F major. Sones sin cera (Sones without wax) are all those sones played in the original key of the diatonic marimba.

Son Marimba. A diatonic marimba used for the repertoire of sones. It has 40 keys arranged in a diatonic scale and is played by three musicians.

Strophe. Used as an equivalent for section or part of a musical piece.

Subdominant. Fourth position of a note or pitch in a major or minor scale. In tonality each position has a function in relation to the other pitch positions. Chords rooted in the note which occupy this position in the scale are subdominant chords.

Syncopation. Accentuation of a weak rather than a strong beat.

Tempo. Time; the speed at which music is performed.

Tiple. Marimba treble player or position.
**Tonality.** According to *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*, in Western music this refers to the organised relationships of tones with reference to a definite centre, the tonic, and generally to a scale of which the tonic is the principal tone. The system of tonality comprehends 12 major and 12 minor scales.

**Tonic.** First position or “key-note” of a major or minor scale. In tonality each position has a function in relation to the other pitch positions. Chords rooted in the note which occupy this position in the scale are tonic chords.

**Tremolo.** A fast and continuous reiteration of a single pitch or of an alternation between two or more pitches.

**Tupe.** Square drum called *adufe* in Spanish. The *tupe* and the violin form an ensemble.

**Vuelta.** Musical term with multiple meanings. It may refer to the ornamentation of a melody, to a section, strophe or part of the piece, to a variation, chorus or repetition of a section, or to an improvisatory style.

**Zarabanda.** Sarabande; In contemporary Rabinal this refers to a social gathering where people drink and dance to the *son* marimba.
## Appendix 1: **COFRADÍAS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COFRADÍAS IN DESCENDING ORDER OF IMPORTANCE</th>
<th>PAIRED WITH IMAGE/COFRADÍA OF:</th>
<th>'BIG DAY' CELEBRATED ON:</th>
<th>OTHER FORMATION/EVENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 <em>Divinio Sacramento del altar,</em> also known as <em>Ajaw</em> (lord, sun)</td>
<td><em>Virgen del Sacramento,</em> also known as <em>Ixoc Ajaw</em> (female lord)</td>
<td><em>Corpus Cristi:</em> a Thursday between 23 May and 25 June</td>
<td><em>Corpus Chisti</em> marks the start of the ritual year and is its most important festival. The third general wake of the year and procession of the saints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 <em>Virgen del Rosario</em></td>
<td><em>San José</em></td>
<td>7 October</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 <em>San Pablo,</em> the patron saint of Rabinal - resides in the centre of town in the church.</td>
<td>His 'older' brother, <em>San Pedro Apostol,</em> patron of the SE quarter of Rabinal</td>
<td>25 January (the Conversion of St Paul)</td>
<td>The burden of this <em>cofradía</em> rotates through the four quarters. Cattle fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 <em>Virgen de la Natividad</em></td>
<td>The image of the child Jesus (the <em>cofradía</em> of the Dulce Nombre de Jesus)</td>
<td>The image of the child Jesus (the <em>cofradía</em> of the Dulce Nombre de Jesus)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 <em>Santa Cruz</em></td>
<td><em>Ixoc</em> (woman) <em>Elena</em> (the <em>cofradía</em> of <em>Elena de la Cruz</em>)</td>
<td>3 May</td>
<td>This is the only image with <em>cofradías</em> with mayordomos in each hamlet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 <em>San Pedro Apostol,</em> patron of the SE quarter of Rabinal</td>
<td>His 'younger' brother, <em>San Pablo,</em> the patron saint of Rabinal</td>
<td>29 June (the Festival of <em>San Pedro</em> and <em>San Pablo</em>)</td>
<td>The second most important of Rabinal's <em>cofradía.</em> As the older brother of <em>San Pablo</em> he is considered very important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 <em>Santo Domingo,</em> patron of the SW quarter of Rabinal</td>
<td>A smaller image of <em>Santo Domingo,</em> which is kept in the <em>cofradía</em> house</td>
<td>4 August</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 <em>San Sebastián,</em> patron of the NW quarter of Rabinal</td>
<td>A smaller image of <em>San Sebastián,</em> which is kept in the <em>cofradía</em> house</td>
<td>17 January</td>
<td>The first of the year's general wakes and saints' processions (the second is at Easter involving all four quarters’ <em>cofradías.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 <em>San Pedro Martires,</em> patron of Rabinal’s NE quarter</td>
<td>A smaller image of <em>San Pedro Martires,</em> kept in the <em>cofradía</em> house</td>
<td>29 April</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>San Miguel Arcángel</td>
<td>mythically paired with the fallen angel Satanás.</td>
<td>29 September</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>San José</td>
<td>The Virgin of the Rosario</td>
<td>19 March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>San Jacinto</td>
<td>The image of the Virgin of Tránsito</td>
<td>15 August (the Assumption of the Virgin Mary) and 17 August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>San Francisco, also known as the cofradía de las Ánimas</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>San Francisco, also known as the cofradía de las Ánima</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Elena de la Santa Cruz, also known as Ixoc Elena</td>
<td>The Image of the Holy Cross</td>
<td>3 May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>The Virgin del Sacramento, also known as Ixoc Ajaw (female lord)</td>
<td>The image of Corpus Christi or the Sacramento of the altar; Ajaw (lord)</td>
<td>Corpus Christi a Thursday between 23 May and 25 June.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Dulce nombre de Jesús o Child of the Nativity.</td>
<td>Cofradía of the Virgin of la Natividad</td>
<td>15 January</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix 2

