Introduction to Cerro de Oro

Cerro de Oro is an aldea of Santiago Atitlán of about 7,900 people on the shore of Lake Atitlán in Sololá, Guatemala. It wraps around the base of a small dormant volcano of which the name of the town is the same. It is almost directly between its municipality to the west, Santiago Atitlán, and San Lucas, a large town to east (about 9.5 km to each). The total land area is about 10 square km.

This slow paced but hard working town is a very different scene than the hustle and bustle of the larger towns around the lake such as Panajachel, Sololá, or Santiago Atitlán. The majority of activity in the streets consists of children playing with a small plastic ball, women with large bundles of products on their head, and men with huge heaps of fire wood or large full sacks strapped to their heads and resting on their backs briskly zipping by. Occasionally one of the twelve tuk tuks, small individual taxis, or weighed down pickups carrying fifteen or twenty people into or out of the town drives by and disrupts the peacefulness. The loudest noises come from the schools when children are in physical education class or recess or when the Evangelical churches blare out their loud Christian music.

The languages spoken in Cerro de Oro are Tz’utujil as the first language and Spanish as the second. From some of my interviewing experiences and questioning, I figured out that a great deal of the older generation can speak small amounts of Spanish, but have trouble reading and writing it. The very oldest people speak solely Tz’utujil and no Spanish. The children start out learning Tz’utujil growing up, but because all of the schools start teaching Spanish very early on, Spanish is picked up quickly and they become fluent in it. The majority of the younger generation and middle aged people have the ability to speak fluent Spanish; however, there are also many that struggle understanding it.

The non-farm economy of Cerro de Oro is relatively non-existent. There are jobs such as agriculture, construction, carpentry, and weaving; however, during an interview with one of the current mayors, I was informed that about fifty percent of the people were unemployed. In addition Cerro de Oro does not have a market, and the people must travel to Santiago or the town San Lucas Tolimán to obtain food for the week. Not only do people travel to these towns for food, but many travel there for work as well.

There is also only one health clinic for all of Cerro de Oro - in the center of town. People must travel far from the other sections of town to get medical attention. For serious illnesses or injuries they must travel across the lake to Sololá or all the way to Guatemala City for treatment.

Purpose and Methods

Cerro de Oro is divided into four cantones, or barrios, Paguacal, La Cumbre, Tzanchalí, Patzilín Abaj (ordered east to west) which is the topic of my study. From the beginning, the first thing that people would tell me about Cerro de Oro was about the four cantones. People would also be happy to tell me which one they came from. Many people told me that the language between each canton was different from the others. My initial
thoughts were that this was very interesting, and I wondered how four different neighborhoods all were put together into one town, Cerro de Oro.

I wanted to determine the use of space and various socioeconomic differentiations between different neighborhoods. I also wanted to investigate, by observation and various interviewing techniques, various people from the different cantones and find out what the differences were between the neighborhoods and how peoples’ identity was affected by living in their barrio. I found out early on in my work that each canton had its own school. However, I wanted to discover if this was the only use for separating the community into quarters. I wanted to find out how much rivalry might exist among the cantons, whether people in one different are from the others, whether they dress different, or whether there is differentiation in socioeconomic class, whether there are differences in religious trends, and whether there are specific leaders in each canton community. In fact, I wanted to know whether each canton was a separate community each in its own way. My results took an unexpected turn that I will discuss later; however, for now I would like to start by discussing my observations from participant observation in the four cantones of Cerro de Oro.

Observations

There is one main entrance into Cerro de Oro from the road that runs between San Lucas and Santiago Atitlán. This road switches between dirt and stone pavers as it winds through coffee groves that surround the base of the volcano Cerro de Oro. Before entering the town a large dirt soccer field opens up in between the heavily forested surrounding land. About 200 meters after the soccer field is the entrance into the town. A sign saying Cerro de Oro rises above two guards wearing cream colored cowboy hats with large batons and leather straps sitting and waiting to question all incoming traffic. This road enters the town in the center, Tzachali.

