POPULAR RESPONSE TO NEOLIBERAL REFORM: THE POLITICAL CONFIGURATION OF PROPERTY RIGHTS IN TWO EJIDOS IN YUCATÁN, MEXICO

by

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This dissertation examines popular responses to property rights reforms in Mexico by comparing two *ejidos* in the southeastern state of Yucatán. As part of a series of neoliberal reforms enacted in the 1980s and 1990s in Mexico, the federal government altered the existing property rights regime to enable the division and privatization of previously protected communal land. I argue that the responses to the reforms were contingent on the historical development of institutional rules, political and economic practices, and cultural values. In the first case study, Maní, *ejidatarios* accepted the new rules while simultaneously expressing concern over changes in the process of becoming an *ejidatario*, a rights holder making land tenure decisions. Community members used the new rules to guarantee access to land and the *ejido* system by purchasing individualized *parcelas* of *ejido* land in part because they gained material benefits, such as secure access to state-funded irrigation systems. The rise in the remittance-economy and population

pressures increased local demand for land and provided the income for local buyers. In Hunucmá, the other case study, *ejidatarios* contested the state-imposed rules as violations of their traditional *usos y costumbres*. They fought against land sales for the construction of a new airport, rejecting the legitimacy of the formal property system because the new rules had been manipulated by state officials and land speculators. In doing so the *ejidatarios* revived and re-deployed historical cross-*ejido* alliances and habits of militancy and mobilization. Both cases reveal that property rights regimes are more than institutions but rather political configurations of control over resources, whereby the distribution of rights and subjective interpretation of the rules and practices determine local responses.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF GRAPHS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is about an outcome that was not anticipated. In 1992, the Mexican government ended land redistribution, which had been carried out through the *ejido* system, and created a neoliberal property rights regime.[1] Many ejidos rejected the new rules and in 1994 an indigenous rebellion erupted in the southern state of Chiapas over, among other things, agrarian reform. Yet, in comparing two cases in the southeastern state of Yucatán – Maní and Hunucmá – I find that responses to the neoliberal regime did not conform to predictable patterns (see figure 1). In Maní, with agricultural practices embedded in ethnic identity, the reforms produced little resistance. In Hunucmá, where most people had abandoned the land for wage labor, a militant indigenous movement emerged to contest land sales. These seemingly inverted outcomes are the result of community members creatively adapting cultural and institutional resources to craft local responses.

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[1] Article 27 of the 1917 Mexican Constitution provided the legal framework for agrarian reform. Communal usufruct rights to land were granted by the Mexican government after indigenous communities petitioned for restitution of ancestral lands (*comunidades agrarias*) or if twenty or more *campesinos* petitioned for access to land (ejido). In Yucatán there are 784 ejidos and 2 comunidades agrarias. Given the small number of comunidades agrarias compared with ejidos, I focusing exclusively on ejidos. Until the neoliberal reforms of 1992, the ejido enjoyed a special legal status in Mexico and could not be mortgaged, rented, or sold.

If we look at the structure of social relations, we may have expected to see conflict in Maní. The population is primarily Yucatec Maya.[2] Ejido land is linked to ritual knowledge of maize production and collective memory of a royal, ancestral lineage. On the eve of the neoliberal reforms, 82% of the residents spoke Maya (INEGI 1991). Population pressures were straining available land and the prices for its main commercial product – oranges – fell by 50% in the 1980s. The ejido was part of a regional citrus producer's union, a mobilizational resource for alliance-building.

Figure 1: Mexico, map by Patrick Gronli

[2] For the rest of the dissertation I refer to the Yucatec Maya as Maya, dropping the regional descriptor. This is not meant to characterize all Mayan people throughout Mesoamerica. However, the Maya in Yucatán share both language and post-conquest regional history.

The situation in Hunucmá was very different. Nearly 80% of the population was employed in non-agricultural sectors and only 15% of ejido land was being cultivated when the neoliberal property rights regime was instituted (INEGI 2001; PA 1998a, 2). One-quarter of the population spoke Mayan (INEGI 2006) and Mayan ceremonies and rituals were not widely practiced in the community. Between 1990 and 2004, attendance at ejido meetings never rose above four hundred and fifty people, out of a total of sixteen hundred members. Usually, less than one hundred people participated in ejido assemblies. The ejidatarios of Hunucmá had disengaged from the agrarian institution and become wage workers.

These outcomes elude the predominant structuralist modes of explanation in political science. Structuralism is wide-ranging in our discipline. Structural predictions usually privilege economic processes and social class (e.g. Marx 1978, Gellner 1983, Schumpeter 1950, Wallerstein 1979, Moore 1966, Cardoso and Faletto 1979, Gunder Frank 1969, Hall and Soskice 2001). But structuralism is just as apparent when analysts privilege cultural identity and affective ties (Huntington 1997, Putnam 1994, Geertz 1980, Almond and Verba 1963, Eckstein 1988) in explaining outcomes. These perspectives presume that human behavior can be predicted through a structural analysis. My cases challenge these assumptions, illustrating that behavior cannot be "read" off of structures. Situated agency determines outcomes, where behavior becomes both restricted and possible as structures constrain and enable new strategies.

The purpose of this dissertation is to explain why people in Maní and Hunucmá behaved in ways that were not easily predicted from structural factors. In doing so, I

focus on the historically-situated cultural and institutional resources ejidatarios drew upon. Which particular cultural and institutional resources were used? How did they impact behavior? Why did particular resources become salient at specific times? How did actors reconcile imposed rules with existing practices?

In the case of Maní (see figure 2), communal ejido land is used to make the milpa, an agrarian practice of maize production linked to ritual knowledge and Mayan ceremonies. Commercial production on individualized, irrigated plots of land began in the 1960s and became an important local source of wages. A local land market emerged when the neoliberal rights regime was established and guaranteed access to land for local residents ended. The institutional reforms limited future availability of land, but enabled a new set of local strategies. Land transactions were often driven by a generational obligation to provide land as patrimony. This strategy had unintended effects as the definition of patrimony shifted to include individualized, as opposed to only communal, land. Ejidatarios also used the new rules to maintain a large amount of communal land, which was valued for milpa production and embedded in conceptions of collective memory and normative rules governing land tenure. Actors in Maní creatively adapted institutional and cultural resources and rejected neither instrumentality nor traditional agrarian practices.

The Hunucmá ejido (see figure 2) was dominated by the production of henequen, fibers extracted from the agave cactus. State institutions controlled the sector and organized ejidatarios as a rural proletariat, but one that extracted concessions in exchange for loyalty. By the 1980s the henequen sector had failed and ejidatario participation in

agrarian production and attendance at ejido meetings was extremely low. Midwifed by corruption, ejido land sales in 2005, part of a state government development project, catalyzed a new social movement to defend ejido lands. Ejidatarios contested the fairness of the price paid for the land, but increasingly their grievances were framed as violations of past practices. Elements of Mayan identity, once latent, resurfaced. Institutional and cultural legacies were recast, fusing indigenous rights, Mayan history, and historical ejido practices.

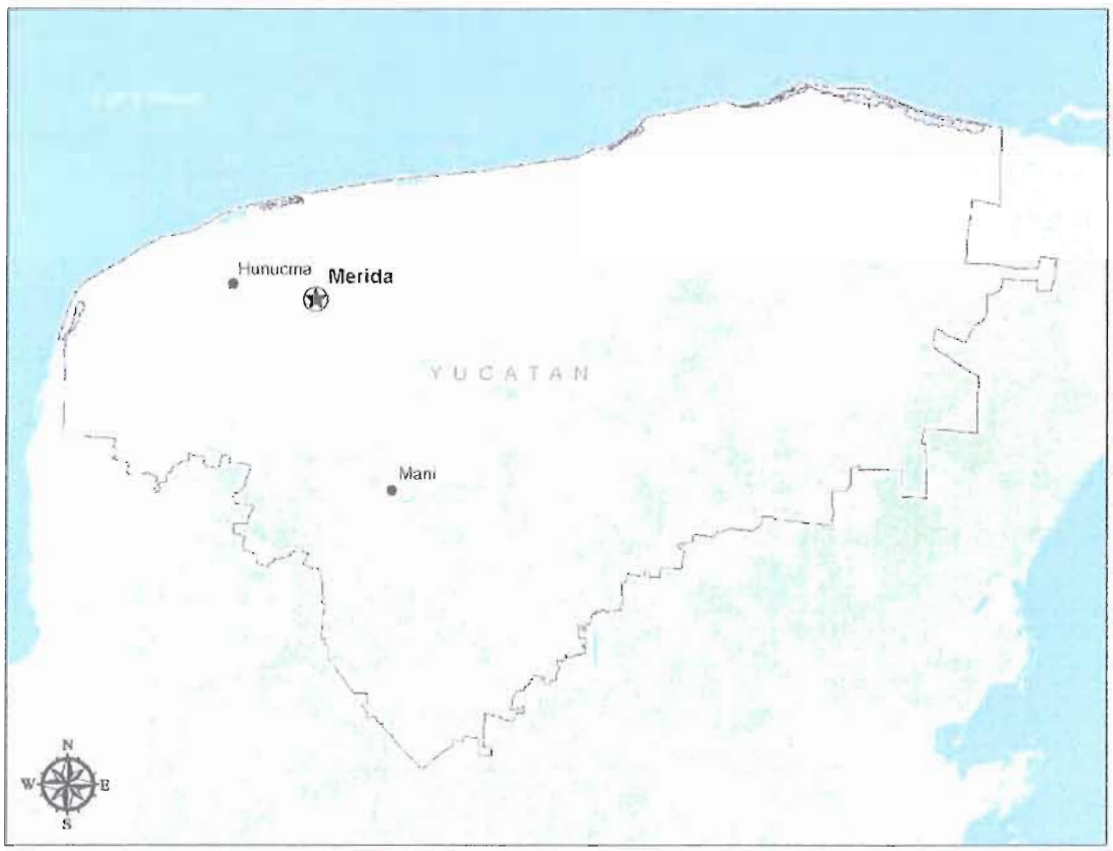

Figure 2: Yucatán, map by Patrick Gronli

This dissertation proceeds in five chapters. Chapter two provides the theoretical foundation for the inquiry into local responses to neoliberal property rights reforms. I

argue for attention to situated agency, which is both shaped by and transforms structures. This approach helps me to focus on the types of resources ejidatarios drew upon in reacting to the imposition of new property rules.

In chapter three, I analyze changes in land tenure, property rights rules, and agrarian practices in Yucatán. Colonial authorities imposed new forms of political, economic, and social organization on indigenous communities. Mayan beliefs and religious practices, embedded in agrarian production, survived on the margins of colonial society, but were increasingly threatened by new forms of domination over land and labor. Post-independence land tenure became increasingly concentrated in elite hands, causing an unsuccessful Mayan revolt in the nineteenth century. After the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), the state reconstructed land tenure patterns, granting communities land to work through new agrarian institutions such as the ejido. Yet government policies dominated production decisions and limited ejido independence. In 1992, neoliberal reforms established new property rules to simulate investment and economic output. The changing dynamics of Mexican political economy produced unanticipated outcomes in Yucatán, as ejidos used the new rules to maintain communal, rather than individualized, land.

The national politics of neoliberal reform and indigenous organizing are covered in chapter four. Changes in federal policy in the 1970s and 1980s created new spaces for independent peasant and indigenous organizing. The adoption of neoliberal reforms in the 1980s gradually eroded support for the one-party dominated regime and provided a target for social movements aimed at reforming the political system. The Zapatista rebellion in

1994 drew attention to the plight of agrarian and indigenous communities, initiating a national dialogue on autonomy. Opposition political parties took advantage of the regime's governability crisis and new democratic reforms in the 1990s. By 2000 a new party controlled the presidency. Social mobilization continued as civil society groups pressed for greater accountability and inclusion, but state repression of local communities continued.

Chapters five and six cover the case study of Maní. Formerly home to a royal Mayan lineage, Maní was dominated by haciendas during the colonial and post-independence periods. Land was returned to the Mayan population in 1934 when the ejido was created. Agrarian production was dominated by the milpa, a subsistence farming practice. The ecological, religious, and community norms governing production were passed down from father to son. Both milpa production and maize were central in Mayan ceremonies. This agrarian structure persisted until the 1960s when the state introduced and funded irrigation systems and permitted individual plots of land to be carved out of the communal land for citrus production. A regional credit association and citrus processing facility, governed by citrus-producing ejidos, facilitated commercial production and marketing of crops. Population increases resulted in pressure for more land. As a result, more individualized, irrigated plots were created from communal land in the 1980s and 1990s.

Despite high levels of ethnic identification linked to collective memory and ritual knowledge, Manienses were gradually altering their agrarian practices from the 1960s on. The irrigated plots of ejido land provided early experience with individualized

commercial production and were an important local source of wages. Cultural heritage and attachment to traditional agrarian practices failed to provoke widespread opposition to the neoliberal property rights regime in Maní because people had already worked out ways to participate in market production without losing their sense of identity. Under the new rules, ejido land could be sold. A local land market was created, as people bought and sold the irrigated plots. However, they did so partially in response to rule changes under the new property rights regime. The 1992 reforms ended future land redistribution by the federal government and restricted the process of gaining ejido membership. These two changes produced insecurity over access to land and undermined the ability to provide land to future generations, to secure patrimony.

A local land market was created to satisfy these needs. The strategy of buying land responded to cultural concerns – the right of future generations to access land – and economic need. In the process, the definition of patrimony shifted. Rather than generally having access to communal land, individual land provided to descendants could fulfill the obligation. At the same time, ejidatarios refused complete individualization, maintaining half of the ejido as communal land. This land was available to ejidatarios, but also to other community members for milpa production and as a source of firewood for cooking. The high proportion of communal land reflects the Manienses' desire to maintain community access and the embedding of everyday practices in identity. Ritual knowledge about farming and religious practices honoring Mayan gods were linked to the milpa. Local narratives of Maní as an ancestral home and of the Revolutionary struggle to reclaim the land connected place and collective memory. While neither rejecting material

interests nor cultural imperatives, Manienses appropriated elements of the new property rules and adapted institutional and cultural structures.

Chapters seven and eight are devoted to Hunucmá. The ejido was established in 1937 after years of violence between hacienda owners and the Mayan peasantry. The ejidatarios cultivated henequen, the most lucrative export crop from Yucatán. Without the resources to grow, process, and market their crop, ejidatarios had to accept the intervention of both the state and federal governments providing credits, access to technology, and wages for the ejidatarios. The expansion of henequen production was accompanied by a loss of traditional Mayan agrarian practices and rituals. This arrangement reinforced the ejidatarios' identity as henequen wage workers rather than proprietors of their own land. But they were not passive subjects; they found allies in other henequen ejidos. In the 1960s and 1970s cross-ejido mobilization increased to combat unfair state practices that threatened their material interests.

As the Yucatecan henequen sector waned in the 1980s, ejidatarios shifted their primary economic activities away from agriculture and disengaged from the ejido. While not a complete abandonment of the institution, the ejido no longer served as an economic or political resource for its members. This relatively under-utilized land, near the state capital of Mérida, could be freed from the restrictive laws governing the ejidos. Indeed, government officials saw the situation in this way in 2004 when they attempted to purchase land from the Hunucmá ejido for the construction of a new airport. The state's airport development project would create new jobs and revitalize the economy.

At first, ejidatarios seemed to accept the sale, but within a few months things changed. Ejidatarios charged state leaders and land speculators with manipulating the legal framework and using state resources for the benefit of a few private individuals. The ejidatarios drew on habits of mobilization and militancy from the Revolutionary era and the 1960s and 1970s, reviving and redeploying these historical tactics. They formed a coalition with other ejidos to defend ejido land. With supporters in national indigenous movements and peasant organizations, the ejidatarios appealed for public support and legally contested the process. Increasingly, the alliances they formed both locally and nationally highlighted their shared experiences, indigenous victims of neoliberal reforms. Ejidatarios reinterpreted their sense of patrimony, rules about voting rights, and norms of membership derived from working the land as traditional and customary practices, known as *usos y costumbres*, in the tradition of Zapata and the historical Mayan struggle against conquerors.

Chapter nine compares the creative and adaptive responses in Maní and Hunucmá. In both cases ejidatarios constructed new patterns of interaction, drawing on cultural and institutional resources. The outcomes were unexpected from a structural perspective. Drawing on the ideas of situated agency and temporality, I argue that these dissimilar contexts produced similar responses. My cases demonstrate that property rights regimes are political configurations, whose rules are subject to contestation and adaptation as some elements are appropriated and others rejected.

CHAPTER II

THEORY AND METHODS

This chapter provides the theoretical foundation for the inquiry into local responses to neoliberal property rights reforms. I argue that structurally deterministic models of behavior fail to predict outcomes because they ignore the role of agency. Both institutions and culture can be reshaped as actors reconcile imposed rules and existing practices by drawing on historically-situated resources. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the methods used for data collection and analysis.

Theoretical Approach

Structural deterministic approaches are flawed because they fail to adequately account for agency. Marx (1978) argued that social, political, and cultural outcomes (e.g. regime-type, religion, dominant ideology, social classes) are determined by economic structures, specifically the mode of production and the relations of production. Other structural arguments focus on material factors and social class without the Marxian slant. Moore (1966) argued that democracy resulted from the emergence of the middle class in Great Britain. Almond and Verba (1963) linked socioeconomic status, education, and democracy, implying that structural factors, particularly economic development, produce a civic culture, which is conducive to creating and maintaining a stable democracy. This

kind of theorizing privileges economic position as a determinant of behavior and identity, people's values, attitudes, and beliefs.

The assumption of material conditions determining identity and behavior has been challenged by scholars of identity formation. Working within a Marxian frame, Roediger (1999) does not take working class identity as a given. Rather, he details the actions of the 19th century American working class in constructing their own identity. The Irish workers played an integral role, abandoning racially integrated working class solidarity to reconstruct themselves as white. This was a mechanism to deal with the rapid changes brought about by industrialization and the creation and expansion of the wage system, allowing workers to reap the benefits of prestige and status conferred by whiteness. Structural changes may have been the impetus for social change, but the content and direction of the change was not pre-determined.

Studies of nationalism illustrate the differences between structural and agency-based accounts. Gellner (1983) argues that the nation and nationalism resulted from a technological shift in material conditions (industrialization) as agrarian societies transformed into industrial ones. Gellner accords primacy to the process of industrialization as fundamentally reorganizing social life, creating more mobile populations and shifting the nature of work from primarily physical to communicative. For him, reordering society to serve industrial development necessitates state involvement in mass education. For him, an organic process, at its base caused by material changes, produces nationalism.

Yet this inevitable, evolutionary process of national identity formation results in nationalism without nationalists, architects who engage in the process of constructing identity, much like Skocpol's (1979) revolutions without revolutionaries. By contrast, Anderson (2000) argued that the existence of administratively organized societies and the rise in print-capitalism provided a space for identities to be imagined based on a new conception of belonging to a nation. He combined historical configurations, technological change, and the agency of Creole pilgrims and printman to explain the origins of nationalism in Latin America. Anderson's narrative is compelling because it avoids the structuralism of Gellner, which assumes that nationalism is a function of technological changes and industrialization. Agency-based accounts of identity formation incorporate both process and content without rejecting structural constraints (e.g. Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

Studies of group organization and behavior sometimes take identity as a given, a pre-existing condition. Primordialist conceptions of culture hold values, practices, and beliefs as stable, leaving little room for change, such as in Geertz's (1980) Negara. Instrumentalist conceptions try and bring agency in by recognizing that the politicization of identity is something to be explained. For Bates (1982) the pre-existence of ethnic connections (e.g. shared language, geographic location, kinship ties) reduces the costs of organizing a "minimum winning coalition." Identity is primordial here, waiting to be politicized by cultural entrepreneurs. Laitin (1986) tries to bring in agency to explain how ancestral city, and not religion, becomes a politicized identity, focusing on the colonial reinforcement of one identity over another. While he helps explain how one identity

becomes more salient at a particular historical moment over another, his view of culture is primordial, privileging the hegemonic reinforcement of identity.

Interest-based explanations focus on rational actors as utility maximizers, acting on their preferences (Ostrom 1990, Bates 1998). Preferences and utility maximization, as opposed to wealth maximization, is a way to include non-economic motivations. Yet these explanations are problematic for two reasons. First, they believe that motivation or preferences are revealed by behavior – "if they are people buying and selling, maximizing wealth seems a reasonable assumption" (Levi 1999, 24). Yet behavior may not reveal preferences. Second, they do not account for why and how preferences may change during interaction.

Even explanations that integrate historical conditions and path dependence face these challenges. Anthony Marx's (1998) analysis of racial domination privileges historical trajectories that set South Africa and the United States apart from Brazil. Legal racial domination in South Africa and the United States emerged from intra-white conflict, which had to be muted to create a sense of nationalism and a stable polity. The lack of intra-white conflict set Brazil apart, and thus failed to produce legal racial domination. Even beyond structural characteristics of white conflict, Marx concludes by asserting that black mobilization against domination only succeeded where white, national unity was consolidated. Historical patterns of conflict within white society determined the type of racial domination, which then drove the type of organization and protest that emerged in each state to challenge racial domination. His argument is

structuralist, but dependent on historical conditions that set one state on a path different from others.

Path dependency arguments (e.g. Pierson 2000) try to correct for the over-emphasis on structural determinism by examining key points historically which led to particular outcomes. Putnam's (1994) comparison of the development of a civic culture in northern and southern Italy concludes that both historical pre-conditions and institutions account for the development of civic community. The traditionally civic-minded areas of northern Italy that became communal republics with professionalized, public administration in the twelfth century retained their sense of civic-mindedness, despite transformations in the political structure that occurred. In contrast to the economic development that Almond and Verba proposed, at its core Putnam's argument is "once a civic people, always a civic people."

As a structural model for development, neoliberal reformers believe that altering economic institutions will reshape behavior, hoping the market will determine actions. The neoliberal model posits a series of steps a state needs to accomplish in order to foster market-led growth.[1] Policy-makers at international financial institutions (e.g. International Monetary Fund and World Bank) believed that state intervention in markets and the over-regulation of the private sector were obstacles to development (Stiglitz 2002). The solution to low economic growth was to be found in the market, as "the history of market-based reforms has repeatedly shown that free markets, open trade, and

[1] The policies associated with the "Washington Consensus" include fiscal austerity, macroeconomic stabilization, liberalization, deregulation, and privatization (Williamson 1990).

an economy fueled by private ownership are enormously powerful in stimulating rapid economic growth" (Sachs).[2]

Neoliberal macro-economic restructuring was designed to induce efficient resource use. Proponents of this position argue that secure and transferrable private property rights lead to investments and increased productivity, since the benefits are concentrated and exclusive (de Soto 2000; Demestz 1967; Levy 1997; Muir and Shen 2005). In the 1980s and 1990s, governments in both the developing world and the post-communist bloc embarked on programs to create private property rights out of state and collective property.[3] They ended redistributive agrarian reform efforts, once the goal of state leaders to achieve greater collective equality (Borras Jr. 2003). The 1992 neoliberal reforms in Mexico were similarly designed to create private property out of communal land.

Evidence from Mexico suggests that neoliberal reforms have not had the effects proponents expected. Politicians at the federal level implemented policies to insulate sectors of the economy from the neoliberal reforms (Kessler 1998; Carruthers, Babb, and Halliday 2001) and at the state level reregulated regional production through new institutions (Snyder 2001). The neoliberal property rules have been resisted by some peasants, who balance multiple conceptions of land in determining land use and tenure. The ejido represents not only an economic resource, but is embedded in historical narratives, authority, political organization, ritual knowledge, and existing practices

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[2] Quoted in Rodrik (1996, 33)

[3] See, for example, Stark and Bruszt (1998), World Bank (2003), Deininger (2002), and Borras Jr. (2005).

(Baños Ramírez 1998; Goldring 1998; Mummert 2000). These examples suggest that the macro-structural reforms do not always induce predicted beahvior. To understand this disconnect between predicted behavior and outcomes, we need to bring agency back into the equation.

The relationship between structural conditions and behavior is complex. Changes in one arena, such as economic organization, may not induce the kind of social reorganization structuralist and path-dependent arguments assert. Thompson's (1991) analysis of changes in the English market in the eighteenth century illustrates that structural changes may not always determine outcomes. The culture of peasants and the working class did not change overnight to accept the commercialization of agriculture in England. The new organization of the economy was a violation of traditional norms, and was resisted as it infringed upon people's sense of morality. Thompson's argument is akin to resistance faced by authoritarian regimes attempting social reorganization (Scott 1998). Ignoring existing practices and mētis, local knowledge, states fail to achieve their desired outcomes because the do not account for the informal processes within which institutions are embedded.

Forms of social organization, once entrenched, are not so easily overcome and replaced by new, modern forms of organization, such as interest-based associations replacing extensive kinship structures. New forms of organization have a basis in past forms. Institutions are constituted in a dialectical process of reconciling new institutional forms with existing social, political and economic forms of organization. The particular legal-rational form of the political system in Great Britain, the adherence to liberalism

and individuation, and the establishment of private property and accumulation arose because these values and forms of organization were constructed from the legacy of the past (Bendix 1977).

Even outside of western nation-state development we find the transformation and redeployment of institutions from the past. Rudolph and Rudolph (1967) found that the caste system in India was not merely an illiberal relic from a traditional era that impeded development, but a central component in organizing interests in a "modern" democracy. Modernization did not render the caste system unnecessary, the nature of the caste shifted as social actors redeployed the institution for new ends. Principles and orientations which existed as preconditions to state development were often woven into the organization of the nation-state.

In a purely structural account of social change, macrohistorical forces determine change. In a purely agency-based account, individual action is the only factor bringing about social change. My approach, situated agency, falls in between. Imposing new rules can produce discord and rejection (Scott 1998; Thompson 1985). But they can also be adapted and transformed (Bendix 1977; Rudolph and Rudolph 1967; Watts 1992). Structural imposition can result in adaptive transformation as new institutions come in contact with existing rules and practices (Kjær and Pederson 2001; Granovetter 1985). Institutions are embedded in other structures of beliefs and aspirations, and throughout the course of institutional transformation, the intentions or goals of the change itself are shaped, interpreted and created (March and Olsen 1989).

Values, existing practices and identity shape how actors respond to new contexts, but these cultural elements are not deterministic either. Both imposed rules and culture are institutions, dynamic and reconstructable by individuals, and thus preferences embedded in culture are open to change as well (Dessler 1989). Individuals and structures are not distinct categories of analysis, they are mutually constituted, whereby "actors are at the same time the creators of social systems yet created by them" (Giddens 1991, 204). Institutions are both enabling and constraining, cutting off some routes and opening others. It is this iterative process that will determine how the neoliberal property rights rules are translated at the local level and how imposed rules reshape values, existing practices and identity.

People are creative, drawing on resources from past experiences, old institutions, (sometimes latent) cultural identities, and common practices. Situated agency helps us to think through how this process works. Actors behave within constraints, but they draw on cultural and institutional resources in responding to changes. This suggests that prior, available resources are situated historically and actors may be tempered by earlier and often gradual alterations in the political, economic and social realms (Sewell 1996).

I focus on how structural change and existing practices are reconciled in Maní and Hunucmá. Ejidatarios used different sets of cultural and institutional resources in complex ways to produce contradictory results. For example, the ejidatarios in Maní responded to the new rules by creating a land market. Yet their wealth maximizing behavior partially served cultural imperatives – generational obligations to provide land as patrimony – which became redefined to account for this new strategy. In Hunucmá,

prior mobilizational experience was redeployed to combat land sales. In the process, the space created by national indigenous movements provided a context to reframe material grievances as part of a wider movement of respect for indigenous practices. Both cases reveal creative and adaptive responses that could not be read off of structures.

Methodology

To understand how people respond to state imposed property rights changes I selected the ejido reform project in Mexico as a political process to research. Mexico's agrarian reform originated with the Revolution (1910-1920) and Article 27 of the 1917 Constitution. By the time neoliberal reforms were instituted in 1992, there were over 27,000 ejidos, covering half of Mexico's land, and approximately three million ejidatarios. The sheer size and diversity of ejidos provides variation in cases while simultaneously keeping several factors constant (e.g. timing of reforms, laws governing cases). Within Mexico, I selected the state of Yucatán for several reasons. At a practical level, little research had focused on ejido reforms in the state.

At a theoretical level, the view from 2004 was different from 2006. In 2004 I selected Yucatán as the state within Mexico to study the process of ejido reform. The Yucatán peninsula proved difficult for the Spanish to conquer; the indigenous population resisted and fled into the jungle. During the nineteenth century, the Maya rebelled against the elites. They were almost successful. But as of 2004, they had not engaged in coordinated actions against the state. Over half of the state's population is Maya. With Chiapas so nearby, a large indigenous population, and a history of mobilization, why

were the Maya of Yucatán today not mobilizing against the neoliberal reforms and fighting for autonomy as other groups were in Mexico? I wanted to understand the "dog that didn't bark."

However, when I went back to conduct the bulk of my field research in 2006, the situation had changed. Ejidatarios from Hunucmá were organizing against a state development project. Given these events, I decided to analyze one case where ejidatarios were contesting the neoliberal property rights regime and one case where they were not. In Maní, people maintained Mayan practices and had ancestral ties to the land. I would have predicted resistance in Maní. In Hunucmá the history of henequen workers mobilizing may have led me to expect tension; but in the course of my research I watched the movement transform from one based on material claims to one that invoked a shared indigenous identity. The differences between these two ejidos proved to be fruitful ground for study.

Yucatecan ejidos are generally split into three categories – northern henequen zone, southern tropical zone, and eastern milpa zone.[4] Land in the northern henequen zone and the southern tropical zone is considered very valuable in Yucatán. The former henequen ejidos are near the capital of Mérida and thus provide land for the expanding urban zone. The southern part of the state has a more tropical climate and better soil for agricultural production. With the use of irrigation systems, year-round production is possible. Both of these geographic regions of Yucatán could be construed as good cases

[4] Some researchers divide Yucatecan ejido*s* into five zones, the three already mentioned and two others – northern fishing zones and northeastern ranching zones. However, these two types do not constitute the bulk of ejido*s* in Yucatán.

for the privatization of land. The experience with irrigated plots of land and increases in population in Maní led me to believe that pressure for land privatization would be high. The conflict in Hunucmá generated by the state's airport development project provided me with a high-profile case that many viewed as symbolic of an emerging trend of ejido land sales in the former henequen zone.

To better grasp how land tenure has changed over time and the basis for ejido and individual decision-making about land I employed a number of strategies for data collection. Prior to research in Mexico, primary and secondary source materials from the Center for U.S.-Mexico Studies library at the University of California at San Diego provided me with information about the 1992 reforms. The Center coordinated research by American and Mexican scholars on ejido reform between 1992 and 1996. The library contained Mexican government publications, published reports and conference papers, and a number of theses and dissertations. These materials enabled me to consider early experiences with the land titling program, the evolution of agrarian policies, and responses from several ejidos.

The majority of my data came from field experience in Mexico. In 2003, 2004, and 2006, I lived in Mexico. My time was primarily spent in Yucatán, between Mérida, Hunucmá, and Maní. In Yucatán, I supplemented my secondary source materials with local archival and statistical data about agrarian rules and practices, economic activity, and demographic trends.[5] Most of this data was for the state as a whole or municipality-based, although some ejido-level data was available. For ejido and community specific

[5] A complete list of sources of archival data is located in Appendix.

archival data I relied on three sources of primary materials. The archives at the National Agrarian Registry (RAN) in Mérida contained data on Maní and Hunucmá from their creation by presidential decree through the 1990s, including reports from assemblies and letters between agrarian agencies and the ejido. The Agency for Agrarian Justice (PA) contained ejido level data from the 1990s to the present, including information about the state's land titling program (PROCEDE), ejido assembly reports, and lists of rights-holders. These materials were supplemented with locally-produced books in Maní and Hunucmá providing the history of the communities.

Periodicals, reports, other publications and interviews were the primary data sources for explaining the government's goals for the property rights reform and the assessments of the reforms. Several government-produced reports and books provided the justification for the neoliberal reforms. The state also produced pamphlets, brochures and manuals explaining its land titling program. The periodical archive in Mérida and on-going coverage in the regions two main daily newspaper – *Por Esto!* and *Diario de Yucatán* – were also sources of information, particularly in assessing the evolution of the debates surrounding the airport project in Hunucmá. I conducted ten semi-structured interviews with agrarian officials in Yucatán, including individuals working directly with the two ejidos and the heads of several agencies.[6]

I benefited from several contacts with universities in Mexico. The libraries at Autonomous University of Yucatán (UADY), Central Regional University of the Yucatan Peninsula (CRUPY), and the Agricultural Ecological School in Mani contained

[6] A complete list of agency representatives interviewed is located in Appendix.

both primary and secondary sources of data. Several faculty members and researchers at these schools were very helpful in providing me with information about agrarian transformations in Yucatán, Maní and Hunucmá. Additionally, I interviewed representatives from non-governmental organizations, attended local conferences and presentations regarding agrarian issues, and had access to independently-produced reports assessing the reforms.[7]

To assess decision-making processes and local practices I observed people's behavior at a number of events in Maní and Hunucmá, attending ejido assemblies, rallies, religious ceremonies, family celebrations, local seminars, and organizational meetings. I also followed people's daily routines to better understand everyday practices, including living with a family in Maní. Through this process I was both an insider and outsider, tacking between "grasping the sense of specific occurrences and gestures emphatically" and "stepping back to situate these meanings in wider contexts" (Clifford 1983, 34). No where was this more evident than in my experience as a subject of an interview. After attending a coalition meeting in Hunucmá for the defense of ejido lands, I was interviewed by the region's two newspapers. Despite my desire to remain removed from the conflict, I was directly inserted into the situation. Opponents of the land sales hoped my research and the publicity generated from the interviews would help their cause. Supporters of the sales saw me as an outsider interfering and sometimes as an

[7] In total I interviewed nine researchers in Yucatán and six representatives from non-governmental organizations focused on campesino issues, liberation theology, and human rights issues. I attended three conferences and five presentations.

independent actor who could be swayed to support the project.[8] The newspaper articles had another unintended consequence; several people in Maní read the stories and were eager to have their views included in my analysis of agrarian reform in their community.

I employed several techniques to understand local responses to the 1992 reforms and people's interpretation of agrarian reform more broadly. Local historians in Yucatán, regular community members who are interested in Yucatecan society, often gather in the mid-morning in community coffee shops to discuss politics, current events, history and a variety of other issues. I was able to immerse myself in this "coffee shop culture" to get opinions from dozens of people. This provided me with a local terminology and points of reference to use in my more formal community interviews.

