

Anthropologist as Anti-Christ: Positioning and Reciprocity in San Miguel Acatán, Guatemala

Timothy B. Jafek

The accusation by some villagers that I was an Anti-Christ provides an opportunity to reflect on the production of anthropological knowledge. The production of knowledge by anthropologists must not only take into account the personal characteristics of the anthropologist but also the ways in which the culture the anthropologist studies classifies that anthropologist, thereby making available to him or her certain ways of knowing. In my case, as an unmarried man with no visible means of economic support, I appeared similar to others, like Earthlords, and priests, who offered villagers Faustian bargains. The deals' dangers lay in the fact that the exchanges occurred outside of the moral and social frameworks which undergird the community. Thus, their accusation of me as antithetical to the community opens an opportunity to consider the nature of that community.

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I

In June 1996 I was accused of being an anti-Christ while doing anthropological fieldwork in San Miguel Acatán, a small Maya community in northwestern Guatemala. One afternoon María, the woman who ran the household where I lived, told me that as she walked home from her store that day to fix lunch for me and her family, a woman stopped her in the street. The woman asked María if I was staying with her and her family. When María told her that I was, the woman warned her that some people in the town were saying that I was an anti-Christ. In jest, María told her that if that were the case, she had better hurry home to fix my lunch so as not to anger me. María also told the woman that she should come up to the house some time to get some money out of the big chest of money that I had.

The accusation puzzled me. I considered myself a good Christian, and did not think that whatever faults I might have added up to being an anti-Christ. Curious, I made inquiries about the subject of anti-Christ. It turns out that in highland Guatemala there are a plethora of anti-Christ. In San Miguel Acatán these included various non-governmental organizations funded by European countries and the Guatemalan

government, human rights monitors sponsored by the United Nations, and the Pope. A few traits linked most of us accused of being anti-Christ. First, we were from outside the community; second, we were there, ostensibly, to "do good" at no cost to the migueleños; and third, most of us were adult males without spouses in the town.

This essay ponders why I and others were considered anti-Christ. Examining why we were categorized as such allows an examination of local systems of knowledge and morality. As I argue below, stories of anti-Christ and similar characters serve as commentaries on notions of exchange and reciprocity. The anti-Christ accusations also provide a way to reflect on the production of anthropological knowledge. What can my "positioning" as an anti-Christ by some migueleños tell us about the production of anthropological knowledge?

II

The role of the observer in the production of anthropological knowledge has historically been problematic. Early anthropologists argued that their observations were scientific, and thus superior to those of missionaries, government officials, travelers, and other groups of people who had close contact with "primitive" groups. Despite this claim to science, anthropology remained, for the most part, a *social* science. Anthropology is a social science in a special sense in that not only does it examine society, but the production of knowledge about society is fundamentally social. That is, the anthropologist engages in social relations with others to understand and eventually describe characteristics of other societies. The anthropologist is the instrument used to conduct research.

Renato Rosaldo argues that while certain problematics of the role of the anthropologist in the production of knowledge exist, legitimate knowledge can still be produced about other cultures. He states that, "If classic ethnography's vice was the slippage from the ideal of detachment to actual indifference, that of present-day reflexivity is the tendency for the self-absorbed Self to lose sight altogether of the culturally different Other" (1989:7). To avoid the pitfalls of the classic or hyper-reflexive positions, Rosaldo advocates recognizing the positionality of subjectivity. He illustrates this point by relating how the death of his wife, Michelle Rosaldo, helped him understand the rage that Ilongot headhunters felt at the death of loved ones. An Ilongot headhunter, when asked why he chops off others' head, replies that, "rage, born of grief, impels him to kill his fellow human beings.... The act of severing and tossing away the victim's head enables him, he says, to vent and, he hopes, throw away the anger of his bereavement" (1). Rosaldo attempted

to explain this common statement through various anthropological theories. He did not really understand the sentiment behind such a statement, though, until he was 'repositioned' by the rage he felt at the death of his wife. At that point he understood the truthfulness of the Ilongot statement and concluded that the emotions it conveyed had to be explained on their own terms.

Rosaldo focuses on the positioned subjectivity of the anthropological observer. The fact that most fieldworkers are young and have not experienced the devastating death of a loved one closes certain empathetic avenues of knowledge production to them. More widely, because of anthropology's embracing of what Rosaldo calls Weber's 'heroics of value-free inquiry', fieldworkers rarely use their own emotions as a means to create knowledge or consider how power differentials between themselves and their informants affect their fieldwork.