Tzanchali

Tzanchali is the central residential area of Cerro de Oro. There is a basketball court with lights in the center of this canton that surrounded by the modern built, three story Filadelphia Evangelical Church, a teal painted school, some small stores, the municipal building, a pharmacy, and an old abandon church. All of the buildings are one story, with a few acceptations, and are built with the volcanic rock that can be found throughout Cerro de Oro. Overlooking the center of town is the large San Martin Catholic Church on a hill above. The main road to enter and leave Cerro de Oro runs right beside and around this central part of the town. On the northern side of this central part of town is a hill that runs down towards the lake. This is where the majority of residential houses are located. There are also many churches and tiendas spread throughout this area as well. At the top of the hill is the house of the Constucutzal compound, which contains a large temple for the Ministerios El Shadai and a store. To the east of this house, store, and temple is also another temple that is painted orange with a large sign of the name of the church, Iglesia Evangelica Asemblea de Dios Bethania. Across the street are random spaces of land filled with tiny coffee plants that are placed in rows. All around these coffee plants, on the ground, is filled with trash from snack foods, plastic bags, and tin cans. Behind the evangelical church is a small alley that leads to very small houses, some built with the volcanic rock, some with concrete blocks, and some built with the stalks of corn for walls. All of these houses have rusted brown and silver tin roofs with smoke stained chimneys and walls. There is not much or no space between these houses except for the occasional milpa for tomatoes or a few corn plants. Further down the road, to the east, is a Medical Clinic that doesn’t seem to be used very often. Beside this clinic is a very skinny dirt road that leads towards the lake. Walking down towards
the lake I encountered large concrete block walls with broken glass shards lining the top. Above the shards was a small fence that extended the height of the walls. Behind these walls were large chalets built with modern materials with large spaces of land that were landscaped and kept perfectly clean. These chalets look like mansions compared to the surrounding houses. Also, the large land that surrounds these chalets is what crams the other houses so tightly together. Along the south side of the road, away from the lake, heading back towards the center of town there are not many houses. Besides the sporadic spaces filled with litter and coffee plants, most of the land is forested and filled with cacti and pitayas. There is a large tower surrounded by a wall and barbed wire the juts out of this land. This tower is the tallest structure in Cerro, and is designed to look like a tall evergreen tree. It doesn't do much to save the view of the landscape and is topped off with a red flashing light.

Back towards the center of town, are two small, mostly dirt roads that break off from the main paved road that runs throughout all of Cerro, lead down towards the lake, and contain most of the housing for the residents of Tzanchali. The road to the east is lined with houses that are compacted together accept for the small walkways that weave in between them. About 95 percent of the houses are one story houses made of stone, or corn stalks, with tin roofs much like near the clinic. Back in the small walkways, there is sometimes a space that opens up and acts like a dirt and tool filled courtyard for about four to five houses around it. Smoke is always rising from these courtyards. Some houses have small milpas for little gardens that are fenced in by the tall corn stalks tied together tightly or free standing volcanic rock walls with no mortar. At the end of this road is a beach area along the lake that has cement tables and benches covered by metal pointed roofs for shade. A little walkway surrounded by these tables and huge boulders, leads down towards the lake. There is also a small road that leads down towards a dock that is rarely used.

The other road, slightly to the west, that leads down the hill is very similar to this road. The houses and walkways are designed the same and line the street. At the top of this road is a small one room Evangelical church, painted a turquoise green. About halfway down, the road forks left and right. In the center of this fork is a computer school painted bright white. Right behind this school is a business that cuts tile and concrete. The road that leads to the east is a small skinny dirt road that winds between houses with chicken and turkey coops and is filled with dogs and whatever the dogs have left from picking through the trash in the dug out drains along the sides. Eventually the houses end, and the road opens up to huge fields that extend almost to the lake. These fields are mostly filled with corn, but there are a few small plots of land used for other plants such as beans. The road eventually comes to end at a large gate in a wall that leads into the landscaped area of a chalet. Chalets line the lake all around the beach area. The large fields of corn make a barrier between the rich and the poor. All along the other road of the fork that leads to the west are the small houses, tiendas, and sporadic vacant lots filled with trash, mud, boulders, and young children playing. At the end of this road is an open space lined with an old stone wall which now works as a place to tie up cows. Beyond the wall of cows are rows of corn that would reach all the way towards the lake if it wasn't for the chalets. Most of the people, besides the children, are hard at work. Some people are repairing walls or parts of their houses, while many women are hard at work in the small courtyards preparing food or washing clothes. Many of the houses in this lower part of Tzanchali appear to be of the same economic social class. The few houses that have two stories appear to be owned by people of what might be a lower middle class. These houses are built with more modern building materials and have many electrical wires, and even sometimes satellites.
The principal economic activities of Tzanchalí appear to be the tiendas and the corn production. In this small section of Cerro there were a total of nine stores all virtually selling the same products. The land below the houses, in between the locals and the chalet owners, were vast amounts of land filled with corn. There was also a great deal of construction going on as well. Besides the building of chalets, there were four other places where houses were being repaired or added on to. There is also a pick up stop right beside the basketball court which stays pretty busy throughout the day. Many people have their own gardens to grow some crops, but most of their income comes from working. Besides construction, farming the corn, or owning tiendas, there is not much else to do for work. Therefore, many people travel to San Lucas or Santiago to work in the fields of coffee along the way or to sell crafts in the markets. There is no tourism to bring in money to Cerro, and the only visitors are people that own the vacation chalets.

There are many buildings throughout Tzanchalí that are non-residential such as the center plaza/ basketball court area. The schools play an important part in the community not only for education but also a social gathering point for young people. There are the stores that dot the landscape that provide goods from outside of Cerro. There is a Medical Clinic and a pharmacy that provides medicine and advice for sicknesses. The mural covered school building also sits in the center of town. However the largest buildings with the most activity are the churches. These buildings usually have music and prayer belting out from the windows during services, which are about four times a week. These churches not only provide a place to worship, but also a place to gather as a group and talk and communicate. Many times after the services, there is food, and people sit around with their peers and converse. Tzanchalí is the center of politics within Cerro de Oro having the police station and the Alcaldía Auxiliar, or mayors’ office. The most outstanding part of the landscape is Cerro de Oro itself. Rising out of the back of the city like a tidal wave is this large tree covered hill. It towers above everything else as if watching over the town.

