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**NEOLIBERAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY
FORESTRY**
Subjection and Discourse in a Oaxacan Community

Mémoire présenté
à la Faculté des études supérieures de l'Université Laval
dans le cadre du programme de maîtrise en anthropologie
pour l'obtention du grade de maître ès arts (M.A.)

DÉPARTEMENT D'ANTHROPOLOGIE
FACULTÉ DES SCIENCES SOCIALES
UNIVERSITÉ LAVAL
QUÉBEC

2008

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Abstract

In the context of open struggle between a neoliberal state and popular social movements in the state of Oaxaca, Mexico, this thesis seeks to explore how neoliberalism also works more subtly through state-sponsored community forestry. Using the concepts of “development discourse” and the Foucauldian conception of government, this thesis sheds light on the power networks that run through the language, practice and process of community forestry in a community with a well-established forestry enterprise. Neoliberal government is found to be present in the practice of community forestry, in discourse calling for change to governance structures in the community, identities of *comuneros*, as well as in environmental discourse. The exploration of this web of government also contributes to a greater understanding of relationships between state institutions, professionals and community members involved in community forestry.

Acknowledgements

« *Une Maîtrise est la maîtrise de soi-même* »
Manon Ruel

« *Quand tu as le goût de travailler ton
mémoire, travaille...parce qu'il y aura des
moments où tu n'auras vraiment pas le goût* »
Manon Ruel

This thesis has been a long and challenging journey that has taken me from Quebec City, to Oaxaca and then to Vancouver. I have been helped and inspired by many along the way.

En México gracias:

Al pueblo del “Altamente del Zopi” por haberme acogido, por haber compartido tantas cosas conmigo, por haberme invitado a participar en diversos aspectos de su vida comunitaria. A Raúl, por haberme traído a la comunidad y por todas las pláticas. A toda la familia Gaspar por haberme sostenido con chocolate, tlayudas y risas. A Reina por ser mi “mamá” en San Pedro y por enseñarme a hacer tortillas. A l@s niñ@s que me dejaron jugar fútbol con ell@s. Al Zopilote, la Comadreja y el Tejón por los partidos de baloncesto, las bromas, las discusiones e intercambios. A tod@s quienes me invitaron a sus casas o a participar en sus vidas. A todas las autoridades y a Chucho por haberme dado acceso a sus reuniones y asambleas en la comunidad y en la oficina. A tod@s quienes aceptaron sostener entrevistas conmigo y tomaron tiempo para platicarme sobre sus vidas, la comunidad, la empresa y cualquiera otra cosa.

A Yolanda, Rodolfo y Zenaido por haberme introducido al mundo profesional de la silvicultura comunitaria en la ciudad de Oaxaca.

A Gustavo Esteva por las discusiones honestas, intensas, y para mi, muy útiles.

A tod@s los que cantaron y tocaron guitarra conmigo y a aquellos con quienes compartí en el hostel Sta. Isabel : sobre todo los trabajadores, así como Pablo y David.

À Québec merci:

À mes collègues du département et du bureau, particulièrement à Étienne et Joëlle pour avoir partagé leurs expériences, idées et ressources avec moi ; à Manon pour les danses de salsa à 21h00 dans le bureau et pour ta sagesse (voir les épigraphes plus haut).

À Jean-Mi et Fabienne pour la belle collocation harmonieuse dans un appartement charmant du quartier « St. Jean Baptiste» et pour toute votre aide à distance quand j'en ai eu vraiment besoin.

À Martin, mon superviseur, pour ta confiance en moi du jour de notre rencontre jusqu'à aujourd'hui ; pour l'opportunité de travailler avec toi sur plusieurs projets ; pour ta patience, le partage de tes connaissances et de tes expériences.

À Manon Boulianne, pour sa lecture très critique et précise de mon Sujet II. Elle m'a été très utile.

Au membres de GISELE présent et passé, qui ont partagé avec moi une rêve et qui ont travaillé et/ou continuent à travailler pour le rendre réel.

A Jorge por sus críticas precisas; por las comidas, ideas y risas compartidas; y por las muchas “*miscomunicaciones*” divertidísimas.

In Vancouver thank you:

To Tao and Nadia for being my Vancouver “thesis buddies”; to Tao and Rachel for their rigour. “Harsh acknowledgements” to James, Scanning and Formatting Project Manager, and great friend.

To my parents for their love and support in more ways than I can name and even know.

Thank you to all those who have given me warmth, kindness, support, translation, teachings, laughter, song, dance, food, friendship and love.

*This thesis is dedicated to all those who
struggle for the well-being of their
communities - small or large, near or far.*

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

APPO :	Asemblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca (Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca)
APPO-CODEP :	Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca-Comité de Defensa de los Derechos del Pueblo (Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca-Committee in Defence of the People's Rights)
ASETECO :	Asesoría Técnica a Comunidades Oaxaqueñas (Technical Consulting for Oaxacan Communities)
CBNRM :	Community Based Natural Resource Management
CECFOR :	Centros de Educación y Capacitación Forestal (Centres for Forest Education and Training)
CFE :	Community Forestry Enterprise
CFO :	Compañía Forestal de Oaxaca (Oaxaca Forest Company)
CIDA :	Canadian International Development Agency
COINBIO :	Conservación de la Biodiversidad por Comunidades e Indígenas (Biodiversity Conservation by Communities and Indigenous people)
CONAFOR :	Comisión Nacional Forestal (National Forest Commission)
CONASUPO :	Compañía Nacional de Subsistencias Populares (National Company of Provisions for the People)
DGDF :	Dirección General de Desarrollo Forestal (General Administration of Forest Development)
DTF :	Dirección Técnica Forestal (Technical Administration of Forestry)
ECLA :	(United Nations) Economic Commission of Latin America
FAPATUX :	Fábrica de Papel Tuxtepec (Tuxtepec Paper Works)
GATT :	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

GNP :	Gross National Product
IMF :	International Monetary Fund
NAFTA :	North American Free Trade Agreement
NGO :	Non-Governmental Organization
np	no page numbers
ORDRENASIJ :	Organización en Defensa de los Recursos Naturales y Desarrollo Social de la Sierra Juárez (Organization for the Defence of Natural Resources and Social Development of the Sierra Juárez)
PDFC :	Plan de Desarrollo Forestal Comunitario (de Altamonte del Zopi) Community Forestry Development Plan
PMF :	Programa de Manejo Forestal (Forestry Management Plan)
PRD :	Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Democratic Revolution Party)
PROCyMAF :	Proyecto de Conservación y Manejo Sustentable de Recursos Forestales en México (Forest Resources Conservation and Sustainable Management Project)
PRODEFOR :	Programa Para el Desarrollo Forestal (Forest Development Program)
PRODEPLAN :	Programa de Apoyos Para el Desarrollo de Plantaciones Forestales Comerciales (Commercial Forestry Development Supports Program)
PROFAS :	Programa de Ordenamiento y Fortalecimiento de la Autogestión Silvícola (Silvicultural Self-management Ordering and Strengthening Program)
PROFEPA :	Procuraduría Federal de Protección al Ambiente (Federal Attorney's Office of Environmental Protection)
SEMARNAT :	Secretariado de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (Secretariat of the Environment and Natural Resources)

SAP :	Structural Adjustment Program
TCPS :	Texas Centre for Policy Studies
UCEDEFOS :	Unidades de Conservación y Desarrollo Forestal (Forest Conservation and Development Units)
UMAFOR :	Unidad de Manejo Forestal Forest Management Units
UK :	United Kingdom
USA :	United States of America
USDA :	United States Department of Agriculture

INTRODUCTION

Since the tsunami of “neoliberalism” hit Latin America, it has been explicitly targeted as an enemy of the people by a myriad of Latin American social movements. The struggle against neoliberalism, and even capitalism, has since been bolstered by Chavez’s “Bolivarian revolution” in Venezuela, and, to a much lesser extent, by the election of other “leftist” governments throughout South America (See Petras 2006). In the most recent presidential elections in Mexico (2006), the “centre-leftist” PRD candidate, Manuel Lopez-Obrador, who is widely believed to have lost through fraudulent practices (Weisbrot et al. : 2006), had promised to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The symbolism of this election promise was powerful, as NAFTA is one of the strongest representations of neoliberalism and US influence in Mexico; a fact that was brought to light by the irruption of the Zapatista¹ revolt in Chiapas the day the agreement came into effect. More recently, this continent-wide organized resistance against neoliberalism has moved to Oaxaca, the neighboring state of Chiapas.

At approximately 4am, June 14th, 2006, an encampment protest, called a “*plantón*”, of striking teachers seeking better conditions in schools as well as a group called the Promoter of Unity Against Neoliberalism (APPO 2008, my translation) were violently removed from the central square of Ciudad Oaxaca (Oaxaca City) – 96 people were injured and one woman miscarried. The protesters regrouped, took back the square that afternoon and a mass movement was born. An organization called the Oaxacan People’s Popular Counsel (APPO) (APPO 2008) made up of approximately 350 social organizations essentially took over the city for over five months, creating road blocks, replacing many municipal services and demanding the removal of governor Ulises Ruiz. The APPO has repeatedly identified “neoliberalism” (and at times capitalism) as a cause of suffering and injustice for the people of Oaxaca and Mexico (APPO 2008, APPO-CODEP 2007). They have enjoyed an impressive show of solidarity from people and organizations in Oaxaca State, throughout

¹ The Zapatistas nonetheless refused to support López-Obrador, launching what they called “the other campaign”.

Mexico and the world at large, who support them in this struggle. After a huge military build-up by the Federal Preventative Police, violent clashes in the streets ensued, leading to widespread repression involving many human rights violations - assassinations, mass arrests and torture. Many of the movement's leaders were forced underground. In the face of these draconian tactics, the organization continues to hold public assemblies and mass demonstrations (as of January 08).

Merely six months before all of this “began”, I² was in Oaxaca doing research on a “model” indigenous community forestry enterprise. I had initially been interested in community forestry in Mexico because of its potential as “alternative” development; however, in studying the literature surrounding the topic, I became increasingly weary of the power dynamics inherent in the process. My field research focused on these power dynamics, and was particularly inspired by Escobar's work (1992a, 1992b, 1995, 1996, 1999) on the development “discourse.” At times during my field-work, my research seemed frivolous as I spent so much time with people who were working towards something daily, while I felt I had little to contribute and seemed to be merely documenting the work that they were actually doing.

When I began to analyze my data in the context of what has been called a “*clash between two political and economic concepts*” (Vigna 2006) going on in the very streets where I had so recently walked, the importance of the kind of research I was conducting became apparent. I questioned, more than ever, the extent to which the state's community forestry programs I had been studying were a “strategy” (Petras 1997) of neoliberalism. Indeed, the power dynamics that I witnessed are intimately linked to the struggle which continues in Oaxaca, where activists remain in hiding to this day (as of November 2007). Much of what I documented in my time in Oaxaca was the connection between “neoliberalism” and “community forestry”.

² “I” am a white “middle-class” Canadian Jew who strives to be aware of my positionality and privilege and to act responsibly in that knowledge. Further, my status as “male”, “outsider” and “Canadian” certainly affected my research, particularly in how people responded to me; allowing me easier access to certain information and discourses and making others harder or impossible to access. The use of the first person denotes that I ultimately must take responsibility for this work, based on my analysis of the data that I collected and the theoretical sources that I have brought together. Having said that many others were extremely important in the creation of this document as I acknowledge in the appropriate section above.

This thesis is therefore an attempt to better understand and illuminate this complex relationship. I seek to explore how neoliberalism works within, on and through community forestry, in a “model” forestry community in Oaxaca, Mexico. In doing so, I will argue that while the “participative development” process has allowed this community to make important material gains and maintain a large amount of formal autonomy, it also implicates them in a web of neoliberal “government”, which guides their conduct and limits their “possible field of action” (Foucault 1982 : 790) in ways that are congruent with neoliberalism.

0.1 Thesis Plan

Chapter I looks at important theoretical and methodological approaches that allow me to discern my object of investigation and pose answerable research questions. Specifically, the ideas of power, government, discourse, participation, development and neoliberalism, as well as the connections between them, are examined here. This chapter also contains a section on methodology and then lays out the specific research questions which guide the rest of the document.

Chapter II provides contextual elements for the present research, looking at both the larger historical and political context, including state forestry policy in the 20th century, particularly the simultaneous rise of community forestry and neoliberalism. It provides a brief overview of the community of Altamonte del Zopi, looking specifically at the governance structure of the community and the communal enterprise as well as the gains made through community forestry and gender relations in the community.

Chapter III explores the power networks in community forestry starting with Altamonte’s community forestry enterprise (CFE), looking at the connections, interactions and power dynamics between various actors involved community forestry. Here, I focus on how various actors are constituted through the practice of community forestry. In doing so, I attempt to elucidate the web of power in which community forestry both operates and which it plays a role in shaping.

Chapter IV examines environmental discourse more thoroughly. This chapter also sheds light on connections between state actors and the community, showing how through community forestry state actors are constituted as experts and allies to communities such as Altamonte del Zopi.

Finally, the conclusion of this thesis summarizes the ways in which government operates through community forestry in San Pedro, provides some paths for future research and also sheds light on the importance of this kind of research in the contemporary political context.

Chapter I – THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND METHODOLOGY

To imply a strong connection between neoliberalism and community forestry is, in and of itself, a controversial claim. On the surface, they seem completely antithetical as common understandings of “community” and “neoliberalism” seem to be nearly opposites. However, this thesis will demonstrate that community forestry projects can be fertile ground for insidious manifestations of neoliberalism. To understand this connection, a definition of both “community forestry” and “neoliberalism”, as well as an exploration of the theoretical discussions around “power” and “development” are necessary.

1.1 Definitions and Theoretical Foundations

1.1.1 Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism has its roots in “liberalism”, which can be traced back to the repealing of the Corn Laws in Manchester, England in 1846 (Schonhardt-Bailey 1991, Palley 2005 : 20). In Mexico, liberalism is generally associated with the era known as the Porfiriato after the dominant political figure of the time: Porfirio Díaz (1884-1910). In fact, the “liberal” period has much in common with the “neoliberal” one. Notably, the “liberal” Mexican state made a significant effort to bring its population within the folds of capitalism, partially through forestry, though its strategies to do so were quite different than those of the contemporary Mexican state (see Chapter II below).

The advent of “neoliberalism” is generally associated with the Chicago School of Economics³ (Palley 2005 : 20). The first implementation of neoliberal policies, and the mass propagation of the neoliberal discourse, are generally associated with the Thatcher (UK) and Reagan (USA) administrations in the 1980s, as well as the Bretton Woods Institutions: the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), since their

³ Key figures in the Chicago School are Milton Friedman, George Stigler, Ronald Coase, and Gary Becker – all of whom have been awarded the Nobel Prize in economics (Palley 2005 : endnote 1).

transformation in 1982. Highly indebted countries (starting with Mexico) needed to agree to the IMF's Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), which called for drastic policy changes (see below) to make countries more "market friendly" in order to access new loans. These SAPs were in fact at the heart of neoliberal reforms throughout the majority world. However, in some cases, including Mexico, the ideology was already entrenched among national technocrats, many of whom had studied in the US under the "Chicago Boys" (Babb 2001). When the SAP was imposed, these technocrats went above and beyond even the draconian measures imposed by the IMF (Babb 2001).

The term "neoliberalism" is hard to define, as it covers such a wide range of "*social, economic and political phenomena at different levels of complexity*" (Saad-Filho and Johnston 2005 : 1-2). According to McCarthy and Prudham: "*the term 'neoliberalism' stands for a complex assemblage of ideological commitments, discursive representations, and institutional practices, all propagated by highly specific class alliances and organized at multiple geographical scales*" (2004 : 276).

Neoliberalism is indeed a multifaceted and multiscale *project* (Brenner and Theodore 2002): a constant work-in-progress being implemented (and resisted, adapted, reformed) in a variety of ways across much of the globe. As William Roseberry (1983 : 201-208) points out, capitalism in its various forms (including neoliberalism) does not entirely replace previous modes of production, but rather articulates itself with them, creating "hybrid" social formations (see also McCarthy 2005). One such "hybrid" formation is a Community Forestry Enterprise (CFE). However, neoliberalism is only a useful analytical term (and target for social movements) in so far as its general characteristics can be recognized. The first, and most important characteristic of neoliberalism is an ideological adherence to the notion of the "*'self-regulating market' [...] increasingly wide in its geographic scope, comprehensive as the governing mechanism for allocating all goods and services, and central as a metaphor for organizing and evaluating institutional performance*" (McCarthy and Prudham 2004 : 276-277). In fact, under neoliberal rule, the market becomes the judge, jury and executioner of a society's practices and projects involving goods and services. It eliminates those that do not work "efficiently" (according to the market's criteria) and rewards those that do. For the market to play this role, all goods and services need to be

treated as commodities. Neoliberalism thus implies the “*deeply problematic commodification of everything*” (McCarthy and Prudham 2004 : 276-277). Of particular interest here is the commodification of nature, which, as demonstrated below, is an important aspect of much contemporary development language and practice. Further, under neoliberalism, the private enterprise, which adapts to market conditions to survive and constantly attempts to maximize profits, is portrayed as the ideal model. While many “participative” development schemes such as “community forestry” do not adopt the private enterprise model directly, communal enterprises are often both competing with private enterprises in the market, and as this thesis will demonstrate, are at times measured up against them as well. As Fairclough (2002 : 164) argues, the concepts of adaptation and flexibility are also central to current neoliberal discourse. In the minority world⁴, this idea often surfaces in terms of the “flexibility of the labour force” and is part of a larger anti-union ideology. In the context of “development” in the majority world⁵, the idea of flexibility can be seen as a reframing of an older development idea that “traditions” must be let go so that communities can achieve “progress” (Escobar 1995 : 4). The idea of flexibility can also serve to place the responsibility for “success” on the people who are the “targets” of “development” as they are the ones expected to adapt to market conditions.