While Rosaldo's notion of positioned subjectivity represents a compelling way to think more carefully about the production of anthropological knowledge, it focuses too much on the anthropologist and not enough on the "other". Rosaldo argues that the characteristics the anthropologist brings to the field will affect what he or she observes and feels and will later lay the basis for his or her interpretation. Yet how the members of the other culture interact with and categorize the anthropological observer will also influence what he or she will be able to experience. As anthropologists are differentiated and thereby have special insights into certain experiences, other cultures are also differentiated and allow individuals access to certain experiences based on the characteristics of the individuals engaged in that culture, whether they are natives or anthropologists. In fieldwork, positioned anthropologists from a given (usually dominant) culture interact with positioned individuals from another culture within the context of that other culture that positions individuals according to certain characteristics. What Rosaldo terms "positioning" can be referred to as "classification". Rosaldo's discussion of positioning can be fruitfully considered within the rubric of classification, which refers to the organization of knowledge more generally. Rosaldo states, for example, that, "In discussing forms of social knowledge, both of analysts and of human actors, one must consider their social positions" (169). However, he tends to over-emphasize how the characteristics of the anthropologist affects the production of knowledge at the expense of how the culture the anthropologist works in classifies the him or her on the basis of those characteristics, and thereby limits the ways anthropological knowledge can be produced.

How the anthropologist is classified by another culture reveals certain elements of that culture. Anthropological knowledge is created through engagement. An important finding of Favret-Saadra was that "there is no neutral position with spoken words: in witchcraft words wage words. Anyone talking about it is a belligerent, the ethnographer like everyone else" (1980:10). Talk simultaneously produced witchcraft and knowledge of it. Cunningham's act of engagement also produced information about the suspicious and ambiguous nature of the Tucson Sanctuary community's relations with American society (1995). Finally, Stoller employs his "European-ness" to engage in the "horrific comedy" of Hauka spirit possession (1995). Through playing this role assigned to him, Stoller explores the significance of the Hauka's classification as Europeans. Like Stoller, I was classified by the "natives" in a particular way based on some of my characteristics. The rest of this essay will demonstrate that by considering how I was positioned by some *migueleños* as an anti-Christ, certain elements of the role of exchange and reciprocity in *migueleño* life can be described. It exemplifies how anthropological knowledge is produced dialectically at the edges of the self and other.

III

Given this discussion of the dialectical nature of the production of anthropological knowledge, I return to the question of why I was classified as an anti-Christ. First, it is important to note the characteristics I shared with others accused of being anti-Christ; namely that non-governmental and human-rights workers and I were primarily adult males from outside the community without spouses in town who were there to "do good" in the community at no cost to the *migueleños*. We represented outsiders who were there to give something for nothing. Second, *migueleños* folk stories narrate tales of similar characters, to which modern anti-Christ's can be compared.

Migueleño folklore has many stories about outsiders who ostensibly offer something for nothing. *Migueleños* call them *witz alkal*, "mayors of the mountains." *Witz alkal* are the local manifestations of Earthlords, a being common throughout the Maya world. They are generally light-skinned non-Indians who are rich in land, livestock, and money, who live inside the earth in caves or mountains. Earthlords make Faustian bargains with Mayas – those who bargain with Earthlords get rich in this world but serve the Earthlord eternally in some demeaning role in the next life (Watanabe 1990:141).

Accusations about the *witz alkal* in San Miguel fall into two categories – people who were thought to have had dealings with the *witz*

alkal and, in the special case of American priests, those who were thought to be witz alkal. The first classification is much more common. For example, Don Antil, who owned a store and, in the 1960's, was among the first migueleños to own a truck, was often accused of getting his money through deals with the witz alkal. When the guerrillas took over the town in 1980, they targeted him as one of the wealthiest migueleños and forced him to flee. The mayor of San Miguel from 1994 to 1996 was also accused of having dealings with the witz alkal. As evidence, people cited the fact that he owned several buses and did not even charge some people for rides. Two other men in the town were rumored to be sons of witz alkal. The men's mother, according to local lore, had been a lover of the witz alkal. They had light-colored skin, hair, and eyes. To me, they looked like albinos. Despite the fact that they were the sons of witz alkal, however, they were poor. Apparently the witz alkal's capriciousness extends to his children, as he neglected them. The two albino men's nicknames were 'saj xil' – 'white hair' – a nickname that I shared with them. I was independently given the nickname 'sk'al witz alkal' – son of the witz alkal – by other migueleños. So although I was sometimes considered genetically linked with the witz alkal, as far as I know only one group of people were accused of actually being witz alkal – the American Maryknoll priests who, in 1946, became the first priests assigned full-time to San Miguel (Jafek 1996).