Below is a chart representing census data for Tzanchalí.

**Figure 1**
ENCUESTA 2008
ALDEA CERRO DE ORO, SANTIAGO ATITLÁN, SOLOLÁ
CUADRO ESTADISTICO
CANTON TZANCHALÍ

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Patzilín Abaj

The canton of Patzilín Abaj starts about at the Evangelical church, Ministerios El Verbo De Dios. The way into this section of town is to turn west off the main road when entering Cerro de Oro in the center of town. About a hundred meters from the entrance, there is a stone and dirt road that turns left right at the Saint Martin Catholic Church. The road goes up a small hill which, at the top, turns to a solely dirt road. This is still Tzanchalí. The concrete houses, some two stories, with tin roofs that are very close together begin to spread apart and become smaller. In between these houses and small stores are rocky plots of land with trees and cacti growing in the cracks and on top of the boulders. Mossy volcanic stone walls with flowering bushes overhanging line the street on one side as the houses turn to forests on the other side. The stone wall breaks for stairs that lead up about fifty feet to a school. Two signs flank the stairs to right both representing different organizations. Kids sit beside the steps, playing in the road throwing a ball up the wall to more children playing above, while others laugh and joke with each other. Houses start to become placed further from the street (which switches between dirt and pavers) surrounded by plots of land used for growing crops.

In about a quarter of a mile Ministerios El Verbo De Dios comes up on the right and the road enters Patzilín Abaj, the furthest western canton. The road is now solely dirt and lined on both sides by volcanic stone walls that are often broken by barbed wire fencing closing in coffee plantations or forested land. Skinny dirt paths lined with stones also weave into the coffee plantations and forests. On the right, around the first left turn is the first chalet with its large metal gate and high stone walls. The large house is barely visible from the road and seems to be in a different world of landscaped yards and gardens with a tree lined driveway. Back on the road a rare tuk tuk whizzes by a woman carrying a large wad of produce in a hand woven shawl upon her head. The road begins to climb again into a group of houses and stores that are more closely bunched together. There are even a few two story houses that are built right up beside the volcanic boulder walled one story houses with rusting tin roofs. These houses sit in clusters along the road with smoke rising out of the soot covered circular metal chimneys. Old scratched Toyota or Mazda pickups used to transport people fill in the open spots along the road. Young people and women group together around the doors or window of stores eating snack food or talking to the store vendor. Every now and then there is a tight open spot in the houses on the north side of the road where the lake can be seen down the hill. There are a few small alleyways that lead down to the right into the maze of one or two room houses. Dogs scamper around looking for food as small children run between some of the houses made old cornstalks. Men gather in a dusty workshop working with electrical tools grinding some unseen metal object. Right after the buildings end, on the left is the central school of Patzilín Abaj. The group of buildings and basketball court (which has a sign saying it is authorized by the ministry of culture and sport of Sololá) sits about a hundred feet back from the road, and the sounds of children of all ages can be heard from within. The road once again becomes lined with forests and coffee on both sides as it takes a dip down. Along the lake side of this dip is a compound with a group of greenhouses that are much larger than the residential house that sits beside them.

At this point the lake side of the road now becomes full of that other world of chalets. The first one after the green houses is an abandoned large stone house that had once been beautiful but now is roofless because it had been burned down. A brown wooden picket fence lines the road with flowers now growing over. The lawn still looks relatively clean compared to the trash filled woods across the street. Down the hill towards the lake is a great deal of land that is completely filled with chalets and there large gardens. The road now is paved with large stones and eventually becomes flanked on both sides by chalets. Very few of the chalets’ gates are open or
appeared to have any activity going on. The residents don’t appear to be living there at the moment, but the lawns looked very well maintained. The only thing to break this continuous array of chalets is the occasional church, like a small branch of the Filadelfia Evangelical Church of Tzanchalí. The road takes another change into dirt as the line of chalets fades again. Purple flowers grow over the small stone walls as a sign that once again there are more chalets. There are a few chalets on either side of the road, but the ones on the side away from the lake are broken by some unpainted concrete block local housing. This housing is dusty and the little bit of land around them is covered with chickens and dogs. The chickens are held in by a cornstalk fence that surrounds the house or, in some places, broken and repaired chicken wire and crooked branches from trees or old two by fours of many shades and colors. Some chickens escape and peck the roads searching for a bit of food. People sit in these houses working on repairing sections of the fence or cooking something in the fire. Young kids in shorts, dirty shirts, sandals or barefoot, play with each other laughing loudly. Clothes hang on the fence drying or on lines running between buildings. Coffee saplings are growing in an open plot ready to be dug up and placed somewhere in the woods. To the right, a stone road leads down towards the lake. On both sides are tightly bunched houses of which the tin roofs can only be seen because of the high stepped stone walls topped off by pitayas. At the bottom, near the lake, the road turns to an overgrown path. At the end of this path is the stone foundation of an old chalet that is no longer there. Stairs lead down to the lake from this foundation. Near the lake, the hidden chalets that were not visible from the road now are peeking through the surrounding forest. There is a beach lined lagoon around which these huge mansions built with modern materials and large boat garages and docks sit upon.