The core of my data on local responses to the property rights reforms came from fifty-five interviews with community members. The interviews ranged in time from one hour to several hours spread out over multiple days. Most of these interviews were semi-structured, asking people to assess the reforms and their impact on land tenure, explain their views on the privatization of ejido land, and discuss their strategies for household survival. In Maní the thirty people interviewed also explained their view of the role of migration and the remittance-economy, and changes in agricultural production. The fifteen people interviewed in Hunucmá further evaluated the highly contested airport development project, the role of henequen, and the institutional conflicts related to land sales, ejido membership, and local elections. The interviews in Hunucmá were supplemented with ten interviews from people in Mérida involved in the airport project

[8] I consistently remained neutral, informing those I spoke with, including the reporters, that I was a researcher investigating broader patterns of change in response to the ejido reforms.

and an analysis of over sixty articles, editorials, and opinion pieces from 2005 through 2006 focused on the controversial land sales in the region's two main newspapers.

I utilized two other interview strategies – *rumbos* and life histories. Rumbos are a "walk-as-interview" (Forrest 1997). During these walks, residents would take me on tours of the community, their land, or locally important sites. In doing so they provided me with valuable information about historical development and changes, agrarian practices, land use patterns, and current conflicts. Six ejidatarios and community members were willing to discuss in detail their life histories. These interviews, usually over several days, focused on the individual's biography, and allowed me to identify generational changes in social reproduction and locally meaningful time periods of change.

I identified and categorized patterns of difference and cleavage within the communities of Maní and Hunucmá. Then I interviewed individuals who represented the categories For example, the respondents in Hunucmá included ejidatarios both in support and opposed to the land sales and the airport project and those who were relatively neutral. In Maní the respondents included different types of agrarian rights-holders and represented various demographic categories by age, biological sex, and political party.[9]

Analyzing this data required several techniques. First I created a chronology of key dates and time periods of relative stasis and change. This was a difficult process as often there is a tendency to focus on exogenous markers of time rather than locally meaningful events. While important periods of change can be read off the Mexican

[9] A description of these categories is in Appendix.

narrative of agrarian reform – e.g. 1917 Constitution and Article 27, 1992 neoliberal reforms – this cataloguing privileges these structural changes as exogenous causes of outcomes. The political configuration of property rights in Maní cannot be understood without a careful reading of the changes produced by early experience with production on individual, irrigated plots of land and the expansion of the remittance-economy. The political alliances and coalitions ejidatarios formed and the strategies employed to fight the state's airport development project in Hunucmá cannot be understood without considering the government's organization of henequen ejidos and ejidatario mobilization during the 1960s and 1970s. I pieced together this chronology from archives and secondary source materials, but oral histories presented to me through interviews, rumbos, and life histories helped me to affix the significance, impact, and temporality of events.

CHAPTER III

AGRARIAN RULES AND PRACTICES IN YUCATÁN

This chapter focuses on land tenure and agrarian practices in Yucatán. Colonial authorities imposed new forms of political, economic, and social organization on indigenous communities. Mayan beliefs and religious practices, embedded in agrarian production, survived on the margins of colonial society, but were increasingly threatened by new forms of domination over land and labor. Post-independence land tenure, concentrated in elite hands, caused an unsuccessful Mayan revolt in the nineteenth century. After the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), the state reconstructed land tenure patterns, granting communities land to work through new agrarian institutions such as the ejido. Yet government policies dominated production decisions and limited ejido independence. In 1992, neoliberal reforms established new property rules to stimulate investment and economic output. Legacies of domination, ritual knowledge, and collective memory became resources the ejidatarios drew on in the neoliberal era.

Early Land Tenure and Use-patterns

The Yucatán peninsula is a flat, limestone plateau in the tropical southern zone of Mexico. The lack of rivers and lakes, coupled with the cycles of wet (spring-summer) and

dry (fall-winter) seasons, make access to water difficult for much of the year. Historically, cenotes, natural wells formed in the limestone, provided a source of water during the dry season. Settlement patterns on the peninsula reflected their importance.

Prior to the conquest, Mayan residences were based in a main village, but cultivation of the milpa led to a dispersed and mobile population. During the rainy season, people employed a shifting slash and burn production method to make the milpa, rotating fields every few years. Shrubs and brush were burned before the rainy season and then sown with maize, beans and squash. People allowed the land to lie fallow for several years after cultivation as harvest yields declined.[1] Generally a permanent home was established in one area, but Mayan men and sometimes whole families emigrated for the rainy season to tend the milpa. This created dispersed temporary settlements away from primary villages.

Rituals associated with agrarian societies have been well-documented by anthropologists and help us to understand the centrality of maize in historical Yucatecan Mayan society. The Mayan creation story is laid out in the Popul Vuh, an account of the origins of the Maya believed to have been written in the sixteenth century based on oral accounts from Quiché Maya in Guatemala. In this narrative, the Gods Tepeu and Gucumatz tried to forge humans after creating the earth and endowing it with plants and animals. After trying and failing to make humans out of mud and then wood, Mayan ancestors were forged from maize (Coe 1993, 29).

[1] Slash and burn agriculture and land rotation was an effective agricultural technique prior to the advent of fertilizer for this geologic area (Patch 1991). Milpa production declined in these poor soils after about two years, necessitating the cultivation of new land (Coe 1993).

Particularly among the Maya in the lowlands, the area including the Yucatán peninsula, maize production was a central part of subsistence life. However, the cultivation of other native crops, hunting of pheasant and deer, and the collection of honey augmented the diet. A number of rituals and sacrifices were associated with these daily tasks, but the "largest and most dramatic of Yucatec Maya agricultural ceremonies is the *Cha chaac*; its purpose is to bring rain during times of drought, and thus involves the entire community" (Coe 1993, 210).

The chaacs are the rain spirits/gods and sacrifices to them were considered crucial to the bringing of the rains to support the milpa. Historical and contemporary anthropological accounts of the rite are relatively similar. An *hmen*, or shaman, presides over the ceremony on the outskirts of town. An altar is erected and sacrifices of food and drink are arranged (Coe 1993, 210). During colonialism, when traditional Mayan worship was banned, the Cha chaac ceremony was pushed into hiding, occurring mainly in the milpa and with only a few individuals present, not whole communities as in the past (Farriss 1984). Modern day Cha chaac ceremonies also employ an altar and sacrificial food, but now they are public affairs. Historically only men attended the ceremony, but now women may attend or serve as the hmen. Further, as part of the syncretic outcome of colonialism, a cross is also present on the altar.

Agricultural production and ecology were linked not only to religious practices but also to patterns of land use and ownership. By and large, fixed private property did not exist before the colonial era. However, patrilineal corporate ownership based on male kin groups was evident prior to Spanish conquest and during the colonial era (Farriss

1984, 134). Extended families, usually parents, their adult children, and the young grandchildren, resided in one or several small dwellings, clustered together. The father and adult males tended to the milpa, growing maize, corn, beans, and sometimes cotton. The mother and females raised small patches of other vegetables and turkeys (later chickens) on the homestead plot. Land was shared by the male kin, and passed from generation to generation. However, rather than one male inheriting land, it was held in a corporate arrangement for use by all male members of the extended family. Once an adult male had a sufficiently large (and older) family, he left the family homestead to establish his own.

The Colonial Changes

The Spanish conquest of Yucatán was a protracted affair. Early attempts at conquest, such as the campaigns of Cortés' lieutenant Francisco de Montejo in 1527, were successfully resisted. The geography of Yucatán was difficult for the Spanish and their horses, particularly the dense vegetation. Troop morale was low and many abandoned the campaign due to a lack of gold. Further, the Yucatecan Mayan civilization was organized into sixteen provinces, territorial divisions that were largely autonomous (Farriss 1984, 12). Rather than topple one centrally located empire, as the Spanish had done with the Aztecs in central Mexico, conquest was more complex. There were many political authorities in the area, so that dominion and control over one only covered a portion of the population. However, this was also a resource for the Spanish, who forged

alliances with some provinces, such as the one formed with the royal Tutul Xiu lineage ruling in the southern province of Maní.

While 1547 is generally recognized as the end of the conquest, control of Yucatán and the Maya by the Spanish was never complete. Many Maya, throughout the colonial era, evaded their would-be masters by retreating into the forests of the south. Spanish settlements and towns tended to be confined to the northern part of the peninsula. This is not to suggest that Maya and Spanish society were separate and distinct spheres; indeed, early on the Spanish settled rural estates and there were relationships and interactions, including trade. However, the south was relatively uncontrolled, and Maya would often "vote with their feet" (Hirschman 1970) to resist Spanish domination.

Mining was not a major source of wealth in the Yucatan; the labor of people cultivating agricultural products was the basis for Spanish wealth. The *encomienda* system was the principal institution organizing the tribute paid by the Maya to the colonists (Patch 1993, 28) Tribute was assessed in terms of goods, often a combination of cotton cloth, maize, fowl, and wax. A fixed monetary level was assigned to the items over time. Tribute was paid to the *encomenderos*, those private individuals receiving a land grant from the crown allowing them control over the conquered population in the area. Other fees were required by the church. Further, the Maya were required to pay municipal taxes to build local treasuries and to donate labor time to their Spanish community.

Agricultural practices which dominated the colonial economy required the Maya to spend long periods of time in the forests alone and not under Spanish control. The

provision of wax for the colonists meant that Maya men often spent weeks on end wandering alone in the forests to find bees nests, unsupervised. All of this contributed to the Maya having a degree of freedom from colonial authorities. Southern Yucatán was largely independent of Spanish control for about one hundred and fifty years after conquest, and some people fled there to escape Spanish persecution. The lack of Spanish supervision over daily life allowed Mayan customs to persist hidden from colonial eyes.

The church emphasized conversion of the Maya, but also sought to control the population to extract resources to support parishes and to ensure Christian morals and teachings were being followed. Sometimes the church forcibly relocated Maya who resided in dispersed areas into more concentrated centers, making it easier to assess and collect fees to support local parishes (Rugeley 1996). The Spanish sometimes burned villages to get the Maya to move. However, the Maya resisted forced moves. There were not enough Spanish settlers to keep complete control over the Maya, especially outside of the main towns; thus, the Maya often went back to their old homes, abandoning their places of forced relocation. Increasingly, Maya subsistence patterns and the Spanish labor requirements collided. Colonialism brought with it a struggle between Mayan tendencies to migrate in search of better milpa for subsistence farming and the needs of the parish to centralize communities for tax collection, labor, and the supervision of morality (Rugeley 1996, 9).

The milpa practice resulted in seasonal migration. Thus, the Maya, while keeping their home in one place, would live for much of the year elsewhere. This made it difficult for the friars to maintain control over them. The friars often used money they received

from church wages and extra money they collected from their Mayan parishioners to buy land and, eventually, many established haciendas. Many church officials individually became wealthy land owners.

But the main role of the church was conversion. Idol worship was outlawed and Catholicism was the official religion. Religious conversion, a cornerstone of colonial life, was directed at supplanting local gods and rituals with Christian ones. Parishes were established throughout the Yucatán to control and organize spiritual life and more. Publicly, Christianity supplanted Mayan ceremonies, as "The Christian ritual took over the towns, just as the churches took over the temple sites, and the friars replaced the *ahkins*, the Mayan high priests" (Farriss 1984, 290).

Still, many elements of Mayan cultural and religious practices endured. Public religious life was characterized by adherence to Christian practices and ceremonies. Mayan religious practices were pushed to the margins, underground and hidden from the friars and colonial authorities, carried out in the forest and in caves. They were preserved through rituals relating to hunting, cenotes, and milpa ceremonies for rain and good harvests (Farris 1984, 292). For example, the Cha chaac ceremony to avoid drought was held in the milpa, where families brought religious items, privately held as family heirlooms, for the ceremony. Small groups of men would bring offerings to the rain god to end the drought, but these were not the large community affairs of the past. Over time, this dual form of private-public worship was fused, with Christian saints and names taking the places of Mayan gods and deities, and Christian symbols used in Mayan rituals

(Farriss 1984). This syncretic fusion allowed Mayan practices to survive the Spanish onslaught.[2]

Many of the pre-conquest Mayan rituals seem to have survived, with little alteration, to the present day. Farriss' (1984) research into Mayan cosmology argues that early colonial descriptions of various practices and ceremonies are virtually identical to more recent descriptions by ethnographers. She argues that the links between subsistence food production and traditional beliefs and rituals are relatively stable. "This continuity in lifeways and beliefs can be seen most strongly in the all-important task of food production, with its locus in the milpa" (Farriss 1984, 288). Since Mayan religious beliefs and practices were obscured from public view and pushed into the realm of the private, they persisted despite acceptance of Christianity.

The relative stability of the colonial order was maintained for about one hundred and fifty years. But by the end of the eighteenth century, rapid changes transformed Yucatecan society. Population increases accelerated the demand for grains. Many estates, the precursors to the haciendas, thus expanded agricultural production and claimed as private property land the Maya used (Patch 1993, 143). Initially labor on these estates came from free peasants, who traded work every Monday of the year for a piece of land on which to make their own milpa (Patch 1993, 148). But increasingly the Spanish elites dominated and controlled of once-free peasants. The Bourbon reforms introduced by King Charles III liberalized the colonial economy. In particular the rules governing trade were relaxed allowing for trade without first going through Spain (Patch 1993, 208).

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[2] For a discussion of religious syncretism, see Stewart 1999.

These rule changes gave rise to extensive privatization of land in Yucatán and the expansion of haciendas, as elites focused on producing products for export (e.g. hides, tallow, meat, logwood, and henequen products). The Spanish colonists set up large haciendas in the country to supply growing urban markets with food and to produce export products (Rugeley 1996).

Rural society was increasingly under pressure. To improve economic productivity and ensure a sufficiently large base of labor, *hacendados* started paying taxes and church fees for the peasants, not as a gift, but as a forced loan. The peasants were forced into labor on the haciendas to work off the debt. This often began a cycle of permanent service on the hacienda as the peasants were not able to pay their involuntarily incurred debt. They were often unaware of the amount of their debt. This debt-peonage system was increasingly used to guarantee access to cheap labor. Even independence from Spain did little to alter this system. Existing land and labor practices gradually continued after 1821. Hacendados claimed communal lands as private property, as haciendas expanded to supply both the growing internal market and export of raw materials.

Independence and Liberal Legislation

Concentrated land tenure increased in post-independence Mexico, although the new policies were based on the liberal laws of the colonial Spanish regime. In the 1840s, a series of laws resulted in large swathes of what were deemed "empty" lands (*terrenos baldíos*) being seized by elites as private property. The goal was to restrict communal land ownership and extend private property.

The Yucatecan state government passed a law in 1841 which severely restricted the size of communal village lands (Patch 1991, 55). Everything outside of the core of the communal village lands was considered empty land and could legally be colonized by private individuals. Lacking revenues, the state government increasingly used land as payment, particularly to compensate soldiers for military service. In 1844 the state levied taxes on milpa land and required villagers to pay surveying fees to delineate communal village lands from empty land (Patch 1991, 56). These actions by the Yucatecan government dispossessed many Maya from the land and increased the financial hardships of the peasant class.

Many Maya lived in dispersed areas and cultivated the milpa outside of the main village land, since these lands were largely in private hands. The milpa plots often had to be planted farther and father away in order for the crops to grow given the poor soil conditions on over-used land near the villages. The actions of the state government illustrated their failure to understand or desire to ignore land use by the Maya. The liberal legislation was designed to alter land tenure and improve Yucatán's economic position. The goal of extending private property rights was to increase general welfare by creating incentives for more efficient use of resources. But instead they resulted in conflict.

In 1847 the Caste War began and fighting broke out in Yucatán between the Mayan population and the Spanish-descended elites. The Maya were quite successful in retaking rural land, pushing their "foreign" invaders back to the capital of Mérida. But that was not to be. In a now famous description of the Caste War, as the time for planting the milpa came, the Maya turned their backs and retreated to the land. Agrarian practices

trumped continued fighting, illustrating the centrality of the milpa in Mayan life. By and large the war was over.[3] In 1848, with supplies from Mexico City, Yucatecan elites began to reassert control over land, pushing back against the rebels. While re-colonization of the peninsula took many years, control gradually spread east and south.

The Caste War left a mark on the Yucatán and "reveals the continued vitality of Maya culture. Not only were the Maya capable of organized resistance but they had also preserved a collective memory of their past" (Farriss 1984, 389). The Maya had resisted complete domination and settled in the south and east, fertile lands where milpa cultivation could continue (Joseph 1986). But the elites would not be confined to this arrangement. The demands for export commodities and agricultural products for the urban areas once again pushed the boundaries, as the landed aristocracy sought to recover and expand its economic power.

President General Porfirio Díaz (1876-1911) increased privatization and control over land, partially to pacify the area after indigenous uprisings. By 1912, 134,000 hectares of communal village land in Yucatán was subdivided into about 12,000 individual plots. Echoing the liberals of a few decades before, the federal government believed that these agrarian reforms were "progressive acts that would eliminate the backward communal-village system and produce industrious, individualistic farmers working in a free enterprise system" (Chacón 1991, 180). The impact on Yucatán was to concentrate land in a few hands. Less than one percent of the elites owned over 97% of

[3] Violence and battles continued to rage in Yucatán, even after most fighting had ended. In 1850, a "talking cross" prophesized a holy war. The eastern part of the peninsula remained an uncontrolled frontier and the base for low levels of insurgency and fighting until 1910, when control was exerted by the federal government.

the land and about 96% of the population was landless by the early twentieth century (Chacón 1991, 181).

One of the major causes of the new wave of land concentration was the expansion of henequen production. Henequen is a member of the agave family. The arid and rocky soil of northern Yucatán provides ideal growing conditions. The plant takes between seven and ten years to develop, and then its leaves may be cut. Raw fibers can then be extracted from the spiky leaves. These can be used for rope and twine. Starting slowly in the nineteenth century, by 1880 the cultivation of henequen for export became the major economic activity in the northwest area of Yucatán and around Mérida.

Several technical improvements in henequen production during the nineteenth century improved processing, making the industry lucrative. Originally fibers were scraped from the leaves by hand, a time-consuming process. But in 1860 Yucatecans developed mechanical rasping devices (*desfibradoras*), which cut costs and permitted the industry to meet growing demand (Wells 1985, 28). The 1878 invention of the McCormick knotter-binder and its use in the U.S. dramatically increased demand for hard fibers (Joseph 1982, 26).[4] And Yucatán was poised to become the number one supplier satisfying U.S. demand. Over 85% of all binder twine manufactured in North America was made with Yucatecan henequen (Wells 1985, 28).

"Far cheaper and far more accessible than any of its rivals, Yucatecan henequen virtually monopolized the world market prior to 1915. While potential competitors in

[4] Both the McCormick and Deering companies in the U.S. made improvements in knotter-binders by the end of the nineteenth century. These increased efficiency in wheat harvests, more than doubling output. The companies formed a consolidated trust, International Harvester Company, by 1915. (Wells 1985, 30-37).

Africa and Asia were still years away from establishing the stable conditions under which sisal plantations might flourish, Yucatán's henequeneros had mastered a technically advanced, highly capitalized plantation economy predicated upon a labor system that reduced production costs to a bare minimum." (Joseph 1986, 91-92) American demand drove expansion in the Yucatecan henequen industry. Between 1870 and 1915 production increased from 30,000 bales to 950,000 bales (Wells 1985, 29).[5]

With henequen a viable export commodity, land and labor was needed to support the new commercial activity. Many henequen planters acquired individual land holdings from the indigenous people through confiscation or purchase. Further, the so-called empty lands that many Maya used for the milpa were given away or sold at low prices to private companies before peasants could file a legal claim to the land (and even when they did, there were often problems with the courts). (Chacón 1991) Few haciendas outside of the northern zone grew henequen; rather, they focused on the production of foodstuffs for the expanding urban zone using indigenous peasants as agricultural laborers often forced into service through debts. While small compared to other haciendas in Mexico, large mono-crop henequen haciendas replaced mixed crop haciendas around Mérida by the end of the rule of Porfirio Díaz (1911).

The concentration of land often forced free peasants to seek out work on haciendas. Through the expansion of debt-peonage, labor became tied to the haciendas. Between 1880 and 1900 the hacienda labor force increased nearly four-fold, to 80,216 (Brannon and Backlanoff 1987, 39). The debt-peonage system was reinforced by

[5] One bale equals 350 pounds.

hacienda stores (*tienda de raya*), which provided credit for peasants to purchase goods, effectively placing them deeper into debt. Military conscription could also be avoided if a peasant was an indebted laborer, and many peasants moved to the haciendas to escape military service (Wells 1985, 159). The increasing demand for labor in the northern henequen zone often drew Maya workers from the south to fulfill shortages (Joseph 1986).

By the early twentieth century (prior to the Mexican Revolution), Yucatecan society had been re-shaped through government policies and mono-crop agriculture. Landless peasants, largely Maya, had been dispossessed of their land. Political and economic elites allowed indebtedness to serve as the mechanism supplying the henequen haciendas with a year-round labor supply. Outside of the henequen zone haciendas predominated, and most Maya were forced to work on them since they lacked land of their own. These haciendas supplied food and other products to support the urban and henequen areas of the north.

But the reliance on a mono-crop export was volatile. During World War I, supplies of non-Yucatecan fiber from were cut-off and stockpiling by the U.S. government increased both demand for henequen and prices three-fold between 1915 and 1918, from $0.0559 to $0.14 per pound (Brannon and Backlanoff 1987, 42). But after the war, with competition from abroad, prices fell to $0.065 per pound (Brannon and Backlanoff 1987, 43). This, coupled with technical changes and the Great Depression, lowered demand, price, and henequen profits. Mexican President Calles intervened in the sector and created the *Henequeneros de Yucatán Cooperativa Limitada* to coordinate the

Yucatecan henequen market, setting export prices and restoring Yucatán's falling market share (Brannon and Backlanoff 1987, 43). But the plan failed and the henequen sector was "unable to overcome burgeoning foreign competition after World War I" (Wells 1991, 142).

Revolution and Land Distribution

The Mexican Revolution (1910-20) once again re-shaped land tenure. Article 27 of the 1917 Mexican Constitution provided the legal basis for redistributing land to campesinos through the ejido system.[6] This system reformed land tenure relations in an attempt to satisfy the needs of the fifteen million landless peasants (95% of rural families), many of whom were indigenous people (Thiesenhusen 1996, 35). The ejido system was also a pragmatic response to the needs of thousands of politically mobilized peasants.

Ejido land, unlike private property, could not legally be sold, rented, or purchased. Communities essentially obtained usufruct rights to land from the government. A 1971 legal change allowed ejidatarios to rent out ejido land to non-ejido members. Ejidatarios were required to directly work their land and not hire wage laborers. They also had the right to serve on the executive committee of the ejido and voted on committee membership and internal rules. The rules governing ejidos remained relatively stable until the shift to neoliberalism.

[6] Agrarian reform is generally dated from the conception of Plan de Ayala by Zapata's supporters on November 28, 1911. The document called for the restoration of expropriated land to local communities and the division on one-third of all hacienda lands for landless peasants. (Katz 1996, 23)

Yucatecan society was not mobilized and engaged in struggle on the mass scale that other parts of Mexico were during the Revolution. The populist ideals of the Revolution came late, imposed on the Yucatán by federal leaders "from without" (Joseph 1982). "Various factors – geographic isolation, counterrevolutionary movements, lack of revolutionary leadership – caused the revolution largely to bypass Yucatán, and, as a consequence, the state maintained its pre-Revolutionary socioeconomic structures" (Chacón 1991, 182). The revolutionary governors imposed on Yucatán by the federal government began agrarian reform at a faster pace than the federal government supported.

Yucatán's first revolutionary Governor was General Salvador Alvarado (1915-1918), arriving from Campeche in 1915. Alvarado believed that he could transform Yucatán into a more productive region, responding to the needs of workers and campesinos within a capitalist framework. But first he had to reorganize Yucatecan production, eliminating obstacles to growth and development. Alvarado wanted to use state power to end the unproductive practices that dominated the state: debt-peonage, the large and often unproductive haciendas, and foreign control of henequen (Joseph 1982, 101). He enforced federal decrees outlawing debt-peonage, freeing some 100,000 people (Joseph 1992, 104). However, the majority of the freed campesinos only left the haciendas temporarily, as the haciendas still provided work and continued to control vast amounts of land. They were nevertheless free peasants, no longer forced to work to pay off debts, signaling the end of what is commonly referred to as the era of slavery (*la epocha de esclavitud*).

After the 1917 Constitution was established, Alvarado implemented a modest agrarian reform program, providing land so peasants could grow food, which was being imported to supplement the region's growing population (Chacón 1991, 192). Alvarado persuaded several hacendados to rent or cede (with compensation) land temporarily to groups or communities. Land redistribution was minimal, but some several thousand hectares were distributed to 12 communities (Joseph 1982, 128). Alvarado did not believe the restoration of communal lands would lead to development. He argued that "Those men [Maya] want only to sow their miserably small *milpas*, will eat nothing but corn, and cannot be persuaded to produce anything of worth for society as a whole" (Alvarado 1982).[7]

U.S. demand for henequen during World War I. raised prices and provided Alvarado with funds to support his reforms. But in 1918 he was called back from Yucatán by the federal government for reassignment. After the war, henequen prices plummeted. Governor Felipe Carrillo Puerto (1921-1924) came to power and also attempted to implement agrarian reform. He hoped to break up the henequen haciendas by restoring land to villages that had been taken during the boom. However, he recognized that the state did not have sufficient funds to support campesinos by providing the necessary agricultural inputs. Still, his main goal was land redistribution, and, after Zapata's state of Morelos, more land was distributed in Yucatán during these early years than anywhere else in Mexico (Joseph 1982, 231). He distributed some 438,866 hectares to 22,525 peasants, most of which was land for milpa production (Spenser 1991, 234).

[7] As quoted in Joseph (1982, 128)

Carrillo Puerto's agrarian reform was aggressive and worried the landed elite, yet his demise came when he specifically targeted the henequen haciendas. In late 1923 he issued two decrees, both of which targeted the interests of the *casta divina*, Yucatán's landed elites. He sought to seize idle lands from haciendas; however, rather than grant usufruct rights, he planned to turn ownership over to workers to manage communally (Joseph 1982, 261). Nominal compensation would be provided to the owners of the expropriated lands. Further, he pursued a plan to distribute a share of the henequen profits to the workers, to support the new cooperatives (Ibid). But Carrillo Puerto's project of agrarian transformation was never complete, as he was assassinated in 1924.

In order for the goals of the Revolution to be fully implemented, especially in the henequen zone, the power of the federal government was necessary. Ten years later that requirement was met, as President General Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) focused on agrarian reform in Yucatán's henequen sector. His goal was to break the power of local economic elites in Mexico, those opposed to the Revolution's aims. But he also recognized that political stability in Mexico, and success of the new National Revolutionary Party (PNR), rested on mass-based support.[8]

Cárdenas redistributed seventeen million hectares of land throughout Mexico, more land than had been redistributed in the prior twenty year period, creating hundreds of ejidos (Beaucage 1998, 12). His agrarian reform benefited more than 800,000 peasant families and he distributed twice as much as land as all of the other administrations since

[8] The National Revolutionary Party (*Partido Nacional Revolucionario* – PNR) was created after President-elect Alvaro Obregon's assassination in 1928. In 1946 the name was changed to the Institutional Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional* – PRI).

the Revolution combined (Handelman 1997, 37). His genius lay in the development of the corporatist structures of the PNR. Cárdenas incorporated both workers and peasants into the party through institutions such as the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM)[9] and the National Peasant Confederation (CNC).[10] Ejidatarios became members of the CNC, which provided access to state support. Mexican agrarian policy was ultimately created to respond to demands for land, but also served to strengthen and maintain political support for the one-party regime in rural areas (Barry 1995, 12). As Brannon (1991, 245) noted "the distribution of property to landless peasants created a large, durable, and manipulable base of support for the official party".

Landowners and processors in the henequen sector continued to be a powerful force opposing agrarian reform. In 1937 Cárdenas visited Yucatán, decreeing that each hacendado would be allowed to keep a total of 300 hectares and the rest of their holdings would be expropriated (Joseph 1982, 292). Arriving with teams of surveyors, engineers, and bureaucrats, he carried out the largest single episode of land reform in Yucatán. Within two weeks he created 276 collective ejidos, which controlled 61% of the henequen land (Brannon 1991, 246). But his effort to transfer control of henequen production to peasants was fraught with problems. The ejidatarios had neither the capital nor the technical skills to manage henequen farming and processing. Over the following 50 years, both the state and federal government would step in, managing and organizing the henequen ejidos. Their actions effectively made ejidatarios state employees. The

[9] *Confederación de Trabajadores de México*

[10] *Confederación Nacional de Campesina*

henequen ejidos nevertheless proved to be a formidable political bloc, and the federal government poured millions of pesos into Yucatán to bolster the sagging sector and ensure that the ejidatarios' support for the PRI never waned.[11] This arrangement resulted in ejidatarios being converted into wage workers as opposed to proprietors of their land, dependent on the state for their economic livelihood.

During the PRI's seventy year reign, the ejido often served as a political instrument for the state to provide campesinos with a place to live and raise at least subsistence crops. By institutionalizing agrarian reform, the one-party state was able to co-opt dissent and maintain some rural stability. But increasingly the rural sector was a drain on federal reserves, with resources supporting industrialization. Efforts to improve agricultural output and diversify crops were undertaken in Yucatán, specifically with the creation of irrigation systems. Generally beginning in the 1960s, the national water commission began to install irrigation systems in parts of (particularly southern) Yucatán. This infrastructural change resulted in some communal lands being broken up into individual plots to grow various fruits and vegetables for the domestic market. Southern Yucatán in particular focused on citrus production.[12] But federal policy changes once again would impact the rural sector in Yucatán.

State support for ejidos was furthered diminished with the onset of the debt crisis in 1982 and the subsequent adoption of neoliberal reforms. The federal government's debt bankrupted the treasury when interest rates rose in the 1980s. To avoid defaulting on

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[11] The politics of the henequen sector after Cárdenas' distribution are discussed in greater detail in chapter seven.

[12] The development of irrigation and the citrus industry in Yucatán is discussed in greater detail in chapter five.

its loans, the federal government negotiated with the U.S. government and the International Monetary Fund for further loans to cover debt service payments. These loans came with strings, and in 1982 Mexico entered a period of neoliberal economic restructuring. As a result of neoliberal reforms and budgetary cuts, fewer state resources were available to support the ejido sector.

The agrarian sector in Yucatán was sagging by the 1980s. Construction projects in Cancun, for the development of the tourism industry, brought jobs to the region. Temporary migration provided wages for many campesinos. The 1980s also saw the rise of a relatively new phenomenon in Yucatán – migration to the U.S. This migration largely involved Maya, who compose approximately 65.5% of the state's population (CONAPO 2005). This trend was partially driven by the failing henequen sector, which was in crisis by the 1970s as the availability of cheaper and higher quality natural rope from other areas (notably Brazil) and synthetic fibers began to dominate the world market. For example, the percent of total workers employed in Yucatán's cordage industry declined from 54% to 14% between 1965 and 1980 (Lewin 2007, 11). Further, falling citrus prices in southern Yucatán pushed people north seeking employment. Fluctuations in citrus prices, and the extraction of profits by intermediaries for transportation and marketing costs, undermined the sector (Lewin 2007, 12).

Whereas work in Cancun or in the northern henequen zone historically provided labor, by the 1990s these sectors were unable to fill the demand for wages from Yucatán's rural sector. Natural disasters, such as hurricane Gilbert in 1988, and the higher wages available in the U.S. also contributed to increases in migration. The rise in

migration to the U.S. has been accompanied by increases in remittances. While not reaching the high levels found in other Mexican states, between 2001 and 2006 remittances to Yucatán rose from approximately $44 million to $114 million (Lewin 2007, 17).

Neoliberal Reforms

Neoliberal reforms were designed to alter ejido structures and permit the sale of ejido land.[13] By creating secure and transparent property rights, reformers hoped to attract investment into the rural sector. The changes to agrarian law and government policies were expected to "catalyze the formation of a new economic and social dynamic based on free market principles" (Baños Ramírez 1998, 33). The greatest changes came during the tenure of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994).

There were three main changes in policy under Salinas that greatly impacted the ejido system specifically, and the agricultural sector broadly. First, the state ended its blanket subsidies to the agricultural sector, removed price supports and the provision of credits.[14] Second, trade protections were reduced, as liberalization proceeded and tariffs

[13] Neoliberal reforms are usually dated as beginning in Mexico in 1982, the time of the first Structural Adjustment Program. Reforms to Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution, which officially ended the government's responsibility to redistribute land, were made in 1992.

[14] Salinas' poverty-reduction program, PRONASOL, was designed to target some state funds towards the poorest individuals and alleviate the stresses caused by liberalization. However it failed to provide relief for rural agricultural producers because the distribution of funds was biased towards political and electoral priorities, as well as poverty reduction, and was also biased towards urban areas (Kelly 2001, 91).

were dropped. Finally, Article 27 of the Constitution was changed, ending agrarian reform and land redistribution.[15]

In 1992, Salinas reformed Article 27 as he finalized the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The reforms granted members of ejidos the right to title to their own land, which could be sold, rented or used as collateral; granted companies the right to purchase ejido lands and hold twenty-five times more land than individuals; and removed the ability for peasants to petition for land redistribution (Harvey 1998, 187). When the reforms were announced in 1991 and implemented in 1992, about half of Mexico's territory was covered by Article 27; that is, half of the land was legally bound through usufruct rights granted to ejidos (Stephen 2002, 6). There were approximately 27,410 ejidos within Mexico, which supported about 3.1 million ejidatarios and many more of their dependents when the reforms were announced (Cornelius and Myhre 1998, 2).

This process of creating and implementing mechanisms to provide land titles was complex. The neoliberal land titling program was lengthy, consisting of years of meetings, mapping land, designating beneficiaries, and allocating certificates and titles. The federal government created new agencies (Agency for Agrarian Justice – PA)[16] and programs (Program for Certification of Ejido Land Rights and the Titling of Urban House

[15] Land redistribution had been continuing in Mexico despite earlier neoliberal reforms. For example, Harvey (1998, 174) found that in the state of Chiapas, between 1989 and 1992 there were 358 new ejidos and comunidades agrarias created, bringing the total combined number to 2,072 in Chiapas.

[16] *Procuraduría Agraria*

Plots – PROCEDE)[17], and enlisted existing agencies (National Institute of Statistics, Geography, and Information – INEGI)[18] in this project.