The close similarities between the categories anti-Christ and witz alkal allow them to be analyzed together. In accusing me of being an anti-Christ, they accused me of being a witz alkal. The shift from one classification to another probably owes much to the introduction of evangelical Christianity, in both orthodox Catholic and non-Catholic variants. The descriptions given above show how the categories of anti-Christ and witz alkal resemble one another – both are wealthy non-Indian outsiders who seem to offer something for nothing. In the case of the witz alkal it is clear that accepting money from the witz alkal is an exchange – money in this life for one's soul in the next. The anti-Christ offers a similar exchange although the cost is not apparent. By noting the similarities between anti-Christ and witz alkal, however, one can conclude that the fear is that anti-Christ will exact a similar price.

IV

A consideration of how other anthropologists have examined Earthlords, a classification to which the witz-alkal belongs, and exchange relations can help explain why some migueleños thought of me as an anti-Christ. Taussig (1980) argues that Earthlords in pre-Conquest times represented an ambiguous relationship with nature mediated through

exchange. During the colonial and modern periods, however, the Earthlord became a thoroughly evil figure. Exchange with the Earthlord symbolically represents the alienating forms of exchange peasants are forced into in the capitalist system. As Taussig states, "With some regional variations, since the conquest the spirit owners [e.g., the Earthlords] have come to embody the contradiction that finds reciprocity coexisting with commodity exchange and exploitation by whites and mestizos, whom the Indians generally regard with hate, fear, and awe" (1980:183-4).

Watanabe (1990), in a review of Mayan beliefs, also describes Earthlords as beings who enact their immorality through unequal exchange relations. He does not consider Earthlords essentially evil, however. Instead, they are capricious and indifferent to the needs of Mayas, intervening in human affairs only when it serves their own interest. In this way, the Earthlords symbolically oppose the saints found at the center of Mayan towns, who are responsive to the pleas of townspeople and who do engage in morally balanced reciprocity with Mayas. Watanabe situates this moral opposition between saint and witz within the problematics of living a moral life within a small community.

In a sense, Watanabe refocuses Taussig's insight by considering how immoral exchange relations unaccountable to other community members, as represented by the Earthlord, problematize living in small communities. Thus, although one must consider how capitalist relations have penetrated communities and how communities are linked to larger capitalist order, analysis should focus on moral relations within the community. Watanabe's analysis is most useful for the purposes of this essay in that he convincingly argues that witz alkal and saints are symbolically opposed to one another in a complex of beliefs that are "in part constituted by, and thoroughly constitutive of, cultural conventions" of morality and exchange (1990:132).

With different emphases, Taussig and Watanabe discuss how Earthlords subvert exchange relations which undermine the basis of community. To understand how that happens, one must properly take one step back to consider how exchange forms community. Mauss argues that relationships between people are mediated through exchanged objects. As he observes, "Souls are mixed with things; things with souls. Lives are mingled together, and this is how, among persons and things so intermingled, each emerges from their own sphere and mixes together. This is precisely what contract and exchange are.... Sociologically, it is once again the mixture of things, values, contracts, and men which is so expressed" (1990:20,26) Exchange is a 'total social phenomena' which imposes three types of obligations on those who

participate – to give, to receive, and to reciprocate. These obligations are not purely material or economic and have wide-ranging consequences. In fact, systems of exchange ground morality and social organization. Thus for Mauss exchange plays an analogous role to religion for Durkheim – exchange is how society creates and symbolizes itself to itself. But Mauss's exchange is cotidian and can thus explain how society is constituted as an everyday event. Such an analysis allows for analysis of folktales and the like to explore notions of exchange in a community.

Earthlords and anti-Christ's pervert the system of exchange by participating in exchanges but by using unequal relations of power to enforce a reciprocity which harms the individuals and communities with whom they participate in exchange. As Nugent and Alonso state, "Reciprocity does not imply equality in the distribution of power" (1994:210) but in fact shapes the contours of power in society. Earthlords and anti-Christ's are "impervious to the moral suasions of reciprocity" (Wantanabee 1990: 142) and thereby dangerous to engage with in exchange. Moreover, the non-reciprocal exchanges which form the basis of relationships with Earthlords and anti-Christ's undermine the moral and social bases of community.

