Performing the community: representation, ritual and reciprocity in the Totonac Highlands of Mexico

Govers, C.J.H.

Citation for published version (APA):
CHAPTER 1

BELONGING TO A COMMUNITY

High on the slopes of el cerro ('the mountain') above Nanacatlán, one gets a splendid view of the impressive mountains of the Sierra Norte de Puebla (map 1.1) and the small Totonac village below. When I climbed on a cold day in January 1998 to one of the steep maize plots however, I had to keep my eyes on the trail for where to place my next step. The paths that I had taken to visit the fields, the river on the foot of the mountain, and the neighbouring villages, had been difficult enough; to visit these high fields was scary. And it was not even raining. Without words but amidst fits of laughter, first my bag and then my camera was taken from me, so I could use both hands to climb. My companion Irene, who could not stop laughing over my clumsiness, was also carrying a bag with a pot of food (chicken prepared with a broth called tixmole); her small son ran further and further ahead of us carrying a bag with a pile of warm tortillas (maize pancakes) and two bottles of sweet hot tea. Irene was bringing a meal to her husband Pedro, her two sons, a cousin, and a neighbour with his small sons who were sowing maize on a plot Pedro had rented. On our way, the men working the fields around us took the opportunity to take a short break and comment on our slow progress. Irene became impatient every now and then, because we had to arrive before noon. Custom requires that she serve the workers their meal at noon, and eat with them, to secure a good maize harvest. Fortunately we had begun earlier knowing that my presence would make the trip much longer. We ate with the men and after a short while returned to the village. It was a busy time for the whole family, as my field notes of that day show:

Early in the morning the neighbour, his two sons and Irene’s cousin arrive. They have a cup of coffee and a piece of sweet bread before going to the milpa with Pedro and his two eldest sons. Last week Pedro helped them to sow their maize and today they return the favour. He wants to have the fields sown now although the best time (the waning moon) has already passed. He cannot wait till the next period of waning moon because he wants to return to Mexico City to work. Yesterday Irene selected the maize used for sowing and the grains have been soaked in water all night. Today she is also busy because she has to feed the men on the milpa and Pedro’s sister is visiting from Huehuetla and can help her, as well as Irene’s grandmother who lives with them. After the men have left, the women start preparing the chicken, the sauce, and the maize dough for the tortillas. They make tixmole, a sauce often made with beef, but beef is taboo today, because the maize plants would not grow well. Irene would have preferred to make the traditional mole, but there
is not enough money to buy the expensive *chile ancho*. The chicken is from their own coop. When the food is ready, the women start preparing a large pile of *tortillas* and tea. Before packing the food and drinks Irene puts a small portion on their house altar, to ask God for a good harvest. Her youngest son accompanies her and helps carry the meal. When we arrive up the mountain the men are still working, walking in a neat line to sow maize, and they finish their row before taking a break. Irene gives them two pieces of chicken and sauce in a plate, and eats her own meal only after everybody else has been served. She has to eat on the milpa as well, because otherwise the plants could be damaged. We return home while the men continue working. There the women prepare another pile of *tortillas*, which Irene carries with a pot of food to her comadre, the wife of Elios from whom Pedro has rented the land. Irene also brings some food to her father. Since he is a widower Pedro’s father comes to eat with them almost daily and she thus does not carry food to his house, like she used to do when her mother-in-law was still alive (fieldnotes 2 January 1998).

Not only had I been present at an auspicious moment in the annual agricultural cycle that day, but I had also made the stiff walk up and been given a share in the ritual meal. Days later people would still say that they had heard our laughter throughout the village, and they complimented me on my attempt to climb to the steep fields. Clumsy as I may have been, I had apparently fulfilled the basic conditions that made me acceptable: to eat, and even enjoy the village food and walk to the fields “unlike those migrants who have moved to the city and now feel too proud to do so”. That I, in contrast to those migrants, was not even born in the village only shed a harsher light on those ‘townspeople’ who refuse to eat local food and walk the village paths. In doing so, these migrants distanced themselves from more than just the food and the fields that touched upon the very core of village life – they separated themselves from the rhythm of men working the fields and women preparing food, including the customs and values that go with them. Though in this case all migrants were stereotyped by the villagers, such distant behaviour is actually uncommon among those villagers who live in the city. Many migrants not only take care to remain in touch but are actively involved in village life, especially the sizeable number of men who divide their lives between Nanacatlan and Mexico City. They commute to their urban jobs during the year but return regularly to attend to their fields. In the meantime, their wives have to take care of their households and livelihood. It is a hard life for both, but far from rejecting rural life, they make an arduous effort to remain involved. Over the years that I periodically stayed in the village I have tried to understand why and how working the land, eating local food, performing customary rituals, and generally living according to local custom are so central to many people who declare themselves Nanacateco. They would say it is very important to follow their *costumbres*, the local customary repertoire of

---

1 As I explain later in this chapter, this term is part of local ritual kinship. *Compadrazgo* refers to the relationship between parents and the godparents of one or more of their children, when women become *comadres* (co-mothers) and men *compadres* (co-fathers).
practices and ideas that have been handed down by the ancestors. Why is this? And why does this apply not only to permanent residents of the village but also to temporary and even permanent migrants?

That day in the steep fields however, I was content enough to finally sit and admire the view overlooking the mountains, the valley, the scattered neighbouring villages, and Nanacatlán below. The village looks greener and less populous from above, as many houses and small paths are hidden under the canopy. Along the main road the large houses, schools, village hall, and especially the church with its tall towers, dominate the view just like they do from within the village. The road connects Zapotitlán with Ixtepec and since the 1990s also moves on to Huehuetla and beyond (maps 1.2 and 1.3). To the southwest of the village the cemetery covers the top of a small hill. The steep mountain slopes above the village are usually covered with maize, but on that day in the fallow period between crops, there were only weeds, rocks, and stones that seem to just hold on to the mountain. Closer to the village and all the way down to the Zempoala river below, the slopes are green from coffee bushes and the shadow and fruit trees that almost hide them. In between the coffee plots there are meadows with a few cattle and some scattered maize
Map 1.3 Nanacatlán and neighbouring villages

Legend
- Settlements
- Unpaved road
- Trail
- River
- High tension network
- #: Altitude (metres)
- T: Telephone

Places in stories
1. Kuksvi (Nanacatlán) in the past
2. Puhuac (Zapotitlán) in the past
3. The hidden well
4. Two men turned into rock
5. Maria Tatum well
6. Mapilco bridge
7. Yakat lake
8. Church/house of Yakat
9. Village border where Hojs-Kaxi leaves left leg
10. Cerro Lacapoxne/Cara de Cerdo (Pig Head Mountain)
11. Cozotl mountain, where animal-souls (dobles) of Nanacatecos live
12. Cuatro Caminos (Four roads)
plots. Only one field is now planted with sugarcane which before the 1970s was the main commercial crop in the region.

The road which crosses the Sierra and connects the towns of Zacapoaxtla and Zacatlán forms a clear line on the mountain on the other side of the river, on the way passing through Zapotitlán de Mendez. This centre of the municipality to which Nanacatlán belongs, is just visible further to the west along the river (map 1.2), where a small road branches off to Nanacatlán and beyond. For public transportation, buses are available that serve both Zacapoaxtla and Zacatlán and nowadays drive all the way up to Nanacatlán. Built in the 1970s, the road was asphalted in the early 1990s thereby reducing the bus trip to and from Mexico City from about 11 to between 8 to 10 hours. This would have been less if the branch road to Nanacatlán had been improved as well. From my position on the slope, San Miguel de Cerdo lies across the road and further up the mountain I catch a glimpse of Zongozotla. Behind San Miguel de Cerdo but hidden by the mountain, lies the neighbouring village of Huitzilan whose inhabitants are not Totonac but Nahua (map 1.3). To the east one can see the village of Tuxtla, which belongs to the same municipio as Nanacatlán, and on clear days even Nauzontla (map 1.2). On the other side of the mountain I climbed begin the fields of neighbouring Zitlala and Hueytlatlan (map 1.3), villages reachable after a stiff walk of another 1½ to 2 hours.

For a newcomer like me, the view that I was admiring provided natural beauty covered with cultural, historical, and religious meanings. Most Nanacatecos know every plot, well, stream, mountain, or other environmental detail by name as well as the stories that go with them; like they know whether it is part of the village territory, to whom it belongs, and often what event took place there. They can indicate where the village boundaries are currently, and where they used to be in the past when the village was a lot bigger. They can also read it as a socio-economic map: they can point out the lands owned by the rich villagers and the smaller plots of the local peasants, whether such land is fertile, relatively flat, or steep and rocky, and whether it is fit for coffee (see map 1.3).

A community on the move

Several villagers could ruminate endlessly with stories about the topological markers one can observe from the mountain slope – and a number of them will come up in the book – but modernity and migration have taken their toll: for a few decades a sizeable number of villagers are away at least part of the year, and are not always around to share such stories. From March to July and from September to December, the village looks nearly deserted. With over one-third of its inhabitants gone, the

---

2 San Miguel de Cerdo belongs to the municipality of Huitzilan. The Zempoala river is the border between Nanacatlán and Huitzilan/San Miguel de Cerdo.

3 See below for how people engage in place-making (Basso 2002; Low and Lawrence-Zuñiga 2003).
streets are empty and life is a little dull with only one or two women and children who go shopping or fetching water. In these months, the village is only livened up before and after school hours when the children are on the streets or when an occasional truck, bus, or car passes. Even the fields are mostly unattended, though the new plantings of maize and coffee are witness to some recent agricultural activity. Only in the evening does the village come back to life when people gather in its centre: the young to play basketball, the grown-ups to consult one of the authorities in the village hall or to go to a meeting, a few Catholics to visit the church. People walk the streets to visit each other or to watch television elsewhere, if they do not own a set themselves. Sundays bring a welcome change, with a visit to the market in Zapotitlán, or to one of the churches; the main Catholic one or the smaller chapels of the Pentecostals or Baptists. A closer view reveals that the grown-ups are mostly married women and elderly men and women, the young men and women and able-bodied men being conspicuously absent.