The land titling program was voluntary. The process was composed of several steps. For each ejido, an assembly of ejidatarios had to vote to participate. If a majority voted for the program, the entire ejido began the process. The state mapped ejido land, delineating boundaries. Often there were boundary disputes pre-dating the 1992 reforms. These had to be settled before the program could progress in the ejido.

The ejido assemblies had to designate land tenure patterns. There were three types of land. The first type, *uso común,* referred to land held in common by ejidatarios. No one individual owned a specific piece of land; rather, all ejidatarios had access. Each ejidatario was given a title for rights to communal land. The second, a *parcela,* was an individual plot of ejido land titled to one or more persons. This was individualized ejido land. It was not privatized. The parcelas were still part of the ejido, even though not all ejidatarios had access to it. Ejidatarios received titles to parcelas, but community members who were not ejidatarios also received titles to parcelas. Sometimes people had homes built on ejido land; this land was designated *solar*, the third type of ejido land. When the land titling program had delineated ejido boundaries and mapped the different forms of land tenure, titles were given to the agrarian rights-holders.

Completing the land titling program did not mean that ejido land was private property. In order to create private property, the ejidatarios had to vote, in an assembly, to

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[17] *Programa de Certificación de Derechos Ejidales y Titulación de Solares*

[18] *Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía e Informática*

allow property to be privatized. Only parcelas could be privatized. Uso común land first had to be converted into parcelas for it to be privatized. The ejido assembly had to vote to create parcelas out of uso común land. If the assembly permitted the privatization of land, the individual who had title to the parcela had to file for a land tenure change. They did this through RAN. Once the paperwork was filed, the owner of the parcela received a new title for private property.

As part of the new rules governing the ejidos, three categories of rights-holders were established in the agrarian law. Ejidatarios were those individuals with ejido rights, including participation in ejido assemblies and elections. The second category, an *avecindado*, is officially recognized by the ejido assembly or agrarian tribunal as living in the area for one year or more. A *posesionario*, the final category, is not an ejidatario, but owns a parcela or uses uso común land. Posesionarios must be recognized by the ejido assembly. The category of posesionario includes *parcelarios*, people who own ejido parcelas. Sales of ejido parcelas are permitted under the new law without the privatization of ejido land. However, these sales are restricted and can only be conducted between these legally recognized categories of rights-holders. For sales to outsiders, people without recognized agrarian rights, ejido land must be privatized.

Neoliberal Reform in Yucatán

The land titling process began in Yucatán in 1994. There was little organized resistance to the program, and nearly 60% of the ejidos were participating in PROCEDE

by 1999.[19] By 2006, 702 of the 786 ejidos in Yucatán had completed the land titling program. Approximately 500,000 hectares of ejido land was designated as parcelas and nearly three times as much, 1,530,244 hectares, as uso común (Agency for Agrarian Justice 2006). In total, about half of Yucatán's land was in the ejido system. Virtually no land was designated as solar. The amount of land held as uso común, virtually 75% of the ejido land in Yucatán, is large by national standards. The national average is 66% uso común and 33% parcelas. Yucatán and six other states in Mexico have less than 30% in parcelas; by contrast in eighteen states over 50% is held as parcelas, with six states registering more than 66% in parcelas (Agency for Agrarian Justice 2007).

Generally, the ejido land in Yucatán falls into three main categories of production (see figure 3). Land in the northwestern part of the state, around the capital of Mérida, is comprised of about 270 of the ejidos that had produced henequen. These were the ejidos carved out of the henequen haciendas, particularly during Cárdenas' administration. The eastern part of the state is characterized by milpa production on about four hundred ejidos (Baños Ramírez 1998, 32). These communities are sources of temporary migratory labor, some destined for Mérida, but the bulk headed to Quintana Roo, working mainly in the Cancun area. The southern part of the state is dominated by mixed production systems,

[19] Some researchers found resistance in the early years of PROCEDE, prior to 1996. For example Baños Ramírez (1998, 34) argued that by 1996 only 37% of Yucatán's ejidos received certificates from RAN. He argued that the lukewarm response (in some cases outright hostility) by ejidatarios was due to a lack of information about the program, wariness over large-scale government programs, and internal issues; however, he argued that the relative slow pace of participation in PROCEDE signaled that ejidatarios were "far from being swept up in an entrepreneurial or free market culture" and that "the government has ignored the social, cultural, and political dimensions of the crisis of the rural sector."

with both uso común land for the milpa and irrigated parcelas for commercial fruit and vegetable production.[20]

Communal land (uso común) appears to have been preserved because it is suited to the traditional milpa practice, as it allows for field rotation. One agrarian representative argued that uso común predominated because it "was what they [ejidatarios] could envision." Perhaps after centuries, past agrarian practices became accepted as inevitable, and so ejidatarios made their tenure choices based on what they knew best.

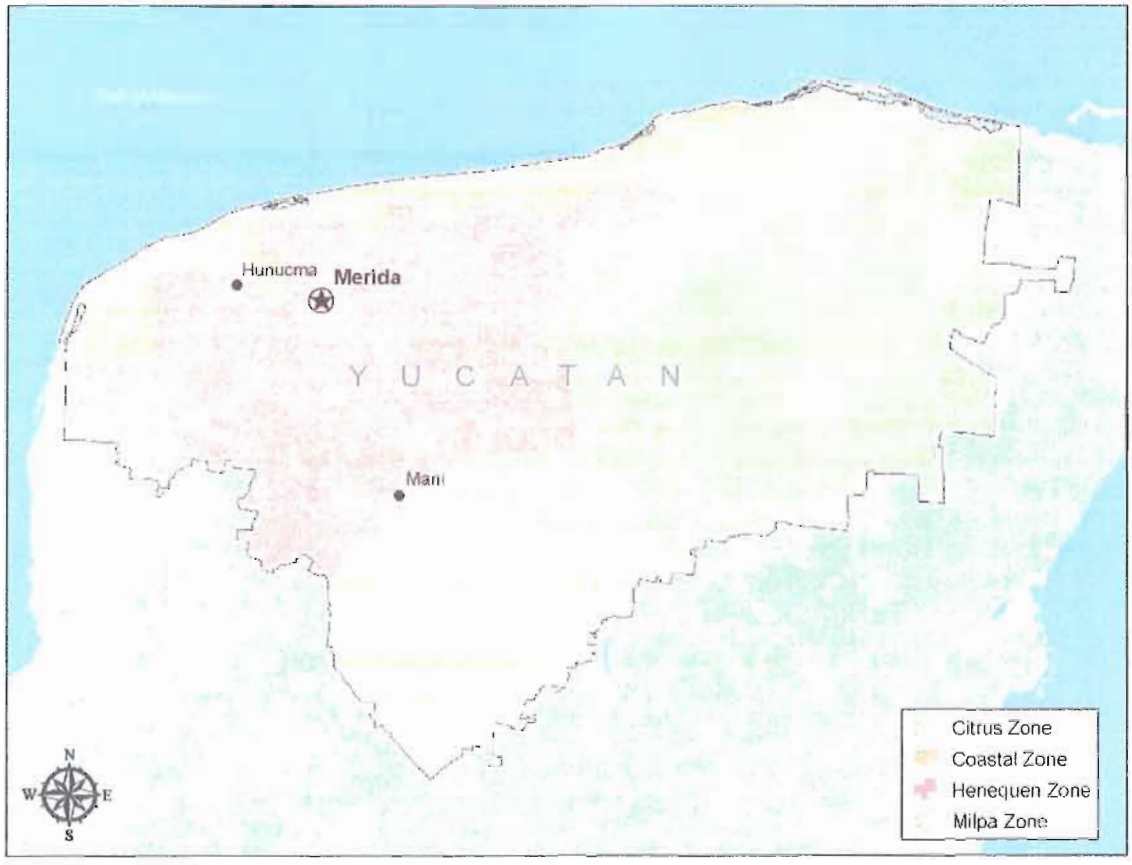

Figure 3: Ejido Zones, map by Patrick Gronli

[20] Some characterizations of ejido land in Yucatán describe five areas, the three already mentioned plus ejidos involved in the cattle-raising and fishing. However, these two types of production, and their geographic locations, are not as large as the other three categories.

As Baños Ramírez (1998, 39) noted, "For centuries, repeated attempts to introduce the concept of private property into Yucatán's corn-producing communities have failed. They failed for one simple reason: cultivation is based on field rotation, and the most suitable tenure pattern for field rotation is communally held land."

One current trend in Yucatecan ejidos is the sale of land in the former henequen zone. Much of this land has been sold to satisfy the demands of the growing urban population of Mérida. Some wealthier Meridians have built estates outside the city. Several high-profile projects, such as a country club and housing for Mérida's elites and an increasing foreign community, have been built on former ejido land. Still, these types of transformations have been relatively limited compared to the total size of the ejido sector in Yucatán.

Approximately 21,000 hectares, less than 1%, of ejido land had been privatized by 2007, of which just under half (8,562 hectares) was in the municipality of Mérida (Ministry of Agrarian Reform 2007). This is logical, as the urban population has been expanding. These transactions have caused many members of agrarian agencies to argue that gradually the ejido will disappear in Yucatán. Many agrarian bureaucrats believed that out of economic necessity ejidatarios were forced to sell their land. They further argued that as the ejido waned as the predominant form of land tenure, it was inevitable that the traditional culture would fade and with it cultural values and practices.

Conclusion

The milpa practice, embedded in ritual knowledge and identity, was preserved in Yucatán. When land concentration threatened this practice, the Maya rebelled. Despite failing to retake their land, this mobilization became part of the collective memory. While Maya in some parts of the Yucatán maintained milpa production on ejido land in the twentieth century, those in the henequen zone were transformed into wage workers. As my two case studies illustrate, in the neoliberal reform era cultural identity served as a resource for both groups in responding to the changes, even if ethnic identification had become latent for the henequen ejidatarios.

CHAPTER IV

AGRARIAN REFORM AND INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

This chapter provides an overview of the national politics of agrarian reform and indigenous rights from the 1980s to the present. Federal policies in the 1970s and early 1980s created the conditions for regional ejido organization independent from the state. Financial crises caused Mexico to abandon its nationalistic economic policies and adopt neoliberal reforms in 1982. These reforms accelerated, and in 1992 the government ended land redistribution. Criticizing neoliberalism and injustices committed against the indigenous people, the Zapatista army mounted a short-lived military offensive in 1994. They succeeded in opening new political spaces for dialogue and contestation, and pressured the state to recognize indigenous autonomy. In doing so they proposed participatory democracy, rooted in various indigenous conceptions of autonomy, as a counter to the neoliberal emphasis on individual liberty. In creating an alternative framework for viewing state-society relations, indigenous movements directly confronted and challenged official political authority in Mexico.

The Beginning of the End

In the 1980s grassroots indigenous and peasant movements took root in Mexico. The increase in independent organizing was the result of new associational spaces created in the 1970s and 1980s. President Echeverria (1970-76) encouraged regional second and third level associations of small producers to form through the 1975 Agricultural Credit Law (Fox 1992, 58). The goal of the law was to unite producer groups – ejidos, indigenous agrarian communities and private production societies – around common economic interests, such as accessing credit and the marketing of crops. They were permitted to form secondary level associations of two or more producer groups. This resulted in the formation of Unions of Ejidos. Two or more secondary level groups could also form a third level Rural Collective Interest Association (ARIC). The formation of Unions of Ejidos Unions, third level associations, increased during the 1980s, partially as producers struggled to appropriate the productive process (Harvey 1998, especially chapter 5).

Between 1980 and 1982, the federal government channeled some of their oil revenues into the Mexican Food System (SAM), an agrarian subsidy program designed to increase grain production and alleviate hunger. Peasant stores were created under SAM in rural communities, managed locally by the community. While the 1982 debt crisis ended the program, the peasant stores had a lasting political effect. "Autonomous peasant movements took advantage of the program's participatory procedures to build their own representative organizations, whose activities and scope went beyond the boundaries originally defined by policymakers" (Fox 1992, 152). While new spaces were created for

peasant and indigenous mobilization, it would take some time for their demands to impact the political system. In the meantime, the relationship between economic policy and political institutions changed dramatically.

By the early 1980s Mexico's financing for industrialization had become unsustainable. With mounting external debt, interest rates, and government deficit, the state declared that its treasury reserves were depleted and would not be able to make its debt payment in 1982. The crisis caused President Madrid (1982-88) to agree to Mexico's first structural adjustment plan. The government began to privatize state-owned enterprises, lowered tariffs, and cut its budget. Madrid cautiously abandoned traditional nationalist economic policies, joining GATT in 1985 and beginning NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) negotiations (Lindau 1996). By the end of his administration, neoliberal reforms were accelerating.

The fiscal changes the federal government made in accordance with structural adjustment programs resulted in budget cuts to social sectors. This disrupted the long-standing tradition of the PRI, which maintained a corporate political structure and allegiance through distributions of state benefits. The shift towards market-oriented economic policies and the abandonment of social sectors faced with falling wages created a backlash against the PRI.

Cuauhtémoc Cardenas, son of agrarian reformer Lázaro Cárdenas, broke with the PRI in the 1988 elections to run as a populist candidate. Cárdenas enjoyed broad support, especially in rural areas. He argued for greater democratization and protection for those suffering the tough adjustment period. Carlos Salinas, the PRI candidate, officially won

the 1988 elections, but his legitimacy was challenged by widespread allegations of vote tampering.

President Salinas (1988-94) aggressively pursued neoliberal reforms, including NAFTA negotiations and the privatization of state-owned enterprises. His reforms to Article 27 of the Constitution and the agrarian law ended land redistribution, removed protections on ejido land, and created the legal mechanism for the individualization and privatization of ejido land.[1] The goal was to establish a market-driven model of development and foster capitalist agrarian transformation with the infusion of private funds and the creation of a land market. This neoliberal development model in Mexico was based upon the idea that the indigenous would disappear as social actors, instead serving as a source of cheap labor for bulk commodities production. One of Salinas's rural policy advisors believed that indigenous farmers would be driven off the land and become "proletarianized" as a result of NAFTA and neoliberal economic reforms (Nigh 2000, 124).

The adoption of neoliberal reforms and the radical shift in agrarian policy represented a new conception of state-society relations. The federal government signaled that the protection of the individual and private property was supplanting the needs of communities. The neoliberal shift in economic policy-making was tied to a reorganization of society, one that sought to refashion a modern Mexico. For some twenty million peasants in the countryside, Salinas sought not to provide further agrarian reform but to see them as inevitably unnecessary for modern Mexico (Centeno 1997).

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[1] These points are discussed in greater detail in chapter three.

The peasants were to be incorporated into the modern, free market economy. The agrarian reform of the past, which redistributed land to peasants and supported small-scale agriculture, would cease to be a central state goal, cast instead as an obstacle to development, and supplanted by market-driven agricultural policies.

Yet economic benefits were not evenly distributed and dissatisfaction with the PRI was mounting. To restore legitimacy and earn international acceptance as a modernizing state, both the Salinas and Zedillo (1994-2000) administrations liberalized the political sphere, providing new opportunities for competition by rival parties. The PRI was under pressure to implement democratic reforms throughout the 1990s, partially resulting from economic crises. One of the most surprising and enduring challenges to the PRI and the neoliberal agrarian reforms came from a poor state in southern Mexico: Chiapas.

Building a National Movement for Indigenous Rights

By 1994, the early experiences with peasant and indigenous organizing coalesced into a guerilla movement against the state. As NAFTA went into effect on January 1, 1994, about three thousand peasants in the state of Chiapas rose up under the auspices of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) and captured a number of regionally important towns. They claimed that NAFTA was a "'death sentence to the indigenous' and protested against exploitation and repression" (Schulz 1998, 587). Initially enjoying success as the police and military were taken off guard, days of fighting and police brutality against the indigenous participants and their supporters followed. Global

attention focused on the situation as the Zapatistas were able to utilize the media to convey their message.[2] Their media war kept the watchful eyes of the world attentive. Through successful international organization, the Zapatistas were able to pressure the Mexican national government to call a cease fire on January 12, 1994.

The 1994 movement was neither a spontaneous response to neoliberalism nor a direct result of the 1992 agrarian reforms. A variety of regional organizations arose in Chiapas throughout the 1970s and 1980s that, along with existing ejido governance structures, became important in connecting peasants, spreading information, and recruiting members for the EZLN.

Three different organizations emerged in Chiapas in the 1970s. The first was the Emiliano Zapata Peasant Organization (OCEZ), which focused on land issues and worked with peasants to maintain and receive title to ejidos. The second was the Independent Confederation of Agricultural Workers and Indians (CIOAC), an organization approaching the agricultural peasants as a rural proletariat and organizing local unions based upon federal labor laws. In 1980 the CIOAC and the OCEZ joined with other ejido unions in the central highlands and Lacandon jungle to create the Union of Ejido Unions and Peasant Groups in Solidarity, later known as ARIC-Union of Ejido Unions. (Collier 1999; Harvey1998; Hernandez 1994)

In the 1970s the National Forces of Liberation (FLN) arrived in Chiapas and in effect helped to create a base for the future EZLN (Barmeyer 2003). By 1983, the EZLN had already been established by San Emiliano community members wanting to train in

[2] The Zapatistas brought communiqués to a newspaper in San Cristobal, which then faxed the texts to the newspaper LaJornada, Initially the Zapatista communities did not have direct access to the internet.

guerilla tactics and firearms use (Barmeyer 2003). Over the next several years, through the work of the FLN, the Maoist-inspired Popular Politics (PP), and the existing organizations, the EZLN militarily grew, amassing what materials they could and establishing training facilities to prepare for military action. As peasants became concerned over the ability of the ARIC-Union of Ejido Unions to effectively fight for their concerns, some began to move towards the Emiliano Zapata Independent National Peasant Alliance (ANCIEZ), a precursor that in 1989 became officially the public face of the EZLN (Harvey 1998; Barmeyer 2003).

The variety of local and regional organizations operating in Chiapas was central in linking peasants from ejidos together and forging a sense of shared identity. These organizations also provided a training ground for different models of how to achieve goals, by working with the government, by appropriating the process of production, and by navigating the system to achieve ejido grants. The ejido structures themselves, with community-based governance where individuals participated and shared responsibility, using a consensus model for decision-making, were also important locations for peasants to work with each other, build community trust and solidarity, and share information. These regional and local forms of organization are central in understanding how people in different areas, spread out in the jungle, could be mobilized by the EZLN.

As demonstrated in chapter seven, the mobilization of ejidatarios in the Yucatecan henequen zone during the 1960s and 70s was the result of a regional association. However, in the Yucatecan case those associations were imposed from above as a union. The shared class identity established among the ejidatarios as henequen wage

workers became the basis for mobilization against the government when their material interests were threatened.

The symbolic beliefs attributed to Zapata, agrarian reform, and the Revolution were tapped by peasant, ejido, and indigenous organizations within Chiapas, including the EZLN. However, these beliefs were not static, nor were they used by outside urban leftists to brainwash peasants to work with them. Instead, peasants themselves were actively engaged in a process not just of reclaiming the myth of Zapata, but of fusing that myth with traditional beliefs to construct a new symbolism, one in which Zapatismo was "projected as a symbol of struggle not only for indigenous peoples in Chiapas but for all people living in misery, without rights, justice, democracy, or liberty, and who support the struggle to obtain these goals" (Stephen 2002, 167).

The 1994 uprising opened new political spaces for indigenous people to articulate their grievances and demands. The peace negotiations, facilitated by Chiapas Bishop Ruíz in San Andrés Larráinzar, opened a national dialogue for civil society to examine the costs of neoliberal reforms and consider and contest what citizenship and democracy meant in Mexico (Harvey 1998, 199). The EZLN included over 100 advisors from a broad array of organizations during negotiations with the government. Despite a signed agreement on "Indigenous Rights and Culture," negotiations broke down over the issue of "Democracy and Justice," resulting in increased violence and government assassinations of political activists and their families (Schulz 1998, 601).

Indigenous autonomy emerged as a major goal during the negotiations. "The economic struggles for land, credit, and fair prices, while necessary to build regional

organizations, were increasingly articulated in a cultural-political discourse of indigenous autonomy" (Harvey 1998, 204). During the meetings, EZLN representatives asserted their cultural identity, displaying their cultural pride in their language, dress, and the make-up of the team, composed of Maya (Gilbreth and Otero 2001). The 1996 San Andrés Peace Accords that resulted from the negotiations did not deal explicitly with land and agrarian reform, but focused instead on indigenous autonomy and the rights of self-determination (Stephen 2002). The concept of indigenous autonomy is based upon the idea that indigenous people can live according to their own "practices and customs," in accordance with Covenant 169 of the Internal Labor Organization, which Mexico has signed (SIPAZ 1998).

Out of the events of 1994-1996, two rival national indigenous organizations emerged – CNI and ANIPA. The National Indigenous Convention (CNI) is a national network of indigenous groups, many of whom are Zapatista sympathizers. The CNI has often endorsed Zapatista proposals and has consulted with the EZLN. The National Pluralistic Indigenous Assembly for Autonomy (ANIPA) emerged from communities in Chiapas who were not supportive of the EZLN, specifically members from the ARIC-Union of Ejido Unions (Harvey 1998, 220-222). A series of assemblies in 1994 and 1995 of indigenous people in Mexico focused on the issue of autonomy. During the meetings there was contestation over the conception of autonomy. These disagreements became more solidified as the CNI and ANIPA became established networks. ANIPA members supported regional autonomy that cut across ethnic divisions (Mattiace 1997). The Zapatistas supported communal autonomy. While these organizations have diverged over

autonomy, they have also served as spaces for dialogue over how autonomy should operate within the state.[3]

Opening National Political Space

In 2000, the previously unimaginable became reality. Seventy years of PRI rule came to an end. Vincente Fox, candidate for the conservative National Action Party (PAN), won the presidency. The PAN displaced the PRI from power. The opposition party victory created an opening for real democratic competition, which also benefitted the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). The leftist PRD was established in the wake of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas' failed 1988 candidacy. Since Cárdenas' first attempt to win the presidency, the PRD had fared poorly in presidential elections. However, they had done well at the local level in some regions of Mexico, including winning the mayoral election in Mexico City.

By the 2006 elections, the PRD had a leading candidate. Andrés Manual López Obrador (AMLO) was a populist mayor from Mexico City who had achieved national fame by the time the 2006 electoral cycle commenced. He was the projected front-runner in the July election. As summer approached, the PAN and PRI launched massive attacks on his reputation, painting him as a radical leftist. AMLO made a number of missteps,

[3] Amendments made to Article 4 of the Mexican Constitution in the mid-1990s formally guaranteed protection to the culture, traditions, and customs of indigenous people. However, the changes were placed under a section of the Constitution entitled "Of Individual Guarantees" thereby conferring protections to individuals but not conferring rights to collective indigenous groups. Further, the section explicitly focuses on protection culture, customs and traditions of indigenous peoples, but not giving rights to indigenous peoples. (Jung 2003)

assuming his lead in the polls was large enough to skip a nationally televised presidential debate. His lead in the polls began to shrink.

The Zapatistas adopted a new political strategy for the 2006 elections. They created *La Otra Campaña*, The Other Campaign. Working outside of the political parties, they tried to mobilize people throughout Mexico. A delegation of Zapatistas traveled across the country to areas where indigenous conflict was developing. They listened to people talk about their problems and the injustices they faced. The Other Campaign was endorsed by the CNI and they jointly called for a convention in the spring to discuss injustice and highlight the plight of indigenous communities throughout Mexico.

Both the Zapatista movement and the democratic reforms created a political space for civil society to pressure the political system to incorporate alternative conceptions of state-society interaction. Rather than a top-down process of control, indigenous groups were pressing for more localized decision-making. But their movements were resisted by authorities. In May of 2006 an annual protest in Oaxaca turned violent. The protests were organized by teachers during union contract negotiations with the state. On June 14th the governor ordered police to remove the protestors, resulting in violence. Months of unrest followed. The government opposition, the Popular Assembly of Oaxacan Pueblos (APPO), staged protests, took control of radio stations, and pressured the governor to resign. The government's response was increased harassment, assassination, illegal arrests, and torture (Guttman 2008). The governor never resigned, but the APPO catalyzed hundreds of thousands of marchers for massive protests. Violence also erupted in Atenco, near Mexico City, as flower vendors were attacked by police. Atenco was the

cite of violent confrontations between residents and police a few years earlier when President Fox tried use ejido land to build a new airport.[4]

In July, Felipe Calderón, the PAN candidate, was declared the victor in the presidential elections. Months of protests followed. There were accusations of voter fraud during the election and AMLO demanded a recount. While the vote was close, recounts showed Calderón had narrowly won. Refusing to accept the decision, AMLO took to the streets. Protestors blocked major intersections in Mexico City. AMLO called for an overthrow of Calderón and set-up a parallel government. His protests and rallies lasted into the fall before finally dissipating.

Conclusion

The intersection of agrarian policies and neoliberal reforms helped to propel an indigenous rebellion in Chiapas into the national spotlight. As the Zapatistas pressed for indigenous rights, they also opened up political space for contestation over local, state, national, and international actors to examine neoliberalism and its impact on communities. Their goals went beyond local needs and increasingly focused on participatory democracy and the meaning of autonomy (Stephen and Collier 1997). As a result, the neoliberal emphasis on individuals within society resided next to the movement for explicit recognition of indigenous practices and customs and a community-centric definition of autonomy.

[4] The conflict in Atenco is discussed in greater detail in chapter eight.

The Zapatistas and CNI created an important political opening. They provided a national space for people to articulate their grievances against neoliberalism and treatment by the state. Networks of indigenous people from different communities mobilized and worked together on common issue. In doing they established a shared frame for how to view state-society relations, local rights and autonomy. The mobilization against land sales in Hunucmá, the subject of chapters seven and eight, is an example of the intersection between the national (indigenous politics) and the local (one ejido). They employ a shared language – usos y costumbres – and make comparisons – Atenco – based on their interactions in the new spaces created by the Zapatistas.

There are many parallels between the ejido of Maní and the situation in Chiapas. In both places secondary associations were created, organizing ejidos as producers. Both coffee and orange prices fell in the 1980s and demographic changes exerted pressure on the land. Yet, in Maní indigenous identity and protections for existing practices did not produce ejidatario resistance to the neoliberal reforms or mobilization against the state. In 1994, after the EZLN mobilized against authorities in Chiapas, the Mani ejido began the new land titling program. Explaining the outcome in Maní is the subject of the next two chapters.

CHAPTER V

DUAL LAND TENURE IN THE EJIDO OF MANÍ

The case of land tenure changes in Maní provides us with a window into the decision-making process from the bottom-up, how ejidatarios and community members respond to state-imposed rules and structures in one local community. In this community, identity is linked to ritual knowledge, place, and agrarian production. This may have produced resistance to the neoliberal property rights regime if cultural identity determined responses. The end of protections for ejido land, central in Maní for the milpa, may have generated opposition. Yet this is not what occurred. Rather than opposition to the new rules, Manienses engaged in creative and adaptive responses, drawing on locally-available political economic and ideational resources: the benefits of institutional association, new migration patterns, and cultural values embedded in land.

This chapter examines the establishment of the Maní ejido prior to the neoliberal reforms. Formerly home to a royal Mayan lineage, Maní was dominated by haciendas during the colonial period. Christian missionaries further undermined Mayan rituals and customs, trying to convert and Hispanicize the local population. This situation persisted until after the Mexican Revolution, when the Mayan population reasserted its claims to ancestral lands.

After violent battles in the 1920s to reclaim land from haciendas, the ejido was created in 1934. Agriculture centered on making the milpa on communal ejido land.[1] This land tenure arrangement persisted until the 1960s when the state introduced and funded irrigation systems and permitted individual plots of land to be carved out of the communal land for citrus production. In the 1970s, Maní joined a regional secondary-level citrus producer's organization for ejidos to strengthen their economic power. With state support reduced and orange prices falling, temporary migration accelerated as a household strategy in the 1980s.

The high levels of ethnic identity in Maní – linked to milpa production – and the mobilizational resource of the regional citrus union could have resulted in a movement against the neoliberal reforms, as occurred in Chiapas. Yet there were no local manifestations of the kind of movement that arose in Chiapas. The gradual introduction of individual plots of irrigated land for commercial production began to displace milpa production on communal land and led to the creation of a land market in Maní. Yet the individualization and marketization of ejido land failed to completely supplant culturally-rooted and historically-constituted agrarian practices. To understand this reaction, we must first explore the institutional and cultural resources that actors drew upon in the neoliberal era.

[1] Milpa is translated from Mayan as "to the field". It is an historical process in the Yucatán of slash-and-burn agriculture used to cultivate corn, beans, and squash. Milpa practices date to pre-conquest times and are linked to religious rituals, most notably the Cha Chaac ceremony for rain. The milpa practice is explained in more detail in chapter three.

Colonial Imposition of New Rules and Practices

With a population of about four thousand, the town of Maní is located sixty-seven kilometers south of the state capital of Mérida (see figure 4).[2] Maní was the capital of one of the sixteen Mayan provinces in Yucatán prior to the conquest. When the Spanish arrived in Yucatán in the sixteenth century, the Tutul Xiu family ruled the area around Maní. Gaspar Antonio Xiu, grandson of the Tutul Xiu king, was born in 1531 in Maní.

Figure 4: Maní, map by Patrick Gronli

[2] Maní is the name of the town and the municipality. The municipality has two towns, Maní and Tipikal. There is one ejido for residents of the town of Maní, of the same name. There is also one smaller ejido in Tipikal. My references here are all to the town and ejido of Maní.

When the Spanish conqueror Francisco de Montejo arrived in 1541, the Tutl Xiu family worked with them; the king was even baptized as Francisco Montejo Tutul Xiu. Gaspar Antonio Xiu was educated first by leading Mayan teachers and then the Franciscan friars who settled in Maní (Xiu 1981, 9). With this background, Gaspar Antonio Xiu was fluent in both Spanish and Mayan. He served as a translator for the Spanish and the friars, and wrote an account of Mayan life and customs.

Spanish rule in Yucatán, as elsewhere, conflicted with local practices. Xiu tells us that prior to the arrival of the Spanish "land was held in common" and there were no boundaries between the towns (Xiu 1981, 79). However, under Spanish rule a conference was held in Maní in 1557 to delineate the boundaries between various provinces in the area, including the areas of the Xius (Gates 1978, 132). This would be one of many Spanish efforts to transform the existing practices and customs of the Maya.

Aside from altering land use patterns, the Spanish imposed a tax system on the Yucatán, requiring residents to pay tribute. The dominant milpa practice directly conflicted with the tribute system, as it was difficult to collect tribute when the population was dispersed. The result was greater restrictions on Mayan settlement patterns. From the surviving tax records, we can deduce the size of the population in the area. The 1549 tax list records 7,290 "heads of households" in the Xiu territory, which was the third largest (of sixteen) province listed in Yucatán (Gates 1978, 142). For the village of Maní, 970 households are listed, the largest in the Xiu territory (Gates 1978, 154). Roys (1957, 69) estimates that there were 4,365 residents in Maní in 1549. However, these numbers are misleading. It is likely that many more households were

found in both the Xiu territory and in Maní. The entire Xiu territory was composed of fifty-seven villages, but only sixteen were reported on the 1549 tax list; further, the names only corresponded to identifiable male heads of household (Gates 1978, 154). Often the Mayan settlement patterns were dispersed owing to the need to travel for milpa production and hunting. And people evaded the authorities so they would not have to pay tribute.

To establish greater control over the Mayan population, the friars worked with the Spanish colonial authorities. By instilling Christianity and Spanish customs, they hoped to alter the existing rituals, customs, and practices of the people. In 1552 the Spanish Royal Audience in Guatemala, at the behest of the friars, decreed a set of ordinances on the "conduct and treatment of the Indians" (Gates 1978, 157). The decree forbade people from living in the forests and restricted moving from one town to another without approval. Being away from town for more than 40 days, unless for public service, was punishable with "100 blows and 100 days in prison" (Gates 1978, 157). These rules violated existing Mayan norms of working and, often, living away from the main village during the milpa season. To further restrict Mayan ritual practices, Christianity was the only religion permitted and teaching the "old rites" was forbidden. Attacking the role of maize – produced in the milpa – in local culture, the casting of grains for religious purposes was forbidden, as were the ancient drinks (Gates 1978, 158).[3]

[3] The Mayans made two drinks from maize mixed with water. The first was a cold drink, usually prepared in the morning for mid-day. The other, usually reserved for special occasions, was a mixture of maize, cacao beans, water, and often other spices. The drink was mixed with a wooden utensil, making it appear foamy.

Aside from these restrictions on Mayan daily routines, the main square in Maní was converted literally and symbolically to represent the new authorities in the area. On one side of the square a Franciscan convent was built. Begun around 1549, it wasn't completed until the seventeenth century. It is one of the oldest in Yucatán. Across from the convent the municipal government building was constructed on the site of the old Tutul Xiu house.

In 1562, friar and bishop of Yucatán Fray Diego de Landa carried out an infamous *auto-da-fé* in Maní, publicly punishing those who were continuing their Mayan religious practices. The punishments were carried out in the main square, in front of the convent. The Franciscan friar, writing about the incident, noted that despite great inroads among the Maya and the willingness of the people to become "good Christians" there were problems. The friars held an inquiry and found that the Maya "were perverted by the...chiefs and went back to worshipping idols and making sacrifices" (Landa 2003, 60). As punishment, many people were tortured, humiliated and forced into service for their crimes. Historical accounts estimate that 10,000 Mayans were killed, and 5000 idols, 13 large rock altars, 27 rolls of parchment, and 197 religious vessels were destroyed (Burgos Parra 2000, 32).

Gaspar Antonio Xiu, as a translator for Landa, was forced to be a witness against the accused. He had to read off the charges and punishments against his own people. A month later he was accused of having forbidden objects and was arrested. He was quickly released and tried to get his grandfather and others released from prison for their crimes,

but he was too late; Francisco de Montejo Tutul Xiu, "the last governor Maní had, from the ancient royal lineage" died in prison (Xiu 1981, 11).

These early colonial experiences are not merely historical accounts of Maní. They retain importance in the collective memory of the current residents. One of the main restaurants in town is named "Tutul Xiu" after the royal family. The restaurant has paintings commemorating the auto-da-fé, which illustrate the destruction of the Mayan possessions and the brutality inflicted against the people. There is also a framed section of a note from Professor Gaspar Antonio Xiu, descendant of the royal lineage, which states: "And still after many centuries the Indian laments in the silence of the night the story he has heard from his elders of the destruction of the last kingdom of the Tutul-Xiu which existed in this province of Maní."