V

Stories of witz alkal and saints in San Miguel clearly outline the norms of reciprocal exchanges expected of moral migueleños. Mekel, a tailor in his nineties who recently arranged a match for himself with a 16 year old woman, told me the following story in 1995:

A woman sold xhekas [a type of bread] from village to village. One day she visited all of the villages but didn't sell all of her bread. As she returned to her house, she wondered why she hadn't been able to sell all of her bread. As she was wondering a man on horseback came up to her. She asked him if he wanted some xhekas. 'Maybe', he said, 'let's go see my boss [patrón]'. He was the son of the witz alkal 'How are we going to get there', the woman said. 'Close your eyes', he told her. She closed her eyes. Then he said, 'open your eyes'. When she opened her eyes she was inside the mountain [cerro]. There was a big man swinging on a hammock. 'What did you come for? Who is this lady?' 'It's a lady who sells bread and she wanted to know if you want to you'll buy her bread.' 'With pleasure.' The big man grabbed a shovel and pushed it in a sack of money. 'No, I only want the money for my bread', the lady said. So she only got the little bit of money for her bread and turned and walked away.

The woman came to a pig, who said, 'Comadre, what are you doing here?' 'No, I came here to sell bread.' 'Don't take anything from the man because if

you do you are going to end up where I am. Here they kill me every two days. Today they kill me and the day after tomorrow they kill me. Every two days I'm knifed.' Another pig came to her and said, 'Hello comadre. Don't take anything from the mountain if you don't want to end up here like us.'

The woman left. The two men [the witz alkal and his son] said to her, 'take a little bit of meat with you to eat on the way.' They wrapped it up in a cloth.

She was in on the way home when a child with whom she came said, 'Let's eat'. She took out the meat but only found money. They had given her the *pixan tumin* [heart or soul of money].

When the woman died she returned to the witz alkal [to live as a pig like her compadres].

The features of this story parallel those of Earthlords in other Mayan areas. The woman was coerced into participating in an exchange. Although at first it appeared that the exchange was reciprocal, in the end the woman paid with the her soul. The witz alkal enforced such an unfavorable exchange because he operated beyond the moral and physical bounds of the community. The fact that the exchange was conducted with money resonates with Taussig's argument that stories of Earthlords represent capitalist relations of exchange. It is of note, too, that the money came from a piece of meat, the heart of money. Meat is much more commonly produced by non-Indians. Its mode of production also threatens or at least does not participate in the wide range of reciprocal relationships necessary for the production of corn, the staple of Mayan diets. The reciprocal exchanges necessary for the production of corn will be discussed below. Animating the piece of meat that produces the money by calling it the heart of money also suggests the magical way that money reproduces itself in the capitalist system.

The fact that the witz alkal in this case deals with a woman deserves comment. Most bargainers with witz alkal are men, which makes sense since the witz alkal deals primarily with those involved in capitalist relations of exchange. This woman, however, is involved in economic activities unusual for her gender. Although selling in markets in one's own home town is a normal female behavior, traveling from one market to another to sell is a male economic activity. Selling from village to village, as opposed to town-to-town, also suggests that she was selling not in regular markets, which are held in towns on a scheduled basis but rather more informally, outside the bounds of male governmental authority. Traveling with only a child between villages marks her as somewhat anti-social. Speaking with the man on the trail also marks her

negatively - women and men who speak alone together are assumed to be involved in sexual relations. Thus her economic and social behavior signal her anomalous position vis-à-vis migueleño gender roles. These gender roles, as will be discussed below, ground elements of migueleño notions of reciprocal exchange.

I do not want to place too much emphasis on the gendered nature of this witz alkal story since, as I stated, males are the one who most often strike deals with the witz alkal. The gendered aspect of this tale, though, highlights the fact that most individuals who deal with the witz alkal are marginal to the community. The nature of their deal with the witz alkal confirms that - in getting something for nothing migueleños circumvent community sanctioned means of production which enmesh one in a range of reciprocal exchanges. The marginal position of those who deal with the witz alkal is confirmed by circular logic and overdetermination. By making gender a focus of the analysis, though, I want to show that gender must be considered when examining notions of exchange. This becomes more apparent in the examples below.

Accusations against American Maryknoll priests, who were assigned to San Miguel beginning in 1946, took a special form in that they were accused of actually being witz alkal. Religious traditionalists, the authors of these accusations, also claimed that the priest slept with the wives of the converts to orthodox Catholicism. Analysis of the form and reasons for these accusations reveal more fully the norms of reciprocal exchange in San Miguel.

