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Las Fiestas against Displacement: Religious Celebrations as Socio-Territorial Resistance in San Andrés Cholula, Mexico

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Keywords

San Andrés Cholula, religious festivals, urban indigeneity, everyday resistance, gentrification

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Las Fiestas against Displacement: Religious Celebrations as Socio-Territorial Resistance in San Andrés Cholula, Mexico

_Abstract

The region of Cholula, comprising the municipalities of San Andrés Cholula and San Pedro Cholula in Puebla, Mexico, has experienced rapid urban expansion and increased real estate development in recent decades. This transformation has led to an intensification of processes of commodification and demographic change. However, indigenous communities in San Andrés Cholula have persisted in their organization and sustenance of religious festivities that are deeply rooted in neighborhood-based structures, such as *mayordomías*. This *_Article* explores the function of these celebrations as forms of spatial appropriation and everyday resistance within the context of urban restructuring, emphasizing their role beyond mere expressions of cultural continuity. The study draws on long-term ethnographic research to analyze three key celebrations—Christmas Day, Candlemas, and the Feast of Santiago Xicotenco—in order to explore how ritual practices reinforce social networks, reproduce local authority, and sustain territorial belonging. The *_Article's* argument is supported by theories of ritual, the production of space, and urban indigeneity. The institutionalization of social and cultural capital enables Indigenous residents to maintain their material presence and collective visibility in an increasingly commodified urban context. In this manner, they assert their right to remain and to define the social and spatial meaning of their city.

_Introduction

The pre-Hispanic city of Cholula was an important religious center for the cultures of Mesoamerica. The settlement under discussion was located in the territory that comprises the municipalities of San Andrés Cholula and San Pedro Cholula in the state of Puebla, within the Central Highlands of Mexico. It is claimed that in Cholula there are three hundred sixty-five churches, one for each day of the year. Despite the absence of empirical evidence, this legend constitutes a component of the collective imagination of contemporary Cholula, wherein the Indigenous population safeguards its profound cultural and spiritual heritage through religious festivities dedicated to the patron saints of Catholicism.

The religious syncretism that characterizes these celebrations has its roots in the 16th century, when the Conquest and the evangelization imposed by the Spaniards transformed Indigenous ritual expressions. In this process, a significant number of pre-Hispanic practices were adapted to Christian traditions, leading to the development of religious customs that have persisted to the present day. While these traditions may be problematized for perpetuating a neocolonial logic that maintains symbolic structures

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of domination, in Cholula they have also become important practices of social and cultural resistance. Consequently, this research aligns with scholars such as Homi Bhabha in understanding hybridity as a relational process, wherein syncretism is conceptualized as the 'in-between' space where new identities emerge and shape societies.[1]

The objective of this *_Article* is to examine how *las fiestas religiosas* [religious celebrations], particularly those organized by the traditional neighborhoods of the municipality of San Andrés Cholula, function as an active form of appropriation of public space and as a strategy of territorial continuity and collective permanence in the face of gentrification and displacement. A case study of three festivities—Christmas Day, the Candlemas of the Parish of San Andrés Apóstol, and the celebration of the patron saint of the traditional neighborhood of Santiago Xicotenco—was conducted to explore how these rituals serve as a tool for the political and communal legitimization of native peoples.

In this context, the present work acknowledges ritual as a performative practice through which social order is reproduced and negotiated.[2] The persistence of religious celebrations in San Andrés Cholula cannot be reduced to cultural continuity alone, rather it must be understood as a situated practice that actively produces meaning, belonging, and social authority. Accordingly, scholars of urban indigeneity, such as Renya Ramírez, have explained how Indigenous communities actively negotiate urban contexts, maintaining a balance between their identity and governance.[3]

The *_Article* also acknowledges the scholarly criticism surrounding the problematic relationship between culture and gentrification. As discussed by scholars such as Sharon Zukin, cultural practices have the potential to enhance the attractiveness of an urban area and accelerate processes of displacement.[4] It is imperative to emphasize that the present study does not assert an immune status of religious celebrations with respect to commodification.