Connected to the expanded role of the market, the idealization of the private enterprise and the flexibility of labour, is another central tenant of neoliberalism: an antipathy towards state “interference” or “distortions” imposed on the market. The idea is that the market needs to be allowed to “work its magic” in as many spheres as possible, unimpeded by the state. In the 1980s and 1990s the IMF’s SAPs invariably prescribed what were known as “Washington consensus” policies to indebted majority world countries - the expansion of the “free market” and “free trade” through privatization, deregulation, a decline in social spending, the liberalization of foreign trade and the devaluation of the exchange rate (Saad-Fihlo 2005 : 114 ; Babb 2001 : 171). The state was to be “rolled back” to play three key functions: “*Defence against foreign aggression, provision of legal and economic*

⁴ “Richer” countries which make up the minority of the world, often referred to as “developed”, or “first world” countries (Check Your Head undated).

⁵ “Poorer” countries which make up the majority of the world, often referred to as “less developed” or “third world” countries (Check Your Head undated).

infrastructure for the functioning of markets, and mediation between social groups in order to preserve and expand market relations” (Saad-Fihlo 2005 : 114).

As these policies were being enacted, they were also being opposed, resisted and critiqued. Critics of neoliberalism focused on its inability to explain the economic success of East Asian countries; the relatively poor economic performance of countries that applied SAPs; and the highly negative consequences of these policies on the poor. Eventually, *“even economists based at international financial organizations began to admit that the adjustment programs were not working”* (Saad-Fihlo 2005 : 117).

A second body of policy, which was an enrichment of the dominant neoliberal paradigm (Robinson 2002 : 1058), was thus deployed in the late 1990s. New Institutional Economics focuses on how institutions constrain individual behavior. It attempts to address what are referred to as “market imperfections” - particularly “transaction costs” and actors lacking “perfect information” to make the most economically rational choice (Robinson 2002 : 1058 ; Mosse 2005 : 4). *“Policy prescriptions can thus focus on institutions conceptualized as sets of rules structuring incentives and modeled mathematically, **reshaping social behavior so as to increase efficiency and enhance the economic behavior of individuals”*** (Mosse 2005 : 4, my emphasis). In what is known as the “Post-Washington consensus” the state’s role is thus re-accomodated in that it is prescribed to take an active role in creating the right institutions to make “the market work for the people”, and particularly “make the people work for the market.” It must help convince its citizens to participate in the increasingly globalized market, actively creating conditions which guide them towards becoming efficient economic producers. The state has therefore been somewhat “rolled back out” in new neoliberal forms.

1.1.1.1 Towards a Definition of Neoliberalism

Therefore, neoliberalism has its roots in “liberalism” and the practice of both these projects have much in common: notably in that that they both seek to expand the capitalist market. Indeed, the major goal of the neoliberal project is to expand and deepen market relations. Important features of the project related to this goal are: the promotion of “free trade”; a constant drive towards the commodification of nearly everything; and the promotion of the

“flexible”, “efficient” and “competitive” private enterprise model. The role of the state, however, has gone through important changes throughout the neoliberal era. In the contemporary neoliberal development framework (the “Post-Washington consensus”), the state has an active role to play in shaping the behavior of its citizens so that they become economically productive. Indeed, as illustrated in this paper, the Mexican state is certainly actively trying to “enhance the economic behavior of individuals” through community forestry.

1.1.2 Community Forestry

Community forestry is a relevant form of “development” through which to study neoliberalism in marginalized regions for several reasons. Firstly, community forestry in indigenous areas bloomed and gained state support partly as a result of, and at the same time as, neoliberalism began to dominate the Mexican political landscape (see Chapter II). Secondly, after the decline of state support to coffee producers in the late 1980s, government support to marginalized indigenous regions was largely oriented by the *World Bank Forestry Report* (1989-93) and the programs that emerged out of the report (Nahmad et. al. 1995 ; Hébert and Rosen 2007 : 12). Thirdly, forestry is a sector that is directly impacted by neoliberal trade policies. To better understand this connection, it is important to look at the literature surrounding community forestry and, more generally, Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM).

The term “community forestry” usually implies that a local community has access to the forest and participates in its conservation and management. Its promoters emphasize the idea of voluntary compliance with conservation strategies and attention to local conditions and knowledge (McCarthy 2006 ; Li 2002 : 265). Critics of community forestry, and CBNRM in general, have questioned assumptions about “local community.” Some have questioned the homogeneity of “community” (Klooster 2000), while others have scrutinized the assumed environmental benevolence of communities (Li 2001 ; Dove 2006 : 198-199). Lopez-Arzola (2005, personal communication) claims that in Mexico, community forestry is a misnomer, as only a small percentage of community members in any “forestry community” (generally a few adult men) have significant knowledge about,

and are involved in, decisions about forestry operations. Li (2002) has questioned the boundaries between “local community” and the state, arguing that CBNRM, rather than rolling back the state and reducing official interference in local affairs, can be a vehicle for realigning the relationship between the state and its citizens (Li 2002 : 266). Through research in Southeast Asia’s upland regions she observed that “*CBNRM simplifications that assume an inherent separation between community and state, and posits community as a natural entity outside and/or opposed to state processes, fits poorly with the historical and contemporary processes of state and community formation*” (Li 2002 : 266). My understanding of community forestry is informed by these debates. Community forestry in this thesis is seen as a process involving the active participation of members of the community and even a certain amount of decision-making surrounding forestry by community members and institutions. However, this process is “embedded” (Taylor 2001) in relationships and power dynamics involving many actors and institutions including the state and NGOs.

1.1.3 Power

Power is a vast concept that has been approached in from a huge variety of perspectives in the social sciences. In the last few decades, much of this has been affected by the thought of the political philosopher Michel Foucault. In Anthropology, Eric Wolf’s (2001 [1990]) depth of knowledge and insight on power stands out.

1.1.3.1 Power: Eric Wolf

Wolf (2001 [1990] : 384-385) identifies four different modes of power. The first is “*power as the attribute of the person, as potency or capability.*” This is power in its most individual sense. The second refers to interpersonal relations; this kind of power “*can be understood as the ability of the ego to impose its will on an alter in social action*”. It is thus the power of one person over another. The third form of power addresses the “*nature of the arena in which such interactions go forward*”. This type of power is the power “*that controls the settings in which people may exhibit their potentialities and interact with others.*” This can be seen as “*organizational power*” and it works within particular settings or domains.

Wolf's fourth form of power is a kind of power that "*organizes and orchestrates the settings themselves.*" Wolf refers to this as "*structural power*" that "*shapes the social field of action in such a way as to render some kinds of behavior possible, while making others less possible or impossible.*" He seeks to use it as related to political economy, arguing that anthropologists should look at how larger political economic structures "*impinge upon the people we study*" at the local level⁶. Wolf also mentions that this fourth form of power "*forms the backdrop*" of Foucault's work on power and "*government.*" It is this specific form of structural power that is at the heart of the present analysis.

1.1.3.2 Power: Michel Foucault

Foucault focuses on a form of power that seems virtually ubiquitous. Power, according to him, "*needs to be considered as a productive network that runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression*" (Foucault 1994 [1980] : 120). This power is therefore present in virtually all social processes and works in subtle ways such as through social and institutional norms. It is insidious as it is embedded in processes and institutional practices, ways of speaking about or thinking about the world, oneself, the past, present and possible future. This power is infused into, and affects, people's relationships with themselves, others and their surrounding environment, while also constituting itself through these relationships.

The type of power that Foucault seeks to explore is "*a power bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them*" (1990 [1978] : 136). "*It doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no; it also traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse*" (Foucault 1994 [1980] : 120). Indeed, part of what makes this power accepted is its creative aspect: how it shapes desires and even enables the fulfillment of some of them. At the same time, it can also affect priorities, limit other desires, or even what it seems possible to achieve. This paper explores how the power relations embedded in the process of community forestry in Altamonte – some of which may have contributed to "successful" development – also limit the possibilities of subjects

⁶ This process is relevant to the present research and will be touched upon.

in the community and/or guide their efforts in specific directions that are congruent with neoliberalism.

1.1.4 Government, Governance and Development

1.1.4.1 Governance and Government

To allow for a clear analysis of the various forms of structural power described above, a brief discussion of the usages of the words *governance* and *government* is in order. Definitions of the word *governance* have changed quite drastically over the last 25 years as has its increasing importance in development circles; its meaning is still largely debated (Mosse 2005 ; Saad-Fihlo 2005 ; Campbell 2000). For the purposes of this research, I will use a relatively simple definition of *governance*: “the creation, application and enforcement of policy - of laws or formal rules - for any given activity.” *Governance*, so defined, can be distinguished from the foucauldian use of “*government*”, though the two are often very related. *Government*, in the foucauldian sense, includes all “*endeavours to shape, guide, direct the conduct of others*” (Rose 1999 : 3). To understand it, one must focus on *informal* norms and more subtle forms of control, without ignoring the formal structures and policies that affect these norms.

Government entails acting upon the action of “free” subjects. It implies understanding the capacity of action of the “target populations” and trying to guide this action in a desired direction (Rose 1999 : 4). The term also “*embraces the ways in which one might be urged and educated to bridle one’s own passions, to control one’s own instincts, to govern oneself*” (Rose 1999 : 3). These two facets of government go hand-in-hand as endeavours to shape or guide the conduct of “target populations” are particularly successful when such populations are guiding or shaping their own behaviour in the desired manner.

A relatively simple example may help understand the differences and the relationship between governance and government. If an employee gets their boss coffee because it is formal company policy, or part of their job description, that is *governance* in action. If an employee decides to get their boss coffee because that is what they’ve been told by other

employees that they are *supposed to do*, or because they identify themselves as the *kind of employee* that “goes beyond the call of duty”, that is evidence of *government*.

Naturally, in the real world, this dichotomy is often not so clear. In fact, Shore and Wright (1997) put together a volume dedicated principally to how policy (governance) is also government, in that, for example, it affects norms of conduct. To keep the same metaphor, an official company policy of “politeness” or “teamwork” (governance) may help establish a social norm that makes bringing the boss coffee more accepted or even encouraged, though it is not specifically a part of that workers job description. Similarly, a policy of “downsizing” (governance) which threatens an employee’s job could also indirectly lead the establishment of a norm in which employees bring coffee to the boss (government). In this case, this establishment of this form of government occurs through employees “strategic action” within these regimes of government and governance.

I will argue that in community forestry in Mexico, neoliberal governance and government are very connected as neoliberal policies directly affect norms and relationships between actors. Also, neoliberal free-trade policies which make the timber market more competitive, also contribute to increasingly strong pressure to conform to neoliberal behavioral norms through what Larner (2000) calls “market governance”. Finally, actors involved in community forestry at all levels act strategically within regimes of government and governance, and their actions can affect these regimes.

Delving deeper into government, Mitchell Dean’s work (1999) lays out four dimensions of what he calls “*the analytics of government*” which emphasizes “*how we govern and are governed*” (Dean 1999 : 23, emphasis in original):

1. Forms of visibility, ways of seeing and perceiving (the picturing and constituting of objects).
2. Ways of thinking and questioning, relying on definite vocabulary and procedures for the production of truth.

3. Ways of acting, intervening and directing, made up of particular types of practical rationality ('expertise' and 'know-how') and relying upon definite mechanisms, techniques and technologies.
4. Forms of identification (the forming of subjects, selves, agents and actors, in short, the production of governable subjects).⁷

Government therefore works at various levels. It works through complex mechanisms that shape the way that people perceive themselves, their relationships with other people and other objects. When certain ways of operating and thinking become "hegemonic", others can even become almost unimaginable. This analysis of the operation of government becomes even more clear when it is applied to "development".

1.1.4.2 Development and Government

Anthropologists such as James Ferguson (1994) and David Mosse (2005), as well as geographers such as Michael Watts (2003), have made insightful links between development and government. David Mosse writes:

International development does not (for the most part) operate through negative power [...] but through positive (or productive) power that wins legitimacy and empowers action while putting in place arrangements and 'regimes of truth' that structure the 'possible field of action'.

(2005 : 13)

Thus, while development creates opportunities and "empowers", it also subtly creates "limits" on actors at various levels by structuring the process in particular ways. The relationship between power and development is thus complex. Mosse (2005 : 13) points out how insidious the power relations in this process can be: "*Individuals constitute themselves, their desires, aspirations and interests in terms of the norms through which they are governed as 'free' economic and social agents – as governable subjects*". The incorporation of these norms is affected by the teaching of "proper" governance that is being promoted by development agencies.

⁷ Adapted from Dean 1999 : 23 and Watts 2003 : 14

Development thus creates norms and categories through which, and relative to which, people create their identities. It makes certain aspirations probable and desirable, while others seem impossible or are not even considered. Particularly relevant to the present analysis is how development practices create “*internalised disciplines, where ‘local’ [...] actors come to assume responsibility for externally engineered policies*” (Mosse 2005 : 13) and also how “*‘rule’ is accomplished through complicity and the hegemony of trust and mutual interest*” (Mosse 2005 : 13).

Indeed, development also constitutes relationships between actors. In development projects, particular “articulations” emerge (Li 2004) in which actors are constituted in specific ways. For example, NGOs and the state actors are often constituted as “experts” and/or “allies” to communities. The state and indigenous communities may also be constituted as having mutual interests. However, responsibility for achieving these “common goals” is often placed largely on the shoulders of the “target” communities, while development projects are generally structured by other actors.

To understand development projects in terms of government, one must tease out the complex relationship between knowledge and power. The concept of discourse, to which I have already referred, is necessary for the exploration of this relationship.

1.1.5 Discourse and Development

1.1.5.1 Discourse

Mohan defines discourse as:

[...] a complex relationship between power and knowledge and a radical reading of subjectivity in the sense that through discourses individuals become ‘subjects’. Discourse, then, is ‘the interplay of the rules that make possible the appearance of objects during a given period of time’ (Foucault, 1972 : 33)⁸. Discourse is more than texts and includes a whole range of representational practices through which knowledge is generated, communicated and transformed.

(1997 : 314-315)

⁸ FOUCAULT Michel, 1972, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, London, Tavistock .

The assumptions that influence our decision-making process are shaped through verbal and written language as well as representational practices. Discourse plays a key role in government as it directly affects the way that human-beings perceive ourselves, our relationships to others, and our environment, in terms of our perceptions of how things are, how they should be, and even how they were. It establishes what is appropriate and legitimate, and plays a role in constituting various actors and the relationship between them (Grillo 1997 : 12 ; Escobar 1995). Discourse “*invests actions and objects with meaning, and it bestows people with morally charged identities*” (Rossi 2004 : 2).

1.1.5.2 The Development Discourse

Many authors, primarily in geography and anthropology, have approached development using the concept of discourse. Among the most prominent and provocative of these, is Arturo Escobar (1999, 1996, 1995, 1992a, 1992b). For him development is seen “*as a historically and culturally specific form of rationality which is inseparable from related regimes of practices and configurations of power*” (Rossi 2004 : 1). It becomes a space for the systematic creation of concepts, theories and practices, as well as a domain of thought and action that often seems almost inescapable. This space potentially limits not only what can be said, but even what can be imagined (Escobar 1995 : 39).

Escobar encourages researchers to focus on the systems of relations established between institutions, socioeconomic processes, forms of knowledge and technological factors (Escobar 1995 : 40).

“In sum, the system of relations establishes a discursive practice that sets the rules of the game: who can speak, from what points of view, with what authority, and according to what criteria of expertise; it sets the rules of the game that must be followed for this or that problem, theory or object to emerge and be named, analyzed, and eventually transformed into a policy or a plan.”

(Escobar 1995 : 41)

Therefore, discourse is a product of a system of relations, yet it is also constantly creating, reinforcing and/or changing this system of relations. The rules-setting of the development discourse described here by Escobar is clearly related to Dean’s four dimensions of

government described above. Discourse can, in fact, play a key role in government within development projects; and as I will argue, the spreading of the contemporary development discourse can be a technique of neoliberal government.

1.1.5.1.2 The Monetary Focus of Development

In the dominant development discourse, “poverty”, which some see as a powerful and distorting construction (Sachs 1999 : 10), is seen as the main problem, and economic growth, measured generally in terms of an increase in Gross National Product (GNP) or Gross Domestic Product (GDP), as the solution. The only way to stimulate growth measured by these macro-economic indicators is by encouraging projects that lead to monetary income. As James Petras notes, an important effect of development policies and projects are that they incorporate “*the poor into the neo-liberal economy*” (1997 : np). Thus, the World Bank encourages price reforms which encourage farmers to “*switch to crops that promise the highest returns*”, (World Bank 1991 : 32) while “*‘nontradables’ such as low-value food crops, may experience slower growth of output*” (World Bank 1991 : 29). In other words, the World Bank encourages rural people to switch from subsistence activities to activities that promise a monetary return: “tradable goods”. The discourses and practices of development also tend to lead people to perceive their situation and their needs in monetary terms. Development, thus often leads to the commodification of various aspects of life, as money is symbolically constructed as fulfilling any “real” need⁹. In development, the economic sphere often colonizes the other various domains of social life (Fairclough 2002).