On February 5, 1946 Father Al Smith, an American Maryknoller, rode his horse into town. He was the first priest ever to be assigned full-time to San Miguel. He brought with him his vestment case, clothing, softball bat, and a toilet seat. He was eager to start to work with his "thirty thousand red little Indians... [who] through no fault of their own are little more than baptized pagans" (Mission Diaries 1(4), Jan.-Feb.1946). Father Smith was one of the many Maryknollers who had begun to labor in Huehuetenango, reversing an ecclesiastical neglect going back at least until the Liberal Revolution of the 1870's. In 1940 there were only about 120 priests in all of Guatemala and only 3 in the department of Huehuetenango. The Maryknoll Order had been invited to Guatemala by President Ubico. The conservative Maryknoll order was searching for new missionary fields after China and Japan, their traditional sites of missionary work, were rapidly closing because of the Chinese Revolution and World War II (Fuller 1971)

Although Father Smith was given a warm welcome, it would not last. As one migueleño recalled, "When the first priest arrived the *alkal txa* [the head of the traditional religious hierarchy] welcomed him. But

after a little while passed they realized that what the North Americans did was a little different. And the North Americans realized that they [the alkal txá] were different, too." Father Smith convinced Juan P. Méndez, the mayor, and 2 of his 4 chief municipal officials to accept marriage, the key act of conversion to orthodox Catholicism. In all he performed 31 marriages – about 4 times as many as had been performed from 1918 to 1945. Father Smith left San Miguel after only about 10 months, though, before a serious backlash developed (Jafek 1996).

In late 1949 the Maryknollers established a permanent presence in town. By the middle of the 1950's they were well-established – building chapels in the surrounding villages, planning for a school, working with enthusiastic catequists, remodeling the church, and restricting the burning of candles inside of it, a key traditional ritual. It was this last exercise that served as a flashpoint for the complaints of the traditionalists. Father Scanlon began renovations to the church which, according to him, "looked like a barn – with its straw roof; dirt floor; black walls from the smoke of candles; collapsing balcony and altars within the church of mud and stone on which sat weird looking boxes within which were the statues, or santos, as the people called them, clothed in dirty rags" (Mission Diaries 1(6), Nov.1955). The dirt floor was paved with cement tile, the altar was raised, the walls painted, and a tin roof erected. With the new floor and painted walls the priests prohibited the burning of candles and incense, which traditionalists complained prevented them from worshipping San Miguel. The raising of the altar, some traditionalists complained, disturbed San Miguel's resting place, since it was carved from the tree where the patron saint first appeared to their ancestors. And the new tin roof upset traditionalists since they felt a straw roof was appropriate. As an orthodox Catholic recalled the complaints of the traditionalists, "and now they're taking the straw roof off San Miguel's house. We're Indians, and our patron is Indian. He's used to a rancho. He's used to straw. He doesn't want a nice house, because we're Indians. All Indians have a house, a rancho of straw. That's how our patron is. And that's how we are too. What, is San Miguel a gringo and wants a nice house?"

The traditionalists' accusations that the priests were witz alkal can be traced to personal characteristics and behavior. The priests physically resembled the witz alkal and acted like him, most notably in that they interfered with the migueleños' traditional reciprocal exchanges performed in the church. The priests were tall, light-complexioned, and very wealthy – just like witz alkal. Their wealth, moreover, did not come from working the land. Working the land is a key part of being a good migueleño in part because it engages one in a variety of reciprocal

relations of exchange. First, land is scarce in San Miguel and is therefore inherited from parents, primarily patrilineally. Parents only grant land as inheritance to children who fulfill their familial obligations based on reciprocal exchanges. Thus, from an ideal perspective, having land is evidence of proper moral behavior vis-à-vis one's parents as actualized in reciprocal exchange. Second, to work the land one must engage in a range of reciprocal relations of exchange. This is true particularly for labor. Most labor comes from one's own children. One might also call on other relatives such as brothers or sons-in-law. The son-in-law deserves special attention. In this case, the obligation for reciprocal exchange comes through an exchange of a woman, the daughter/wife. The father loses the right to control the labor of the woman and his son-in-law, therefore, incurs an obligation to make labor available to his father-in-law. This exchange can also be analyzed from the point of view of control of sexuality – the father cedes his right to control the sexuality of this daughter to his son-in-law. However, the son-in-law enters into a relationship of reciprocal exchange with his father-in-law. Third, in working the land one engages in reciprocal exchanges with the ancestors, who are considered the legitimate owners of the land. One must show respect to the ancestors to use the land. A key part of showing respect is maintaining *costumbre*, that is, the traditional religious forms which were established in ancient times when the ancestors and the saints were on the earth. Most rituals central to *costumbre* involve burning candles. Many of these rituals took place inside the church until the American priests prohibited burning candles inside the church.

