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The Challenge of Trade Liberalization to Cultural Survival on the Southern Frontier of Mexico

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Mexico, once considered the most protectionist nation of major trading countries in the world, has reversed its policies of high tariffs and tightly controlled permits to import goods in the 1980s and 1990s. Responding in part to the demands of the International Monetary Fund to promote export-oriented production, remove barriers to imports, and release corporate controls over national lands and enterprises, Mexico's President de la Madrid reversed the earlier decision to stay out of GATT, resulting in a drop of average import tariffs from forty-five percent to nine percent. He sold hundreds of state enterprises, using the proceeds to pay off the foreign debt. As a result of the policies pursued during his administration from 1982 to 1988, privatizing nationalized industries where the best wages and benefits were secured, and reducing social welfare subsidies for food and transportation, real working class wages declined fifty-one percent, from forty percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to twenty-four percent in 1991, and unemployment increased to over twenty-three percent.¹

After winning a contested election in 1988, President Salinas de Gortari has embraced neoliberal policies that have allowed freer entry of foreign imports and encouraged export-oriented production even before the passage of the controversial North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). With the restructuring of the economy, Mexico has shifted to export oriented production.² Imports have increased from twelve to thirty billion dollars,

* Distinguished Professor of Anthropology, The City College of the City University of New York. I am indebted to George Collier, whose comments greatly assisted me in the final version of the paper. My research has benefitted from two summer field research teams supported by the National Science Foundation's Research Experience for Undergraduates grant, especially the work done by Luz Martin-del Campo, Robert Martinez, and Kathleen Sullivan. I am also grateful for assistance from the PSC CUNY Research Program for funds that enabled me to do the research for this paper.

1. Daniel Goldrich & David V. Carruthers, *Sustainable Development in Mexico? The International Politics of Crisis or Opportunity*, 19 *LATIN AM. PERSP.* 97, 101 (1992).

2. Nora Lustig, 1990 *Economic Crisis, Adjustment and Living Standards in Mexico*, 189 *WORLD DEVELOPMENT* 1325 (1990).

with U.S. non-oil trade increasing from \$1.2 billion in 1989 to \$2.1 billion in 1990.³

When the Mexican government held down the price of tortillas to feed thousands of people who migrated to the city, they succeeded in driving more rural inhabitants off the land.⁴ Now that this key piece of legislation in President Salinas' program is passed, it will accelerate this process. A corollary of cash crop promotion is the erosion of the subsistence base of rural populations as Mexico has become a net importer of basic foodstuffs.⁵ In the controversy before NAFTA's approval, speculation about its impact on the national economy envisioned the maquilization of Mexico, with low wage production enterprises in Mexico shipping goods free of tariff except for the value added by labor.⁶ Real wages of Mexican workers, which had plunged since 1982, going from forty percent of the GDP to twenty-four percent in 1991, are expected to rise with the influx of new industries and products, but this is expected to increase inequalities.⁷ The environmental disaster on the northern border with maquila plants polluting the air and water became a central focus in the negotiations over NAFTA, resulting in hurried efforts to reverse a half century of development programs that "have left [the northern border's] environment in a shambles."⁸ Salinas de Gortari's major political opponent, Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, points to these indices in his claim that the government fails to recognize the high social costs that are borne by the majority of the population with these new policies.⁹

Given the structure of control over communications, media, and government, the people who are the victims of environmental degradation are most often those who are blamed for it. As Leonard points out, the media often constructs an image of millions of poor people eking out a

3. *Mexico Beckons, Protectionists Quaver*, THE ECONOMIST, 20-26 Apr. 1991, at 24.

4. Richard A. Nuccio & Angelina M. Ornelas, *Mexico's Environment and the United States*, in, IN THE U.S. INTEREST: RESOURCES, GROWTH AND SECURITY IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD 34 (Janet Welsh Brown ed., 1990).

5. David Barkin, *The End to Food Self-Sufficiency in Mexico*, 14 LATIN AM. PERSP. 271, 271-72 (1987).

6. Sheldon Friedman, *NAFTA as Social Dumping*, CHALLENGE, Sept.-Oct. 1992, at 27, 27-28.

7. *Id.* at 28.

8. Stephen P. Mumme, *System Maintenance and Environmental Reform in Mexico*, 19 LATIN AM. PERSP. 123, 123 (1992).

9. Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, *Mexico: Political Freedom and Economic Development*, 24 REVIEW OF RADICAL POLITICAL ECONOMICS 104-08.

living by deforestation, when in fact the cause is in “deeply rooted political and administrative structures and economic incentives that induce the poor and not-so-poor to cut trees, abuse the earth’s soil, or cram into unhealthy living quarters.”¹⁰ The tendency to blame ancient systems of cultivation such as those loosely grouped under swidden or “slash and burn” cycles extends back to the decline of the Mayas in Middle America.¹¹ Recent evidence of irrigation and *chinampa* cultivation—“floating” gardens on lakes which provide highly fertile soil conditions—contradicts the assumption that the Mayas lacked intensive farming techniques.¹² Studies of contemporary Mayan farmers indicate that there are many levels of competence involved in what is called swidden cultivation, and careful control of heat in order to save precious trees and plants can even encourage secondary growth.¹³ Nahmad and Gonzales show the importance of a kinship and communally controlled production system using slash and burn techniques in ways that do not cause deterioration of the soils in the Yucatan.¹⁴ When these systems are undercut by wage labor paid by the task, workers are not rewarded for taking the time to save valuable plants and trees nor for attending to the fine points of burning that maximize the distribution of heat. As a result, knowledge of the local environment is lost and environmental degradation proceeds apace. New developments in organic gardening with intensive cultivation compatible with the human resources available in rural areas provide an alternative course in the agrarian economy.¹⁵

Only recently, as the Lacandon forest is threatened with destruction, have ethnologists begun to appreciate the considerable knowledge and understanding that *Lacandonos* utilize to perceive and act in their jungle environment in ways which once meant that they did not upset the fragile

10. H. Jeffrey Leonard, *Political and Economic Causes of Third World Environmental Degradation*, in *DIVESTING NATURE’S CAPITAL: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ENVIRONMENTAL ABUSE IN THE THIRD WORLD* 93, 103 (H. Jeffrey Leonard ed., 1985).

11. Ray T. Matheny & Deanne L. Gurr, *Ancient Hydraulic Techniques in the Chiapas Highlands*, 67(4) *AM. SCIENTIST* 441, 441 (1979).

12. *Id.*

13. Salomon Nahmod & Alvaro Gonzales, *Medio Ambiente y Tecnologías Entre los Mayas de Quintana Roo*, in *CONFERENCIA MEDIO AMBIENTE Y COMUNIDADES INDÍGENAS DEL SURESTE: PRACTICAS TRADICIONALES DE PRODUCCIÓN, RITUALES, Y MANEJO DE RESERVAS* (Rodolfo Uribe Inieta ed., 1988).