Instead, it posits that the internal organization in San Andrés Cholula, grounded in neighborhood structures known as the *mayordomías*, functions on the basis of communal principles that differ fundamentally from market-oriented cultural production, which is susceptible to monopoly rent.[5] Following Appadurai, what can be observed in San Andrés Cholula is a grassroots socio-urban structure, intricately woven

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into local political dynamics and symbolic hierarchies, through which communities sustain forms of collective organization and territorial belonging.[6]

Finally, a multidisciplinary theoretical framework is employed to analyze religious celebrations in San Andrés Cholula, drawing from anthropology[7], sociology[8], urban studies[9], and critical geography[10]. Rather than perceiving these practices as static traditions or mere remnants of the past, this research conceptualizes religious festivities as dynamic social practices embedded in power relations, territorial struggles, and processes of urban transformation.

_Methodology

The present study is grounded in qualitative research methodologies, incorporating long-term ethnographic participation, participant observation, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews. The fieldwork was conducted over an extended period, from 2017 to 2024, through recurrent visits to San Andrés Cholula, with intensive observation during major religious celebrations, such as Christmas (December), Candlemas (December–February), and the patron saint festivities of Santiago Xicotenco (July).

The author's involvement in these events was facilitated by sustained communication with members of the Xicale family since 2017. This Indigenous family has a long tradition and actively participates in the religious and political life of San Andrés Cholula. Their active engagement in the *mayordomías* and municipal affairs offered a distinctive vantage point from which to observe the nexus between religious organization and the perpetuation of political continuity. The researcher's participation in the events as an invited guest enabled observation of both the public ritual performances and the internal preparatory processes.

A substantial portion of the understanding of the interrelation between religious festivities and political structures was derived from informal, open-ended dialogues with members of the Xicale family: Maribel Xicale Coyotl, Georgina Xicali Coyotl, María Flor Coatl Cuautle and Roberto Maxil Coyopotl. All are native residents of San Andrés Cholula and active participants in community life.[11] All interviewees provided informed consent for their participation and agreed to be identified by name in this publication.

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Maribel Xicale's professional background includes her service as Director of the municipal DIF System for the Integral Development of the Family, a position she held as spouse of the municipal president during the administration of Omar E. Coyopol Solis (2005–2008). Furthermore, she has engaged in various political activities in San Andrés Cholula since 2024. Georgina Xicali Coyotl's place of residence is in the San Juan Aquiahuac neighborhood, where she occupies a property inherited from her mother. Her primary commitments are to domestic work and household care. María Flor Coatl Cuautle, sister-in-law to Maribel and Georgina, resides in a separate dwelling on the aforementioned family property. She serves as a Minister of Holy Communion at the Parish of San Andrés Cholula, assisting in the distribution of communion during Mass and visiting the sick. Roberto Maxil Coyopotl is an Indigenous resident of the San Juan Aquiahuac neighborhood who actively engages in local political endeavors as a member of one of Mexico's political parties. In addition to these roles, he has held various positions within the ecclesiastical hierarchy, including *fiscal* and *mayordomo* at the Parish of San Andrés Cholula and the Temple of San Juan Aquiahuac.

The dialogues, which took place over the course of several years, enabled the identification of key analytical themes. Subsequent to the consolidation of the research focus, three semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants to explore the subjects addressed in this work, including neighborhood organization, religious communal structures, and the relationship between religious authority and the municipal government. The interviews were recorded and analyzed to identify recurring patterns related to territorial belonging, political continuity, and religious and community organization.

It is important to note that participation in the religious festivities of San Andrés takes place within relatively closed community networks. Active participation in organizational roles is typically restricted to members of traditional neighborhood structures or those who assume ritual responsibilities, such as the *fiscal*, *síndigos*, *mayordomos*, and godparents, which will be delineated in greater detail subsequently in this text. This restricted access partially explains the scarcity of existing research specifically focused on San Andrés Cholula, as much of the literature on Cholula focuses on San Pedro Cholula, which has historically attracted greater academic and tourist attention.

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Given the established relationships with the community, this study adopts a reflexive ethnographic approach, acknowledging both the advantages and limitations of access facilitated by community members. While the primary interviews were conducted within a single extended family network, triangulation with documentary sources and public municipal records was used to contextualize and corroborate key findings.

