Religion and Respeto:
The Role and Value of Respect in Social Relations in Rural Oaxaca

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Abstract

This paper discusses the different ways that the notion of 'respect' (*respeto*) is used in common discourse in rural Oaxaca, Southern Mexico. My particular focus is on the relationship between religious affiliation and the meanings attributed to the term. In the ethnographic example of indigenous Zapotec villages, where I have done fieldwork since the late 1990s, I examine how Protestants and Catholics employ the term and how it serves as a tool for legitimising their attitudes towards each other and towards the social norms of communal life. Both Protestants and Catholics consider 'respect' as an important value in social relations and communal well-being, but in significantly different ways. Catholics conceptualise respect mainly as a hierarchical value central to which is villagers' subordination to the authority of customs and communal leaders. For most Protestants, however, respect is a horizontal notion that is associated with freedom of faith and the individuals' right to distance themselves from the 'traditional' without being excluded or marginalised. The differences between these two perspectives are reconciled by a mutual acknowledgement of the need to reciprocate respect. This has enabled many rural communities to reach social consensus despite the increasing diversification of religious identities and a long history of religious conflicts in Oaxaca.

Key words: Respect, Protestantism, Catholicism, customs, community, Oaxaca

Introduction

Engraved on the coat of arms of Oaxaca, a Southern Mexican state, is the phrase '*El respeto al derecho ajeno es la paz*' ('Respect for the rights of others is peace'). These words belong to Benito Juárez, the first and to date also the only Mexican president of indigenous origin – a Zapotec Indian from the village of Guelatao situated in the mountains of Northern Oaxaca. In 1867, President Juárez defeated Emperor Maximilian I who ruled the country during a brief military occupation by France. After liberating Mexico City Juárez issued a manifest, which called upon all Mexicans to obey the new authorities and laws, and to respect the rights of each and every Mexican (Selser 1994, 175-176). The full sentence from which the above-quoted famous phrase derives from stated: 'Among individuals, as among nations, *respect for the rights of others is peace*.'

In contemporary Mexico, Juárez's maxim is still often used, mainly in political discourse that emphasises liberal democratic values. In the State of Oaxaca and especially in the region where Juárez himself originated from – now called the Sierra Juárez – the phrase has a broader use, however. One of the many contexts of its occurrence is that of religion and the discourse on the freedom of faith. The indigenous Zapotec and Chinantec populated Sierra Juárez has been marked by one of the highest growth rates of Protestant population in Oaxaca, if not in all of Mexico in the past few decades. As a result of this process, numerous villages in the region have experienced tensions of varying degree between the Catholic majority and the Protestant minority.[1]

This article will explore the ways that the notion of 'respect' (*respeto*) is employed by Catholics and Protestants in the context of often tense relationships between affiliates of different churches in the villages of the Sierra Juárez. The discussion builds on my intermittent fieldwork in the region since the late 1990s, most recently in June 2012.[2] As I will demonstrate, the concept of 'respect' is central to the arguments that both Protestants and Catholics use, albeit in different ways, when talking about religion, communal commitment, and the relationships between different religious groups. Protestants use the notion of 'respect' approximately in the sense attributed to it by Benito Juárez, emphasising religious freedom and their right as individuals to practice a non-Catholic faith despite its break with many local customs and practices. Among the Catholic majority, however, the term 'respect' is predominantly used in the meaning of a 'cultural norm' that emphasises the collective responsibility of all villagers to obey the customary laws and to participate in collective communal practices.

Protestantism in Mexico: culturalist and nationalist critique revisited

Although Protestantism[3] in Latin America dates back at least to the early 1800s (Mondragón 2005, 47–49), until the mid-20th century the percentage of Protestants in the population of all Latin American countries was negligible. Since the 1960s, however, Protestant churches have grown rapidly, in some contexts exponentially. While the increase has been particularly fast in Brazil, Chile, and in various Central American countries, Mexico could be considered to date as one of the most 'conservative' Latin American societies in terms of Protestant growth. According to the General Census of 2010, a mere 9.7 per cent of Mexico's population are non-Catholic believers. Yet, the overall dynamics of Protestant growth in Mexico are reminiscent of the process in the rest of Latin America (see also Gross 2003b). It means, above all, that a rapid and almost exponential growth has now replaced an earlier slow and linear increase. The Mexican census data demonstrate this clearly.[4]

Two trends within the process of Protestant spread in Mexico stand out in particular. Firstly, Protestant growth has in many contexts become synonymous with 'Pentecostalisation.' The trend is, in fact, common to most of Latin America. As Hernández Hernández (2007, 73) claims, possibly as many as 75 per cent of all non-Catholic believers in contemporary Latin America are Pentecostals. Pentecostal churches adapt to local cultural and social contexts relatively more easily than other Protestant groups. The Pentecostal 'version' of Protestantism is emotional and often simple in its practices, but at the same time innovative and dynamic. Escalante Betancourt (2007, 17) even suggests that one should draw a clear line between the 'rational Protestantism' and Pentecostalism, especially because these appeal to very different social groups. Whereas the former was adopted mainly by individuals belonging to the urban middle classes in the beginning of the twentieth century, Pentecostalism has managed to penetrate the poor slums of big cities and rural areas. This, in fact, is the second dominant trend in Latin American – and Mexican – Protestantism. The Protestant growth is now mainly powered by conversions in rural areas, in indigenous communities, and among the poor. The relatively horizontal and flexible organisation of Protestant churches enables them to expand into regions that were often neglected not only by the Catholic Church, but also by the state (Hernández Hernández 2007, 64). Consequently, the percentage of Protestants among the indigenous populations of most Latin American countries is considerably higher than the respective national average. For example, while 7.6 per cent of Mexico's population considered themselves non-Catholic believers in 2000, the equivalent figure for the indigenous population was 12.9 per cent (Garma Navarro and Hernández Hernández 2007, 211). Another reason for Protestant success in rural Mexico, and also among urban migrants from rural communities, is the cultural and social disorganisation of communities due to out-migration. New churches provide their members with novel social networks and these function as a substitute for kin relationships that migrants (or their relatives remaining in the villages) have relinquished.

Protestant growth in the predominantly Catholic Latin America has been considered by many scholars to cause broad and deep social and cultural changes. Although some attention was paid to the phenomenon already in the 1960s (*e.g.* Lalive d'Epinay 1968; Willems 1964, 1967), it was Martin's *Tongues of Fire* and Stoll's *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?*, both published in 1990, that set the tone for numerous studies that followed (*e.g.* Garrard-Burnett and Stoll 1993; Bastian 1994 and 1997; Miller 1994; Brusco 1995; Bowen 1996; Cleary and Stewart-Gambino 1997; Smith and Prokopy 1999; Patterson 2005; Steigenga and Cleary 2008). Common to most of these accounts is the argument that Protestant growth and modernisation in Latin America are to a certain extent synonymous processes. In rural communities in particular this may lead to changes in the forms of social organisation and collective practices, a more individualist worldview, as well as a more salient emphasis on success and prosperity.