In these periods, Nanacatlán at first glance seems to be a hollow (Geertz 1965:4) and timeless place tending towards stagnation, where nothing much happens and nothing changes. This relative emptiness is in fact a recent phenomenon; it is only since the road was constructed that many men started working in Mexico City, some going to live there permanently, others just commuting. Only a few dozen years ago the village was bustling with local people and itinerant traders passing with their trains of mules and horses, as the elderly people recall. It was quieter in the evening though, because everybody went to bed early; only since electricity do people stay up later and fill the air with the sound of their radios, cassette players, and an increasing number of televisions. But such noise can’t replace the liveliness of having people around. Is this then a ‘village without development’ that people increasingly tend to leave and is in danger of becoming deserted?

The answer is certainly in the negative when one visits the village, together with the returning migrants during one of the main village rituals: Semana Santa (the week before Easter), the days of the village feast of Santiago (25 July), the days to commemorate the dead during Todos Santos (All Saints’ Day, November 1, and including All Souls’ Day, November 2), and the period around Christmas and New Years. Then it feels like a different place, full of life and activity. Over the years these bustling days have even increased. Moreover, new rituals such as birthdays and the Mexican national religious feast of the Virgen de Guadalupe have become popular. Men work hard to prepare the public rituals, women put a lot of effort into cooking the appropriate meals and migrants make the long, and for most of them expensive journey to return. Several migrants remain active in one of the village dance troupes, take part in the basketball competition during the village feasts, or are among its organisers. Many prefer to celebrate their weddings or important birthdays in their home village. This is not to say that it is all is harmonious in Nanacatlán or that everyone takes part in all community and family rituals: particularly since nearly a quarter of the population has turned from Catholicism to Protestantism, there are obvious dividing lines between villagers. But all in all, in the
past decade village rituals and feasts are much more frequently celebrated and attract more participants because people have become, as they say, interested in their own *costumbres*, "just like our ancestors were". This increase in rituals and feasts has given current village life a much stronger contrast between relative quietness and flamboyant bustle.

Many migrant Nanacatecos come for more than a family visit or attending one of the village rituals. After the village feast in July and again after Christmas, they stay on for a while to harvest their maize (in July or August) or coffee (in December, January, February), or sow maize (in January or February). Some of the permanent migrants still own land and they stay for a week or so to arrange such work as needs to be done and to give instructions to a resident relative who acts as a supervisor for their lands. Unlike in the past, quite a number of people actually own land which they have bought with the money they earned in the city and even when they stay for some time in the village, they rarely work as day labourers for one of the village patrons. In addition to being part-time farmers, they remain as strongly interested and involved in village affairs as resident villagers; during the politically highly strung 1990s it was hard to guess from the intense debates and fights who was living in the village and who was not. Many stay with at least one foot in the village and are continuously to-ing and fro-ing between urban and rural life. Living in two worlds has made people more vulnerable to the ups and downs of global economy conditioning migration cycles: when the price of coffee dropped dramatically in 1989 more people left to work in Mexico City. Inversely, when the Mexican economy stagnated and the national currency (*peso*) was devaluated in 1994, many returned to the village to await a recovery of the urban labour market. On the other hand, these new income sources for migrant labourers have blurred the steep divide between a majority of Totonac day-labourers and a mostly *mestizo* elite of past decades. Migration may have brought economic uncertainties but it has also changed the old forms of social differentiation in the village.

The rapid transformations Nanacatecos have been dealing with have turned the village into a relatively quiet place during large parts of the year and a bustle of activities during the main annual celebrations and agricultural peak seasons. The urban-rural divide and the growing economic, social, religious, and political pluriformity have led to a more fragmented and differentiated community, but remarkably not to a demise of the community. In the remainder of this introduction I will sketch how to understand the relation between general transformations and the way local communities change, give an insight in how I did the fieldwork on which this study is based, and summarise the outline of the book. My key concern here is to understand why and how in a period of rapid transformations the local community not only remained relevant as a socio-economic safety net, but also why it has become an ideal place to belong to. In the past, communities in flux have been studied as either disintegrating and disappearing under the pressure of outside forces or struggling against these forces and surviving as a ‘traditional community’. Such approaches miss the paradoxical reality of a resilient community where under
rapidly-changing conditions a common place to belong to increasingly matters, especially when members of a community live in different places. To understand why community life can gain in prominence I will look at how people create and recreate their community against all odds through social networks, narratives, rituals, and exchanges. Before doing so, I first focus on how communities have been framed in anthropology.

**Conceptualising communities**

‘Belonging to a community’ is a problematic conceptual statement because in everyday speech it carries a sentimental judgement, expressing positive feelings of connection. “These are not value-free ideas. ‘Belonging’, like ‘association’, ‘relationship’, and a host of similar connective terms, carries positive overtones” (Edwards and Strathern 2000:152). Such a sentimental and natural connotation is often at odds with its anthropological re-conceptualisation. Community – with its underlying nineteenth century utopian ideal of loss, recovery, or achievement (Delanty 2003:19-20) – has the same positive overtone of embodying direct relationships, often contrasted to being a citizen in an alienating state (ibid: 10). But a community can be everything between supportive and destructive, the latter not only for those who are excluded, but also for the people who belong. Moreover, the concept of community derives from a past in which it was seen as the opposite of modernity and about to disappear, or if not, at least as a hindrance to development. Ideas on changing communities build upon a long discussion within the social sciences about the relation between modernity and community in which modernity was seen as the cause of declining community life. Community was thus often equated to tradition, understood as a making of the past, and this traditional community was to be found on a map, its boundaries enclosing a group of people living and belonging together, sharing a culture.

Mexico has a rich history of anthropological community studies (Chambers and Young 1979) and a concern with ‘rurality’ amidst a process of internal capitalist development (Hewitt de Alcántara 1984). Such studies mainly focus on indigenous communities and how to see their place in the world; which until the 1970s meant that they were destined to disappear due to their incorporation and integration within the larger society, for their own good. Watanabe distinguishes two schools

---

4 The uneasy relationship of anthropology with these and many other of its concepts has made them prone to quotation marks. This seems to have almost become a charming spell. I will try to avoid this and instead clarify concepts, taking critical re-assessment of and disagreements about anthropological concepts for granted.

5 A view on tradition as a product of modernity was lacking (Delanty 2003:30). It is interesting to note the historical similarities between the concepts of community and culture as traditionally bounded units that exist in opposition to modernity, while both are nowadays seen as its product. Culture – even though conceptualised as shared ideas and values – has often been seen as a thing that can be owned: the by now ‘classic’ idea of culture as contained in a location and/or attached to a particular group (Ortner 1999:7).
BELONGING TO A COMMUNITY

within this integrationist view: the ‘cultural essentialists’, who had a static view on culture but an eye for inter-personal differences, and the ‘colonial historicists’ who saw the opposition between mestizo (Ladino) elites and Indian rural masses as an artefact of colonial domination (Watanabe 1992:5-11). The early cultural essentialist studies, such as Redfield (1964) and Lewis (1972), focused on the community as a holistic and isolated unit and have been criticized as ‘trapped in time and space’ (Chambers and Young 1979:50). Though early on anthropologists were concerned with change and development, change was seen as something that came from outside and not from the dynamics of rural and indigenous communities themselves: they were ‘closed corporate communities’ (Wolf 1955 and 1957) or dominated and underdeveloped ‘regions of refuge’, the so called exploited hinterland of the industrialized metropolis (Aguirre Beltrán 1987b). Wolf and Aguirre Beltrán did not see this relative closure as inherent to such communities, but as a historical outcome within a hostile and dominant environment. In their view “… the Indian community became a creation of the wider society, not a subtraction from it” (Hewitt de Alcántara 1984:75).

In contrast to the cultural essentialist studies, Marxist studies (cf. Stavenhagen 1968 and Friedlander 1975) are more critical of the dominant society and stress class differences. Indian-ness is here an expression of peasant subordination and marginality. Notwithstanding their critical view on society, they share with the cultural essentialists the view of Indians as passive, and expected them to ultimately merge into the Ladino world (Watanabe 1992:7). Only some Marxist studies consider cultural and economic pluralism as a positive force for development (Chambers and Young 1979:53), of which I use Durand (1986) about Nanacatlán in this book for a comparison with socio-economic differentiation and livelihood in the 1990s and for its historical insights. General modernization theory expected or even endorsed the disintegration and demise of indigenous communities, because that was the most favourable way for them to become part of development.

Contrary to expectations, communities turned out to be neither safe havens of the past nor did they disintegrate and disappear. More so, their ‘survival’ was not directly related to a lack of development (Watanabe 1992:7-11). This brought a turn in social research: communities were increasingly studied not as a stage in an evolutionary process of development or as a social and economic problem, but for their cultural, religious or ethnic continuity, and change. Anthropologists replaced

---

6 In light of the well known Redfield-Lewis debate it is clear that the hindsight evaluation of early community studies abstracts from many differences. Redfield, pioneer in peasant studies, conceptualised cultural change along a folk-urban continuum that would inevitably lead rural communities to integration into the modern world. In his restudy Lewis criticized Redfield amongst others for putting to much emphasis on a homogenous, integrated, and isolated nature of the community of Tepoztlán, and for seeing change as exogenous. Lewis saw a conflictual and individualistic village, full of fear, envy, and distrust in inter-personal relations (Lewis 1972:428-29), a view on indigenous communities shared by Foster (1965a and 1965b).