_Cholula: From Mesoamerican Sacred City to Colonial Catholic Pilgrimage Center

The name Cholula is derived from the Nahua term *Chololla*n, meaning 'to flee.'[12] Archeological evidence indicates continuous occupation since at least 500 BCE,[13] making Cholula one of the oldest inhabited urban settlements in the Americas.[14] Cholula was regarded as a sanctuary city, thus attracting rulers, merchants, and priests from diverse populations in central and southern Mexico.[15] By the second century CE, the Great Pyramid of Cholula reached the dimensions by which it is recognized today. This structure, known in Nahuatl as *teocalli*, meaning 'house of God' or 'temple,' and also referred to as *Tlachihualtépetl* or 'artificial hill,' constituted the city's principal ceremonial center and symbolized its religious significance.[16]

When Hernán Cortés arrived in Cholula in 1519, the Great Pyramid had been abandoned for several centuries and appeared as a hill covered with vegetation and trees.[17] Nonetheless, Cholula maintained its status as a prominent religious hub.[18] On October 18, 1519, Cortés's army assaulted the sacred city of Cholula, perpetrating one of the most egregious attacks against Indigenous populations in recorded history. This event is known as the Cholula Massacre.

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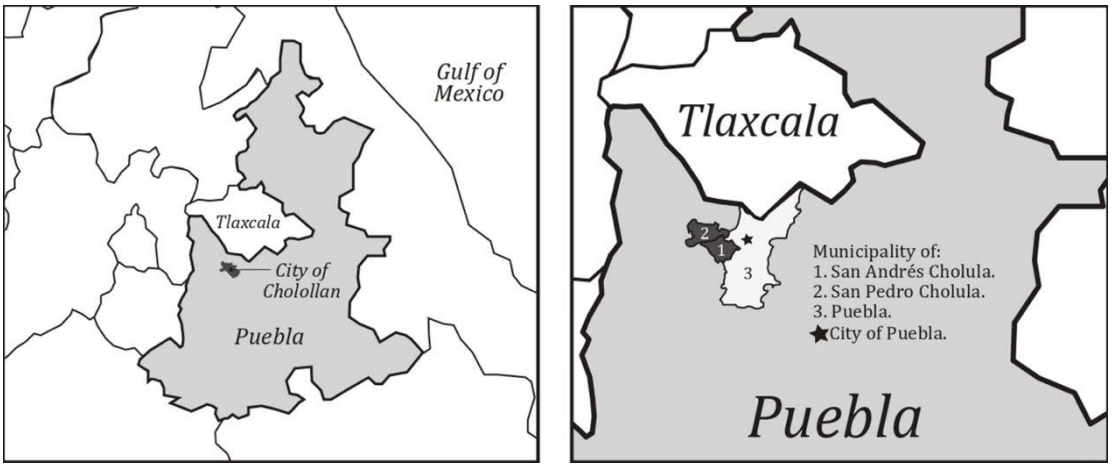

Fig. 1: The above is a geographical depiction of the city of Cholollan, which corresponds to the present-day municipalities of San Andrés Cholula and San Pedro Cholula. © Adriana Armenta-Ramírez.[19]

In the post-conquest period in Mexico, the adoption of Christianity by Indigenous populations was characterized, as Barnett explains, by a superficial emulation of the new doctrine, devoid of a genuine comprehension of its ideological tenets.[20] The process of authentic evangelization commenced in 1523; for a century, Franciscan friars effectively disseminated their religious doctrines throughout the central highlands, exerting a profound influence on prominent Indigenous communities.[21]

A further strategy they later implemented in their efforts to eliminate paganism entailed the construction of churches and chapels upon the *teocalli.*[22] Consequently, in Cholula—a sacred settlement replete with worship sites—a substantial number of churches were constructed, with origins dating back to the 16th and 17th centuries. One of the most renowned and distinctive landmarks is the church dedicated to the most venerated Spanish Virgin, Our Lady of Remedies, which was positioned at the summit of the Great Pyramid.[23] Accordingly, the locations that had previously been dedicated to the veneration of pre-Hispanic deities were converted into pilgrimage centers to honor Catholic saints.[24]

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Fig. 2: The photograph depicts both the *Tlachihualtépetl* and the Sanctuary of Nuestra Señora de los Remedios. © Adriana Armenta-Ramírez.[25]

_Religious Celebrations as Spatial Resistance: Indigenous Continuity in the Urbanized City of San Andrés Cholula

The municipality of San Andrés Cholula offers a particularly significant case study for examining the contemporary socio-political role of religious syncretism. This is due to the specific way in which ritual practices remain deeply rooted in Indigenous territorial organization and local governance systems. Rather than perceiving these practices as static vestiges of the past, this research conceptualizes religious festivities as dynamic social practices embedded in power relations and urban transformation. For this reason, it is noteworthy that religious celebrations manifested through major community festivals have persisted in San Andrés despite the impact of real estate development and the influx of new residents. In this case, as Chatherine Bell argues, ritual is not merely expressive or symbolic but strategic, operating as a form of social action that produces authority and structures social relations.[26]