Once again the chalets end and there is a dirt road that is lined by open lots or occasional local houses. After a few curves in the road there is another group of poor but colorful houses that are more tightly grouped together. There are a few large stores in between these houses that supply these peoples snack foods and basic home repair goods. Women here walk the streets again with large bundles on their heads, and men scamper by with large piles of fire wood or coffee saplings strapped to their heads and resting on their back. This area looks very similar to the first section of local housing. Near the end of this cluster of houses is a little white church with young girls selling fruit drinks in a stand beside the entrance. Towering above this section of housing is what looks like a leaning rock skyscraper compared to the height of the surrounding houses. This tilted rock structure is called Patzilín Abaj and is what the canton is named after. The steep sides are a dull grey full of damp cracks, while the top is covered with pitaya, cactus, and a large crooked tree that grows from the highest point. This rock is swarmed at the base with coffee trees that extend part way up the side of Cerro de Oro which sits behind and dwarfs Patzilín Abaj. Around the corner is a small path that breaks off the main road and weaves through the coffee plants to the base of the rock face. Around the back is a climbable area which is worn from the frequent locals that climb part of the rock to burn what appear to be ceremonial fires near the top. From the top, the view overlooks the whole residential area of houses and stores below along with the distant chalets around the lake.

Moving farther and farther west, the road now takes a steep climb up a rock paved hill leading towards some more local housing that is spread very far apart. One side of the road is a drainage system that controls the water running down the road. These few houses are made up almost completely of cornstalks or concrete blocks, but have a great deal of land for growing crops. One colorful group of teal houses is surrounded by many banana trees. These clusters of houses appear to be extended family housing on the same land. People of all generations gather in the dirt floor centers between the house and do various jobs. Some women are weaving
cloth, others hanging clothes, children play, while men and young boys are working on repairing or building things.

The land breaks at the top of the hill to a section of no housing along the muddy road. The summit of the hill is covered with plots of land plowed by hand into rows and waves of dirt. Peeking out of the tips of the rows are plants of different sizes according to the type of plant. In the center of many of these plots is a large cactus that has string reaching out in all directions covering much of the entire plot. Farmers walk along this road wearing traje and sacks on their backs. Some carry farming tools while others walk briskly, empty handed through small paths between the stoned divide plots. Many of the plots have tall branches with plastic or cloth tied to the top blowing in the wind like multicolored flags used to scare birds. The road winds between these plots to a fork. The road to the right leads down towards a gated chalet and the left leads to a longer road. Part way down towards the lake there is a small shack with smoke coming from within. This is the last local house along this road. Passing this house about 100 meters away is also the last chalet along the road. The road has no more turns or forks and now is the furthest western point of Cerro de Oro.

There seems to be a few types of economic activities throughout Patzilín Abaj, agriculture, maintaining the chalets, and stores. Agriculture seems to be the main form because of the vast amounts of land between houses to grow crops such as corn, beans, and coffee. There is also a great deal of stores selling a variety of things throughout the clusters of housing. However, the last form, maintaining the chalets seems to be an important occupation as well. The residents of the chalets do not appear to be living there all year around; therefore, they must hire full time help (guardianes) to maintain the landscape and the house itself. I assume that the last house out there by itself at the end of the road is or, at least used to be, a home base for a family that serve as guardianes. However, Patzilín Abaj appears to be the poorest of the four cantones of Cerro de Oro. The majority of people here appear to be in a lower middle rural class in contrast to the upper class mansions right across the street. Once again, the churches seem to be a gathering place for people to enjoy each other’s company, and even though these people seem to be the poorest, they all appear to be happy when they are together at these church functions.

Below is census data for Patzilín Abaj.

Figure 2
ENCUESTA 2008
ALDEA CERRO DE ORO, SANTIAGO ATITLÁN, SOLOLÁ
CUADRO ESTADISTICO
CANTON PATZILÍN ABAJ

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La Cumbre

La Cumbre, literally meaning "the summit," is rightly named because it sits on top of one of higher sections of the main road that runs throughout Cerro de Oro. La Cumbre is the smallest canton in size and population of Cerro de Oro and sits just west of Tzanchalí and just east of Paugucal. After a slight dip down on the western side of Tzanchali, the center, the paved road takes a left curve and a steep climb up a hill. To the left of the road are the roofless walls remaining from an old building. Plants have overtaken the center and one wall of this structure. On the road side of the building is campaign slogan graffiti and political party signs. The right side of the road is a steep embankment full of large rocks, weeds and small coffee trees. Along the left side of the road a bit higher up is a cliff that falls down into some forests and eventually to a chalet along the water. The road takes a right turn when it seems to be leveling out and continues to climb up. On the left side of this section is a large retaining wall with a fence above it. On the space which the wall levels out sits a two story house that is the first house of La Cumbre. The second story of this house is not being used and seems to have been stopped in the middle of construction, leaving it without a roof. Many other houses throughout Cerro look like this one; construction starts, and then is abandoned part way through leaving huge parts unfinished.