**MUSICAL ENSEMBLES, REPERTOIRE AND OCCASION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MUSICAL ENSEMBLES</th>
<th>REPERTOIRE</th>
<th>OCCASION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Violin and adufe (square drum or tune)</strong></td>
<td><em>Sones de cofradia</em></td>
<td>Up to the first decades of the 20C the <em>sones de cofradia</em> for the violin and adufe were played for prayers and zarabandas in <em>cofradias</em> and life crisis rituals. Today these <em>sones</em> are only played for anniversaries of the dead.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sones of the Chicomudo (mute dance) - <em>sones</em> for the beginning and the ending of the dance and the <em>sones</em> for each character are included in all dances.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mainly played and danced for the <em>cofradias</em> of <em>Corpus Cristi</em> and <em>Santa Cruz</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Little flute and big drum</strong></td>
<td><em>Sones de cofradia</em> where the <em>toques de procesión</em> (beats for processions) called <em>sepiva</em> are included.</td>
<td>These are played during all celebrations of <em>cofradias</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sones of the San Jorge dance.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Performed during the <em>cofradias</em> of <em>Corpus Cristi</em>, <em>Santa Cruz</em>, and <em>Virgen del Carmen</em> in Xococ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sones of La Princesa dance.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Performed during the <em>cofradias</em> of <em>Corpus Cristi</em> and <em>Santa Cruz</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sones of the Moros Tamorlán dance.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Performed for the dance during the <em>cofradia</em> of <em>San Sebastian</em>, <em>San Pablo</em> and <em>San Pedro Apostol</em>. These <em>sones</em> are also performed for other ritual activities during all the celebrations of <em>cofradias</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sones of the Moros Conversión.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>This has not been performed lately...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shawm and big drum</strong></td>
<td><em>Sones of La Conquista</em></td>
<td>Performed in the central square during the Ladino <em>cofradia</em> of the <em>Virgen del Patrocinio</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sones of the Cortés dance.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Performed during the <em>cofradia</em> of <em>San Pablo</em>. It has not been performed lately.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sones of the San Pablo dance, also called <em>Nima Xajoj</em> (big dance)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Performed during the <em>cofradia</em> of <em>San Pedro Apostol</em>. It has not been performed lately.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shawm and tum (slit drum)</strong></td>
<td><em>Sones of the Charamiyex</em> (deaf elder dance).</td>
<td>Performed during Carnival, at the beginning of Lent. It has not been performed lately.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Little flute and tum</strong></td>
<td><em>Sones of the Kiej</em> (deer) dance.</td>
<td>Performed during the <em>cofradia</em> of <em>San Pablo</em>, <em>San Pedro Apostol</em> and <em>Corpus Cristi</em>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Little flute, little tum, and singing

*Sones* of the Balam Kiej (jaguar-deer) dance. Performed during the *cofradia* of San Pedro Apostol.