It is documented that since pre-Columbian times, the territorial space of Cholula was organized into six districts: Tianguisnáhuac, Mizquitla, Texpolco, Xixitla, Tecama, and Colomoxco. Each of these districts was composed of *calpulli*, or 'neighborhoods.'[27] The neighborhoods were defined as social, religious, political, and economic units that were closely linked to kinship. These territories were further characterized by the presence of dedicated temples and deities, which served as focal points for community life and spiritual practices.[28]

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The *calpulli* survived and adapted to Catholicism, replacing the temple with the church and the pagan gods with a patron saint. This continuity was noted by Aldous Huxley during his visit to Cholula in 1934. Observing the city from the summit of the Great Pyramid, Huxley remarked that the temples described by Hernán Cortés had not disappeared but had been transformed into what he metaphorically described as "mosques" dedicated to Catholic saints.[29] In this sense, the contemporary network of neighborhood churches in San Andrés Cholula represents not a rupture with the pre-Hispanic past, but the spatial and institutional continuity of an Indigenous system of territorial organization in which religious practice remains inseparable from community identity and territorial belonging.

The colonial city of San Andrés Cholula, situated in proximity to the renowned Great Pyramid archaeological site, has been a popular tourist destination for several decades. However, it is now also known for its wide range of student housing, restaurants, and bars that attract a fluctuating population of university students, tourists, and residents of Puebla and other surrounding urban areas, who come here in search of entertainment and recreation. This phenomenon has been further propelled since 1970 by the presence of the Universidad de las Américas Puebla (UDLAP).[30] A university located a few kilometers from downtown San Andrés that attracts students from various regions of the country and worldwide. Concurrently, over the past two decades, there has been an influx of new residents to downtown San Andrés, accompanied by a proliferation of housing developments in the surrounding area,[31] many of which are occupied by foreign residents.[32]

As elucidated in open-ended interviews with Maribel Xicale, Georgina Xicali, and María F. Coatl,[33] this phenomenon has not interrupted or diminished the way Indigenous families conduct their religious events. The celebration of Catholic feast days and the patron saint of the town and neighborhood is indicative of the adherence to religious traditions that have developed since the 16th century. The events share several characteristic features, including their organization by the neighborhood, the lavish adornment of altars with floral arrangements, the presence of saints attired in sumptuous robes, and the staging of *pastorelas*, which are a genre of pastoral plays accompanied by processions.[34] In this context, interpreted through Pierre Bourdieu's notion of forms of capital, religious celebrations contribute to the persistence of

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Indigenous communities in San Andrés Cholula by reinforcing forms of territorial legitimacy that cannot be reduced to legal ownership or economic value.[35]

San Andrés Cholula, previously the district of Colomoxco, has maintained a traditional religious organization based on neighborhoods, which remain fundamental units for community and festive life. At present, eight neighborhoods have been identified: San Juan Aquiahuac, San Miguel Xochimilhuacán, San Andresito, Santa María Cuaco, San Pedro Colomoxco, Santo Niño de Macuila, La Santísima Trinidad, and Santiago Xicotenco. Despite the absence of a tangible demarcation that circumscribes the territorial boundaries of these entities, their distinctiveness is discernible through the geographical positioning of their respective temples.[36] These sacred spaces serve not only as sites of veneration for patron saints but also as venues for religious festivities dedicated to central figures of Catholic devotion, such as Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Guadalupe and Jesus Christ. Of equal significance is the fact that these temples serve as venues for various rites of passage, including baptisms, communions, *quinceañeras,* weddings, and death anniversaries. These events, which are central to the community's sense of cohesion, are no less significant than major liturgical celebrations in their role in sustaining everyday forms of belonging and neighborhood identity.