After this house, the residential area lines both sides of the street. Concrete block houses, some painted some not, step up the last fourth of the incline and are so close together they share one or two common walls with the surrounding houses. Electric lines sprawl over this section like a giant spider web. A few two story houses rise above the one story houses. Looking back once at the top of the hill the view looks over to the Catholic church and part of Tzanchali. Once the road begins to level out, there is a narrow volcanic pebble and trash filled alley that turns north down towards the lake. The right side of the path is lined with stones that form a wall, blocking in the coffee trees. The ground around the coffee trees is completely filled in with trash, and in many places it is not possible to see the dirt beneath the trash. The left side is a line of local houses that share dirt paths that run in between them. The sound of chickens digging in the trash and the smell of dog feces fills the walkway. Cats scurry down the path and dart into small breaks in the wall. A woman in traje sits on a stone with a shawl thrown over one shoulder glaring into the sparkling blue water of the lake. The wall on the right turns from stone to corn stalks barely holding back a forested space that shoots between the cracks in the fence. The left is now a vacant lot that nature has also overtaken. There is a small hut to the left and a small dirt path that leads to a cluster of three short one or two room houses with tin roofs. The bottom of the walkway stops at the aluminum fence and gate of a chalet; however a smaller path runs along the fence line down to the beautiful view of the lake that is not visible further up. There is another dirt trail that turns right off the road directly across from this previous one. This path runs along the house line to the right and coffee plants on the left. This path differs from the other in that is leads into a maze of other paths running between the small hut-like houses. Baby chickens run along these narrow dirt lines in the dirt between grey and brown stone walls searching for food.

The main road now runs between a tightly packed yet colorful section of La Cumbre. There are many two story buildings painted purple, orange, or sky blue that are right up against the road and touch each other on at least two to three sides. Stores and abandoned houses with no roofs, doors, windows, or anything inside fill in the spaces between residences. Very loud music comes from within the large two story orange painted church on the right. People stand and belt out the words to the song that is being blared over the big speakers. Little alleyways and walkways dotted with plastic bags and small candy wrappers shoot off from the main street very frequently. These paths lead back to the residential areas full of smoke. The right side of the street is now lined
with a cornstalk fence topped off with the spine filled green palm like plants. The fence runs along the street for about 100 meters and is only broken by a small white store with a bright green door. A sign hangs above the door advertising a beer called Brahva. The left side is lined with a mossy volcanic stone fence. The haphazardly strewn together wall of stones turns into a taller stone wall built with mortar and smooth level surfaces. It is covered in leafy flowering vines, and is only broken by a tall decorated brown gate. Behind this wall the only thing that is visible is the flower covered trees and bushes and open space of a chalet yard.

Directly across from this chalet is the Escuela Canton La Cumbre. A sign with these words painted in bright blue is displayed high on an electrical post marking the dusty road that runs back away from the lake. Houses and vacant lots occupy the sides of the road for the 150 meters back to the basketball court. Young children wearing white shirts and shorts of many colors laugh and yell playing red rover while being chaperoned by a young teacher on this concrete slab. Surrounding this court are various buildings made of concrete blocks used as the classrooms for these children. Over the open areas that surround this court are various groups of the children in white shirts all having a teacher watching over the various games. Behind the school is a huge building which would be the largest building in Cerro de Oro if it wasn't abandoned and crumbling with vines growing up the walls. It looks to have been damaged in a storm and lost its roof and parts of the walls. It also seems to be relatively new because the building materials look modern and up-to-date. Along a trash covered path that leads to a dirt soccer field is a much damaged cornstalk fence that separates the school from the land surrounding the large building. Young teenage coed students play soccer on this field with a large dugout hole that takes up about a quarter of the field. This hole is being dug for the rock that lies beneath the soil. Even though it takes up a large portion of the field it doesn't stop the game which the students seem to be very much enjoying. A classroom building painted two tones of orange sits beside the field with younger boys and girls sitting watching the game on the concrete step that surrounds it.

The lake side or the main road now continues to be lined with the walled in chalets and gates while the right side is packed with the lower class housing and stores. Some of these stores and houses are being worked on slowly but steadily everyday by two to three men construction crews. In between some of the concrete block walls are some open spaces fenced in by cornstalks or the black brown sharp volcanic stones. Within these walls and fences are women weaving material later to be made into guipils, cortes, and other traje, while the children not in school kick a small red ball against the house. Approaching the section that retreats down the hill that La Cumbre sits atop, there are white and red painted iron letters upon a concrete pillar saying "Canton La Cumbre" welcoming people into this neighborhood. There is a store and the Asamblea de Dios Cristo el Mejor Camino on the right side of the road, and gates with paved driveways leaded down to the water and views of the lake are on the left. At the bottom of this hill a concrete wall about six feet high runs along what appears to be the border between La Cumbre and Paguacal.

The most recurring thing of La Cumbre is the churches. It seems that around just around every corner there is an Evangelical church with music coming out of the doors and windows and people filling the small room dancing and singing. For the small amount of people that live in this canton the amount of churches is a bit overwhelming.
Below is census data for La Cumbre.