Owing to these changes, whether real or imagined, the relationship between Protestants and the Catholic majority in Mexico, especially in rural areas, has often been troublesome. Taking into account the favoured position of the Catholic Church in the early 19th century Mexican society and the colonial legacy, it is not surprising that Catholicism has gradually evolved to constitute an integral part of the Mexican national culture and identity. Catholicism is a source of various dominant national symbols, among which the most eminent one is the Virgin of Guadalupe. In fact, the strong identification of popular Catholicism with national identity in Mexico is often referred to as '*guadalupanismo*' (Mondragón González 2005, 39).

Converts to Protestantism in Mexico have for long been criticised both by the Catholic clergy and by secular nationalists. The Catholic Church has blamed Protestants for turning against the Mexican 'national religion' and for destroying the 'symbiosis' between Catholicism and Mexican collective identity. Already in the first half of the 20th century, well before the accelerated growth of Protestantism in the country, the Mexican Catholic Church adopted a strongly 'nationalist' discourse to confront the 'Protestant danger' (*e.g.* Crivelli 1929; Esquivel Obregón 1946). Protestants were accused of serving the interests of the United States – by rejecting Catholicism they were believed to undermine the main source of ideological resistance to North American influence and interests. Closely related to such 'nationalist' rhetoric was what might be called a 'culturalist' critique of Protestantism. Critics argued that by turning away from the saints, including the Virgin of Guadalupe, Protestants were destroying the Mexican cultural identity (De la Torre 1995, 9).

Although condemning Protestantism on nationalist and culturalist grounds was more common in the first half of the twentieth century, such reasoning has been slow to vanish (Blancarte 1992, 417), despite the fact that most conversions are now endemic and various Protestant churches in contemporary Mexico are homegrown. The prime example is the Guadalajara-based Luz del Mundo (e.g. De la Torre and Fortuny 1991; De la Torre 1995; Masferrer 1997). On the contrary, intolerance towards the Protestant population, especially in the indigenous South, increased in the second half of the twentieth century. In Oaxaca (but also in Chiapas and elsewhere) the period from the 1970s to the 1990s stands particularly out in this respect. Religious conflicts at the time were common in almost all regions of Oaxaca, but especially in the Sierra Juárez (*e.g.* Ramírez Gómez 1991, 1995; Marroquín Zaleta 1995a, 1996; Montes García 1995; Grijsbers 1996; Gross 2003a; Marroquín Zaleta and Hernández Hernández 2009). Chiapas had probably the worst religious conflicts during that era in terms of the number of people involved, but Oaxaca suffered from the highest number of individual cases of confrontation.[5] Grijsbers (1996, 51) even talks about the 'Balkanisation' of the state due to violent religious clashes.

Since the mid-1990s the number of religious conflicts in Oaxaca has gradually declined and the rights of religious minorities are now legally better protected. Most important in this regard is the Law of Religious Associations and Public Cult (*La Ley de Asociaciones Religiosas y Culto Público*) passed in 1992 to combat mounting religious intolerance towards Protestant congregations. The current Mexican constitution guarantees the freedom of faith and the first sentence of its Article 24, amended also in 1992, stipulates:

> Every man is free to pursue the religious belief that best suits him, and to practice its ceremonies, devotions or cults, as long as they do not constitute a crime or an offense punishable by law.[6]

Despite these legal modifications, occasional conflicts still occur, also in rural Oaxaca.[7]

The Sierra Juárez: a contested ground for Protestant churches

My research in Oaxaca focuses on the Sierra Norte, the mountainous northern part of the state, and more specifically on the Sierra Juárez, one of its regions. The majority of the population of the region is indigenous Zapotec, although Chinantec villages are also numerous in the northwestern part of the area. Like most of Mexican countryside, communities in the Sierra Juárez have recently faced such processes as the decline of traditional economic activities, the increasing role of the money economy, socio-economic

differentiation, unemployment, as well as environmental degradation and growing violence. Out-migration to bigger cities and to the United States has been common for decades. As a result many communities in the region have become 'ghost-villages' (*pueblos fantasmas*) as they are sometimes called, the population of which mainly consists of women, children, and the elderly. Such villages survive almost entirely on the remittances sent by migrant workers.

The social, political, and cultural life in most villages of the Sierra Juárez is based on the so-called '*usos y costumbres*' ('habits and customs') – a loose body of local customs, norms, and practices. *Usos y costumbres* embrace religious ceremonies rooted in folk Catholicism, most importantly the *fiestas patronales* organised in honour of village patron saints. But *usos y costumbres* also entail local modes of social and political organisation, such as specific forms of political succession and decision-making, conflict-resolution, and, most notably, the system of *cargos*. The latter stands for a hierarchical system of communal responsibilities, historically characteristic of all of Meso-America.

It is commonplace to consider *usos y costumbres* 'autochthonous' and they constitute a strong basis for collective identity, unity, and solidarity in the villages. As a form of political and social organisation, *usos y costumbres* are often juxtaposed to the non-native, allegedly corrupt, and alienating electoral system based on political parties. 'Here custom is law (*Aquí la costumbre es la ley*),' I was often told by my informants in the Sierra Juárez. Various scholarly approaches to *usos y costumbres* in Oaxaca and customary law in Mexico more generally have also built on the perception that they embrace *native* practices, norms, and values 'inherited from the past generations,' and are thus the most legitimate way of organising communal life (*e.g.* Stavehagen 1992; Gómez Galván 1993, 1997; González 1994; Durand Alcántara 1998). But the lived reality of Oaxacan villages is obviously much more nuanced. Customary norms differ across villages and they articulate with the official electoral system in intricate and not necessarily oppositional ways (e.g. Recondo 2007). As I have demonstrated elsewhere (Gross 2006), the norms and rules pertaining to the realm of customary law are perceived very differently by different people, and it is not uncommon to regard the local forms of social organisation as repressive and undemocratic rather than as a 'social glue' that ties people together into a 'united and harmonious whole.'