14. *Id.*

15. RONALD B. NIGH, *EVOLUTIONARY ECOLOGY OF MAYA AGRICULTURE IN HIGHLAND CHIAPAS, MEXICO* (1975) (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Stanford).

balance of nature and human interaction.¹⁶ Accustomed to moving throughout the jungle and living in small dispersed settlements in order to carry out cultivation without destroying large tracts of forest, the *Lacandones* are now subjected to pressures by the national government and missionaries to concentrate and stabilize their population in three large groups.¹⁷

This author shall argue that the most effective control over the predatory incursions of large, agro-industrial enterprises, oil exploration and refineries, and tourist meccas that are the principal cause for most of the current environmental deterioration, could be exercised by small plot cultivators and artisans who draw on centuries of experience and knowledge in their exploitation of resources. The incorporation of their knowledge of the local environment and their commitment to long term exploitation of it for future generations would ensure greater concern for its protection. Further, this author maintains that development plans that ignore the intelligent application of such traditions do so at the risk of creating dependency relations counterproductive to the reproduction of the society being developed. The forced migrations of rural dwellers disrupted from their communities in the last half century give evidence of the negative effects of past development that failed to take the subsistence needs of *campesinos* (small plot farmers) into consideration. The debasement of the labor of these uprooted *campesinos* on the plantations to which they migrate diminishes the intelligent application of knowledge to their tasks in the new environments. Yet Mayan colonizers in the Lacandon jungle have continued to practice techniques that preserve the resources of the forest. By focusing on the impact of the neoliberal policies on the indigenous populations of the state of Chiapas, those people most removed from the U.S.-Mexican border show the remarkable vitality of deep-rooted traditions of production that are a tribute to the effectiveness of culturally situated solutions to change.¹⁸

16. Marion Odilon Singer, *La Dominación de la Naturaleza*, in CONFERENCIA MEDIO AMBIENTE Y COMUNIDADES INDÍGENAS DEL SURESTE: PRÁCTICAS TRADICIONALES DE PRODUCCIÓN, RITUALES, Y MANEJO DE RESERVAS, *supra* note 13 at 19.

17. *Id.* at 20.

18. *Research Experience in Anthropology Program, Slash and Burn Agriculture in the Lacandon Rainforest*, NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION (Luz Martin-del Campo; directed by June Nash, 1991).

I. ENVIRONMENT AND CHANGES IN CULTIVATION IN CHIAPAS

Chiapas was long considered the most backward and isolated of Mexico's twenty states. This was the result of both neglect and planning: the infrastructure of roads, potable water, electricity and health services were rudimentary until recent decades, and education barely reached the level of literacy for the predominantly Indian population. When the government finally acted, it reinforced the subsistence-based production of Indian villages.¹⁹ The Constitution of 1917 established the Land Reform Act, granting *ejido* (communal lands), which provided the Indian communities with a collective base for pursuing small plot cultivation with limited surpluses. These "corporate communities" have provided much of the subsistence crops sold at government-controlled prices. In addition, since colonial days they have served as a labor reserve for nearby plantations. The policy of preserving and supporting indigenous culture was even more evident in the bilingual education program that not only promoted indigenous languages in the classroom but also created a progressive new cohort of Indian leaders among the bilingual teaching staff. Their impact in the contested terrain of political action brought about by neoliberal reforms will be discussed below.

The structure of semi-autonomous indigenous communities put in place by the colonial administration and restored after the erosion of their land base during the Porfiriato by the policies of the Cardenas period, is now threatened by the neoliberal policies of the Salinas de Gortari government.²⁰ The termination of national land available for *ejidos* means

19. Fabregas proposes that the government policies regarding the southern frontier have many parallels with colonial policies in Asia that preserved ancient systems of agriculture on its southeastern border as a fallback providing subsistence crops for indigenous populations when cash crop development failed. This "culture system" spelled out by the geographer Karl J. Peltzer in 1941 was, as Fabregas notes, later incorporated by Geertz in his conception of "agricultural involution". Rosa Luxemburg was one of the few marxists in the early decades of the twentieth century who recognized the importance of these subsistence-based "natural economies" to the advance of capitalist accumulation. She theorized that the loss of these retreat zones would precipitate the end of capitalism. See Andres Fabregas Puig, *La Antropología Social en la Frontera Sur*, in *LA ANTROPOLOGÍA EN MÉXICO: PANORAMA HISTÓRICA* (A. Fabregas Puig ed., 1988); ROSA LUXEMBURG, *THE ACCUMULATION OF CAPITAL* (1972); June Nash, *Global Integration and Subsistence Insecurity: An Anthropological Perspective*, 96 *AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGIST* (1992).

20. The liberal policies pursued by Porfirio Diaz during his presidency from 1871 to 1910 abolished corporate land holdings by indigenous communities, the church and the state, permitting their sale to large land owners. The 1917 Constitution made these lands available for communally owned plots or *ejidos* distributed to *campesinos*.

that the federal government cannot guarantee minimal subsistence plots to its growing population.²¹

The southern frontier exhibits a ferment of activity with over 23,000 Guatemalan exiles forming new communities along the border or settling within established Mexican communities in Chiapas.²² Thousands of colonists have been migrating into the track in the Lacandon forest. Colonization, along with lumbering, has reduced this rainforest from fifteen million hectares twenty-five years ago to one million hectares.²³ The ongoing exploration for oil by the Mexican Petroleum Company (PEMEX) in the Lacandon forest and in other areas of Chiapas presents a new threat to the indigenous control over land that was too marginal to interest predators in the past. The expected growth of populations predicated on the construction of oil facilities and oil-linked industries in Chiapas or the Yucatán may outstrip the ability of existing institutions and communities to absorb them.²⁴ The chaining of the powerful rivers of the area in dams for the production of hydroelectric energy now provides over half the power in the nation, yet the *campesinos* who inhabited the lands that were inundated by the dams are still left without compensation or alternative resources. Their protests have been met by military contingents that are now based in the region and exert a powerful counteraction to democratic processes of adjustment.

The problems of environmental and social adjustment attendant on development on the southern frontier appear insolvable. Yet those who emphasize the dismal side of development may be underestimating the ingenuity and vitality of the indigenous economic systems when given an opportunity to develop within their own logic of subsistence needs. Longitudinal ethnobotanical and ethnographic analyses provide the basis for rethinking the problem of ecological planning in ways that might better take advantage of the cultural store of knowledge among contemporary communities. Ethnobotanical and ecological studies²⁵ confirm the intimate

21. See *infra* at I.A.3.

22. 20 WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME J. 1 (1992).

23. See *supra* note 19.

24. Henry Bienen & H. Jeffrey Leonard, *Environment, Economic Growth and Distribution in the Third World*, in *DIVESTING NATURE'S CAPITAL: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ENVIRONMENTAL ABUSE IN THE THIRD WORLD* 51, 77 (H. Jeffrey Leonard ed., 1985).

25. See generally BRENT BERLIN et al., *LA HERBOLARIO MÉDICO TZETZAL-TZOTZIL EN LOS ALTOS DE CHIAPAS* (1991); GEORGE COLLIER, *FIELDS OF THE TZOTZIL: THE ECOLOGICAL BASES OF TRADITION IN HIGHLAND CHIAPAS* (1975); Soto Pinti et al., *Etnobotánica y Religión Entre los Chamulas*

understandings of plant and human occupation of local populations. Longitudinal studies of communities²⁶ show the careful balancing of resources and consumption based on long-range planning by *campesinos* who think in terms of future generations rather than present profits. Longitudinal studies by ethnologists working in highland Chiapas for over a quarter century indicate that *campesinos* in the indigenous communities are adept in transforming *milpa* (small plot corn cultivation) agriculture into more intensive economic production units with the use of purchased fertilizers and weed killers.²⁷ Artisans display a similar proclivity in taking advantage of new tourist markets.²⁸ Before predicting the doom of contemporary communities and cultures, one should take a careful look at their long history of confronting disastrous problems and somehow turning them into new survival rules. Observations based on ethnographic studies in Zinacantán,²⁹ Amatenango del Valle,³⁰ Oxchuc,³¹ Chenalho,³²

en los Altos de Chiapas, México, in CONFERENCIA MEDIO AMBIENTE Y COMUNIDADES INDÍGENAS DEL SURESTE: PRÁCTICAS TRADICIONALES DE PRODUCCIÓN, RITUALES, Y MANEJO DE RESERVAS, *supra* note 13, at 105-16; Nahmod & Gonzales, *supra* note 13; Daniel Zezumba & Pancino Sima, *Las Prácticas de Roza-tumba-quema en la Agricultura Maya-yucateca y su Papel en la Regeneración de la Selva*, in CONFERENCIA MEDIO AMBIENTE Y COMUNIDADES INDÍGENAS DEL SURESTE: PRÁCTICAS TRADICIONALES DE PRODUCCIÓN, RITUALES, Y MANEJO DE RESERVAS, *supra* note 13, at 84-104; George Collier, *Seeking Food and Seeking Money: Changing Productive Relations in a Highland Mexican Community*, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (1990); NIGH, *supra* note 15; Ronald B. Nigh & James D. Nations, *Tropical Rainforests*, 3 BULLETIN OF THE ATOMIC SCIENTIST 12 (1980).