When I was at the restaurant, one of the waiters was quick to discuss the town's history with me. He told me about "the royal family Tutul Xiu who ruled many years ago…they were from here, Maní." As he said this last part he smiled broadly, clearly with pride in the history of the town. He also spoke of the restoration of the old convent, now a famous landmark and a tourist destination. He said, "the history and the culture are very strong here. It is why people come to visit."

The convent was mentioned to me by many residents as an important piece of history to go and see. It is a large building and the oldest in town. There is a sense of pride about it, and more than one person encouraged me to go inside for a tour, which I did. A few people asked if I know about Landa and the auto-da-fé. When I said I had heard the story, they often shook their heads. The sadness and pain, evident on people's

faces when they mention the "priest who burned everything" have not passed in the centuries since his violence against the Mayans and destruction of their history. Neither the Tutul Xius nor the Landa episode are forgotten; stores along the main road selling hammocks, locally made clothing, and souvenirs also contain books about the Tutul Xius and Landa's actions.

While the population of Maní was quite large in the sixteenth century, as illustrated above in the tax records, it soon dwindled. The centuries of colonial rule and settlement pushed people off of the village lands as nearby haciendas expanded. Some residents fled the area. One of the older ejidatarios I spoke recounted the history of land and population changes in Maní. "Around 1540 or so Maní was very large with many people," he told me, "but the people died very quickly. There were only 70-100 people around" by the early twentieth century. He believed that before the haciendas expanded "there used to be land anyone could work, but then it became private and there was no land." That, according to him, is what drove people from the area. And, he added that people fled the area because of "the priest who burned everything during the auto-da-fé." He said before "the land was all private property, there was no ejido. There weren't many people in the town." The 1549 tax list recorded almost 1,000 households, corresponding to about 4,300 residents. By the seventeenth century, that figure was cut in half (Forrest 1997, 92).

Despite Spanish legal efforts to change Mayan customs and practices by imposing stiff penalties, many elements survived, if in an adapted and obscured form.[4] As

[4] This point is discussed in more detail in chapter 3.

discussed later, the milpa system of agricultural production persists to the present day. And other Mayan rituals continue to be held, such as the hetz luum to ward off evil spirits. Maize is still the main subsistence crop, used not only for tortillas but also in a number of hot and cold beverages and for rituals. While the Manienses may have lost their land under colonial and post-independence regimes, many elements of their history, culture, rituals, and agrarian practices survived.

Colonial and Mexican regimes presided over the creation of private property, displacing Mayans from this land as occurred on the lands of indigenous people throughout Mexico. As noted in chapter 3, by the early twentieth century, the land around Maní was held largely by private owners in haciendas. The liberal economic reforms of the nineteenth century and the policies of former President General Porfirio Díaz (1876-1911) resulted in privatization of the last of the communal lands on the peninsula. The haciendas around Maní were built around the few underground water sources – cenotes – existing in the region. Thus the private owners had a monopoly hold on this vital resource. Many of the Maya in the area were forced to work on these estates (Forrest 2004, 182). The haciendas supplied food for the northern zone, where henequen production dominated the landscape. Food was brought to the nearby town of Oxcutzcab, southwest of Maní. Oxcutzcab was linked to the state capital of Mérida in the nineteenth century by the construction of a railroad and was a key point in transferring food between southern Yucatán and the urban north.

Struggling to Create the Ejido

The early 1920s are remembered by locals as a violent period during which they struggled to regain control of land from local elites. During Governor Carrillo Puerto's administration, the official Socialist Party of the Southeast (PSS) sought to implement agrarian reform, viewing the campesinos as a potential base of support for a socialist revolution "from above" (Joseph 1979, 56).[5] In Maní, Carrillo Puerto sought to end the control exerted by the hacendados. Some ejidatarios, whether out of experience when they were young or through stories passed down from their fathers, recall the former socialist governor's visit to Maní. One ejidatario told me that his father's generation had struggled, "violently and with force" to free land that had been held by a very few private land owners before the ejido was established. His father had told him that Governor Carrillo Puerto came to the area and told the people "to take the land back". Forrest (1997, 132) found similar recollections among the ejidatarios, who recalled the governor's speech in Maní that "the time of slavery was over and that freedom had come" instructing the campesinos to go to the haciendas and "claim your ejido".

These early struggles for land began a process that culminated in 1934. Landless campesinos who lived in the area and had worked on the haciendas around Maní requested the return of their ancestral land. The petition was considered by the Local Agrarian Commission, a state-level branch of the national agrarian agency in charge of

[5] The goals of the PSS stressed individual rights and freedoms, state intervention in the economy, and secularism. They hoped that with an end to the "time of slavery," they could break the power that the landed class, Catholic clergy, and local political bosses exerted over Yucatecan society through education, agrarian reform, cooperatives, and secularization (Fallaw 2001, 11).

land reforms.[6] The Local Agrarian Commission recommended 1,943 hectares be granted. The governor of Yucatán approved a provisional occupation of the lands, expropriated from seven haciendas for 460 beneficiaries.[7] On October 15, 1934, by a decree from President Rodríguez, the ejido of Maní was officially established. (Diario Oficial 1935)

Operation and Significance of the Ejido

This section details the agrarian and institutional processes of the ejido. The next chapter analyzes how Manienses responded to changes in the rules governing the ejido. But these historical practices provided resources the ejidatarios drew upon in neoliberal reform era. The initial 460 beneficiaries of the agrarian reform, the new ejidatarios of Maní, had usufruct rights to ejido land held as uso común. The communal land tenure pattern can be viewed as linked to Mayan cultural values, which have tended to stress the needs of the community before those of the individual (Flores Torres 2000). One ejidatario contrasted ejido land to private land. He said that the "ejido is important because it is for all the people, the invitation is for all. All of the people are the owners of the uso común land, but not one specific part of it." He gave an example. "The wood on the ejido land is yours, it's for everyone to use. If it's private land you cannot cut it because you cannot enter the private land. But here you can get the wood for cooking."

The milpa provided the basic staple of the diet – maize – and was linked to household roles. Families, generally the father and young sons, made the milpa. They

[6] As Craig (1983, 250) notes, the name of federal agency in charge of administering land reform has changed several times and has been called the National Agrarian Commission, the Department of Agrarian Affairs and Colonization, and the Ministry of Agrarian Reform.

[7] Land was expropriated from the haciendas of San Pedro, Mopilá, San Lorenzo Chumucbé, Santa Teresa, Santa Rita, San Antonio Ekmabén, and San Antonio Ticimul (Diario Oficial 1935).

planted their monte with maize every spring to take advantage of the rains and tended to it throughout the rainy season. The fields were burned before the rains started and a stick was used to push the maize kernels into the wet, ash-covered ground after the rains began. Weeding was done by hand and the land was rain-fed. Ejidatarios in Maní used this method quite successfully, as had people historically in the region.

Women would turn the maize into food for the family. The kernels were soaked in lime and ground to make a corn meal. That meal was used to make tortillas and drinks for the family. Tortillas were cooked over a fire. This practice still persists in Maní. One ejidatario told me that "we have a stove but my wife still makes the tortillas over a fire. Everyone uses wood for cooking [tortillas] even if you have a stove because it's custom." Any leftover maize was fed to animals raised at the homestead, usually turkeys or chickens.

As discussed in chapter 3, the milpa is also associated with the Cha Chaac ritual. In this Mayan ceremony sacrifices are made to the chaacs, the rain gods. Prior to burning the vegetation bowls of maize stew, pozole, are set at the four corners of the milpa as a sacrifice. The hmen in Maní then presides over the ritual to see if the rains will come. After the ceremony, the fields are burned. Maize kernels are usually present on altars for Mayan ceremonies and other foods prepared from maize are offered as gifts to the gods.

The communal ejido land was well-suited to the customs and practices of the Manienses in making the milpa, which required the rotation of crop land and fallow periods for soil regeneration. Since there is very little top soil on the Yucatán peninsula, field rotation was necessary so the foliage could grow back. Once vegetation grew on the

land it could be burned again. Burning the vegetation enriches the soil, acting as a fertilizer for the crops. The availability of communal land, as opposed to assigning each ejidatario a specific plot of land, fit with the requirements of moving the milpa's location every few years.

Yet, the techniques of making the milpa, learning to read the landscape to know when the rains were coming, and understanding local ecological practices, were learned in the family as an inheritance, imbued with cultural significance. One ejidatario told me that he learned from his father, as his father had from his grandfather, how to make the milpa. One ejidatario noted that when he was young and the ejido was first created he "would go to the field with my father, for the milpa, starting when I was seven. All of the land used to be for the milpa, all for corn and maybe a few other things. When I was seventeen I stopped going to school and got my own milpa." He said that before the ejido was created most of the land was privately held and it was hard for people to make the milpa. But there was lots of land available after the ejido was created. "There were large *montes*[8] for the milpa. We cut maybe 4 hectares. The first year the harvest was very good, and then the second. But then you had to move. The land needed to recuperate for five years." Moving the milpa to a different place was the result of years of local knowledge being passed down. Everyone I spoke with who made the milpa knew that you had to change the monte every few years for good harvests to continue. And they learned this through practices taught to them by their fathers and through their experiences working the land. Milpa production was linked to everyday life in Maní, connecting agricultural

[8] "Monte" is the word people used locally to refer to the hill, mountain, or place where they cultivate the milpa.

practices, land tenure forms, the family division-of-labor, social reproduction, and Mayan religious beliefs and rituals.

The need to allow the soil to regenerate resulted in immediate pressures on the available ejido land. In 1942 the ejidatarios began the process of working with Yucatecan agrarian officials to expand the ejido territory. In 1943 the agrarian agency noted that there were 415 ejidatarios, each with approximately five hectares of land. They concluded that this amount of land "was insufficient to cover the needs of a typical campesino family of this region" and found the request completely justified (Ministry of Agrarian Reform 1943, 2). However, the expansion of ejido land did not occur. In 1948 then President Ávila Camacho denied the request. There was broad agreement on the need for more ejido land in Maní "in view of the campesinos ability to work and the period of rest that the land needs," however the ejido was surrounded by other ejidos and private property (Ministry of Agrarian Reform 1948, 1). Thus, no land was available in the area for the expansion at that time.

The pressures for greater land distribution in southern Yucatán were recounted to me several times. One resident of Maní told me the story of a nearby ejido. His father was an ejidatario. He remembered that the ejido petitioned for an expansion since "there was not enough land in the ejido for the community but there was no more land to give out in the area." An agrarian official working in southern Yucatán corroborated the problems Maní was having with land pressures. He said "the population increased, but there wasn't any land near Maní." Instead, "the state gave the ejido land near Tekax and created new population centers for the applicants from Maní." The expansion of ejido

land that was requested in 1942 took more than forty years to complete. In 1985, 430 hectares of land was added to the Maní ejido, bringing the total amount of land to 2,364 hectares (Agency for Agrarian Justice 2001). The expansion of ejido land was not accompanied by the expansion in the number of ejidatarios listed in Maní.

The creation of the Maní ejido was a historically significant event, providing guaranteed access to land for the local population. Yet it was not a panacea for the people because of the institutional rules governing the system and natural disasters that ravaged the harvests. The structure of the ejido system opened the door for new forms of state control over the ejidatarios and limited the type of crops that could be produced. The agrarian code forbade the hiring of wage laborers to work the land as well as the sale or rental of land. Irrigation and other improvements were too costly for the ejidatarios who only had access to public (state) resources and could not attract or generate private investment. These rules constrained agricultural diversification. They also maintained ejidatario dependence on the PRI-run federal government for credit.

Milpa production was important in the Maní ejido, but it was also risky. The milpa was the primary source of subsistence food for the community, although maize was often sold in nearby markets for transport to Mérida. The income earned by selling maize was a supplement for the family. But reliance on milpa production for subsistence food and supplemental income was prone to devastation. Natural disasters could wipe out an entire harvest. In the 1940s a plague of locusts ravaged the area. The locusts destroyed the entire harvest from the milpas in Maní. Normal rates of maize production did not resume for six to eight years (Forrest 1997, 124).

Often, milpa production did not provide sufficient income for family survival. During World War II, the federal government pressured the ejido leadership to plant one hundred *mecates*[9] of milpa, indicating that the ejidatarios were "morally obligated" to produce for the nation. The ejido leadership responded that this request was very difficult to fulfill. Ejidatarios were "often obliged to return and look for private work to support their families" (Ministry of Agrarian Reform 2000a, 11).

Access to uso común land to make the milpa was granted in two different ways within the ejido structure. The first was by becoming an ejidatario. Ejidatarios were guaranteed access to communal land for milpa production. Residents of Maní could request that the ejido assembly grant them agrarian rights to be officially listed as an ejidatario. Proof of their residency was necessary for the agrarian agencies to officially record them as having rights. The process of granting ejido membership was determined locally, but within government guidelines.

The ejido assembly, at approximately ten year intervals, would examine the list of officially recognized ejidatarios and update it. During these times, names were purged from the list of those that had died, were no longer in the area, or were not using the land.[10] The ejidatarios would then vote, in an assembly, to offer membership to community members who wanted to become an ejidatario. Between 1935 and 1984, the agrarian records indicate that on five separate occasions names of ejidatarios were purged from the list and new ones added (Ministry of Agrarian Reform 1985).

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[9] A mecate is an old measurement term, roughly equal to one-tenth of an acre, measuring about twenty by twenty meters.

[10] An ejidatario could not maintain their status if they were not working the land.

Second, on could obtain the right to work on ejido land via a grant from the ejido assembly. The assembly often voted to grant other community members (non-ejidatarios) the use of communal land for the milpa. This was an important point of access for the sons of the ejidatarios. When they were of age, around seventeen years old, young men often began to make their own milpa apart from their father's on uso común land. One ejidatario noted the importance of making the uso común land available to non-ejidatarios. For him it is important because "it is a patrimony for our kids. The land belongs to the community and it's there so they can use it." He felt that without communal land, the sons of ejidatarios would have no land to access.

Being an elected official within the ejido, especially to the *Comisariado Ejidal*, the ejido executive council, came with other benefits. Ejido leadership was sometimes a stepping-stone to the municipal government. "Frequently the president will run for the municipal president," one ejido leader told me. While in Maní I spoke with the former Comisariado president, who had been elected to the municipality post.

Ejido presidents also found ways to make money from their position. One such way was by renting out the ejido building for private events. Several ejidatarios told me that presidents made money by "renting out the ejido building and then keeping the money, instead of giving it to the ejido." Speaking with a group of people, one ejidatario accused the current president of doing that for a family's birthday party for their daughter and then keeping the money for himself. The other people present agreed, nodding their heads and making jokes about the fairness of him using the ejido building for his own gain.

The benefits associated with ejidatario status and leadership positions contributed to controversy in other areas. Control over the list of ejidatarios generated internal conflict. One ejidatario said that "before [the neoliberal reforms] there was only a list of names. The agrarian agencies kept the list. Someone would say, 'yes, my name is on the list,' and you would look and say, 'no, I cannot find it,' and they would say, 'yes, it's there, I have rights'." The agrarian officials kept the list of names and had the final say in who had rights; this control could be used to take people's rights away during ejido elections, as sometimes occurred. "There were problems before with names disappearing off of the official list of ejidatarios," an ejidatario told me.

The control over land and resources often led to intense competition for leadership positions within the ejido assemblies. One older ejidatario told me that in the past "during the assemblies, the candidates used to pay for or buy votes. Sometimes there was bidding. You would go into the ejido building and one would say 'I'll give you 5 pesos' and another 'I'll give you 6'." In the early decades after the creation of the ejido there was no political party competition. Still, ejidatarios recalled contested elections between rival PRI candidates.

These allegations of tampering with the list of ejidatarios and individual money-making increasingly became embedded in political divisions. Yucatán was historically a state with ties to the conservative National Action Party, PAN. Several ejidatarios told me that the oldest, local, Yucatecan PAN chapter was in Maní. It was "started by an ejidatario. He was once the president of the ejido." Another ejidatario said he was the

president of the PAN chapter in Maní over 25 years ago. The internal partisan divisions increasingly manifested themselves in assessments over the ejido.

In speaking with PANistas, several accused PRIista ejido presidents of taking ejidatarios affiliated with the PAN off of the list of ejidatarios. PANistas also accused PRI ejido presidents of taking ejido money. In this vein, a PRI ejidatario criticized the federal agrarian programs under PAN President Fox. He said that, "before there were programs and supports from the government. Salinas and Zedillo [PRI presidents] helped more than Fox. Now the [private] ranches get more help than the campesinos." He went on to note that "there are many PANistas here and many PANista ejidatarios do not receive help from the government." PAN members level similar accusations against former PRI presidents. "We got nothing from the PRI," said one PANista, "then the PAN came into power with Fox and the government built us these houses." He was referring to the program of building small, cement houses, with electricity and running water, that occurred after a hurricane destroyed much of the area.

While real internal conflicts and divisions existed (and persist), the community was linked by a shared set of agrarian practices. The milpa, embedded in ritual, production, institutional features of the ejido, and social reproduction, dominated the communal land. Woven together these elements formed part of a collective identity that combined elements of Mayan historical beliefs and practices with post-Revolutionary forms of organization. This system persisted for nearly thirty years until a new government program was created in Maní and altered agrarian practices.

Irrigation and Citrus Production

While some small scale diversification occurred in the 1940s and 1950s, major inroads for commercial production did not begin in Maní until the 1960s when the state began to invest in irrigation systems in southern Yucatán (Rosales González 1988). The tropical southern Yucatecan landscape was the target of state plans to cultivate citrus and other fruits for market sale. The goal was to increase the productivity of the land for both export and the need for food for expanding urban areas. Year-round production for market sale originated with these state-sponsored irrigation systems introduced in the 1960s. These irrigation systems resulted in the establishment of a new category of land in the Maní ejido, the parcelas, and a new category of rights holders, *parcelarios*. This new land tenure category and changes in agrarian practices were the direct result of government programs. As demonstrated in the next chapter, the parcelas threatened the continuation of milpa practices by reducing the amount of communal land available, while simultaneously providing new routes to access land. In the neoliberal reform era this impacted the strategies available to Manienses in responding to the new rules. This section details the creation and operation of the parcelas prior to the 1992 reforms.

The land for the individual parcelas came from the existing uso común ejido land, and all of it was irrigated. As ejido land, it was subject to the same types of rules governing all ejido land. Individuals enjoyed use rights, not transferable ownership rights. The land was not privatized, only individualized. Holders of these use rights, referred to as parcelarios, did not have ownership titles to their land. That is, individuals had access to their own plots of land to work, but the land was not the equivalent of private property.

However, the parcelas could be bequeathed. Ejidatarios who wanted a parcela could obtain access with the support of the ejido assembly; other community members who were not ejidatarios also had the ability to obtain use-rights to a parcela.

The National Water Commission[11] built the irrigation systems for the parcelas, providing wells, electric pumps, and various canals, pipes and tubes to carry the water (Forrest 1997, 151). Some projects consisted of wells dug into the limestone to bring up fresh water, which then passed through small canals made of rock. Wooden boards were placed along the canals to stop and start the flow of water. Other irrigation projects dispersed water through sprinkler systems or used drip irrigation systems.[12] A project of this scale could not be carried out independently by the ejido given their lack of access to private funds for such a project.

Such an undertaking required the financial investment, technological knowledge, and coordination of state agencies. Federal support to expand citrus production for export was part of the national economic strategy of import-substitution industrialization in the 1960s and 1970s. While most investments during this period favored manufacturing over agriculture, agricultural investment continued in market- and export-oriented crops, as opposed to subsistence production (Levy and Bruhn 2006, 152). Aside from the foreign currency earned through export-agriculture, increased commercial production provided food for the expanding urban population.

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[11] *Comisión Nacional de Agua* (CNA)

[12] The state installed sprinkler irrigation systems on 3,900 hectares in 15 municipalities, primarily in southern Yucatán (Baños Ramírez 1998, 41).

Yet the expansion of irrigation was not simply a regional or national project; this investment involved international financiers. In 1964 the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) created Plan Chaac to provide assistance to Mexico. The push for citrus production in Yucatán by the IADB was partially a response to increasing demand for oranges in Florida (Fuentes and Morales 2000, 158). In coordination with the Mexican federal government, IADB constructed irrigation systems and supplied credit and technical advice.

As part of the project irrigation units[13] were constructed to manage the provision of water to the parcelas. These irrigation units constituted a new institutional arrangement within the ejido. They were formed of thirty to fifty of the irrigated parcelas. The parcelarios who were granted exclusive rights to the individualized ejido land became members of the irrigation units. These "partners" in an irrigation unit paid for the electricity to run the water pumps by the hour. The parcelarios were responsible for agricultural inputs (e.g. fertilizer). They also tended the irrigated parcelas, particularly focusing on weeding until the fruit trees were mature and could provide shade, which then decreased the need for weeding.

Many of these irrigation units have locally meaningful names. The first, created in 1960 and functioning by 1961, was called "Unidad Antigua" and contains 65 parcelas, most of which are three hectares. The next three irrigation units, each with parcelas three hectares in size, were created under and bear the name of "Plan Chaac," a reference to the Mayan Chaac gods. Another unit is named after the royal Mayan lineage, "Tutul Xiu."

[13] *Unidades de riego*, literally units of irrigation.

Irrigation units constructed after 1980 were part of "Plan Nacional" and some have names of Revolutionary leaders, such as "Francisco I. Madero" and "Emiliano Zapata." The names suggest an attempt to create a link between the new agrarian practices and historical legacies of both Revolutionary agrarian goals and Mayan ancestry.

According to the agrarian records, the size of the individual parcels varied. Initially they were quite large, some as big as four hectares (Ministry of Agrarian Reform 2000b). Over time, the size shrank as there were pressures for more ejido land due to increases in population and demand. One ejidatario argued that "back when it started everyone planted milpa and no one wanted parcelas, so they had more land to give out."

In the 1960s few people in the ejido of Maní signed up for the program. Some thought the program was just another way for the government to control them, and they feared joining. "People were afraid. The Plan Chaac lands were heavily regulated. Maybe they thought it was a way for the government to control them," said one ejidatario. Others were concerned about the financial risks and the time spent working on the parcels before any income could be generated. A parcelario told me "for 10 years people had to pay a lot before they [orange trees] were ready and you could make money."

When the parcelas began to generate income, and particularly when citrus production proved to be successful, demand for parcels increased. This was especially true when orange prices increased. Now, most ejidatarios, and many other members of the community, have parcelas of land. As one ejido official in the community told me, "it seems to me that now everyone wants one." This suggests that demand increased as the community became more familiar with the new production process or as people saw the

benefits of participation outweighed the drawbacks. As a consequence of the increased demand for parcelas, those created in the 1980s and later tended to be no larger than one hectare.

Since the 1960s uso común land and the parcelas have represented two different types of land tenure, understood locally as constituting two different types of agricultural practices and crop choices. The milpa made on uso común land was seasonal and rain-fed. It had signified and continues to represent, the small-scale production of maize and beans for subsistence consumption.[14]

Some Manienses view the parcelas as eroding the availability of communal land for the milpa, and thus destroying the essence of the ejido. "The ejido is being wasted, ended," one ejidatario lamented. "As more people enter the irrigation units, there is no more ejido. There is no more ejido because the people are increasing [parcelas] with the irrigation." Despite the irrigated parcelas being ejido land, he believed only the communal land constituted the ejido. He saw population increases coincide with an expansion in irrigated land, which further raised demand for parcelas to be carved out of uso común land. For him, this cycle was destroying the ejido.

The irrigated parcelas were associated with commercial production. Parcelarios earned cash by selling their produce, usually citrus, to nearby markets. Further, they would often hire local campesinos to aid in the weeding process.[15] Historically, there

[14] A few people reported growing chilies or watermelon in their milpas, but this is not a widespread phenomenon.

[15] Despite the illegality of hiring wage labor to work ejido land, the practice often occurred on a small scale. Anecdotal accounts and my own observations in Maní suggest that the local campesinos hired to work on the parcelas were residents of Maní.

were virtually no options in Maní for campesinos to earn wages, and they would have to travel to Oxcutzcab for day labor. But the parcelas altered that situation beginning in the 1960s. The income earned was a supplement to the (largely) subsistence milpa production. In times of poor milpa harvests, such as in 1979 and 1980, the money earned on parcelas allowed campesinos to purchase food. At other times, the milpa provided staples and income from parcelas was used as a supplement. (Forrest 1997, 157). While extra maize and beans produced on the milpa were sold in local markets, milpa production did not entail wage labor and the income generated tended to be quite small.[16] The parcelas were linked to year-round production of fruits and vegetables for market sale and served as a locus for earning income in an area with few other opportunities for wage labor.

Crops cultivated on the parcelas usually were sold in markets of nearby Oxcutzcab for distribution throughout Yucatán. Often a variety of local fruits were cultivated, but since the early 1980s a greater emphasis has been placed on oranges. In 1978, nine ejidos in southern Yucatán formed the Union of Citrus-producing Ejidos (UEC), a secondary-level association of ejido citrus producers (AMSDA 11). [17] The UEC was created to solve problems associated with marketing citrus crops and provide credit for citrus production (e.g. fertilizer).

In 1981 the state government received support from the Banrural to build the Akil juice processing plant (AMSDA 11). The Akil facility was built near Maní and

[16] One ejidatario told me that he only receives two pesos for a kilo of corn at the local markets.

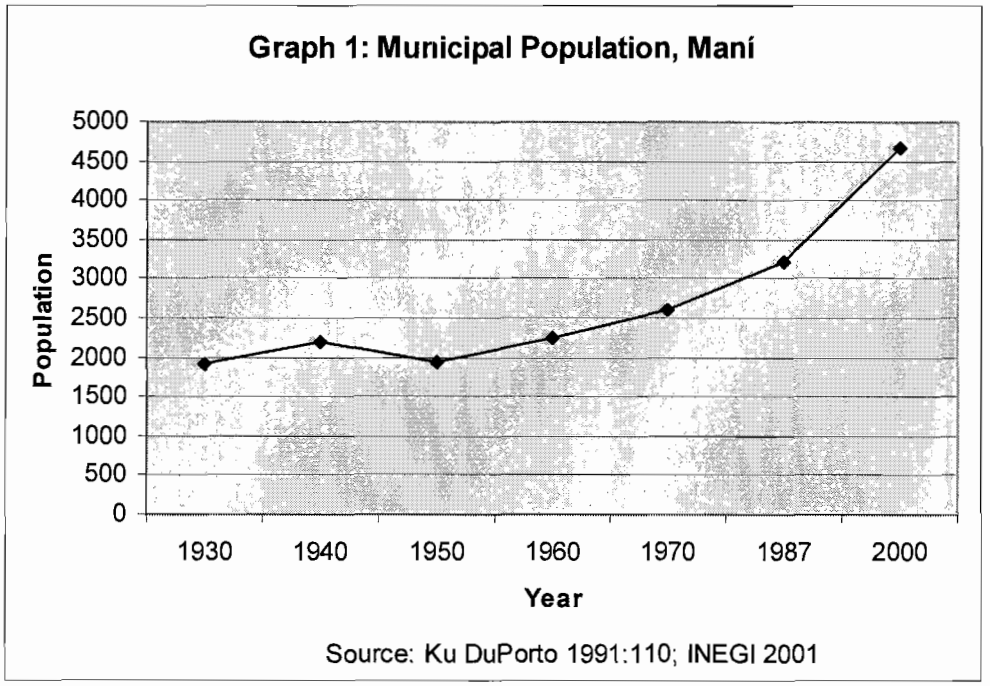
[17]The formation of UEC (*La Unión de Ejidos Citricultores*) was part of national policies encouraging ejido unions to form, as discussed in chapter four. The ejido unions, such as the UEC, were granted access to state resources. Later the number of ejido members of UEC was expanded to twelve ejidos.

Oxcutzcab as part of the state's initiative to diversify agricultural production, particularly for export. Ejidatarios sold oranges to the factory, which produced concentrated frozen juice for export to the U.S. and for consumption within Mexico. Since the producers of the citrus technically owned the plant, they often set purchase prices for oranges that were higher than in other markets. This could be sustainable given economies of scale and the foreign export of frozen juice. Local markets were notorious for offering low prices. However, state subsidies provided the necessary income to fund the equipment and continue to keep the juice processing plant afloat. Still, the Akil juice factory needed foreign revenue to maintain its high prices for oranges.

Juice production did not solve the economic woes of the parcelarios as the prices have been unstable and have fallen considerably. Baños Ramírez (2003, 93) estimated that by the end of the 1980s prices had fallen in absolute terms by 50%. Still, even if the citrus development plan was less successful than intended, the irrigation systems have allowed the production of a variety of crops, such as squash, achiote, avocado, and cucumbers. People now sell their products at markets in Oxcutzcab in large quantities to be shipped all over Mexico (Cancun, Mexico City, e.g.).

During the time period the parcelas were being established in Maní the population was also increasing, exerting more pressure for the individualization of land. The population of the town was only 1,723 in the 1940 national census; by 1990 that figure had nearly doubled to 3,418 (Forrest 1997, 100; INEGI 1991). Statistics for the Maní municipal population, which includes residents in the nearby town of Tipikal, are more

revealing (see chart 1).[18] The population decreased by 11% between 1940 and 1950 before beginning dramatic, double-digit increases during the next quarter century or so. Between 1960 and 1970 the population increased from 2,252 to 2,598; by 2000 it was over 5,000.



Temporary Migration

Temporary migration for wages is not particularly a new phenomenon in Maní. However, as a household strategy it became increasingly important in the 1980s and 1990s. In the neoliberal reform era, the remittances were valuable as a source of income to purchase parcelas, as demonstrated in the next chapter. In times of natural disaster, when drought or plague destroyed the milpa, men often left their homes for wage work to buy food for their families. But beginning in the 1970s the nature of temporary migration

[18] Tipikal is a small town, with only 704 people as of the 1990 census (INEGI 1991).

changed. The development of Cancun and the Maya Riviera, the coastal area south of Cancun, as a tourist destination created a high demand for labor in construction in the border state of Quintana Roo. Over time, demand expanded, as labor was needed to work in the tourist industry. Gradually, Yucatecans migrated to the area for work and eventually some found employment in the Caribbean.

The trend towards migration began in Maní in the 1980s. Under the strain of a poor economy and cut-backs in state subsidies due to Mexico's structural adjustment policies, people went to the U.S. for work. By the 1990s temporary migration was a major strategy for wages. Some Yucatecos had begun to migrate to the U.S. for work in the 1980s, but as a large-scale phenomena U.S. migration did not really impact the region until the 1990s.[19] Between 1990 and 2005, the number of Yucatecan migrants living in the U.S. rose from 35,374 to 50,982 (CONAPO 2006, 138).[20] While not all went illegally, many did.

Portland, Oregon became the major center for the people of Maní. They set up communities in Portland's suburbs, cooking their hometown food in small, family-run establishments. Some families have become established in both Mexico and Oregon, with relatives visiting each other for special events and keeping homes in both places. One couple had five adult children, and their families, living in Portland and another 2 in Maní. They sometimes visited their family, as when Hurricane Gilbert in 1988 destroyed their home in Maní or for their granddaughters' quinceñera (fifteenth birthday). Over half

[19] On this point, see especially Lewin (2007) and Lewin and Guzmán (2005).

[20] Earlier data on Yucatecan migration and Maní specific data was not readily available since this is a relatively new phenomenon that has not historically been well-documented in Yucatán.

of the people I spoke with in Maní had been a migrant to the Portland-area or had someone in their family with migratory experience. Indeed, only one person I spoke with had not heard of Portland; he stood out to me as the only person who had no stories about someone having been in Oregon.

Wages earned in the U.S. exceed local averages. The average wage in Maní is five to seven U.S. dollars for one day of work; in the U.S. they make the same amount hourly. Remittances from Manienses have become an important part of the local economy. This phenomena is not just specific to Maní; migration from Mexico to the U.S. increased dramatically in the 1990s (Pew 2007). A new, national program has been created to harness remittances from migrants living in the U.S., "3 for 1" – *tres por uno*. In these programs remittances from migrants (the one) are matched by local, state and federal funding (the three) for community projects. In 2006 a health clinic opened in Maní, with funding coming from this program. One of the local government officials told said he often travels to Portland to visit people from Maní, inform them about the community, and get support for projects.

Many people temporarily migrate when the family needs wages. This often happens when school-age children need money for books, tuition, transportation or other related expenses. Young men often go shortly before or after getting married. They then use the money to construct their own homes. Wages are used for many household improvements, including better housing construction, trucks, even a pool. Now those remittances are also used to buy land.

These remittances make income available for community members to buy land and other agricultural inputs. Planting citrus trees, purchasing seeds and other chemical inputs, is costly. In the early years of parcela production, extra labor is often needed to help with the weeding. Some residents told me they hire other community members to harvest some crops or to reduce their time in the fields, particularly when they have a parcela and make the milpa. Further, it is quicker and easier to get crops to the market in Oxcutzcab with a truck. All of these resources, which make the parcelas productive, must come from somewhere. And remittance wages is most often cited as the main source of income for purchasing a parcela (Hervik 2003, Lewin 2007).

Conclusion

Despite high levels of ethnic identification linked to collective memory and ritual knowledge, Manienses were gradually altering their agrarian practices from the 1960s on. The irrigated parcelas of ejido land provided early experience with individualized commercial production and were an important local source of wages. The cultural significance of milpa production failed to translate into wide spread opposition to the neoliberal property rights regime in Maní because people were already participating in market production.

Population increases resulted in pressure for land. In the 1980s and 1990s more irrigated parcelas were created from communal land. The remittance economy also provided new sources of income for households. These trends of increasing population and new sources of income created pressure for the marketization of land, forging new

economic arrangements (Boserup 1965). The strategy of gradually replacing communal land and milpa practices with irrigated parcelas for commercial production seemed to be a successful way to transform traditional peasants to modernizing farmers.

Several structural characteristics could have produced tension in Maní when the neoliberal reforms were introduced. Ejido land was stretched between communal land for the milpa and parcelas for citrus production. This stress could have produced resistance to the reforms and divided the community. Yet, as demonstrated in the next chapter, ejidatarios drew on cultural and institutional features of the pre-reform ejido to craft solutions to these new challenges.