7 Though Aguirre Beltrán attributes a more active role to the Indians in closing off their community, he is also more outspoken in his solution of integration into national culture and society (Sandstrom 1991:40).
a temporal conception of communities (as timeless and in the past) with a notion of
coevalness (Fabian 1983), a sharing of present time between other and their own
societies. From the 1970s, the great narrative of modernization theory and develop-
ment thinking gradually gave way to a trend of empirical studies with a clear
regional and cultural orientation. In Mexico this is reflected in a number of studies
of indigenous peoples stressing the resilience of ways of living rather than seeing
them as cultural remnants from the past (Chambers and Young 1979:48). Ichon’s
study of the highland Totonacs (1973), to which I will refer frequently, is one of the
interesting examples of this trend.

To look at communities as changing themselves in different ways – and not only
under the impact of external forces originating in the wider society – meant to
move away from holistic, integrative, and primordial ideas of culture and the geo­
ographical rooting of community. Instead, notions such as imagined communities
(Anderson 1983)\(^8\) and community as a symbolic construction (Cohen 1985)
emphasise that a community need not necessarily be conceptualised as static and
closed. Cohen especially made an important contribution to community studies by
his emphasis on shared practices as opposed to shared values, or as he framed it: on
aggregative instead of integrative belonging, a commonality of forms but not nec­
essarily meanings (1985:20), in which ritual may play an important part:

... the symbolic expression of community and its boundaries increases in importance as
the actual geo-social boundaries of the community are undermined, blurred or otherwise
weakened. Evidence to substantiate this thesis may be found not only in settled com­
munities, but also among those whose members have been dispersed and for whom ritual
provides occasions to reconstitute the community (ibid. 50-51).

Although formulated several years before the term became fashionable in social
sciences, Cohen’s ideas can be effortlessly linked to discussions on globalisation
– a process which Tomlinson (1999) has characterised as the general framework of
transformation processes of our time and which he defined as the rapidly develop­
ing and ever-densifying network of interconnections and interdependencies. The
perspective of globalisation on the study of communities offers a link to change as
a heterogeneous and differential process and provides the local with an automatic
reference to the wider world. Globalisation studies within anthropology have thus
fostered an intensified sense of cultural and ethnic heterogeneity with a keen
emphasis on difference. Communities are focal points in which the global and the
local meet and are expressed through an interaction of general and particular pro­
cesses and a series of paradoxes. The two processes of sameness and difference
operate simultaneously: the disappearance of difference and the creation and trans­

\(^8\) Anderson used it to refer to people who never meet but can imagine belonging together within a
bounded national community. I also find it useful for referring to diasporic situations, where people
know each other and occasionally meet and imagine belonging to a (non-national) community that
crosses spatial boundaries.
loration of new differences; the loss and the revival of traditions (Clifford 1988); revitalisation and creolisation (Eriksen 1997); global homogenisation and increased heterogeneity (Geschiere and Meyer 1998). One might say that the most significant feature of the globalisation paradigm is that it has created an increased awareness of cultural difference – both beyond and within the immediate and local world.

Anthropologists have increasingly studied local ethnic communities with a focus on why and how local people continue to live as a community in a changing world instead of taking community existence for granted. It is useful to recall how Barth (1969) pointed at ethnic identity as the social organisation of cultural difference, which he understood as a focus on processes of boundary making and maintenance and not on “the cultural stuff that the boundary encloses”. He later (1994) argued that to study ethnicity it is necessary to look at culture and to reconceptualise it as ‘flux’ – instead of seeing it as a partition in neatly separable, integrated wholes – and that any imagined community (ethnic, national, religious, global) is full of cultural difference and contention. Recent work points at how global and transnational contexts often sustain and strengthen local indigenous groups and organisations, or provide contexts in which indigenous ethnicity can emerge (Kearney 1995:560; Morin and Saladin d’Anglure 1997). Migrant networks and migrant leaders reconstitute and localise dispersed communities at home and in the Mexico-US frontier society, but also lead to new inter-ethnic alliances (Velasco 2002). Ethnic revival is however, not the inevitable outcome (cf. Eriksen 1997), and ethnicity not necessarily an issue for indigenous people.

Viewing indigenous culture and ethnicity as ‘in flux’ or ‘under construction’ nevertheless seems more problematic (see however, Baud et al. 1994), as the notion of indigenous often implies people who set forth centuries-old traditions. Though it is altogether logical and patently evident that people draw on existing repertoires (and that cultural continuity does exist in this sense9), even then such developments are not an automatic or natural process as Sandstrom (1991) shows in his beautiful study of a Nahua village. Traditional cultures persist in the face of massive worldwide change by a conscious effort. The emphasis on local communities as products of modernity instead of continuations of the past on the other hand, does run the risk of neglecting communities as products of people who relate to regional, national, and global developments as well as to their own past, present, and future.

... Western assumption that assertions of ‘tradition’ are always responses to the new (that there is no real recurrence in history) may exclude local narratives of cultural continuity and recovery (Clifford 1988:15).

9 A social constructionist approach does not imply that ‘anything goes’. It just reminds us that ‘continuity’ itself is an interpretation or choice, involving relations of power. It is more useful to take social constructionism as a concept which facilitates the critical assessment of ethnicity and culture and which opposes the essentialisation of them (Vermeulen and Govers 1997).
Ouweneel (2000) has a similar suggestion by pointing at the Western tendency to regard Western essentialisms as neutral or universal and to only see other views as essentialist. He calls for attention, like Sandstrom, to what he refers to as ‘essences’: constant factors over the centuries. It is important however, to understand that practices similar to those of the past have acquired shifts in meaning over time and reflect upon the present. This makes it crucial to analyse continuities (or constant factors) and to try and understand what they mean (and have come to mean) in a changed context (cf. Barabas & Bartolomé 1984; Bartolomé 1979; Barth 1993; Chamoux 1987). Moreover, an ideology of continuity is characteristic of most ethnic groups, but what is claimed to be tradition from the past is more often than not ‘tradition remembered’ (Eller 1999:15, 29). What these studies of indigenous communities show is that local forms of religion and morality prevail as frameworks for giving meaning to life, though this does not mean that they are unaffected by change. Despite changes in beliefs and practices, villagers nowadays consider themselves to be no less locals than their parents and grandparents (Watanabe 1992:18-19), and they definitely feel themselves as belonging to the locality from which they originate.

In periods of rapid transformations, belonging is more likely to become an ideal to overcome social and personal insecurity and disintegration. As Ortner (1999) emphasises, people are always trying to make sense of their lives to grapple with the threats and sometimes realities of chaos and evil. Therefore the meaning-making process is a central issue for anthropology in a changing world. To understand why the local gains in prominence in fast-changing times I focus on what ‘belonging to a community’ means because it emphasizes a social process of connecting to others and ties this connection to a specific place with a past, beliefs, rituals, and to land and livelihood in the case of a rural village. A community is imagined and unbounded but also material; its specific elements not only concern cultural, but social, economic, and political processes.

Community is constituted by a set of practices, a series of ‘performances,’ through which claims are made about collective and inter-subjective identities. These claims can be contradictory, produced through relations of power, and are open to resistance and contest (Hardgrove 2002:5; see also Turner 1987).

Belonging needs practice; this implies a focus on how people create a symbolic and material community by performing stories, rituals, and exchanges that divide and unite people.

A community of networks

In the same sense that belonging is rooted in practice, communities are not abstract entities, but constitute actual connections of people. In the present world people’s lives are rarely confined to a specific socio-geographic locality, making a living out
of locally available resources. Their worlds are tied to what happens in a much wider region outside their own place of residence. If we want to discuss communities we have to see them not as primarily based on cohabitation but as a grid of relationships, in other words as network communities (Appadurai 1996). Rural and indigenous villages have increasingly become part of national and transnational networks and people in even remote villages increasingly need skills to deal with socially varied and geographically dispersed social networks. Diversification of livelihood has become the norm and this has made people's social networks more complex. People who have started working in urban jobs need different networks from those who focus or focused primarily on the village. This implies a focus on changing patterns of social relations and social differentiation to see how and why social networks and their resources have come to differ.

A social network is the chain of people with whom a person more or less regularly interacts (Boissevain 1968). People within a network do not have access to the same resources and a social network therefore consists of hierarchical relations and is socially differentiated. To understand a network it is necessary to look at who owns resources, who has access to them, and who is excluded from such access. In the rural past this meant primarily land, credit, and trade but nowadays it includes access to non-agricultural resources and often urban jobs. Social networks themselves can act as resources as they provide access through the sequence of reciprocal obligations that characterise relations between people – giving, receiving, and returning a gift (Mauss 1970). Though everyone is part of at least some social networks, not everyone is a member of the same number of networks, nor is everyone able to use social networks to the same extent. The crucial function of networks and the differential access people have to them has given birth to the introduction of the overarching concept of social capital – the ability to connect into social networks to get things done outside formal and bureaucratic procedures, as Field (2003) has defined it – stressing exactly the instrumentality of networks in providing access to resources. Through their contacts with others in their network, people are able to gain access to resources they do not own themselves, and so broaden their resource base. Sometimes access is direct when the person becomes the client of a rich and influential patron, someone who directly controls resources such as land, jobs, scholarship funds, or specialised knowledge. In other cases it is highly expert network specialists – social brokers – who bring people in touch with

---

10 The network concept is nowadays used to study a community that crosses geographic boundaries or more generally of people not living in the same place (anymore). Initially though, the study of networks was meant to overcome the classical anthropological concept of corporate groups as a focus for study (see Boissevain 1968; Wolf 1966).