26. See generally FRANK CANCIAN, *ECONOMICS AND PRESTIGE IN A MAYA COMMUNITY* (1965); FRANK CANCIAN, *CHANGE AND UNCERTAINTY IN A PEASANT ECONOMY* (1972); FRANK CANCIAN, *THE DECLINE OF COMMUNITY IN ZINACANTÁN: ECONOMY, PUBLIC LIFE AND SOCIAL STRATIFICATION, 1960-1987* (1992); GEORGE COLLIER, *FIELDS OF THE TZOTZIL*, *supra* note 25.

27. George Collier, *Energy Development and Transfer of Peasant Agriculture: An Unexpected Outcome of 'Dutch Disease.'* CONSORTIUM ON INTERNATIONAL EARTH SCIENCE INFORMATION NETWORK (1991).

28. See Christine Eber & Brenda Rosenbaum, *That We May Serve Beneath Your Hands and Feet: Women Weavers in Highland Chiapas, Mexico*, in CRAFTS IN THE WORLD MARKET 155, 159 (June Nash ed., 1993); June Nash, *Maya Household Production in the World Market: The Potters of Amatenango del Valle, Chiapas, Mexico*, *supra* at 127, 129.

29. See generally FRANK CANCIAN, *THE DECLINE OF COMMUNITY IN ZINACANTÁN: ECONOMY, PUBLIC LIFE AND SOCIAL STRATIFICATION, 1960-1987* (1992); EVON Z. VOGT, *ZINACANTÁN: A MAYAN COMMUNITY IN THE HIGHLANDS OF CHIAPAS* (1969); George Collier, *Peasant Politics and the Mexican State*, 3 MEXICAN STUD. 71, 85-86 (1987).

30. See generally JUNE NASH, *IN THE EYES OF THE ANCESTORS: BELIEF AND BEHAVIOR IN A MAYA COMMUNITY* (1970).

31. See generally, HENNING SIVERTS, *OXCHUC: UNA TRIBU MAYA DE MÉXICO* (1969); ALFONSO VILLA ROJAS, *ETNOGRAFIA TZELTAL DE CHIAPAS: MODALIDADES DE UNA COSMOVISIÓN PRÉHISPANICA* (1990).

32. See generally JACINTO ARIAS, *SAN PEDRO CHENALHO, ALGO DE SU HISTORIA, CUENTOS Y COSTUMBRES* (1985); CALIXTA GUITERAS HOLMES, *LOS PELIGROS DEL ALRIA: VISIÓN DEL MUNDO DE*

Bachajon,³³ Tojoloba,³⁴ and Chamula³⁵ indicate the importance of understanding the total social, political, and economic context in which production takes place. Rituals that order the production cycle; gender, kin and neighborhood relations that ensure the exchange of labor when it is needed and that the labor force is knowledgeable in the particular environment in which it is rendered; and traditions that ensure the redistribution of basic resources are as essential in maintaining the reproductive cycle of land and society as are credit, technology, and new inputs.

The longitudinal view of the anthropologists who have done successive studies in the same village, or who follow in the footsteps of earlier pioneers, indicates the ongoing adaptations of indigenous people that, when ignored by development agents, contribute to environmental disaster. The accelerated change in the wake of neoliberal policies promoting international trade and movement of people presents new problems that shake the basis for past adjustments. These changing conditions involve: first, access to land; second, access to political power to realize their goals; third, adjustment to an increasingly commoditized economy in an expanding global market; and fourth, adjustment to interethnic diversity in the pluricultural environments to which they have been forced to migrate.

In the pluricultural environments in which Mayas are adapting, each community, in accord with past traditions, has found a distinctive mode of response to each of these dilemmas. The new communities that have been formed by colonization of the jungle or expulsions because of protestantism from traditional communities, are facing some of the same problems brought about by sixteenth century colonization when the *reducciones* (concentration of populations) brought together indigenous groups of disparate languages and cultural practices. New solutions are being tested and worked out in these novel settings.

UN TZOTZIL (1985).

33. ALAIN BRETON, BACHAJÓN: ORGANIZACIÓN SOCIOTERRITORIAL DE UNA COMUNIDAD TZELTAL (Instituto Nacional Indegenista No. 68, 1984).

34. LOS LEGÍTIMOS HOMBRES: APROXIMACIÓN ANTROPOLOGICA AL GRUPO TOJOLOBA (Mario Humberto Ruz ed., 1981).

35. *See generally*, GARY H. GOSSEN, CHAMULAS IN THE WORLD OF THE SUN, (1974); ENRIQUE PEREZ LOPEZ, CHAMULA: UN PUEBLO INDÍGENA TZOTZIL (1990); RICARDO POZAS, CHAMULA: UN PUEBLO INDIO DE LOS ALTOS DE CHIAPAS (1959).

A. Access to Land

Population increases combined with competition from agro-industrial and oil interests have severely reduced the land available for subsistence cultivation. The limited *ejido* land in highland Maya communities, which was never adequate to sustain the growth in population, is further depleted by the aggrandizement of *caciques* (indigenous leaders who are intermediaries with dominant societies) within the communities themselves.³⁶ This depletion of land has threatened the system of land inheritance and subsequently the labor service of young people to their parents that was contingent upon this inheritance, as we shall see in reviewing case studies.

Four kinds of properties are recognized by the highland indigenous community: privately owned house plots and agricultural land, farmland granted by the township under nineteenth century land law referred to as "communal," *ejido* land which was established by the revolutionary constitution of 1917 granting lands that had been seized by large landholders during the Porfirio Diaz government to the townships in which they were located, and national territory which has not as yet been converted into *ejidos* and which has been the prime area for colonization.³⁷ Each type of land is treated differently within the communities in which they are located, and distinctions exist in land holding patterns from one community to another since they are the product of distinct historical processes experienced by each locality. In their day-to-day operations, local courts adjudicate cases in accord with local custom, evading contradictory national laws.

1. House Lots and Privately Owned Land

Women are as likely, or in some townships preferred to, men to inherit house lots, particularly when a woman is unmarried or divorced. In patrilineal household structures, as in Zinacantán, this occurs by default when a woman is left without resources by the divorced spouse; while in

36. George A. Collier et al., *Peasant Agriculture and Global Change: A Maya Response to Energy Development in Southeastern Mexico* (unpublished manuscript on file with author).

37. Compare COLLIER, *FIELDS OF THE TZOTZIL*, *supra* note 25, for a discussion of land ownership patterns and the acquisition of *ejido* lands.

Amatenango it is as often left to a daughter as to the youngest son, (called *kosh*, "the last one") since women are most often the ones to care for parents in their old age.

Traditional rules regarding inheritance and sale are often violated both in patrilineal inheriting communities such as Zinacantán and Oxchuc or in bilaterally inheriting communities such as Amatenango del Valle and Chamula, since the particular needs of each family member are taken into account. In Zinacantán, redistribution of privately owned land occurs ideally within the patrilineage where these still exist, and children whose mother separated from their father would have no access to private lands.³⁸ Yet one third of the plots censused in Apas, a hamlet of Zinacantán, were owned by women either because of the lack of male heirs or held in trust for children of a deceased husband.³⁹ Other claims on the basis of *compadrazgo* (grandparenthood) can be made by those with little land who are able to "borrow" lands without rent.