Despite the contested nature of *usos y costumbres* and villagers' diverse attitudes towards communal mode living, it could nevertheless be argued that the community (*comunidad*) constitutes a fundamental political and social unit in the Sierra Juárez. Various previous studies have demonstrated that people in the Sierra Juárez and elsewhere in Oaxaca strongly identify themselves with the community as a place and as a corporate social entity (*e.g.* Kearney 1971; De la Fuente 1977; Alatorre Frenk 1998; Barabas 1998; Mendoza Zuany 2008). Berg (cf. Hirabayashi 1993, 11) calls this phenomenon *pueblismo*. However, despite their strongly corporate identity, indigenous communities of the Sierra Juárez are not exclusive entities closed to outsiders. As Mendoza Zuany (2008, 352) argues, in the Sierra Norte, unlike in Chiapas for example, the autonomy and identity of the communities is not constructed by emphasising ethnic differences, by drawing socially impenetrable boundaries, or by the exclusion of non-indigenous and non-native population. On the contrary, the strong collective identity of the villages is predominantly residential and not ethnic. Mendoza Zuany demonstrates this eloquently in the example of Guelatao and Ixtlán, two Zapotec communities of the Sierra Juárez. The corporate identity and the sense of communality (*comunalidad*) of these villages does not build on the development of exclusive Zapotec identities, isolation, or on the rejection of outsiders but on integrating and socialising the latter into local customs,

traditions, institutions, and modes of socio-political organisation – in other words into *usos y costumbres* (Mendoza Zuany 2008, 352).

Although this means that non-indigenous and outsider residents are not necessarily perceived as 'a threat to local culture' as long as they are successfully incorporated into it, for Protestants such is nevertheless a contested cultural ground. Oaxaca has experienced rapid Protestant growth in recent decades. From the demographic and socio-economic point of view this is not surprising. As argued above, Protestant growth in contemporary Latin America is especially fast among the poor and indigenous populations. The State of Oaxaca is the most indigenous and one of the poorest among 31 Mexican states, and the significant increase of Oaxacan Protestant population during the past forty years thus confirms the overall demographic trend.[8] The growth of Protestantism in the mainly indigenous region of the Sierra Juárez has been particularly salient. Partly this is related to migration, although I would be hesitant to draw an unequivocal link between contemporary conversions and out-migration from the region. It is true that in the past foreign missionaries, especially those of the Summer Insitute of Linguistics often acted as 'recruiters of *braceros,*' Mexican migrant workers to the United States (Marroquín Zaleta 1995a, 15; 1996, 215), where they were exposed to new religious ideas and, when returning, brought the new perspectives and ideologies with them. Conversions in contemporary Sierra Juárez are mainly endemic, however. Changing faith could still be related to migration but it is the inter-village migration rather than out-migration from the region that has the greatest effect on religous dynamics. An unproportionally high percentage of Protestants in the villages that are at the receiving end of internal migration in the Sierra Juárez (*e.g.* Ixtlán, Natividad, Capulálpam), are regional migrants. In rural Oaxaca migrants often have fewer opportunities than native villagers for social mobility and political participation. Villages jealously guard access to their communal resources, and the person's origin is often a crucial factor determining his or her status in the community. The migrants' relatively low social status and the fact that they have relinquished their kin ties while migrating favours and sometimes actually pushes them to search for alternative modes of collective belonging that Protestant churches offer. It is important to note, however, that the individual motivations for people to convert are much more nuanced than macroscopic explanations such as demographic profile, poverty, migration, and rapid social change seem to suggest. Reasons to change one's faith range from a 'miraculous' recovery from a severe illness to family pressure or a conscious escape from the collective communal ethos of an indigenous community. Likewise, religious conversion can be motivated by a determination to avoid the almost 'institutionalised' obligation to drink in the Oaxacan villages, as Dennis (1975) and Kearney (1991) have demonstrated.[9]

What renders indigenous villages a contested ground for Protestant growth is the above-mentioned strong reliance of communal identity and 'belonging' on all villagers' participation in *usos y costumbres*. As anthropologists have demonstrated in numerous ethnographic contexts, religious conversion often leads to a break with customs and traditional practices (*e.g*. Meyer 1998; Robbins 2004; Engelke 2004, 2010). Although this break is seldom absolute, it nevertheless has a strong rupture effect with both social and cultural implications. Due to such rupture, the tensions between the Catholic majority and the Protestant minority have been a frequent corollary of religious pluralism in the Sierra Juárez. In the discussion that follows I will mainly focus on mutual criticism, a more moderate but at the same time an almost quotidian manifestation of tensions between the affiliates of different religions. As I will argue, at the core of the criticism from both sides is the notion of '*respeto*.'

I will be using the generalising labels 'Protestant' and 'Catholic' because these are emic categories used by people themselves and such lumping together of affiliates of different churches is common. In reality, of course, the religious identities in the villages of the Sierra Juárez are much more nuanced and multiple than the binary division suggests. Protestants are obviously a heterogeneous group, not just from the theological perspective but also when it comes to their relationship with communal organisation and customs, as I will demonstrate below. The generalising label 'Catholic' is likewise contested. For example, the charismatic renovation within the Catholic Church has split the Catholic population in many villages into groups with varied takes on religiosity and religious practices. As De la Torre (2006, 228) has also suggested, charismatic renovation can be regarded both as a movement of unification and as a divisive force. New practices, livelier and more entertainment-oriented expressions of Catholic faith, as well as the Church's more 'this-worldly' attitude engender different reactions from both lay believers and the clergy.

It is also important to note that religious competition and conflicts, of which mutual criticism is but one manifestation, are not necessarily about religion at all. As I have demonstrated elsewhere (Gross 2003a), religious conflicts in the villages of the Sierra Juárez are usually not concerned with the conceptual differences between religious doctrines and do not occur because of the struggle for the monopoly of means of salvation. Their immediate motives are economic, socio-cultural, and political, mostly driven by competiton for resources, different interpretations of law and justice, different perceptions of communal norms and order, the incompatibility of individual and collective communal rights, or an implicit confrontation between native villagers and immigrants to the communities. Different perceptions of respect can be added to this list.

Respeto as a cultural value

Most contemporary discussions of respect in moral as well as in political philosophy owe much, of course, to Kant (*e.g.* 1785, 1795) and his categorical imperative to treat every other person as an end in him- or herself. In Kantian moral theory, respect for persons is the very essence of morality and the foundation of all other moral duties and obligations. In fact, Benito Juárez is often considered to have been influenced by Kant and his above-quoted famous phrase is tied to the principles laid out by Kant in *Perpetual Peace* (*e.g.* Richards 1999).

Respect in the Kantian sense is a horizontal and egalitarian value, a moral duty of each and every inidividual towards all other persons. *Respeto* as a cultural value in Latin American context, however, generally implies hierarchy. It approximately stands for 'proper behaviour' characterised by 'politeness' and 'deference' but often also by 'obedience' to social superiors like elders, parents, and the authorities. This has been suggested by many studies conducted in the Latin American as well as in the Latino contexts in the United States. These accounts have most often focused on kinship and parenting (*e.g.* Lauria 1964; Kemper 1982; Garcia 1996; Lyons 2001; Manago and Greenfield 2011), as well as on communicative competence and rules (*e.g.* Bradford, Meyers, and Kane 1999; Félix-Brasdefer 2006, 2008). Garcia (1996, 146), for example, considers *respeto* 'a Mexican base for inter-personal relationships, in which elements of honour and dignity are incorporated into a culture-specific transaction norm.' Lyons (2001), examining the ambivalent interaction between liberation theology and the notions of 'respect' among Quichua speakers in the central Ecuadorian Andes, similarly suggests that *respeto* refers to an obligatory moral code that secures a general state of social harmony and moral order. In a recent study of Dominican and Mexican mothers in the United

States, Calzada, Fernandez, and Cortes (2010) show that *respeto*, manifested in the obedience to authority, deference, and public behavior, is among the most important values that mothers seek to transmit to their children.

