

Getting connected: Kinship and *compadrazgo* in rural Tlaxcala, Mexico*

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Three decades after introducing the now famous “closed corporate community” Eric Wolf acknowledges in a note on the vicissitude of Mesoamerican peasantries that the disregard of connective networks, networks other than those of the market, turned out to be a major shortcoming of his approach (Wolf 1986:327). He is not the only one to be charged with this neglect, which indeed has a long history in Mesoamerican anthropology. Blom and La Farge had noted another three decades earlier that the groups they had visited during their expedition to Mexico and Guatemala were quite different from those in North America and Africa, where social relationships and shared ideologies formed the basis for solidarity. In Latin America those ties appeared loose and the authors noted skeptically that communities were built on geographical proximity alone (Blom und La Farge 1927:354).

Consequently, then-popular kinship-based models to analyze social organization were discarded as inadequate to describe ethnic groups south of the Rio Grande. Sol Tax was the first to address this challenge analytically. He argued that the intra-cultural variation within the Quiché-speaking community is so high that the Quiché could hardly be a unit of ethnographic description, analysis and comparison. Instead, Tax proposed the *municipio*, the local administrative unit, as an appropriate focus of the ethnographic endeavor (Tax 1937). Redfield followed this line of thought when he arranged territorially defined groups along a folk-urban continuum (Redfield 1941), much as Eric Wolf did in distinguishing between ‘open’ and ‘closed corporate’ communities in the mid 1950ies. While open communities have active social and economic ties to the outside the widespread, closed corporate community is subsistence oriented, endogamous and relatively isolated (Wolf 1955, Wolf 1957).

In each of these different theoretical approaches, membership in groups is considered to be either one or the other; in or out. Beginning in the 1980ies and under the impression of accelerating globalization and movements of people, this treatment of boundaries was increasingly questioned and some anthropologists argued that anthropology should view actors as nodes in an interconnected web of relationships rather than focusing on distinct groups defined in discourses or practices (Olwig und Hastrup 1997). Urban sociology had gone through similar debates before (Wellman 1979). Today, national and global flows of people, goods, and money shape the social organization of most rural communities in Mesoamerica and it must sound nostalgic for a migration-shaken country like Mexico to describe peasant villages as *closed corporate communities* (Cohen 2004, Hirsch 2003, Massey, Goldring, und Durand 1994).

Both approaches to social structure – the territorial and the relational – contain three key elements: actors, social relationships and a definition of group membership. While the former approach focuses on actors and the rules that specify their boundaries (e.g. territorial), the social approach puts actors and their social relationships at centre stage. The aim of this paper is to cross these definitions and to show how network analysis can be used to address the intersections and unions of territorial and relational ties to gain a deeper understanding of social organization. Our approach builds on the work of Harrison White who has argued that the intersection between categories (cat) and networks (net) defines *catnets* in which social solidarity is formed (White 2008).

Crossing these two definitions will enable us to analyze comprehensively the social organization of Belén, a rural community in Tlaxcala, Mexico. The two most important social relationships that intersect with the territorial organization of the community are *compadrazgo* and kinship. The Mesoamerican *compadrazgo* system is a syncretic transformation of the European catholic practice to invite godparents as spiritual sponsors when an individual is accepted as a member of the religious community (Gudeman 1975, Nutini 1984). The bilateral kinship system and the importance of the nuclear family are often referred to as a second cultural universal many Mesoamerican societies share (Nutini 1976, Robichaux 1997). The relationship between kinship and *compadrazgo*, as central social institutions, varies throughout Latin America. More than half a century ago Paul showed through a comparison of more than 50 cases that *compadrazgo* can be used to either intensify or extend existing social relationships (Paul 1942). Earlier, Redfield had proposed that while in rural communities people choose *compadres* among kin, they lose importance as market oriented transactions gain importance in towns. However, further research could not confirm his hypothesis. While kin play a major role in the *compadrazgo* system in some rural communities (Foster 1969), they do not in others (Dershem und Gzirishvili 1998). The same ambiguity can be found in cities (Lomnitz 1977).