11 Bourdieu has used the term social capital in a different way by stressing difference. “Different individuals obtain a very unequal return on a more or less equivalent capital (economic or cultural) according to the extent to which they are able to mobilise by proxy the capital of a group” (Bourdieu 1980:2). He defines social capital as the sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:119). This a more formal definition compared to Field, who is primarily concerned with the informal usefulness of social relations.
each other, bridge gaps in communication, and provide access to patrons (Boissivain 1974:147-148).

Networks may differ in the degree of the density and strength of the social relations that constitute them. The ability to access resources depends both on *strong ties* and *weak ties* in the sense that Granovetter (1973 and 1983) uses them. Granovetter asserts that acquaintances (with weak ties) are less likely to be socially involved than close friends (with strong ties) who form a densely knit network (clique). Each of the acquaintances however, is likely to have strong ties with other friends and thus participate in a clique that is different from the others. An individual with weak ties is thus connected to different cliques and will have access to information from distant parts of the social system, while an individual with only strong ties will be confined to the provincial news and views of close friends. While strong ties are a good source of jobs in firms and occupations where family and friends were already represented, he states that bridging weak ties (those acquaintances that act as bridges between network segments) are a relatively effective way of finding jobs in new fields.

Those with many relations meet a lot of people, while the encounters of those with few relations are more modest. People with a very dense network often frequent the same people but have little contact with those outside their own circle and may form a group with strong social cohesion. Those who have an extensive network with a low density are less likely to belong to a strong, culturally cohesive collectivity where people feel at home, but have more opportunities to access resources and to become acquainted with various *mores* (Blokland 2003:212).

**Kinship, household, and *compadrazgo***

Providing social support in times of need and acting as social capital is, of course, not the only function of networks as they also provide empathy, moral and emotional support, attachment, and a sense of belonging. For their networks people thus not only, and maybe often not even primarily, focus on the usefulness of their social ties as their affectionate value may be far more crucial. How networks are composed is not the result of individually calculated or socially dependent decisions, but arises from institutionalised social practices (Blokland 2003:59). Choice, affection, and social support can lead to independent initiatives which not only apply to friendship and ritual kinship but also to kinship relations. Kinship is usually seen as consisting of ‘blood’ relations and serves as a model for many other relations, ritual kinship in particular. Generally the most important personal ties exist between next-of-kin (often including household members) and in the case of Mesoamerica in particular, between ritual kin.\(^\text{12}\) In Mexico relations between ritual

\(^{12}\) According to Coleman (1991) individualisation has undermined kinship and reciprocal relations. This rezones the issue of community disintegration, where a nostalgic view on a supposed holistic and integrated past blocks alternative views of what could be a community. Coleman in particular relates
BELONGING TO A COMMUNITY

kin in the form of compadrazgo are taken very seriously and are often as or even more important than between next-of-kin (Mintz and Wolf 1977; Nutini and Bell 1980).

Granovetter’s distinction between strong and weak ties also holds for relationships between kin. This is the more so in a flexible kinship system such as in Mexico. Here, kinship is important as the primary network of people but it is not restricted to a small circle of next-of-kin or to the kindred. Who is considered kin is broadly defined and may be anyone with whom there is a connection through blood, marriage, or ritual relations. Relations between this wide variety of kin are maintained and encouraged regardless of genealogical or geographic distance. They are usually characterised by an ideology and morality of generalised reciprocity and do not attach a particular relation to a particular obligation, like in so-called balanced reciprocity (Rothstein 1999:583). Such kinship flexibility enables considerable choice because it is possible to maintain weak ties with a large number of kin as well as to have strong ties with a smaller number of one’s own choices.

People relate not only through networks but are usually also members of a household, traditionally seen as the basic unity of society involved in production, reproduction, consumption, and socialization. A household’s anthropological conceptualisation rests on what the people themselves regard as the significant unit of their society (Moore 1988:54-55). The household also has a spatial connotation as the place where people live together ‘under one roof’ (even though not necessarily all the time), organise their livelihood, eat together, raise children, support their elderly or sick parents and other relatives, and where strong feelings of emotion and support may exist. However, relations with people outside the household – especially with kin and ritual kin, but also friends and neighbours – can be equally or even more important than those within. Following Moore, I regard the household as the basic social unit of people who live together in a place where they focus their efforts to organise their home, livelihood, and personal life (even when they do not live there most of the year). Using the household as a unit of observation and analysis is valuable as assets tend to be owned by, and networks are centred on households. There are however, obvious internal differentiations, divisions of labour, and hierarchical relations based on gender and age within households.

Social capital to primordial ties such as kinship and the origin of the most effective form of social capital to relationships established by childbirth (Field 2003:109). He sees anything changing kin ties (divorce, separation, migration) as disruptive. It is not only that migration studies suggest otherwise, as Field (ibid.) rightfully points out, but Coleman’s whole idea of undermined kinship relations rest on a narrow definition of kinship.

13 Recent kinship studies (Carsten 2000) depart altogether from the conventional relationship of the biological and the social in kinship studies and ‘nature’ or ‘biology’ as the grounding for the ‘social’. Instead, they focus on how people relate and connect to understand how relatedness may be composed of various components – substance, feeding, living together, procreation, emotion.

14 In terms of Mauss (1970): balanced reciprocity is where the obligation to give, receive, and return are equally important, while in generalised reciprocity the generosity of giving and its acceptance are more important than the obligation to return the gift.

15 People, not households, interact and there is always an inherent tension between the category of
which should not be overlooked. In this study I therefore use the household in the first place as a unit for analysing land use, land tenure, and non-agricultural jobs in order to compare changes in assets over time (in particular with the data from Durand’s (1986) study of Nanacatlán). In the second place, I use the household as a unit because it provides the basis of social networks which are operative in relation to migration and religious and political pluriformity.

In dealing with social networks and kinship in Mexico, particular attention needs to be given to ritual kinship in the form of compadrazgo or ‘co-parenthood’. This term points to a complex of relationships between an initiate (usually a child), its parents and the sponsor(s) of the initiate (the godparents). Originally such relationships were established in the ritual of Catholic baptism. Parents and sponsors address each other as compadre and comadre and in Mexico this connection obliges them to offer help, honesty, and hospitality – obligations that not only involve the individual compadres and comadres but their children, parents, and other relatives as well, thereby making it a powerful core of social networks.

As it creates the basis of important social relationships, the compadrazgo model has been extended to other life-cycle events. There are numerous occasions at which such ritual kinship relations are established: from baptism, marriage, confirmation, first communion, blessing of the house, blessing of a saint, and installing a cross on a grave, to the inauguration of a new oven, ground-mill or shop, and school graduations. The mediating occasion, person, object, or entity through which the relationship is established is only of secondary importance: it is not the relation between godparents and godchildren which is at the heart of compadrazgo, but the relationship between the individuals or couples who have become co-parents: compadres and comadres (Nutini and Bell 1980:53-54; Masferrer 1983:24; Masferrer et al. 1984:380). Especially the sacramental baptism and wedding compadragzo involves a life-long bond of loyalty and reciprocity between compadres and comadres who address each other on equal footing. As it is such a powerful model, in situations of social change when traditional obligations between kin and neighbours are under stress, compadragzo relations tend to multiply in order to maintain and strengthen face-to-face relationships and include new categories of potential supporters or competitors (Mintz and Wolf 1977).

Combinations of the different types of social networks and social capital are noticeable in the way compadragzo ties are created. Though ideologically it is an egalitarian relationship between co-parents, in practice they can be distinguished in horizontal relationships between social equals and vertical relationships between elites and ‘commoners’. Totonacs and poor mestizos in the Sierra Norte of Puebla often ask local rich mestizos to be godparents for their children thus creating a bond

households and the activities of its members, who may act for themselves or on behalf of their household (or both). Households are not a unity but are full of differences and clashes of interests between its members, of which gender and generation are the most obvious (Niehof 1994; D. Wolf 2000). Households moreover, not only vary considerably between societies, but within societies according to life-stages and social strategies (Moore 1988:54-59).
that may develop into a patron-client relationship, while *mestizo* families in turn prefer to ask other wealthy *mestizos* who usually live in other villages in the region (Ichon 1973:201).

From the perspective of a network community, *compadrazgo* is especially important to create and sustain local and regional networks, because it provides a collective model for ideal human relations (Bartolomé and Barabas 1982:150) and strengthens the social organisation of the community (Masferrer 1983:29). As *compadrazgo* is modelled after kinship, it also is dominated by an ideology of generalised reciprocity (as between close relatives) where the focus is upon solidarity and giving and not so much on the obligation to return a favour (Sahlins 1974:193-194).

**Locating memory and worldview**

If we look exclusively at networks and their mutual overlap, we only reach a partial understanding of what a community of locals living in and outside the village is about. It provides a grid of relationships and linkages but still lacks insight into how networks, and therefore also communities, operate 'in action'. A local past and a worldview expressed through sharing narratives both as listener and speaker, provide instructive actions for what brings people together, as well as what divides them. Stories, memories, and other spoken communication such as gossip, jokes, prayers, and songs create a local community and are also sources for knowledge about the community: they offer an explanation for why and how the community exists and how life is or should be lived. Such narratives are also very concrete in that they attach people to a place with a history and to the natural environment. People do not necessarily have to agree on a story or interpret it in a similar way to share common themes.

Theorists on globalisation often assume that complex connectivity leads to an increasing mobility of people, ideas, and commodities and that this weakens the ties of culture to place; a process called 'deterritorialization' (Tomlinson 1999:29). Societies are thus not limited to a specific place but are based on flows of people and goods (Appadurai 1996) and creolisation (Hannerz 1987); in this view the anthropological tendency to 'place' people is a problem that should be overcome. Ethnographic places were primarily seen as anthropological images and ideas, but places are also – just like voices – local and multiple social constructions with overlapping and competing narratives (Rodman 2003).

The physical, emotional, and experiential realities places hold for their inhabitants at particular times need to be understood apart from their creation as locals of ethnography. While anthropologists indeed create places in ethnography, they hold no patent on place-making (ibid p. 205).