Respeto also constitutes an important cultural value in Oaxaca. As Norget (2006, 47) argues in her study of the Day of the Dead (*Día de los Muertos*), the concept of 'respect' strongly directs social interaction in Oaxaca, especially in ritual settings.[10] 'Respect,' as Norget (*ibid*.) claims, is an authoritarian principle and it is most articulated in family, the basic unit of socialisation. But 'respect' also strongly influences various types of interactions between individuals whose relationship is hierarchical in nature – for example, the relations between *compadres*, the old and the young, between mestizo and indigenous populations, the rich and the poor. As Norget (*ibid*., 46) observes, life in Oaxaca is characterised by an odd balance of insecurity, authority, restraint, and openness, deeply rooted in hierarchical notions of domination and subservience. Norget brings an example of Oaxacan schools, where children are taught to venerate the 'national *patria*' in the weekly rites of honoring the flag (*Homenaje a la Bandera*), and other civic rituals. The situation is not very different in the rural areas – as I will demonstrate below, Protestants' and especially the Jehovah's Witnesses' alleged 'lack of respect' for patriotic symbols is often at the core of the Catholics' arguments against them.

***Respeto*, religion, and inter-denominational criticism in the Sierra Juárez**

I will now turn to scrutinising how the notion of 'respect' or *respeto* is employed by Catholics and Protestants in the villages of the Sierra Juárez. *Respeto* is an emic concept in the discussion that follows. My informants – from numerous villages – repeatedly used it in interviews and conversations without any allusion or explicit reference to the notion from my part. Although villages in the Sierra Juárez are different in terms of their religious composition and the history of relations between different religious groups, the use of the term 'respect' is fairly uniform. The omnipresence of the term in common discourse is perhaps partly explainable by the malleability of its meaning, as noticed also by other scholars. For example, Lyons (2001) in his study of religious change and ethnic resurgence in the Ecuadorean Andes similarly observed that various notions of 'respect' figured prominently in the local talk about religion, ethnicity, authority, and change. Lyons (*ibid*., 11) explains this by the term's salience in intergenerational relations, as well as by its breadth and elasticity.

Respect for usos y costumbres as a normative position

Many of my Catholic informants used the term 'respect' in a normative sense, and it constituted an integral part of their criticism of religious 'dissidence' in the villages. The most common and recurring accusation against Protestant converts was their alleged 'lack of respect' for various aspects of *usos y costumbres.* Protestants are, of course, not a homogenous group when it comes to their break with local customs. For example, only the Seventh Day Adventists would refuse to participate in *tequios*[11] organised on Saturdays. All Protestants, quite obviously, refrain from participating in the Catholic festivities and from venerating saints, and denounce practices and events that involve consuming alcohol. But only some groups would refuse to pay the *cuota* – an obligatory financial contribution of each household in the village – for the organisation of the *fiesta patronal*. Jehovah's Witnesses stand particularly out in this regard. The following is an excerpt from my interview with Rosa, an elderly Jehovah's Witness from the village of Capulálpam, in which she describes her confrontation with the village authorities for not paying the *cuota*:

> One day three men appeared at my door and asked me for two hundred pesos (at the time equivalent of approximately 15 US dollars) that they claimed to be collecting from each family for financing the fiesta of Saint Matthew. I categorically refused. I told the men that I would be glad to support the village with my money, but only in matters that were not related to Catholicism. If they had asked money for schools or for the construction of roads, it would have been different. But paying money for drinking and celebrating saints – no, God does not like this. The men got angry with me and left. They, of course, reported my words to the village authorities, and people started to gossip about me. But I do not care about their opinion.

Jehovah's Witnesses also refuse to accept higher *cargos* in order not to get involved in local politics. As Manuel, a young Jehovah's Witness from Capulálpam, put it:

> We can accept [the *cargos*] up to the level of the *regidor*. Beyond that one would have to mess with politics. Catholics like the President, Jehovah's Witnesses like work. It is not recommendable for a Jehovah's Witness to get themselves nominated for higher *cargos*.

The same applies to any communal responsibilities that might be related to Catholicism. Manuel had refused to co-operate in various such activities while serving as a *topil*, the lowest position in the hierarchical system of *cargos*. The village authorities threatened to incarcerate him for neglecting his duties, but he claimed he was not afraid of them.

It would be wrong to conclude from this that Protestantism is essentially incompatible with the premises of social and cultural organisation of indigenous villages. There are many examples of Protestants', especially Pentecostals' seemingly rather easy adaption to local cultural and normative contexts. It is nevertheless true that owing to the growing awareness of one's constitutional rights, more people and not necessarily only Protestants, now vocally criticise the obligatory nature of participating, for example, in the system of *cargos*, communal assemblies, and *tequios* – in other words the foundational pillars of the social organisation of indigenous villages.

It is not surprising that such a stance triggers a 'retaliatory' response from the village authorities as well as from the Catholic majority, especially if the main obstacle to fulfilling the communal responsibilities is the person's non-Catholic faith. Whereas in the past, this response often took various violent forms ranging from expulsions to even homicide, it is now mainly manifested in criticism, moral pressure, and social stigmatisation of Protestants for their 'lack of respect' for local customs, culture, and traditional authorities. Many critics also lament the fact that religious pluralism in Mexico has now constitutional backing – this leaves communities helpless when trying to contest the cultural destruction that religious 'dissidents' allegedly cause. The opinion of Mario, a middle-aged man from Ixtlán, is a fairly typical example of such reasoning. Mario was extremely critical of the Protestants' unwillingness to collaborate for and participate in the *fiesta patronal*. As he claimed: 'These religions are foreign, not Mexican. Many sects from abroad come and pay their members for proselytising and convincing people.' Yet, as Mario complained, the village authorities can no longer punish or put 'real' pressure on Protestant converts, because this would lead to a confrontation with the human rights organisations in Oaxaca City. As a consequence, 'customs and traditions are fading (*estan alejando*),' he diagnosed the situation. Another of my informants –

Roberto, a teacher from the community of Tlahuitoltepec in the Mixe region of Oaxaca but working in the Sierra Juárez at the time of the interview – similarly argued:

> Let's suppose that a person who his expelled from a village for his or her religion says that this is against the constitutional laws of Mexico. OK, but internal rules are like local laws that are simply not written down, and Protestants as well as the state should respect these rules.