Building on these studies the aim of this paper is to show how networks and categories can be combined to achieve a comprehensive understanding of social integration and community organization. More specifically we will show, (1) how networks of kinship and *compadrazgo* form ties that connect the inhabitants of Belén into socially cohesive groups, (2) how the two institutions intersect both on the dyadic and the group level, and (3) how the boundaries of these networks and their cohesive cores intersect with the territorial boundaries of the community.

Before we can address these questions in some detail, we need to get familiar with the ethnographic setting, the data and the methodology applied.

Ethnographic setting

The ethnographic focus of this study is the village of Belén, located in the heartland of Tlaxcala. Tlaxcala is the smallest state in the Mexican Federation bordering Mexican Federal District to its west-southwest. Belén had a population of approximately 1200 people at the time the systematic data analyzed here were collected between 1976 and 1978 (White et al. 2002). A majority of its inhabitants combine rainfed agriculture on their own lands with work in the industrial centers of the Tlaxcala-Puebla valley (Nutini 1984, Schnegg 2007).

Compadrazgo is a transformation of the European god-parenthood system which was introduced in Tlaxcala by the Spanish Friars shortly after the Conquest of Mexico in the 16th century (Mintz und Wolf 1950). In addition to the baptism of a child, which was the backbone of the European god-parenthood system, the Spanish Friars introduced a set of other ritual relationships that were established at important events in the Christian religious life cycle, including marriage, first communion, confirmation, and the blessing of the dead (Nutini 1984). Within the second century after conquest – as the Franciscan Friars lost their central role in proselytizing and rural Tlaxcalan religious practice was left to its own devices by more secularized priests – the system underwent at least three significant changes, which distinguish it from its European roots and the way it was introduced by the Franciscans. First, the important dyad, which was in Catholic doctrine the dyad between child and godparents, shifted away from the child to the *compadres* and *comadres*-relationship between the parents and the godparents. Second, the mediating object (the child in the European tradition), through which the *compadrazgo* link is established, was no longer restricted to persons but came to include other objects (material and immaterial) as well. Third, and somewhat related to the former transformation, the set of occasions for establishing a ritual kinship relationship was extended from the blessing of a child to many other indigenous religious and secular events (Foster 1961, Foster 1963, Nutini 1984, Nutini und White 1977, Schnegg 2006, Schnegg 2007).

The relationship of *compadrazgo* in contemporary Mexico is established between an individual or a couple, with other individuals or couples, through the link or mediation of a third person (or object). This mediating object is of central importance to the system, for without it the relationship could not be established. But once the two couples or individuals asking and asked to

sponsor the object or godchild establish their relationships, they become the primary actors in *compadrazgo* roles within a dyadic web of *compadre* relationships.

The shift in the most important dyad has significant effects from a structural point of view: From a system which provides security between two *different* genealogical layers, a system emerged that provides a wide range of support on the same genealogical level (cf. Mintz and Wolf 1950). Ideally, *compadrazgo* ties are highly formal, consecrated by the use of *compadre* and (for females) *comadre* as the mandatory form of address. *Compadrazgos* involve a wide range of obligations that reach from the exchange of labor or other economic and political support to the common performance of religious obligations.

In Belén, as for most parts of Mexico, the nuclear family is the small-scale social group in which most of the economic activities – be it production or consumption of goods – are carried out and organized. Generally, the nuclear family constitutes a household with a strong bias – at least in many rural parts of Mexico – for patrilocal residence at least during part of the domestic cycle (Pauli 2000, Pauli 2008, Robichaux 1997).