It must be noted that economic goals are often seen as a means to political and cultural ends and that economic strength can contribute to the achievement of some “alternative” projects (Bebbington 2004 and 2000). However, a focus on specific forms of economic production can also contribute to the subduing of political or cultural goals. Further, certain alternative strategies, such as developing social capital and the capacity for autonomous production that is neither dependent on (inter)national markets, nor contributing to the GNP, are completely incongruent with many development projects that focus on monetary goals. If a

⁹ John R. Searle argues that the construction of money and its value are highly dependent on existing institutions and that each time money is used it sustains these institutions as social realities (1995).

community becomes dependant on national or international markets, the autonomy of the community is threatened as it is constrained by the “rules” of the market that are largely outside of its control (Esteva 2005, personal communication). Thus, only “alternative” political and cultural projects that are congruent with the needs of the market become acceptable or executable.

The relationships between the economic sphere, social relations and the environment are particularly relevant to this research. A recent incarnation of the development discourse, “sustainable development”, addresses these relationships directly.

1.1.5.2.2 Sustainable Development

While there is a discursive struggle over the ubiquitous term “sustainability”, the most relevant discourse in this discussion is what Williams and Millington call “weak sustainability” (2004 : 100-102). This discourse holds that through planning and management, as well as technological interventions, people can make the most of the earth’s resources, and therefore eliminate poverty and save the environment at the same time. In the sustainable development discourse, “nature” is seen as having “valuable biodiversity” which local residents can “harmlessly” exploit; such as the commercialization of rare species (for example see Brunois 2004). Indeed, what is sustainable in “sustainable development” is often the income that can be extracted from the environment. The environment thus becomes merely a factor of production (“natural capital”), to be used and transformed through efficient scientific techniques as well as “participative” planning and management.

However, as Sachs observes: *“Not everything that looks like an economic activity is necessarily a part of economics. Indeed, economics offers only one of the many ways of looking at goods-oriented activities and putting them in a larger context”* (1999 : 18). In a rural setting, “goods-oriented activities” involve a direct relationship between people and “nature” which can be seen in many ways (Escobar 1999). For example, many local systems of knowledge exist in which nature and society are not separated ontologically¹⁰;

¹⁰ For examples see Brunois 2004, Shiva 1989.

Escobar (1999 : 7) calls this perspective “organic nature”. As these societies “encounter” development, the commodification of nature can have important consequences.

According to authors such as Vandana Shiva (1993) and James C. Scott (1995, 1998), scientific forestry is particularly dangerous in this regard, largely because of its commodifying effects. They argue that scientific forestry’s reductionist vision of forests as commodities can lead to the disappearance of local knowledge and food systems, and can have disastrous ecological consequences.

Commenting on the colonization of Asia and its forests Shiva writes:

The forest was no longer viewed as having a value itself, in all its diversity. Its value was reduced to the value of commercially exploitable industrial timber [...] The separation of forestry from agriculture, and the exclusive focus on wood production as the objective of forestry led to a creation of one-dimensional forestry paradigm, and the destruction of the multidimensional knowledge systems of forest dwellers and forest users.

(1993 : 17-18)

Thus, through the introduction of “scientific” knowledge, which claims universalistic status, local knowledge systems in which agriculture and the forest are connected are often excluded and even destroyed. Scott (1998 and 1995) looks at an example of a disastrous intervention in Europe in the late 18th Century in which the state, through its obsession with Scientific Forestry, ignored “*the vast and complex negotiated social uses of the forest for hunting and gathering, pasturage, digging valuable minerals, fishing, charcoal-making, trapping and food collection as well as its significance for magic, worship, refuge, etc*” (Scott 1995 : 192). While *community* forestry opens possibilities for local actors to balance and negotiate multiple forestry uses, it is worth asking to what extent adherence to the scientific and commercial forestry vision leads to the marginalization and devaluing of other ideas about, and uses of, the forest.

Also, according to Shiva, the focus on commercially valuable species often disturbs the ecological balance:

The destruction and dispensibility of diversity is intrinsic to forest management guided by the objective of maximising commercial wood production, which sees non-commercial parts and relationships of a forest ecosystem as valueless – as weeds to be destroyed. Nature’s wealth characterised by diversity is destroyed to create commercial wealth characterised by uniformity.

(1993 : 24)

Thus, scientific commercial forestry, which seeks to maximise profits by focusing only on species valued by the market, often leads to less diversity, which may have other serious ecological consequences such as increased vulnerability to pests and weather. Further, when sustainable development becomes defined largely in terms of the ability to have “sustained yields” of profitable species (Shiva 1993 : 50), diversity in food systems (which integrate agriculture and the forest as sources of food) and knowledge systems are at risk. Some argue that scientific commercial forestry and other development efforts lead to what Vandana Shiva calls “monocultures of the mind” (1993).

However, as noted above, contemporary forms of “sustainable development”, including community forestry (which is often a form of scientific commercial forestry), come to affect communities not by directly imposing themselves *on* their target populations, but rather through the implication of these populations *in* them. Connected to the rise of “sustainable development” are, therefore, another discourse and set of practices that are central to this analysis: participation.

1.1.6 Participation

The recent support at various levels for CBNRM, including community forestry, is closely linked to the “*major discursive shift in global development circles toward ensuring the participation of indigenous communities in their own development*” (Dove 2006 : 200). Indeed, nearly all contemporary development claims to be participative. As the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) puts it: “*International development, foreign aid, development cooperation. All these terms mean the same thing: helping people to help themselves*” (2005).

According to Campbell and Vainio-Mattila (2003 : 420-421) the shift in development circles towards participation came out of the work of the “Frankfurt School”, Paulo Freire’s work; NGOs trying to shift power relationships in development; and out of the frustrations of development workers with failed projects.

Given these diverse roots, it is not surprising that the meaning of participation in development is controversial. Hildyard and al. argue that “*‘participation’ covers a spectrum of meanings: for many project managers, it may signal a means to cut costs, secure cheap labour or co-opt opposition; for marginalized groups, by contrast it is a right – both a means to an end and an end in itself*” (2001 : 56-57). It is therefore important to keep in mind that while all actors in a given development project may express their desire for a participative process, the meaning of participation and the reasons for supporting it may differ significantly.

Local actors also support participative processes because the move from models that are overtly and explicitly top-down, towards more “participative” ones, can provide opportunities for control over certain aspects of the development process. This is particularly the case for communities who are well-organized when joining the participative development process¹¹ (Vincent 2003 : 4). Participation can therefore be quite meaningful in some cases and allow for autonomy within a given framework. However, though a certain space for “local” decision-making may be created by “participative development”, the larger processes are almost invariably, to a large extent, top-down:

Being a **participant** in, for example, a conference, means that you are not the **organizer** of the conference. Similarly, the underlying implication of participatory development is that people will be joining a game the rules of which have already been decided.

(Vincent 2003 : 3, emphasis in original).

Thus while participative development may give communities input and some power over certain procedures, their participation is structured within processes that are often largely out of their control and which reflect larger power imbalances.

¹¹ Conversely less-so for the most disorganized and/or marginalized communities.

Critical scholars of participative processes have noted that participation can also be a form of government:

The discourses and practices of participation powerfully govern the possibilities of behaviour, reflection, representation and action within a given arena of research or intervention. They are powerfully productive of new subject positions. Within the bounds of the project ‘participants’ must learn to constitute themselves as [...] part of a collective engaged in a process of problem solving; as responsible for their own progress, as self-reflective, self-policing agents engaged in a rolling process of critical and rational self-analysis.

(Kesby 2003 : 5).

Participative discourses and practices are important elements in the process through which “locals” become subjects of development. Indeed, while participative development empowers people, in that it often seems to give them new options, empowerment is also “*an attempt, however benevolent, to reshape the personhood of the participants*” (Henkel and Stirrat 2001 : 182). What matters, according to Henkel and Stirrat (2001 : 182) “*may not be ‘how much’ are people empowered, but rather ‘for what’ are they empowered*”. I would add that it is equally important what people are consistently *not* empowered for in “development” projects (i.e. a struggle against capitalism and/or structural inequalities). In “development”, people are very often empowered towards the production of tradable goods, which can shift their focus and their priorities away from other, more counter-hegemonic struggles (Petras 1997). Related to this idea, is the fact that participative development processes facilitate the shifting of responsibility for development onto the shoulders of local communities themselves. They often focus communities on self-criticism (Legoas *forthcoming*) and ways in which they can *fit-into*, rather than radically challenge, larger power structures (Petras 1997, McCarthy 2005 :1009-1010).

Finally, based on their examination of a community forestry program in India, Hilyard et al. (2001) argue that group dynamics in development often lead to participatory decisions that reinforce the interests of the already powerful. This may be the case not only between the communities and other “external” actors, but within communities as well, as participative

processes can lead to the reinforcement, or even the deepening of, for example, gender inequalities.

The definitions of various forms of power, discourse, community forestry, neoliberalism and the critical discussion of participation outlined above allow for an informed exploration of the complex relationship between neoliberal government and community forestry. However, before continuing to the research questions and methodology, it is important to look at the sensitive debate around structure and agency and how it relates to this research.

1.1.7 Structure and Agency

As government consists of attempts to guide or shape the action of “free” subjects, it is logical that these subjects have *some* room to manoeuvre within or even against a regime of government. They may propagate counter-discourses and they may strategically adhere to, adapt, or adopt dominant discourses and practices. While the focus of this research is structural power, it is important that this focus does not lead to a denial of local agency (Dove 2006 : 199) or to implying “false consciousness” (Bebbington 2004, Li 2004). Here, the concept of “articulation” is useful to us as “*it recognizes the structural character of distinct entities [...] but highlights the contingency of ways in which they are brought together – articulated – at particular conjunctures*” (Li 2004 : 339). I have paid attention to draw out some of the contingencies of these particular articulations and hence recognize the agency of the actors in this process. I also point out situations in which people may be acting “strategically” within regimes of governance and government. Thus, while the focus of this research is structural power, I am not implying that these forces absolutely determine outcomes (Rossi 2004). If agency is “*the socioculturally mediated capacity to act*” (Ahearn 2001 : 12), a research focus on this “sociocultural mediation” is not necessarily a denial of the capacity of actors to act. Rather, the elucidation of structural power may be useful to actors in that it can provide reflections on potential pathways for action.

1.1.8 Summary and Research Questions

The theoretical and conceptual base that will guide the rest of this analysis has now been established. Firstly, this chapter examined neoliberalism, focusing on its central idea: the market as the allocator of all goods and services and as the ultimate measuring stick of “what works”. I have also looked at community forestry as a practice that involves actors both within and outside the community and that is embedded in power relations. In order to understand these power relations, I have explored various aspects of power, looking briefly at governance while putting particular emphasis on Foucault’s notion of government and its connection to the development discourse. This chapter has also looked at aspects of this discourse, connected to neoliberalism, such as the increasing dominance of the economic sphere and the commodification of nature. Further, I have drawn on authors who argue that while the rise of “participation” may allow for a certain amount of decision-making by local actors in “development”, this participation takes place within larger structures which guide the process. It is worth exploring if and how this process, and those who participate in it, are guided towards ways-of-being that are congruent with neoliberalism. This theoretical analysis has therefore led me to ask the following research questions:

Does neoliberal government manifest itself through the discourse and practices of community forestry in Altamonte del Zopi? If so, how does neoliberal government manifest itself through processes within the comunal enterprise and the discourses of various actors about the operation and governance of the enterprise? Also, how does the environmental discourse of community forestry constitute the relationships between the community, the forest and the state?

1.2 Methodology

1.2.1 General Approach - “Studying Through”

To understand the relationship between neoliberal government, governance and community forestry, I needed a methodology that would allow me to examine both the discourses and practices of community forestry at various levels. In doing so, I followed the lead of Chris Shore and Susan Wright who suggest that anthropologists seek “*a method for analysing connections between levels and forms of social process and action*” (1997 : 14). They

suggest we use “what Reinhold¹² (1994 : 477-9) calls ‘studying through’: tracing ways in which power creates webs of relations between actors, institutions and discourses” (Shore and Wright 1997 : 14 ; see also Gauvin-Racine 2005). For my research, following this approach implies fieldwork, not only in the community and communal office, but also in the offices of NGOs, government institutions and spaces where various actors meet.

Further, following the suggestion of Escobar (1995: 40-41), I have focused particularly on the discourses of various actors, interactions between actors at various institutional levels and socioeconomic processes. This approach is also inspired by Michael Watts who has tried to analyze development and government without ignoring what he calls “*the hard edges of global capitalism*” (2003 : 28). He suggests social scientists look at “*the multiple ways in the name of adaptation, that governable and ungovernable spaces and subjects are thrown up by the rough and tumble of the grand slam of liberal capitalism*” (2003 : 29). While subjects in Altamonte are not “thrown up” nearly as dramatically or as violently as those in Watts’ study of oil and conflict in Nigeria, it seems they are being “squeezed” by pressures of the market under neoliberal trade policies.

1.2.3 Data Collection

As I wanted data from a variety of actors at multiple institutional levels, a multi-site approach was necessary. Actors involved with community forestry are situated in various spaces, from the actual forests of the community in the *Sierra Sur* of Oaxaca State, to the World Bank office in Washington D.C. However, due to financial and temporal constraints, I focused on the town of Altamonte del Zopi, its work camp and its communal office, as well as other (largely NGO and government) actors that could be found in Ciudad Oaxaca. I also attended a national forestry congress in Morelia, Michoacán, Mexico.

A year prior to doing my official field work, while working as a research assistant, I established contacts in NGOs and in communities, collected documents, did some interviews¹³ and some participant observation. This experience and a review of the literature that I collected there helped me choose Altamonte del Zopi as the focus of my

¹² Shore and Wright’s bibliographical reference: Reinhold, Susan, 1994, “Local Conflict and Ideological Struggle: “Positive Images” and Section 28”, U. of Sussex, unpublished Phd thesis.

research. Specifically, I chose the community because of its success in, and focus on, community forestry, its connection to various actors at multiple levels, and because of the community's involvement in a particular social movement and regional organization¹⁴. Further, before arriving in Oaxaca the second time, I made contact with an NGO in Ciudad Oaxaca, as well as with Altamonte's forestry engineer. This work allowed me to make the most of my limited time in the state as I already had a basic understanding of community forestry in Oaxaca, some important contacts, and had completed the first step towards gaining access to the community.

My first month of fieldwork was spent mainly in Ciudad Oaxaca, identifying more actors in the NGO and government sectors and in the community enterprise's office (located in the Ciudad Oaxaca). After making contact with these actors and having informal discussions with many of them, I conducted interviews with a few of them. I also made arrangements with the forestry engineer and the *comisariado* of Altamonte to spend time in the community. At this stage, I also attended an intercommunity seminar on *ordenamiento territorial* (territorial ordering) held in a different "model" forest community. During the following three months, I returned often to Ciudad Oaxaca for various events involving different actors, to meet with and interview NGO and state sector professionals and to collect documents pertaining to community forestry from these sources. I was also able to chat with and interview Gustavo Esteva, an internationally renowned critical development scholar who works in Oaxaca. I also interviewed a professor at a technical institute who played a key role in the creation of a recent development plan for Altamonte (PDFC 2005). In Ciudad Oaxaca, I undertook participant observation in the community enterprise's office which became an important research site. There, I was able to take field notes on a training process; observe meetings in which professionals and men from the community were present; and have informal chats and do interviews with the actors who were working in the community enterprise.

¹³ All interviews cited took place in Spanish and were subsequently translated.

¹⁴ The organization was called Coordinadora de Organizaciones y Ejidos Forestales de Oaxaca (COCOEFEO). However, after a short time in the community I discovered that the regional organization was long dead, that the community's involvement in it had been relatively minimal and that the community no longer ascribed much importance to it (if they ever had). I therefore adjusted my research accordingly.

My time in the community was divided mainly between the work camp and the town of Altamonte itself. I first spent time in the work camp which is where many of the “working-aged” men live from Monday to Friday. There, I was able to observe how they live and work during the week and was able to do participatory observation in day-to-day forestry work and forest related projects. This period allowed me to build relationships with some of these men as well as the women who cooked in the work camp and an older couple who had a ranch in the same area. I was able to document informal chats and conduct a few semi-directed interviews during this stage as well. Further, at the work camp, I also benefited from long conversations (which I documented in my field notes) and an interview with a professional forester who was involved with various NGOs and who had been contracted by the government and the community to do a study which sought to improve tree extraction. Finally, during my time in the camp, members of a different community arrived for an intercommunity seminar in which members of Altamonte were giving them a tour of their enterprise. I took very detailed field notes of these interactions and used the collected data in later interviews.

In the town of Altamonte, where I spent the majority of my last 2.5 months, I was able to carry out participant observation in the preparation and celebration of various *convivencias* (get-togethers) and to have informal discussions with people of all ages (male and female), which I would document in detail in my field notebook as soon as possible after they occurred. I also conducted many interviews with a variety of informants during this time. Further, I was able to observe and take field notes of three general assemblies (of men) as well as two meetings of the *Comité de Caracterizados* (Elders Committee). These meetings were places to observe decision-making, formal political and organizational processes in the community, as well as document discourse. I took detailed field notes on these processes and the interactions.