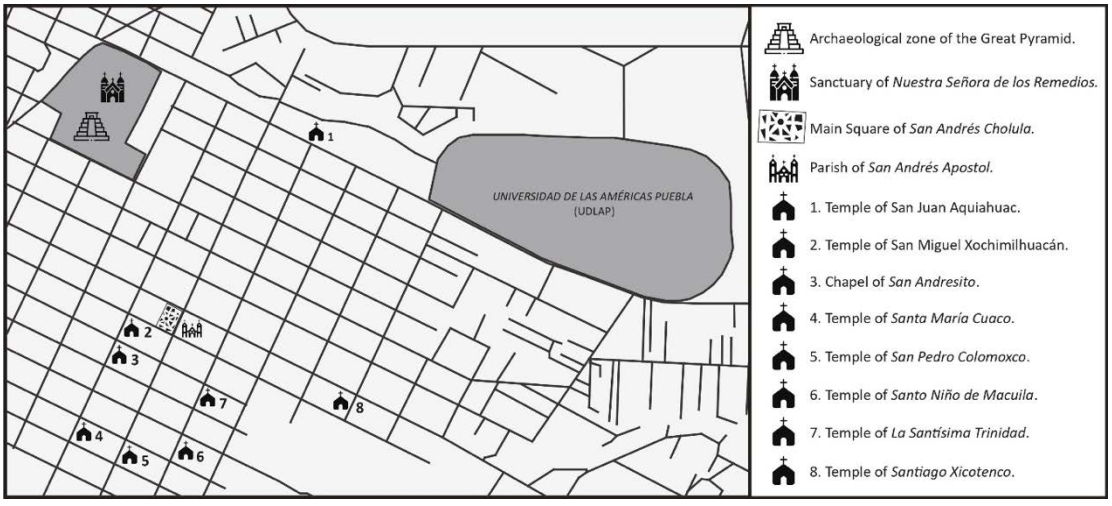

Fig. 3: The above map illustrates the distribution of temples in each of the eight neighborhoods of San Andrés Cholula, along with the surrounding areas. © Adriana Armenta-Ramírez.[37]

Families that have resided in San Andrés for multiple generations possess a strong sense of neighborhood affiliation and a specific patron saint to whom they offer

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worship. In many cases, this practice persists even after a relocation to a new neighborhood, with the individuals maintaining their involvement in the festivities of their original neighborhood while also assimilating into the community events of their new environs. As Maribel Xicale explains, "last year we were invited to participate in receiving the *posada* from the temple here of our house [Macuila neighborhood], and this year it was from San Juan [Aquiahuc]."[38] Moreover, they partake in the collective festivities dedicated to San Andrés Apóstol, in which the community as a whole engages.[39] Following Victor Turner, religious celebrations can be understood as performative moments that temporarily suspend everyday hierarchies and reaffirm communal bonds tied to place, through what he defines as communitas.[40] In San Andrés Cholula, hierarchy is mediated through offices such as the *fiscal*, the *síndigos*, and the *mayordomías*, whose authority extends beyond religious organization to influence social cohesion and local political dynamics, institutionalizing social capital.[41]

The ongoing observance of religious festivals is predominantly attributable to the efforts of the *fiscal*, who, as María F. Coatl expresses, "in their capacity as an ecclesiastical authority, assumes responsibility for the celebration of all feasts listed in the liturgical calendar."[42] The *fiscal* preserves functions that originated in the 16th century, when Franciscan friars appointed Indigenous community members to supervise religious life at the neighborhood level due to the scarcity of clergy and the territorial extension of their jurisdictions.[43] In contemporary San Andrés, the *fiscal* continues to care for the church through the administration of alms but is also responsible for organizing and funding festivities that extend beyond the temple, including processions and communal meals.[44]

The position of *fiscal* is held for a period of one year, commencing on January 1 and concluding on December 31. At this juncture, the incumbent *fiscal* relinquishes their responsibilities to a newly designated *fiscal.*[45] It is important to note that the individual fulfilling this role within the parish of San Andrés Apóstol is formally designated as a *fiscal*. In contrast, as María F. Coatl explains, "the individuals who execute this responsibility in the various church locations across different neighborhoods are referred to as *síndigos*."[46]

María F. Coatl also notes that "the *fiscal* or *síndigo* selects his *mayordomos*, who are individuals who accept the invitation to assist with the funding and organization of the most significant celebrations of the liturgical calendar."[47] The average number of

mayordomos per temple is approximately ten, although in certain churches this number may be elevated. This phenomenon is collectively referred to as *mayordomía.*[48] The *mayordomía* constitutes a significant economic and political institution, with its members being regarded as the moral authorities of the community. During their one-year term, mayordomos engage in the formulation of decisions pertaining to both religious life and local community matters.[49]

In this regard, Roberto Maxil elucidates that, despite his age, he is now considered one of the *mayores* (elders) in the community, having previously held the most significant ecclesiastical positions in San Andrés. According to him, "when there is an important issue in the Parish or the neighborhood, they call [the *mayores*] to consult or simply to be present. The presence of individuals with prior experience in *fiscal* roles, commissioner positions, and *mayordomos* positions is noteworthy,"[50] as it signifies their capacity to assume these responsibilities, having already demonstrated their competence and experience in these domains. This practice aims to prevent individuals from promoting initiatives that deviate from the customary community practices of San Andrés. Consequently, the *mayores* assume a pivotal role in the preservation and safeguarding of local traditions, ensuring their continued respect and adherence to them.