Data

The data presented and analyzed here are part of a larger research project (White et al. 2002). The objective of the larger *compadrazgo* network study, described in Nutini (1984:411-6), was to discover how social network structure and social integration differed across a continuum of traditional - transitional - acculturated Tlaxcalan rural communities, and to test hypotheses about the relationship between network structure, socioeconomic factors and transformation processes going on within the region. Of the four villages studied, Belén was one of the two transitional communities chosen to contrast with a highly traditional and partly Nahuatl-speaking village on the one hand, and a community that was highly acculturated to the regional variant of national Mexican or Mestizo culture, on the other.

Comparable social network data were collected in all four villages. Household heads, both men and women, were interviewed (N=142 couples for Belén) and ancestries back to the great-grandparents' generation were collected in each interview. In addition, extensive structured interviews were conducted to produce an exhaustive compilation of godparent/godchild and *compadrazgo* relationships, their properties, and the attributes of the *compadres*. The list of the named *compadres* outside the village, and their children (who might be godchildren of Beleños), included 3.383 individuals. Belén resident Isaias Bello Perez did most of the final interviews.

One of the key challenges in the course of data preparation was the coding of these different data sets. Each individual, whether appearing in the genealogical or in the *compadrazgo* data, had to be assigned a unique identification number. Once this coding was done, the different datasets could be merged and combined on the level of individuals, couples, and/or households. The following analysis is based on these datasets.

Concepts

Social cohesion is a key concept in the social sciences (Moody und White 2003). In social networks it describes the degree to which any relationship is indirectly entailed by some other aspect of the rest of the network structure. The concept is illustrated when we compare two extreme forms of social organization: cliques and a formal bureaucracy. A clique has maximal cohesion. Since everybody knows every other member of the group, the removal of any link or person *cannot* disconnect the group. The opposite occurs in a formal bureaucracy. Ideally they have a tree-like or semilattice structure, where every member has exactly one supervisor and a set of subordinates under that supervisor alone. This structure avoids redundancy. The removal of *any* link or person will disconnect the formal group structure.

This notion of social cohesion, with its various levels of intensity, corresponds to one of the most fundamental concepts in the theory of graphs (Brudner und White 1997, White und Jorion 1992).

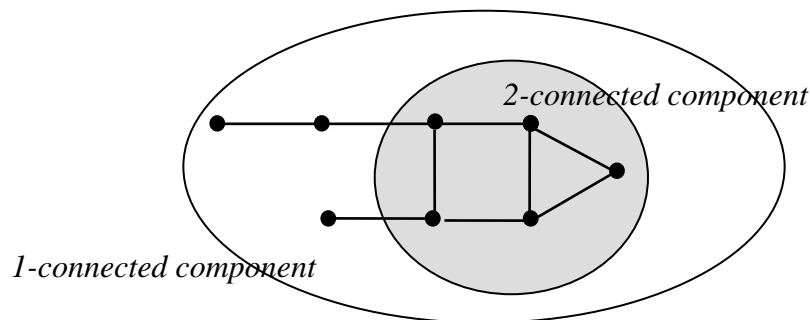


Figure 1: 1- and 2-connected components of a graph

A graph as shown in Figure 1 is a mathematical abstraction to describe social networks. A *graph* $G = (V,E)$ is a set V of *nodes* (actors) and a set E of *edges* (relationships) connecting pairs of nodes that are said to be *adjacent*. A *path* in G is a sequence of nodes, each of which appears only once, along with those edges defined by pairs of nodes adjacent in the sequence. A graph is *k-connected* if between every pair of nodes there are at least k independent paths. The parameter

k and hence the level of connectivity in groups may vary (Moody und White 2003). The loosest level of connectivity ($k=1$) is called a component in which each node is connected to every other node through some path. A component contains no isolated nodes. In Figure 1 all nodes are connected through some path and hence form a single 1-connected component. Restricting the level of connectivity further allows us to define a 2-component (also called bicomponent). A 2-component of a graph G is a maximal subgraph of G that has at least two independent paths between every pair of nodes. A 2-component cannot be disconnected by the removal of any edge or link and is thus a more robust or cohesive social unit. In colloquial terms we call a 2-component a cohesive component or “core” of a network. In Figure 1 the five nodes in the center are connected through multiple paths and form a 2-connected component.