Drum

Toque (beats) of the Patzka dance. Played during the procession of Corpus Cristi.

Pipe and tabor

*Sones* of the Negritos (Black Men or Four Wise Kings) dance, including the *sones* to collect contributions and to ask permission for shelter (Mary at the inn).

*Sonsof the Corrido del niño* (the visit of baby Jesus). Performed during Christmas in the streets and private houses.

Two trumpets and big tum

*Sones* of the Rabinal Achi dance, also called Xaïoj Tum (dance of the drum). Performed during the *cofradia* of San Pablo.

Two trumpets

Toques (fanfares) of procession, annunciation and courtesy. Played during the processions every Friday of Lent and Holy week.

*Marimba sencilla de pieza*, bass and drum set

*Sones* of the *cofradia*. Played during all celebrations of *cofradias*.

*Marimba sencilla de pieza*, bass and drum set

*Piezas* for the Animalitos (little animals) dance. Includes a very old contredanse.

*Piezas* for the Diablistos (devils) dance. Includes an old contredanse (the same as that played in the Animalitos dance).

*Piezas* for the Marineros (sailors) dance. Includes the same contredanse.

For various occasions. It has not been performed in years.

*Piezas* for Las Flores (the flowers) dance. Performed during the *cofradia* of the Virgin of Patrocinio.

*Piezas* for the Patzka moderno also called Dance of the Towns (The Ordoñez family version). Can be performed for any of the celebrations of the 16 *cofradias*, and other occasions.

*Piezas* for the Dance of the Towns (Valdizón family version).

*Piezas*. All the *pieza* repertoire. Performed during Christmas eve.

*Sones* of the Costeño (Coast) dance. The Costeño dance is the most popular
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument/Ensemble</th>
<th>Musical Composition</th>
<th>Performance Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chromatic marimba, double bass and choir</td>
<td>Piezas for the Moro Español (Spanish Moor) dance.</td>
<td>Dance and it is performed on celebrations of cofradías and other occasions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Piezas for the Sotomayor dance (a modified Spanish version of the Charamiyex dance).</td>
<td>Performed in the cofradía of San Pedro Apostol. It has not been performed lately.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sones and Piezas.</td>
<td>For different occasions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guitar, accordion, double bass and choir</td>
<td>Piezas for the hymns and sung praises.</td>
<td>Played during evangelical religious services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duo singing, violin and adufe</td>
<td>Son Costa Cobán or rebix son adufe</td>
<td>Performed to bid farewell the souls of the dead at the end of the festivities commanding them to dance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choir</td>
<td>Chant Santo Dios.</td>
<td>Chanted at the end of the Mystery prayers whenever these are performed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3

MUSICAL TRANSCRIPTIONS

KEY

The transcriptions only represent the main notes and rhythms that could be clearly recognized from the field recordings.

Letters in a circle indicate section.

Letters underneath the staff between measures indicate the chord progression.

Chord indicated only by its Tonic.

Tremolo in different speeds.

Return to sign
1. Four mallet marimba son: *Entrada*
2. Three mallet marimba son: Costa Chiquita
SON COSTA CHIQUITA

D. C. (with variations on the melody from Bar 20 to G. W.)
3. Two mallet marimba son: San Pablo
4. Marimba pieza: Contradanza
5. Marimba pieza: Danza de la Muerte

DANZA DE LA MUERTE

Music notation image
Appendix 4

DANCE-DRAMAS

Dance-dramas in Guatemala are ritual plays (with or without dialogues produced from memory or written texts) with dance and music interludes. They are organised by Indians and Ladinos to celebrate the main festivities dedicated to Jesus, the saints, and virgins of towns throughout Guatemala.

A group of boys, youngsters and old people¹ wear masks and costumes to represent a story, or a farce. Each character is identified by its costume, mask, dramatic role accompanied by a particular *son* or *pieza* music. The stories represent Rabinalense historical, mythical and legendary past and farces of everyday life situations. Alternatively they are mockeries of Rabinalense myths and legends where common sense is reversed resulting in absurd actions and dialogues and provoking great laughter and hence good entertainment for the spectators.