### Figure 3

ENCUESTA 2008
ALDEA CERRO DE ORO, SANTIAGO ATITLÁN, SOLOLÁ
CUADRO ESTADISTICO

CANTON LA CUMBRE

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### Paguacal

A similar scene could describe much of Paguacal except for the fact that the main road takes a slight turn away from the lake. When entering Paguacal, there is a dirt road that splits off the main road and heads towards the lake while the main road turns away. The road that splits off from the main road splits again into two roads. The left split is paved with rocks and leads down to a modest built chalet that is not surrounded by walls, gates, or fences. All of the people walking through have the ability to walk along this section of this side road down towards the lake. The house is surrounded by flowers and a nicely kept garden that are viewed to the left as the road turns to a small path leading past a boat and up to the lake. The rough dirt and rock filled right split of this side road is flanked on the right by a rocky hill topped off by a crooked tree full of vines. It leads to a cluster of chalets that set on a peninsula type of land. Before reaching the group of chalets a small path breaks off to the right that opens up in between two fields. The fields used to be used for agriculture but now appear to just be overgrown.

After going between the fields the road gets narrower and is used only for foot travel. It enters into an area of small houses and turns into a maze of little paths that lead between the houses, into houses, between gardens, and dead ends that lead nowhere. Murky water drains throughout these streets towards the lake leaving a rank smell when combined with the rotting trash and dog feces. Clothes hang over the tumbling fences and sagging nylon lines. Turkeys, chickens, dogs, women with baskets on their heads, men with hoes, and children weave through these paths without confusion. To the outsider it is impossible to find one’s way around in this puzzle. This section of housing is one of the main residential sections of Paguacal. One of these paths that connects with three or four others from different sections of the cluster of buildings leads to the central school of Paguacal, Escuela de Autogestion Comunitaria Canton Paguacal. This school is a different scene than the schools of the other cantones. The other schools have a large land area for a basketball court and even space to play soccer,
but this school is crammed in between the houses that surround it. There is a basketball court, but it is about half the size of the others. The teal painted tin roofed buildings of classrooms (some two stories) surround this fenced in court. This school and housing sets on the lake side right beside the main road. The other side of the main road is not as crammed together with house. Stores with the advertisements of cellular phone companies painted on the side dot the landscape that is mostly filled with coffee plants and empty lots.

The road then begins to climb a small hill and becomes surrounded on both sides with residences and stores. On the left is a fabric making store where two young girls are busy sewing. A pickup from San Lucas full of people from the various cantones of Cerro de Oro whizzes by as people and dogs scurry across the road to avoid being hit. A butchering shop is also on the left right up against the road. Some more small paths lead down to the left into the maze below. Piles of concrete blocks are stacked up beside houses on the right that are under construction.

Also in this section of Cerro de Oro exists the Campamento Shalem. Signs along the road to San Lucas and Santiago and throughout the main road running through Cerro de Oro advertise this park. At the top of the hill that this residential cluster sits on is a sign pointing to the left saying that the Campamento Shalem is only fifty meters on the left. Directly across from this sign on the lake side is a short road that leads into the park. A parking lot with a couple of nice cars parked in it is next to the nicest basketball court in all of Cerro de Oro. Another sign rises from a path leading downhill that says welcome to Campamento Shalem. The park is landscaped as if it were one of the chalets with mowed green grass and trees placed in great spots for shade. There is a large building made of modern building materials that can be used for banquets or church gatherings. There is also a nice yellow building further down the hill by the lake next to the pool and soccer field.

Back on the main road there is another dirt road with water draining down through the muddy ravines. It breaks off to the right up a large hill that rises above Paguacal. The road is barely wide enough for a car to make it through. Boulders and trash line the houses that pile up right against this road for about 100 meters. Then the road turns to stone pavers and become surrounded by coffee groves rather that concrete block houses. The road switches between dirt and the stone as it meanders up the forest covered hill for about three quarters of a mile. Eventually it reaches the top which is topped off with the foundations of a large house and the surrounding buildings that used to look over all of Paguacal. All that is left is the concrete slab floors and supporting pillars. There are also huge expanses of land on the top of the ridge that are covered in the rows of agricultural plants. The small road connects to the road between Santiago and San Lucas about 200 meters past this house.

Along the main road below a pharmacy and stores break the monotony of the gray concrete block housing roofed with rusting tin. A steep road breaks off from the main road to the left and runs down towards the lake. Small residences fenced in by the classic cornstalk fences fill this area. Some houses are surrounded by the tin roofing that is erected to act as a fence. Near the bottom of the hill is the Iglesia de Dios E.C., a two story building pained white, rises above the surrounding houses. The road leads down to agricultural fields near the lake and another entrance into the Campamento Shalem. The main road continues to be crammed with houses as it approaches another small hill. The last building of this residential section of Paguacal at the top of this hill on the right is the Centro de Convergencia Paguacal, which is a sort of health center.