Kinship

Collecting genealogies has a long tradition in anthropological fieldwork (Hackenberg 1973, Powdermaker 1931). Nonetheless, new tools and concepts for a systematic analysis of the empirical richness of large kinship networks became available only recently (White und Jorion 1992). These studies differ from former approaches in conceptualizing genealogies as p-graphs. The p-graph overcomes a general problem of classical genealogical notations: In those well known notations, units of analysis are individuals. The lines or relations between individuals are necessarily of two (or even three) types: marriages and parental relationships (and by implication: sets of siblings). In many kinship studies, however, we are not interested in individuals *per se*, but in whom and how individuals marry and in the alliance patterns that evolve out of these marriages (Lévi-Strauss 1969 [1949]). Consequently, for analytical purposes, couples and not individuals would be more appropriate units of analysis.

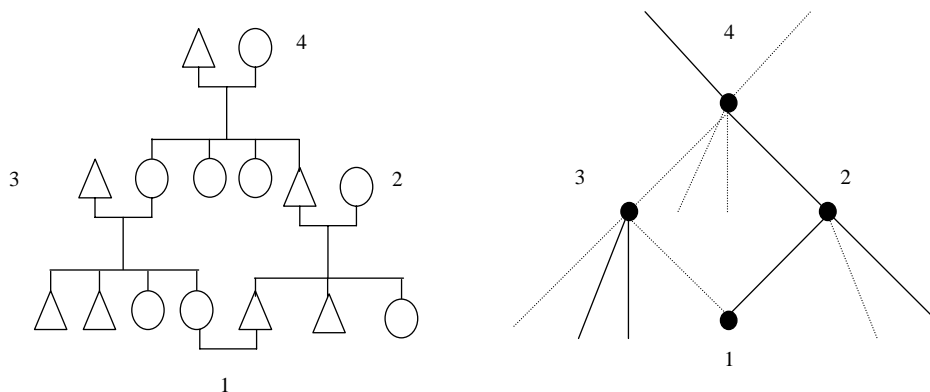


Figure 2: Classical (a) and p-graph (b) notation of a cross cousin marriage

This is realized in the p-graph notation. Here, the nodes are marriages and the lines individuals who connect a marriage to the marriage of one's parents. Consider the genealogy shown in figure 2a. In the context of an extended family, it shows a couple (#1) engaged in cross-cousin marriage. In the p-graph notation, shown in figure 2b the nodes are the marriages and the lines are individuals who form a marriage and are also the offspring of a sexual union between parents. The family of *orientation* provides each individual – each line in the p-graph – at least one connecting node. If he or she is married or has children, there is a second node of connection to other lines that refers to the family of *procreation*. Once conceptualized as p-graphs, genealogies can be usefully analyzed with tools and concepts common in network analysis.

The genealogies collected in Belén contain information on 532 couples. Wolf and others have noted that many genealogical relationships stay within the community (Wolf 1955). In Belén, of the couples informants remember, 180 were not born in Belén (Table 1: not 207?). They are the parents and grandparents of those who married in. In 61 cases only the husband, and in 28 only the wife was born in Belén, reflecting the mostly patrilocal residence pattern described above. The large majority of couples, 244 cases, married within the community. This supports the thesis that endogamous marriages may be a key element of the social organization of peasant communities. These numbers describing territorial integration give a general idea about mobility and integration through marriages. They show that the vast majority of marriages take place within the territorial boundaries of the community.

But do they integrate? Do people only co-reside or do they link to build a cohesive community?

As introduced above, the p-graph allows examining the social structure and the level of connectedness that emerges from genealogical links. 461 (87%) of the couples in the genealogies of Belén residents and their ancestors are linked in a single giant component, and 174 (33%) are relinked to form a single bicomponent. In addition, 11 small components with two or more nodes are not connected to the core. They constitute 13% of the connected couples. These figures indicate the power of the kinship system to integrate on some bounded level, although they do not tell us as yet on which level it integrates: Only the “old” core of Belén’s population, the larger community of Belén, Belén plus its most closely allied villages, or the larger heartland of Tlaxcala?