To grasp larger discourses and connect local issues to a national context, I attended a three day national forestry conference in Morelia, Michoacan along with the delegation from Oaxaca, where I recorded speeches and workshops with my tape recorder, took fieldnotes, and had informal conversations with representatives of various communities involved in forestry. I also gathered documents from a variety of government and NGO sources.

Following an inductive approach, I adjusted my interview questions and even interviewed a few participants multiple times to address important issues that arose during this process. I did a total of 60 interviews with 50 informants. 36 of these informants were from the community (men and women of various ages, though somewhat weighted towards “working-aged” men as they were the most “involved” in the enterprise). The rest included the two professors and the forester mentioned above as well as NGO workers and government workers connected to Altamonte’s CFE.

1.2.4 Data Analysis

One of the challenges of analysing my data (other than its sheer quantity), was that I had collected it in various formats (fieldnotes, audio and written documents). The first step was to transcribe all of the interviews and type out my field notes to bring everything into a textual form that facilitated organization and analysis. In transcribing and looking over my data, I established important themes that arose such as “environment”, “problems and needs”, “efficiency and competitiveness” and then coded sections of my interviews, field notes and documents accordingly. I then looked at the data organized under these themes alongside the basic tenants of neo-liberal governance and government that I had established through a selective literature review. Dean’s four dimensions of “*the analytics of government*” (1999 : 23) (above) were useful in helping me tease out these connections.

I must also note that the main focus of my discourse analysis is the point where the discourse of various actors intersects. This is the case because I found a relatively consistent discourse emanating from various sources. The extent of the commonality of the discourse that I documented may partly be due to a certain “ethnographic” effect - actors trying to tell me what they thought I wanted to hear, or, in the case of communal actors, what would guarantee that they keep their funding for their projects. However, I was also able to document discourse in various contexts such as trainings, assemblies and in more informal “semi-private” discussions and intercommunity seminars. I am sure that some discourses remained off-limits to me. However, the pervasiveness of this “common” discourse and associated practices in various settings provides strong evidence of important government effects which I describe in this thesis. Having said that, I also paid attention to

the “whiffs” of other, somewhat contradictory, or more marginal, discourses and have drawn on these as well.

1.3 Material Connection

Finally, throughout my research and in analyzing my field data I was aware that government effects, their impacts on community life and their particular articulations were closely related to specific material realities. Informants connected their need to change themselves, their enterprise and their community to the necessity of competing in an increasingly competitive market. While I was weary of scope limitations, I undertook some basic documental research to explore the link between this government and “the hard edges” of neoliberal capitalism (Watts 2003 : 28). Of particular interest is a document produced by the US Department of Agriculture on forestry opportunities in Mexico which explains how the Mexican timber market is open to competition from the US (See USDA 2004).

1.4 Chapter Conclusion

In order to undertake this research I have defined my key terms including community forestry, neoliberalism, discourse, government and governance. I have also shown how these themes are connected, and explored this connection through a discussion of the discourses and practices of “development” and “participation”. After briefly addressing the “structure versus agency” debate I defined my specific research questions which focused on neoliberal government and governance in a “model” forestry community.

The general methodological framework I established is “studying through” (Shore and Wright 1997 : 14) which involves multi-site research in order to explore the connections between multiple actors who operate in a variety of spaces. I therefore collected written documents and held interviews in NGO and government offices in Ciudad Oaxaca as well as in the communal enterprises office (also in Ciudad Oaxaca) and in the community itself. I then put all of my sources into text form and separated them based on broad themes. Finally, I looked at these themes in light of my theoretical knowledge, as well as the

relevant historical, political and social context. This context is the focus of the following chapter.

Chapter II – ELEMENTS OF CONTEXT

Having now established research questions, theoretical framework and methodology, some elements of historical and political context are necessary. It is of course difficult to do justice to the complexity of the context that is relevant to the question at hand. The greater the understanding of the larger historical and political context as well as the contemporary living and working situation of the people of Altamonte, the better one can understand the contemporary discourses and their effects. In order to examine the most important elements in this limited space, I have broken down this chapter into two principal sections. The first is the larger historical and political context surrounding community forestry. In this section, I will move chronologically, starting very briefly in the colonial period. Of particular interest are efforts by the state to exercise control over forested areas and the indigenous people in forested regions throughout the 20th century, as well as the simultaneous rise of community forestry and neoliberalism. The second section is a brief overview of contemporary Altamonte del Zopi, with a focus on the governance structures of the community and the enterprise itself. In this chapter I will also examine gender dynamics and the sense of urgency for change felt by many members of the community which will help explain the exercise of government in the community.

2.1 Historical and Political Contexts of Community Forestry

2.1.1 Indigenous Land Control Since the Colonial Period

In the colonial period in Oaxaca, one major point stands out: that despite huge population decline and inhumane treatment, many indigenous people in Oaxaca were determined to keep formal control of their land and were successful in doing so. In Oaxaca, *“the great hacienda did not become a major feature of the colonial landscape”* (Clarke 2000 : 16). While both the church and Spanish estate owners did get control of significant amounts of the more productive land in the valley, indigenous communities maintained control of a significant portion due, in part, to *“an imperial system that recognized Indian[sic] land*

rights” and “*the determination of the Indians[sic] to defend their individual and communal property at law*” (Clarke 2000 : 21).

Communities living in forested areas have been particularly successful in retaining control of their territory and also in regaining it in subsequent land distributions as “*historically, forests have been considered second-class lands in Mexico*” (TCPS 2000 : 5). Though De Vos 1988 has noted that there was a mahogany rush in the Selva Lacandona of Chiapas from the 1820s on,

“it was not until 1884, as forests of the states of Chihuahua and Durango were becoming important providers of pine and oak to North American markets, that overarching federal legislation regulating forestry in the country came into existence.”

(De Vos 1988 in Hébert and Rosen 2007 : 10)

Indeed, it was in the era known as the “Porfiriato”, at the turn of the 20th century, that forests first took on a real importance to the Mexican state.

2.1.2 The Porfiriato: Forests, Indigenous People and Liberalism

The era in Mexican political history dominated by the presidency of Porfirio Díaz (1876-80 and 1884-1911), known as the “Porfiriato”, marked a period of “liberalism” and “free trade” in Mexico which has much in common with the current neoliberal regime, as well as some important differences. Díaz perceived foreign capital as key to both territorial and economic consolidation of the nation. “*He envisioned foreign capital opening up frontier locations by providing necessary infrastructure, thereby encouraging colonization, national business opportunities and Mexican control of the area challenged by British Honduras, Guatemala, and rebel Maya*” (Klepeis 2003 : 555).

Under Díaz, forests also took on a whole new importance due to a number of factors including the international demand for wood; rapid population growth in the countryside; near desertification of much-needed productive lands caused by deforestation and the modernizing ambitions of Díaz and his state governors (Hébert and Rosen 2007 : 10). As part of this modernizing project, Díaz sought to develop the forest industry primarily

through the injection of foreign capital. From that period on, forestry was seen as a way to alleviate the poverty of the *campesinos*¹⁵ “*but also as a way to consolidate the Mexican state itself by becoming a vector for the assimilation of indigenous groups through modernization*” (Hébert and Rosen 2007 : 11). It is also at this point that economic growth, preservation and “rational” use of the forest, became important themes in Mexican forestry policy, accompanied by the denigration of traditional agricultural practices. These themes are still important in contemporary forestry policy.

A central figure in this period was Miguel Angel de Quevedo, a civil engineer trained in France, who played “*a key role in professionalizing forestry [...] and entrenching environmental protectionist attitudes toward forest conservation*” Klooster (2003 : 99). Indeed, De Quevedo sought to “*protect forests from campesinos*” (Klooster 2003 : 101) – who were portrayed as highly destructive to forests – through logging bans and the creation of national parks. Contrary to current forest policy, this philosophy did not promote a *campesino* role in forest use or stewardship, but rather an increasingly authoritative and repressive forest bureaucracy (Klooster 2003 : 99-100). The philosophy at the time was that Indigenous people were to be kept away from forest resources for the good of the nation. “*‘Education’ of peasants was to teach them how not to harm forests, [rather than] how to use them ‘productively’*” (Hébert and Rosen 2007 : 15).

President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40), took a more decentralized and *campesino*-focused approach (Klepeis 2003) and actually dismissed de Quevedo. Taking advantage of the US focus on Europe, President Lázaro Cardenas (1934-40) began to fulfill some of the promises of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1921), nationalizing the oil industry (taking control over an industry traditionally dominated by large foreign corporations) and distributing 18 million hectares of land to 800,000 recipients. As part of his “*project of consolidating a peasant base of support for the ruling party*” (Klooster 2003 : 101), he also encouraged forestry communities to exploit their own resources, supporting, in particular, “*community resin extraction in central Mexico’s temperate forests and chicle extraction in*

¹⁵ Mexican rural-dwellers, often directly translated as *peasants*. However, this term can be misleading as these actors often have diverse livelihood strategies (wage labour, forest extraction, craft production, remittances among others) and, partly as a result, are involved in a large variety of social relations (see Kearney 1996).

the southeast” (Merino and Seguro-Warnholz 2005 : 51). Though, in general, he “*paid little attention to forest development*” (Merino and Seguro-Warnholz 2005 : 51), the land reform and the precedent that it set (which would be followed by Echeverría in the 1970s) as well as Cardenas’ discourse of community control, are important contributions to community forestry. It is important to note that Cardenas’ nationalistic policies also had an “indigenist” agenda in that the introduction of modern forestry (and the presence of mestizo engineers and specialized workers) would provide a “good example” for the development, and assimilation, of Indigenous peasants (Hébert and Rosen 2007 : 12 and 16). Further, despite Cardenas’ limited attempts encouraging community participation in forestry, this period was generally marked by the *rentismo*¹⁶ that has plagued Mexican forestry throughout the 20th century (Klooster 2003 : 99, ASETECO 2003, Bray 2005).

2.1.3 1940-1970 - “Top-down” Development

Miguel Alemán’s presidency (1946-52) would mark the beginning of state-led capitalist “modernization” and import-substitution policies which would be followed by the Mexican government until the de la Madrid government (1982-88) (Bray and Merino-Pérez 2002, Klooster 2003). In forestry, the paper shortage caused by World War II and the heightened concern of government officials about dependence on imports set the stage for this productivity centred “top-down” development era. However, Vitye (1993 : 112) argues that this idea of productive uncertainty was seized upon by the Mexican government to gain control of sectors that had been dominated by foreign capital since the Porfiriato. This approach was again very centralized (Klepeis 2003 : 551), though unlike development in the oil industry at the time, it left “*a significant role for private corporations*” (Hébert and Rosen 2007 : 18).

Importantly, this period also marked the turn of the states’ attention to more remote areas such as Oaxaca, as accessible forests near Mexico City became less productive and demand

¹⁶ Klooster describes *rentista* agreements in which private companies use short-term permits, relationships of *compadrazgo*, *caciquismo*, raw corruption, and direct violence to buy timber at cutthroat prices (Klooster 2003 : 99). According to the CONAFOR - it means renting out their forests for a fixed price without participating in the “*aprovechamiento*.” (CONAFOR 2003). Bray (2005 : 335) also describes this type of forestry arrangement in detail.

from growing industries and construction was high (Beltrán 1959). Thus, private corporations were to inject capital, know-how and technology into these regions in order to modernize them (Wilshuen 2002, Mathews 2003, Hébert and Rosen 2007 : 18).

It follows that the dominant forestry policy from the 1940s to the 1960s was therefore to give national private capital favourable conditions under which to invest in such areas. This was achieved through “concessions”, which meant that communities were only able to sell the rights to their forests to one company. These policies, which included repealing of the part of Article 27 of the Mexican constitution (which allowed communities full rights over their territories) hindered communities’ bargaining position vis-à-vis these private corporations. In Oaxaca, two forestry companies, FAPATUX and CFO (the company that was already working in Altamonte), were granted concessions in the late 1950s¹⁷. Further, these companies generally practiced selective logging (*el método mexicano*), in which they only took the best trees, negatively affecting the genetic stock as well as the regeneration of the more commercially valuable, light-loving pine (Zabin 1998 : 405-6). The only compensation the communities received was sporadic employment and often extremely low stumpage fees¹⁸ (Klooster 2003 : 105).

“In Oaxaca, company representatives and agrarian officials often arrived at community meetings together and contracts were often signed amidst freely flowing mezcal, beer, and empty promises of roads and schools” (Abardía and Solano 1995 in Klooster 2003 : 105). Not only did the government set up these unfair trading situations for campesinos through laws, but government agencies such as the Secretaría de Reforma Agraria and the Secretaría de Agricultura y Recursos Hidráulicos were also directly complicit in the corruption between the companies and the communities (López-Arzola 2005 : 112-114).

One effect of these policies was that more qualified workers were brought in from other states (Klooster 2003 ; Merino-Pérez 2004). This was seen as beneficial by foresters as it was a way for mestizo labour to be used productively in the forestry sector. Also, in this period, perhaps even more than in the Cardenas period, some saw potential for

¹⁷ Bray and Merino-Pérez (2002) note that this period was also marked by ineffective bans on forestry in the name of conservation.

¹⁸ Fees paid for the right to log.

“acculturation”, as indigenous workers worked along side mestizos in industrial production (Hébert and Rosen 2007 : 16). In some cases, this was expressed extremely clearly:

We wish to take this opportunity to reiterate one more time our idea that, without any romantic attitudes the indigenous problem should be settled as soon as possible, bringing to aboriginal groups all the benefits of Western culture and making it so that little by little, the difference between the various Mexican groups disappears in order to achieve a true national integration.

(Beltrán 1959 : 76 in Hébert and Rosen 2007 : 16, their translation)

This thesis argues that elements of western commercial forestry culture have, indeed, seeped into Altamonte del Zopi and that community forestry can play a role in forms of “acculturation”.

Nonetheless, by the 1960s, this policy of private concessions “*had not even fulfilled the objective of overcoming the trade deficit in forest products*” (Merino-Pérez and Segura-Warnholz 2005 : 54). The state therefore began to invest more heavily in forestry, creating state-owned enterprises and taking over private ones (often referred to as “parastatals”) which would then take advantage of the concessions. In some ways, this concessionary period would lay the groundwork for community forestry by bringing commercial forestry techniques, machinery and culture into communities and by creating road networks connecting communities’ forests to bigger cities. I will explore this link further in Chapter IV.

2.1.3.1 Effects on Oaxacan Forestry Communities

In Oaxaca, these policies, which largely followed the ECLA “developmentalist” model (Babb 76-77), led to quick steady economic growth and industrialization, but also to massive inequality and the destruction of local economies which hit rural communities in southern states such as Oaxaca particularly hard¹⁹. The roads built for the exportation of

¹⁹ “*El caso de Oaxaca ilustra así, con impresionante claridad, el efecto real del “desarrollo” sobre la mayoría de la población : se basa en el sacrificio de las economías locales y regionales y de los modos de vida de las mayorías. Ese sacrificio se realiza en el altar del proyecto fundamentalista de construir una economía y generalizar un modo de vida calcado de una versión idealizada de la vida moderna en los Estados Unidos*” (ASETECO 2003 : 32)

forest products allowed cheap industrial and agricultural products to flow into the region, devastating local manufacturing and agricultural sectors (ASETECO 2003 : 32). Further, the federal program, CONASUPO would channel cheap, (and low quality) corn that would compete on local markets, and eventually favour a restructuring of local indigenous economies toward commercial crops and commercial activities (Cohen 2001 : 957, Personal Communication, Martin Hébert, 2007). This, along with government pricing policy, led to a decline in farming incomes and moved farmers in forested communities away from agriculture and towards forestry. Although, in the optic of “modernization” and “development”, this was seen as “progress”, the destruction of the local manufacturing sector and the decline of traditional agriculture²⁰ had strong effects on rural communities which many see as negative (ASETECO 2003 : 31, Moros and Solano 1995 : 102).

2.1.3.2 Emigration

Mass migration out of small Oaxacan communities started in the 1950s, either towards large urban centres in Mexico or to the USA, arguably as a result of “development” policies (ASETECO 2003 : 31, Cohen 2001 : 957). There are now more Oaxacans that live outside of Oaxaca than in the state itself and remittances have become an indispensable component of many communities’ economies²¹ (ASETECO 2003 : 32, field notes 2004). In many communities, migration (much of it temporary) affects almost every sphere of life. Moros and Solano claim that most migrants assumed an obligation to support the struggle for community-based forestry (1995 : 106) and struggles in Oaxaca (see below), included international tactics, such as pressure on the Mexican consulate in Los Angeles (ASETECO 2003 : 217).

2.1.4 Resistance - the Spirit of the 1960s and 1970s

Throughout Mexico, and much of the world, the late 1960s were a time of political turmoil. In rural areas, guerrilla movements were organizing, while in Mexico City, in 1968, the

²⁰ In the District of Ixtlán, between 1950 and 1970, the area planted to maize dropped 72% and total production dropped by 80% (Moros and Solano 1995)

²¹ In the communities I visited in May-June 2004, as many as 50% of the men and some women of the community were living outside of its physical boundaries, mainly in Ciudad Oaxaca, Mexico City and especially the USA.

army's violent repression of unarmed demonstrating students sent shockwaves throughout the country and the world. The policies of presidents Echeverría (1970-76) and López Portillo (76-82) that included increased social spending, significant land reform and support for some community forestry initiatives are often seen as responses to political instability (Bray and Merino 2003 : 66-67 and Babb 2001 : 111). As Bray and Merino (2003 : 67) put it, "*the Mexican mechanism for achieving both rural pacification and a new source of timber was to grant local communities major forest areas, with the potential for the growth of autonomous local action*".²²

A leftist corps in the ministry of agriculture that supported a concept of grassroots forestry development flourished in this era. One important state actor that would emerge out of this situation would be the DGDF²³ who would do studies, help start experimental community forestry projects, and lobby for the lifting of forestry bans and the promotion of the community forestry model (Bray and Merino-Pérez 2002 : 36-38, I 10). The DGDFs employees would filter into higher posts in government as well as local NGOs.