My main argument will be that on the contrary, an increased mobility goes very
well together with an increased emphasis on local culture and on the village as place of origin and orientation. Locals may move around, local customs may even be performed elsewhere, but amidst flow and deterritorialization people recreate community, reterritorialize the landscape, and reconnect people (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003:25-26). In other words people produce and construct locality (Appadurai 1996). Scattered communities or network communities are more appropriate concepts to show that people and place do not necessarily coincide. Cohen’s understanding of the ethnography of locality focuses on the ways people express their attachment and belonging to a locality or community (1982:2-3). He looks mainly at the social relations between people and groups in the local population. Landscape and place here are passive settings of social interaction (Gray 2003:225-227). But when people share memories, stories, and activities that relate to the community and its past this often includes place-making: to give meaning to and to name places or in more fashionable terms, the social construction of place (Rodman 2003). This is a way of constructing history itself, a means to revive as well as revise former times (Basso 2002:6). It may well be, as Basso (2002:63) suggests for the Apache, that in today’s climate of social change the importance of the relationship with the land has deepened. Because (through the stories or names attached to them) geographical locations have a moral significance, the landscape is a moral reminder of the ancestral ways in the face of outside influence. The issue here is twofold; to look on the one hand at how different actors construct, contest, and ground experiences from and about the past, and on the other hand how they create a morality.

Narratives are important for creating and reproducing a sense of belonging to a local community because they provide people with a distinct history and worldview and this may well become more important in times of increased mobility and social change. The community is not only a place to meet people and participate in rituals, but also to share memories and a way of living through oral history and myth. Persuasive arguments exist to link oral history and myth instead of treating them as opposing categories because “... both myth and history use experiences from the past to respond to the needs of the interested parties in the present” (Gossen 1977:250). The realism attributed to history is itself a myth (Tonkin 1990).

My attempt here to distinguish between two kind of narratives that can be categorised as oral history and myth, does not rest on a hierarchical view about what is more or less ‘real’, but on the different ways these kind of narratives relate to the community and its people. The oral history category concerns the stories and memories that give the past a very specific spatial connotation. Places produce meaning and meaning can be grounded in place (Rodman 2003:207); in their stories and memories of places people link the community and its past firmly to its place. Myths are often not situated in a specific time and place and they link people to the natural and supernatural world. A reciprocal relationship exists between land and self, and people thus produce a moral relationship with the land (Basso 2002:102). Historical place-making can serve as moral teaching and in such a case
history and worldview work upon each other (see Basso 2002), but this is not necessarily so. Though it is obvious that the two categories presented here are not mutually exclusive nor are their boundaries always clear, I use them to distinguish between local history (chapter 4) and the local worldview (chapter 5).

Oral history distinguishes itself from myth when such stories provide locals with a view about the past of their community. According to Connerton (1989) memories of groups – what he calls social memory – are conveyed and sustained in social activity, by (more or less ritual) performances. He also sees informally told narrative histories as a feature of all communal memory.16 Connerton’s analysis also points to the fact that the form of memories (in his case ritual performances) is important, while often content has received attention, especially in political contexts (Sutton 2001:10). The interesting feature of spatial stories and memories is, however, that both form (the landscape) and content (the story) matter and work upon each other to relive the past. My focus will be on those stories about the village past that are widely known among Nanacatecos, or that express memories of particular categories of people (such as the poor, mestizos, women). Such local stories come in different forms but are often connected to places, and create an image of continuity with the village past in their retelling.

Myths distinguish themselves from oral history by a stronger, and sometimes outspoken, emphasis on morality. Like oral history they refer to local place and space, but tend to combine environmental references with the embodiment of morality. Within Amerindian cosmology the body is central for differentiating between people, and therefore categories of identity are often expressed in bodily idioms, particularly food practices and bodily decoration (Viveiros 2002:317). Myths link the environment (the natural world) and the supernatural beings who are the ‘owners’ of natural phenomena (such as sun, moon, earth, and water) to human beings. In Meso-America this happens through a widespread belief in the existence of two souls in the human body, an animal-soul and a spirit-soul (cf. Gossen 1994). The relationship between nature, supernature, and human beings works through the influence of supernatural beings on the body-souls. This manifests itself when the balance between the three is broken. In sickness, this relationship is disturbed, harmony needs to be restored, and myths offer the necessary explanation that lead to specific healing practices.17 The body is thus the symbolic location of the relationship of human beings with the natural and supernatural environment and acts as a moral reminder (cf. Bowie 2000:38-69). I therefore also look at ideas of and practices in sickness and healing to provide a key to understanding indigenous notions about the world.

16 Connerton, though, emphasizes rituals because according to him their structure has significantly less potential for variance compared to myths (1989:57). He sees rituals as merely re-enactment but as I will show below it is vital to consider their capacity to change while appearing to be a continuity of the past. In this sense they do not differ from narratives.

17 See chapter five for a further explanation and references.
Rituals and change

A community also assumes an 'imagined' character (Bloklund 2003:60) that becomes social through performance. People imagine and symbolise their community; it is through social action and rituals in particular that they give meaning and bring people together. As Clifford Geertz (1973:112) states: "In a ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turn out to be the same world". Following Alexander (1997:139) I define ritual in general and basic terms as a performance, planned or improvised, that affects a transition from everyday life to an alternative context within which everyday life is transformed (see Bowie 2000:151-189). A ritual is a special form of symbolic communication that can create strong emotions of togetherness and belonging and is well suited to include a wide variety of people because it can be interpreted differently by its participants. Cohen (1985) specifically relates rituals to community, which he sees as a symbolic expression and affirmation of boundary, confirming and strengthening social identity and people's sense of social location. They are an important means through which people express their belonging to a community. This points to an understanding of community as

an expression of a highly fluid communitas – a mode of belonging that is symbolic and communicative – rather than an actual institutional arrangement, and that is a variable, capable of sustaining modern and radical social relationships as well as traditional ones (Delanty 2003:31).

Rituals often have an 'official' form, but their participants may attribute a different meaning and experience to them and, as Cohen states, it is the individual and idiosyncratic possibility of assimilation that makes them so compelling and attractive.

Rituals have historically been associated with religious performance (Leach 1968). Turner\(^18\) has broadened this view understanding rituals in a wide religious and secular sense, and has drawn attention to the ways in which rituals are being changed and which new ones are performed to cope with new situations. The transformational potential of rituals has now been commonly accepted, though maybe

\(^{18}\) Turner distinguishes between rituals of status elevation, status degradation, and status reversal. Life cycle rituals and those related to achieving a higher status (such as a political office) generally concern status elevation but calendrical rituals, almost always referring to large groups or whole societies, and rituals relating to groups crises (going to war, to reverse disasters like famine or drought) can also be rites of status reversal (Turner 1969:168-169). Courts martial and excommunication ceremonies create ritual degradation (1974:232). Turner (1974) argues that some rituals can lead to communitas, an absolute identification among members that strips away social divides and distinctions. According to Turner (1974:232) communitas emerges in liminality – a time and place of withdrawal from normal modes of social action – during which the ritual subject becomes ambiguous, betwixt and between all fixed points of classification. In his view communitas leads to a sharing of meaning. Cohen on the contrary claims that community rituals work because of their ambiguous character that can easily incorporate different meanings (Cohen 1985:50-63; see also above).
less so its association with conflict and violence (Bowie 2000:176-183). Rituals are thus paradoxical in that they create a feeling of belonging but are also occasions where social and cultural tensions come to the fore.

Rituals come in many sorts and Bell (1997:94) offers a wide range of categories that overlap in practice: rites of passage (life cycle rituals), calendrical and commemorative rituals, rites of exchange and communion, rites of affliction, rites of feasting, fasting and festivals, and political rituals. In this study I apply a simpler classification of rituals – or costumbres as the appropriate translation would be in Mesoamerica – and focus on ritual performances in the agriculture cycle, at life cycle events, annual public celebrations, state ceremonies, as well as in healing practices and interpersonal and inter-household exchanges. I have included agriculture as a separate category because many steps in the cultivation of food crops are accompanied by strictly prescribed practices, and I subsume feasting, fasting, and festivals under the other ritual categories. I prefer to use state rituals above the more narrowly-defined political rites, because state-sponsorship also includes many celebrations at schools that are not political in the strict sense. For reasons I explain later, I also look at those customary practices that that at first sight seem less ritual and more mundane like labour exchange (mano vuelta) and communal labour (faena).

Changes in traditions and rituals have been conceptualised as (re-)invention, (re-)creation, revival, or as imagined. These distinctions can be taken as different kinds of perceptions about change that I also apply to costumbres. As we have seen above, Clifford points at the neglect of cultural continuity in anthropological discussions and this is reflected in his use of the term revival. When culture is considered as a process rather than as a static essence (Fabian 1991 ch. 10) however, the supposed cultural continuity and revival do not operate outside of change but inevitably include it. That people regard and express their rituals as a continuation or revival of the past is, of course, a significant moral and political statement. Furthermore, people actively choose and select particular forms and discourses making continuity and active creation thus quite compatible (Feierman in Ranger 1993:77).

Claims of continuity are especially strong when people refer to their own memory. The concept of ‘invention of tradition’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) stresses the opposite, a discontinuity with the past and a conscious construction of tradition. In a later essay Ranger himself (1993) generously points at the drawbacks of the use of the term ‘invention’, because it implies a one-sidedness of colonial inventors to the disregard of custom, and makes little allowance for process (for which re-invention has been used). He has come to prefer ‘imagined traditions’ (following Anderson 1983) because this stresses ideas, images, and symbols, and instead of only focusing on colonial ideology allows for (in Ranger’s case) African

---

19 Ichon (1973:327) distinguishes among the traditional Totonac ceremonies, both individual and collective, as: transition rites, curative rites, purification rites, agricultural rites (almost neglected), and a now disappeared public rituals related to the earth and idols (Tawilate). He unfortunately does not mention possible new rituals.
participation and initiative in innovating custom (ibid. 81-82). By taking the concept of invention out of its specific African colonial context and by focussing on its meaning as conscious construction of tradition, it may yet prove to be useful for pointing at customary change that does not derive from memory but is an imagined continuity from an imagined past.