In the twenty years since Collier's initial survey of land, the ownership in Zinacantán has shifted from older to younger men. In 1967, fifty-six percent was in the hands of men over forty-five years of age and thirty-five percent was held by men aged twenty-five to forty-four⁴⁰ years of age. In 1989 elder Zinacantecs controlled only forty-four percent of the land and men from twenty-five to forty-four hold forty-nine percent. As Collier reflects, the change indicates the greater economic independence of younger men and the loss of control by elders over the value produced by their offspring.⁴⁰ The greater opportunities in commercial enterprises release younger men from the dependency relations of patrilineal inheritance. This is equally true in the bilateral inheritance community of Amatenango, where trucking and wage work have expanded wage earning activities for younger men and they are no longer dependent on their parents for inheritance.

Traditional rules regarding inheritance and sale are violated in bilateral as well as patrilineal towns since the particular needs of each family member are taken into account. In Bachajón land belongs to the descendants of the lineage that cut the trees and brought the land into

38. GEORGE COLLIER, *FIELDS OF THE TZOTZIL*, *supra* note 25, at 99-105.

39. *Id.* at 102.

40. George Collier, *Would Raising the Price of Corn Aid Zinacantec Peasant Producers? A Study of Changing Productive Relations* (1990) (manuscript prepared for United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Morelos, Mexico).

cultivation the first time. Those who lacked land during Breton's stay in the seventies migrated into the Lacandon jungle to open up colonies.⁴¹ Litigation is frequently undertaken, involving lengthy and costly settlements, sometimes even forcing the sale of the disputed lands. The amount of privately owned land held by each family is diminishing in the indigenous communities because of population increase and sales, usually under duress. In the interim between censuses done in Amatenango del Valle from 1957 to 1964, this author found that 89 families had less land than at the earlier date, while seventy-two had the same amount, and forty-four had acquired more land.⁴² Increasing populations and polarization of wealth account for some of the changes in this period, but the *ejido* lands balanced the wealth gradations. In 1967 no household was without some form of land holding and only fourteen of the 299 households for which data were available in the 1964 census had five or more parcels; forty-seven percent had only *ejido* land and the rest had both inherited and purchased land as well as *ejido*.⁴³ By 1987, twenty-four households had no land of any kind, eighty-nine had *ejido* land only, eight-three had only purchased lands and 121 had both purchased and *ejido* land.

As *ejido* lands are reduced and the prospects of colonization become more remote, people are turning to private land ownership more frequently than ever. During the 1980s it was common for groups of ten or more household heads to cooperate to buy land in common and divide up parcels among themselves, and in 1988 the town purchased a tract of fertile irrigated land from a former large estate with funds contributed by household heads in the community. This kind of collective effort went into the colonization of *terrenos nacionales* (lands belonging to the Mexican nation) in the 1960s. However, the rights of those who had contributed cash for the purchase came into conflict with those who expected to receive equal shares by virtue of membership in the community even when they had not contributed. The case was being adjudicated by the new office of the Agrarian Tribunal instituted in 1992 after passage of Article twenty-seven allowing private sale of *ejido* land as this author was writing this paper in April 1993.

41. BRETON, *supra* note 33, at 91-92.

42. NASH, *supra* note 30, at 30.

43. *Id.* at 31.

2. Communal Farm and Pasture Lands

Communal lands recognized in the original allotments of townships during the sixteenth century were assigned on the basis of proximity and the absence of Spanish and *ladino* (people who took on the culture of Europeans including the Spanish language and “western” clothing) settlers. Except for Ocosingo, which had suffered the consequences of the development of great *haciendas*, the communal land occupied by the northern Tzeltals had not been depleted in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁴⁴ It was not until the nineteenth century when communal lands in Ocosingo, the department in which Bachajón is located, were made available for sale that the region was inundated with *ladinos*, resulting in indebtedness and the extension of cultivation into the hills, stripping them of forests.⁴⁵ Although Bachajón retained most of its original communal lands because of the difficulty of access limiting its exploitation, the community was still attempting to regain lands which had been expropriated thirty years after the *ejido* reform. Chamula also lacked fertile lands that might otherwise have attracted *ladino* expropriators, and for them the *ejido* was an affirmation of their rights to communal lands.

3. Ejido Land

The greatest threat facing the indigenous communities today is the private sale of *ejido* land that once provided every family with a basic plot of land on which to grow subsistence crops. These lands were acquired during the 1930s when the Land Reform Act of 1917 was put into action expropriating large landowners in the south of Mexico. Each community benefited separately from the seizure of private estates within their boundaries. In Amatenango del Valle, the wage workers on the estates within the township initiated the land seizures in 1937 when they learned about the passage of the Land Reform Act two decades earlier. They burned the *villas* of the landowner who occupied the farmland. Only later did the town officials step in to legitimize the claims, and when the original squatters attempted to buy houselots in the town center they were evicted by the Amatenangueros who treated them as aliens, seizing their land and

44. BRETON, *supra* note 33.

45. *Id.* at 85.

animals.⁴⁶ Each male head of household received two hectare sized parcels which were then passed on to his male heir. Widows are able to hold on to plots assigned to their husbands if they have children old enough to work them. In Zinacantán, where lineage patterns establish inheritance to all males, *ejidatarios* are supposed to follow the rule of single inheritors, but they often violate the rule which goes against their own inheritance customs and divide their parcel among all their sons.⁴⁷

Often criticized because of the conservative effect collective land holdings have had on agricultural practices, the net effect of land reform has to be assessed in terms of its overall effect on nutrition, standards of living, and political engagement.⁴⁸ With *ejido* lands, migration to the plantations for wage work was no longer mandatory for young men,⁴⁹ although they continued to resort to wage work for cargo and betrothal expenses. Semi-subsistence farmers were released from the haunting fear of famine that is remembered from the early decades of the twentieth century. But the land reform also subordinated the peasantry to national State regimes, as Collier shows,⁵⁰ segmenting Indian communities from one another and from the larger agrarian working class as they coopted local-level peasant leaders who might otherwise have objected to the State promotion of agro-industrial interests contrary to the subsistence sector. Furthermore, it deterred the potential for larger-scale, more capitalized ventures by individualizing and fragmenting land holdings. The passage in 1992 of the "reform of the Agrarian Reform law," Article 27 of the 1917 Constitution has opened the *ejido* lands to a market economy. Some of the compromises reached in the negotiations over passage of the reforms resulted in phrasing that assured greater local control exercised by the *ejido* commissions. As of June, 1993 this author was told by the Agrarian Solicitor's Office that no sales had taken place in the highland indigenous villages. Yet indigenous leaders, on the basis of centuries of experience and knowledge of the practices of the State, have learned to be cautious of such guarantees.

46. NASH, *supra* note 30, at 73.

47. COLLIER, *FIELDS OF THE TZOTZIL supra* note 25, at 97.

48. Moises T. de la Pena, *Tuxtla Guitierrez, Chiapas: Departamento de Prensa y Turismo Sección Autográfico*, 1 CHIAPAS ECONÓMICA 327 (1951).

49. NASH, *supra* note 30, at 73.

50. See George Collier, *Peasant Politics and the Mexican State*, 3 MEXICAN STUDIES 71 (1987); George Collier, *The New Politics of Exclusion* (1990) (unpublished manuscript, on file at Centro de Investigaciones Ecológicas del Sur).

Enrique Perez Lopez, a Tzotzil of Chenalho, comments that the protection does not extend to *ejido* property which is exploited with a third party in an association established in terms of Article 100 of the New Laws. In case these ventures fail, the property can be permanently alienated. This caution was reiterated throughout the negotiations between the rebels and government representatives in the weeks of negotiation following the uprising.

The high cultural preference for independent production of corn and beans in domestic units is made possible by artisan production that provides immediate cash returns. This has been an ancient strategy in Amatenango del Valle⁵¹ where almost every woman makes pottery for sale as well as home use. It has become an important alternative for towns such as Zinacantán, Chamula,⁵² and Tenejapa, where the sale of textiles formerly restricted to domestic consumption has become an important source of earnings for most households. Investments in herbicides and fertilizers make it possible to cultivate continuously on limited lands without allowing for fallow. This adaptation has made it possible for Zinacanteco farmers to remain in their hamlets where "they have wrested resources from their own regional economy to reinvest in reinvigoration of small plot cultivation."⁵³ Collier predicts that if these *ejido* lands are eliminated in the state it would rule out the motivation to persist in small plot cultivation, with the inevitable outcome being an increase in migration to the cities that would impose additional burdens on the urban economy.