Couples resident in Belén (Residents and ancestors)	1-connected	2-connected (cohesive)	Not 2-connected	Isolates
Born in Belén	157	145		23
born outside Belén	17	143		47
Percent born in Belén	89%	50%		33%

Table 1: Connectivity and integration through the kinship network

Table 1 crosses these two dimensions of integration to answer this question. The table reveals that most couples (89%) of the cohesive core of the network were born in Belén. Only seventeen of the relinked couples have an origin outside Belén. Among those that are more loosely linked to the community’s genealogical space (not 2-connected) the proportion of people born in and outside Belén is very similar. Only among those in small isolated trees do we find more people born outside than inside the community.

Table 1 shows a clear picture: kinship and marriage ties do not integrate outsiders immediately, but only over generations of co-residential assimilation. Perhaps the power of kinship ties would be too diluted to attempt to integrate the large Tlaxcalan heartland population through relinking, given the necessarily low density of parent-child links.¹ We can also understand how, if trust and solidarity is more characteristic of a village “core”, the relinking of marriages greatly contributes to the maintenance of a moral community. In contrast to the internal solidarity of a village core,

¹ Marriages, as shown in Figure 2, can only have two incoming links.

the village is also porous to immigration by outsiders as well as to outmigration of any number of children. These outside ties provide links to the larger social, political, and economic world. In sum, the relationship between social cohesion and territorial organisation is one sided. To be born in Belén does not imply to be a member of the genealogical core, whereas if you are a member, then you were born in Belén.

Compadrazgo

In contrast to kinship, *compadrazgo* ties typically span a much greater number of individuals or couples and cover an extensive area of social contacts. Table 2 lists the most common types of *compadrazgo* which involve either a godchild (baptism, first communion, confirmation, graduation, marriage, burial, and first mass of a child) or an important religious ritual (Coronation of the Image of the Virgin associated with the village church; setting of the Christ child in the home manger at Christmas time) (Nutini 1984, Schnegg 2005). Table 2 distinguishes between relationships within the community and those reaching outside of it, and gives the frequency of each type of tie as between couples. It becomes clear that the vast majority of these relationships (76%) reach outside Belén (Nutini 1984, Schnegg 2007). The most sacramental ties – baptism, confirmation and marriage – are the most exocentric (84% outside), while those ties stressing ceremonials within the village (Coronación de Santísima Virgen, Acostada Niño Diós en Casa, Parada de Cruz de Entierro) are more endocentric. In between are the more secular ties – Primera Comunción and Graduación – relatively new *compadrazgos* that are often celebrated by families who are economically better off.

Label	Inside Community	Outside Community	Percent Inside
Coronation of the Holy Virgin (<i>Coronación de Santísima Virgen</i>)	29	2	94%
Bedding of the child Jesus at home (<i>Acostada Niño Dios en Casa</i>)	24	11	69%
Erection of a burial cross (<i>Parada de Cruz de Entierro</i>)	17	12	59%
First communion (<i>Primera Comunión</i>)	79	143	36%
Graduation (<i>Graduación</i>)	31	53	37%
Taking mother and child to mass after birth (<i>Sacada a Misa</i>)	4	10	29%
Baptism (<i>Bautizo</i>)	100	480	17%
Confirmation (<i>Confirmación</i>)	60	312	16%
Marriage (<i>Casamiento</i>)	20	104	16%
Total	354	1127	24%

Table 2: *Compadrazgos* within and outside of Belén

Compadrazgo ties, like those of marriage and descent, do not necessarily form cohesive social groups. To what extent they do is an empirical question. The *compadrazgo* networks of the 142 interviewed couples in Table 1 spans 1.458 couples. On average, couples have 10.3 *compadres* and *comadres*. The vast majority of them (96.4%) are linked into a single connected component. The proportion of people in the cohesive core of this network, however, is much smaller. Only 17.6% (N=257) form a bicomponent. Again, crossing those two approaches, the territorial (residence at birth) and the structural (cohesive core of *compadrazgo*), gives a more comprehensive picture of social organization.