The burning of candles was a key point of conflict. Candles are polysemous symbols within systems of reciprocal exchange in Mayan communities where they can be considered food for deceased souls (Collier 1975:91), lights to guide the ancestors in their otherworldly travels, food for saints, initiating elements of communication with saints and ancestors, and as signs of respect for continuing *costumbres* initiated by the ancestors. Candles can also serve as the materialization of reciprocal exchanges while indexing other systems of reciprocal relationships, as in Zinacantán, a Mayan community in Chiapas, where candles are thought to be 'tortillas' for the ancestors (Vogt 1976:50). Traditional corn production, as discussed above, necessarily involves multiple relations of reciprocity. Thus the burning of candles function as polysemic symbols whose meanings simultaneously index multiple systems of reciprocal exchange.

Traditionalist *migueleños* protested bitterly against the priests' prohibitions against burning candles in the church. Their resistance took

a variety of forms. Some defied the order outright but were dragged from the church by the sacristan. They sent a letter to the Guatemalan president requesting that he order the Archbishop of Guatemala to prevail on the priest to rescind his order against burning candles. The priest successfully argued, however, that his 'modernization' of the church was in the best interests of the community and the nation (Archivo Departamental, Expediente 800/miga). They tried to continue their ceremonies behind the priests' backs by keeping a key to the newly installed door of the church. The priests soon changed the locks, however. They also spread false rumors. For example, an anthropologist who did fieldwork in the town in 1958 reported that, "Stories were circulated that he [the priest] had cut off the head, hands, and feet of the patron of the village [San Miguel] and sent them to the United States. Then a mob gathered, a mob that was not in a gay, festive mood. When the leaders were shown the picture in perfect condition in the very sacristy, they were satisfied but unhappy" (Grollig 1959:154). The priests made small concessions to the traditionalists by building areas outside the church where candles could be burned without dirtying the renovated insides of the church. But their connections to local and national-level government officials allowed the priests to maintain their prohibition against burning candles in the church, thereby limiting an important means through which migueleños participated in reciprocal exchange with San Miguel and the ancestors.

The traditionalists also accused the priests of violating norms of hospitality, a moral norm rooted in notions of reciprocal exchange. The church was considered San Miguel's 'home'. The story of how San Miguel came to be the patron saint of the town has multiple variations but most of its essential points appear in the story below, collected by José Juan, a migueleño, in San Miguel Acatán in the late 1970's as part of a collection of texts he gathered for linguistic studies in the town:

The ancestors tell that San Miguel used to appear under a big bito tree. They say there was a big tree that was larger than the others. The ancestors wanted to take him to where there used to be a cross, a place called El Calvario. So they cut down the big bito tree under which he had been appearing. But the next day there he was again where they had cut it. So then they cut the bito tree again and they took it off to El Calvario. At dawn the bito tree was already back in its original place. San Miguel didn't want to live there, he stayed there with the bito tree.

One day a woman appeared to him at a spring. It used to be called the Bito Spring but now its called the Town Spring. That's where he was standing, at the source of the river. When the woman came to get water, she realized that

there was a man standing by the spring. She was startled and then was relieved as the man began to talk to her:

“Woman, I’m telling you to go and tell the old men not to cut down the bito tree where I am staying. Tell them to build me a house where the bito is. They mustn’t take me where the cross is. I want them to make a house out of that cross and they can make one for me. Tell them also that I am Miguel, that I am the owner of this land, that this land is going to become a town. Because my name is Miguel, it will be called San Miguel Ak’atan, because I am appearing near to you. That’s why it’s going to be called that. Now go and tell them everything I told you and have them do everything I said.”

The woman left to tell the old men all that San Miguel had said. They agreed and complied with everything they had been told. They built a house where the bito tree was. When the house was finished they chopped down the bito tree and fashioned it in the shape of San Miguel and they put it in the back of the house. That house is the church now.

And when the Ladino authorities found this out, they granted it the status of town... (Juan 1993:95).

Thus the church was San Miguel's home – built as the ancestors' part of the reciprocal exchange in which they built a home for San Miguel in return for him becoming their patron saint. The terms of this reciprocal exchange are partially described by the norm of hospitality – San Miguel contacted the ancestors and they, as moral people, listened to him and responded to him as was appropriate for a being of his stature. They built him a home, which serves as a physical location which anchors the idea and practice of hospitality. The ancestors' relations with San Miguel also established the basis for *costumbre*. Thus the church, as San Miguel's home and the site for important *costumbre*, powerfully indexed the norms of hospitality and reciprocal exchange more generally.