These early community forestry initiatives supported by sectors of the government along with the land reform of the 1970s were important factors in the initial growth of community forestry. Another important element was the growth of local resistance to the concessions. In Oaxaca, large scale local resistance is often traced back to 1967 and the community of Macuiltianguis. This community started a contract strike in which it refused to sign a contract with a company and thirteen other communities soon followed its lead (Moros and Solano 1995 : 104). During the 1970s, conflicts between communities and the concessionaires became more intense and widespread. Regional organizations such as ORDRENASIJ²⁴ as well as a group of eight other communities led principally by Ixtlán in the Northern Sierra and by Altamonte del Zopi and Santiago Textitlán in the Southern Sierra would organize to struggle against new concessions that had been granted in 1982

²² As we will see, it is partly through forms of government connected to community forestry that the state attempts to "limit" or at very least "guide" this local action.

²³ The *Dirección General de Desarrollo Forestal* "...would become a rich brew of moderate reformers, environmentalists, and political radicals, with ties reaching out from the bureaucracy into political parties, newly emergent NGOs, and the forest communities themselves (Bray and Merino-Pérez 2002 : 36)."

²⁴ *Organización en Defensa de los Recursos Naturales y Desarrollo Social de la Sierra Juárez* was a group of communities which opposed the concessions.

(See Moros and Solano 1995, Klooster 2003, Zabin 1998, Bray and Merino-Pérez 2002, ASETECO 2003). Their victory, which culminated in the canceling of the concessions, the 1986 Forestry Law and the blooming of community forestry in Oaxaca, coincided with, and was partly a result of, the shift towards neoliberalism at the national and international policy level (Taylor 2001).

2.1.5 The Debt Crisis and the Rise of Neoliberalism

The move towards neoliberalism in Mexico can be attributed to both the rise of the “technocrats” trained at the Chicago school of economics (Babb 2001) and the Mexican debt crisis. The crisis came as the Mexican government (along many others) owed more money to international lenders than it could feasibly pay back. The causes of the crisis included irresponsible lending by financial institutions (partly due to an international surplus of petro-dollars); the floating of the U.S. dollar to finance the Vietnam War and the subsequent rapid rise in interest rates; the decline of world oil prices and heavy government spending financed by international borrowing. When it hit, and international institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF intervened with their first SAP, the technocrats in the De La Madrid government (1982-88) complied enthusiastically (see Chapter I). Social spending and the import-substitution model were thus on their way out, while open markets, international integration, export promotion, decreased public expenditures and technocratic economic management were on their way in (Babb 2001 : 171). In this context, the policy of concessions, often to “parastatal” companies, no longer fit well with the national economic strategy. The rise of neoliberalism therefore created fortuitous conditions for the end of the concessionary era and the beginnings of community forestry. *“Though the forestry sector’s transformation cannot be entirely attributed to this new policy environment, neoliberalism has had an important impact”* (Taylor 2001 : 63). Indeed, this paper will demonstrate how aspects of community forestry such as the commercialization and commodification of nature; the promotion of “tradable” goods; and the promotion of “competitiveness” and “efficiency” according to market criteria fit well with the neoliberal agenda.

With the rise of neoliberalism in Mexico came the rise of “participatory” approaches and increased NGO participation in mainstream development circles (Veltmeyer and Petras 2005 : 124). Interestingly, in Latin America, the growth in the number and importance of NGO’s came at the same time as the rise of neoliberalism. Indeed, in some cases, NGOs partially filled a void left by the withdrawal of the state, and some argue, created a “soft cushion” reducing class conflict (see Petras 1997). NGOs that emerged in this period, such as ASETECO in the case of Altamonte, have played an important role in the emergence and promotion of community forestry.

Community forestry in Oaxaca therefore came about due to a series of factors including the indigenous ownership of land; the experience of these communities with private companies (often concessionaires); the struggles by indigenous communities against these companies; and support for community forestry in government sectors. Importantly, it was also a result of the simultaneous rise of neoliberalism, NGO’s and the “participative” development model. Government support for community forestry was solidified by the 1986 Forestry Law.

2.1.5.1 The 1986 Forestry Law

Following pressure from these NGOs, unions of forest-owning communities, and from reformers within both the state’s forestry bureaucracy and *Reforma Agraria* (the agrarian reform agency), the 1986 forestry law:

1) Ended all private concessions and initiated a process of dismantling the parastatals; 2) required more detailed and environmentally sensitive studies for logging permits; and 3) authorized communities to receive (directly or through second-level organizations) forest technical services (Bray and Merino-Pérez 2002 ; Klooster 2003 : 109).

This law was generally seen as a victory by supporters of community forestry. It gave communities more control over their forests and provided incentives for collective action around profitable logging businesses. After breaking free from a concessionaire, community revenues increased by as much as 600 percent, even after raising the wages of community-member loggers. This transformation of opportunities generated powerful motivations for communities to engage in the construction of grassroots social capital

(Klooster 2003 : 109). Central to the argument that I am making here is that, through community forestry, the use and construction of such social capital is guided in specific directions that are congruent with neoliberalism as defined in Chapter I.

2.1.6 The Evolution of Forestry Policy in the Neoliberal Era

“Neoliberal ideology demanded a series of changes to agrarian and forest laws that paradoxically, increased the need for state support to campesino forest communities at the same time that the state retreated from previous methods of intervening in the countryside” (Klooster 2003 : 112-113). Indeed the signing of the GATT and NAFTA (free trade agreements) led to the opening up of Mexico’s forestry sector to competition and investment from the US and Canada. Further, the raw form of neoliberalism, reflected in the 1992 forestry law, led to a retreat of state intervention, including cuts to community forestry subsidies, in the early 1990s, which supporters of community forestry generally saw as a step backwards (See Zabin 1998 ; Taylor and Zabin 2000 ; Taylor 2001 ; Klooster 2003).

In the late 1990s, partly as a result of pressure from inside the government and the community forestry sector (Klooster 2003 : 115-116) in combination with changes in international financial institutions and their philosophy (see Ch. I), government support for community forestry was renewed. In the “new” global neoliberal framework (the “post-Washington consensus”) such support is seen as warranted as it aims to bring communities into larger markets and meet contemporary environmental norms. The *World Bank Forestry Report* (1989-93) had already created the foundations for this renewed support and World Bank loans partially financed (and continue to finance) programs such as PRODEFOR and PRODEPLAN that were included in Mexico’s 1997 forestry law (Hébert and Rosen 2007 : 12 ; Klooster : 2003).

More than half of PRODEFOR's 1998 expenditures underwrote the costs of forest management plans [...] the program also funded training workshops for communities not yet involved in timber production. The community forestry management sector not only called for more funding, but also for a greater emphasis on enhancing community managerial capacity and technical forestry skills.

(Klooster 2003 : 116)

The federal government has continued to distribute World Bank-funded subsidies which help bring communities into community forestry and to comply with environmental norms that are in line with World Bank priorities. This funding also helps communities navigate the legal and bureaucratic framework demanded by the state. These programs and the laws, norms and processes connected to them are important elements of the web of government connected to community forestry. I will explore aspects of them, particularly *Programas de Manejo Forestales* (Forestry Management Plans), in Chapter IV. In fact, access to these subsidies is generally predicated upon adherence to norms which legitimate and validate the state (Hebert and Rosen 2007 : 14).

Other programs, such as PROCyMAF, a pilot project in Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Michoacán also partly funded by World Bank loans since 1998 has:

developed an innovative approach to building communities' managerial capacity for forestry through training in administration and forest management, participatory rural appraisals, and workshops in which successful forestry communities share their knowledge with less experienced forestry communities.

(Klooster 2003 : 116)

I will attempt to demonstrate how efforts to "improve" management and administration through "participative" processes with the goal of economic efficiency can lead to, or become forms of, neoliberal government. One such process, explored in Chapter IV, is a community forestry workshop like the one mentioned in the above quote. Specifically, this thesis will look at the discourse in this workshop and how it pertains to government.

In April 2001, the Fox government created the Comisión Nacional Forestal (CONAFOR) which administers the above mentioned programs and whose staff is actively involved in their promotion and execution. The CONAFOR's policy is to officially support community forestry and it receives financial support (along with guidelines) from the World Bank to that end (CONAFOR 2003, Klooster 2003, Bray, Merino-Pérez and Barry 2005, Merino-Pérez and Segura-Warnholtz 2005). Community forestry was, in fact, the main focus at the CONAFOR's annual conference in Michoacán in 2005 (field notes Nov. 24th and 25th, 2005).

Currently, community forestry is championed by state institutions, NGOs and academics as potentially providing “*equity, social stability, and better environmental management of local and global forest resources*” (Antinori and Bray 2005 : 1541, see also Bray, Merino-Pérez and Barry 2005). Many communities have indeed created community forestry enterprises which allow them a degree of control over their forestry operations and a few have made very important material gains through forestry (Bray, Merino-Pérez and Barry 2005).

2.2 Altamonte del Zopi

Altamonte del Zopi, the community in which I did my fieldwork, is in fact, upheld as one of Oaxaca State's best examples of what community forestry can achieve, in terms of both community control and profits. It is considered by state institutions as a sort of “model” to which other communities can aspire.

The community of Altamonte del Zopi is found in the southern branch of the Sierra Madre mountain range (*Sierra Sur*), southwest of Ciudad Oaxaca (see Appendix II). Of all of the communities in the *Sierra Sur*, Altamonte has among the largest land masses, with approximately 30,000 hectares of land, 20,000 of which are forested (*Smartwood* 2004 ; PDFC 2005). However, the community is currently besieged by land disputes with a number of neighbouring communities which affects how much they are currently able to log. The forests are generally pine and pine-oak and the most commercially valuable species are *P. pseudostrobus* and *P. patula* var. *longipedunculata* (*Smartwood* 2004). The climate is mainly temperate-humid (*templado húmedo*) and the terrain is mountainous (80%

of their territory is sloped). Most of the communities of the region, including Altamonte, are accessible only by dirt roads that were originally created by the private *Compañía Forestal de Oaxaca* (CFO) (ASETECO 2003).

In Altamonte, the people are of Zapotec ancestry. Many of the older people in the community speak some Zapotec, but very few young people do. According to the communal engineer, the community formed around the year 1600 (field notes Oct. 21st, 2005). It became an official independent Municipal Agency, with its own communal territory and government, at the beginning of the 1800s (Garibay 2004 : 19).

The actual community is made up of various towns (*rancherías*) where people live. The largest of population center of the community is actually called “Altamonte del Zopi” and it contains the community’s main elementary school, the municipal palace, the church, the cemetery and both health clinics. Generally, the major communal celebrations take place in this population centre and people from the other towns of the community gather there for these occasions. In the actual town of Altamonte del Zopi, during most of the week, as many of the working aged men are in work camps, tents near their work area or at the office, the town is occupied mainly by women, children and “retired” men.

Another of the community’s major population centres lies two kilometers away and contains a “*telebachillerato*” (a senior high school taught partly through standardized videos) and high school. There is also a communal school bus to transport children to schools if there is not one in their town. The curriculum, some basic teaching materials and teachers for these schools are supplied by the state, however, there is a communal school committee made up of *comuneros* that is in communication with these teachers.

Like most indigenous communities in Oaxaca, Altamonte is organized according to the “*Usos y Costumbres*”, a complex system of rights and responsibilities based largely on age. In Altamonte, these rights and responsibilities are generally reserved to the men (an issue I will return to later) over 18²⁵ who are referred to as commoners (*comuneros*). According to

²⁵ Men over 18 in the community actually choose whether to become *comuneros* or not and the vast majority choose yes.

this model (See Appendix I), the *Asamblea General de Comuneros*²⁶ (General Assembly of Commoners) is formally the highest authority as all important decisions affecting the community must be approved by the *Asamblea*.

The rights of *comuneros* currently include the right to a job in the communal enterprise; territory on which to build a house; a percentage of revenue from the enterprise when it is distributed; access to communal services; and a “voice and vote” in the *Asamblea*. In the *Asamblea*, *comuneros* can also bring up important issues to be resolved or even ask for a loan from the community in a time of crisis. These decisions often take place through discussion and consensus and sometimes by a vote or show of hands. Middle-aged and older men generally speak more in the *Asamblea*. The basic responsibilities of *comuneros* are to attend assemblies and to do *Tequios* : communal work for the common good. The major *Tequio* being performed while I was there was to carry multiple bags of heavy gravel and wood for a communal reservoir up a hill.

Comuneros must also take on posts or obligations referred to as *cargos*²⁷. Most of these positions are unpaid or paid very little, however (as we’ll see in Chapter III), some *cargos*, which are connected to the management of the communal enterprise, are now paid more than most of the official enterprise jobs. The core *cargos* are those that serve the municipal agency, the *Alcalde* (communal judge) and the community’s Catholic Church. The men of the community rise through these *cargos* throughout their life. The first six are “voluntary” in that the *Asamblea* chooses by votes (largely based on age) out of those who put their names forward. People who have not finished these six must serve as communal police officers during years that they are not serving other *cargos*. Many of these positions are “part-time” as more than one person is named to each position and they rotate throughout the year, a few weeks at a time. At times they all mobilize for communal festivities. The top six positions are not voluntary and are voted on by all the adults in the community. Men bring their family’s ballots to the *Asamblea* and only men are voted into these positions.

²⁶ Herein referred to as the “*Asamblea*”

²⁷ According to the *Usos y Costumbres*, essentially all the positions of authority are *cargos* and are traditionally very poorly remunerated (if at all). Every *comunero* is expected to fulfill the *cargos* to which they are assigned which often means significant financial and temporal sacrifice. Part of the effects of this system is generally a distribution of power and wealth.

Among these positions are those of the municipal agency including the *Agente Municipal* who is the top municipal government authority position in the community.

Parallel to the agency is the *Comisariado de Bienes Comunales*²⁸ (communal resources management committee) and the *Consejo de Vigilancia* (vigilance council). The *Comisariado*, which is in charge of all communal territory including the communal enterprise, is made up of a President, a Secretary and a Treasurer. The responsibility of the *Comisariado* includes not only the communal enterprise, but also territorial disputes, which currently take up a significant amount of its energy and time. However, any important decisions that the *Comisariado* and the *Agente Municipal* want to make must first be approved by the *Asamblea*. To do so they can call assemblies. They set the agenda for these assemblies which they often keep secret until the meeting begins. How to “sell” an idea to the *Asamblea* seems to be an important concern for any people who want to make changes in the community.

The *Consejo de Vigilancia* is essentially a check on the power of these other two committees and also plays an advisory role to them. The members of these committees are generally assigned by the *Asamblea* every two or three years. Other positions of authority in the enterprise are assigned by the community for one-year or two-year terms. Another important committee is the *Comisión Revisora* (revision committee) which audits all communal transactions. This committee is accompanied by a full-time professional from outside the community.

2.2.1 Altamonte’s CFE

Below these three committees (*Comisariado*, *Vigilancia*, *Revisora*) are men who are responsible for different areas of the forestry enterprise and other elements of the communal business. In the forestry business these include the *Jefe del Monte* (head of forest operations), *Jefe de Finanzas* (the head of finances) and his two assistants, as well as the *Documentador* (documentor) and his assistant. These positions change every two years and all of those who fill them go through a two month training period led by a professional hired from outside the community (which I will describe in more detail in Chapter III).

Other assigned positions include the heads of the bus company and the water plant, as well as the members of the *Grupo Operativo* (operations group), who act as a sort of research and planning committee for the enterprise. The people assigned to the above mentioned positions generally spend their weekdays in the communal office in downtown Oaxaca, which also includes sleeping quarters, and they generally go back to their respective residences in the community for weekends and holidays.

Other important actors in the enterprise are the members of the *Dirección Técnica Forestal* (DTF) (forest technical administration) which I will look at in more detail in Chapter IV. The engineer, who is the *Director Técnico Forestal* (Forest Technical Director), and the *Coordinador de Áreas* (Areas Coordinator) are full-time employees and spend most of their time in the community's office, but also visit the work area regularly. The other communal technicians, along with most of the other enterprise employees (who are mainly *comuneros*), spend most of their weekdays in the work area and sleep either in tents near their worksite or in dormitory type housing in a work camp.

They receive salaries often based partially on productivity as well as a base rate. The lowest paid workers receive one hundred pesos (approx \$10 CAN) a day (twice the Mexican minimum wage). Many receive this as their base salary and then extra pay based on productivity. Among the highest paid positions are the loggers who cut down the trees, as their job is the most dangerous. A productive logger can earn up to 5000 pesos a month (approx \$500 CAN).

According to the communal engineer, forestry makes up 80% of the population's "economic activity." Cattle raising makes up 12%, agriculture 6% and commerce 2%. Some of those who work in the forest also farm or raise cattle.

2.2.1.1 Benefits of the CFE

Over the years, the community has spent profits from the industry in a variety of ways. The accomplishments highlighted by the community include: (a) building four preschools, one primary school, one high-school (*telesecundaria*) and one senior high-school

²⁸ Herein referred to as the *Comisariado*.