Couples linked to Belén through <i>Compadrazgo</i>	1-connected		Isolates
(Residents and <i>Compadrades</i>)	2-connected (cohesive)	Not 2-connected	
Born in Belén	114	18	10
Born outside Belén	143	1130	43
Percent born inside Belén	44%	2%	19%

Table 3: Connectivity and integration through the *compadrazgo* network

The results of the analysis are shown in Table 3. The intersection between structure and territoriality is quite different. Among 257 couples forming the cohesive core of the *compadrazgo* network, more are born outside than inside Belén but 43% are born inside. In contrast, of the more loosely (1-) connected social periphery, 98% live outside of Belén. Among those who are not linked at all, outsiders dominate. Again, the relationship between social integration and territoriality is one-sided. However, it is different: to be born in Belén does imply to be more integrated whereas to be more integrated does not imply to be born in Belén.

Compadrazgo on the one hand serves as a cultural institution which integrates the community internally through cohesive links. It not only integrates people who live in Belén but forms a very well connected ‘invisible community’ extending beyond the physical boundaries of the village. On the other hand, internal integration does not preclude external integration and expansion. The vast majority of relationships has a tree-like structure and reach to the outside world. As a means for external embeddedness, *compadrazgo* overcomes the limitations of the locally endogamous kinship network. Selective relationships anchor the community into the larger social, economic, and political world.

It might be surprising how well a rural community of roughly 1.200 inhabitants like Belén is integrated into the larger Mexican society in the middle of the 1970ies. This is easily understood from the history of the village and the nearby Tlaxcala-Puebla industrial valley and the reorganization after historical demographic crises (Schnegg 2007). The region has a long tradition of labor migration which dates back to the 1740s. By 1870 the first industrial textile factory was founded in the valley. Over the next century, the local industry grew continuously, including automobile production and other labor-intensive work. For many Beleños, the physical proximity to large cities like Mexico City and Puebla created opportunities for industrial or

artisanal jobs in the cities. During the week, men live and work in the industrial zone to earn a living for their families. Nutini and Bell (1980: 232ff.) give a detailed discussion of these developments and Schnegg (2007) has shown how these economic developments have been accelerated by demographic crises, most notably plague outbreaks in the 18th and 19th century.

Getting connected

Networks of kinship, as a partly ascribed relation, are slow to achieve social integration, especially if they are open to marriage with outsiders. Only if every marriage represents a relinking among descendants of a community can the network of kinship and marriage integrate every new married person. This occurs only in the case of “caste” type systems, which are virtually endogamous. Any marriage with an outsider who does not share relatives in common with the community can *at the earliest* stage only be relinked by his or her children. *Compadrazgo* ties, however, have the potential to integrate marriages with outsiders long before any of their children marry.

As *compadrazgo* has this power to integrate, it also has the potential to exclude. Hence, when we examine the network structure of kinship and *compadrazgo* in conjunction, we will determine if the addition of *compadrazgo* either greatly expands social integration through relinking, or reproduces the existing kinship structure by reinforcing the exclusion of certain couples from the multiple-connectivity core of society. Table 4 provides the answer.