Rituals can not only be characterised as continuation, revival, or invention, but also as ‘innovation’, though they may be framed as old. People introduce new customs, or customs that are new to them, and not only continue the past. Globalisation has led to an increased confrontation with or participation in new worlds and the consequences are not only an increased emphasis on local customs, but the introduction of urban, national, and global customs. Rather than invention or imagination I prefer to use the term ‘creation’ as a more general term and I will show how the creation of costumbres occurred in Nanacatlán: how old and new ones are introduced, how they are related to existing local customs, and how these in turn are influenced and changed.

Until recently, rituals in Mesoamerica were related to Catholicism, which in indigenous communities has blended with or has been incorporated within indigenous religious practices. These communities are organised through a system of hierarchical religious and political positions, the so-called ‘cargo system’. The political cargos (cargos civiles) cover a variety of activities for the benefit of the community ranging from cleaning, weeding, and organising the schools to acting in the highest offices as a mayor or a member of the village council. The religious cargos (cargo civiles) centre on participation in activities and rituals for the Catholic Church with the cargo holders as highest offices for organisation and supervision of the local church affairs. Being part of the local community brings the obligation of participating in communal labour and in the ritual and economical duties of the cargo system. In this way men can show their loyalty and gain respect (Sandstrom 1991:315; Watanabe 1992:113). The cargo system is thus seen as central to community life and its changes have therefore often been taken as an example of community decline, as Cancian (1992) for instance shows.

But if one makes the cargo system central for community participation, one negates different and new costumbres. Moreover, with the cargos being male and Catholic affairs, such a view implies that women and the increasing number of followers of new religious movements are excluded from being part of the (ritual) community. Keeping Turner’s broad view on rituals in mind, there are many rituals that are not or not only related to the cargo system, such as life cycle, agricultural, healing, and state rituals. They also point to other hierarchical positions besides cargo holders such as ritual specialists, reciters and performers (including young people and migrants), healers, and midwives. Including these actively involved people can also shed light on why people can be central to the community without high offices in the cargo system or when their socio-economic position does not distinguish them from most of the other villagers.
The material basis of belonging

Food exchange combines all the relevant themes for studying a community discussed so far: it has a definite link with locality and world view, the exchange takes place between members of social networks, and exchanges are intimately connected to ritual occasions. It therefore embodies, so to speak, what constitutes a community.

What is eaten and how it is prepared, with and by whom food is exchanged, what rituals are performed, what food is suitable or taboo on such occasions, and how the food is regarded in relation to the community's past and present are crucial issues for understanding a community. According to Sahlins (1974) food is more suited than other goods for sharing. Fundamental in the exchange sequence of obligations – giving, receiving, and returning a gift – is that the giver is always the superior one, and this prompts the receiver to in turn become giver (Mauss 1970). In a continuum of exchange constructed by Sahlins (1974:191-196), one extreme is the already mentioned generalized reciprocity based on solidarity and altruism where giving is more important than the expectation of a return gift. In the other extreme of negative reciprocity, receiving is at the expense of others (through transactions like theft, gambling, barter, cheating) and is obviously more important than giving or returning a gift. The midpoint is balanced reciprocity whereby social relations are continued through the material flow of usually the same type and amount of goods or transactions. The return gift can either be simultaneous or later (delayed reciprocity) within a usual finite and narrow period.

With the growth of ritual celebrations and the expansion of social networks, food exchanges also increase because they usually take place when people come together. It is usually women who prepare the food, serve it, and in general are responsible for providing and carrying out food gifts. Food production and exchange are a central female activity that nevertheless only recently received attention for how it highlights the central role of women in social, religious, and ritual life and how this relates to gender (Komter 1996; Van Esterik 1998; Counihan and Kaplan 1998; Pollock 1998), understood as the social and symbolic construction of female and male.

My emphasis is on widely shared food habits and how they bring people together. The answers to questions about food habits “... centre on a question of group identity – a sense of belonging to some particular human group” (Murcott

---

20 The general idea is that “... food consumption practices, and food uses, are a function of social differences, or distinctions” (Gofton 1986:130). Control over food and food distributions and the relations involved are linked to political and economic power, as well as to male-female power relations (Counihan and Kaplan 1998). “If food is treated as a code, the message it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relations being expressed. The message is about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions about boundaries” (Douglas 1972:61). In Latin America it seems that the differences between men and women can be made to stand for other forms of differences and therefore gender is seen as an entry for understanding both social and cultural classifications and inequalities (Melhuus and Stolen 1996:1-33).
1986:108). Food and cuisine can be central in creating a sense of collective belonging (Fischler 1988:280). Food habits can change by a wish to belong and share food in an imaginary common meal and thus share an imagined experience (Falk 1991). Like landscape and place, food can be an object that triggers memory and produces meaning (Sutton 2001). I especially focus on how food habits in Nanacatlán highlight the role of women in maintaining social networks and the community, and how this is related to the particular food preferences and taboos.

Looking at what people eat during daily meals as well as special occasions, and what people consider to be edible and taboo, means a concern with the basic edible/inedible distinction, which is "... closely related to analytically constructed and more abstract binary oppositions such as us vs. them, same vs. other, inside vs. outside, good vs. bad and culture vs. nature" (Falk 1991:69). People do not eat everything available or eat the same, even within comparable ecological, social, political, and economic circumstances. Mary Douglas explains specific food taboos and preferences through her notion that taboos and avoidance occur where something does not fit into existing classifications (Douglas 1966). I use her symbolic approach to see how the food used in the exchanges is related to the social and supernatural relations involved.

This is not sufficient to explain how and why food practices continue to exist or have changed. Looking at food in today’s world invariably includes looking at how large-scale processes of change have influenced food habits (see inter alia Mintz 1996; Kurlansky 1997, 2003). The coevalness of new and old ways of producing and consuming food reflects developments in food acquisition and preparation through time – from gathering to global distribution – in one locality.21 In many parts of rural Mexico industrialised food supplemented but did not replace self-produced food (Allen 1992). Subsistence agriculture and gathering are often used more for daily food intake than the unaffordable industrial products (Allen 1992; Pelto 2000; Vargas and Casillas 1992; Zarate 1982:108-153). There have been major shifts in food availability by the large scale diffusion of flora and fauna as well as ways to prepare food across the world through barter, trade, conquest, colonialism, and globalisation. Food in Latin America reflects a meeting of for the

---

21 Major historical food developments coincided or at times even enabled three crucial historical processes (Bryant et al. 1985): the slow process of the domestication of plants and animals, with agriculture and permanent settlement as a replacement of or in combination with hunting and gathering, a very early process in Mesomerica (between 7000 and 10,000 b.p.); the industrial revolution with greater agricultural efficiency through machines and considerable improvement in processing, storing, and transporting food to be able to feed the urban population; the scientific revolution, which started as an effort to solve the problems caused by the industrialised food chain, especially large scale diseases and malnutrition. Industrialised food only took off in Mexico from the 1940s onwards (Allen 1992; Vargas and Casillas 1992). Malnutrition, together with disease, poor sanitation, and limited access to health care – still present in many parts of Mexico today – are especially affecting children and pregnant women (Pelto 2000:104-105).
greatest part regional indigenous and Mediterranean European customs (Long 1997; Coe 1994:228-246; Cartay 1992). Indigenous communities however, have frequently complemented instead of displaced native products with new introductions (Martínez et al. 1994: 27-28). This fusion of food habits further highlights costumbres as creations because it is relatively easy to identify the origin of dishes and produce in local cuisine. Typical for the world today is not only the spread of food but also the fact that eating has mainly become consumption, because people often do not prepare their meals anymore, let alone cultivate produce. People no longer have knowledge about the production, history, and origin of their food; and this causes anxiety and fear (Fischler 1988:289). Typical for many rural Mexicans – Nanacatecos are no exception – is that they at times consume anonymous food when they work in the city, though when returning to the village men can still be producers of agricultural products and women of meals. This context is crucial in understanding the significance of food exchanges in Nanacatlan. In Mauss’ words (1970:10), gifts create and sustain social relations because to receive a gift is to receive a part of the giver’s nature and substance (someone’s spiritual essence). The more so when a gift concerns home-made food from subsistence crops that is seen as typical of the village in contrast to industrial urban food. In that perspective, the villagers’ indignation about migrants who refuse to eat village food mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, sums up what belonging to the community is about in their eyes.

Introducing the research

My research began with the question of how, amidst the relatively rapid transformations that the village is experiencing, Nanacatecos have coped with the new economic, social, and cultural landscape that has emerged – and also how these changes have affected people’s lives. Why did some villagers stay at home while others took up the opportunity to earn a living in the city and why do they, despite their often prolonged absence from the village, continue to invest time and money in agriculture and in local rituals? How can we understand the connections and differences between people living and working apart, and how did the changes in income, work, and education affect social relations and village social differentiation? What kind of village are we dealing with, where a large part of its population is absent most of the year, a quarter has converted to religions which exclude them.