(*telebachillerato*); (b) a school bus to bring students to school from the outlying towns; (c) building and funding one medical clinic, with a doctor and a nurse, as well as an ambulance (the community also has a state medical clinic); (c) six networks of drinking water; (d) four small agricultural reservoirs; (e) building a (large and visually impressive) municipal agency building; (f) significant church renovations (also large and visually impressive); (g) five satellite phones; (g) satellite television (in a few communal locations); (h) 12 passenger busses for regional service; (i) a water purification plant (both the water plant and the buses are other elements of the enterprise that are have tended to lose money, but create a few jobs); (j) an experimental orchard; (k) economic support for people over the age of 60; (l) the beginnings of a sewage treatment project and (m) the profits from the enterprise are periodically distributed (*repartamientos*) to all the *comuneros* and in the last few years, to the women of the community as well.

The success of the enterprise therefore seems to have had many positive effects and outcomes for the community. Some say that it has also given the community a sense of pride that it did not have before. Another important indirect effect of the enterprise is that in providing local livelihood alternatives as well as all of the above mentioned services, it has helped stave off emigration out of the community. Keeping people in their community is of great importance to community leaders in Altamonte and also among leaders of other indigenous communities in the region (field notes Sept. 23rd, 2005). Bebbington goes as far as to claim that “*indigenous identity hinges on sustained and corporate rural residence*” (2004 : 409). Indeed, it is important to recognize the positive effects that this form of development has had in Altamonte del Zopi. The success of the community and these positive outcomes also explains much of the enthusiasm that is found in the community for this type of development. At the same time, I will argue that, in Altamonte, efforts to create jobs and the pressure to continue the success of the enterprise also lead to, at very least, the “guiding” of the identity of many in specific directions. Also, through the enterprise, certain attitudes towards, and relationships with the forest that are congruent with neoliberalism are fostered.

2.2.3 Under (Neoliberal) Pressure

While neoliberal policies affect different communities in different ways, it is clear that competition from the US, Canada and other countries with which free trade agreements have been signed, such as Chile, represent a serious threat to many forestry communities (USDA 2004 ; Klooster 2003 ; Bray and Merino 2003 ; Zabin 1998 ; Moros and Solano 1995 ; I 61 ; I 65). Importantly, trade agreements and/or low tariffs on imports which create more external competition for communities threaten some CFEs and force others to modernize and become more “efficient” (Bray and Merino-Pérez 2002). Klooster (2003 : 112-113) claims that neoliberal reforms in the forestry sector have given communities more autonomy, but also more responsibility²⁹. Yet when communities feel pressure to change the way that they operate to suit the market, their actual autonomy is affected (Esteva 2005, Personal Communication). This is what Larner (2004) calls market governance.

Altamonte certainly seems to be feeling the effects of market governance as the price of wood is being driven down by international competition, partly as a result of free trade agreements and policies (USDA 2004, I 65, PDFC 2005). An influential member of the *Comisariado* put it this way :

It's more difficult now because it is more competitive [...] Products come from Chile, from the United States. The timber, for example, right now is at 1,200 *pesos* per cubic meter and the timber from there comes at 800 or 900 *pesos*. So the productive processes should be more efficient, the machines more efficient, to be able to produce at a lower cost and to be able to be competitive. Because if we continue with our current structure that we have [...] what we produce will be more expensive than what we will sell.

(I 65, my translation)

This community leader articulates clearly the increasing difficulties of being in a competitive global market. Part of his answer to this problem is that the community needs to alter its structure.

Indeed the sense of urgency among many of the members of the community and the professionals is a part of the discourse that seeks to make changes in the communal

enterprise to make it run as a more “efficient” business (as we will examine in Chapter III). This sense of urgency is exacerbated by demographic pressure, as a large percentage of the community is young and will soon be looking to join the workforce (PDFC 2005 : 18-19 ; I 65) (See Appendix III). The fact that the community is embroiled in multiple territorial disputes³⁰ which could mean the loss of a significant amount of territory (PDFC 2005 : 5-6) also contributes to this pressure.

While the causes and discourses surrounding this sense of urgency itself deserve more in-depth examination, here I am merely pointing out that this pressure exists, partly as a result of neoliberal policies and dependence on the market; and that it gives weight to the discourses that call for significant change in the enterprise. Adding to this sense of urgency is the fact that many young women, who are proportionally more numerous and increasingly educated, are also wanting access to paid work.

2.2.4 Gender Issues in Altamonte

Partly as a result of the increasing emigration of males, more than half of the community is female (See Appendix III). As such, gender issues in Altamonte and how they are connected to development and community forestry, is a theme that deserves much more attention than I have room to explore here. I will nevertheless give a brief overview of the gender dynamics which are essential to any understanding of life in Altamonte and the topic at hand.

Within the community structure, women are marginalized politically and economically. Though they are allowed a vote for certain municipal positions³¹, they are not allowed to participate in the assemblies and are not assigned to any of the civic *cargos*. Within the whole communal enterprise there are very few positions currently available to women and none of women work any of the forestry jobs. In the office, there is a woman who cleans the office and a female secretary. The water plant employs five or six women who are paid close to the community’s minimum wage at 109 pesos a day, except for the one that is the

²⁹ As we will see, the idea of responsibility is an important concept for the “participative” development and neoliberal discourses that surround community forestry.

³⁰ Various neighbouring communities are claiming stake to what Altamonte considers its land.

³¹ Men bring the family’s ballots to the *Asamblea*.

on-site supervisor who makes 119 pesos a day. However, even at the water plant, the person responsible for that aspect of the enterprise is a *comunero* (a man) who reports to the *Asamblea* (field notes Nov. 12th, 2005).

Women do, however, make money indirectly from the forestry business by cooking, running stores, and doing laundry for forestry workers. However, many married women are still quite dependant on the income of their husbands. Women who are single, and particularly single mothers, are among the most marginalized and often economically poorest in the community. This situation also undermines the position of married women in the community vis-à-vis their husbands as divorce or separation can mean significant economic hardship. As more young men are emigrating, the population of women now outnumbered that of men, which reinforces this dynamic by creating a higher “demand” for husbands. The trend of disproportionately male emigration, however, may also have other effects which empower women in the community and may change in the medium-term as more women seek out educational and economic opportunities outside of the community.

A significant amount of violence against women was reported to me by various women and men. The main response commonly available to women is reporting this violence to the (male) communal authorities. Unsurprisingly, many told me that this violence often goes unreported. According to informants this violence is almost always connected to alcohol consumption.

Indeed, alcohol consumption in Altamonte is quite clearly a gendered phenomenon in that most women rarely drink heavily, if at all. At communal celebrations when men are offered mescal, women are not. Women do, however, suffer many consequences of the alcoholism in their families and their community.

It is hard to say how forestry has affected gender relations in Altamonte. In the community forestry projects that Saxena et. al studied in India, participative development often served to further marginalize, already marginalized groups, particularly women, in the communities partly through “*delegitimatization of their traditional resource use patterns (and the) use of monetary and wage incentives*” (Saxena et. al in Hildyard et al. 2001).

Similarly, in Altamonte, farming is considered an activity in which women and men participate, while forestry is not. Men now have access to higher wages than they did while women's opportunities for monetary income have not grown to the same extent. It may well be that the focus on development discourses and practices, which treat the "community" as a homogenous entity and focus on "traditional" structures, serve to marginalize women in the community. This is, again, something that warrants much further research.

However, it is important to note that many in Altamonte are working on these issues and that some steps towards equality have recently been taken. One major step is that when the community decides to distribute profits throughout the community, they give it out to the *comuneros* and the women in the community who also take on certain responsibilities (like *cargos*) such as cooking in communal celebrations³². Further, the fact that there are now jobs for women in the water plant can be seen as a step towards equality, despite the "low" pay. Also, recently, an *Asamblea* for women has been created. The meetings are called by men³³, happen irregularly, and seem to be largely a place where women are informed on happenings in the community, rather than a place of decision-making. However, some decisions - such as which women would work in the water plan - are made in the women's *Asamblea* and it does seem to provide space for women to get together and discuss various issues. Finally, many of the young women in the community go to school and some were also part of an environmental education program that used to be offered to youth in the community by an NGO. For a few of them, their education may give them a better chance at employment outside, or even inside the community, if it is able to make space/find jobs for them. Because of this newfound access to education, younger women in the community are, in some ways, less marginalized than some of the older women. Despite, and perhaps partly as a result of, the frustrations many of the women in the community experience (and expressed to me), the community seems to be slowly moving *towards* more equitable gender relations. However, along with most peoples and cultures in the Americas, including the dominant ones in Canada and the USA, they have a long way to go.

³² One single mother noted to me, that, with each adult receiving the same amount, single women raising children still end up with much less for their family.

2.3 Chapter conclusion

In examining the political and historical context of community forestry in Mexico, I have pointed out that forest policy has, for much of the 20th century been concerned with the economic productivity of the forest, but that until the 1970s, state and industry actors generally considered indigenous people as a “barrier” to this productivity and portrayed them as a threat to these “resources”. This history sheds light on the current policies which seek the same productivity, but that also attempt to shape the behaviour of communities, rather than completely exclude them. Further, the history explored in this chapter shows that community forestry, which does give indigenous people a more significant role in forestry, gained significant state support simultaneously to, and partly as a result of, neoliberal policies.

I will argue that community forestry is, in fact, more congruent with contemporary forms of neoliberalism than past policies such as forest concessions and that contemporary state programs are important threads in a web of neoliberal government. Access to them is predicated upon compliance with state norms (which are aligned with the norms put forward by multilateral institutions such as the World Bank) and adherence to certain elements of their discourse. Further, I attempt to demonstrate how through these programs, specific forms of knowledge and discourse are spread.

In the overview of the current situation in Altamonte del Zopi, I have explained the basic system of governance in the community into which the communal enterprise is integrated. This chapter shows how this system of governance is based largely on the *Usos y Costumbres* and *cargos* system which is central to the discussion of governance structures in Chapter III. Further, I have shown that the community has been extremely successful in profiting from community forestry and generally has spent a significant amount of it on communal goods and services, which partly explains the enthusiasm of many community members about forestry. At the same time, in the context of agrarian conflicts and declining profits in an increasingly hostile international market (partly due to neoliberal policies),

³³ When I expressed interest in these assemblies a male communal authority figure actually offered to call one for me.

there is currently a feeling of urgent need for change and “improvement” (in market terms) of the enterprise.

The following chapter will pay particular attention to what this discourse is calling for in terms of change to the structure of the enterprise and to the identity of the community members who work within it. To do so, I will look more closely at the structure of the enterprise, focusing on specific actors from both “inside” and “outside” the community, and the discourse between these various actors.

Chapter III – COMMUNITY BUSINESS

“They are in a learning process, they are open and they are introducing changes, many changes.”

- Professional forester who works in government and NGO sectors (I 10)

“Are they going to be businessmen, are they going to be comuneros, are they going to be owners or are they going to be peons?”

- *Comunero*, member of the *caracterizados*, referring to other *comuneros* in the enterprise (I 33)

In Altamonte, there is a constant tension between communal processes and running a business in a competitive globalized marketplace. In this chapter I show how the communal enterprise structure has been slowly shifting toward a business-oriented model and that many actors from both inside and outside the community would like to see more drastic changes in that direction. Further, to be really successful, many believe that it is not merely the structure that must change, but people’s ways-of-being, their identities and their relationships with others in their community. In fact, the dominant discourse holds that the *comuneros* of Altamonte need to make their community structure, and themselves, more “business-like” than they have already. This chapter focuses on how this discourse, as well as the practices and processes connected to community forestry in Altamonte, promote rationalities and ways-of-being that are congruent with neoliberalism.

3.1 Structural Issues within the Enterprise

The adaptation and functioning of the communal enterprise model involves a constant “interplay” or “negotiation” between communal structures and the search for profitability in the market. The governance structure of the communal enterprise and the debate around it are therefore fertile ground for the study of neoliberal government and governance. It must be noted, however, that communal structures are not always diametrically opposed to the needs of the market. In fact, in some instances, communal forms of operation are also

market-friendly. For example, as an NGO worker pointed out, the president of the *Comisariado* (the committee in charge of communal goods) is paid much less than his rough equivalent in the private sector, a Chief Executive Officer, thus saving the enterprise money and allowing for more profits. However, in the dominant discourse surrounding Altamonte's CFE, communal and "market-oriented" organizational forms often clash.

Currently, the community seems to be adjusting traditional values and ways of operating with the hopes that it will allow the enterprise to be more profitable. In fact, the community has recently decided to pay the *Comisariado* more than other positions in the enterprise because certain administrative positions are deemed to require more responsibility than others. Though salary inequalities are still very small compared to those of a private enterprise, this wage scale is nonetheless materially and symbolically significant. Before this change, high positions of authority (inside and outside the enterprise) were not very materially rewarding; people performed these duties as responsibilities to the community. These positions have now essentially become "well-paying jobs" though they are still assigned by the *Asamblea* every three years. Further, unlike the higher positions in the community's "civil" political authority structure (e.g. the *Agente Municipal*), people may be assigned multiple times to the same position (though not consecutively). For example, while I was in the community, the *Presidente del Comisariado*, the top communal administrator in the enterprise, had already served one and a half³⁴ terms before being chosen for the term he was serving. The community has thus adjusted the organizational form of the CFE, that was based on community service and a rotating (though male-dominated) hierarchy, towards a somewhat more "business-oriented", "merit-focused", and "fixed" hierarchical model in order to gain efficiency.

While so far, this change has not been drastic, the dominant discourse from actors inside and outside the community holds that the community needs to continue to make changes to make the enterprise more efficient. A particularly interesting document in this respect is the *Plan de Desarrollo Forestal Comunitario de "Altamonte del Zopi"* ("Altamonte del Zopi"

³⁴ Another "presidente de *Comisariado*" stepped down half-way through his term after heavy criticism from the general *Asamblea*.

Community Forestry Development Plan) the first draft of which was being circulated and discussed while I was in the community.

3.2 The Communal Development Plan

3.2.1 Creation of the Development Plan

Even though much of the process of the creation of this document happened before I arrived in the community and continued after I left, what I was able to understand about the process, through interviews, informal conversations and the draft that I had access to elucidated interesting elements about the development process and the flow of discourse and power in Altamonte. According to a member of the DTF, who was one of the people who originally proposed the plan, the goal was to make it a comprehensive development plan that looked at all sorts of aspects of community well-being such as recuperating the indigenous language and creating spaces for cultural and athletic enrichment (I 49). However, the document produced was extremely focused on making forestry more efficient and competitive, particularly in terms of the concrete action and investments called for (See Appendix IV). How and why this process took such a focus is of particular interest in terms of neoliberal government because it is an example of how the search for well-being in the community is guided towards the search for monetary income.

As suggested by Escobar (1995 : 41), in looking at the system of relations between various actors and institutions, it becomes clear that the “rules” of the development “game” guide the community’s search for betterment in a specific direction. Further, as with the “participative” processes documented by Henkel and Stirrat (2001), the creation of this document certainly seemed to favour the interests of powerful actors both within and outside the community. This process also demonstrates how the material power of the state and the monetary gains made through forestry play a role in determining the outcome of such a plan.

When I pointed out to the DTF member how the document was dominated by the forestry aspect (particularly in terms of the concrete investments called for), he told me that there were two principal reasons for this. First of all, to get the *Comisariado* and then the

Asamblea on board with the project, he felt that he needed to focus on the forestry aspect as it directly affects the men's jobs prospects. It is also much easier for him to get funding for a forestry-oriented development plan through forestry programs such as PROCyMAF, partly because he already knows the procedures and has the connections (I 49). These two aspects also work together; it is easier to sell an idea to the *Asamblea* if the communal authorities can confidently say that they will secure external funding for it. The state's material power and its ability to fund projects, therefore, allows it influence over the agenda of communities in such a "participative process".

I also pointed out to the DTF member that women and younger members of the community seemed to be less focused on the forestry aspect and that he might be able to get their support for the other parts of the project. He responded that though he agreed, if he went to the *Asamblea* with a project supported mainly by women and youth, it would essentially be suicide for the project.

If I start with the women or the youth and we bring a proposal to the *Asamblea* [and say] 'you know what, we, a group of twenty youth, we want a change in the community', no, they'll flush us down a tube³⁵, so here the important thing is to get the men, the older men and tell them 'we want to do this project' and then include the youth and the women.

(I 49)

According to this logic, all major projects must first be able to attract the interest of the men, particularly the older men, if they have a chance of getting through the *Asamblea*³⁶. The participatory process in the community connected to community forestry is therefore problematic in terms of gender relations and arguably in terms of youth participation as well. It is also interesting to note that it is the men who have had much more exposure to the development discourse in various forms through work in the enterprise, assemblies and contact with state, NGO and other professional actors from outside the community. The combination of the power imbalance the fact that it is the men who are more exposed to the

³⁵ "nos van a mandar por un tubo"

³⁶ Further, the process for reviewing the document was that it would first get passed out to the group of *caracterizados* (older men) and then the (all male) *Asamblea*.

dominant development discourse gives more weight to this discourse and the action it calls for.