The internal organization of *mayordomías* must be understood in relation to local political power. In San Andrés Cholula, the historical tendency has been for the municipal leadership to remain within the familial lineage of the Indigenous communities in the area, including prominent families such as the Cuautle, Paisano, Coyopol, and Tlatehui.[51] The municipality of San Andrés Cholula was formally recognized as a Republic of Indians in 1714, at which time it was granted the right to elect its own local authorities.[52] In accordance with the regulations established by Charles I of Spain, the governance of Indigenous communities was to be carried out by Indigenous officials.[53] Consequently, the uninterrupted succession of these lineages in local government stands as a testament to the resilience of community-based authority structures.

The preponderance of long-standing residents in public administrative positions has facilitated sustained involvement in political decision-making processes that directly impact the town's social and territorial organization. In regard to the 2024 municipal election in San Andrés, Roberto Maxil has stated that the political party with which he

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is affiliated "had effectively lost the race the moment they nominated [Galeazzi as the candidate], because he is not well-known in the community."[54]

The continuity of Indigenous governance has also had material consequences, such as access to public employment, combined with income derived from renting commercial spaces in an increasingly commodified urban environment. As Georgina Xicale notes, "it is more convenient for me to rent [my commercial space] than to start my own business."[55] The potential for generating economic income through the rental of commercial spaces and rooms to university students and tourists enabled local families to maintain property ownership and generate the economic resources necessary to finance patron-saint festivities. Consequently, the Indigenous population in San Andrés has established a system of social capital that has made possible access to specific benefits, thereby enabling the conversion of their cultural and symbolic capital into economic capital.[56]

Moreover, the political continuity has promoted the institutional endorsement of religious activities, thereby normalizing the temporary closure of streets for processions and celebrations as an integral component of daily life in San Andrés, rather than as urban disruptions. In the context of rapid urban expansion and real estate speculation, the capacity of long-term residents to remain economically and politically anchored in place, and to publicly occupy urban space through ritual constitutes a subtle yet effective form of resistance to gentrification.

_Case Studies: Christmas Day and Candlemas of the Parish of San Andrés Apóstol and the Celebration of the Patron Saint of Santiago Xicotenco

Religious festivals have been observed to extend into public spaces, with processions, fairs, and temporary markets often being established in the vicinity of temples. Christmas Day is a particularly significant holiday in Catholicism. As is the case in most religious institutions, the temples in this area offer Masses, nativity plays, and community dinners. However, the most significant event in this area takes place at the Parish of San Andrés Apóstol, which is located beside the *Zócalo* of San Andrés Cholula. Community cohesion and participation are integral components of these celebrations. *Fiscal*, *síndigos*, and *mayordomos* are joined by *padrinos* and *madrinas* [godfathers and godmothers], who assist in covering expenses and organizing specific events, such as the Christmas Day procession and the *pastorela*.[57]

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On December 25, a procession is held through the streets of San Andrés Cholula to commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ. The procession is led by a representation of Joseph and Mary, followed by the godmother of the Virgin Mary carrying the Baby Jesus in her arms, accompanied by lanterns lighting the way, and the community walking alongside them. As was the case in pre-Hispanic times, the objective of the procession is for all participants to collectively proceed towards the Eucharist, a celebration that takes place at the parish level.

Fig. 4: Procession of the Birth of Jesus Christ from the Parish of San Andrés Apóstol, organized by the family of the Virgin Mary's godmother. © Adriana Armenta-Ramírez.[58]

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Fig. 5: All who accompany the procession are expected to enter the church to attend Christmas Mass. © Adriana Armenta-Ramírez.[59]

Beyond their religious significance, these processions actively reshape the experience and function of urban space. By moving collectively through streets, participants temporarily reorganize spatial hierarchies and assert their presence in areas increasingly transformed by real estate development, tourism, and commercial activity. As Henri Lefebvre has argued, space is produced through social practice, and these ritual movements represent a form of spatial production grounded in collective memory and belonging.[60] In this context, processions serve a dual function: they symbolize territorial attachment and enact it, thereby reaffirming the community's historical and social relationship to places that are otherwise being redefined through market-oriented urbanization.