4. Colonized Lands

Colonies are cut out of *terrenos nacionales* to provide more land. Colonization has been a continuous process of fissioning off from established communities or as retreat zones from the arduous demands of Spanish settlers since the sixteenth century, and the Lacandon jungle has served as a retreat zone for settlers. Jan de Vos argues that the Lacandon themselves did not penetrate the jungle until they were forced to leave their more amenable lake habitat Lacam-Tun by the Spaniards at the end of the

51. See Nash, *supra* note 28, at 127.

52. Eber and Rosenbaum, *supra* note 28, at 155.

53. George Collier, *Mesoamerican Anthropology: Between Production and Hegemony*, 26 *LATIN AM. RES. REV.* 203 (1991).

sixteenth century.⁵⁴ During the 1960s and 1970s every new road that was constructed by lumbering and oil exploration stimulated the settlement of colonies by *campesinos* from the highland communities. These roads became the arteries for the flow of settlers.

Competition for the lands opened up for settlement can be intense, especially in the more desirable agricultural areas in hot country which provides continuous cultivation activities throughout the year. In Amatenango the two groups that organized to take over land in San Caralampio came to blows with the end result of a homicide on both sides in 1967.⁵⁵ In the colonies settled by families from Bachajón the original "pioneers" set the fiesta pattern and dominated political life, in a form which Breton calls *caciquismo* (government by native leaders favored for carrying out the will of the dominant class).⁵⁶ When the colony acquires twenty male heads of households they may legally petition for an *ejido* allotment.

Today the contest for colonies is expressed in religious terms as Protestants, often those who have been forced into exile, vie with Catholics who have moved because of population pressures and landlessness. Amatenango colonizers of both Protestant and Catholic faiths lived in peace for over a decade until the renegotiation of the *ejido* allotments in 1990. Then the Catholics, an older group of landless settlers whose sons were now of age to cultivate, demanded allotment on the basis of age criteria while the younger Protestants who had immature sons preferred to limit the allotments to those heads of households who had settled the land. The Protestants were expelled and set up a tent settlement on the side of the road to Venustiano Carranza until the dispute was settled.

Many of the new colonies, such as Betania on the Pan American highway between San Cristóbal de las Casas and Teopisca, are formed exclusively by Protestants who buy tracts of land, on which they build their church and houses, in the rocky forested lands along the Pan American highway. These inferior soils cannot provide an agricultural base for the communities which often turn to commodity production of charcoal, truck crops and artisan products. Over fifteen thousand Chamulans expelled from their township have been forced into exile in the urban barrios of San

54. JAN DE VOS, *LA PAZ DE DIOS Y DEL REY: LA CONQUISTA DE LA SELVA LACANDONA 1525-1821* (1980).

55. NASH, *supra* note 30, at 74-76.

56. BRETON, *supra* note 33, at 96.

Cristóbal de las Casas. The strategy of expulsions by the ruling *caciques* is condoned by the state and federal government since the *caciques* deliver the vote to the PRI.

Migration upsets the sense of living in a sacred environment.⁵⁷ The belief that they are “watched over by the ancestors,” (*ta sit me'tiktatik*) as every prayer in ritual celebrations in Amatenango reminds participants and conduces behavior respectful of the land, the mountains, the water and the sky.⁵⁸ The social obligation to preserve in trust these resources for one's children and grandchildren is evoked in every household celebration. To sell land or to treat it (or the crops that are produced) negligently bears strong social sanctions. The “inner souls” in the ear and “heart” of each kernel of corn are treated with care in order to ensure that they will not wander.⁵⁹ Corn is the flesh of humans that gives it substance and resistance to disintegration.⁶⁰ Tales of past apocalypses provoked by the failure of humans to care for their resources are prevalent in the southern frontier,⁶¹ and the ongoing eruptions of volcanoes (the last great eruption was in 1981 and provoked a good deal of speculation about the end of the world) remind people of the threat they encounter if they should ignore the warnings. These attitudes are threatened by the forced mobility and exploitative wage work forced upon rural people alienated from their lands.

B. Access to Political Power

The isolation of Chiapas and the separatist tendencies of the *caudillos* (armed strongmen) who controlled the major enterprises of coffee cultivation and commercial outlets of San Cristóbal contributed to the politics of caciquism that are evident even to this day. Resistance to the *Reforma Agraria* delayed the apportionment of lands controlled by feudal landowners for over a decade after its passage in 1927.⁶² The survival of corporate

57. JACINTO ARIAS, SAN PEDRO CHENALHO, ALGO DE SU HISTORIA, CUENTOS Y COSTUMBRES (1985); VOGT, *supra* note 29.

58. NASH, *supra* note 30.

59. Vogt was astounded to see one of the Zinacantecos, riding in the Land Rover he was driving, lap up atole spilled on the muddy floor as they took off. I have seen women of Amatenango pick up with almost reverent care kernels of corn spilled by a child, and check under stools and mats to ensure that each one is retrieved. VOGT, *supra* note 29, at 35.

60. Mario Humberto Ruz, *En Torno a los Orígenes*, in LOS LEGÍTIMOS HOMBRES, *supra* note 34.

61. LOS LEGÍTIMOS HOMBRES, *supra* note 34.

62. Antonio García de León, *Lucha de Clases y Poder Político en Chiapas* (unpublished

communities as viable economic units for the reproduction of indigenous society depended on a hinterland to which the people could escape when conditions became intolerable. The history of highland communities exhibits continual internal migrations in search of land or wage work. In some cases the move led to the disappearance of whole dialects.⁶³ Breton notes frequent desertions of the town center as a means of defense against excessive tribute during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the demands of government and revolutionary groups in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁶⁴ Summarizing the review of these cycles of dispersion, Breton says:

Pueblo and territory are two distinct spaces: while the second offers security over land, the breast (*seno*) of the domestic groups and the lineages, the *pueblo* remains as a creation, and in a way an "antenna" of the colonial administration, in which it exercised economic, social and political oppression.⁶⁵

Protest movements for the revindication of land have increased throughout the 1970s and 1980s. *Campesino* organizations have increasingly emphasized autochthonous identification. Organizations such as *Kiptitcka Lecubtezal* include *Tzeltales*, *Choles*, *Tojolobales*, and *Tzotziles* who have tried to gain lands, while the *Central Independiente de Obreros Agrícolas y Campesinos* (CIOAC), the *Organización de Campesinos Emiliano Zapata* (OCEZ), *Alianza Nacional Campesina Indígena Emiliano Zapata* (ANCIEZ), and the *Organización Indígena de los Altos de Chiapas* (ORIACH) extend their activities beyond peasant claims for land to achieve objectives of rural and urban wage laborers. In a recent march to the state capital Tuxtla Gutierrez,⁶⁶ these combined groups demanded the continuation of land redivision and the cessation of hostile confrontations with the army and recognition of human rights. Claims by the Bishop's Commission on Human Rights that the army tortured *campesinos*

manuscript, on file at Centro de Investigaciones Ecológicas del Sur, Tuxtla Gutierrez).

63. Edward E. Calnek, *Los Pueblos Indígenos de las Tierras Altas*, in ENSAYOS DE ANTROPOLOGÍA EN LA ZONA CENTRAL DE CHIAPAS (Norman A. McQuown et al. eds., 1989); BRETON, *supra* note 33, at 204.

64. BRETON, *supra* note 33 at 204.

65. *Id.*

66. *El Tiempo* 20 de abril 1993, No. 1967.

apprehended in one of their protests resulting in the death of two have increased the tension in the area and led to the armed uprising of the Zapatista National Liberation Army on December 31, 1993.