It is noteworthy that these local laws and norms are in fact no longer 'just' customary – there has been a gradual trend in Mexico in recent decades to 'codify' customary laws and render them more 'positive.' The trend is equally manifest at federal, state, and municipal levels. The second article of the Constitution of Mexico, for example, stipulates:

> [...]. The nation has a multicultural composition, originating in its indigenous people, who are descended from people who lived in the current territory of the country, who live in it now, and who keep their own social, economic, cultural, and political institutions or parts of these. [...].

The paragraph continues by declaring constitutional support, for example, for the autonomy of indigenous villages and their right to determine their internal forms of living and social, economic, political, and cultural organisation, to apply their own standards in regulation and resolution of internal conflicts, and to elect authorities in accordance with local traditions, procedures, and practices. At the administrative level of the state, an important legal tool defining the social organisation of the communities is *The Organic Municipal Law of the State of Oaxaca (Ley Orgánica Municipal del Estado de Oaxaca)*. This law provides village authorities with various legal arguments that can be used against Protestants when the latter refuse to accept communal responsibilities and participate in collective practices. Article 28 of the law, for example, stipulates that citizens (*ciudadanos*) of a municipality are obliged to 'respect and to obey the legally constituted orders of the authorities,' to contribute to the public spending of a municipality, and to participate in *tequios* for the benefit of the community to which they belong.

Additionally to federal and state level legislature, in recent years many villages of the Sierra Juárez have themselves codified the norms and rules of their socio-political organisation, clearly defining the rights and responsibilities of villagers. These written documents, usually entitled *The Decree of Police and Good Government* (*Bando de la Policía y Buen Gobierno*), add 'legal weight' to the hitherto unrecorded *usos y costumbres*. Consequently, it is not uncommon that representatives of governmental institutions responsible for the resolution of religious conflicts take a similar normative stance towards respecting *usos y costumbres*. For example, in my interview with a high official in the Government of the State of Oaxaca who was personally responsible for registering complaints of religious intolerance at the state level and negotiating with the groups in conflict, claimed quite emotionally:

> Non-Catholics only want to have rights and no obligations. *Usos y costumbres* are older than the constitution and they [non-Catholics] should understand that it is more important to respect communal traditions than to follow the ones that are imported from outside.

Apart from the normative emphasis on respecting and participating in local *usos y costumbres*, the term 'respect' also plays a salient role in what might be called the 'nationalist critique' of Protestants. Central to this is generally the claim that Protestants do not respect Mexican national symbols. Strictly speaking, this only applies to the Jehovah's Witnesses who do not salute the national flag, for example during the *Homenaje a la Bandera* ceremony at schools, and who reject to participate in various other civic rituals. Yet the claim is often erroneously extrapolated to all non-Catholic churches. Many of my Catholic informants justified their opposition to the foundation of Protestant congregations in their native villages namely by arguing that 'Protestants do not respect patriotic symbols (*no respetan a los símbolos patrios*).' To bring just one example of such argumentation, Julio, a middle-aged man from the village of Xiacui claimed, when describing to me the recent changes in the religious composition of the villages of the region, that 'religious pluralism is a bad thing – it distorts the *normal* life in the villages, because sects (*sectas*) do not respect the flag and the national anthem.' His wife, also present during the interview, seconded: 'by not having respect for Mexico they [Protestants] isolate themselves (*ellos mismos se aislan*).'

Such 'nationalist critique' is no longer based only on moral arguments. The already-quoted Article 28 of *The Organic Municipal Law of the State of Oaxaca* also lists 'respect for patriotic symbols' as one of the six major responsibilities of the inhabitants of municipalities. To combat the erroneous generalisation that all non-Catholic churches in the region oppose national symbols, some Protestant congregations draw a clear boundary between themselves and the Jehovah's Witnesses. Often they do this namely in terms of respect. For example, David, a Seventh Day Adventist from Capulálpam put it rather bluntly: 'respect towards authorities and the fatherland (*patria*) is what distinguishes us from the Jehovah's Witnesses.' The Adventists in Capulálpam have a Mexican national flag permanently exposed in their church to explicitly distinguish themselves from the Jehovah's Witnesses. Members of various other Protestant churches also made such a distinction. Acela, an elderly Pentecostal from Atepec, for instance claimed:

> We should subject (*someternos*) ourselves both to God and to the authorities. Jehovah's Witnesses are completely separate, they have a different doctrine. They do not salute the flag, because they say that it has a serpent on it. We *do* salute the flag, because as the Bible says, one has to respect authorities.

As Laura Nader (1990, 3) argues in her account of dispute settlement in the village of Talea, the ideologies of harmony and solidarity are deeply embedded in the social organisation of contemporary Zapotec communities of the Sierra Juárez. Respect for customs and for traditional authorities constitutes an integral aspect of this ideology. My informants in the region often talked about 'having respect' (*tener respeto*) as a precondition for social solidarity, peace, harmony, and communality in the villages. Many devoted Catholics in Capulálpam, for example, claimed that in their village there were *no longer* major problems with Protestants *because* the latter had *finally* agreed to respect the traditions and customs of the village. For example, Reynaldo, an elderly man holding a higher *cargo* in Capulálpam at the time of interviewing suggested that there existed a relative consensus and harmony between Protestants and Catholics in the village because 'everyone respects the *usos y costumbres* here, and for that reason there are no problems.' Reynaldo also emphasised that respect for customs and especially for traditionally elected village authorities is what truly unites a group of people into a community (*comunidad*) *par excellence*. In other words, for him respect for customs and authorities was an imperative that each and every villager, regardless of his or her faith, age, or gender, had to accept.[12]

Hence, respect in a very abstract and general sense is often considered to constitute a foundation of communal life in the Sierra Juárez. As one middle-aged Catholic man from the village of Natividad eloquently put it: 'The unifying and the underlying feature of life in a community is respect – to other villagers, to authorities, and to traditions.' Another informant, an elderly Catholic woman from the same village summarised the essence of communal life in the Sierra Juárez accordingly: 'One needs two things to live in harmony – faith and respect.'

The repeated emphasis on 'respect' for customs and traditions as the main foundation of communal life indicates a common concern with the sustainability of local collective identities and social organisation. It is not merely about the preservation of cultural heritage – *usos y costumbres* are also believed to secure the relative political and to a certain extent also economic autonomy of rural communities. As Mendoza Zuany (2008, 357) argues, contemporary villages of the Sierra Norte (of which the Sierra Juárez constitutes a part), facing the forces of globalisation and significant socio-economic changes, have had to develop strategies of dealing with increasing diversity. These strategies include the creation of new rules, ways of integration, categorisation of villagers, and local identification. Although open to the outside, communities define the rules of integration and the degrees of belonging (*ibid.*, 364). The outsiders' integration has many restrictions and depends on their ability to learn and respect *usos y costumbres*, and their willingness to become committed to the community.