The road turns to dirt for this section of Paguacal after the health center. There aren't many houses for about half of a mile. There is a building that resembles a Catholic style church on the left and the Iglesia Evangelica la Hermosa, a bright peach colored church surrounded by flowers and decorative trees, is on the right. The majority of this section of road is forested on both sides, only being broken a few times by buildings such as
the Ramirez carpenter buildings and a few small houses. Chickens scamper across the dusty street as a tuk tuk passes by stirring up a cloud of dirt. A road breaks off to the left down into the forested area and leads down to a group of many chalets. The main road becomes paved with uneven rough rocks and climbs another steep hill into another smaller residential area. This section is about a quarter the size of the last residential area and the houses are not as packed together. This section of Paguacal is usually referred to as Tzanguacal. A road called Pachitulu breaks to the left right before the hill climbs another hill and leads to agricultural land dotted with low income housing. It also leads to the Iglesia de Dios Casa de Oracion “La Hermosa” and the Tzanguacal School, Escuela de Autogestion Comunitario Juan Pablo II. Paguacal is the only canton to have two schools.

The hill that the main road now climbs is probably the steepest and has the best view of Cerro de Oro besides the volcano itself. The road is paved with the uneven rocks and climbs to the final section of residential housing. One of the first buildings on the right is a wood planked building with no windows and has a sign above the door saying, “Segundo Iglesia Filadelfia Cerro de Oro.” It is nothing compared to the huge Filadelfia church of Tzanchali. A group of houses and an unmarked church line the right side of the dirt road, and a nice local house with a garden full of multicolored flowers sits on the left. Dirt paths run between the coffee plants on the left as the main road enters the last section of agriculture before it connects to the road between San Lucas and Santiago.

Paguacal seems to be the business sector of Cerro de Oro. Many types of business including stores, pharmacies, carpenters, brick layers, and construction seemed to be centered in this area. It also is the most populated with clusters of houses grouped together tightly into smaller subdivisions or residential neighborhoods.

Below is census data for Paguacal.

**Figure 4**
ENCUESTA 2008
ALDEA CERRO DE ORO, SANTIAGO ATITLÁN, SOLOLÁ
CUADRO ESTADISTICO
CANTON PAGUACAL

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Figure 5: Photo of the official map (croquis) of the Community of Cerro de Oro

Interviewing

I had a great first interview with Diego from the Association ACMAT (Asociación Campesina Maya Tz’utujil Cerro de Oro). Not only did he answer many of my questions with very in-depth answers, he also gave me a presentation of some facts about Cerro de Oro and the mission of ACMAT. The next day he also brought me some census data along with a copy of the presentation.

One of the techniques I used to determine how people viewed their canton and Cerro de Oro was to have them draw maps of Cerro de Oro solely from memory. Although these maps contained the most detail in the individual’s canton, they still had extensive knowledge of the other cantones as well. They were able to give names of churches, schools, and stores of the other cantones. Afterwards, I would ask them questions about how they viewed the other people in the other cantones. Many said that everyone in Cerro de Oro was the same; they all speak the same language even though it is a little different between each canton.

I also developed a twelve question questionnaire based on the four cantones of Cerro de Oro. Many of the questions were designed to bring out the differences between each canton. I asked four people from each neighborhood, two men and two women, trying to also pay attention to getting a variety of occupations and socioeconomic classes. I asked questions about the different occupations, religions, differentiation in wealth,
and difference in language hoping to develop and idea of how people identified with their own neighborhood and how they perceived the other people of other neighborhoods.

I did obtain a good list of jobs for Cerro de Oro as a whole better, but I was unable to get a similar list for the individual cantones. The main jobs are: weaving, traveling to Santiago Atitlán or San Lucas, agriculture/farming (mostly coffee and corn), cleaning produce, working in stores, bricklaying, fishing, carpenters, and rock quarrying. Most of the time people didn't divide these jobs between the cantones; they would just tell me that they were for all of Cerro. About 50% said that there was a difference in the Tz'utujil language among the cantones, but they would all remind me that everyone in Cerro de Oro speaks Tz'utujil. They would also tell me that they could easily understand each other; some people just used different words to express themselves. For the next questions, I asked specific questions about the differences. For the question about the richest canton, Tzanchalí was the most common answer, followed by a very tricky way of getting around the question by answering that they were all equal, third was Paguacal. Many people responded the same way for the poorest community by saying that they were all equal. The second most common response was Patzilín Abaj, and third was La Cumbre. The answers for the trash were all about equal among Patzilín, Tzanchalí, Paguacal, and La Cumbre. However, I did get one response telling me that there were cleanup projects even though there was a lot of trash. Tzanchalí and Paguacal are tied for the most Catholics, but many people said that it was just because there were more people in these cantones. Some said Tzanchalí because the Catholic Church is there. La Cumbre and Paguacal win the prize for the most Evangelicals. I interviewed a few more Evangelicals than Catholics, as well as one individual who said that he didn't practice any religion, but I feel that the responses to my questions were not tainted by religious differences.

Analysis of Interviews

A common theme that occurred throughout all of these interviews was the answer, "igual." Or that none is richer or poorer than the others. I also got response like, "we are all poor" or "there is a lot of trash in all of Cerro." Most of the time people also had to think pretty hard if they were going to give an answer about one of these questions. Another common theme was with the occupation list. People more frequently gave jobs for all of Cerro rather than individual neighborhoods.