The experience of the colony called Marques de Comillas in the Department of Ocosingo encompasses most of the problems affecting the environment in the frontier region. Located in the Montanas de Oriente on the banks of the Usumacinta river, four *ejido* plots were cut out of the jungle in 1963. Hemmed in by the grant to the Lacandon and the Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve, new immigrants are encroaching on colonies established before 1972, the year in which they received their first grant of land. The *ejido* lands are the last zone of the forest to become colonized. The region now includes Choles, Zoques, Nahuas, Chinantecos, Tojolobales, Tzeltales, and Tzotziles along with *mestizos* (people of mixed indigenous and ladino parents) and *ladinos* who have settled in the *ejido* lands.

The lack of clear policies regarding the exploitation of forest and other natural resources aggravates the political conflicts that have ensued in the Lacandon jungle. Contradictory aims are pursued in the colonies settled by indigenous inhabitants and those where *mestizo* settlers predominate. Arturo Coutino Ferrera⁶⁷ indicates that in the former case, where Indians have settled in Flor de Cacao and Nueva Union, they show a strict respect for the forest reserves, while in the latter settlements *mestizos* are cutting the forest with motor saws for commercial sales or burning woodlands for cattle *fincas* (plantation). The presence of PEMEX has upset the colonizers' attempts to pursue their ends in this highly contested area. Road construction has cut off some inhabitants whose access roads have been obliterated by the machinery for new lines. The high wages for PEMEX employees distorts market prices for local settlers. As a result of these encounters, the colony became embroiled in a conflict with the state in 1991.⁶⁸

Throughout the 1980s colonization was increasingly resorted to as demands for land outstripped available resources in the *municipios*. As these became permanent settlements, they no longer offered the escape valve for fragmenting groups. The colonizers are receiving very little support from the national government except that offered by the *Instituto Nacional Indigenista*. Their projects include fruit culture, sugar refining mills, coffee

67. M. Arturo Ferrera, *Incendios Forestales, Conflictos Agrarios, Colonización Sin Freno y Atosigamiento de PEMEX*, 1 PERFIL, Nov.-Dec. 1987, at 5, 22-23.

68. C. Pohlenz, *La Selva Lacandona*, 1 PERFIL, Nov.-Dec. 1987, at 5, 24-25.

drying platforms, fertilization, mechanization of agriculture, health and technical assistance for the cattle herders. Their health agents are vaccinating settlers against the tuberculosis contagion in the area, but medical attention is sporadic. These settlers could establish a balanced relationship with the remaining forest land if the existing programs could be reinforced. They would provide important points of resistance to the depredation of commercialized exploitation by lumber and oil interests who take without consideration of the future.

The contradictions inherent in government policies led to the combined protest of hundreds of the colonizers in 1991. For example, the government ruled that trees could be cut but not sold for their lumber; when colonizers cut down the trees to plant their crops government trucks arrived without any forewarning, loaded the wood, and carried it off to sell. The many distinct groups colonizing the area objected, and over 150 men, women and children began a march to Mexico to protest the corruption of the government. They were met by over 700 military troops, now stationed in the area, and men, women and children were imprisoned in Palenque and Tuxtla and remained incommunicado for several days without the food offered by relief agencies that are allowed to enter. The fortuitous meeting of a United Nations group in Mexico at the time of the jailing led to a UN declaration calling for their release. Even after this experience, the same group formed several months later to protest the government's failure to uphold the terms of their agreement.⁶⁹

The political potential of these communities has been demonstrated in such protest actions. Despite the diversity of cultural groups in this new setting, they have shown a greater ability to coordinate political action than the corporate communities they left behind.⁷⁰ Tejera explains this on the basis that the corporate structure of the communities has become an exploitative mechanism whereby older elites, in the name of tradition, expel compatriots who they claim are subverting the customs of the community.⁷¹ This civil religious hierarchy, in addition to playing an overt role in the

69. June Nash & Kathleen Sullivan, *Return to Porfirismo*, CULTURAL SURVIVAL Q., SPRING 1992 at 13.

70. Nash & Sullivan, *supra* note 69, at 13.

71. HECTOR TEJERA, *Identidad y Lucha Política en los Altos de Chiapas*, 35 NUEVA ANTROPOLOGÍA X, 39, 39 (1989).

cohesion of the community, is the key to the mechanism of accumulation within a small cohort of commercial middlemen, truckers and *caciques*.

This is manifestly the case in Chamula, where massive expulsions of more than 15,000 members were carried out on the charge that they were protestants in the past decade, a small group of *caciques* pretend to retain ethnic culture intact while seizing the lands and goods of their countrymen. The involution of the political struggle in Chamula and other such established communities involves a class struggle masked as religious purification. Frequently the targets of the repression are poorer members of the community who have protested the control by the *caciques* or the new groups associated with the administration of the community. During the 1980s, PRODESCH, the government sponsored Socioeconomic Development Programs for Chiapas. These programs coopted many of the enterprising men of the indigenous communities through the financing of large-scale projects that reinforced and in some cases created the *cacicazgos* operating in the towns.

In Amatenango, a group of bilingual teachers who were Indians from other communities opposed the local *cacicazgo* made up of the men in an extended family, members of which had taken advantage of the funds coming into the town through PRODESCH to enrich themselves, buying trucks and expanding their commercial activities. When the woman who served as president of the cooperative of potters ran for mayor against one of the family members, she charged him with embezzling town funds, and during the campaign she was killed. The bilingual teachers protested, mobilizing to select another candidate who also was murdered before the election was over. The teachers have attempted to bring the suspect to justice, but he fled town and his father was jailed for a few days. The case has not as yet been resolved.

While wage workers in the *fincas* express their protests in a much greater arena than the members of the corporate communities, the character of the struggle is more restricted than in the states of Morelos and Guerrero to the North.⁷² Fernandez Ortiz has perhaps the best explanation for this phenomenon: the *campesinos* working in the *fincas* of Chiapas are for the most part tied to small plots which are not sufficient for their subsistence needs.⁷³ The Chamulas who go to work in the coast continue to be

72. *Id.* at 49.

73. LUIS M. FERNANDEZ ORTIZ, *Economía Campesina y Agricultura Capitalista: Notas Sobre*

citizens of Chamula,⁷⁴ often carrying out offices in the civil religious hierarchy. Much of the exploitation of the Chiapas farmer occurs through the pricing mechanism whereby the government maintains subsistence foods at a low price. In his occasional entries into the wage market he does not have the long range commitment to proletariat status which might bring about a greater engagement in struggle.

C. *Adapting to a Commoditized Economy*

The Mayas along with other Mesoamerican societies, were long adapted to commercial exchanges before the arrival of the Spaniards. After the decline of the great centers based on a redistributive economic system, Mayan cities were constructed along commercial trade routes to take maximum advantage of the new circuits of movement of goods and people. Throughout the colonial and independence period until the decade of the 1960s, the commodities produced by Indians were bought wholesale by *ladinos* who gained the greater part of the profits in exchange. Henri Favre describes the predatory *ladino* middlemen called "*atajadores*" or "*esperadores*" who waited in key traffic areas for the arrival of Indians with goods which they seize, throwing down coins which did not nearly cover the cost, let alone the value of the goods.⁷⁵ If the Indians refused to accept the offering, they risked being turned in as thieves by their own attackers. Within the barrios of San Cristóbal craft specialists, some of them the descendants of Mexican Indians brought by the conquerors to provide for their needs in the new setting, continue to ply their trades. Textiles for the skirts worn by indigenous women woven on the colonial looms, now often rented to Tenejapa weavers are still produced in *Barrio Mexicano* and leather workers still produce sandals, belts and saddles in shops in Calle Real de Guadalupe. Iron work is carried out in "*El Cerillo*."