I registered 24 different dance-dramas in Rabinal out of which only 15 have been performed in the last decade. Each dance-drama is performed in a particular *cofradia* festivity. Most dance-dramas may be performed during the festivities of: *Corpus Christi, Santa Cruz, San Pedro Apostol, San Pablo* and on Christmas.

The following are synopses of three of the important and popular dance-dramas mentioned in the main text of the thesis. The first is a 16C. Indian account of the preHispanic Achi history, the other two are very popular 19C. *loa* plays (short religious theatrical piece praising the virgin Mary; see Correa y Cannon 1958) written in Spanish. The dancing in both of the *loa* plays is organised in 2 *cuadrillas* (quadrilles; groups of dancers) of 6 dancers each, making six couples all together. Musically speaking these dance-dramas are important because they preserve *Contradanza* and *Danza* musical pieces from the 18C. or early 19C revealing the influence of ballroom dances on the Indian and Ladino dance-drama traditions.

¹ In a few dances, like the *Rabinal Achi* and in the *Moros Tamorlán*, women take the part of the princess.
Synopsis of the Xajoj Tum or Rabinal Achi dance-drama:

The Rabinal-Achi is considered the only early Colonial dance-drama in Guatemala which has survived in both written and oral traditions. The written text of the dance-drama was discovered in late 1855 by the French abbot Charles E. Brasseur de Bourbourg. He transcribed it from the Achi language oral dictation by Bartolo Sis, an Achi elder who was in charge of keeping the text of the dance-drama.

The music of the dance-drama are sones and altos (fanfares) played by an ensemble of two trumpet players called “alto”(treble) or first and a “bajo”(bass) or second, and a percussionist with a big idiophone or “slit-drum” called tum.

The oral text is faithful to the written text of the Rabinal Achi dance-drama which is a local literary version of the political and military inter-ethnic conflicts in the Baja Verapáz region which occurred during the end of the 15C and beginning of the 16C, shortly before the arrival of the Spanish rule. The story relates how the great warrior of the K’iche’ empire attacked the Rabinalense fortress of Cajuy, destroyed several towns and kidnapped Job Toj, the sovereign of the Rabinalense. The great warrior Rabinal Achi rescued his sovereign and caught the K’iche’ Achi warrior. The two warriors have a repetitive and long dialogue exchanging words of admiration for each others deeds, and explicating the motives behind the conflict between the two parties. The Rabinal Achi warrior presents the captive before his sovereign. During a trial the captive is offered the choice between sparing his life with the condition of subordination to the Rabinal sovereign and sacrifice. The K’iche’ Achi warrior opts to be sacrificed, but makes a series of requests first: to fight against the Rabinalense Eagle and Jaguar warriors, to eat, drink and dress the best of the wares of Rabinal people; to dance to the music of the Tum with a young woman, the mother of the green birds. She represents a political alliance of the Rabinalense court with the Q’eqchi’ people of Carcha and Cobán who had control of the access to the Maya
lowland and its resources. His final wish was to bid farewell his own K'iche' land. After complying with his petitions the captive is sacrificed.

**Synopsis of the Costeño (Coast man) dance-drama:**

The *Costeño* dance-drama is an early 19C. representation of a “bull type” dance-drama composed by Felipe Galiego (Mace 1981). The story represents the encounter of two groups of merchants who meet in an Inn “posada” during the festivities of one of the saints of the town. The Ladino group bring cattle to sell and the Indian group who come from the Pacific coast sell *cacao* (*cacao* seeds from which cocoa and chocolate are prepared). The owner of the Inn and his wife receive them and invite them to join the celebration. Both groups exchange their products, pay their respects to the virgin and then organise a *toreada* (bull fight).