Respect for the liberty of religious faith as a human right

But 'respect' is not a core term only in the critique by Catholics– it figures prominently in the Protestant rhetoric as well. Significantly, however, for Protestants 'respect' is first and foremost an individualistic value rather than a moral imperative to 'belong' and to 'participate.' The individualistic meaning that Protestants attribute to 'respect' renders it an egalitarian and horizontal notion that is in essence very different from the above-discussed collectivistic obedience to the authority of customs and communally elected leaders.[13] Persecuted Protestants often criticise the village authorities as well as the Catholic majority for not respecting Protestants' constitutional right to freely practice their religious faith. By calling for 'respect' Protestants emphasise their right to be *different* without being excluded. In the opinion of many of my Protestant interlocutors, communal membership and belonging should not be defined by cultural, social, and religious homogeneity and by participation in *all* collective practices of the village. As one of my informants, a young Jehovah's Witness, argued, alluding to the authorities of his village of residence: 'they want everybody to be similar but we are independent, we have liberated ourselves from the chains of the customs here. But this does not mean that we are not of this village.'

In their criticism of the forcefully collective ethos of the indigenous community and the pressure from the Catholic majority and village authorities, Protestants occasionally refer to Benito Juárez. The following is an excerpt from my interview with Maximino, a former pastor of the Pentecostal church in Ixtlán, who recalled how he and his religious 'brothers' and 'sisters' had been persecuted in the 1980s:

> We respected everyone – one should respect in order to be respected, as was Benito Juárez's slogan. During the communal assemblies we were a couple of souls against three hundred, and we talked about the ideas of Juárez, in this very land of his! We talked about the rights we have, but nobody took any notice. According to Juárez one has to know how to live and how to respect another person.

Juárez is an exemplary authority in such argumentation not only because of his famous phrase and because he was a Zapotec himself. He was also a liberal who stood against the privileged position of the Catholic Church and for religious tolerance towards non-Catholic religions. The Constitution of 1857 and Juárez's Reform Laws of the same decade considerably, albeit temporarily, undermined the position of the Catholic Church in the Mexican society (*e.g.* Aguirre Beltrán 1992; De la Torre 1995). With this in mind, my Protestant informants often claimed that in 'the land of Benito Juárez,' as people often call the region, religious intolerance had to be particularly condemned and ignorance concerning religious liberties fought against. Fernando, a Presbyterian from Atepec, for example, explained why there existed religious intolerance in the Sierra Juárez accordingly: 'People are not very civilised here, they do not have enough education. This is why they refuse to follow Juárez's idea that "respect for the rights of others is peace."'

In recent decades, public awareness of and concern with religious intolerance has grown hand in hand with the increasing focus on human rights in Mexico in general. Specific state institutions and offices – for example, the Department of Religious Affairs (*Dirección de Asuntos Religiosos*) under the state government of Oaxaca – now moderate and resolve religious conflicts. Various non-governmental organisations have also been founded, mainly by Protestants, to stand up against the mounting religious intolerance. In Oaxaca, organisations such as the Cofraternity of Christian and Evangelical Pastors of Oaxaca (*Cofraternidad de los Pastores Cristianos y Evangélicos de Oaxaca, COPACEO*) and the Christian Defense of Human Rights (*La Defensa Cristiana de los Derechos Humanos, DECRISDH*) are the most notable examples. *COPACEO*, founded in 1987 in response to the assassination of three Pentecostal pastors in the Sierra Mixe, is primarily a network organisation (Fabre 1995, 134). *DECRISDH*, founded in 1991, acts as a mediator in religious conflicts, gives legal advice to persecuted religious groups, and works to raise general awareness of religious rights (Grijsbers 1996, 46). Its director Enrique Ángeles Cruz summarised the organisation's aims to me in an interview accordingly: 'Above all, our aim is dialogue and reconciliation.' He further emphasised that it would be erroneous to consider Protestant faith to be incompatible with the communal mode of living *per se*:

> For Catholics, the ultimate manifestation of collective communal life is the fiesta where saints are honoured, money is spent, and alcohol is consumed. The fact that Protestants and others do not want to take part in this does not mean that they are necessarily against communal ideology but rather against its Catholic premises.

The Protestants' call for respect for religious freedom has now also legal foundations. The liberty of faith in contemporary Mexico is protected by a number of laws and constitutional articles, most of them rooted in the constitutional modifications and neoliberal reforms under President Salinas de Gortari. This has in some cases transformed tensions between Catholics and Protestants into a veritable legal battle. Whereas Catholics base their claims usually on Articles 4 and 27 of the Mexican Constitution, Protestants, in their criticism of religous intolerance in the villages, usually rely on Article 24, already cited above, and Articles 5, 14, and 16 of the Constitution. The latter three can be recurred to when criticising certain aspects

of obligatory *usos y costumbres*. The beginning of Paragraph 3 of Article 5, for example, stipulates: 'Nobody will be obligated to give personal service, work without just compensation and without his or her full consent […].' This paragraph is used by some Protestants (as well as by others) to undermine the obligatory nature of non-remunerated *cargos* and *tequios*. Article 14 of the Mexican Constitution, in turn, states, among other things:

> […]. Nobody may be deprived of life, liberty, or of his land, possessions or rights, except by means of judicial proceedings before previously established courts that comply with essential formalities of procedure, and conforming to laws made previously before the case.

It is also worth citing here the first two paragraphs of Article 16:

> Nobody can be disturbed in his or her person, family, residence, papers, or possessions, except by virtue of a written order by a competent authority, that is founded in and motivated by legal procedural cause.
>
> No order of apprehension and detention can be issued except by the judicial authority, preceded by a denunciation, accusation, or complaint about a specific action determined by the law to be an offense for which the individual may be punished by loss of liberty; and there exist facts to support the punishment and the probable responsibility of the accused.

Recurring to Articles 14 and 16 by Protestants and various NGOs concerned with religious rights was especially common in the 1980s and 1990s, when tensions between Protestants and Catholics in the Sierra Juárez took explicitly violent forms. At that time illegal detentions and expulsions of non-Catholic believers from their native villages were relatively common.

The above-mentioned Law of Religious Associations and Public Cult, passed in 1992, also aimed to ease the tension between religious groups and to combat mounting religious intolerance. Not surprisingly, it quickly became yet another tool in the legal battle (*e.g.* Gill 2002). Article 2 of that law is particularly significant in this regard. Besides clearly stating every individual's right to adopt any religious belief that most pleases him or her and to associate pacifically for religious purposes, it also stipulates the right to abstain from religious activities and rituals. As sections b) and d) of its Article 2 state, each individual has the right 'not to profess any religious belief, to abstain from religious activities and rituals, and not to belong to any religious association,' as well as 'not to be obliged to offer personal services, nor to contribute with money or kind to sustain any association, church or another religious group, nor to participate or contribute in the similar way to rituals, ceremonies, festivities, services or religious cults' (Secretaría de Gobernación 1996, 5-6). Protestants, in their rejection of religious *cargos* and in their criticism of forced contribution to and participation in village fiestas, often call for respect for these two clauses.