Indians avoided the exploitation they suffered in regional markets by carrying their products on horseback over trails to neighboring communities for exchange for crops or woven cloth. *Amatenangueros*, who developed

Chiapas, in *ECONOMÍA CAMPESINA Y CAPITALISMO DEPENDIENTE* 15, 37 (1978).

74. Vera K. de Hartwig, *Procesos de Integración Indígena en la Producción Agraria y Artesal de Chiapas y Tabasco*, in *EL SUR DE MÉXICO: DATOS SOBRE LA PROBLEMÁTICA INDÍGENA* 119, 126 (1980).

75. HENRI FAVRE, *CAMBIO Y CONTINUIDAD ENTRE LOS MAYAS DE MÉXICO* 101 (1973).

a veritable culture of horses, celebrated races held during the Santiago festival. This traffic of artisan products persisted until 1964 when the Pan American highway that skirted their town was paved and bus transport was made available. Trucks now owned by the *Amatenangueros* themselves, who took over this lucrative service from *ladino* truckers in the nearby town of Teopisca in 1967 when a cooperative bought the first truck locally owned, are now preferred for transport to the nearby *ladino* centers.

The adaptation required with the present increased commercialization is to changes in the balance of power within household groups which come about with new sources of income from wages or sale of artisan products that favor different members. At the same time that this can overcome generations of exploitation of young men (as in Zinacantán) or women (as in Amatenango and Chamula), it also threatens the basic adaptive unit of the family. Involvement in commercial circuits will expectedly increase with the stimulus to oil extraction and commercial crops which will probably come about with the passage of the NAFTA, as young men are drawn away from communities by wage work.

1. Intensification of Artisan Production

Women of the many indigenous communities surrounding San Cristóbal de las Casas in Chiapas have increased the output of weaving and pottery that were made for their own use or sold in local markets. In many cases preconquest techniques persist. In Amatenango, coiled and open hearth firing of pots is still practiced despite attempts by the National Indigenist Institute to introduce kilns in order to save wood. In San Juan Chamula, San Andres Larrainzar, Chenalho, Venustiano Carranza, Tenejapa, and other towns that now weave traditional patterns for sale, women continue to use the backstrap loom although they are not as likely to spin their own threads. The reason for the persistence of archaic techniques is in some cases that the women have tried the new technology, as in the case of the kilns in Amatenango, and found that the high firing reduced the clays to ash. In part the conservative traditions relate to the low evaluation of women's labor. Since the work is undertaken in the context of carrying out a multitude of household activities including childcare, it does not involve the sacrifice of time to other higher income activities. Yet the very fact that the artisan products are made with traditional techniques enhances the value of the products in the new international "art" markets into which they have entered.

The sale of these products brings in more cash than in the past, and since the returns are more immediate than in the case of agricultural products, they acquire an even higher value. The major change that has threatened household power relations is the fact that women are now participating in cooperatives which enable them to bypass the men in their households in marketing their goods. Since they receive the money directly, they are no longer as dependent on men for their basic needs. This has affected the age at which marriages are contracted and even the willingness of young women to marry. Given the increased frequency of wife abuse, women have rejected marriage as an option since they can maintain themselves with their pottery sales. In 1957, sixty-nine percent of girls between fifteen and twenty years of age in the 307 households of the town center that this author censused were married and in 1987 only eighteen percent of girls in the same age group were married; in the same time period the percentage of girls who were married in the fifteen to twenty-five year age group declined from eighty-six percent to fifty-two percent. This is a remarkable shift indicating the far-reaching effect of their economic roles and changing norms.

In San Juan, Chamula women did not until recently sell the wool they weave for garments worn by men and women. Because of the shrinking land base and the expulsions of over fifteen thousand Chamulans by *caciques* on the claim that they are protestants, many women have been forced to gain a living for themselves and their children by selling the goods they weave and other products that they buy for resale. The fact that this activity forces them out of traditional roles adds to the domestic friction in dislocated households, and the women have suffered even more abuse than in the past.⁷⁶

Superficially it would seem that women have acquired greater control over their lives with the new income. Yet the backlash from men threatened by the increasing independence of women has been severe. In Amatenango the thriving women's cooperative had extended the sale of pottery throughout the country and even internationally. The president, Petrona Lopez, was a strong leader and through the contacts she made in Mexico was encouraged to run for mayor of the town. During the course of her candidacy, and after she accused her opponent of having stolen funds

76. See Eber & Rosenbaum, *supra* note 28, at 155-79; Kathleen Sullivan, *Protagonists of Change*, CULTURAL SURVIVAL Q., Spring 1992 at 4.

appropriated to the town, she was killed. The homicide was a warning to all the women associated with the cooperative to relinquish this as a power base. Many of the young unmarried women fled the town while others who had been active in the cooperative withdrew.

The government perceives artisan production as a low cost project that bears potential high returns as a development alternative to the highly capitalized ventures of the 1970s. The agency *Desarrollo y Integración de la Familia* (DIF) has undertaken most of the merchandizing of the artisan products. This agency, headed by the Governor's wife in Chiapas and the President's wife in Mexico city, bypasses the cooperatives organized by the women or even the privately sponsored cooperatives such as *Sna Holobil* to buy from small groups of producers. By contracting production with individual household heads or subcontractors, it has effectively undermined the momentum of politicization of the women that had been growing in the decade of the 1980s along with the increased sales of their products through cooperatives.

2. *Promotion of Cash Crops*

In the early days of the *Instituto Nacional Indigenista*, development programs in the 1950s and 1960s were designed to stimulate independence. Wheat, the cash crop that agronomists promoted, provided a complement to corn in crop rotation that was enriched through its cultivation. It was adopted by most of the *ejidatarios* in Amatenango during the 1960s, but they did not have a complementary processing development that resulted in bread for the cultivators and the producers found it difficult to merchandise it. Transportation to markets was expensive and government wholesale depots frequently cheated them on the measures or condemned whole bags as under scale. They had no alternative but to unload the crops to the unscrupulous wholesalers who bought the crop in advance of the harvest, or to *Banco Ejidal* (a national credit bank for rural cultivators) agents at ridiculously low prices.⁷⁷

State agricultural policies after 1965 promoted commercial intensive agriculture at the expense of the small plot cultivators. Forced to sell some of the subsistence crops they raise at devalued prices, the *campesinos* have

77. NASH, *supra*, note 30, at 27-96.

not been able to buy the food replacement and agricultural inputs now needed.⁷⁸ As a result, there was a diminishing growth of the agricultural sector despite the growing population after 1970. Throughout the 1980s Mexican government agencies were active in promoting coffee and fruit trees in the indigenous towns of the Highlands of Chiapas. INMEXCAFE provides technical assistance, credit for fertilizers, transportation facilities and the coffee plants themselves. CONAFRUT brought fruit trees such as avocados, oranges, lemons, but did not adequately test the soils before introducing the new crops.⁷⁹ Farias Nardi found only minimal contact with agents of the government institutions that promoted the cash crops. Among the complaints of *campesinos* attempting to take advantage of the commercialization of crops, Nardi found that the delay of credit often delayed important procedures (such as planting during the early rains or spraying with insecticides) that forfeited the crops. But most of their complaints were directed at government-controlled prices that impeded the realization of the costs of the producers. In the lowland area around Ocosingo and in Yaluma near Comitán where Farias carried out most of his inquiries he found that the *campesinos* had great difficulty in getting their crops to market and were, consequently, the victim of "coyotes" who came to take advantage of their isolation. The *campesinos* themselves summarized their dilemma in attempting to raise cash crops as follows, "[w]hat we must do is diversify crops to avoid the fall of prices, because without organization with other *campesinos*, the more we grow, the more the prices fall for all of us."⁸⁰

During the 1970s PRODESCH, created an elite of town officials who benefited personally from the funds dispersed by PRI officials as they dispersed funds for agriculture, roads, health and education. In its early years, PRODESCH budgets went to communication and roads as well as rural electrification. By the 1980s government agencies pushed credit for fertilizer and, in Zinacantán, ambitious projects for building plastic greenhouses for growing flowers and for fertilizer.⁸¹

78. Jorge Pacheco Castro, *Problemas de Subsistencia y Alternativas para la Producción*, in MESA REDONDA 18, 109-10 (Halach Cepeda ed., 1981).