22 The most revolutionary introductions by the Spaniards were the plough and draught animals, which enabled agricultural expansion through wide fertile areas, and livestock breeding (cows, domesticated pigs, sheep, goats, and chicken), which transformed vast areas used for hunting and gathering into livestock zones and the growing of fodder. Marginal highland areas like the Sierra Norte in Puebla where mountains are too steep for ploughing, water too scarce for irrigation, and transporting too time consuming, have escaped such expansions. Agriculture itself entails a continuation as well as marginalisation of original crops and displacement by newly introduced ones. This seems to have taken place mainly in the post-colonial period during the expansion of capitalism and commercial agriculture, though there are marked regional differences (Martínez et al. 1994:26).
from the major public rituals, a young generation embraces an urban lifestyle, and women and men must deal with and maintain a social network that increasingly crosses the village boundaries, but for all of whom the village is more important than ever? Such questions about a community in flux relate to one of the basic concerns of the social sciences: the issue of social cohesion and solidarity versus disintegration and individualism. I address this issue through my main research question: how did Nanacatecos manage to create a viable and often lively community, so that far from disintegrating in a period of major transformations it actually gained in prominence?

Looking at communities as aggregative and imagined rather than as given and natural has opened up new ways to study how rapid transformations impact communities without leading to their demise, and how people have crossed the boundaries of local communities and yet maintain a feeling of belonging to their locality and express it through community rituals. In this study I attempt to answer the questions of how and why in such a turbulent period did the community not disintegrate but remain a vitally active village; and why despite major transformations in livelihood, beliefs, and practices, do Nanacatecos still consider themselves to be as local as their ancestors. More specifically, I want to understand why *costumbres* are increasingly valued and performed, to what extent this upswing of community rituals is shared among Nanacatecos, and what this tells us about their feelings of belonging to the village. Rather than leading to the failure of the community, it seems that modernization and globalisation have reinforced their sense of local belonging. Following Cohen and Anderson who showed that in times of change communities are being reconstituted, I focus upon the ways in which villagers living in an increasingly pluriform and fragmented society have to play a multitude of roles and face new situations and experiences; and how they resort to local customs and recreate and reproduce the community as the focus of their social world and of their sense of belonging. [Re]creating a community is however, not a simple and straightforward endeavour; striving for unity and cohesion it simultaneously creates exactly the kind of contradictions and paradoxes it means to overcome.

The objective of this study is thus to use the global-local perspective to explain the paradox of a community that experiences large scale migration and incisive socio-economic change even while becoming a livelier place than before. I want to show how this paradox works by giving ethnographic insight into how people create belonging – through social networks and through sharing a past, a world-view, rituals, and exchanges. To understand belonging amidst a flow of people moving in and outside the village I will focus on those Nanacatecos actively engaged in [re]creating the community; the cultural brokers such as ritual specialists, healers, and some young and migrant initiators, and how their efforts were taken up by Nanacateco women and men. Their combined efforts resulted in creating a continuation with the past as well as linking new influences to the local *costumbres*. I propose that it is precisely the simultaneous input of new and old types of cultural brokers creating a local customary repertoire that links the village past
to a rural-urban present and future and allows the community to remain a central focus in times of change.

The dilemmas of fieldwork and change

The following chapters serve as a representation of social and cultural processes developed in a process of communication with villagers from Nanacatlán and not as a reproduction of realities (cf. Fabian 1991 ch. 11). I bear full responsibility for the text. I understand communication not only as a dialogue or encounter but also as participant observation. This remains however, an unbalanced encounter no matter how human and equal the communication, because rarely are the people we study able to study the lives and societies of anthropologists. But there is of course more. Ethnography is based on a particular kind of communication that rests on more than the actual encounter. Communication is also a meeting of histories and expectations and these are not merely related to the grand world clashes, but to local memories and experiences. In the first months it was hard to convince people that I was not from the USA (like the Protestant missionaries, doctors, and nurses they had come to know); or from a government institute or programme and thus useless for village development; that I had my own methods and behaviour different from the researchers they knew – most prominently Elio Masferrer and Pierre Durand – and that unlike migrants I was staying even though there was no major feast or ritual in the near future.

Processes of change are hard to study, let alone in a single fieldwork period. I was fortunate to have four fieldwork periods between 1989 and 1998 (five months in 1989, four months in 1994, two months in 1996, and again two months in 1997-98). Though this sensitised me to the changes that were hard to overlook, it by no means diminished the struggle that anthropologists face in coming to terms with the people and the places they study, both during fieldwork and in the writing process. The difficulty was to unravel the often contradictory processes of change, without pinpointing or fixing a linear sequence of difference, and to understand how Nanacatecos interpret and deal with change and costumbres without getting entangled in naïve views on continuity even while appreciating the multi-sidedness of contemporary fieldwork.

Ethnography thus must be able to capture more accurately the historic context of its subjects, and to register the constitutive workings of impersonal international political and economic systems on the local level where fieldwork usually takes place. These workings can no longer be accounted for as merely external impacts upon local, self-contained cultures. Rather, external systems have their thoroughly local definition and penetration and are formative of the symbols and shared meanings within the most intimate life-worlds of ethnographic subjects. Except in the most general overview, the distinction between the traditional and the modern can have little salience in contemporary ethnographic analysis (Marcus and Fischer 1986:39).
Though I agree that the 'external' and the 'local' are localised symbols and meanings and often not distinguishable, the distinction between traditional and modern is not easily dismissed. For one, it is made by the people anthropologists study and as such is highly relevant. To understand what this distinction at the local level means, involved being conscious of my own (Western and anthropological) use of the categories, and not to simply ignore them. It took time to understand the difference between what I supposed and what villagers thought was costumbre or new.

During my second stay, when everybody I knew welcomed me warmly as a long lost friend, political tensions were so high that I had to manoeuvre carefully between followers of the two parties; living with the family of an ex-mayor who had faced accusations from opponents did not make this easier. It was also the period when there was a wide-spread rumour about white women who were kidnapping children to either sell them for adoption or organ transplants. I had in fact read about it before I went to Mexico, because a female tourist was almost killed in Guatemala when she was taking pictures of children. The same story ran through the Sierra and the village, and the youngest children who did not know me from my previous stay, shrieked in terror at my sight. Villagers would tell the story and finish comforting me: “We know you, you are not like that” or “I told others you are different”. Stories like “the dangerous white person that you are not” are a recurrent theme in ethnographies as a sign of trust, a passing of some boundary, but they could equally be understood as a confirmation of being “betwixt and between”, not exactly to be distrusted like ‘them’, but also not one of ‘us’. Why otherwise would I have needed reassurance? It is exactly this liminality which enables a creative understanding and communication between increasingly familiar strangers who, to be understood, can share a lot of understanding and affection. (See Bakhtin in Marcus 1999:107 note 22).

Marcus questions whether rapport is desirable and achievable at all in the changing circumstances of anthropological fieldwork and proposes to replace it with complicity:

The basic condition that defines the altered mis-en-scène for which complicity rather than rapport is a more appropriate figure is an awareness of existential doubleness on the part of both anthropologists and subjects; this derives from a sense of being here where major transformations are under way that are tied to things happening elsewhere, but not having a certainty or authoritative representation of what those connections are (Marcus 1999:97).

The idea that ethnographers must remain as strangers and avoid being too much at home has been part of their wisdom (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983:102) but this has always begun with the presumption that increasing familiarity is the rule that runs the risk of ‘turning native’. With multi-sited ethnography the once initial stage of ethnography – with all its uncertainties and ambivalences – has become a more permanent feature. The issue is now how to become familiar in many places and it
is one shared with many locals. The different periods of fieldwork that I spent over a longer period of time (four times in nine years) – when I would be confronted with new people, new developments, and familiar people in quite different circumstances – share much of the characteristics just mentioned.

To address this complexity of ethnographic research and change, I lived and worked with a great variety of people and used a multitude of methods. Though I stayed for most of my fieldwork in Nanacatlan, occasionally I spent time elsewhere travelling or walking with villagers. Most of all I accompanied them to neighbouring villages and to the main cities at the outskirts of the Sierra, to meet their relatives and compadres, to go with them to local or family feasts, to markets and shops, and to some regional offices of state organisations. I also visited some people in their homes in Mexico City.

I visited a number of households almost daily and got to know their lives inti­mately: their domestic chores as well as their working outside the house, social relations, ritual performances, stories, sickness and healing; in short local life as lived by different types of families. Much of my insights into their lives I derived from a combination of participant observation, informal interviews, and recording histories and myths. It proved unproductive to record conversations on tape because people felt uncomfortable, closed up, or started talking very formally. In this book I have turned several families into case-studies which provide a detailed account of their lives over the years. Though I can by no means do justice to the variety of contacts and friendships I had with many Nanacatecos, I will introduce some of the people prominent in this book.\textsuperscript{23}

It is not accidental that this study opens with Irene Castañeda and Pedro Ramos, a Totonac couple I came to know well during daily visits. They are exemplary of the Nanacatecos who are trying to improve their livelihood through income diversification and education of their children. With the money Pedro earned from working in Mexico City, they were able to buy some land to start growing coffee. They rent land to grow maize. Irene gradually turned into a friend and assistant who helped me in many ways, particularly in my struggle with the Totonac language, and Pedro proved to be an animated story teller and interpreter of customs. They were not only themselves major sources of knowledge, but also some of their close relatives: their children, her Nahua grandmother who lives with them, his father don Reyes who knows so many stories, his sister Tomasa whose children had left for Mexico City, and her stepmother doña Juana who is a healer.

I also became good friends with the mestizo family of Lupe (Guadalupe) Ortega and Elios Bravo, their children, and their domestic help Caro Ramos who lives with them. They provided me with a home and an opportunity to see their children grow up; two children when I met them, five by my last visit, one of them Caro’s son. Lupe is a local schoolteacher and Elios’ family had come to the Sierra in the nine-

\textsuperscript{23} Annex I provides short biographies of all the informants that appear in this book.
teenth century. Elios has inherited some plots of land parts of which he rents out while he cultivates others with the help of wage labourers. A long-time member of the PRI (the dominant political party in Mexico), he had been the village mayor for several years. His elder siblings are all professionals in Mexico City but he had to give up his engineering education when his father died and he had to come home. I also came to know his elderly cousin don Gualo rather well. Through them I met the many villagers who are their *compadres*, *comadres*, and godchildren as well as many *mestizos* in neighbouring villages.