Following the celebration of Mass, the *pastorela* is performed. This tradition constitutes a significant component of religious syncretism. The *pastorela*, which include dances and chants, were utilized as a pedagogical instrument to instruct the Indigenous population. These cultural practices were notably promoted by the Jesuit order, which arrived in Mexico in 1572.[61] The *pastorela* is a theatrical performance

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that depicts the journey of the shepherds to Bethlehem to meet and worship the Child Jesus. As the narrative progresses, the protagonists encounter the devil, who employs a variety of tactics, including the deployment of traps and temptations, to impede their progress and prevent them from achieving their objective.[62]

In the municipality of San Andrés Cholula, it is customary for all neighborhood temples to perform *pastorela* on Christmas Day. These performances take place either within the church atrium or in an outdoor area of the church complex. The *pastorela* is a significant cultural event, as the script is consistently enriched with humor and jokes that satirize contemporary social and political issues. Consequently, each play is endowed with distinctive characteristics and components, contingent on the locale and the performers.

It is customary for young people and children to make up the primary cast of the play. A considerable amount of effort is dedicated to the process of rehearsing lines and acting. This process often spans several weeks, and in some cases, internal castings are held to determine who will play specific roles.[63] The involvement of younger generations is imperative for the continuity of these traditions. From an early age, community members become familiar with these practices and actively participate in them, which contributes to fostering a deep-rooted collective identity and ensures that these customs continue to be reproduced in daily life. This finding is consistent with Bruner's theory, which posits that traditions acquired during early development are the most resistant to modification.[64]

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Fig. 6: A *pastorela* performed at the Parish of San Andrés Apóstol in 2023. This event was organized and funded by the family of the Virgin Mary's godmother. © Adriana Armenta-Ramírez.[65]

Fig. 7: A *pastorela* from the Temple of San Juan Aquiahuac, performed in 2019. © Adriana Armenta-Ramírez.[66]

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According to the Christian tradition, forty days after the birth of Jesus Christ, the infant Jesus is presented at the temple, and the Virgin Mary is purified after childbirth.[67] In light of this tradition, a procession is held on February 2, led by the image of the Virgin Mary. On this day, the route commences at the residence of the Virgin's godmother, who is believed to have carried the Child Jesus in her arms. The procession is accompanied by individuals bearing balloons and flowers. It is also customary to scatter rose petals along the route leading to the parish, where the celebration of Mass occurs.

Fig. 8: A depiction of the Candlemas procession that traverses the thoroughfares of San Andrés Cholula. This event is meticulously organized by the family of the Virgin Mary's godmother. © Jacqueline Ramírez-Benítez.[68]

During these processions, residents occupy the streets, thereby transforming urban space into a site of collective visibility. In this sense, the procession functions as both a religious observance and a political and performative act, through which inhabitants reaffirm their connection to public space and to the city. The recurrent nature of these rituals in San Andrés Cholula, uninterrupted over time, has resulted in a high degree of familiarity among the local population, to the point that the presence of official permits, police, or signage is unnecessary for both new residents and visitors to demonstrate respect for the procession's path, as these practices have become embedded in everyday life and are widely recognized due to their consistency with the liturgical calendar. In accordance with Scott's conceptualization of "everyday resistance,"[69] it is important to

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note that these practices do not directly impede property sales or halt urban expansion. Instead, they operate as forms of symbolic and social expressions of resistance. Therefore, resistance does not emerge as a direct opposition to gentrification, but rather as the ongoing reproduction of a social world that exceeds and challenges purely economic logics of urban transformation.