Another interesting element of this process is that the *Comisariado* chose an “expert” from a list provided by the CONAFOR, to lead the process of creation of the document and have it written. The man chosen is a professor at a technological institute specializing in improving micro-enterprises and who had previously elaborated development plans for other CFEs in Oaxaca state. This professor and his research team did research about what had been written already on Altamonte as well as a series of “participatory” workshops with various groups in the community such as “women”, “youth” and “workers” (I 29). However, according to people in the *Comisariado* and the *Consejo de Vigilancia*, the bulk of the document’s content came out of a series of meetings involving them and the professor in charge of the study. The content certainly seems much closer to what I documented from the professor and these men, than it was to that of the women and youth who, for example, often reported alcoholism and the mistreatment of women as extremely important priorities.

Enterprise efficiency and profitability also took priority over others because of a line often drawn between *communal* issues and *individual* issues. The enterprise is constituted as a *communal* issue and therefore something that should be addressed by the *Asamblea* and which warrants much communal attention and decisions. Issues such as alcoholism, and domestic violence, on the other hand, are constituted as individual problems. Thus, though many (particularly women) portray the latter as the biggest problems in the community and a member of the *Comisariado* speaks out publicly about the damages of alcoholism, no communal solutions were proposed while I was in the community. The current lack of communal action on these issues may also be connected to some past efforts, such as community “prohibition” which have failed.

When I spoke with NGO workers of this issue and what I perceived as a lack of institutional support of them, one told me that he had tried to bring Alcoholics Anonymous into the community and address these issues through the *Asamblea*, but that it didn’t work due to this “communal/individual” distinction (I 63). Another NGO worker proposed that institutions were less likely to get involved in this kind of work because alcoholism and

domestic violence were less quantifiable than forestry production and required more detailed work. *“You need to go talk with people, get the opinion of the people, learn the opinions of various people, the women, the youth. One needs to work from much closer and there isn’t time for that [...] It is way easier to say that production has gone up by however many cubic meters”* (I 62).

The desire to deal with issues that can be addressed and measured from a distance without having to get involved in intricate community power dynamics and in-depth investigation processes may therefore also partially explain the focus on “productivity” from NGO and state sectors.

This process, as a whole, elucidates how government can work through “participatory” procedures; how participation happens in a context where the “structure” has already been established (Vincent 2003 : 3). The state has the resources to fund the projects it deems important and create lists of professionals who they decide are appropriate. The “participation” of the community means choosing within projects they think that the state will support, and choosing “experts” off of a list provided by the state. Further, despite nominally inclusive methods, the document that came out of these process, seems to largely represent the priorities of the more powerful actors, both within and outside the community.

Finally, it is significant that the person constituted as a qualified person to create the document – which, let us recall, was apparently originally intended to address the general well-being of the community – is an expert in micro-enterprises. As a brief analysis of discourse in the community and in this document demonstrates, this kind of expertise and know-how, as well as specific forms of intervention and practical rationality (Dean 1999 : 23) related to enterprise efficiency and competitiveness, are currently highly valued in the dominant discourse in Altamonte. Thus, through subtle power dynamics or “government”, the participative process in the search for the well-being in the community is guided in a specific direction which is congruent with the neoliberal development model.

3.2.2 The Discourse of the Development Plan

The language within the document itself is extremely interesting as this development plan is supposed to guide the work and the vision of the community over the next few years and is an excellent sample of development discourse which relates directly to the community. In the first section, the *Fundamentación del Plan* (Basis of the Plan), there is a section on the challenges posed by globalization, which, according to the document, “*is a product of tyrannical [...] forces of transnational organizations that model the global economy which have opened up many regions to the requirements of the global market*” (PDFC 2005 : 3). This has contributed to a crisis of survival “*particularly in indigenous communities in which poverty has expanded and deepened, contributing to inequality and social exclusion. Urgently needing to meet their needs, common natural resources have become key to the survival of many communities*” (PDFC 2005 : 4). Referring directly to Altamonte, it states: “*The community of Altamonte del Zopi faces the challenge of reconciling the imperatives of insertion into the global economy, inevitably at different economic rhythms than that at which globalization moves, with the urgency to attend and resolve social needs*” (PDFC 2005 : 6).

The document therefore contains a strong condemnation of globalisation yet also seems to describe it in a way that makes it seem like an irreversible outside force (denying the policy choices of more local and national government). Poverty is constituted as the problematic result of globalization, while the exploitation of communal natural resources is portrayed as the solution. The document portrays the role of indigenous people and particularly the role of the community as essentially to adapt to “globalization” by using their natural resources to insert themselves into the global economy. Further, it must be noted that the World Bank, known as one of key “globalizing” transnational organizations, contributes loans to PROCyMAF, which sponsored the creation of this particular development document (World Bank 2003 ; PDFC 2005).

The document also states that the process of “*intense global change*” connected to globalization and the transformation in these communities “*has necessitated not only a reorganization of systems of production and exchange, but also a political, social and*

environmental recomposition” (2005 : 4). Thus, this document also portrays a huge adaptation on the part of communities as a necessary response to globalisation.

The sub-text of the plan is that the community’s role in global processes of capitalist expansion is to adapt to them by doing what it takes to produce more goods of economic value. Community members are portrayed as active agents only in that it is up to them to make adjustments to survive “globalization”; in other words, to take on more market-oriented or “neoliberal” ways-of-being. According to this discourse, the only option for communal survival is to try and maintain certain communal values while making adjustments to render themselves economically competitive. As I pointed out in Chapter I, such representations of problems and solutions are common to the development discourse (see Sachs 1999 ; Petras 1997).

The document later states:

In terms of the economic aspect, the idea is to restructure the productive apparatus to solidify the bases for sustainable economic growth, through a diversified economy founded in the rational exploitation of its natural resources, more integrated and with higher levels of competitiveness.

(PDFC 2005 : 8)

This excerpt is a classic example of the compartmentalization mechanism of planning. The fictitious separation of “spheres” from each other “*impose(s) this fragmentation on cultures which do not experience life in the same compartmentalized manner*” (Escobar 1992a: 140). Further, this separation into categories obscures the fact that these changes in the “economic sphere” will clearly impact other “spheres” such as the relationship with the environment and social relations in community. This categorization can be seen as a way of questioning and producing truth that frames issues in a particular way and is thus a form of government (Dean 1999 : 23). Also, the word “rational” here is used as a rhetorical device as “rationality” is used in a very specific sense. The “rational” exploitation is the one that (supposedly) makes the most *economic* sense over the long term. The use of the word “rational” in this sense makes any other use of natural resources “irrational”, hence denigrating them.

However, according to the document, a balance can be met between being productive and maintaining cultural identity and autonomy.

“This implies complex processes and requires the conjunction of traditional knowledge and practices with modern technological know-how, in a way that productive capacities are enhanced while [the people of Altamonte] maintain their cultural identity and the community acquires the capacity for management of their own resources³⁷.”

(PDFC 2005 : 6-7)

This is the utopia of the contemporary community forestry development discourse: that communities can insert themselves into the global economy and be productive while maintaining their “cultural identity” and the ability to “manage” their own resources. Yet, I will argue that the pressure to “increment productive capacities” and the introduction of “modern technological know-how” in Altamonte seems to imply significant changes to communal identities and structures. Further, “self-management” of resources is also monitored and controlled by the federal government through formal and informal mechanisms while traditional knowledge and practices are increasingly marginalized and instrumentalized as part of larger processes based on market criteria.

The second part of the document entitled *Principios y Objetivos* (principals and objectives) and written in the “*nosotros*” (we) form, states more unequivocally the need for an “*inevitable change for Altamonte del Zopi*”, a change “*that is justified and should happen because the actual political and administrative structures are being overtaken by the growing social needs*” (2006 : 62).

As Fairclough (2002) points out, this language of adaptation and flexibility is quite characteristic of the neoliberal discourse. The idea that the people of Altamonte need to adapt their enterprise to meet their social needs by being more competitive in the market is, in fact, completely consistent with neoliberal discourse as defined in Chapter I. It also matches very well with the dominant discourse I heard from various actors inside and outside the community which holds that the communal enterprise needs to move towards a more “business-oriented” model.

3.3 Various Actors, One Discourse

3.3.1 Traditional Structures as “Barriers to Efficiency”

Indeed, many actors have ideas about how Altamonte should improve their enterprise and how important it is for them to become more competitive. Many portray the traditional structures as a barrier to the efficiency of the enterprise.

According to a CONAFOR official:

There are some who see limitations in relation to the *Usos y Costumbres* because they relate it directly to the efficiency that it can have in the industries. I mean, always, when there is an analysis of the industries, they always show that, well, they're not efficient and they relate it to operating personnel and really, if we look at it from the point of view of a private company, of course, in comparison it is deficient [...] one needs to look for an organizational scheme that enables more efficiency in the operation of the enterprise.

(I 05)

This official relates the *Usos y Costumbres* directly to inefficiency of the industries, citing scientific analysis that demonstrates this inefficiency. He also makes the comparison to a private enterprise which is, “of course”, much more efficient. When he says that there is a need for a new organizational scheme that allows for more efficiency, there is a strong implication that it should be more like that of a private enterprise and that it needs to be separated from the *Usos y Costumbres*, the communal governing structure. This discourse clearly fits into Dean’s (1999 : 23) second “how of government” (see Chapter I), in that it uses the vocabulary (“efficiency”) and interventions (industry analyses that measure such efficiency) to justify moving the enterprise away from the communal governance structure. In fact, the idea that the CFE needs to move towards a more “business-oriented” structure and away from the traditional communal one is dominant among the older men in the community, professionals hired by the enterprise, and certainly NGO and state agency workers.

As An NGO worker put it:

³⁷ *Auto-gestión*

If they are able to have more differentiation between the enterprise and the community, it will be more profitable, but this depends on how the community loosens up and opens up more and stops having so much control over everything. And that way there could be some improvement, if [the enterprise] were a formal and independent structure.

(I 02)

As exemplified here, the dominant discourse holds that communal organizing structures should be separate from the enterprise. Here, the fact that this separation means *comuneros* (particularly the *Asamblea*) letting go of some of their control over the operations of the enterprise is rendered explicit. This informant suggests that “a formal and independent structure” could operate under its own rules that are deemed more suitable for business. The metaphor of “openness” came up often in NGO and government discourse as a way of referring to a willingness to embrace processes, seen as more efficient or better for business, from outside the community.

A similar discourse is also present among many of the *comuneros* as the ability to be more efficient and competitive currently seems to be one of their biggest priorities. A member of the influential group of *caracterizados* in the community was clearly very in favour of major changes to the enterprise. To fix the “structural problem”, to make the business “more efficient”, he told me that:

[It should not be] a communal design anymore, [it should be] like a private enterprise where there is one person who leads and who takes charge of everything [...] The *Asamblea* gives you approval, but you are responsible, one single person would be responsible and then would look for all his assistants and everything.

(I 25)

This informant also told me that if people are doing a good job in a position, they should stay in that position for much longer. The vision of the enterprise proposed by this *comunero* implies a more fixed hierarchy and specialization based on “ability.” It also implies pulling decision-making away from the *Asamblea* and concentrating it in the hands of a few people. This vision is different from the current structure in which positions of

authority are constantly rotating; the hierarchy is (still) largely based on age (and gender); and in which the *Asamblea* plays an important decision-making role.

Thus, while Altamonte is considered one of the most successful forestry communities in the state and even the country, with a very large, healthy and productive forest, the dominant discourse holds that the community needs to make significant changes to its communal enterprise towards a more “market-friendly” model; one more akin to that of a private enterprise. What is being called for is, in certain respects, the neoliberalization of part of the community’s governance structure.

Despite the strength of this discourse, these changes are not happening as fast as many would like to see. In order to move the community business towards more efficiency, a variety of informants thought that *comuneros* also had to change their way of thinking, their identities, and how they related to each other. Forms of identification or the production of governable subjects is, of course, another way that government operates (Dean 1999).

3.3.2 Training *Comuneros* to be “Businessmen”

Among the most important actors involved directly and overtly in the process of identity formation of *comuneros* in the enterprise are the handful of professionals that are hired from outside the community. They are “experts” with credentials in business-related areas such as accounting or business management and their official role is to train and accompany the enterprise’s administrators (who rotate in and out every two years) in the central office in Ciudad Oaxaca. These more permanent staff members give the enterprise some continuity and consistency and also allow it to be less dependent on temporary professional assistance; short-term staff who may be less committed to the enterprise. Many consider the long-term staff as key to the functioning of the enterprise. They are also important actors in the network of power I am describing here.

One accountant, who has been working with the communal enterprise since its inception, originally as part of an NGO and now directly for the community, plays a particularly important role in the business as the head professional. Though the accountant is technically an employee of the community and formally has little decision-making power,

his opinion is held in high esteem by the *comuneros*. As he has been working consistently in the enterprise for 20 years, he has accumulated knowledge of the enterprise that *comuneros*, who rotate in and out of the enterprise, often don't have the opportunity to gain. Further, he has more formal education than almost any of the *comuneros*. The status afforded to him is evident in interactions between him and the *comuneros* and by the comments made to me by various *comuneros* in the enterprise. Many explained that it is hard for them in the enterprise, because they are not used to office work, but that he is very patient with them in that, for example, he explains things multiple times. Through his many years of service with the community, he has clearly gained the trust of many members of the community. Indeed, from what I saw, he is skilled, hard-working and dedicated to the enterprise. At the same time, his relationship with the *comuneros* must be seen in light of the power-knowledge dynamic inherent in this development process. As large-scale commercial forestry requires a specific skill-set that *comuneros* often do not have, business professionals from outside the community are constituted as "experts" in that they have business "know-how", formal education and important connections to the "outside" world. In this context, it is important to note that many of the *comuneros* seem to regard themselves as slow learners as they are formally "uneducated." This constitution of outside professionals as "experts" and lack of recognition of, or instrumentalization of, "local" knowledge is often an effect of development strategies (Escobar 1995 : 204) and can also be seen as a government effect.

This power dynamic is important as the professionals train the new administrators of the CFE and also provide constant "accompaniment" – support to those that work in the office – to make sure that they are able to do their jobs. The training involves teaching what one professional calls "*the theory of what it is to be a business administrator*" (I 60); general knowledge connected to the business skills (for example, how computers have evolved and who Bill Gates is); and "pep talks" to inspire them to work together as business administrators. They are also taught basic administrative skills including computer use (i.e. how to turn a computer on and off, basic word processing, using spread sheets and data banks); basic math skills (i.e. how to use calculators and/or adding machines to allow them to make timber volume calculations); and basic banking skills (i.e. how to cash a cheque or withdraw and deposit money in a bank account). While some of the *comuneros*, particularly

the younger ones, have some high-school and even “college” level education, many others have not graduated from elementary school. Both the trainers and the trainees talk about how this is “*like a school*” for those who lack a formal education. According to one of the main trainers, the “school” is largely about running a business – both “*the mechanical or operational questions*” and learning about business principals and how to be and think like an administrator or businessman (I 60).

In fact, this professional told me that changing the *comuneros*’ identities and the way that they looked at the enterprise was the hardest and most important part of the training and accompanying process:

I think that what is most important for us to transmit is [that they need] to be bosses or to work as a team that are businessmen; that are the directors of a company. I think that it is more important than, for example, how to measure, how to make a spreadsheet. Those are more operational, mechanical questions. The problem is how to make them- make it so that they think in a business-like manner. We aren’t always successful in this objective.

(I 60)

Therefore, while this professional is hired by the community to help it run a successful business, an important part of his job, as he sees it, is changing the way that the *comuneros* think. The logic is that if *campesinos* are to run their own business successfully, those who take on the jobs of businessmen or managers need to start thinking and acting in a business-like manner³⁸.

In learning to be business administrators, the importance of changing ways of thinking is evident not only to the professionals, but also to many *comuneros*, including some who participate in part of the training as well as those being trained. The following interaction occurred in the context of a “pep-talk” or meeting which was part of the training process and included members of the *Comisariado*, the *Consejo de Vigilancia*, two professionals and the administrators-in-training:

³⁸ When I asked him what he meant by business-like manner he responded “They should work as a team so that the enterprise follows a path with the ends being that it is more efficient...”

Member of *Comisariado (comunero)* –

It's easy to say 'if no one says anything, I won't do anything'. It's up to you guys to tell (the workers) what to do or they won't do anything.

Administrator-in-training A –

For me, it is difficult to accept this. I have always been a peon, but listening to these talks, I am getting up for it. **I have to start changing my way of thinking.** Everybody is used to working freely. This training is good. Here we learn something....It is a school for us and here we learn what we don't see in the forest (*monte*). I need to be responsible. (my emphasis)

Administrator-in-training B –

Yes, it's difficult to change mentalities [...]

(field notes Nov. 18th, 2005)

Thus, these administrators-in-training are publicly recognizing that they must change their way of thinking in order to do their jobs well and serve the community. They aren't used to being "bosses" or "administrators" in a business context and it is a challenge for them to do so. One of the trainers told me that he sees this recognition as one step in the larger process: "*I hope that this doesn't just end up being a good chat*" (field notes Nov. 18th, 2005 ; I 60). In other words, he wants people to actually make the changes that they admit that they need to. This attempt at identity formation of *comuneros* is an overt attempt at a form of government. It is an endeavour "*to shape, guide, direct the conduct of others*" and also involves "self-government" on the part of the *comuneros* who publicly recognize that they need to change themselves (Rose 1999 : 3-4).

However, this trainer clearly finds this task of changing the *comuneros'* ways-of-being and thinking challenging. As he mentioned, he is "*not always successful in this task*" (I 60). This attests to the strength of other identity formations value systems and the ways-of-being (i.e. those of a *comunero* and a *campesino*) that fit uneasily with being a business administrator and more generally with the competitive business model.