CHAPTER VI

CREATIVE ADAPTATION OF CULTURAL AND INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES IN MANÍ

The neoliberal reforms could have catalyzed the privatization of ejido land in Maní. However, privatization failed to emerge. The individual parcelas remained in the ejido system. This was a logical outcome given institutional features of ejido association and changes in political economy. Ejido parcelas included access to water rights and lower transaction costs for ejido land sales (as opposed to private land sales). Coupled with changes in demographics and wage-earning, *local* demand for land increased, resulting in marketization of ejido parcelas. But despite the economic value of the irrigated parcelas, ejidatarios also rejected the state's efforts to parcelize all of the ejido land, instead choosing to maintain a large amount of communal land for milpa production.

In explaining this outcome, I argue that the local land market was partially a response to concerns over generational obligations to provide land and represents a market solution deployed for non-market reasons. Further, the maintenance of communal land is embedded in ritual knowledge, place and collective memory, and norms linking labor and tenure. Actors in Maní creatively adapted institutional and cultural resources and rejected neither instrumentality nor cultural imperatives, both structuralist bases for

behavior. To understand this outcome, we must first examine the neoliberal land titling process.

Land Titling in Maní

This section explains the land titling process in Maní and the new institutional framework established by the neoliberal rules. During the land titling process a key issue emerged. A large portion of ejido land was held as communal land, while some land was in the irrigated parcelas. During the land titling process, ejidatarios had to determine what kind of land – uso común, parcelas – would compose the ejido. Ultimately they decided to maintain a dual tenure pattern. However, the neoliberal rules changed the rights associated with the parcelas, allowing them to be sold. Strategies that Manienses employed in responding to the new rules were contingent on this rule change, as demonstrated in the next section.

There was no widespread resistance to the state's land titling program in Maní. The ejidatarios voted, during an assembly in 1994, to participate in the program. During the assemblies held over the multi-year process, the state proposed dividing all of the land into individual parcelas. This seemed like a logical proposition. As noted earlier, population pressures were already straining land use. And the state was hoping to improve food production, which had fallen in recent decades and led to an increase in importing food into Yucatán. Communal land was a less desirable tenure form from their

perspective. Parcelizing all the land was a logical proposition. By 1994, eight irrigation units composed of individual parcelas already existed in the Maní ejido.[1]

But the ejidatarios refused to individualize all of the land, choosing instead to maintain the existing dual land tenure pattern. They did agree to create four more irrigation units in 1996, while the land titling program was still in progress. The four new irrigation units were completed in 1997. By the time the land titling process was completed in 1999, a total of twelve irrigation units existed. In the end, 1,413 hectares were designated as uso común land and 799 hectares were designated as parcelas, and therefore part of the state financed irrigation system as all parcelas in Maní are irrigated (Agency for Agrarian Justice 1999).

All 438 ejidatarios were given certificates entitling them to an equal percent of uso común land (Agency for Agrarian Justice 1999). The state also mapped 538 parcelas. Each of the parcelarios, who had earlier been granted access to individualized land (the irrigated parcelas), received titles to their ejido parcelas (Agency for Agrarian Justice 1999). These titles ensured them ownership rights to their land. Of the 538 parcelarios, 244 were listed as being held by an ejidatario (Ibid.).

The ejidatarios and parcelarios are very proud of their certificates entitling them to agrarian rights. On most occasions they showed me the certificates, pointing out their name. They see it as a guarantee of rights. One ejidatario told me that "before the reforms we only had a list of ejidatarios and nothing else…now there are individual documents" He showed me the list of ejidatarios and said "before it was like this but now it's better

[1] Recall from chapter three that the individualization of ejido land is not the same as the privatization of ejido land.

because everyone has documents and this is because of the reforms." He then showed me his certificate of rights to uso común land.

This ejidatario noted problems with the official list of ejidatarios prior to the neoliberal reforms. There were often disputes, sometimes fueled by partisan cleavages between the PRI and PAN, about names on the list. The ejido leadership and the agrarian agencies were often accused of changing the names of who could vote in assemblies. The new law not only provided a guarantee of rights, it also removed dependence on the state to ensure one's rights. The certificates also have the potential to diminish partisan cleavages, reducing the chance that party affiliation would interfere with the maintenance of agrarian rights.

Parcelarios received certificates to the irrigated parcelas, which were created in the 1960s and later. Under the new rules, parcelarios owned the parcelas, having individual and transferable rights. Parcelarios could sell the land to a locally recognized agrarian community member (ejidatario or non-ejidatario residing in Maní) without consent of the ejido assembly.[2] However, they could not sell the land outside of the community. This is one key difference between parcelas, which are individualized ejido land, and privatized land. Private land can be sold outside of the community, parcelas cannot. The marketization of land could occur with the parcelas, but it was an internally-controlled process. The ejido assembly determined who would be recognized as having agrarian rights. Only members of the agrarian community could receive rights under the ejido rules. Legal recognition served as an institutional barrier to outsiders acquiring

[2] In chapter three the legal categories of locally recognized community members with agrarian rights are explained.

ejido parcelas. Thus, the process of buying and selling parcelas was bounded by community.

The irrigation infrastructure on the parcelas and access to the water was also provided to the parcelarios and individuals purchasing a parcela. If a parcela was sold, access to irrigation was sold with the parcela. Parcelarios still had to pay for the electricity to run the pumps and the state continued to maintain the irrigation infrastructure and provide the water.

Decision-making power during assemblies continued to reside with ejidatarios, who had rights within the institution. Parcelarios who were not ejidatarios did not have voting rights or the right to run for ejido leadership positions. However, they were permitted to speak during assemblies and make requests for the assembly to consider.

In 2006, the ejidatarios created three hundred more ejido parcelas from uso común land to form six new irrigation units. When the land titling program concluded in 1999, two-thirds of ejido land was communal (uso común) and one-third was in the form of parcelas; now these proportions had shifted so that about half of the ejido land was uso común and the other half in parcelas. Each of these new parcelas was approximately one hectare in size.

The creation of new parcelas in 2006 may have signaled a move towards increasing individualization, and eventual privatization, of ejido land. But the benefits of keeping the parcelas within the ejido structure and the local demand for land within the community made privatization unnecessary, as demonstrated in the next section. Ejidatarios rejected the proposal to parcelize all of the ejido land, preserving a large

segment of uso común land. The local land market and the preservation of communal land were partially the result of ejidatarios balancing cultural and material needs.

Benefits of Institutional Association

The gradual evolution of the parcelas and their importance in the local economy should have made Maní a good case for privatization. This would be a logical next step in the seemingly inevitable adoption of market-oriented practices. The ejido parcelas can be used as collateral for loans under the law, but they are not being accepted by banks as collateral (Brown 2004). Privatizing the land would provide more opportunities to access non-state credit. Yet, despite the existing demand for parcelas in Maní, the ejidatarios have not allowed the privatization of land and there have been no efforts by non-ejidatario parcelarios to have the ejido assembly consider land privatization. This outcome is the result of features of political economy and local context.

One reason there is no movement to privatize ejido parcelas is water rights. The ejido assembly can request that the state expand the irrigation infrastructure. Ejidatarios told me that on private property it is more difficult to get water unless you have the money to build the irrigation infrastructure. According to the ejido leaders, every request to expand the irrigation infrastructure thus far has met with agreement by the state. The parcelas, which might otherwise be only rain-fed, are thus always irrigated in the Maní ejido. Ejido parcelas are institutionally linked to secure water rights, a crucial ingredient for production in a seasonally water scarce region. One ejidatario who served in a position of leadership in the ejido assembly spoke to me about the six irrigation units that

were being created in 2006. He said "the ejidatarios voted to create the parcelas. We told the *visitadora* [state agrarian official] we wanted to have the irrigation systems built. The state said yes."

The irrigation infrastructure is an important local resource for market production. One ejidatario said, "before there was no citrus without the irrigation units because there was no water. But now we can grow them [oranges] and sell them at the markets, which is a benefit to the people." He also told me that "now you can sell products year round, every month or two when a harvest is ready. I grow watermelon, squash, oranges, and avocados, and sell them in Ox."[3] When I spoke with this ejidatario he offered me watermelon; "it's from my parcela. Try it."

The parcelarios (both ejidatarios and non-ejidatarios) often express pride in the products they grow. When I first met one parcelario, he cut open a fresh coconut from his parcela. "Drink the juice," he told me. He then cut up the flesh and spooned some of the soft parts into the juice. "It's good, no?" I agreed it was good. He smiled and said, "I grew that on my parcela." Later he took me to see his parcela. It was off of the old road to Oxcutzcab. He took me on a tour of the one hectare plot. He showed me the irrigation system, but said "I am not using it now because of the rains." The parcelario also pointed out his lime, lemon and orange tress, achiote, squash, and yucca. He told me he sells the produce in the markets. He also grew a grass, which is sold to ranches as a feed for cattle. This is one of the family's main sources of income. Sometimes he works as a day laborer

[3] Many Manienses call Oxcutzcab "Ox" (pronounced "osh").

when there is nothing to sell from the parcela. "Take these back with you," he offered, as he picked several limes. "They are very good and fresh."

A few people with parcelas spoke about their products as feeding the nation. At the large markets in Oxcutzcab, parcelarios sell their crops to be shipped off to Mérida, the Cancun area, and even Mexico City. Many also sell their oranges to the Akil juice factory. Concentrated orange juice is then sold throughout Mexico and exported. One parcelario said, "the countryside produces the food for the nation." He further argued that because of this, the government had an "obligation to aid the campesinos."

This conception of the role of Maní as food suppliers has historical roots. During the colonial era the amount of land in milpa cultivation increased to feed growing urban populations. With the henequen boom at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, milpa production increased in southern Yucatán and in Maní. Large amounts of land in the north were converted to henequen production and the northern hacienda populations expanded to provide the necessary labor (Forrest 1997, 118). This was accompanied by railway expansion from Mérida to southern Yucatán, increasing the speed with which foodstuffs could be transported to the henequen zone (Wells 1992). A few years ago, a paved road between Maní and Oxcutzcab was completed to facilitate travel between the two towns and the movement of crops from the parcelas to Oxcutzcab's markets. Both the historical and contemporary roles of campesinos in Maní as producers not only for their own families or even community, but also for people throughout the region and nation, provide a sense of pride and income.

The irrigation systems have brought economic benefits to the area and the beneficiaries are proud of the crops they cultivate. Although the irrigation infrastructure could be built on private land, Manienses I spoke with believe the process is much more difficult and costly. The parcelarios were unclear if the state would have paid for the infrastructure if it was not on ejido land. More importantly, the ejido has regular contact with state agencies through the agrarian representatives working with them. The transaction costs for getting the irrigation infrastructure built are lower since the ejido requests the new systems from the state through the agrarian representatives.

Within the institutional structure of the ejido, collective action problems are solved and state resources can be harnessed through a familiar process. As I noted above, an ejidatario explained this process to me. He said "the ejidatarios voted to create the parcelas. We told the *visitadora* [state agrarian official] we wanted to have the irrigation systems built. The state said yes." For the ejidatarios the process of getting the state to construct the irrigation infrastructure is simple. They ask for it, get approval, and it is done. This institutional arrangement, providing easy access to water rights, has created counter-weights to the pressure of privatizing land. The institutional benefits of irrigation are one logical reason to keep parcelas in the ejido structure.

The continued availability of state resources for infrastructure development on ejido land seems disconnected from the national rhetoric. The neoliberal language of the reforms emphasized private investment, as opposed to public support. The divergence between the official action of providing state funding for investment on non-privatized

land and the neoliberal language suggests a contradiction between how the agrarian bureaucracy functions and the goals of the reform.

Lower transaction costs are another institutional feature of ejido parcelas. Under the new agrarian laws, ejido parcelas can be transferred to an ejidatario or to a local resident (recognized by the ejido) without a vote of the ejido assembly. To do this, the buyer and seller of the land must have a written agreement, which is signed before two witnesses. That agreement is then transferred to the ejido leadership. It is the ejido governing body's duty to inform the Agrarian National Registry (RAN) of the change in ownership (Agency for Agrarian Justice 2007). All of the ejido parcela land sales are now carried out this way, within the community. A *local* land market has emerged.

Privatizing land is a lengthy and involved process. First, if it is communal land, the ejido assembly must vote to divide the land into a parcela. Then that parcela must be assigned to a specific person. In Maní, this has already been done with half of the land. But the process does not end there. The assembly also has to vote to allow parcelas to be privatized. A quorum of 75% of the ejidatarios is required at the assembly; if this quorum is not met, only 50% +1 are required at subsequent assemblies.[4] Once quorum is met, a majority of all ejidatarios present at the meeting must agree to the privatization of land. Finally, land owners must file proper paperwork with RAN to receive their title. It is thus simpler to sell a parcela to a legally-recognized community member than to privatize the land and sell it to someone who is not part of the ejido or the associated local community.

[4] Under the new agrarian laws, there are different quorum requirements for different types of motions. If quorum is not achieved at the first assembly, subsequent assemblies can be called, within one month, to deal with the same agenda items. For subsequent assemblies, the quorum requirements are reduced.

The relative ease of ejido land transactions makes privatization a more time-consuming, and thus costly, route to marketization.

Yet a local land market could not have been established without two other changes in Maní: increases in population and remittances. As noted in the last chapter, the population of Maní increased dramatically from the 1960s on. In 2006 the population of the town was 3,915 (INEGI 2007). However, residents claim the actual population is much higher, believing that between one thousand and fifteen hundred people have temporarily migrated to the U.S. for work. These population increases contributed to more demands for land, including the creation of parcelas in 1996 and 2006. The remittance economy has provided the means to purchase parcelas.

One returning migrant I spoke with had been working in the U.S. He had sent money home to his mother every week while working to set-up his own household and buy a truck. He also used some of the remittances he sent back to buy a parcela. Another ejidatario originally went to the U.S. to earn money for school for his children. But, when he returned, he was able to use some of that money for a new commodity: land. He told me, "I bought many things with the money, like a truck. We have a bigger house… And I bought another parcela."

The link between remittances and parcelas is clear amongst most people I spoke with in the community. One parcelario noted that in order to buy more parcelas he would have to "leave home and go to the U.S. or Cancun" where the wages are higher. He had two brothers already living in the U.S., but said "I don't want to go with my brothers." He had worked near Cancun in the past, but he did not want to do again. Another

campesino expressed similar concerns, noting that without funds from the remittance economy, he was just too poor to be a parcelario. "I am too poor for a parcela," he told me. "I would have to go to the U.S. for money."

Demographic shifts, remittances, and the institutional benefits of ejido association have all impacted ejido land tenure decisions. Privatization is neither necessary nor desired. And a land market functions in Maní within the existing rules. But there is a difference here between a local or internal market in ejido parcelas and the idea of a private market. The local land market restricts land sales to community members; those restrictions would not be in place if the land was privatized. This arrangement privileges community members over outsiders and restricts ownership patterns. It is possible that preservation of local patterns of land ownership is a motive for not privatizing land, not simply institutional benefits. This raises an important question: what motivates buyers of parcelas? Pressure on the land and economic benefits are central, but as demonstrated below, institutional changes under the neoliberal reform and cultural values are crucial components.

Deploying Market Strategies for Non-market Reasons

The continued creation of parcelas and the local land market are being driven not only by economic considerations, but also by concerns over generational obligations to provide land. The generational obligation to provide land is often equated with patrimony – a legacy or right for all people to have access to land. Nearly one-third (nine) of the community members interviewed expressed concern over access to land for future

generations.[5] Each of them spoke of a generational obligation to ensure that land was accessible for those who wanted to work on it. One ejidatario said they, referring to the community, had "an obligation to the past and future" to ensure that land "was available for people to work." This sense of obligation was widespread.

Several people specifically mentioned their own children in this process, but all of them also referenced a more general obligation, not just for their children or grandchildren, but for "many generations to come." One older woman had inherited her husband's ejidatario rights. She was passing them onto her daughter when she died because her daughter is single and has a son. He had a right to have land and she wanted to guarantee that right.

There are two features of the neoliberal property rights regime that have caused concerned about access to land in the future. First, the reforms to Article 27 ended land redistribution. The state is no longer obligated to provide land to peasants who request it and there will be no more grants from the federal government for ejido land. The removal of this provision limits ejido land to the land currently available in the ejido. Of course, in an area such as Maní, where population pressures and private land ownership have stretched the availability of new land to its limit, it was improbable to believe that the state would have been able to increase the amount of ejido land even before the 1992 reforms.[6] But another set of reforms also contributed to the sense of instability, and these centered on how an individual becomes an ejidatario.

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[5] See Appendix for a description of interviewees in Maní.

[6] One agrarian official told me that even before the 1992 reforms there were pressures on the land in southern Yucatán as many people wanted the access they were guaranteed in Article 27. As new land was

An important institutional change altered the process for becoming an ejidatario. One of the pieces of the neoliberal reforms was the establishment of inheritance rights. Each current ejidatario is required to have a line of succession naming who will receive their rights when they die. Ejidatarios can also pass on their rights to others before they die. Prior to the 1992 reforms, the ejido assembly could vote to change who was an ejidatario, purging outdated names and adding new ones. Now, the only way to become an ejidatario is to inherit the rights. The process to become an ejidatario is thus more restrictive than in the past.

Ejidatario status provides many benefits. Ejidatarios have voting rights in assemblies, where land tenure decisions are made. The ejido assembly also has the power to permit non-ejidatarios access to communal land to make the milpa, a common practice in Maní. Ejidatarios are also guaranteed access to uso común land, of which they are technically the owners of an equal percent of the uso común land. Nearly every ejidatario I spoke with made the milpa on communal land. Those with ejidatario status must decide which of their children will get the rights, knowing the rest will not. For those without a parent with ejidatario rights, it is highly unlikely that they will ever become an ejidatario. Changes in designating ejidatario status are part of the reason that many community members express concern about access to communal land for the milpa.

While President Salinas professed that the neoliberal reforms would make land tenure more secure, many people in Maní view the reforms as having the opposite effect. Fully one-third of the people I interviewed in Mani expressed concern about the

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added, often it was not near the core of the ejido. One part of the Maní ejido, for example, is near Tekax, which is in another municipality.

availability of land for future generations.[7] These people all recognized purchasing a parcela as a viable strategy, even if they did not uniformly support the idea.[8] Some already had one parcela but hoped to get more. The community members I spoke with believe they have a generational obligation to ensure land is available. The restrictions placed on enlarging the size of the ejido and adding new ejidatarios have resulted in some people purchasing parcelas. The market now functions as the main route to guarantee access to land.

Manienses in different structural positions express similar concerns about access to land in the future. Ejidatarios and parcelarios noted that the availability of land as a patrimony or right for future generations is a problem with the new rules. Examining the statements of people with different institutional access illustrates this point.

People who are not ejidatarios, yet primarily engaged in agricultural work, are rationally expressing concern over access to land. They have no guarantees to uso común land for themselves or for their children. Yet even among parcelarios there is continued concern over the availability of land for future generations. Parcelarios have irrigated parcelas to pass onto their children; however, many of them also make the milpa on communal land. One parcelario explicitly spoke about the changes in this process. Both his father and brother are ejidatarios. He will not inherit his father's ejidatario rights, another brother will. But he said would like to become an ejidatario because "it offers

[7] These individuals include people of different generations, categories of rights holders (ejidatarios, parcelarios, campesinos), and political parties (PRI and PAN), and people with migration experience and without.

[8] Three of the community members were concerned about the parcelas because they were created from communal land for the milpa. I discuss this point below.

security. Now my milpa is not secure, it's temporary." He uses the communal land to make his milpa. He is worried about the future, "what about my daughters and their children? What land will be available for them?" Three other campesinos who do not own a parcela spoke of similar concerns with changes in the process of adding new ejidatarios and how that may impact access to land for themselves and for their children. Without ejidatario status, both campesinos and parcelarios express concern over land for future generations.

Three ejidatarios, two of whom have parcelas, expressed the same concern over the security of land in the future. Why would people with guaranteed land rights express concern about access to land? They were worried about the restrictiveness of the new policy on designating ejidatarios. Their concerns also focused on generational obligations. One ejidatario noted, "I have seven children and only three hectares of land. It will not be enough land for them." Despite having three parcelas and full ejido rights to pass onto one of his children, he wanted his children and their children to be able to be guaranteed their patrimony, access to land. His solution has been to purchase additional parcelas, a market solution deployed for non-market reasons.

Another ejidatario expressed concerned about land for his children. Some of his adult children go to school and live in Mérida, getting trained in non-agricultural fields. One, for example, is studying computers. I asked him if he thought they would return, to work the land in Maní. He admitted that some probably would not. But, he told me, "I want them to have land when I die to work, to make a living on. It's their patrimony." Even though he recognized that it is unlikely that all of his children would return to Maní

for agricultural work, he felt obligated to ensure they had that opportunity. He bought parcelas to fulfill this obligation.

Some people are beginning to view the parcelas as constituting a patrimonial legacy, which would enable them to pass on irrigated land to pass on to their children. In the face of concerns over communal land for the milpa, Manienses in different structural positions are altering their conception of how to fulfill the obligation to provide land. Even though the parcelas are not used for the milpa, they still constitute land available for future generations.

One ejidatario who doesn't have a wife said he sold his parcela to his brother, who is now working in the U.S. Instead of earning money through a parcela, he works as a day laborer in Yucatán. His brother, with income in the U.S., purchased the parcela to pass onto his children, to ensure they had land if they returned to Maní. He told me "my brother is not an ejidatario and has no land for his children. If they want to have land in the future, how will they get it?" His brother has lived in the U.S. for almost twenty years. I asked him if he thought his nephews or nieces would return to Maní and work the land. "It's possible, but maybe not," he told me. "But it's their patrimony."

The new rules governing ejido land have simultaneously served as constraints and resources. The institutional rules ending land redistribution and limiting the path to ejidatario status have generated concerns over guaranteed land availability. Yet the neoliberal property rights regime enabled a local land market with low transaction costs. Participating in the land market is a creative solution deployed for cultural motives. The new property laws and institutions have shaped local action. But they are not simply

imposed from above; the laws and institutions have effects through concrete behaviors and are given meaning through practice. Actors are both constituted by and constitute the new rules.

This strategy, though, is contested. Conflict over the idea of using parcelas to fulfill generational obligations is evident in Maní. Not all ejidatarios believe buying parcelas is a good strategy. One ejidatario said he was not supportive of the parcelas because they come from uso común land. He argued that "as more of them [parcelas] are created, there is less land for the milpa." The historical struggle to get back land and constitute the ejido partially drives his desire to protect the communal land, not only from outside interests, but also from further parcelization.

One of the second generation ejidatarios argued that if all of the land was parcelized, it was possible that "someone's monte would be far away from their home," making it difficult to work the land for the milpa, like it had been before the ejido was created. In the past "there was lots of land for the montes." But now, "with the irrigation units, the ejidatarios cannot enter to make milpa." He directly compared the parcelas to the time when haciendas dominated the landscape in speaking of land availability. He added that before the irrigated parcelas were established, "you could change the monte every one or two years, but now you cannot." He believed that as "more people enter the irrigation units, the ejido will disappear." His desire was for another land reform, this one an appropriation of privately held land and parcelas to create more uso común land.

The conflict over the parcelas is linked both to age and agrarian rights. Older ejidatarios who do not have parcelas rejected the parcelas as beneficial. Campesinos,

people who are neither ejidatarios nor own a parcela, also rejected the parcelas as beneficial. But their rejection of the benefits of the parcelas is due to the source of the land: the ejido uso común land. Of the twenty male heads-of-household interviewed, over one-quarter of them specifically argued that the parcelas were valuable (all but two own a parcela) and only three believed they were not beneficial.[9] Of the three who did not think they were beneficial, none owned a parcela and two were second generation ejidatarios.[10]

The parcelas are obviously viewed as beneficial by those who own them or see others benefiting from them; but there is also a difference between generations and parcelarios and non-parcelarios in their assessments of the irrigated parcels of land. All of the people who did not agree with parcelization of ejido land recounted narratives of learning to make the milpa on uso común land with their fathers. This regularized habit, especially amongst the second generation ejidatarios, actually defined what ejido land is for them. The ejido was equated with communal land, not the parcelas. The parcelas were like private land, whose creation "cut off access to the montes."

The five individuals arguing that the parcelas were beneficial were all younger, born after the parcelas were created in Maní. In speaking about their life histories they recounted going to make the milpa with their fathers. But they also spoke about the parcelas and early experiences cultivating crops on the irrigated land. The changing agrarian practices seemed to have impacted how they viewed the parcelas.

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[9] The other male heads-of-household either did not discuss the benefits of the parcelas specifically, speaking about ejido land in general, or had no opinion.

[10] As a second generation ejidatario, their fathers were the first ejidatarios in the 1930s.

The concept of patrimony and fulfilling a generational obligation to provide land is not stagnant. The salience and meaning of patrimony is relatively stable, but the acceptable strategies for fulfilling the generational obligation have changed for some people. The "parcelas as patrimony" rationale is still contested within Maní. Despite the contested nature of the marketization strategy, there is broad agreement that patrimony and continued access to land for succeeding generations is important. All of the contestation over the parcelas takes place within a shared frame of reference about how to fulfill the patrimony.

Even as ejidatarios and parcelarios continued to buy parcelas, nearly all of the ones I spoke with expressed concern about dwindling uso común land for making the milpa. This is particularly problematic when trying to understand the rationale for ejidatarios. For the ejidatarios, with guaranteed access to land and rights to pass onto future generations (although only one ejidatario status to bequeath), their behavior does not correspond to their structural position. Since they have institutional, guaranteed access, they should not be expressing concern about their own, or their children's, ability to access land. It is true that most of these ejidatarios have more children than parcelas. But in buying parcelas, they would have additional land for multiple children. They could individualize all of the ejido land, carving parcelas out of the uso común land. Then they would have more land to pass on and their security concerns for future generations would be alleviated. Still, though, this solution would not guarantee access for making the milpa on communal land.

Over half, 244, of the 438 ejidatarios already have at least one parcela. With a majority in the ejido assembly, the ejidatarios have the institutional power to convert all of the uso común land into parcelas. Yet, instead of parcelizing all of the land, the ejidatarios have maintained a large amount of communal land. Despite recognizing parcelas as a way to fulfill generational obligations, these ejidatarios with parcelas still believed land should be available for the whole community to use. Beyond that, they viewed the communal land as something to be protected because of its cultural significance.

In making land tenure decisions, ejidatarios rejected neither instrumentality nor cultural imperatives. The maintenance of parcelas within the ejido structure provided access to resources not readily available with private property. But the new rules generated insecurity. As a result, buying parcelas emerged as one strategy to ensure land was available for future generations. But the ejidatarios employed another strategy. They preserved a large amount of communal land. While permitting new parcelas to be created from ejido land as recently as 2006, the ejidatarios still recognized the need to provide uso común land for the milpa.

Preserving Communal Land

Uso común land still constitutes half of the ejido, a sizeable portion. The cultural significance of communal land impacted the ejidatarios' decision to oppose the parcelization of all ejido land. The preservation of communal land is linked to three things. First, it is the primary location for making the milpa, which is embedded in ritual

knowledge and Mayan religious practices. Second it is linked to place and collective memory. Finally, it is imbued with a sense of acceptable land use policies, partially derived from the Revolutionary reinforcement of the idea that land should be available for those who want to work it. These three elements explain why most ejidatarios, and other community members, support the preservation of uso común land.

Communal land has been preserved in Maní because it is the physical place in which many residents make the milpa. Ejidatarios recognize the value of uso común land as a resource to be shared with the community for milpa production. This explains why non-ejidatarios are granted the right to work the ejido land. One ejidatario estimated that over fifteen hundred community members (non-ejidatarios) made their milpa on uso común land.[11]

Neither the parcelas nor wage labor has supplanted the milpa. A common practice in Maní is for someone to work during the week away from the town. Residents sometimes migrate regionally for wages. On Saturday nights they return and Sunday is the day for tending to the milpa. Two Manienses I spoke with were working northeast of Maní for an archaeologist excavating ruins. They left on Mondays in the morning and went to the site several hours away. On Saturdays they returned in the evenings. Sundays were devoted to tending the milpa. Both men used communal land for the milpa.

Milpa production is common amongst parcelarios, people who work irrigated land, and wage workers. I spoke with one parcelario about his work. He is young and has not yet gotten married or started a family. He has a parcela and grows oranges and other

[11] In a 1994 survey, about 60% of the milpas made by residents of Maní were made on ejido land (Forrest 1997, 150).

fruits for sale. He also works in Oxcutzcab at a shop during the week. And he makes his milpa on uso común land. Despite the wages he earns in Oxcutzcab and the money he receives from selling his produce, he still invests time in milpa production.

One ejidatario, also engaged in wage labor, continues to make the milpa on uso común land. He works as a cook on the weekends in a local restaurant. He owns a parcela and often sells his watermelon and other products at the market in Oxcutzcab. Yet his participation in the market economy has not displaced the value he places on the milpa. This agrarian practice is not limited by generation, income level, or agrarian status (owner of a parcela or not). Rather, the milpa practice is common and widespread in Maní.

The actual process of making the milpa is learned as it is experienced by sons going to the fields with their fathers. An ejidatario told me that he takes his sons into the fields with them, so they can learn. "They see me work the land. Then, when the father dies, the sons know what to do." As noted in the previous chapter, several ejidatarios recounted their life histories, noting how they learned to make the milpa. One ejidatario said he "would go to the field with my father, for the milpa, starting when I was seven. When I was seventeen I stopped going to school and got my own milpa."

One element of this ritual knowledge is knowing the process and communal norms for making the milpa. One parcelario explained to me the burning process. "Before the rains you burn the field. It's the stuff from last year that's left over." He and his brothers had learned this process when they were young. Their father, an ejidatario, would take them to the milpa and teach them. I asked how he knew it was time to burn.

He said, "You know, before the rain when everything is dry." There are also rules for burning. "You cannot burn someone else's land." He recounted an incident with another milpero. "He burned his fields, but part of mine too. He is supposed to pay me for doing this. But he didn't." This communal rule governs milpa production. If your fire leaves your area and burns the area where someone else is making the milpa, you are obligated to pay. I asked how much, but he only said "not very much money." He wasn't planning to report the violation, mainly because he burned the field a few days later.

Both the milpa and the maize produced on it are embedded within Mayan religious practices. Of the thirty community members interviewed, over two-thirds (twenty-one) participated in Mayan religious ceremonies. And of the ten people interviewed who make milpa (nine on uso común land), eight of them spoke about Mayan ceremonies related to the land, particularly the Cha Chaac ceremony. The rain ceremony, they told me, is a community affair held in April or May and marks the start of seasonal milpa production. A hmen (Mayan religious leader) presides over the ceremony. Beginning in 1994, the local Catholic parish began to incorporate elements of the ceremony into a mass as well. The incorporation of a Mayan rain ceremony by the parish further signifies the local prevalence of milpa practices.

The ritual of prayers and sacrifices to the rain god in Maní were captured by a recent researcher in a series of photographs (including descriptions) that hang outside of the government offices in the town square. The pictures show the hmen in front of the altar. On the altar are sacrifices of tortillas, fowl, and various foods made with maize. A cross is also on the altar. The hmen was surrounded by women helping with the

preparations. With these pictures, the importance and centrality of Mayan practices related to the milpa are on display.

Several people spoke of the Maya as a "people of the land" who were dependent on the land for their well-being. Sacrifices to the rain god are seen as crucial to ensure their survival. One person noted that the recent hurricanes were because the gods were "angry because not enough was offered during the ceremonies." The Maya often call themselves, and are called by others, the people of the maize. This is partially, as noted in chapter three, from the Popul Voh story of creation, that the Maya were created out of maize.

The maize produced on the milpa is central to other Mayan ceremonies as well. One ceremony I witnessed was the hetz luum, to ward off evil spirits. A family had asked a hmen to perform the ceremony because the father was sick and needed an operation. But the family couldn't afford the procedure. They hoped the hetz luum would help him.

When we first arrived we walked to an altar in the back of the family's homestead. A small rectangular table was set-up. A large wooden cross was on the table in the back. Bowls and old paint buckets of sacrificial food offerings were laid out on the table. There were tortillas, made of maize, cooked turkey, a thick maize stew called "yax," and small bowls of a maize and honey mixture. There was a candle and incense on the table as well. When we first arrived, women were helping to place the food they had prepared on the altar. Then they left and the hmen lit incense and started the ceremony. The ceremony was short and consisted of the hmen softly offering the sacrifices and asking for the evil spirits to leave. It was all in Mayan. After the ceremony the family and

guests ate the food from the altar that had been used as an offering. This narrative of the hetz luum illustrates the centrality of maize in Mayan ceremonies performed today. Ensuring the production of maize responds to the persistence of Mayan beliefs in Maní.

Preserving uso común land is equated with providing a space for milpa production. The milpa itself is embedded in ritual knowledge, passed down from father to son, and Mayan religious practices, particularly honoring the rain gods. The maize harvested from the milpa is central not only in the local diet, but also in sacrificial offerings to the gods made during different ceremonies. The dual land tenure system in the Maní ejido reflects not only the instrumentality of needing irrigated land for production, but also the practice of milpa production on communal land.

The second major explanation for the preservation of communal land is that it is embedded in collective memory and place. Community members view the land in Maní as ancestral land that belongs to them all, not just a select few. When speaking about the land, many people invoked their "Mayan ancestors" who had lived here before.

One ejidatario invoked "past ancestors" and people having the land as a patrimony to pass on. He said "land and the cyclical nature of time are linked. What happens here now is connected to what happened before and what happens in the future. These old ideas about land are important. They are from the ancestors. We must have the land to pass onto our children and grandchildren." He believed these conceptions of time and land came from the "ancestors" writings and beliefs.

As noted in the previous chapter, one ejidatario[12] said that the "ejido is important because it is for all the people, the invitation is for all. All of the people are the owners of the uso común land, but not one specific part of it." This conception of "land" includes the resources on the land. "The wood on the ejido land is yours, it's for everyone to use." I often witnessed members of the community, non-ejidatarios, coming back from uso común ejido land with piles of sticks for their fires, over which they cooked the tortillas. This conception of land belonging to the community as a whole can be found far back in Mayan history. In writing about the lives of his people, Gaspar Antonio Xiu who lived in Maní in the sixteenth century noted that "land was held in common" (Xiu 1981, 79).

One ejidatario told me that historically people "never used pockets for money. They would bury their money and if they died sometimes others didn't know where the money was and it was lost for awhile or forever." He told me that, about ten years ago, one of his neighbors was "digging in the land to put in a pole for a house and found a box. It was full of gold, pure gold." He said the "Mayan ancestors often buried things" of value. A parcelario showed me a rock collection of from his land. Part of the collection was old shells. He said, "these used to be money. My ancestors used them. I found them right here, in my yard." Both of these Manienses saw the land as providing evidence of a link to the past, evidence of ancestors who had lived in the area.