In addition to the Masses and processions dedicated to Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary—which represent a fundamental part of the religious celebrations in San Andrés—the feast day of each temple's patron saint is also a significant event for the inhabitants of each neighborhood. On the feast day of the patron saint, commemorative Masses are held, and the church interior is adorned with abundant floral arrangements, fabrics, and sawdust carpets with religious images. In the street, fairs are set up, and food stalls are installed where pre-Hispanic foods can be found, such as *espuma de cacao* [cacao foam] considered the food or the drink of the gods. The beverage is prepared with toasted blue corn, sugar, cinnamon, cacao, and water. The ingredients are meticulously amalgamated using a wooden implement, known as *molinillo.*[70]

Fig. 9: The interior of the Temple of Santiago Xicotenco is depicted on its feast day, July 25. © Adriana Armenta-Ramírez.[71]

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Fig. 10: The preparation of the cacao foam is underway, and Maribel Xicale Coyotl is imbibing the beverage. Amusement rides, installed in the street for the feast of Patron Saint Santiago Xicotenco, are visible in the background. © Adriana Armenta-Ramírez.[72]

A plethora of additional religious festivities are observed in San Andrés Cholula, which often encroach upon public spaces. These include the celebration of San Andrés Apóstol and of Our Lady of Remedies, whose sanctuary is situated on *Tlachihualtépetl*. While these community celebrations often include larger events and processions than those previously described, all collective expressions are of utmost importance and are an integral part of the daily lives of the native inhabitants of San Andrés Cholula, regardless of the saint worshipped, the size of the event, or the number of attendees. In the midst of accelerated urban transformation, these celebrations thus function as mechanisms through which Indigenous residents assert their right to stay, not necessarily by directly blocking displacement, but by reproducing the social, economic, and symbolic conditions that make continued presence possible.

_Concluding Remarks

The religious festivities observed in San Andrés Cholula represent a multifaceted social phenomenon that cannot be adequately explained by considering only the aspects of

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faith and tradition. As elaborated in this *_Article*, these festivities have been adapted and re-signified in response to contemporary socio-urban transformations. Therefore, ritual practices serve as the foundation for the material and political infrastructures that enable Indigenous permanence, despite the ongoing processes of gentrification and territorial dispossession. In accordance with Renya Ramirez's observations, the ongoing discourse in San Andrés is characterized by a continuous dialogue "between the traditional and modern" elements.[73]

Since the colonial period, religious syncretism has functioned as a mechanism through which Indigenous populations have sought to assert their identity within the context of an imposed religious framework. However, in contemporary San Andrés Cholula, this syncretism has evolved to encompass new dimensions. It does not merely represent a symbolic fusion of Catholic and Indigenous elements; rather, it serves as an active instrument of community continuity. In this context, ritual elements that have been handed down through history are imbued with a sociopolitical function in the present. It has been outlined that dances, processions, festive hierarchies, and community religious offices—such as the *fiscal* and the *mayordomías*—are practices that enable traditional neighborhoods to sustain their social and political networks, internal cohesion, and visibility in public space.

This research entailed close observation of the case study, which offered privileged moments for examining the articulation of symbolic resistance. Hence, it can be concluded that the practice of religion in San Andrés Cholula is not limited to the confines of temples; it is also manifested in external activities and interactions. These communities inhabit a variety of public and private spaces, including streets, plazas, homes, atriums, and public spaces. The subjects engage in practices that symbolically and physically demarcate their territory. By engaging in acts of ritual occupation, Indigenous residents assert their right to the city,[74] subtly challenging the neoliberal urban logic that privileges tourism and real estate speculation over collective life.

Consequently, these rituals should be appreciated as dynamic expressions of human existence that adapt and transform in response to evolving material and political circumstances. In the contemporary context, marked by challenges posed by real estate expansion, tourism, and economic interests that threaten to displace historic communities, religious celebration—through processions, festivities, and fairs—also

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functions as an act of territorial reappropriation that strengthens social and political structures that lead to Indigenous political continuity.

The residents of San Andrés Cholula partake in these events from a position of agency, enabling them to reinterpret and update their cultural heritage. The intricate interplay between tradition and change, between Catholic and Indigenous, is intricately woven into a tapestry of symbolic disputes, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of social life in this city. The present *_Article* has aimed to initiate a discourse surrounding these tensions and to draw attention to the way religious celebrations function as mechanisms of adaptation and resistance against the forces of neoliberal urbanism that favors market-oriented cultural production. Concluding this analysis does not signify the culmination of the study of a completed phenomenon; rather, it initiates a series of inquiries from multiple perspectives regarding the manner in which Indigenous communities reconfigure their relationship with the city, with their beliefs, and with their history. The religious festivities of San Andrés Cholula continue to serve as a testament to collective identity, a manifestation of cultural resistance, and a tangible way of inhabiting and contesting the city from grassroots perspective.

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Fig. 11: Photograph of María F. Coatl Cuautle and Georgina Xicali Coyotl, taken at Georgina's residence in San Andrés Cholula. © Adriana Armenta-Ramírez.[75]

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