Respect as a reciprocal value

One possible way of reconciling the Catholics' and Protestants' apparently incongruent perceptions of respect is to treat it as a reciprocal value, as something that can be 'offered' as well as 'received.' Reciprocating respect as a means of establishing social consensus was ofen suggested to me by both Catholic and Protestant informants. For example, Eduardo, the

former municipal president of Capulálpam, argued that although respect is the basis of social harmony, it serves this function only if respect between different persons and groups is mutual. In his opinion, Protestants in Capulálpam respect *usos y costumbres* and collaborate for the fiestas not only because these are obligatory. As he claimed:

> They do so because they know that in return *we* respect *their* religion. In other villages Protestants are very fanatic, do not respect the customs, and consequently there is no respect towards them from the part of the village. And vice versa. Here we haved manage to strike a balance.

Miguel, an engineer from the same village, reasoned in a somewhat similar manner:

> In our community one respects everyone's individual religious ideologies, and an important factor here is the fact that Protestants have not infiltrated too much into the local forms of living and they respect the traditions. One has learned to live together (*convivir*) and to respect different perspectives on things.

Protestants themselves in various contexts also explictly emphasise their respect towards local authorities and customs, often as a conscious strategy to secure the village majority's tolerance towards their religious 'dissidence.' Pablo, an Adventist from the village of Natividad, for example, was critical of some Protestants' eagerness to accuse Catholics of drunkenness, fornication, and various crimes, claiming that 'one should not think like that and criticise only – there has to be respect between us since this is the way to avoid problems.' In a similar vein, a young Jehovah's Witness from Atepec, a village that for long has suffered from serious tensions between religious groups, suggested that for her it was of utmost importance 'to be a good citizen and to respect and fulfil the demands of authorities, as long as the authorities respect her and their demands are not in conflict with the principles of the Bible.'

The latter claim is important and indicates that the Protestant respect for customs and local authorities, although acknowledged as a value for social harmony, is not unconditional. Reciprocating respect should not be in conflict with one's religious convictions. For example, Victor, a Jehovah's Witness in his early thirties from Ixtlán, suggested that although he respected the customs of the village where he lives, and he felt as an 'Ixteco' sharing the colletive identity of the village, in cases of conflict between his faith and the customs of the community, his religious identity came first. As Victor put it:

> One is a Jehovah's Witness here, in any other village, and in any other country. If the village authorities violate our right to practice our faith in peace then, yes, one thinks of oneself first and foremost as a member of the community of Jehovah's Witnesses rather than as someone from Xiacui, Ixtlán, La Trinidad, Capulálpam, or from any other village. But these things – identitifying with one's religion and with one's village – are usually in a certain balance because one cannot be a good Jehovah's Witness without respecting the authorities. Even the Bible teaches us that.

Victor's quote demonstrates that religious affiliation should not be treated as an exclusive and all-encompassing identity. Villagers', especially Protestants' sense of collective identity is multifarious, situational, and dynamic. Religious belonging becomes more meaningful as a distinguishing feature in the context of conflict and in the absence of respect. David, a leader

of the congregation of Adventists in Capulálpam similarly emphasised the importance of reciprocating respect, recalling that this had not always been the case in his village:

> When the first Protestants arrived in Capulálpam, local people were very closed and narrow-minded, and there were big problems. Nowadays they already have respect, they understand that we are Evangelicals, and that we live differently. We in turn also respect the authorities.

The reciprocity of respect means, in other words, dialogue. There are well-known examples of cases of exclusion – especially in Chiapas but also in Oaxaca – because of religious differences provoked by the spread of non-Catholic groups. However, exclusion and segregation are not sustainable options for solving problems related to religious or other forms of diversity. As Mendoza Zuany (2008, 361) claims in her analysis of communal autonomy in the Sierra Juárez, different groups – in case of her research native and non-native villagers – have eventually come to acknowledge that autonomy is not a matter of unilateral decisions. In order to be viable, it requires dialogue in a context of open attitudes towards integration and, at the same time, respect for the *usos y costumbres*. This is the most sustainable way to achieve agreements that could result in coexistence, or even better, in a mutual acceptance of differences. As Mendoza Zuany (*ibid*., 362) concludes, it is through constant dialogue in daily life that different groups learn and teach each other how to live in '*comunalidad*.'

Conclusion

This paper has been concerned with how the notion of 'respect' is used by Catholics and Protestants, and to what extent the term can be employed by the two as a tool to legitimise their actions and attitudes towards each other and towards the norms of communal life in the Sierra Juárez. As such, the notion serves as an analytical window into studying broader processes and phenomena in contemporary indigenous communities of Oaxaca, such as changes in traditional modes of social organisation and cultural practices. Scrutising the ways how people talk about 'respect' contributes to the understanding of the dynamics of religion in these communities, as well as of the politics of collective identity in the context of increasing cultural and social diversity. As I have demonstrated, for many Catholics and Protestants respect is an important value but its role in inter-personal and inter-denominational relations is perceived differently. Catholics conceptualise respect predominantly as a hierarchical value central to which is the villagers' subordination to the authority of customs and communal leaders. For Protestants, generally regardless of the denomination, respect is a horizontal value and a guiding principle of a communal life that allows one to be different but yet to be acknowledged as an equal member of the community.

The social and cultural organisation of indigenous villages in the Sierra Juárez is relatively authoritarian in essence. It prescribes certain normative, political, and to some extent also economic homogeneity and leaves relatively little space for difference and dissent. Antagonism between collective and individual interests in such a social setting is inevitable. The diversification of religious affiliation, alongside with political, economic, and social change in the Oaxacan countryside in general, adds to the normative and ideological pluralism in the villages of the Sierra Juárez and further amplifies the antagonism between collective and individual ideals. The notion of 'respect,' as I have demonstrated, becomes a contested term that is used to argue for different perspectives that are in conflict with each other. Yet these two perspectives are not entirely irreconcilable. Although Protestants and Catholics are

using the term differently, the concept also serves as a potential bridge between the different groups. It appeals to fundamental values they both share, thereby 'reconciling' their differences. In many communities with a relatively long history of Protestant presence, different religious groups have 'learned' to live with each other as equal components of the same social whole. Communal unity under the conditions of religious pluralism requires a constant dialogue where both sides are flexible and willing to make concessions, compromises, and exceptions.