As noted in the previous chapter, collective memory also links present day Manienses to a Mayan past. The royal Tutul Xiu family continues to have a presence in the form of pictures, historical narratives, books, and a restaurant. The harsh treatment of

[12] This ejidatario also owned multiple parcelas but was against parcelizing all of the land.

the Maya at the hands of the friar Landa is still remembered and lamented by community members. The majority of people I spoke with linked Maní as a physical space with local Mayan history not as an abstract idea but an ancestral home.

Local collective memory also invokes the post-Revolutionary struggle to get the land back from the haciendas. One resident recalled the difficulties his father and others had in getting land to create the ejido. He said "people had machetes, the socialists were fighting the land owners, there were fires, it was very violent." Another second generation ejidatario said he would never sell his land or give up his rights, as the land "is a symbol of the struggle to get access."

The impact of Revolutionary ideas is also partially evident in the discussion above about patrimony. During the period of land reform and redistribution, the state said it would provide land to all of those who wanted it. This probably reinforced Mayan ideas about collective land and the generational obligations that people now express. It is also linked to norms about land use and access. The pre-1992 agrarian rules required that ejidatarios work the land or else lose their status. This link between work and land rights, a legacy of the Mexican Revolution and provisions in the agrarian code, was popularized by PRI governments. This norm continues to be expressed in Maní.

Two ejidatarios interviewed argued that uso común land should be made available for any local resident wanting to work. They were both second generation ejidatarios whose fathers had been among the first beneficiaries of the land reform in 1934. Legitimate land tenure was defined for them as mixing labor with land. If you work the land, if you do something productive with it, then you should be entitled to have land to

work. If you are not going to use the land, than you have no claims to it. One resident noted that there "used to be land for whoever wanted to work it" but was concerned that there wouldn't be enough in the future if more land is converted into parcelas.

Several ejidatarios argued that anyone wanting to make the milpa should be guaranteed access to land. This is also one explanation for the granting of access to uso común land for the approximately fifteen hundred non-ejidatarios for the milpa. Communal land is not restricted to ejidatarios only; ejidatarios grant others the opportunity to use it. This concept was reinforced at a class offered at the local ecological school.[13] During one session, the instructor talked about land use in the Bible, noting that "all land comes from God so only use it, work it...you cannot sell the land because only God owns the land." This message is harmonious with protecting communal land for milpa production. And we see that Mayan, Revolutionary, and Christian discourses all reinforce the idea of land being available to those who want to work it.

The uso común land has been preserved for many reasons. Both ritual knowledge and Mayan religious practices are embedded in milpa production, locally equated with communal land. The landscape is also tied to collective memory and place, invoking ancestral ties and a struggle to gain back land. The post-Revolutionary governments reinforced norms about mixing labor and land as a norm. These values, beliefs, and practices have shaped land tenure decision-making and have acted as a counter-weight to the pressures for parcelization of all ejido land. These cultural values and practices

[13] U Yits Ka'an, the Experimental Farming School of Maní, began operating in 1996 and teaches participants about agricultural practices for development that are environmentally and culturally sound. It was created by a group of Catholic priests influenced by liberation theology and is connected to two universities in Yucatán.

associated with land are part of the historical construction of identity in Maní. They acted as resources ejidatarios drew upon in shaping their responses to the new rules. While the economic value of the crops grown on the parcelas resulted in ejidatarios permitting more parcelas to be created, the ejidatarios also recognized the cultural values of uso común land.

Conclusion

The case of Maní illustrates that the responses to the neoliberal property rights reforms cannot be "read off" of structural factors. With a high degree of ethnic identification linked to milpa production and place as ancestral home, one could have predicted resistance to and rejection of the new regime in Maní. Alternatively, with population increases and the benefits of irrigated parcelas, one could have predicted full individualization of communal land. Yet neither of these outcomes occurred.

Rather, Manienses responded in different ways. They avoided land privatization, selectively appropriating elements of the new rules. The neoliberal property rights regime restructured interaction, fostering a local land market. But marketization was deployed for different reasons, often used to fulfill a cultural obligation to future generations. Through this process, the definition of patrimony was contested as some people used the new land tenure rules to solve the insecurity produced by the institutional reforms. The new rules and strategies for fulfilling patrimonial obligations were reinterpreted and transformed. Further, ejidatarios limited the conversion of communal land because it was embedded in cultural meaning and a sense of identity. Their behavior in making land

tenure decision was embedded in historically constituted values, cultural patrimony, collective memory, and existing agrarian practices. The Manienses creatively adapted cultural and institutional resources to craft locally appropriate responses to the imposition of the neoliberal property rights regime.

CHAPTER VII

THE HENEQUEN WORKERS OF HUNUCMÁ

The neoliberal property rights regime established by President Salinas in 1992 resulted in unexpected outcomes in Hunucmá. When the reforms were enacted, most people had disengaged from the ejido. Ejidatario participation in agrarian production and attendance at assemblies was extremely low. Developing the land could bring economic benefits to both the ejidatarios and the community, through privatization and outside investment. This ejido was a good candidate for the kinds of transformations the neoliberal reformers hoped to achieve – freeing up under-utilized land to make it more productive. Thus, Hunucmá appeared to be a place where little resistance to the reforms would emerge. Yet the outcome was quite different. Land sales in 2005, which were part of a state government development project, catalyzed a new social movement to defend ejido lands. In the process, ejidatarios in Hunucmá drew on institutional and cultural resources to contest the new property rights regime, reviving habits of militancy and national mobilization and framing their grievances as part of wider indigenous resistance actions.

Opposition to the sale of ejido land under the neoliberal regime was the result of irregularities in the land privatization process and questions about the fairness of the price paid. A structuralist explanation may be able to account for these claims. Upon learning

that the land sold would be more valuable since it was being developed by the state government, ejidatarios claimed that the institutional rules were violated and the sales should be nullified or renegotiated. But a structural interpretation fails to account for the re-framing of the material and processural grievances as part of wider national indigenous autonomy actions, ignoring the agency of the actors involved. Ejidatarios drew on institutional and cultural resources – local customary practices and a national discourse of indigenous rights linked to the contemporary political context – in challenging the state and linking their struggles to a centuries old conflict between the indigenous people and foreign conquerors.

This chapter examines the historical institutional and cultural resources the ejidatarios were able to draw on in the neoliberal era. The establishment of the Hunucmá ejido in 1937 resulted from the mobilization of the local, largely Maya-identified peasantry seeking land redistribution from the large henequen haciendas. But management of the henequen sector by both state and federal institutions exerted political and economic control from above, making ejidatarios dependent on the state for their economic livelihood. This arrangement reinforced the ejidatarios' identity as henequen wage workers rather than proprietors of their own land, and resulted in cross-ejido mobilization against the government in the 1960s and 1970s when material conflicts arose. Both the internal organization of the Hunucmá ejido and its relations with the state and other ejidos were driven by henequen production. As the Yucatecan henequen sector waned in the 1980s, ejidatarios shifted their primary economic activities and disengaged from the ejido. Their historical institutional practices and cultural identity became latent

but, as demonstrated in the next chapter, ultimately were revived and redeployed under the new property rights regime.

Creating the Ejido

The ejido of Hunucmá is located in the municipality of the same name, 28 kilometers west of Merida (see figure 5). The ejidatarios and their families primarily reside in the city of Hunucmá, which has a population of 22,800 (INEGI 2005). Hunucmá forms part of the henequen producing region of Yucatán, the arid northwestern part of the state. In the late nineteenth century henequen production became a viable export-industry. The success of the henequen industry was partially conditioned by technical improvements elsewhere, as noted in chapter 3. Hacendados in this region earned their living by exploiting a largely indigenous workforce, tied to the henequen hacienda through debt-peonage. These workers were legally barred from seeking employment in other sectors until their debts were paid (Brannon and Baklanoff 1987, 49).

While Yucatán was not characterized by large-scale fighting during the Revolutionary period (1910-1920) as compared with northern and central Mexico, Hunucmá was an exception. In March of 1911, President Porfirio Díaz appointed General Luis del Carmen Curiel as Governor of Yucatán. Riots followed in Hunucmá and two other municipalities as rural laborers protested their treatment and General Curiel's actions, especially conscription (Carey 1984, 24). The violence in Hunucmá resulted in major property damage. Curiel, like Díaz, didn't last long. Fighting increased in Hunucmá throughout the decade as "bands of rebels escaped elite supervision" and

operated throughout the area (Fallaw 2002, 649). Imposed Revolutionary governments in the peninsula neither lasted long nor were very successful for the first several years. In 1915 the debt-peonage system was officially outlawed in Yucatán by Governor Avila, but major changes failed to

Figure 5: Hunucmá, map by Patrick Gronli

emerge as his power to enforce the degree was limited (Carey 1984, 29). Over the next five years debt peonage gradually eroded as a mechanism of control over workers. However, lacking access to their own land, tools, or other agricultural inputs, the former peons were forced to seek work on the haciendas as agricultural wage laborers.

In 1918 henequen workers in Hunucmá first petitioned for land restitution, one year after the 1917 Mexican Constitution was drafted. Article 27 of the Constitution provided the legal basis for the request. But the hacienda owners who controlled both the land and henequen production resisted the expropriation of their lands and the privileges that they had exercised. According to the agrarian archives, hacienda owners in Hunucmá petitioned the government to halt the land redistribution. They argued that the request was inappropriate since their land was "constituted of industrial units dedicated to the cultivation of henequen," an important export crop (Ministry of Agrarian Reform 1939).

Rather than wait for government action, the workers and peasants in Hunucmá organized into brigades to take the land for themselves. Historical recounts of this period showed that the battles at many of the haciendas were violent (Cetina Aguilar 2006). In 1922 the state governor denied the initial request for ejido land by the residents of Hunucmá. Instead, he provided a provisional land grant (Ministry of Agrarian Reform 1939). But this provisional land grant was insufficient. Many local residents did not have agrarian rights and the amount of land provided failed to conform to the stipulations in the agrarian code regarding the hectares of land per person that should be available to ejido.

Violence continued in the municipality of Hunucmá throughout the 1930s. The local peasant class, primarily Maya, fought alongside leftist leaders to over throw the old landlords. In 1936 a state-wide electoral struggle spilled into Hunucmá. Ideological tensions between conservative and several left-wing factions were mounting. One leftist leader, Antonio Betancourt Pérez, head of the state's education department, spoke at a

rally in Mérida. He threatened to "bring down 5,000 Indians from the hills of Hunucmá" to counter the conservative factions (Diario de Yucatán 1936).[1] Both the leftist movement to reform the region and the peasants of Hunucmá would be bolstered the following year by Cárdenas' visit.

In 1937 President Cárdenas visited the Yucatán to implement agrarian reform. During the presidential campaign in 1934, he had been in Mérida and pledged to support the henequen workers in recovering their land. After his election, federal intervention in the Yucatecan henequen haciendas was blocked by local politicians and hacendados. Cárdenas returned to Yucatán with members of the agrarian bureaucracy to redistribute henequen land to the workers, creating collective ejidos from the haciendas (Fallaw 2001).

The ejido of Hunucmá was created by an edict by President Cárdenas on September 1, 1937.[2] The land granted for the creation of the new ejido was composed of the prior, provisional land grant, plus another 10,000 hectares. Use-rights for the land were officially transferred from the hacendados to the ejido, although, as granted under the law, the hacendados were allowed to retain their equipment, buildings, and three hundred hectares of land per individual (Brannon and Backlanoff 1987, 52). The state mandated that the majority of the land was to be used for the collective cultivation of henequen (Ministry of Agrarian Reform 1939). A few hectares were set aside for local

[1] Quoted in Fallaw (2002, 66)

[2] The ejido of Hunucmá was officially created by presidential decree on September 1, 1937. It was published in the Diario Oficial de la Federación on August 11, 1939.

schools. After almost twenty years, the former henequen workers of Hunucmá were now ejidatarios.

Both the national agrarian laws and the institutional structure of the ejido were imposed from above. But over time they came to constitute local customary practices. As discussed in the next chapter, when the neoliberal reforms altered the legal framework of the ejido, the property rights regime came under attack for violating these established norms. Thus, understanding the historical construction of local practices is crucial for understanding the institutional resources that ejidatarios drew on in contesting the validity of the neoliberal regime. A few components of the institution were central.

Under the agrarian laws, ejidatarios had to work the land; as such, being an ejidatario was linked to agrarian production. If a peasant was absent or not working the land for more than two years, that peasant would lose agrarian rights and could be replaced by another person. Decision-making within the ejido occurred at assemblies. All ejidatarios had equal rights at the assemblies. The assemblies elected members of the *Comisariado Ejidal* and *Consejo de Vigilancia*, by majority vote. Each ejidatario had the option of running for office. The Comisariado Ejidal was the executive committee of the ejido. The Consejo de Vigilancia was charged with ensuring that the members of the executive committee fulfilled their duties in accordance with the law and maintaining and defending ejido boundaries. The ejido assembly voted on the internal rules, which were binding to all members. Finally, the assembly controlled access to the land. Since Hunucmá was a collective ejido, the land was worked communally, however not as one big plot of land but in groups.

The ejido contained a sub-layer of institutions – nineteen groups. The ejidatarios were organized into groups for the cultivation of the large portions of land. The groups corresponded to the haciendas and properties where land had been taken, and were not necessarily geographically connected. The agrarian archives make several references to the "*trabajadores y peones*," workers and peons, being granted access to ejido land in a particular group. For example, in 1937 the ejido was officially formed and the provisional land grant given to the residents was expanded. The decree from the Ministry of Agrarian Reform specifically delineated which henequen estates[3] land will be taken from and then went on to specify that the land for the ejido will benefit the workers and peons from that estate (Ministry of Agrarian Reform 1937). For example, the "peons and workers of the estate Texán and Annexes" were delivered "852 hectares with henequen and 1,892 hectares uncultivated" (Ministry of Agrarian Reform 1937, 3). The newly created ejidatarios were being given land carved from the very haciendas and, later, estates where they had worked.

These groups, though, were not simple geographic assignments of people to parts of the land. The ejidatarios of Hunucmá were expected to cultivate henequen collectively with members of their group. The groups also made important productive decisions, including receiving credit to support henequen production. Each member of a group had equal rights and groups decisions were made by majority vote. Meetings, separate from the assemblies when the all of the ejidatarios met, were held for each of the groups whenever they needed to discuss various matters. The groups could also make requests

[3] The term "hacienda" was no longer regularly used after the Revolution in official communications regarding the Hunucmá ejido. Instead the haciendas were referred to as ranches or estates.

for the whole ejido to consider. Below the level of the whole ejido, Hunucmá then had a spatial, organizational, and productive institutional structure of group-membership, heavily imbued with the legacies of the hacienda era.

Henequen continued to be the most viable crop for the ejidatarios. President Cárdenas' decree instructed the beneficiaries of the agrarian reform "to promote and preserve the henequen plants they had been granted" (Ministry of Agrarian Reform 1939). But the relative amount of the land planted with henequen that the ejidatarios received was quite low. Only 2,343 hectares were planted with henequen (Ministry of Agrarian Reform 1937, 1). The ejido needed state support, primarily credit, to expand henequen production. As detailed below, both federal and state agencies provided assistance, but the process was riddled with problems that hampered the success of the henequen ejido.

The Hunucmá ejido as a whole maintained its importance despite the productive centrality of the groups. The various functions of the groups did not supersede the role of the ejido assembly or the importance of participation. All ejidatarios maintained equal membership in the ejido. Violations of this norm often resulted in disputes. For example, in 1952 there was an internal conflict over ejido elections. After the August election, several ejidatarios challenged the results, noting irregularities in the process. Specifically, charges were leveled against the validity of the election and the Ministry of Agrarian Reform was asked to intervene in the situation. The complainants noted that some ejidatarios were not notified about the meeting or were barred from participating while other people, who did not have agrarian rights, were permitted to vote (Ministry of

Agrarian Reform 1953). The election of new leaders was certified and made official in 1953. Yet this episode illustrates that despite the productive importance of the groups, the stakes in ejido elections remained high. The Hunucmá ejido thus operated as a layered institution.

The Henequen Institutional Matrix

This section examines the organization of henequen-producing ejidos by the federal and state governments. After 1937, when President Cárdenas created over two hundred new ejidos, mostly in the henequen zone, both the national and Yucatecan governments wanted to ensure the continued viability of the lucrative export crop. Through an array of credit, production, and processing institutions, the henequen ejidos were controlled from above. The institutions governing henequen production, heavily influenced by former hacienda owners, reinforced not ejidatario control, but ejidatarios as workers without productive decision-making power. As demonstrated later, this organization of henequen ejidos resulted in class conflict between government institutions and the ejidatarios over material grievances.

The establishment of the Hunucmá ejido was followed by decades of struggle for control of henequen production in the region. First the federal government took control of the sector in 1937, hoping to use the collective Yucatecan henequen ejidos as model of the positive benefits communal land tenure could provide. The federal government had an interest in ensuring that these ejidos continued to produce henequen for export. Over 60% of Yucatecan land sown in henequen was now under ejido control (Brannon and

Backlanoff 1987, 52). Further, Cárdenas believed the collective organization of ejido, freed from the hacienda, a symbol of Old Mexico, was "inseparable from a larger social, cultural, and even moral transformation" whereby the "collective ejido, along with the school, would instill sobriety, patriotism, industry, and secularism" (Fallaw 2001, 13). The stakes for Cárdenas were not only economic but also political and cultural: the modernization of Yucatán, and Mexico.

One example of implementing Cárdenas' policies reveals both their appeal and their limitations in practice. In 1937 federal government representatives in Mérida attempted to prohibit alcohol sales as part of the Cardenista project. Their efforts at restricting the sale of alcohol in the capital of Mérida were successfully resisted by tavern owners who were well-connected with the local political and economic elite; however, the push to limit drinking was well-received in rural areas. In Hunucmá a Communist-affiliated women's group requested that Cárdenas close the taverns, which they called "baneful centers of vice." (Fallaw 2001, 93). While ultimately an unsuccessful movement in Hunucmá, the Cardenista project appealed to members of the peasant class as a way to take control away from powerful economic and political interests. Yet, as we will see repeated often, the transformative potential of Cárdenas' policies was regularly impeded.

The newly established henequen ejidos faced problems from the outset. The henequen plants were at different stages, some ready for cutting, but most in need of more time for growth.[4] This meant that it would be several years before some ejidos were able to harvest their crop and thus gain income. In Hunucmá, only 10% of ejido land was

[4] It could take up to ten years for a henequen plant to reach maturity so its leaves could be harvested and processed an, on average, plants lasted for twenty years.

cultivated in henequen. To make their land more productive, the ejidatarios needed loans to expand production. Further, the rasping machines necessary for extracting the fiber from the henequen plant's leaves were still under control of the hacienda owners, as was permitted under the agrarian laws. Finally, the ejidatarios generally lacked the technical knowledge and the credit to grow, process, and market the crop. Under these conditions, the federal government initially stepped in to provide the resources necessary for the henequen ejidos to operate.

The National Ejido Credit Bank (BNCE)[5] was established by the federal government as a credit agency for the ejidatarios, providing technical advice on henequen cultivation, and administrative and financial support until the ejidos were established and able to function independently. Hunucmá, as with other henequen ejidos, became dependent on the federal government. The henequen ejidos lost money in the early years, falling deeper into debt with the BNCE and unable to generate enough income to support its members (Brannon and Baklanoff 1987, 54). The collective management and communal exploitation of land for henequen production through the ejido seemed to be failing and was draining federal resources.[6] As a result, the Cárdenas administration returned control of the ejidos to the Yucatecan state government in 1938, as controlling henequen production resulted in massive outflows of federal pesos.[7]

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[5] *Banco Nacional de Crédito Ejidal*

[6] For example, the BNCE gave sixteen million pesos to the henequen ejidos and only received nine million in return (Brannon and Baklanoff 1987, 54).

[7] The biggest financial problem facing the federal government was the nationalization of the foreign-owned oil industry, and the need to raise revenues to compensate foreign owners.

Yucatecan Governor Canto Echeverría designed a new strategy to organize henequen production by managing the henequen ejido as a single administrative unit, called *El Gran Ejido*. In place of focusing on ejidos as individual producers, Canto Echeverría believed that centralizing the administration of the henequen ejidos through state agencies would be more efficient, restore discipline, and improve the quality of the product (Fallaw 2001, 128). The old state institution, Henequeneros de Yucatán Cooperativa Limitada[8], was reorganized by the state government to manage henequen ejidos. Canto Echeverría led the agency, which was governed by representatives from both private and ejido henequen producers. In its operation, Henequeneros de Yucatán is an example of the imposition of an institutional layer of control from above and illustrates a deepening of the process of turning ejidatarios into wage workers rather than proprietors of their own land.

Henequeneros de Yucatán was in charge of henequen production, administration, processing, and marketing, and controlled 80% of ejido fiber production, which some likened to one giant henequen hacienda (Chardon 1961, 43-44). This giant henequen hacienda, with 50,000 ejidatarios as members, was based on the premise that "no ejidos would be poor nor rich and all would have proportional salaries and the same opportunities" (Benítez 1956, 168). The agency stepped in to solve a number of problems in the sector. First, it standardized ejidatario wages, eliminating income disparities (Brannon and Baklanoff 1987, 54). Another problem the henequen ejidos faced was that

[8] Henequeneros de Yucatán Cooperativa Limitada was organized by President Calles in 1925 to salvage the henequen industry. As I noted in chapter 3, prices for henequen were high during World War I, but quickly fell once the war ended. Henequenros de Yucatán Cooperativa Limitada was charged with restoring Yucatán's market share *vis-à-vis* competitors abroad (Brannon and Baklanoff 1987, 43).

the agrarian reform had separated the production of raw plants from the processing of leaves. Ejidatarios controlled the majority of henequen land, but they did not have the facilities to process the raw henequen into fiber. The former hacendados refused the ejidos access to their leaf-processing equipment, the raspers. So, in 1938 the state government forced the hacendados to allow Henequeneros de Yucatán to control the rasping machines necessary to process the raw leaves and extract the fibers. A new law was enacted requiring the owners of the mills to allow ejidatarios to use their facilities (Chardon 1961, 43).[9] Henequeneros de Yucatán oversaw the implementation of the law, including the expropriation of rasping machines.

This organization was designed to improve ejidatario life and ensure that regional henequen production kept up with demand. If a henequen producer agreed to sell all of its fiber to the institution, they became a member. Ejidatarios, small producers, and the former hacienda owners all had the ability to join Henequeneros de Yucatán. The organization paid ejidatarios a fixed wage for their henequen crops and directed henequen cultivation on the ejido (Brannon and Baklanoff 1987, 54). Over half of the profits were divided up amongst the non-ejidatario producers, although the majority went to the former hacienda owners. In effect, Henequeneros de Yucatán became a "tool of the governor and landlords" (Markiewicz 1993, 145). The state now exerted its control over the ejidos through this re-organized institution, which was dominated not only by the Governor but also by a few Yucatecan state elites and owners of processing plants, the ex-hacendados (Brannon 1991, 246).

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[9] The new law, enacted in 1938, was called *La Ley de ocupación de maquinarias*.

Ejido access to and control over the rasping equipment was short-lived. In 1942, the equipment was returned to the hacendados (Chardon 1961, 43). The machines had fallen into disrepair and the hacendados agreed to maintain the raspers to ensure that production kept up with rising U.S. wartime demand (Markiewicz 1993, 145). The United States' demand for fibers increased during World War II, creating a temporary peace in Yucatán's henequen industry as fiber prices rose from their interwar trough of 6 cents to 9 cents per pound (Brannon and Baklanoff 1987, 55). The United States contracted for all Yucatecan fiber produced from 1942-1945, as U.S. producers of rope, harvest twine, and other products were cut-off from suppliers outside North America (Chardon 1961, 44). Many former hacendados believed that the return of the processing equipment was a step towards "ending ejidal policy in the Yucatán Peninsula" (Markiewicz 1993, 145).

In the decade after the Word War II boom, little money was invested in technical improvements for the henequen sector. The federal government pressured both the state government and the Henequeneros de Yucatán to purchase modern processing machinery, hoping to spur the private owners of the equipment to also make improvements through increased competition (Markiewicz 1993, 147). But production of henequen in the Yucatán fell from a high of 121,663 tons in 1943 to 74,651 by 1955 (Brannon and Baklanoff 1987, 63). With the henequen industry seemingly in a free fall and widespread rumors of corruption within Henequeneros de Yucatán, President Ruiz Cortines dissolved the institution in 1955 (Brannon and Baklanoff 1987, 56).

This once lucrative export-industry stagnated and was viewed as inefficient and corrupt. Competition from cheaper and higher quality sisal fiber in Brazil, Haiti, and Tanzania and synthetic fiber reduced the economic sustainability of henequen (Brannon and Backlanoff 1987, 104). The federal government stepped in during the 1960s, re-asserting control over the henequen sector. Cordemex, a parastatal agency, was created in 1961 for the industrialization of henequen.[10] Ultimately, Cordemex was granted a monopoly in purchasing and processing raw fibers, creating cordage products, and selling those products abroad. (Brannon 1991, 247)

Cordemex was designed as both an economic and political solution to the problems facing the henequen sector. Officials argued that under this new regime production and manufacturing could be integrated by the federal government, making it possible to take advantage of economies of scale. Further, the state could embark on a modernization program for the industry to retain global competitiveness as producers of cheaper, alternative fibers were gaining market share. The Yucatecan Joint Agrarian Commission sent a letter to the Ministry of Agrarian Reform in 1961 to this effect, requesting federal government support to bolster the henequen sector. Specifically, they asked for an increase in the availability of raspers and greater emphasis on the industrialization of henequen for the ejido (General Archives of the State of Yucatán

[10] Henequeneros de Yucatán was replaced by three organizations, the Union of Henequen Producers (UPH), the ejido bank and agrarian department, and *Cordeleros de Mexico*. The UPH represented private owners. The ejido bank and agrarian department were state agencies working with the ejidatarios. Cordeleros de Mexico was an association of cordage (rope and fiber-making) mills, which ultimately tried, unsuccessfully, to set prices. (Chardon 1961, 45) Under mounting economic difficulties and fears of the henequen industry falling under foreign control, the federal government bailed out Cordeleros de Mexico and nationalized the cordage mills in 1964. The federal government reorganized the cordage mills under federal control through Cordemex.

1961). The report notes that the "henequen ejidatarios must take their henequen leaves and return to be subjects of the past since there are not enough machines" for removing the raw fibers from the leaves (General Archives of the State of Yucatán 1961). They also requested more centers to receive the raw fiber and turn it into rope and other value-added products for sale. Federal authorities, responding to pressure from ejidatarios, hoped to use Cordemex to raise the standard of living for ejidatarios with the profits they would earn through reorganization and modernization.[11] Thus, "the nationalization measure was viewed by government officials as an expression of nationalism and support for the masses" (Brannon and Baklanoff, 1987, 95).

The federal government continued to invest in the industry, despite falling revenues from henequen sales. The state was obligated to pay ejidatarios their wages, regardless of production goals or market demand. Each year, millions of pesos were invested in the henequen sector through subsidies and credits, but not recovered in market sales. For example, the Agrarian Bank recovered 72% of its credit advances in 1956, but by 1964 that figure had fallen to 57.6% (Brannon and Baklanoff 1987, 76). Despite the state's efforts to improve production and modernize the sector, it was characterized by corruption and inefficiency.

Funds from the bank were provided directly to the ejidos. In the case of Hunucmá, the groups managed the funds and directed work. The agrarian archives in Mérida contain evidence of group meetings to discuss credits from the agrarian bank. For example, in 1965, seventy four ejidatarios, members of group five, met to discuss the recently

[11] The state was also under pressure from the cordage workers, who were organized under the PRI's official labor union, the Confederation of Mexican Workers (*Confederación de Trabajadores de México* – CTM).

advanced credit for henequen production (Ministry of Agrarian Reform 1965a). These ejido groups functioned to organize the ejidatarios and corresponded to geographic boundaries demarcating the land that groups of ejidatarios could access. Despite belonging to the same ejido, the groups were central to productive activities, the communal cultivation of henequen and added another layer of organization to the ejido structure.

The groups within the Hunucmá ejido sometimes conflicted. On one occasion a boundary dispute occurred between groups three and seven. The agrarian archives document an exchange between the ejido leadership and the state Department of Agrarian Affairs (Ministry of Agrarian Reform 1963). The letter requests that agrarian officials resolve a conflict between the two groups over henequen plants. The members of group three argued that some of their henequen plants were within the boundaries of the land of group seven. Since henequen production dominated economic activities in the ejido, these types of disputes were not minor. The request to have the state solve the problem illustrates the divisions that could arise and not be solved internally through the ejido assembly. But more importantly, the conflict reinforces the centrality of the ejidatarios as wage workers dependent on henequen. The ejidatarios specifically raised concerns over where henequen plants were located, and thus who controlled them. The dispute focused on economic production and control over resources.

By the 1960s the henequen sector was already in decline. In 1965 the Hunucmá ejido petitioned the state to move into cattle-raising. The ejidatarios were told to abandon the idea owing to the "length of time it would take to start" such an operation. Further,

the state told the ejidatarios that "the lack of vegetation and seasonal rainfall" in the area were problems which would "interfere with successful cattle-raising." The ejidatarios were advised to continue producing henequen. (Ministry of Agrarian Affairs 1965b, 11) The ejido also made a request with the Union of Small Ranches to have a new zone established to support livestock in Hunucmá (Ministry of Agrarian Affairs 1965b, 3). However, it would be nearly fifteen years before even small-scale diversification of production into breeding animals actually occurred. The ejidatarios would have to focus on henequen.

What is notable in the agrarian archives pertaining to Hunucmá during the 1950s-1970s is the absence of references to corn production, particularly the traditional Maya practice of making the milpa. On several occasions henequen production and credits for the groups are raised. There are also exchanges pertaining to the attempt by the Hunucmá ejidatarios to move into ranching. However, milpa production is notable for its absence in the records, in terms of hectares dedicated and the provision of credits or other supports. The act of making the milpa is one of the agricultural practices that characterized pre-conquest Mayan production. During the colonial era it was also one of the few physical places where Mayan religious ceremonies survived. Even today, people in Yucatán speak of the Maya as "people of the corn" and view the milpa as a cultural and religious practice, including sacrifices to the rain god.

Both anecdotal evidence and a 1998 agrarian survey of the Hunucmá ejido suggest that some milpa production continued (Agency for Agrarian Justice 1998a). However, the decline in wide-spread milpa production is suggestive of a turn away from

historical Mayan agricultural practices. The shift away from milpa production was not necessarily the choice of the ejidatarios; generally ejidos were limited in what they could produce by the type of credit and support the government provided. But this raises a fundamental question: How was the organization of the ejido and henequen production related to cultural identity? While it is impossible to know for sure if the internal ejido relationships and the external organization by the state and federal government caused changes in cultural values and identity, some type of relationship seems to exist. The rise in henequen production and the organization of the campesinos as wage workers appears to coincide with a decrease in Mayan customs and habits. A local historian and professor in Hunucmá, Anacleto Cetina Aguilar (2006, 144), noted a decline in pre-Hispanic Mayan practices.

He detailed several pre-Hispanic Mayan ceremonies that had been lost to the community and were now considered "foreign," no longer native to the local population but exotic elements of other places and peoples. For example, a number of ceremonies honoring Mayan gods took occurred historically in the area, including the "Yum Chac" for the rain god and the "Yum K'ax" for the land (2006, 144). These ceremonies are no longer held, at least not as community-wide affairs that people widely know about and participate in. The Mayan baptism, or "Hetz Mek," traditionally was linked to Mayan agricultural practices. For example, a young boy would be baptized at the age of four months. The selection of four months corresponded to the four corners of the milpa and symbolically reinforced the attachment between the Mayan men and their duty to make the milpa (2006, 144). However, this practice, too, is no longer common in Hunucmá.

Cetina Aguilar lamented the loss of these practices, noting that "our land is full of rich traditions, that which we should maintain and preserve for future generations, to guarantee a rebirth of our glorious past" (2006, 145).

The decline in participation in Mayan ceremonies equates with a decline in local use of an indigenous language.[12] Whereas over 50% of the population spoke Mayan at the beginning of the twentieth century, that number had dwindled. The 2000 census recorded the municipal population at 25,979, yet only 7,494 people spoke an indigenous language (INEGI 2001). The 2005 census saw the figure of indigenous language speakers in the municipality fall to 6,971 (INEGI 2006).

The loss of Mayan customs and habits coincides with government organization of and control over the henequen sector and the movement away from traditional crop cultivation towards increased henequen production. A 1988 assessment of municipal production in Hunucmá found that corn was planted on approximately fourteen hundred hectares of land (Centina Aguilar 2006, 162).[13] Agrarian practices of the past, such as milpa production, were supplanted with henequen. The cultivation of henequen in large groups and the amount of land required to ensure a continuous crop pushed the cultivation of other fruits and vegetables off of ejido land. Rather than proprietors of their own land, the ejidatarios had become wage workers, dependent, though, on the capital of the state (Villanueva Mukul 1990, 107).

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[12] Two indigenous languages are spoken in Hunucmá, Mayan and Náhuatl. Statistics delineating the proportion of each spoken were unavailable. However, Mayan is the predominant indigenous language in the municipality.

[13] The Hunucmá ejido alone is composed of over 20,000 hectares of land.

Political Functions of the Henequen Ejidos

Given internal problems in the sector and displacement due to competition from abroad, why did the state maintain and even expand its support for henequen production and manufacturing? Cordemex and its associated institutions had political and social functions, not simply economic and technical aims. Economic decision-making could thus be subordinated to social and political objectives of the regime, in that way serving regime stability by maintaining the status quo. The organization of the ejidatarios as henequen workers made them a political bloc under state and party control.[14] Social and political stability in the henequen zone rested with the National Peasant Federation (CNC), which controlled the ejidatarios and constituted the main political force in the region (Villanueva Mukul 1985, 26). All requests for land and any other demands on the state had to be channeled through the CNC (Brannon and Backlanoff 1987, 14). As such, the state needed to ensure the economic viability of the henequen ejidos to stave off any unrest and maintain support for the PRI.