79. *Borrador del Trabajo de Campo Realizado en Chiapas*, NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION RESEARCH EXPERIENCE FOR UNDERGRADUATES (Pedro Farias Nardi; directed by June Nash in San Cristóbal de las Casas, 1991).

80. *Id.* (quoting Don Salvador).

81. FRANK CANCIAN, *THE DECLINE OF COMMUNITY IN ZINACANTÁN: ECONOMY, PUBLIC LIFE*,

Recognizing the problem of the lack of coordination of markets and producers, the bishop of San Cristóbal, Samuel Ruiz, supported the organization of the *Union de Uniones*, a group of distinct groups of *indigenes* in Chiapas. The promoters of this new group ran into trouble with Mexican government institutions, especially the INMEXCAFE, and with the coyotes.⁸² During the early years of high coffee prices in the early 1980s the *Union* grew rapidly and the profits from coffee were invested in cattle and garden crops. But when the price of coffee fell, the banks took advantage of the impoverishment of the *campesinos* to destroy the *Union*, cutting off their funds.⁸³

With the passage of the new agrarian law in January 1992, *ejidatarios* can enter into joint enterprises with private companies, farmers in rural communities, and government agencies. The new model, promoted by the "reform" of the Agrarian Reform Law's Article 27, has recently been introduced in the commercial production of marigolds in Teopisca. Used as a dye in foods as well as an insect repellent, the cultivation is labor intensive, employing women and children in the continual cuttings, and has a high yield.

The Lacandones, who had always been considered the most remote of the Mayas, are now strategically located near the Maya classic sites of Bonampak, Palenque, and Yaxchilan where they take advantage of tourist and commercial traffic. They are in fact part of the tourist "*Ruta Maya*," and the Lacandon settlements visited by planes are becoming dependent on tourists. The he presidents charge tourists for the right to take pictures and then redistribute the proceeds among the families. Some families have a regular post at Palenque where men, women and children sell arrows and seed necklaces. Wood carvings have acquired a small but growing market promoted by FONART. Their greatest income has, until recently, come from the sale of natural resources in the Lacandon National Park, especially contracts for wood extraction to lumber companies and *chicle* and *xate*. James Nations studied the process of commercialization on the Lacandon during the most dramatic changes in the 1970s.⁸⁴ He found that, with their

AND SOCIAL STRATIFICATION 1960-1987, at 38-48 (1992).

82. Nardi, *supra* note 79.

83. *Id.*

84. James D. Nations, *La Transformación Económica de una Sociedad Tradicional: Los Lacandones de México*, in *ECONOMÍA CAMPESINA Y CAPITALISMO DEPENDIENTE* (1978).

new sources of revenue, the Lacandones have settled down in permanent houses constructed by Tzeltal neighbors who use metal roofs instead of the palm thatch. The compact settlements with a larger population living under the same hygienic conditions has caused high incidences of contagious diseases and gastrointestinal sicknesses. Those who have hired Tzeltales to work the land undercut their own balance achieved in their hundreds of years of adaptation to a fragile environment.⁸⁵

The net effect of the commercialization of cash crops has been to create a prosperous class of entrepreneurs,⁸⁶ many of whom are indigenous people living in their own communities and taking advantage of the production of *ejidatarios* and artisans who are their own neighbors. These new, rich entrepreneurs constitute a class defending their special interests through alliances with one of the three parties, PRI, PRD and PAN that operate throughout the area. Ethnic identification fails to overcome the exploitative relations with other Indians, even of the same community. Cash crops have accelerated the integration of indigenous *campesinos* in the market economy but it is not clear that it has dissolved ethnic identity. It has become an element of commercialization in itself as indigenous sellers seek to identify products, such as organic foods like honey, with nature and aviculture.

II. FREE TRADE AND THE SOUTHERN FRONTIER

Development programs of the past half century have been dominated by a modernization paradigm that involved high capitalized inputs of technology and chemical products that created dependency relations among small plot farmers and contributed to individual and national debt. The anarchical development of Chiapas has accentuated the polarization of wealth sectors, concentrated land ownership, raised prices, increased the reserve labor forces, catalyzed the friction and violence, and increased repression of the most exploited sectors.⁸⁷ Passage of NAFTA will accelerate trends that have been occurring for the past four decades. Problems of access to land, and forced migration to distant places in search of wage work or colonies have been aggravated with the advent of tourism, oil exploration and refining along with hydroelectric power development,

85. See generally Nigh & Nations, *supra* note 25, at 12-19.

86. Hartwig, *supra* note 74, at 126.

87. Singer, *supra* note 16, at 23.

lumbering and agro-industrial enterprises. At the same time, some indigenous producers and truckers have profited from the new enterprises, resulting in growing wealth differences and class conflict within communities. The adaptations made by indigenous farmers in colonization of national lands, seasonal migration to distant plantations for wage work, and even intensified commercial enterprises in trucking, cash crop production, and artisan production, that seem to threaten an indigenous way of life have in fact enabled them to survive.

The resources that made possible this precarious balance of peasant cultivators and predatory private forces are coming to an end. Future development must attend to conservation of diminishing resources. This requires a sensitivity to adaptations that have enabled the indigenous communities to maintain the central values of their distinctive cultures. The passage of Article 27 to privatize *ejido* lands, as Collier points out, "risks undercutting the incentives to peasants to modernize the very small holdings whose ownership the agrarian reform has guaranteed for a half century or more."⁸⁸ Yet it may stimulate new forms of government and private initiatives just being introduced in the region. Similarly the agency concerned with family welfare, *Desarrollo Integración de la Familia*, (DIF) has promoted the commercialization of artisan production but at the risk of undermining the cooperatives of artisans organized from the grassroots that had begun to promote a political consciousness among women. Given the vicissitudes of the international market in which small scale producers are being forced to compete, the stability of rural society is threatened. This has created marked effects on the indigenous communities which rely on internal controls regulating marriage, inheritance of lands, and access to communal resources. These disturbances have contributed to the discontent expressed by the rebels and those who support their action in the January, 1994 uprising.

Each community, in accord with past traditions, has found a distinctive mode of response to each of these dilemmas. The new multicultural communities formed by colonization of the jungle or expulsions because of protestantism from traditional communities are facing some of the same problems brought about by 16th century *reducciones* which concentrated settlements of indigenous groups of disparate languages and cultural

88. George Collier, *Seeking Food and Seeking Money: Changing Productive Relations in a Highland Mexican Community* (U.N. Res. Inst. for Soc. Dev.).

practices. New solutions are being tested and worked out in these novel settings. Hopefully the policy planners will overcome the economic principles that have guided policymakers and include the social costs of market practices that have frequently led to unemployment, subsistence insecurity, and social inequality.

The guerilla uprising is striking in the moderation of its demands and the plea for democratic reforms. At the close of the dialogue between the Mexican government and the rebels on March 3, 1994, the rebels vowed:

We now have the obligation to reflect well on what their words say We must speak now to the collective heart that orders us. From our own, from the Indians of the mountains and the canyons, will come the signal to take the next step in this road, the destiny of which will either be peace with justice and dignity or it will not.⁸⁹

If the Mexican government fails to involve indigenous people in planning for the future, they may encounter an even greater uprising. If they choose, like their neighbor Guatemala, to encounter the future with military oppression, the “*Ruta Maya*,” which projects a panoramic tour drawing international visitors to the heart of Maya territory, will be empty of the people who created such an extraordinary civilization in the southern frontier.

89. Tim Golden, *Mexico, Pledging Big Changes, Reaches an Accord with Rebels*, N.Y. TIMES, March 3, 1994, at A1 (quoting Zapatista leader known as Juan).