This means, for example, that village authorities do not force Protestants to serve religious *cargos* or to contribute financially for Catholic fiestas, that communal assemblies and *tequios* are not organised on Saturdays when the Seventh Day Adventists cannot participate, or that Jehovah's Witnesses are not nominated for higher *cargos*. Non-Catholics, in turn, would not use their religious convictions as an excuse to avoid collaboration for the general benefit of the community, but would complete their *tequio* on a different day, serve other types of *cargos,* or look for alternative ways of financial co-operation. Examples of such flexible manoeuvring are now ample in the Sierra Juárez. In many villages, for example, Protestants who for religious convictions cannot pay the *cuota* for financing the *fiesta patronal* contribute an equivalent sum of money for alternative public projects.

An important broader conclusion can be drawn from this. Protestant growth in indigenous communities has often been claimed to cause profound and significant socio-cultural changes. These changes have generally been described in negative terms. Protestant converts have been accused of switching to a more individualistic worldview that is at odds with the collective ethos of an indigenous community and undermines the cultural integrity and autonomy of the villages. Yet the adverse impact of Protestant presence and the devastating influence of Protestant churches on local traditions and identities in indigenous Mexico and elsewhere should not be exaggerated, as various other scholars have also emphasised (*e.g.* Garma Navarro 1998; Gros 1999; Falla 2001; Gallaher 2007). Religious conversion does not have an *inevitable* detrimental impact on local culture. As the examples of many communities in the Sierra Juárez prove, consensus and dialogue between the Catholic majority and the Protestant minority can be achieved despite the relatively long history of religious tensions in the region. In such communities, the above-quoted Juárez's maxim works both ways and respect becomes a reciprocal value.

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Notes

1. Strictly speaking, Protestants are not a clear minority in *all* villages of the Sierra Juárez. In exceptional cases, like in the community of Madero, for example, Protestants consitute nearly half or even more of the total village population.
2. I first arrived in Oaxaca in the summer of 1998 as a visiting researcher at the Centre for the Advanced Study and Research in Social Anthropology (*Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social*, *CIESAS*). Altogether 18 months of continuous fieldwork in the Zapotec villages of the Sierra Juárez produced ethnographic

data from altogether 39 communities, whereas one village – Capulálpam de Méndez – served as the research base. I have returned to the Sierra Juárez for shorter periods of fieldwork on four occasions, most recently in June 2012. The data collected over the period of 15 years include notes of participant observation in daily communal life, Catholic rituals, and the activities of all major Protestant churches in the region; more than one hundred unstructured interviews with individuals from various villages, as well as with NGOs and governmental officials in Oaxaca City; and three surveys conducted among inhabitants in Capulálpam (125 respondents), with pupils of a regional high-school (126 respondents), and with the municipal presidents of 27 communities. Archival materials were consulted in the State Archive of Oaxaca and I have also performed content analysis of the articles concerned with religion in the 1988-2008 issues of *Noticias*, a major Oaxacan newspaper.

3. For the sake of clarity and simplicity, I am using the term 'Protestant' instead of 'Evangelical' throughout this article. In common discourse in Oaxaca, the categories 'Protestant' (*protestante*) and 'Evangelical' (*evangélico*) are often used interchangeably. It is also important to note that I use the term 'Protestant' here as a cover term that comprises all non-Catholic Christian churches, although in reality it is a heterogeneous group. Some of the churches in this group that are widely present in the Sierra Juárez are, strictly speaking, non-biblical (*e.g.* Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, the Seventh Day Adventists).
4. In 1900, the percentage of 'Protestants' in Mexico was only 0.4 percent and this figure increased, according to Mexican General Census data, at an average rate of two tenths of a percent per decade, amounting to 1.8 percent by 1970. Since then, the growth of Protestant population has been increasingly faster. It is important to note, however, that the Mexican census data can be contested, owing to the variations in labelling religious identities in different censuses. For example, until 1990 Mexican general censuses distinguished between five religious categories – 'Catholic, ' 'Protestant/Evangelical, ' 'Judaic, ' 'Other,' and 'Non-religious' (earlier 'Atheist'). Non-Evangelical Christians were included under the category 'Other. ' The 2000 and 2010 censuses, however, list them as a separate group ('Biblical non-Evangelical'), distinct of the category 'Other. ' A concise overview of the expansion of Protestantism in Mexico can be found in Dow (2005).
5. Official statistics concerning religious conflicts in Oaxaca are available since 1975. A meticulous register was kept by the state government in 1975-92 and the conflicts registered during that period have been thoroughly analysed by various Mexican scholars (*e.g.* Marroquín Zaleta 1995a, 1996; Marroquín Zaleta and Hernández Hernández 2009). Altogether 352 religious conflicts were registered during that period. Although conflicts in Oaxaca have occurred in very different communities, their distribution has been uneven. As Montes García (1995, 33) demonstrates, two-thirds of religious conflicts in Oaxaca have taken place in relatively small communities with 500-2,500 inhabitants, generally located in poor areas characterised by a strong presence of the indigenous population.
6. This and various other constitutional changes initiated by President Salinas de Gortari were part and parcel of more broader neoliberal economic and social reforms that considerably affected Mexican rural communities, well beyond the changes in their religious composition.
7. For example, in 2009 a Pentecostal church was burnt down in the village of La Palma and 15 Protestant families were expelled from the village, allegedly for practicing a non-Catholic religion (*Noticias*, 16 June, 2010).

8. The percentage of Protestants in Oaxaca grew rapidly from 1.5 percent to 7.3 percent in 1970-90 (Marroquín Zaleta 1995b, 10). By 2010, the percentage of Evangelical Protestants in Oaxaca had risen to 10.6 percent, and that of all people belonging to a non-Catholic Biblical religion to 13.2 percent.
9. For example, in Ixtepeji, a village characterised by a 'culture of alcoholism' according to Kearney (1991: 349), most male Adventists had been heavy drinkers before converting.
10. Norget (2006, 47) also singles out *confianza* as an Oaxacan cultural value. *Confianza* stands for a relationship of mutual trust and aid. It is important to note that Norget mainly focuses on Oaxaca City and not on indigenous rural areas, where *respeto* and *confianza* have additional context-specific connotations.
11. *Tequio* stands for a native form of collective labour for the general benefit of the village.
12. This is so not only in the indigenous villages of Oaxaca and Mexico. As Lyons (2001, 9) argues in his study of the Ecuadorean Andes, *respeto* for his informants similarly stood for 'a general state of social harmony and moral order.' The Quichua communities according to Lyons are characterised by a 'respect complex' – the fiesta system, ritual discipline, and norms of everyday behaviour weave the multiple notions of respect tightly into the social and cultural fabric.
13. The shift from the 'vertical' to a more 'horizontal' notion of respect triggered by Protestant conversion also occurs in other social spheres – for example in the context of traditionally hierarchical gender relations in family. Brusco (1995) demonstrates this eloquently in case of female Protestant converts in Colombia.

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