Indeed, in the 1967 state elections, a PAN candidate won as mayor of Mérida, the capital of Yucatán, and two other PAN candidates were elected to the state legislature. These were the first such gains by an opposition party since the PRI consolidated its control after the Revolution (Brannon and Baklanoff 1987, 116). These electoral victories threatened the control the PRI was trying to maintain in Yucatán. The base of support for the PAN came primarily from Mérida's catholic, conservative, upper-class that had, prior

[14] As part of his political project, Cárdenas created the National Peasant Federation (*Confederación Nacional Campesina* - CNC). All ejidatarios were required to join the CNC, which was one of the three main sectors of the PRI. The CNC organized ejidatarios and bound them to the state and the party, acting as a kind of union for rural workers.

to the Revolution, acted as the land-owing aristocracy. But in state-wide elections, the PRI continued to enjoy popular support in rural areas from ejidatarios. The need to maintain political support among the ejidatarios in Yucatán resulted in the PRI-controlled federal government increasing its array of subsidies, credits, and investments in the henequen sector as a response to the needs of the rural population. During President Díaz Ordaz's term (1965-1970), per capita public expenditures in Yucatán tripled that of the previous administration (Brannon and Baklanoff 1987, 117).

The corporatist relationships institutionalized between the state and the ejidatarios through Cordemex, the CNC, and the ejido credit agencies reinforced cross-ejido alliances, which often became the basis for political movements. The relationship was not merely top-down; ejidatarios began to join forces and mobilize against unfair practices and policies. One such example can be found in 1966, when the Agrarian Bank altered the wage system. Ejidatarios had been paid a fixed and uniform wage by the bank. However, in 1965 the bank tried to improve worker-productivity by paying a bonus to ejidos producing a higher quality of henequen fiber. The goal of the bonus was to provide incentives to improve upon export fiber quality, which by then was considered of inferior quality by foreign buyers. But the plan failed as ejidatarios resisted the change to the long-standing practice of paying uniform wages. More than fifteen thousand ejidatarios protested in Mérida in 1966 until federal troops were brought in to end the rioting and looting (Villanueva Mukul 1985, 47). The policy was immediately reversed and the bonuses or profits were evenly distributed to all of the ejidatarios. This experience led one bank official to compare the henequen ejidos to a union, "one whose political power

precluded attempts by the bank to rationalize production" (Brannon and Baklanoff 1987, 80).

Large-scale ejidatario movements were also organized in 1969 and 1976 in Mérida. In 1969 ejidatarios occupied the city's center demanding holiday bonuses be distributed to all of ejidatarios in the henequen zone. In 1976, after the peso devaluation, they marched again demanding increases in their wages (Villanueva Mukul 1985, 48). The 1960s and 1970s in Yucatán were thus characterized by a growing class struggle between henequen ejidatarios and the governmental institutions controlling production. Rather than merely a top-down process, cross-ejido alliances were formed to push back.

Habits of mobilization and militancy in Hunucmá dated back to the Revolutionary period. Recall that, countering the state-wide trend, indigenous peasants here had violently struggled against the hacienda owners to re-claim their land. Once again they were moved to action, now as henequen workers fighting for fair wages. But this time they were engaged in actions that cut across local allegiances and needs. These patterns of cross-ejido mobilization and militant action confronting unjust practices that denied them material compensation would be re-invoked in the post-neoliberal reform period.

In 1974, the state reorganized the array of agrarian and ejido credit institutions and formed Banrural. The purpose of Banrural was to provide credit, advice, and technical support to stimulate agriculture. Banrural created and oversaw a rigid division-of labor on the ejidos that reinforced the role of ejidatarios as wage earners and not proprietors. Banrural created work plans for the ejidos, ensuring that the specific production tasks required for the henequen industry were carried out, including clearing

the land to sow new henequen plants, cutting leaves, and cleaning existing fields. Ejido foreman checked the work progress, which was subjected to weekly Banrural inspections to ensure satisfactory compliance. (Brannon and Baklanoff 1987, 64). "In reality, with the intervention of Banrual, the ejidatario lost all opportunity to act as the proprietor of the land and was converted into a wage earner of Banrural in the process of producing henequen" (Cetina Aguilar 2006, 158). The disaggregating of the production and processing of henequen resulted in the ejidatarios losing productive decision-making control, instead forced to comply with external work plans promulgated by state institutions. The ejidatarios of Hunucmá effectively become employees of the government.

The Cordemex-Banrural matrix and the organization of ejidatarios through the CNC reinforced identity along social class lines, linked to the production of raw henequen fiber. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, re-organization of the sector to increase productivity and efficiency was never seriously considered by state or federal officials because maintaining political support was the primary goal (Brannon and Baklanoff 1987). The credit advanced to the ejidatarios by Banrural functioned as a wage, one that that the government (both state and federal) was loathe to end. The henequen workers were an organized political force, not just an economic one. They could turn out for mass rallies in support of or to oppose government policies. The ejidatarios provided a political base that the state could harness. However distorted, corrupt, and inefficient the henequen sector and market had become in Yucatán, it still operated according to a functional logic. The federal government channeled economic resources into the region to co-opt dissent

and maintain its base of political support. This logic operated to reinforce the social class position of the ejidatarios.

> Since its inception, the ejido was subjected to control by outsiders.
>
> The control exercised by the bank and the owners of processing equipment essentially eliminated the ejidatarios' disposition of their own land and labor. They were treated and came to perceive themselves as wage laborers rather than property owners. Their status was made worse by the gross mismanagement of the henequen bureaucracy, which more often than not took actions in its own interests or that of Mexico City....The ejidatarios had become wards of the state and an increasingly burdensome drain on the federal treasury. (Brannon 1991, 247)

But the ejidatarios were not mere puppets of the government or local elites. When material conflicts occurred, the ejidatarios could mobilize to demand policy revisions and just compensation. Their crucial role as henequen producers and the linkages between ejidos thus operated as a source of political power.

The Decay of Henequen Ejidos

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s world prices for henequen fell. Increased competition from synthetics and the availability of higher quality sisal undercut the viability of Yucatán's "green gold". Henequen production, reaching over 130,000 tons of raw fiber produced in Yucatán during the 1960s, had fallen to about 35,000 tons by 1990 (Brannon and Backlanoff 1987, 63; Baños Ramírez 1998, 45). With the sector losing money and structural adjustment policies forcing budgetary cutbacks, Cordemex was closed on April 10, 1991, the anniversary of Emiliano Zapata's assassination. Zapata, the famed Revolutionary hero of the peasants, inspired the creation of the ejido system.

Ending its commitment to the henequen ejidos on the anniversary of his death symbolically signaled the demise of the henequen ejido. The height of ejido political power in the region, during the henequen years after World War II, is now remembered locally as the golden age of the ejido in Yucatán. Without state support for henequen, the arid and rocky northwestern part of the state provided few incentives for continued agricultural production as little could grow there.

As henequen sales and state support waned, so did participation in the Hunucmá ejido. An ejido report written by the Agency for Agrarian Justice in 1998 illustrates this disengagement. As of 1984, approximately 75% of the ejidatarios had no certificates proving they had ejido rights. An additional five hundred people were utilizing ejido land but were never recognized by an assembly as having rights to the land (Agency for Agrarian Justice 1998a, 1). The official procedures delineating who had agrarian rights and access to the land were being neither followed nor enforced when the neoliberal reforms were enacted by the federal government in the 1990s.

One cause of this failure to enforce ejido rules is found in land-use changes. The ejido as a whole and the individual groups cultivating henequen were key institutions in organizing production and receiving government support. But by the 1980s henequen production was on the decline. The 1998 land titling report of the Hunucmá ejido found that only five hundred hectares were cultivated in henequen, three hundred hectares in citrus fruits, and two thousand hectares were used for cattle ranching (Agency for Agrarian Justice 1998a, 2). With over 20,000 hectares of ejido land available, approximately 15% of the land was being used for production.

In the absence of government support and with the closing of Cordemex, the ejido was in decline. The official list of ejidatarios was outdated and in Hunucmá there was "little interest" in taking the necessary steps to rectify the problem (Agency for Agrarian Justice 1998a, 4). Some ejidatarios had left the area and others had died without being replaced. But many found work in other sectors. State agrarian officials noted that due to "the lack of work they [ejidatarios] migrate to the city of Mérida" (Agency for Agrarian Justice 1998a, 4). Without the ability to cultivate henequen, many people found day jobs in the expanding *maquiladoras* around Mérida or in the city as day laborers. For example, during the 1990s foreign-owned maquiladoras – factories that pieced together items – opened in the Yucatán. Monty Industries operates factories for jeans makers throughout the region, including one in Hunucmá, which opened in 1999 (Castilla Ramos and Torres Góngora 2007, 59).

Further evidence of disengagement from the ejido can be found in examining participation in assemblies. According to state agrarian officials, the problems with outdated lists of rights holders and migration to Mérida for work were "reflected in the attendance of ejidatarios at assemblies" (Agency for Agrarian Justice 1998a, 4). The highest turn-out at assemblies was for the election of the members of the Comisariado Ejidal and the Consejo de Vigilancia. Attendance for these elections was about four hundred and fifty, out of sixteen hundred ejidatarios (Agency for Agrarian Justice 1998a,

4). When the key economic role of the ejido declined with henequen, so did the political value of participation for many members.[15]

This is not to suggest there was a complete abandonment of the ejido in Hunucmá. It continued to be a valuable institution for many residents and even provoked struggles with other ejidos. Boundary disputes with nearby ejidos persisted into the 1990s, resolved only when the ejido voted to participate in the state's land titling program. An initial ejido survey conducted by agrarian officials in 1995 and a follow-up in 1998 noted boundary disputes between Hunucmá and the ejidos of Sisal, Texán, and Hunkanab (Agency for Agrarian Justice 1995; Agency for Agrarian Justice 1998a). There is also evidence of continuing internal disputes over the boundaries between the land of the nineteen groups and who had rights to work land in which are (Agency for Agrarian Justice 1995; Agency for Agrarian Justice 1998a). These problems delayed the land titling process.

Although ultimately resolved, some ejidatarios failed to recognize the agreements as legitimate. One ejidatario told me that there were no markings dividing the land, the government had done so, but "it only exists in their heads." To him, the ejido land belonged to all of them to work together. Another ejidatario echoed these sentiments, noting that with the decline in state support for henequen production, people began to see the land as their patrimony, a right and legacy that could not be divided or taken away.

The rows of henequen, which had so dominated twentieth century life in Hunucmá, disappeared and were replaced by a knotted mix of small trees, shrubs and

[15] As noted in the next chapter, low attendance plagued attempts by the Hunucmá ejido to enter the state's land titling program, PROCEDE.

bushes across the rocky landscape of Hunucmá. In 2006 I walked with two ejidatarios from Hunucmá through part of the ejido land. I asked about the milpa production, that traditional practice signifying not merely maize production but a link to a Mayan past. One ejidatario, now in his sixties, pointed to the weeds and shrubs that had reclaimed the landscape and told me, "there, there is your milpa." The other told me that some milpa was being planted in the western part of the ejido. He also told me that "before lots of other crops were planted, like tomatoes and squash. Now there are not enough government resources and people are not planting much on the land. Many people work in town, in Mérida, or in maquiladoras."

This anecdotal evidence is corroborated by statistical data. The 2000 municipal census found that only 21.5% of the population was engaged in agriculture and other primary economic activities (INEGI 2001). Approximately 78.5% of the population was employed in other sectors, including mining, construction, tourism and the service-sector (INEGI 2001).

Conclusion

During the Mexican Revolution, Mayan peasants in Hunucmá mobilized to fight for land. After 20 years of struggling they successfully formed an ejido, devoted to cultivating henequen. Without the resources to grow, process, and market their crop, both the state and federal governments stepped in, providing credits, access to technology, and wages for the ejidatarios. In doing so the ejidatarios were transformed into wage workers and not proprietors of, and hence decision-makers about, their land. This process was

accompanied by a loss of traditional Maya practices. Yet, the ejidatarios found allies in other henequen ejidos, working together in the latter half of the 1960s and early 1970s to combat unfair state practices that threatened their economic livelihoods.

The decline in the henequen sector and the state's ending of its supports ushered in an era of disengagement from the ejido. Shifting economic activities away from agricultural work on ejido land, ejidatario participation in assemblies dwindled. While not a complete abandonment of the institution, the ejido no longer served as an economic or political resource for its members. The rocky and arid land could be better utilized, and that is what the state government thought in 2005 when it tried to buy land from Hunucmá to construct a new airport. Yet, as demonstrated in the next chapter, the interactions between the state and the Hunucmá ejido resulted in mobilization for a fairer process, better compensation, and respect for the indigenous people of Yucatán and the land that was theirs. The ejidatarios ultimately drew on their experiences of mobilization and militancy from the Revolutionary era and the 1960s and 1970s, reviving and re-deploying these historical tactics.

CHAPTER VIII

THE REEMERGENCE OF EJIDATARIO MOBILIZATION IN HUNUCMÁ

As Salinas pursued neoliberal reforms, ejidatarios in Hunucmá had largely disengaged from the institutions of the ejido. Hunucmá thus seemed like a good candidate for land privatization. The state's airport development project would create new jobs and revitalize the economy. In a place like Hunucmá, where agriculture had largely disappeared as a primary economic activity, one may have expected ejido land to be sold without much conflict. This relatively under-utilized land, near the capital of Mérida, could be freed from the restrictive laws governing the ejidos. This was how government officials saw the situation in 2004 when they attempted to purchase land from the Hunucmá ejido for the construction of a new airport. But this process failed to proceed as state leaders expected. Within two years ejidatarios were fighting the proposal. During this process many ejidatarios charged state leaders and land speculators with manipulating the legal framework and using state resources for the benefit of a few private individuals.

From a structural point-of-view we may have expected some tensions to arise as ejidatarios disputed the low price paid for the land, inconsistencies in the process of purchasing the land, and unequal access to information. Early on, ejidatarios made these exact types of claims. However, the mobilization against the airport project became a

transformative process, one that recast local customary practices, known as usos y costumbres, in the language of national indigenous autonomy movements. Ejidatarios drew on the tradition of Zapata and an historical Mayan struggle against conquerors in building alliances to contest the land sales. Specific chains of interaction between local elites, state government leaders, political activists, and ejidatarios surrounding the proposed airport development project in Hunucmá became the catalyst for social and political re-organization.

The ejidatarios' struggle was not characterized simply by adversarial legalism or public protests, but also by the construction of a new discursive framing for how to evaluate the new property rights regime. The evolution of the grievances of the ejidatarios, detailed in this chapter, can be viewed through three discourses. At the outset ejidatarios framed their grievances as material and processural. Outside activists and Zapatista-affiliated organizations framed the conflict as incursions on indigenous rights and the Revolutionary legacy of Emiliano Zapata. Increasingly, ejidatarios in Hunucmá fused these discourses, framing the land sales as violations of customary practices and as part of a wider indigenous struggle within Mexico. The process of mobilizing against the project highlights the importance of agency and the use of institutional and cultural resources to respond to broader structural changes.

Neoliberal Reforms

President Salinas was radically reforming the ejido system just as Cordemex was closing its doors. Change was in the air. Government workers headed to ejidos

throughout the state to implement the new policy, including granting ejidatarios certificates guaranteeing their ejido rights and access to land. In 1999, President Zedillo visited Hunucmá and praised the efforts by the state government, agrarian agencies and ejidos in implementing the reforms. Over 80% of the Yucatecan ejidos had completed the state's land titling program. He announced that the ejido lands were at last secure, the ejidatarios and their families would be guaranteed their rights to their land and homes, their patrimony, with the new titles they received. He believed that "the security of land tenure prevents conflicts and favors tranquility," and boasted of a hopeful future (Zedillo 1999).

In 1998 the ejido assembly in Hunucmá considered participation in the state's land titling process, beginning the process of mapping and titling the land. Participation in PROCEDE was delayed due to boundary disputes with other ejidos and problems in achieving a quorum. In January of 1998 the ejido held an assembly, but only twelve of the sixteen hundred ejidatarios attended the meeting (Agency for Agrarian Justice 1998b). A second assembly was held in February of 1998. All of the sixty-two ejidatarios present voted to have the ejido participate in PROCEDE (Agency for Agrarian Justice 1998c). Since this was the second meeting called to consider these issues, the quorum requirements were reduced.

The ejido land was held in different forms of tenure. The majority of land, over 70%, was in large plots (Agency for Agrarian Justice 2001). This land was designed to be cultivated collectively – although most was unused – and corresponded to the nineteen groups, a legacy of the henequen era. Ejidatarios were entitled to an equal share or

percentage of land in the group to which they were a member. The agrarian records also indicate that 274 individual parcelas were being used by community members, some of whom were ejidatarios (Agency for Agrarian Justice 2001). Each of these individuals received a title to their parcela. The expanding population had also resulted in people living on ejido land (Agency for Agrarian Justice 1998a, 2). During the land titling process, 800 homesteads – *solares* – were recognized on ejido land (Agency for Agrarian Justice 2001). The ejido completed its land titling program in 2001 and the ejidatarios and owners of the individual parcels of land received their certificates. However, immediately there were problems.

Between 2001 and 2002 the agrarian records noted continuing challenges in determining who was an ejidatario with rights to participate in assemblies. In 2001, a number of ejido assemblies were called, each one falling short of the required quorum figures. In July of 2001 an assembly was held, the fourth called in a month due to attendance problems. Only 308 ejidatarios were present (Agency for Agrarian Justice 2001, 3). However, given the previous failed attempts at achieving quorum, a lower figure was accepted in accordance with the agrarian law. At this meeting, the assembly lowered its total number of ejidatarios with rights in force to six hundred (Agency for Agrarian Justice 2001, 3). Of the initial sixteen hundred rights holders, twenty-seven individuals were listed multiple times[1] despite each only having one vote (Agency for Agrarian Justice 2001, 2). As a result, the quorum figure was lowered by twenty-eight. Another 409 ejidatarios were listed as dead and were also removed from the quorum

[1] One ejidatario was listed three times and twenty-six were listed twice; thus twenty-eight was the figured used (Agency for Agrarian Justice 2001, 2)

count. Finally, 563 ejidatarios were found to have not been in the area for more than six months; according to the agrarian law, this allowed the assembly to purge them as well (Agency for Agrarian Justice 2001, 2). A total of one thousand ejidatarios were considered to have lost their rights. With the lowered number of 600 total ejidatarios, only 301 were necessary for an assembly to be valid.

But this issue persisted. In September of 2001 the list of ejidatarios with rights in force, and thus counting towards the overall quorum figures, was the subject of more debate. The numbers of ejidatarios removed from the original list of 1600 was now altered to only 689, not 1000 as before (Agency for Agrarian Justice 2002, 1). This reflected changes in the number of deceased (358) and those no longer in the area (303) plus the 28 duplicate names. Challenges to the changes made in July of 2001 had resulted in changes to quorum again. In a number of circumstances, it appeared that the problems were administrative; however, some evidence suggests that in a few cases ejidatarios actively pursued reinstatement with the agrarian officials, as proof of their status was needed to resolve the problems. The total number of ejidatarios with rights in force thus became 911, lowering the quorum requirements at assemblies to 456.

The immediate value of the new certificates and the impact of the new rules were not clear. The henequen zone, once a battlefield for control of Yucatán's most lucrative export crop, was no longer subjected to protracted conflicts between the agrarian workers and the government. Without a productive base, there was little interest by the ejidatarios in the land. Henequen production was no longer a primary economic activity, although some land was used for citrus cultivation and raising animals (Agency for Agrarian

Justice 2001). Since primary economic activities had shifted away from agricultural labor, selling the land was logical for agrarian rights holders. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some land sales occurred between 2001 and 2004.[2] The structural prediction is thus right during this time period. Disengagement from both agricultural work and the ejido as an institution reduced the value placed on the land. Selling land was thus a viable option. Yet a few years later, such land sales were being resisted. The central puzzle is to explain how and why this shift occurred.

In 2005 the Hunucmá ejido became the focal point in a scandal surrounding Metrópolisur, a state development project that included the construction of a new airport on what had been ejido land. The scandal pitted a group of ejidatarios against the state government and gained the ejidatarios a national spotlight. The Governor and state-level agrarian officials were implicated in corruption, the misuse of state funds, and circumventing ejido rules. The controversy spread, drawing in other ejidos and political activists who were concerned over the re-concentration of land tenure in Yucatán, what some called a re-colonization process. Market failures and uneven access to information may have caused the mobilization against the land sales, but how can we account for the reinvigoration of a cultural frame that came to dominate the controversy? Doing so requires an examination of the interactions of the actors involved and how this shaped and gave meaning to the discursive construction of the conflict.

This trend of an emerging market in ejido land was not unique to Hunucmá. The neoliberal reforms were aimed at creating the institutional structures necessary to

[2] Some ejidatarios indicated that the former ejido president (2001-2004) encouraged people to sell their land.

transform land into private property and, in many cases, provided the means to regularize ejido land sales that had illegally occurred prior to the reform period.[3] Some land in the peri-urban zone of the capital was purchased by Mérida's jet set and the increasing number of foreign-born retirees. With American baby-boomers retiring, and the low cost of living in Yucatán, several new housing developments were constructed to respond to the rising demand for luxury homes. Yucatán had also become an important tourist destination, linking side trips to its Mayan archaeological sites and colonial cities with tour packages for the beach crowd in Cancun. Without state support and subsidies, the ejido sector in the former henequen zone was in decline. Selling land for new developments was one of the only viable options left to turn the land into something of value.

Hunucmá seemed to be an excellent candidate for the privatization of land, allowing entrepreneurs to develop land in the peri-urban zone. Metrópolisur, the state's airport development project, promised to bring jobs to the area and catalyze economic growth after years of stagnation. As there was little resistance to the state's land titling program and a history of state involvement in economic production, the construction of a new international airport in Hunucmá appeared to be a justifiable solution to local and state problems. But the state's missteps in pursuing the airport project produced tension over the new property rights regime and resulted in an unexpected outcome – the creation

[3] Prior to the neoliberal reforms of the 1990s, ejido land throughout Mexico had been illegally sold or leased. Often this land was near coastal or tourist areas or near an expanding urban zone. On this point, see Vázquez Castillo (2004), Cornelius and Myhre (1998), and Markiewicz (1983). My investigation of ejidos in the municipality of Mérida found that one ejido, Colonias del Sur, had disappeared by the time the neoliberal reforms were enacted. The agrarian records contained no information about the ejido. A local leader of a campesino organization told me that the ejido land had been illegally sold during the urban expansion of the 1980s.

of a new social movement to challenge the land sales in Hunucmá and the impact of the reforms on the ejidatarios. The conflict illustrates the creativity of the actors involved as they drew upon existing cultural and institutional resources to reframe the issue and link their cause to indigenous resistance movements nationally.

From Mega-Proyecto to Mega-Scandal

In February of 2005, about 1,500 hectares (roughly 15%) of ejido land in Hunucmá were purchased by private individuals. At the outset little controversy emerged. But by the summer, the transactions were increasingly scrutinized by ejidatarios and activists. The legality of the land sales and the low price paid formed the epicenter of the conflict. The disputes over the land sales also resulted in an internal power struggle for control of the ejido leadership. With continued coverage in the regions two main newspapers, *Diario de Yucatán* and *Por Esto!*, Hunucmá gradually became a symbol of the abuse of the new property rights regimes in the former henequen zone.

Yucatán's Governor Patricio Patrón Laviada wanted to move Mérida's existing international airport. Located in the southern part of the capital, he argued that the current airport met neither the needs of the state's growing tourism industry nor the expansion of the urban population. So he proposed a two-phase development project called Metrópolisur. The first phase included the construction of a new international airport in Hunucmá and the expansion of a roadway from Mérida to Hunucmá to serve the airport. The new airport would provide easy access to beaches and tourism areas in the west of the state, including the coastal city of Celestún (famous for its flamingos) and its

biosphere reserve. The second phase was the development of the old airport site in Mérida. That area was set to be demolished, paving the way for the construction of new homes, to accommodate a growing urban population. Further, the new housing development would be accompanied by businesses, a new zoo, and a museum focusing on Mayan history.

According to the Governor's office, the state initially attempted to buy the land from the ejidatarios for the new airport, offering seven thousand pesos per hectare. But the ejidatarios rejected the offer. At this point, private land speculators stepped in, offering to purchase ejido land in Hunucmá and other nearby towns for higher prices. On its surface the land seemed relatively worthless. With henequen no longer a viable commodity, there was little else that could grow in the rocky soil and arid climate. Many ejidatarios no longer worked the land. Milpa production had ended as henequen took over during the twentieth century. The president of the Comisariado Ejidal was approached about selling some of the land. Ejidatarios told me that agrarian officials working with Hunucmá encouraged the sale.

The president informed the ejidatarios about the proposal. He also met with the three groups whose land was being considered: groups three, seven, and eleven. These groups were three of the nineteen controlling ejido land in Hunucmá. He spoke with the ejidatarios who had titles to land in each group. In order for the sale of land to occur, the ejidatarios with rights in these groups first had to vote for approval. A member of group three, who voted to sell his land, told me that initially they "were offered a low price for the land, but the president negotiated for more." The agrarian officials working with the

Hunucmá ejido recommended they accept the initial offer. However, the president was successful. The land speculators agreed to pay the higher price he had negotiated. The ejidatarios in the three groups agreed to the sale. The next step was for the entire ejido assembly to vote on the proposal.

The process for selling ejido land requires that the large plots of land, those controlled by the nineteen groups, first be divided into smaller parcelas of land. If the groups accepted the land tenure change, as they did in this case, then the matter would go to the entire ejido assembly for a vote. The ejido assembly could vote for privatization, thus permitting the sale of the land.

That assembly was held on February 27, 2005. By the time of the 2005 assembly, the quorum figures had once again been changed. In 2003 another assembly was held and the number of ejidatarios with rights in force was 944. At the February 2005 meeting, 538 of the 944 officially listed ejidatarios met and voted unanimously to divide 1,526 hectares of uso común land into six parcelas (Peniche 2005). At the same meeting, the ejidatarios agreed to sell the newly created parcelas to six people, identified in the press as land speculators. One of the land speculators was Antonino Almazán Arteaga, the former head of the state-level National Agrarian Registry (RAN). The speculators intended to sell the land to the state government for use as the site of the new airport. The land was sold to the speculators and Metrópolisur seemed to be on its way.

By the summer of 2005, many ejidatarios, including some that had voted for the land sales, were challenging the transactions. They argued first that many ejidatarios had agreed to accept a low price for their land because they did not have the same information

as the land speculators, who knew the state planned to build a new airport which would raise the value of the property. The Governor was accused of providing insider information to Almazán Arteaga about Metrópolisur, enabling him to make a lot of money by purchasing the land cheaply and then selling it to the state for higher prices. The Governor's son and uncle were allegedly business associates of Almazán Arteaga. Critics argued that these connections gave the speculators inside access to information about the project. As such, that information may have allowed the land speculators to know that the value of the ejido land would increase in a short time. Thus the risk in investing was low, as they were guaranteed government support for the purchase of the land. Even though the land seemed worthless on its surface since henequen production had ended, this project guaranteed income for the speculators. But Yucatán's Governor argued that Metrópolisur was part of an already established state development plan, one that everybody had access to, and so the accusations were unfounded.

Some of the ejidatarios next took issue with the February 2005 ejido assembly that approved the land sales, which formed one key element in the conflict. Despite there being 1600 ejidatarios, only 944 names were listed as official ejidatarios with voting rights. This lowered the quorum figures required for the assembly to be valid. Many asked why such a discrepancy existed between what ejidatarios claimed was the official count (sixteen hundred) and the total maintained by the agrarian agencies. According to the state agrarian agencies working with Hunucmá, the 2003 decision to lower the quorum figures was made in an ejido assembly and in accordance with the internal governing rules for the ejido of Hunucmá. But many ejidatarios contested the legality of

the February 27 assembly and the earlier purging of names, arguing that the suspension of voting rights misrepresented the true number of ejidatarios. These ejidatarios argued that 801 ejidatarios had to be present for the February 27 meeting to be legal and that the earlier suspension of voting rights was not legal.

A number of ejidatarios also noted irregularities in the granting of rights. They argued that some ejidatarios were listed multiple times on the official list of ejidatarios, the original list of sixteen ejidatarios, and that some of the individuals were not listed as residents of Hunucmá. They pointed to numerous examples in the official list of names. One ejidatario, who had been among the first to challenge the sale, showed me the inconsistencies in the agrarian records. He pointed to individuals listed multiple times and some who resided in other states in Mexico. He asked, "how could that be?" and called the land titling "a fraud." Some of the names on the list were for people living in Mexico City. Another ejidatario believed "the government already had plans for the land" and so "manipulated PROCEDE to get what they wanted." One community member charged the ejido president with putting "people on the list who were not ejidatarios and had no rights…so they could receive money from the land sales." He further charged that some of the land sold was not even part of the Hunucmá ejido but belonged to a nearby ejido. Another community member noted that his father was on the official list of ejidatarios. His father was now considered absent from the area, and thus had lost his rights and was no longer counted towards the quorum. However, he noted "my father has been dead for seven years. How can he be listed?" Finally, they noted that some people had certificates entitling them to ejidatario status and rights in the ejido, but their names

were not on the official list. Each example of an irregularity illustrated problems with the new property rights regime. The institutions governing the ejido and the designation of rights holders appeared out-of-step with the local reality.

Further, according to some ejidatarios, the February 27 assembly was not a regularly-scheduled meeting. There should have been one month of public notice before the assembly, yet notification did not occur. The meeting was called through a process of collecting signatures from ejidatarios, and some claimed the signatures were not legally obtained since money was paid to signatories; in essence, they charged that ejidatarios were bribed into agreeing to the assembly (Mis Cobá 2006a). The president of the ejido and the leaders of the groups were accused of making the most money, although several ejidatarios believed that over 350 others who participated in the assembly "earned 100-150 pesos for their signature."

Throughout this process, it appeared that the market for land did not function as it was intended due to uneven access to information about the state's plans. More importantly, the institutional process for selling the land was marred by irregularities and inconsistencies, leading to conflict over how the new property rights regime would function. Yet, the Yucatecan agrarian officials argued that the process of selling the land was legal. They say that fifty percent plus one ejidatarios were present at the February 27 assembly and approved the deal, making it legal.

By August of 2005 concerns were raised about the sale price of the land. The key question involved Almazán Arteaga's role as an unofficial intermediary for the state, directly using state money, rather than his own, to purchase the land. The seemingly high

commission he extracted (some say embezzled) also drew criticism. While the technical legality of the use of state funds was not legally challenged by the ejidatarios, the fairness of commissions drew sharp condemnation. Rather than invest his own money in ejido land, Almazán Arteaga was accused of using 61 million pesos of state money to purchase the land in Hunucmá. The amount of money the ejidatarios were paid by the speculators for the land is between 90 centavos and 1 peso 30 centavos per square meter. The first figure is based on what the ejidatarios claimed they received, the higher figure is based on what the Governor says was paid to the ejidatarios (Peniche 2005). Thus, Alamazán Arteaga's fee for the transaction, the discrepancy between what he received from the government and paid to the ejidatarios for their land, falls between 22 and 34 million pesos (Ibid). It seemed to some that state resources were being used to line the coffers of a well-connected businessman – and former agrarian official.

The attention placed on the land speculators and their relationship to state leaders raised further questions about the speed with which the deal was approved. When ejidatarios sell land, a lengthy process is required to officially change the designation of land. The Hunucmá ejido had to carve out sections of land belonging to the three groups and officially change the designation of the land to parcelas with the Agrarian National Registry (RAN). As with all such changes, the ejido assembly must approve the change in land tenure. Once the land is titled as an individual parcela, the ejido assembly must approve a request, by a two-thirds vote, to allow the land to be privatized; only then could the land be removed from ejido control and transformed into private property, thus able to be sold to outside parties. However, this process usually lasts one year and is complex,

as the quorum requirements for ejido assemblies and the super-majorities for approval may not easily be obtained. Yet, in the case of the Hunucmá land sales, the process only took three months. Given the involvement of the governor and Almazán Arteaga's former role as head of RAN, the speed of the land tenure change exemplified, for many, manipulation of the new rules.

By September of 2005 the controversy was dividing the ejidatarios. Questions emerged about the role of the ejido president in the land sales. Some ejidatarios supportive of the sales argued that the state's agrarian advisors recommended a low price for the land. One noted that an agrarian official "wanted a low price for the land, but the ejido president negotiated for more money." Other ejidatarios, who did not support the sales, argued that the president actually used the sales to line his own pockets. One told me that "he [the president] took money from the land speculators, but didn't distribute all of it." Several ejidatarios claimed he kept a portion for himself. Under pressure over the land sales and his role in both the initial transactions and the distribution of funds, the ejido president resigned in September 2005.

With these issues hotly contested throughout the summer and fall of 2005, the governor (from the ruling PAN) sent his proposal for funding of the two-phase development project to the state Congress. He asked the Yucatecan Congress for over one hundred million pesos to fund Metrópolisur in September of 2005. But he met resistance in the Chamber of Deputies. PRI deputies began challenging the project publicly. They called for an investigation into the PANista's approach, questioning the legitimacy and legality of the entire project. The proposal was rejected on a party line vote. All ten PRI

members, and the three other non-PAN members, rejected the proposal, with the twelve PAN representatives voting yes. (Massa 2005). But the Governor did not give up. He stated he had a "Plan B." He would continue to work with business people, other social sectors, and Congress to raise the funds for the project.

At this point it was not clear what the outcome would be for the ejidatarios. The main criticisms of the project centered on the legality of the land sales and the price paid. Had insiders manipulated the new rules to push through the project? Had local elites conspired to make millions of pesos through shady deals? The PRI was beginning to champion the ejidatarios' cause in Yucatán, perhaps to regain the support of their once loyal rural base, hoping to combat the growing electoral victories of the PAN in Yucatán. Clearly, though, political and economic considerations were driving the debate. The upcoming ejido elections were pitched as a referendum on the land sales and whether they were legitimate.

Internal Mobilization Against the Land Sales

Debate about the project continued as 2005 ended. In January of 2006, attention was re-focused as the Zapatistas, part of the Other Campaign for the coming presidential elections, arrived in the region. Subcommandante Marcos and the delegation of Zapatistas were touring the country, listening to the problems that people had and drawing attention to the way indigenous people were being treated. In Yucatán, Marcos went to Chablekal, just north of Mérida, to meet with Yucatecan ejidatarios and learn about their problems. The Zapatistas listened as indigenous people spoke of land being

bought up everywhere around the expanding urban zone. An ejidatario from Oxcun, near Hunucmá, raised concerns about ejido land sales. He said that the land in Oxcun was being purchased for a larger road connecting Mérida and Hunucmá, where the new airport would be built. Marcos railed against the continuing injustices, comparing them to the great Maya fight in the Caste War. Noting that the struggle for ejido land and indigenous justice was not over, he invoked the tradition of both Emiliano Zapata and the Maya (Henriquez and Gomez 2006).