The other *mestizo* family I became familiar with is the Rodriguez family, especially the main female local healer and herbalist doña Celia Manzano (who died in 1990), and her son Camilo who lived in one of the large old houses along the main street. They used to be influential landowners and had shared in the near-monopoly that local *mestizo* families had in regional trade. After the new all-weather road was built in the 1970s however, regional trade was rapidly taken over by urban merchants. As Camilo did not want to grow coffee and was unable to find other new income sources, he gradually had to sell most of his land.

During the first weeks of my first stay in 1989 I lived with don Gustavo Ramos and doña Lucinda Posadas. They were among the first Totonacs who owned a considerable amount of coffee land and kept a popular grocery shop annex bar. After Gustavo and Lucinda died in the mid-1990s and their daughter Susana had left for Mexico City, I was mostly in touch with Odilia, the only daughter who lived in the village. I also spent a lot of time with the father of don Gustavo, don Miguel, a former itinerant butcher who travelled the Sierra with some small cattle, and who now was still active as a healer. He was an expert on village history and as the oldest villager had memories that reached back to the beginning of the twentieth century. His wife doña Miguéla Posadas and her sister doña Lucinda shared many of their experiences with me of a past when life in Nanacatlán was, as they said, much more difficult.

Alibert was among the first Nanacatecos to whom I was introduced as he had experience in working with anthropologists: in the late 1970s and early 1980s he was the assistant of Elio Masferrer. He is from the Totonac Jiménez family, who belong to the first generation of relatively well-educated Totonacs in the village. Like Alibert, several relatives of his generation have become school teachers. Although they do not work the land themselves, he and his brother Leobardo even more so, grow coffee for additional income. At an early stage, Alibert became an activist of the PRD, the opposition party that challenged the powerful PRI during national and local elections during the 1980s and 1990s. Upon my return in 1994 when political clashes ran deep during the presidential elections, I was at first easily associated with the PRI as I was living in the house of one of its leaders. Thanks to Alibert and his relatives I was able to overcome distrust from the PRD following.

Don Beto Vázquez works as a day labourer for Elios with whom he and his wife had a *compadre* relationship. In the mid-1990s he was the Totonac president of the religious cargo holders. His teenage son Esteban sometimes helped me with Totonac
translations. Later, Esteban married a granddaughter of don Miguel, Anita (a niece of don Gustavo), and although he had hoped to escape working the land by becoming a teacher, this didn’t work out: by the time he had earned his secondary school diploma, the entrance rules to the teacher training college had been changed and he now works as a day labourer in the village and in Mexico City.

Lorenzo Velázquez is a Totonac healer who has made healing into his major occupation. In that field he is a self-made man who combines all kinds of practices he has come across in the region. He is often blamed for using witchcraft (brujería), as he keeps his knowledge strictly to himself — although he gradually opened up to me as an outsider who was not a potential competitor. He and his wife Magdalena Ramos live from what his patients pay him, as well as from some small-scale trading by her and after their three sons had grown up, from the money they earn as day-labourers doing all kinds of jobs in the village. The sons are all active in the most important village dance troupe and perform not only in Nanacatlán but also in several surrounding villages.

In contrast, don Felix Ramos comes from a family of Totonac healers and midwives, and though he is well respected even he occasionally faces accusations of brujería. He owns coffee lands but derives most of his income from his work as a carpenter and carver of wooden masks and religious images. His family has always been active in village dances and rituals but most of his children now live in Mexico City. He is known as the informal leader and most important shaman of Nanacatlán; it took a long time before he gradually opened up to discuss his knowledge of the local worldview and healing practices, always presenting a far more coherent discourse than most villagers who only have partial knowledge of these issues.

I held formal interviews with a large number of other people — often in their homes — because of their work, position or specialised knowledge. On the household, its social and supernatural relations, and the networks of food exchanges in which they were involved, I talked primarily with women. I mostly talked with men when it came to agriculture, urban and village labour, and politics. For local politics and village organisation I specifically went to the village authorities and the representatives of the ruling party, to active members of the new opposition parties and to representatives of state organisations from inside and outside the village. For local rituals and religion I talked with the religious officials of the Catholic church, ritual specialists, active villagers such as young Catechists, elderly women, reciters, decorators, performers, and members of various Protestant churches. I visited a number of healers and midwives repeatedly for questions about sickness and healing; some of them several times a week. Oral history was best known by several of the elderly whom I visited; about school I turned to teachers and children.

Day-to-day conversations, informal interviews, and informal observations took place on the streets; in the fields, markets, and shops; at the basketball field; in church or the churchyard; at people’s homes; either with people whom I knew
intimately and through former interviews and contacts, or just anybody I would meet, as often happens in Mexico.

The local archives were a shambles but I used them as much as they were available and accessible; unfortunately a large part had been eaten by mice and had subsequently been burned. What was left nevertheless gave a partial insight into the working of political functions and the village authorities from the 1960s onwards, though not sufficient for a systematic historical overview.

State censuses on population, coffee production, local coffee producers, and on subsidies for land tenure and agriculture were available through the local representatives of the organisations concerned.

I made my own database of all village households, including demographic details, landownership, land use, wage labour and trade, migration, religion, political affiliation, literacy, and type of housing. On top of that all houses were mapped, including a database reference for each household, thereby following the convention in Nanacatlán to equate village households with people living in the same house. Maps were also made of the village centre and of two example houses with a list of all household possessions, and their gardens with a list of every plant species.

Organisation of the chapters

The general question of my research is how Nanacatecos dealt with the rapid transformations of the last three quarters of the past century when the village and the villagers became increasingly part of the wider world, and why and how this did not lead to a decline of community life but rather to an increased interest in village affairs and local customs. To answer this question in the subsequent chapters, I look at the increasingly pluriform setting, the changes in social networks and social differentiation, local stories about the past, the Totonac worldview, the re-creation of ritual life, and the growing number of food exchanges. Throughout the book I focus on recurrences, transformations, and new introductions to try and understand how belonging to the village is being re-created and how villagers take part in and look at this process.

Chapter 2 provides general information about the setting with ecological, geographical, and demographic data, including the daily tasks of women and men. This is followed by an overview of infrastructural and agricultural transformations and a discussion of the civil and religious organisation of village life.

What land and agriculture as a traditional basis of income have meant and still mean, what changes have occurred in land tenure and land use, and what other opportunities to derive income have arisen (most notably urban migration) are the focus of chapter 3. It shows how quickly the economic landscape has changed since the 1970s and what the consequences of the diversification of livelihood were for the social organisation of the village where new income sources and educational opportunities have upset the local pattern of social stratification considerably. In its
wake, the nature and scope of social networks, especially *compadrazgo* relations and brokerage, have changed as they are no longer confined to the village boundaries, but have come to include regional and urban ties as well.

The views Nanacatecos have of their village past is the subject of chapter 4. Oral history is largely shared as long as it addresses the distant past; people hold divergent interpretations when it comes to more recent history, when landownership, trade monopoly, and political control of the emerging local *mestizo* elite turned most Totonac villagers into day-labourers and clients of local patrons. This division of local power was maintained through a system of close *compadrazgo* relations between elite patrons and the majority of villagers, as well as a shared feeling that supravillage authorities always neglected village needs. It was not until the 1990s, after the economic basis of *mestizo* domination had collapsed, that political power of the elite also became contested.

Notwithstanding an increased economic, social, educational, political, and religious pluriformity, Totonac villagers still have a lot in common. Chapter 5 shows how far and in what respects people share a worldview and morality. Nanacatecos and also the Protestants among them, largely agree about how people relate to the natural and supernatural world through Patrons and ancestors, the way in which these relations should be honoured, and how disturbed relations affect well-being and cause diseases or natural disasters. Ideas and practices of sickness and health are central to the moral order and this makes healers and sorcerers crucial for restoring personal and village well-being.

How social relations and networks are maintained through rituals is the subject of chapter 6. Depending on the kind of ritual, the focus is on different kinds of relations: a smaller circle of kin, *compadres*, friends, and neighbours in life cycle rituals and *mano vuelta*; a larger circle of (former) villagers in annual rituals (or in case of the fiesta also from surrounding villages); and more formal and official relations in secular and state related celebrations. With an increasingly outwardly oriented village, local rituals have become important to unite villagers. Local customs have become more elaborate, while new rituals reflect a growing concern with *mestizo* and national ways. Young people and migrants often have a leading role, which occasionally results in clashes with established ritual specialists.

As chapter 7 shows, since all rituals are accompanied by food exchanges there has also been a tremendous increase in the scope of these exchanges, not only because there are more ritual occasions but also because they are often the reason for many migrants to visit the village. Moreover, due to opening up of the village, social networks have become more complex and more outward-oriented. This has considerably influenced women’s roles as the main actors within the food exchange networks. They have become central in incorporating outsiders and uniting a differentiated world. The types and cultural meanings of food exchanged shows what kind of relation is being maintained.

The conclusions in chapter 8 answer the question of how the seeming paradox of a sometimes fragmented or even hollow village and a busy celebrating one can
exist simultaneously and how villagers can feel proud Nanacatecos at a time in which most of them depend on the outside world for their livelihood. The chapter relates this dilemma not only to the changes specific to the Sierra Norte de Puebla, but also to more general processes of globalisation and the [re]creation of locality. The desire to belong to the village and the rituals used to experience and create a sense of belonging however, are a specific response and may well change again over time or under different circumstances, even though they are perceived as customary.*