The priests violated those norms and impeded the ability of traditionalists to continue reciprocal exchanges with San Miguel and the ancestors through candles. Criticisms of the priests often refer to hospitality. For example, when I discussed with 1995's *alkal txa* the relations between the priests and traditionalists during this period of intense conflict, he asked me how I would feel if my house were knocked down. He was referring to the fact that the priests, as part of the renovations to the church, raised the altar, which, according to some traditionalists, was the actual tree, still standing in its original place, where San Miguel appeared to the ancestors. (Note that in this traditionalist version the tree where San Miguel appeared was never cut down but became the altar, in contrast to the version quoted in which the

tree was cut down and carved into an image of San Miguel.) The priests chopped down San Miguel's 'bed'. What could be a more blatant violation of one's home? Instead of serving as custodians of San Miguel's house, the priests made the church a center for an orthodox form of Catholicism that depended on priestly power to function. In short, they put themselves as priests at the center of a universal form of Catholicism, marginalizing the traditionalist form of religious practice that put San Miguel at the center of a local system.

After having attempted and failed with a variety of schemes to outmaneuver the priests, some traditionalists made a dramatic and drastic move in about May 1959 – they announced that San Miguel had appeared in the village of Chimbán, a village about two kilometers from the town center. The form of the account of San Miguel's flight to Chimbán highlights the issue of hospitality. According to the story, San Miguel could no longer stand the rosaries and the priest. He appeared at the house of Juan José as a humble traveler. One migueleño's account continues from there:

One afternoon he [San Miguel] came and asked for posada [hospitality offered to travelers. And they told him that he could, that he could stay there. 'Then I'll stay here,' he said, San Miguel the Archangel... They said to him, 'Yes, you can stay. If you want tortillas, there's food.' No, I don't want to eat, I'm full,' they say that he said. 'OK.' He stayed. He came like a person. He came poor, poor. And in the morning, when they want to go see him, the next day, there was San Miguel the Archangel with his sword, they say. And a lot of people heard about it – from Todos Santos, from Soloma, from San Juan, from San Antonio, from San Marcos, from Jacaltenango [nearby towns]. They came to cry with the saint, they say. Even I went that time.

The audacity of the traditionalists' claim that San Miguel fled to Chimbán cannot be overemphasized. The saint's presence in the church in the town center grounded the townspeople's moral and even political constructions of community. The narrative attacks the moral legitimacy of the town by suggesting that whereas the orthodox Catholics in the town were unprepared to give San Miguel the proper hospitality he deserved, the traditionalists were. They fulfilled their traditional obligations to grant posada to a traveler who, in this case, turned out to be the patron saint.

The flight of San Miguel to Chimbán underlines how norms of reciprocal exchange are used in contests over legitimacy. It also reveals the role of gender in the operation of reciprocal exchange. San Miguel the humble traveler was offered coffee and tortillas by Juan José. Men, however, do not make coffee or tortillas. Juan José's reciprocal exchange with San Miguel depended on the ability to control female labor.

Men's control of females and their labor lays the basis of other forms of reciprocal exchange in San Miguel. I discussed above how men incur obligations of labor to their father-in-laws by virtue of the exchange of the daughter. Even the San Miguel's establishment in the town and the establishment of *costumbre* depended on women being intermediaries between the men and San Miguel. As in other parts of the world, men establish relationships with other men through women (Levi-Strauss 1967).

The charge by traditionalists that priests slept with the women of the converts to orthodox Catholicism depends for its sting on the role of women in reciprocal exchange between men. If the priest were to engage in sexual relations with local women, he would frustrate systems of reciprocal exchange which regulate female sexuality and labor. If the priest was seducing women, as the traditionalists charged, they would no longer depend on their husbands for economic support nor could their husband deploy their labor and sexuality in systems of exchange which were central to the men's world. The removal of women from the system of reciprocal exchange could cause the system to collapse. Perhaps this concern underlies the anxiety felt in many Mayan communities, as revealed in folktales, about priests' sexuality (Sexton 1992).

The civil status of the priest signifies another impediment to his participation in the system of reciprocal exchange. He has no wife or daughters whose labor and sexuality he can control.