The story relates a common commercial practice between merchants of the highlands and the Pacific coast which began during Colonial times, from the 18C. and lasted until the early 20C. Indians from the coast grew *cacao* trees and even hired highland Indians to work on their plantations. During this long period Indians traded *cacao* for other commodities sold by Ladino merchants in the highlands (Alejos 1992). The encounter at the Inn, the organisation of a bull-fight and the participation of all the merchants including the owner of the Inn and especially his wife has important parallels with the organisation of *zarabandas*. Here merchants arriving from outside towns participated in the religious festivities of the towns drinking and dancing with local women.

The *Costeño* whose musical ensemble comprises the *pieza* marimba played by three musicians, is the favourite dance-drama of contemporary Rabinal. The reasons for its popularity are the fact that it is a short dance which is easy to learn, it occurs in

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2 There are several studies about the written text of the *Rabinal Achi* dance-drama, the most relevant are Acuña (1975); Breton (1994); Cardoza y Aragón transl. (1985); Mace (1967; 1981); Monterde (1979). Other studies about this dance-drama as an oral tradition and its performance are: Navarrete (1994); Rodriguez (1962); Sacor, Alvarez and Anleu (1991).
the Spanish language and has a happy and fast tempo marimba son and a contradanza theme (see transcript in appendix 3); it allows dancers to display their abilities as good dancers and has a bull-fight scene where the bull actually chases each of the dancers. The chase of the woman carries sexual connotations which delight the public in and therein lies its strongest appeal.

Synopsis of the Animalitos (little Animals) dance-drama:

The Animalitos loa is also a very popular dance-drama. The story tells how the Lion King of the animals discovers that the bull is organising an army against him. When the king confronts the bull, he reveals that the object of his army is not to fight him but to celebrate the Virgin Mary. After this scene both the king and bull’s group join to celebrate the Virgin.

The musical ensemble is a conjunto marimba including a pieza marimba, with four players a double bass and a drum set. Most of the music played in this dance-drama are popular cumbias and corridos. It also includes a slow dance piece called “danza de la muerte” (dance of death; musical transcriptions in appendix 3), which the squirrel dances with its particular slow dance step. The marimba musician Celestino defined the dance as slow bolero like music (see musical transcriptions in appendix 3). This dance piece and the contradanza piece are valuable examples of the early 19C. musical influence of the ballroom dance on the popular dance-dramas of rural Indian and Ladino populations.
Archival Sources:

AGCA: Archivo General de Centroamerica.
AHA: Archivo Historico de Arquidiocesano "Francisco de Paula Garcia Pelaez."
APR: Archivo Parroquial de Rabinal.

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Arias, Arturo,

Armas, Lara Marcial

Arnauld, Marie-Charlotte

Arrivillaga Cortés, Alfonso

Baily, John

Barry, Tom

Bartók, Béla

Basso, Ellen B.

Bateson, Gregory
Bauman, Richard


Bauman, Max

Becker, Judith

Béhague, Gerard


Berger, Peter

Bertrand, Michel

Bierhorst, John

Blacking John


Bloch, Maurice

Bloch, Maurice and Johnathan Parry

Blum, Stephen, Philip V. Bohlman and Daniel M. Neuman (eds.)

Bode, Barbara

Boilés, Charles L.


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ORTHOGRAPHY

The orthography of the Achi language used in the thesis is that suggested by Antonio López a linguistic authority in Rabinal. Except for the signs (aa, ee, ii, oo, uu), this alphabet coincides with that used by Alain Breton (1994) in his major work of transcription, edition and interpretation of the Rabinal Achi dance-drama text. Breton simplified the signs used in the most important historical vocabularies, dictionaries and grammars of K'iche' and Kaq'chikel' language.

The alphabet has 32 signs or phonemes which are:

' (apostroph or glottal stop), a, aa, b, ch, ch', e, ee, i, ii, j, k, k', l, m, n, o, oo, p, q, q'
r, s, t, t', tz, tz', u, uu, w, x, y.

Most signs have the same pronunciation as in Spanish. Double vowels are slight prolongations of the vowel sound. In linguistic terminology the following signs are considered:

ch' Glottal palatal fricative
k' Glottal velar
q' Glottal uvular
t' Glottal alveolar
tz' Glottal fricative alveolar
x fricative (sounds like “sh” in English e.g. shine)