I started to realize that maybe people would rather identify with the community of Cerro de Oro as a whole rather than their individual cantones. This could possibly be because I am an outsider, and people did not want me to get the wrong perception of the community. Maybe they were trying to hide the truth about what they thought about the other neighborhoods. However, this was too frequent of a response to be ignored. It seems that the cantones exist mainly just as school districts or as a label for a location they live in rather than as a social identity marker. When I heard that people spoke differently within each canton, I had hoped that there would be some kind of rivalry or extreme difference between these cantones strictly because that would seem ethnographically interesting - that people in the same community would be so different. Instead I came to find out that all people are always different from each other, express themselves differently, wear different styles of clothes, walk differently, and are comfortable with different types of people. Nevertheless, I also came to see that this may not be due solely to where they live. Sure it has an impact, but it is more involved with the person's individual personality that makes them different. The quote that really brought this home for me was when one of my interviewees said, "Everyone wears different kinds of clothes" when I was asking about differences in traje. People saying things like, "we are all poor" also reaffirms this.
There is still group identity within Cerro de Oro, but it is a unified group of all of Cerro that makes up this group. When I asked one of the current mayors about the differences between the people in the various cantones, he was quick to respond and say that there wasn’t much. He said that there were no centers of each canton, and that Tzanchalí and the Alcaldía Auxilar was the center for everyone in Cerro de Oro. The people are also more willing to compare Cerro de Oro to the other communities around them, like San Lucas or Santiago Atitlán, rather than compare themselves to the other people that live with them. One guy even told me that there were jokes about the way the people in these two other towns speak.

There are also united community goals that people are all looking forward to like developing tourism, and like Stephanie Garbern, a student from the previous year found out, Cerro de Oro is trying to become a municipality. There are also organizations such as ACMAT that are bringing the community together and running projects to clean up the roads and streets and the lake. People also come together to socialize and have a good time. Children from every community come together to play in the basketball courts or on the soccer field. The most obvious example of this coming together is for church services or other church activities. There is only one Catholic Church, but people from all of the cantones come together for mass. This is also the case in the Evangelical churches. People from all over Cerro de Oro come to these churches. Sometimes the larger churches even build little branch churches in the further communities away from the large central church. A great example of this is the funeral that I attended. It didn't matter which canton people came from, they all came together to support the family. I have also seen this in the other funerals that drive through town. No matter where they live, people will join in with the line that is leading or following the casket when it drives by. They all share similar problems and are working for similar goals to better their lives and live together happily.

Further Research

I believe that the question is not what is different within Cerro de Oro between the people who are living side by side, but what qualities do they share and what are their common interests as a whole. We should find out about what these people need, such as a market, a health system, or a way to bring tourism and money into the area, that will bridge this gap between the people who live across the street in the lakeside mansion-like chalets and the hardworking people living in the houses made of cornstalks and rusted tin roofing. More needs to be asked of these people who strongly identify with each other what they believe will help to accomplish their common goals.

Conclusions

I came into this project looking to study something exotic from this very rich culture that I would be living in for two months. I hoped that this experience would change my life seeing and living in circumstances that I have never experienced before. I accomplished this exciting but humbling experience very early as I went through culture shock, got adjusted, then started to see the everyday lives of the people around me. I started to develop an attachment to these people who were taking time to explain things to me in “dumbed down” ways because my Spanish ability was not the greatest (not to mention that Spanish, the second language, is a translation from the language they are used to speaking Tz’utujil). They took much time out of their busy, constantly hard-working lives to help me with my project. I started to think to myself that they have so many other things that are more important that they could be doing than helping me work on this project that would look great on my graduate school application. What was my work here doing for these people? What was my paper, possibly about how
fascinating the religions or natural medicine remedies are of these people, going to do anything? “So what,” I asked myself. It wasn’t until about halfway through this program that I noticed this, and I hope that the basic information that I was able to develop combined with some further research can benefit these people. I have come to realize the more important things to be discovered within the study of cultures.

The thing to be looked at in anthropology is not necessarily what is most interesting about a group of people, how can more be learned about this, then written up in a way that will be appealing for readers, or even trying to spot the biggest problem to be amended; but it is to find out what the people being studied think of themselves, what they believe the problems are, the goals they have, and how they believe these goals can be accomplished. The first style of anthropology, focused on I, me, and mine, mentioned above in the first section, is very interesting and gives students, researchers, other academics, or interested people in other countries a glimpse into the exotic aspects of another culture. However, the latter can do the same as well as accomplish something for the people being studied. Combining this research of the latter mentioned type of anthropology with helping organizations such as NGOs or social workers gives hands on work in reciprocating to these people who accept the anthropologists into their communities, help them communicate, feed them, show them around, introduce them, spend time in interviews, and help them with their research in many other ways.

End Notes

1. All numerical stats about Cerro de Oro come from information given to me by the organization ACMAT (Asociación Campesina Maya Tz’utujil Cerro de Oro).

Figures 1-4 - All census data comes from information gathered by ACMAT. (Años=years, H=males, M=females, T=total).

Acknowledgements

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