The priests' marginal relationship to the system of reciprocal exchange in regards to female sexuality and labor point to the broader problem of his relationship to the local system of reciprocal exchange in general. The priest is an outsider whose considerable power does not depend on local sources. His power exists outside of the morally circumscribed local community. He has few economic, political, or moral needs for which he needs to engage in exchange with townspeople. Thus townspeople always become indebted to him when they must call on him for essential services, such as baptism and other religious rituals. Yet since his power is extra-local, they have no way to control the manner in which reciprocation might be demanded. In essence orthodox Catholicism introduced a marginal character to the center of religious practice and belief of the community. The priests replaced San Miguel, with whom *migueleños* could engage in reciprocal exchange on equal terms within a locally bounded community in terms of morality and power. Thus, in terms of moral danger created by necessity and unequal relations of power, the townspeople's relationship to the priest is even more dangerous than with the *witz alkal*. The *witz alkal* can be avoided but the priest performs ritual essential to the community.

VI

The analysis of why the priest was accused of being an anti-Christ can be used to explain why some migueleños feared I was an anti-Christ. As I discussed above, the category of witz alkal and anti-Christ are structurally the same – both refer to male outsiders who offer Faustian deals. My classification as an anti-Christ depended on traits and behaviors that I shared with the priest and witz alkal.

I, the priest, and the witz alkal shared many characteristics. Physically, we were all tall, light-skinned European males. When I asked informants what witz alkal looked like they would inevitably laugh and say just like me. We also shared the fact that we were wealthy unmarried outsiders to the community. Our wealth came from extra-community sources.

Our common traits made our participation in the local system of reciprocal exchange problematic. Whereas the priest was a marginal character who played a central role at the heart of migueleño community life, I was a marginal person in a marginal role. My activities in San Miguel passed unnoticed by most and were considered harmless even if inexplicable by those who did watch my comings and goings. Yet I was still vaguely dangerous. My economic activities did not involve me in the community relations from which I could be controlled. Nor did my sexuality, although it was a common enough topic. Did I have a wife? Would I like to marry a Migueleño woman? She could make me fresh tortillas every morning. The mayor even asked me if I had slept with the queen of the feast of the patron saint. She was staying in the same house I was, a house owned by her single mother who worked in Philadelphia but came back to San Miguel for a couple of months every year. I had to tell that mayor that I had not slept with the queen, and imply as much as possible that I had not slept with her mother, either. The question of sexuality, as in the case of the priest, I think revealed more than just natural curiosity – it suggested anxiety about how I related to the web of community relations that are grounded in reciprocal exchange.

The same sort of analysis explains why many non-governmental organizations and their workers are regarded as anti-Christ. They are staffed primarily by men without female companions and who ostensibly offer something for nothing. While I think that the suggestion that I as an anthropologist might be engaged in some sort of Faustian bargaining is somewhat misguided, the critique of outside agencies through accusations of being anti-Christ has greater relevance. Taussig argues that such devil imagery functions as an explicit criticism of the capitalist relations into which peasant and indigenous communities are being

enveloped. One of the biggest presences in recent years in San Miguel has been a program funded primarily by the European Economic Community expanding the network of rural roads which will facilitate commerce. It will also make the Army, which has few helicopters, more mobile. This point cannot be further developed here but I think that, having signaled the issues, the potential for a Faustian dynamic is clear.

VII

The point of this essay has been to consider why I was accused of being an anti-Christ. This was accomplished primarily through a detailed examination of why American priests were considered witz alkal. That discussion allowed examination of how relations to local systems of reciprocal exchange served a central role in the categorization of individuals vis-à-vis the community. An examination of the process through which I was classified as an anti-Christ and the American priest as a witz alkal shows how positioning works in migueleño culture – traits and behaviors of individuals are understood through cultural categories to produce locally meaningful knowledge.

This process has implications for the production of anthropological knowledge. Discussions of the subjective positionality of anthropologists, such as Rosaldo's, fall short because they emphasize only the subjective personal characteristics that anthropologists bring to the analysis of anOther culture. The crux of the production of anthropological knowledge, however, is in the interaction of the anthropological observer and anOther culture. How anOther culture makes sense of the anthropological observer directly affects how the anthropological observer makes sense of anOther culture. More generally, the production of anthropological knowledge must be seen as dialectic in which positioned anthropologists interact with positioned informants in the context of anOther culture which is internally differentiated. Power relations are a part of this interface between the self and other. In considering how this process occurs anthropologists can properly focus on what I feel should be their proper field of study, other cultures, and produce valid anthropological knowledge about anOther culture. In the example described in his essay, an analysis of how I was categorized in migueleño culture on the basis of my personal characteristics revealed elements of the role of reciprocal exchange in community life.

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