The Zapatista delegation also held a public rally in the central square of Mérida, which I attended. This was the same location where ejidatarios had gathered in the 1960s and 1970s to protest unfair henequen policies. But the crowd of approximately five hundred people was markedly different than during those past mobilizations. Near the stage set-up for Marcos' speech, journalists, students, and tourists held the prime spots. Marcos himself looked less like a revolutionary leader than a well-manicured symbol of one. His fatigues were clean and looked freshly pressed. His military belt was stocked with cell phones and a walkie talkie. Marcos again railed against the government and the harsh treatment of the proud Maya. He charged the government with committing "fraud against the people" and stealing the land. The crowd was energetic, but his speech did not command thousands of rural workers and indigenous people. While his appearance was significant, it appeared to represent the start of something in Yucatán rather than the apex. In the months following the Delegation Zero stop in Yucatán, the controversy over land sales, particularly in Hunucmá, only grew.

Ejidatarios opposing the land sales were working with a legal advisor, William Santos Sáenz, to contest the February 2005 assembly and fight the state's project. Santos Sáenz was an outsider, a resident of Mérida. But he aided the ejidatarios in pursuing a legal strategy within the new agrarian institutions and in building a movement against the sales. Many residents of Hunucmá opposed his involvement. They called him a "foreigner," "party-activist," and "Zapatista-operative." One ejidatario claimed that Santos had "a personal agenda…and was using the ejidatarios to gain national and international attention." While the exact nature of his connection to either the left-leaning PRD or the Zapatistas and Delegation Zero were never clear, his involvement was highly controversial.

Nevertheless, the grievances against the state over the February 2005 assembly led some ejidatarios to file a formal complaint with the agrarian tribunal, the judicial body responsible for agrarian matters. Working to nullify the land sales, Santos Sáenz filed papers with the agrarian tribunal on behalf of about one hundred ejidatarios in January of 2006 (Rodríguez 2006). They claimed that they were not paid a fair price for their land by Almazán Arteaga, and were entitled to more money. Further they pointed to what they saw as a number of inconsistencies during the sale process. The ejidatarios wanted the governor to pay them a fair price, or else nullify the deal and return the lands. One ejidatario working to over turn the land sales said he "wanted the false assembly to be found illegal and the land returned to the people." Several others echoed his concerns.

In March of 2006, the ejidatarios were faced with an upcoming election to select a new ejido president. Two challengers vied for power, Marcelino Mex Cauich and Juan

Antonio May Chay. Mex Cauich represented the side opposed to the land sales and was being advised and supported by Santos Sáenz. May Chay had voted to approve the land sales. Supporters of Mex Cauich accused May Chay of being hand-picked by the governor, aligned with the speculators, and receiving five thousand pesos as a bribe. A local resident claimed that, before the election, May Chay had gone to Mérida to get "instructions from the Governor" and was "directly connected to the government." In response, May Chay said he was "defamed in the press and there were protests in the streets over my being paid off by the government." He denied these claims and pursued legal challenges for the attack on his reputation.

As the election approached, tensions ran high. There were accusations that the governor was using state resources to interfere with the process and garner support for May Chay. One ejidatario noted that "There are statements from ejidatarios and their families who welcomed the official candidate [May Chay] into their homes, that he gave them support [money] for their vote in his favor this Sunday and offered more resources if he wins" (Be Palma and Chablé 2006). May Chay, previously seen riding an older bicycle, was seen days before the election in a brand new Nissan Tsuru automobile (Mis Cobá 2006a). He claimed he "won the lottery," and hadn't received any money from outsiders. He was also accused of being an intermediary between Almazán Arteaga and the ejidatarios, "offering them [the ejidatarios] money to sell their land."

On the day of the election, there were arguments in the streets over who was listed as an official ejidatario and thus had voting rights. Some argued that friends of Mex Cauich who were not ejidatarios were allowed to vote. May Chay said that the election

was fraudulent "because of who was allowed in the ejido assembly. There were irregularities in the list of names with non-ejidatarios on the list." He further stated that "some ejidatarios were denied access and could not vote." A skirmish erupted on the street on the main square outside of the ejido office involving supporters of the two candidates. Verbal exchanges and a minor shoving match between May Chay's sons and Mex Cauich's supporters occurred in the late afternoon. The local police stepped in to reduce the tensions and a period of calm followed as they waited for the votes to be counted. Ultimately, Mex Cauich won the election on by a vote of 238 to 188. The former president handed over power. (Mis Cobá 2006b)

After the election, many wondered how Mex Cauich would proceed. Supporters of Metrópolisur said they hoped the new ejido president would enter into a dialogue on the issue to peacefully resolve it. They expressed concern over the confrontational stance many ejidatarios had taken. Other ejidatarios pressed for resolution to the conflict, arguing for a more just compensation for the land and a cleaner, more transparent process. The new ejido president was quoted as saying "we are not against State development." We just want "respect for the rights of ejidatarios" and "a just price for the land". He immediately called for a "new dialogue to establish just prices" with the state. (Cob Chay 2006) Despite the conflicts leading up to the election, it appeared as though the new president was searching for a peaceful solution. Mex Cauich was not opposing the idea of selling land building Metrópolisur, simply the unfair process and low prices. He stated he was "not against the airport, just the process."

Even after victory in the election that was to serve as a kind of local referendum on the issue, the construction project was not dead. The ejidatarios wanted the governor to treat them with respect and talk with them. They wanted fair compensation believing they were under paid. This materialist claim is logical. Under the new regime, some people lost because they didn't know the monetary value of their land. So, they legally challenged the deal to get more compensation. Mex Cauich even admitted that "most people do not work the land" in Hunucmá. The jobs and economic development that a new airport could bring were still valuable to the new president. All he needed now was for the governor to meet with him and try to negotiate a compromise.

Yet the governor refused to negotiate with the ejido leadership, saying the land sales had already occurred. The governor's office repeatedly released statements noting they were "the legal owners of the land" and the deal was "irreversible".[4] Further, the agrarian agencies working with Hunucmá (PA and RAN) refused to acknowledge Mex Cauich as the legal victor. They argued that an agrarian official and a notary had to be present at the election for it to be legal. According to one agrarian official, the agrarian agencies (PA, RAN) considered the former president, who had resigned in September, to be the officially listed and recognized president of the ejido. They argued that Mex Cauich had not been legally elected and was thus not formally recognized. This point became highly contentious. Despite claims that the government was not recognizing the new election as valid, evidence existed that the government *was* recognizing Mex Cauich. A representative for the governor's office released a statement saying the change in ejido

[4] See, for example, Ucán Salazar (2006), Ferráez García (2006).

leadership would not interfere with the project as the government legally owned the ejido land (Ucán Salazar 2006). Implicitly, then, the governor's office signaled that it recognized the new leader. Further, newspaper accounts of the ejido assembly referred to agrarian officials who were present at the assembly and ran the election.

The failure to fully recognize Mex Cauich as the president angered many ejidatarios. Interviews with several ejidatarios after the election illustrated that they thought the process was fair and Mex Cauich had won. Even those ejidatarios who did not support Mex Cauich's stance on the land sales believed the process had been fair and held him as the legitimate president. One ejidatario said "the election was a clean and democratic process…Without a doubt, I think it is bad that the new president is against the airport project" (Diario de Yucatán 2006). Another ejidatario said the election was "transparent" and looked forward to working with the new president on the airport project "for the benefit that it will bring to the community" (Ibid). The ex-president, who had resigned over problems with the land transactions, even turned the key to the ejido office over to Mex Cauich.

Despite problems with the land sales and the controversy over the election, by and large the materialist claims of the ejidatarios, and the general goal of finding a way to bring jobs and economic development to Hunucmá, were at the forefront. Yet simultaneously many ejidatarios began to question the idea of selling land that belonged to them, land that was their patrimony. One ejidatario noted that the land was a patrimony "even after henequen ended, people still worked the land, it had value to them." When this man spoke of the land as a patrimony, his wife touched her heart, one of the few

emotional gestures made during the two hour interview. Another ejidatario invoked the land as a patrimony and said "what effects the ejido impacts thousands of other people who depend on the ejido land, other members of the family." The idea of the land as a patrimony was meaningful to many of the ejidatarios. One specifically noted that "there are many people who do not work the [ejido] land but have rights…and the ejidos must join forces where the patrimony of their children is being taken." Another community member, invoking similar themes of legacy and right, stated "the essence of the ejido is that everyone shares in the fruits, not owns the land."

The statements about the land as a legacy and right of families and the community are in some tension with the materialist claims of Mex Cauich and other ejidatarios. Several opponents to the land sales stated that their main concerns were over the unfair process and the low price paid. However, under the surface, there was also a clear sense of entitlement to the land, a kind of inalienable right. It was in these conversations about the land that we can begin to see the transformation of the materialist discourse as residents began to consider multiple values and meanings attached to the ejido.

Conflicts over government policies and the distribution of material resources were not new and the ejidatarios had historical legacies of mobilization to draw upon. The ejidatarios opposing the land sales progressively began to engage external actors, forming coalitions with other ejidatarios and political activists, including national campesino and indigenous organizations. In doing so, they utilized an old tactic from the henequen era: building a movement to counter the state by reaching out to other aggrieved parties. Historically, a shared social class position, as henequen ejidatarios, was central for

political mobilization. A materialist base, the common victims of corrupt land acquisition policies, would once again provide the link for members of the movement, but increasingly the movements aims were framed on cultural grounds. Involvement with external activists gradually introduced a new discourse to the ejidatarios of Hunucmá, one that stressed their common cultural identity as indigenous people. This discourse became fused with the existing materialist and processural claims, creating a sense of cultural unity among different actors.

Alliance-building and Cultural Re-framing

With the ejidatarios being blocked by the agrarian agencies and the government, they worked to keep their cause alive. They legally contested the institutional process of land tenure changes through the courts, but they also normatively challenged the economic outcomes by appealing to public opinion. They did this by appealing to the left-leaning newspaper, *Por Esto!*, for coverage of their cause, by staging protests at agrarian offices, and reaching out to other ejidos to form alliances. In building their movement, the ejidatarios also began to adopt a new discursive framing for the conflict. Influenced by external activists, such as Santos Sáenz, the leadership was increasingly exposed to an indigenous frame for their struggle, one that transcended the processural and material grievances they were making. Modifying this new language, the ejidatarios turned the external discourse into one that resonated with their local and historical experiences.

Por Esto! became a kind of unofficial voice for those opposed to the land sales. The newspaper regularly devoted space to the cause, often multiple pages to the situation in Hunucmá. At one point the ejidatarios even thanked the reporters for helping to keep their cause alive. In May of 2006 a reporter for the newspaper was detained by the authorities. Over the next several months, their offices were bombed three times. While a link between these incidents and the coverage of the controversy in Hunucmá was never officially proven, many residents in Hunucmá believed it was retribution from the governor. One ejidatario, part of the front for the defense of the land of Hunucmá, said he "was not surprised" and believed that "the repression of the government is carried out against any person who defends their rights" (López Quintal 2006a).

The ejidatarios themselves were becoming much more militant in their stance against the land sales. Increasingly they compared their own struggle to that in Atenco. The residents of Atenco, near Mexico City, successfully, and violently, blocked efforts by the federal government to use some of their land to build a new airport. Land from the ejido in Atenco and five other nearby ejidos was going to be used for the project. The community members who resisted in the protracted struggle with the government became known as "macheteros" because they carried large machetes during their protests and road blockages. In May of 2006 another confrontation with police broke out in Atenco. While not directly related to the airport project, residents of Atenco claimed police brutality hadn't waned and they were under attack from the government.

With stories about Atenco and the police brutality wide-spread, ejidatarios began to liken the two situations. Several ejidatarios said they "would block the construction"

and they would "be ready with our machetes" to confront the government. The window for negotiation over the land sales was rapidly closing and the ejidatarios seemed ready to take matters into their own hands if the governor began construction. Researching in May and June of 2006, I was advised by colleagues also interested in the situation to watch out for my own safety. They told me not to travel to Hunucmá from Mérida (where I was living) at night and to never travel alone. They feared the police were already watching my actions. They urged me to ensure that friends in Mérida always knew my schedule, so that if I failed to return home, they could try and find me. Finally, I was told that if the ejidatarios did take their machetes and confront the authorities, I should leave the area immediately. The actions and accusations of abuse in Atenco were on many people's minds.

The ejidatarios also increased their public protests. In June they staged one at the offices of the Attorney General for the Republic[5] in Mérida. People from Hunucmá and a nearby ejido of Oxcum, where land had also been purchased, denounced state authorities. Representatives from both ejidos filed a grievance against the governor, Almazán Arteaga, and the heads of the state-level RAN and PA. In their complaint they accused the four men of "criminal association, abuse of authority, improper conduct in public service, intimidation, [and] bribery" (Mis Cobá 2006c). The accusations pertained to the illegal ejido assemblies held in Hunucmá in February of 2005 and Oxcun in March of 2005, where land sales were approved.

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[5] *Procuraduría General de la República*

Aside from the legal strategy, the ejidatarios increasingly sought allies in their struggle. At the end of April Santos Sáenz, Mex Cauich, and other ejidatarios attended a conference, *El Campo en Crisis* (the Countryside in Crisis), hosted by the local Mérida chapter of the National Union of Autonomous Regional Farmers' Organizations.[6] During the first day of the conference, Mex Cauich and one of his supporters (an ejidatario from Hunucmá) sat in the audience while Santos explained the problems they were encountering. He argued that the state had acted inappropriately, paying little money to the ejidatarios and "betraying the goals of land reform and the Revolution". He argued that "the government had tipped some people off about a mega project and they had started to buy up all of the land around Hunucmá and Oxcum." He also noted that the newly elected leadership was not being recognized. His comments to the sympathetic audience were supplemented by others expounding on the unfair treatment of indigenous people in Yucatán.

Speakers from throughout the Yucatán drew attention to their specific problems, along with state and national trends. One noted that the government "treated the indigenous people with paternalism." Another criticized the government's land titling program. He said the ejido land "had no value before, and then after regularization it gets some value. What suddenly makes the land that seemingly had no value a valuable commodity for speculators?" He answered his own question. "Some land gets value because of government plans, like in Hunucmá where companies like Cemeto Maya will

[6] The *Unión Nacional de Organizaciones Regionales Campesinas Autónomas* or UNORCA is a confederation of about 280 indigenous and campesino organizations throughout Mexico. They were founded in 1985 and have state-wide chapters as well as a headquarters in Mexico City.

make money on the construction of the airport." Another speaker commented on how "the government was not respecting the Maya and other indigenous local customs and law." He said "the Mayan culture permeates everything in Yucatán... the Mayan people, the artisans in Chitchen Itza, and elsewhere, are not asking for work, but for respect and autonomy to rule themselves."

After the conference in Mérida, Mex Cauich and other representatives of Hunucmá attended the 4th Indigenous National Congress (CNI), also in May. The EZLN and CNI had called for the conference to highlight and combat the growing "war of conquest" and the "plunder and devastation" of the native land for 513 years (La Jornada 2006). During the height of national presidential campaigning, they hoped to draw attention to the forgotten people, the campesinos and indigenous people of Mexico, and their problems. Upon returning from the conference, Mex Cauich commented that "everywhere the story was the same." Indigenous people were suffering, at the hands of the government and with the new reforms.

After these conferences, ejidatarios from Hunucmá held a meeting with representatives from the nearby ejidos of Conkal and Dzelchac[7]. Mex Cauich began the meeting by saying "the problems that they had in Atenco we now have here." Representatives from each ejido shared their own stories. In each case, ejidatarios had experienced a similar problem, with the government buying up their land for little money. The ejidatarios created a Coalition for the Defense of Ejido Lands. They shared their experiences with the new property rights regime and land sales. In particular, they

[7] They were also working with representatives of the ejido in Oxcun.

discussed the low prices paid for their land and the profit the speculators made. The speakers stressed that they would have to work together to defend their land. As one ejidatario put it "the land is our patrimony, we have a right to it, and we cannot defend it alone. We must work together." They continued to argue that the state's land titling program was a fraud, designed by the government to deprive the ejidatarios of their land. An ejidatario criticized the outcome of the land titling, noting that "there are people with ejido land who do not even work it!" Another noted that "we do not need documents to prove ownership of the ejido, since we are part of it" (López Quintal 2006b).

When the PRD's presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador was in Yucatán during the second week of June 2006 campaigning, he met with Santos Sáenz, Mex Cauich and other ejidatarios to hear about the problems in Hunucmá. He promised to step in on behalf of the ejidatarios if he was elected. After that visit, a delegation of ejidatarios traveled to Mérida for López Obrador's campaign rally. They were there to support his candidacy, hoping he "would return their lands." The ejidatarios were now trying to draw national attention to their cause, hoping that if their candidate won, he would end the controversy. In doing so they were also resurrecting a strategy from the past.

When problems had arose with the government during the henequen era, ejidatarios from the henequen zone often worked together to press their claims, march on the state capital, and demand change. These tactics were now being re-deployed. But, unlike in the past, the institutional structure for such political mobilization no longer existed. In essence, they had to build a new organization and harness contacts in existing

civil society movements to mobilize. These shared experiences in interacting with the government and speculators were a source of commonality amongst the ejidatarios, a way to link their struggles.

In his analysis of the conflict, the advisor Santos Sáenz linked the situation in Hunucmá to historical struggles and invoked traditional Mayan ideas about umbilical connectedness. He said that "the great Maya people of the past were all linked together through an umbilical cord" which "connected the Maya cities" and formed "the source of their strength." He argued that "now the government wasn't respecting the indigenous rights of the Mayan *pueblo*". Since the government wouldn't approve the San Andres Accords[8] he said that the ejidatarios were not guaranteed "autonomy in decision-making based on local usos y costumbres". He said "local practices and customs are not respected by this government and foreign ideas are forced upon the people." Santos further argued that many of the institutional reforms in place such as the secret vote and other elements of government rules pertaining to the ejidos were based on "Western ideas and not the local traditions of the Maya." Citing Mayan prophecies, he argued that the movement in Yucatán against the land sales is part of a "change of conscience, one predicted to occur in 2012" in Maya history. For him, the ejidatarios were drawing on a cultural legacy of connectedness and inner strength to work together and overcome the unfair treatment they were once again receiving.

[8] The San Andres Accords were negotiated in 1996 as part of the peace process with the EZLN after the 1994 Zapatista uprising. The Accords called for a series of constitutional changes to respect and guarantee indigenous autonomy, but they were never fully adopted and implemented.

It seemed as though Santos, rather than the ejidatarios, invoked these Maya cultural themes in framing the conflict. In becoming an outspoken advisor for the ejidatarios opposed to the land sales and for the "legitimate" president, Santos Sáenz framed the land sales as part of an epic indigenous narrative, stretching back to the conquest and forward to the Zapatistas and the end of the Mayan calendar in 2012. The ejidatarios largely invoked material concerns and claimed the low price they received for the land and the corrupt process were the central issues. But Santos framed the struggle as part of a centuries old Maya conflict, against those who would take this land away. The ejidatarios did not reject his characterization. At several meetings they emphatically supported what he said, often nodding in agreement as he laid out his interpretation. But they did not use the same type of language in describing the situation. Increasingly many of the views Santos Sáenz espoused, and the experiences the ejidatarios heard about at state-wide and national conferences, were shifting their own language. A compromise with the governor on the land sales no longer seemed a viable option.

A gradual transformation was taking place as the ejidatarios began to link their views of the land in a framework that resonated with other indigenous people. As noted earlier, ejidatarios from Hunucmá invoked the idea that land was a patrimony, and inherited right that could not be taken away. They also began to say that the land was "given to the people and not individuals" to benefit the whole community. As such, many believed that all of the ejidatarios, "all sixteen hundred who have rights," should participate as they had in the past in assemblies.

In speaking about the right to land and participation of all members, the ejidatarios spoke about their traditional "usos y custumbres," usual and customary practices. Several elements of the pre-neoliberal reform operation of the ejido were being re-cast as customary practices. The emphasis on all members counting towards quorum and having a say was one such element. Another was the inalienability of the land, something they and their children were guaranteed. And the emphasis on having to live in the area and work the land to have agrarian rights directly conflicted with the new rules, which permitted ownership of land without that requirement. These elements were found in the pre-reform agrarian laws and are a largely a legacy of the Revolution; yet they were easily linked to an historical conception of indigenous practices constituting a local and Mayan identity.

The ejidatarios' conception of customary practices aligned more closely with their own ejido experience, but did not conflict with Santos' framing in Mayan historical terms. The practices that ejidatarios invoked in contesting the land sales fit within the narrative of respecting traditional practices of agrarian communities in Mexico. This national discourse, associated with the Zapatistas and the CNI, was being articulated in a local context, one which allowed the ejidatarios to link their struggles with those of indigenous people in Yucatán and throughout Mexico.

It was here that materialist and processural claims about the conflict began to take on cultural tone. The ejidatarios opposing the land sales were beginning to reframe their grievances as violations of past practices. In place of the class-based identity rooted in their economic role as henequen workers, new linkages were being formed. Struggles

against the government and private interests taking control of ejido lands were being used to forge coalitions in defense of the rights of indigenous people. As one ejidatario from Hunucmá put it, "As ejidatarios who eat pozole we should be united for the defense of our lands" (López Quintal 2006c). Pozole is a pre-Columbian stew the indigenous people made with maize. Invoking it in this context explicitly links the ejidatarios to a Mayan past and invokes them as people of the land and of maize.

Despite failing to annul the land sales through the agrarian tribunal and failing to have Mex Cauich recognized as the legitimate president of the ejido, many ejidatarios persisted in working against the land sales. About 150 people, including several of the movement's leaders in Hunucmá and representatives from other ejidos, peacefully marched on government offices with Santos Sáenz in mid-July of 2006. They were now aligned with the Popular Cultural Movement of Yucatán (MCP), an organization affiliated with the CNI and the Zapatistas, specifically part of the Other Campaign. The ejidatarios of Hunucmá were working with members of ejidos in Caucel and Oxcun to contest the unfair government practices. During the protest, 39 people were arrested in what was characterized as a violent assault on the peaceful activists. According to reports, those jailed were denied access to lawyers and many were forced to sign confessions. By August the conflict was turning more violent. Government workers were sent to Hunucmá to begin work on Metrópolisur. About 100 ejidatarios were also there to fight them, machetes in hand.

Ultimately the ejidatarios were successful. In 2007 a new Governor was elected, Ivonne Ortega Pacheco, a member of the PRI. She ended Metrópolisur and promised to

work with the ejidatarios to uphold their rights and autonomy, to respect them in decision-making about land. After two years of struggle, and with the PRI returning to power, it seemed as though the movement had succeeded. What had began as a series of materialist claims against the government ended with the revival of an indigenous identity unifying ejidatarios. They found a new basis for political mobilization, one that linked them nationally with a broader left-wing indigenous movement. In doing so the institutional disagreements became framed as violations of customary practices, a key goal of the Zapatista movement.

Conclusion

In 1937 the Hunucmá ejido was created as part of Cárdenas' populist vision. Throughout the post-Revolutionary years of henequen production, the state and federal government increasingly battled for control of the sector. Corruption and mismanagement often resulted in federal intervention and control, but henequen production and sales continued their downward spiral. To ensure a rural base of support, PRI administrations poured billions of pesos into the beleaguered sector to buy off dissent. Organized through the PRI's campesino wing and paid fixed and uniform wages by government-controlled agencies who directed henequen production, ejidatarios mobilized along social class lines. They were constructed by the state as a rural proletariat, but one that extracted concessions to maintain their loyalty.

When the neoliberal property rights reforms were implemented in Yucatán, this looked like a place where things might go smoothly. In Hunucmá, many ejidatarios were

no longer primarily employed on the land. The henequen industry had busted and the institutions that had led to organizing around a social class identity were gone. The ejidatarios were now scattered, working in maquiladoras on the peri-urban periphery or in Mérida. There was little resistance to the land titling program. But only a few years later conflict engulfed Hunucmá. Mid-wifed by corruption, the state's acquisition of land through intermediaries catalyzed a new social movement. Increasingly ejidatarios from Hunucmá found allies in other ejidos, as re-concentration of land in the expanding urban zone was becoming a widespread phenomenon. Cultural entrepreneurs used the scandal in Hunucmá to critique the neoliberal institutional transformation as a re-colonization process. With supporters in left-wing indigenous movements and peasant organizations, the ejidatarios appealed for public support and legally contested the process. Increasingly, the alliances they formed both locally and nationally highlighted the shared experiences of indigenous ejidatarios, victims of neoliberal reforms. Institutional and cultural legacies were recast and articulated with a broader peasant and indigenous movement aligned with the Zapatistas.

The coalition the ejidatarios formed and their movement against the development project was neither pre-ordained nor inevitable. The process itself was transformative and reveals the creativity of local actors. The land sales were initially challenged along material and processural grounds. But interactions with external actors, like Santos Sáenz, framed the grievances as a centuries old conflict between the Maya and their conquerors, usurping land that belonged to the people. These discourses became fused in Hunucmá. Ejidatarios re-interpreted their sense of patrimony, rules about voting rights,

and norms of membership derived from working the land as customary practices. They also revived and redeployed habits of mobilization and militancy. In short, the ejidatarios of Hunucmá creatively adapted existing, but often latent, cultural and institutional resources to successfully contest the new property rights regime.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSIONS

The cases of Maní and Hunucmá suggest the importance of cultural and identity construction processes through time and the ways that enduring bases of such regional identity constructs can become re-invigorated and reworked through new political and historical junctions. Ethnic identity was embedded in milpa production as performed on communal land in Maní. Population pressures, falling orange prices and a mobilization regional citrus-producers association should have sparked an indigenous movement to contest the neoliberal regime, according to structuralist logic. In Hunucmá, by contrast, state organization of the henequen sector pushed milpa production off the land and treated the ejidatarios as wage workers. The proletarianized ejidatarios of Hunucmá disengaged from the ejido when henequen production ended, and had every reason to abandon the old institutions of the ejido and old cultural practices of milpa and Mayaness. Read off of structure, one would have expected little resistance to neoliberal property reform in Hunucmá. Yet in that ejido, peasants remobilized against land sales and embedded their movement in national indigenous efforts. Structuralists cannot account for these outcomes because they ignore agency. The ejidatarios were creative and adaptive, making use of historically-situated cultural and institutional resources as they responded to the imposition of new rules and practices.

The big changes in Maní were actually quite small. A gradual evolution of land tenure and agrarian practices began in the 1960s with targeted state resources for local infrastructure development. Few participated at first. Then more did. The debt crisis and falling orange prices in the 1980s led many people to migrate and use remittances to support their families. This strategy proved valuable when the neoliberal reforms were enacted as it provided resources to buy land. In thinking about historical changes that impact future strategies, the rise in temporary migration became unexpectedly important in the neoliberal era.

The case of Maní also presents evidence of institutional blending, mixing old and new rules. The irrigated parcelas were a valuable legacy from the pre-neoliberal reform era. The new rules did not induce privatization of the individualized land in part because benefits of the past forms of economic organization. The institutional benefits of ejido association outweighed the potential benefits of privatization. Water rights were available through the irrigation units. And the transaction costs were lower for local land sales than for privatized sales.

Similarly, the existing milpa practice was not rejected, as communal land was maintained. Despite concerns over availability, community members can broadly access communal land for milpa production and as a source of firewood. The association of communal land and the milpa is crucial to understand this outcome. The milpa is embedded in ritual knowledge and Mayan ceremonies, part of local identity. Cultural identity, defined as practices, collective memory and rituals which link people and provide a common language and set of beliefs, operates as a resource here. It constrains

behavior, making complete individualization (or privatization) undesirable. But culture didn't trump commercial production on irrigated parcelas. The neoliberal ejido in Maní reflects both economic and cultural needs.

The neoliberal property rules produced insecurity over land availability, limiting the path to ejido membership and ending land redistribution. Manienses instrumentally acted to preserve access to land, buying parcelas. Yet many participated in the land market to fulfill a generational obligation to provide land. In doing so, they began to envision the irrigated parcelas as fulfilling patrimony, as opposed to a more generalized concept of "land." For some Manienses the definition of a cultural imperative – patrimony – was being transformed by the interaction, even as it was contested by actors who shared similar cultural orientations but divergent structural positions and interests.

In terms of neoliberal ejido reform in Mexico, the case study of Maní poses challenges. The reforms were designed to catalyze privatization of land and greater investment. However, ejidatarios may pursue a different route, using the new rules to preserve existing practices. As a catalyst for private investment, the ejido reform project of the 1990s may fail to produce the predicted outcomes.

In Hunucmá, prior experience in cross-ejido organizing in the 1960s and 1970s left legacies of alliance formation. When ejidatarios contested the land sales, they drew on these experiences, reached out to other ejidos, and engaged the national discourse and resources of the CNI and La Otra Campagña. As henequen wage workers, ejidatarios shared a social class position. Material grievances once again framed their outreach. They found other ejidos where land had been bought cheaply – and with questionable use of

the new institutional rules – and reached out on material lines. Repeatedly the ejidatarios from Hunucmá and their allies in other ejidos used the same line "a square meter of ejido land costs less than a coke" reflecting their material grievances.

The ejidatarios also used the new rules, legally contesting the land sales through the agrarian court and fielding a candidate in the ejido elections. Working with outside activists through campesino and indigenous networks, ejidatarios began to reframe their grievances. The process of land sales violated past practices of membership, participation, and rights. These concerns over the institutional process of ejido land sales were cast as attacks on usual and customary practices.

National indigenous organizations, which arose in the aftermath of the 1994 Zapatista rebellion, had been pursuing autonomy for agrarian communities, respect for *usos y costumbres* – usual and customary practices. After working with local and state-wide allies for months, representatives of the Hunucmá ejido attended the National Indigenous Conference (CNI). Upon returning they remarked that "everywhere it is the same." The institutional irregularities in the land sales were not only legally problematic, now they were violations of local practices, linked to cultural identity. Usual and customary practices of the past became a resource, one that pointed to historical cultural resources.

Prior to being organized as henequen wage workers, the Mayan peasants in Hunucmá struggled to claim hacienda land as their own. In a state relatively free of the large-scale violence that engulfed other parts of Mexico during the Revolution, the Maya in Hunucmá were mobilized and militant. Ethnic identity became latent during the

henequen era, as milpa production and Mayan ceremonies faded. But this identity could be re-invoked, linked to long-term oppression dating back to colonialism. When ejidatarios in Hunucmá found similar stories and new ways of framing their grievances, they could draw on a stock of past experiences to revive ethnic identity. The resurgence of ethnic identity in Hunucmá illustrates the impact of the Zapatista opening. Communities without a history of mobilization around indigenous identity might increasingly align with movements for local autonomy to contest unfair practices.

Mobilization around ethnic identity appears to be on the rise, not only in Mexico. Perhaps the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the dominance of neoliberal economic policies have made socioeconomic resistance an unsuccessful mobilizational strategy. Cultural resistance may be the most viable option for oppositional organizing. The switch to indigeneity as a frame for resistance could be conceived of as a clever use of mobilizational rhetoric in an anti-Marxian time. However, this view reduces ethnic identity, and other non-class based forms of identity mobilization, to an instrumentalist use by aggrieved parties. Why cultural identity becomes invoked in the process of resisting neoliberal reforms and how the process transforms local conceptions of identity must be empirically detailed.

In both cases ejidatarios creatively drew on institutional and cultural resources. They used elements of the new rules, drew on identity, and acted on material interests. In doing so, they produced unexpected outcomes – rule tinkering and cultural mobilization. The comparison of these two cases illustrates several important things about institutions in general, and neoliberal reforms in particular.

As an institution, the new property rules were subjected to contestation. In Hunucmá contestation was direct, as ejidatarios found the new rules violated practices and challenged their legitimacy. The situation was different in Maní. Ejidatarios tinkered with the new rules, blending elements of the past with the imposed reforms. They did not directly contest the validity of the neoliberal regime, but they also did not accept all elements of the reforms. A land market arose without privatization.

The property rights regime was composed of several pieces. Ejidatarios could appropriate elements they supported, while rejecting those they didn't. Rather than unified wholes that rise or fall as one, the neoliberal property rights regime was composed of elements that could be selectively used as they were adapted to local needs.

For neoliberal reformers, this comparison raises some fundamental issues. First, behavior will not always follow institutional changes. Actors are willful and creative, and can adapt imposed structures. Even behaviors that appear to conform to those intended, such as the land market in Maní, may actually arise for different reasons. Neoliberal institutions may be judged by the kinds of outcomes they produce. While the people in Hunucmá appeared to have accepted the new reforms, they ultimately contested the new rules. Perceptions of unfairness in outcomes can have unanticipated results. Rejection of neoliberal institutions can reactivate latent cultural identity and serve as the basis for mobilization. In both cases ethnic identity was a relevant factor. This suggests that the neoliberal emphasis on individual autonomy and freedom may be at odds with communal conceptions of how society is organized and what goals should prevail in economic decision-making.

APPENDIX

SELECT DATA SOURCES

Sources of archival data

Archivo General del Estado de Yucatán
Asuntos Agrarios
CORETT
INDEMAYA
Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, Geografía y Información (INEGI)
Procuraduría Agraria (PA)
Registro Agrario Nacional (RAN)

Agrarian Agency interviews

Asuntos Agrarios – Mérida, Yucatán
INEGI
Procuraduría Agraria – Mérida, Valladolid, Tekax
Registro Agrario Nacional – Mérida, Yucatán

Maní Demographic Categories

Age
- Young (18-30) – not married - 5
- Middle (30-59) – married, children at home - 20
- Older (60-?) – adult children, some with own families - 5

Rights-Holders & Land Use
- *Ejidatario* without a *parcela* - 6
- *Ejidatario* with a *parcela* - 2
- *Parcelario* (*parcela* but not an *ejidatario*) - 2
- *Campesino* (no *parcela*, no *ejidatario*, agricultural work) - 3
- Unknown or no agricultural work – 12

Biological Sex
- Female - 10
- Male – 20

Political Party
- PRI supporter - 2
- PAN supporter - 7
- PRD supporter - 2
- Unknown/Ambivalent - 19

Ejido Leadership Role
- Held Positions - 4
- No Official Positions in *Ejido* – 16
- Unknown - 10

Migration to U.S.
- Migrant - 8
- Non-migrant - 6
- Family member migrated - 17
- Unknown/Regional migration only - 16

Religion
- Leader (priest or hmen) - 3
- Participate in Maya rituals - 21
- No participation in rituals - 0
- Unknown participation - 9
- Catholic - 13
- Protestant - 1
- Unknown Affiliation - 16

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