	(N=142)	2-connected		1-connected	
Families integrated through	Frequencies	Percent	Frequencies	Percent	
Kinship	68	48%	126	89%	
<i>Compadrazgo</i>	94	66%	121	85%	
Kinship or <i>Compadrazgo</i> , intersection of separate graphs	109	77%	139	98%	
Kinship and/or <i>Compadrazgo</i> , combined graphs	126	89%	140	98%	
Total			142		142

Table 4: Connectivity and integration through the kinship and *compadrazgo* network

Table 4 again demonstrates the limitations of both the kinship and *compadrazgo* system to integrate the entire community. In the genealogical network, only 48% of those interviewed were part of the cohesive core. This figure is a bit higher for *compadrazgo*: ritual kinship alone ties 66% of those interviewed into a cohesive centre. The additive combination of kinship and *compadrazgo* however, begins to overcome both of these limitations. Memberships in both cores are somewhat negatively correlated (Fisher $p=.002$, 2-tailed; Pearson's correlation -0.24 ; 6% covariance if all relinkings are coded as binary variables), indicating that kinship and *compadrazgo* have rather different centers of cohesion (1-connected memberships are statistically independent, $p=.78$; uncorrelated). Thus, if we determine how many of the interviewed Beleños are relinked by either *compadrazgo* and/or kinship in separate graphs, we find that rate rising to 77% (close to 82%, the expectation for two fully independent or orthogonal variables). More than four-fifths of the population are relinked in one or both of the two separate networks.

However, when the two relationships are combined into a single graph, the rate of relinking among those interviewed jumps to a hefty 89%. These two independent, orthogonal relationships, combined into a single network, have astonishing synergetic effects on integration within the community. They exclude only a very small percentage and integrate almost 90% of the community into one multiple-connectivity social system that operates on the community level and extends into nearby communities. Even further, when we consider the frequencies of interviewees who, through kinship and/or *compadrazgo*, are connected at a looser level, as shown in the rightmost columns of Table 4, the rates rise above 98%. All but two couples form a social community which operates on the village level through kinship and *compadrazgo*. In sum, the analysis reveals that *compadrazgo* integrates couples both by crosscutting the limitation of kinship ties and having distinct centers of cohesive integration, inside versus outside the territorial community.

Discussion

This leads us to a few concluding remarks. We started this paper with the observation that some authors have defined “community” purely in territorial, and others only in social terms. The aim of this paper is to show how these two views can be combined to allow a more comprehensive analysis of social organization and cohesive integration. From the territorial perspective, the analysis reveals that most kinship ties are endogamous and most *compadrazgos* reach outside the community. From a structural perspective, kinship and *compadrazgo* both form well connected

networks that link those interviewed and their interaction partners into a single network. Once we cross-cut the two dimension of social practice, we find that the core of the kinship networks strongly overlaps with the boundaries of the community and those who were born in Belén are likely to be part of it. With *compadrazgo* the relationship is different. To be born in Belén implies membership in the network core, whereas the core membership does not imply that one comes from Belén.

Taken together, both networks integrate the community on the maximum level, leaving only two couples standing aside. This integration is accomplished through the rule that *compadres* should not be chosen among kin. This strategy, which Paul has called “extension”, corresponds to what Gluckman and others have labeled “uniplex” or “unistranded” social ties (Gluckman 1955, Paul 1942). This avoidance of kin in forming *compadrazgo* ties creates a highly cohesive and relatively egalitarian social organization within the community.

In a recent restudy (fieldwork was conducted between 2000 and 2001) in Belén, Schnegg was able to observe that this rule is increasingly questioned. More and more *compadres* are chosen among kin (Schnegg 2006). Two more detailed tendencies can be distinguished: On the one hand, it is within the community that *compadrazgos* are more likely to be chosen among kin. On the other hand, the economic elite is more likely to conduct such relationships within the family than the rest of the community. This indicates a tendency for the elite to start to separate in their dyadic contracts. This tendency started to emerge only recently and many of the elite couples still continue to be very active in religious village level ceremonies, most importantly the organization of fiesta as part of the cargo system (Schnegg 2005). However, an increasing overlap of kinship and *compadrazgo* indicates the direction the community may take: A separation of the elite and a partial disintegration of overarching community cohesion. Social and territorial structure diverge and make it the more necessary to include both perspectives into the analysis of social change.

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