Another interaction involving professionals and community members that I documented is useful here in understanding the dissemination and spreading of the dominant discourse that I have been describing. The interaction took place in a meeting to analyze the financial losses of the communal bus company. The atmosphere in the meeting was tense as authorities from the *Comisariado* and the *Consejo de Vigilancia* wanted explanations from

the person responsible for the bus company (herein referred to as B). One professional was also present. B was clearly nervous and on the defensive as the company had lost a somewhat significant amount of communal money and he knew that this fact would soon be revealed to the *Asamblea*.

Early on in the meeting after they had looked at a calculation which showed the financial losses of the company, the professional (herein referred to as T) said:

T – The bus line needs to be analysed. Do you think that a private company would keep going like this?

B- It can't work well communally [...] One can't demand a lot of the workers.

T- What needs to be done? [...]

B- If it was private, it would have profits. As a communal enterprise it doesn't work.

(field notes Dec. 9th, 2005)

The first interesting point here is that the professional brought up the comparison to how a private enterprise would operate; implying through his rhetorical question, that a private company wouldn't continue to operate at a loss – and that the community shouldn't either. Interestingly, the bus company had in fact been running at a loss for some time. Another NGO worker told me that the community keeps the company running because it provides a service to community members and people from other communities where there is little public transportation. It is thus a source of pride for the community³⁹ (I 30). This explanation is consistent with a value system that works against accumulation by trading in financial advantage for status, which traditionally has been an important part of the *Usos y Costumbres* and many indigenous governance systems throughout the Americas (Esteva 2005, personal communication, Kearney and Varnese 1995 : 212). It is, however, completely antithetical to neoliberal market principals which call for an accumulation of capital and not for its conversion into prestige. The intervention on the part of the

³⁹ “[...] *se los demostré ‘ustedes están perdiendo dinero mucho dinero’, en la asamblea siempre deciden, no les interesa, no podemos dejar de tener los camiones porque es nuestro prestigio en la región y como te lo explicas eso, les interesa conservar su prestigio. Esta bien, no es racional desde un punto de vista económico, pero desde el punto de vista de su autoestima como comunidad vale...*” (I 30)

professional is an example of how he is attempting to have the communal administrators think about their enterprise in a business-like way, and is, hence, an example of an attempt at government.

The second interesting point here is how B (a *comunero*) used the competitiveness discourse and comparison to a private enterprise initiated by the professional (T). The idea that the problem was the structural model was strategically useful for B, as by using this discourse, he was able to deflect criticism from his leadership of the bus company. Indeed, B knew that this discussion could easily become more like an interrogation as he would be questioned on specific expenditures and decisions regarding the bus company. This is not to say that actors inside the community such as B *only* use this discourse strategically; many do seem to, in fact, adhere quite whole-heartedly to it. The interaction nonetheless provides insight into the processes through which such discourse can circulate and contribute to government. According to Seidel and Vidal: “*Discourses are not purely symbolic resources and arguments, but resources that may be politically invested by social actors to particular ends*” (1997 : 59). In this case B may have “grabbed onto” the dominant development discourse because it served his ends. Thus, as discourses circulate, actors at various levels can use them for their own strategic personal and political ends, often reinforcing them.

Business orientation through practice

As noted in Chapter I, concrete practices also carry with them certain forms of rationality and are very connected to the development discourse and regimes of power (Rossi 2004 : 1 ; Escobar 1995). In Altamonte, identities and relationships are partially constituted through practices in the communal office, which are largely structured by the professional staff, the exigencies of the market and state regulatory structures. The process of running Altamonte’s CFE involves mechanisms, techniques and technologies which carry with them specific forms of practical rationality related to running an efficient business⁴⁰. Thus, the constitution of business-oriented administrators only begins with the training mentioned above. Throughout the following two years, the administrators generally spend

⁴⁰ These processes fall under the category of Dean’s third “how” of government (1999 : 23).

their weekdays, along with the *Comite Revisora*, in the business office doing their specific office jobs with constant “accompaniment” by the full-time professionals. The techniques and practices involved in their jobs also play a role in subject formation; they carry with them a particular way of seeing and interacting with “nature”, other *comuneros*, the professionals and sometimes the state. For example, though people have been selling forest products on a very small scale since before the era of commercial forestry, large-scale commercial forestry has brought with it new ways of relating to the forest. Measuring tree trunks; documenting those measurements; and making spreadsheets to document timber flow out of the community involve a very specific way of interacting with the forest. For workers, who log, stack or transport timber all day, the effect is likely similar. These practices carry with them a techno-scientific and “productivist” conception of nature (as a resource to be measured and priced). Through these processes, trees become a commodity to be exploited efficiently for maximum profits over the long-term (or “sustainably”). As I will demonstrate in Chapter IV, this conception of the forest as a “golden goose” was articulated to me very clearly multiple times by a variety of actors.

Relationships among *comuneros* are also affected by these practices. The *comunero* accountants make spreadsheets with the names of workers and their salaries and write cheques for payment. The *Comite Revisora* audits all of the company’s finances including salaries, other expenses and profits. The *Jefe del Monte* is expected to ensure that workers are being productive and are motivated, and is responsible for disciplining them if they are not doing their jobs properly. For the *comuneros* in these positions, other community members therefore become not only family, friends and fellow *comuneros*, but also labourers with costs, who need to be disciplined and motivated, and whose productivity needs to be maximized.

Thus, these practices can be seen as a form of neoliberal governance. They are made up of particular types of practical rationality (‘expertise’ and ‘know-how’) and rely upon definite mechanisms, techniques and technologies (Dean 1999). Through these practices, the forest is treated in a technoscientific and instrumental way and relations among *comuneros* become “business-like”.

3.3.3 *Comuneros as Workers and Owners*

Getting the *comuneros* who are “workers” in the enterprise to be responsible, dedicated, subservient, and motivated labourers is a whole other challenge for the enterprise. The lack of discipline, work ethic and productivity by the workers was a problem that I heard about on numerous occasions from numerous sources inside (I 11 ; I 22 ; I 25) and outside (I 02 ; I 03 ; I 05) the community. Many explained this problem as an identity conflict as the *comuneros*, who are “labourers”, are also the “owners” of the communal enterprise.

As it’s communal, we say ‘I’m a *comunero*, you have to give me [work, pay etc.]’. If one is punished [we say] ‘why are they punishing?’ It’s not like a private enterprise. In a private enterprise, if you make a mistake, then you know what, you’re out of here and another one replaces you. This is all a big mess (*relajo*).

(I 11)

According to this *comunero*, as the men of Altamonte do not perceive themselves merely as labour, but also as owners, they are less willing to accept the authority of other *comuneros*.⁴¹ They perceive work and pay as their right. The informant above saw this as a huge problem for efficiency of the enterprise in describing it as a big mess (*relajo*). Thus, this *comunero*, along with many other actors, feels that is not just the attitudes of administrators, but also of those who work in the enterprise (the majority of *comuneros*) that needs to change. Further, in this quote, the communal enterprise is again compared unfavourably to a private enterprise. The discourse from this *comunero* is, in many respects, very similar to that coming from the NGO and government sectors.

In the following passage from a professional forester who works in both NGO and government sectors, values associated with business are venerated while more “communal” values are either ignored or denigrated.

One thing that I have noticed is that the company mixes with the community. So the forestry company, to be efficient, has to function like a company. However, the *Usos y Costumbres* and the style of the community

⁴¹ Antinori and Bray (2005 : 1535) point out that this “tension” between *comunero* workers and authorities is common in community forestry in Mexico.

clash a lot of the time with the industrial perspective. So there you have problems because **they haven't completely been able to absorb, or to understand** that they are businessmen and, well, they are also *comuneros*. Lots of decisions are taken in the communal frame of mind and sometimes they are wrong decisions: the purchasing of equipment, the assignation of positions [...].

(I 10, my emphasis)

This is an example of how “*attempts are made to displace issues of moral and cultural identity with the imperatives of administrative efficiency*” (Ball 1990 : 154). By framing the “clash” between the communal structure/frame of mind and an industrial perspective in terms of efficiency, the political nature of this clash is concealed. The communal structure and frame of mind are subtly denigrated or unvalued. They are explained by a “lack of understanding” by the *comuneros*. What the *comuneros* “fail to understand” is that they are businessmen. According to this discourse, they need to start understanding themselves in a different way and to make decisions more from a business perspective and less from “*the communal frame of mind*”. Further, according to this official, this “lack of understanding” can lead to “*wrong decisions*”. However, what is “*wrong*” is based on what is efficient in terms of profits for the enterprise, rather than the communal concerns that might lead to such decisions. Indeed, this quote is an excellent example of how integration into larger markets and the development discourse set the “rules of the game” in a way that guides action in a specific direction (Escobar 1995 : 41). When “efficiency” based on profits becomes the measure through which one makes “right” or “wrong” decisions, the meaning of right and wrong becomes much thinner. Other concerns which might come from the “*communal frame of mind*”, be that the importance of the forest or agricultural land for “traditional” purposes or the rotation of authority figures to maintain equality and disperse power, become unimportant. This discourse, therefore, subtly carries with it a certain form of rationality which can set the parameters of discussion and even thought.

3.4. Chapter Conclusion: Change on the horizon?

I have argued here that through the discourse and subtle processes of community forestry, subjects are “guided” in a business-oriented direction and relationships between various actors are constituted in a more business-like manner. Further, I have documented an overt

attempt to transform *comuneros* into strict bosses and/or motivated/subservient employees geared towards efficient business operation.

Throughout this chapter, several themes have emerged in the discourse and practice surrounding community forestry which are connected to neoliberalism. The first theme is the importance of adaptability⁴², both of community structure and of *comuneros* themselves. The dominant discourse calls for the community to adapt its structure to be more competitive (in other words, to change its forms of governance) and for *comuneros* themselves to act more like “businessmen” (which is a form of government). Further, this chapter has shed light on the compartmentalisation of spheres in the dominant discourse in that the economic sphere is portrayed as separate from the social and cultural. This conceals the fact that economic activities are also social and cultural (Sachs 1999 : 18) and that changes in the enterprise for economic gains inevitably affect these other spheres. Here the risk of the colonization of other spheres by the economic (Fairclough 2002) is obvious. A third, and very related theme is rationality; what is considered “rational” or “right”, in the dominant discourse, is based on a particular vision that puts an emphasis on monetary gains and the accumulation of capital. The fourth theme which I have touched on briefly is the dissemination of technoscientific environmental knowledge, practices and conceptions of the forest. The following chapter will delve deeper into environmental discourses and how they constitute and affect the relationship between the state and the community.

⁴² Which Fairclough 2002 notes is central to the discourse of what he calls “new capitalism”.

Chapter IV – ENVIRONMENTAL DISCOURSE

I have now explored how the dominant discourse surrounding community forestry in Altamonte is calling for significant structural change in the community towards forms that are closer to the private enterprise model. I have also shown that the community has already begun to move in that direction and that more fundamental change may well be coming soon. Further, I have demonstrated how discourse, found in verbal forms and in concrete practices, guide people's relationships with each other and their identities towards forms that are much more congruent with what are constituted as the needs of the market. The preceding chapter also explored briefly how through the process of community forestry, a technoscientific vision of the forest is disseminated and/or upheld.

In this chapter I will examine environmental discourses in more detail. Specifically, I will look at how knowledge about the environment, produced and circulated through community forestry, fits into the neoliberal vision. I will argue that the forest is commodified through community forestry's networks of power, knowledge and institutions. The market has, in fact, become a key factor in terms of how community members describe the environment, its use and its protection. Further, I will look at how this environmental discourse, found in the documents of NGOs, community development plans, state policy documents (and the execution of state policy) as well as interviews and informal conversations with various actors, also constitutes actors in particular relationships with each other. Specifically, these discourses constitute state agencies as environmental experts and valuable allies to indigenous communities. Further, I'll show how Altamonte disseminates a certain sustainable development discourse and models a cooperative relationship with the state in intercommunity settings. While the systems of government and the development discourse often seemed inescapable in Altamonte, I will also explore alternative discourses emanating from, both within the community and from another community, that challenge neoliberal government. In this exploration of environmental discourses surrounding community forestry in Altamonte, there is no better place to begin, than with the communal forestry engineer and the communal forestry technicians who are

those most involved in environmental planning and management in the community on a day-to-day basis.

4.1 Scientific Forestry, the State and Altamonte del Zopi

4.1.1 The Engineer and Forestry Technicians

According to federal forestry law, the *Ley General de Desarrollo Forestal* (SEMARNAT 2003), forestry practices must legally be planned and supervised by a “qualified” professional such as a forestry engineer. Most communities that practice community forestry can only afford to hire an external engineer on a contractual basis while some communities have banded together to hire technical assistance on a more permanent basis. These are known as Forest Conservation and Development Units (UCEDEFOS) (Zabin 1998). In Altamonte, however, the engineer works full-time for the community and is originally from the community itself, which is very rare for CFEs in Mexico. In some ways, he symbolically embodies the participative development vision as a local who has “appropriated” scientific knowledge and is bringing it back to his community to help develop it. CONAFOR officials also perceive the training of indigenous engineers as particularly important because non-indigenous engineers “*do not have the necessary knowledge to convince community assemblies, they do not know who is who and what the quirks of each are*” (CONAFOR manager, in Hébert and Rosen 2007 : 36, their translation).

The engineer in Altamonte is not only an important link between the community, the government and NGOs, but also occupies an interesting position which demonstrates the fluidity of the boundaries between the “inside” and the “outside” of the community.⁴³ Though he maintains a residence in the community, he went to school and married outside of it, now lives with his family in Ciudad Oaxaca and does not fulfill regular *comunero* duties (*cargos*). While his primary role – what he is trained in – is as a technical expert in scientific forestry, the engineer considers himself a “communal technical advisor” and is involved in various areas of the community including productive and cultural aspects and

⁴³ See Li 2001 for a more detailed discussion on state/community boundaries and CBNRM.

even community border issues. The multiplicity of his functions, the fact that he works full-time as a professional in the enterprise and also maintains at least part of his status as a *comunero* makes him a particularly important actor in the community. A significant part of his job is looking for funding and technical support for various projects, thereby connecting actors and institutions from inside and outside the community. As the *Director Técnico Comunitario*, the engineer heads up the *Dirección Técnica Forestal* (DTF), which is comprised of himself, a *Coordinador de Áreas* (Areas Coordinator) and a handful of *comuneros* known as *Técnicos Comunitarios* (Communal Technicians). As with the “outside” professionals hired full-time in the communal office, members of the DTF that he directs can be seen as key “nodes” or “relays” through which power, carried in specific forms of knowledge and “truths”, passes (Foucault 2003 [1976] : 29), particularly in terms of environmental discourse.

The *Técnicos Comunitarios* from Altamonte are in charge of specific jobs such as fire control, pest control and tree-planting. While these *Técnicos* often receive much of their training on the job, some have also received training in scientific forestry through a CONAFOR training program, CECFOR⁴⁴ (Deloya 2004 : 35). *Técnicos Comunitarios* also participate in specific government-sponsored studies or projects in which they sometimes accompany professional forestry “experts” from outside the community. These *Técnicos* are thus exposed to environmental and technical knowledge and discourse from a variety of actors from outside the community (often connected to the state). They then bring this knowledge and discourse with them to their work in their community and also to other communities in intercommunity settings. While the DTF performs a number of duties, the creation and follow-through of the *Programas de Manejos Forestales* (Forestry Management Plans) is at the heart of its work.

4.1.2 *El Programa de Manejo Forestal*

The *Programa de Manejo Forestal* (PMF) is described in the forestry law as a “*technical instrument for planning and follow-up that describes the action and procedures of*

⁴⁴ In CECFOR most courses focus on scientific forestry techniques. Students also take basic math, science and Spanish language courses as well as an introduction to social studies and Mexican history (CECFOR n.d.).

sustainable forest management” (SEMARNAT 2003 : 5). The plan must be approved by the *Secretaria de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales* (SEMARNAT), a federal government agency. Though the document is signed by the *Comisariado* and the *Consejo de Vigilancia*, which are legally responsible for the community’s forest resources, Altamonte’s DTF, led by the engineer, largely creates and takes charge of the day-to-day execution of the plan. These tasks require a significant amount of scientific biological knowledge and written Spanish literacy. The PMFs contain biological data about the community and its “resources”, some socioeconomic data, and the community’s plans to use those resources and mitigate environmental damage. Altamonte’s 2000-2005 PMF which I have analyzed is clearly based on the logic of commercial scientific forestry. According to Vandana Shiva, the commercial scientific forestry vision “*looks only for the industrially useful species that can be profitably marketed and measures productivity in terms of industrial and commercial biomass alone*” (1993 : 24). In Altamonte’s plan, for example, productivity of different areas of the forest is based solely on the state of trees⁴⁵ in that area (as opposed to overall productivity of the forest) (PMF 2000 : 35 and 41). Further, based on data and definitions from the community’s 2000-2005 PMF, the main criteria for deciding what areas should be protected or not is the density of the most economically valuable species in any given area⁴⁶ (2000 : 29-33) (See Table 1.0 below). Thus, the timber market largely determines which areas of the forest and what kinds of forest are protected.

⁴⁵ “7.1.4.7 Nivel de productividad : Fundamentado en la ley forestal y su reglamento, se clasificaron los subrodales de acuerdo con su nivel de productividad, utilizando para ello la cobertura de copa y la altura dominante del piso alto.” (PMF 2000 : 35)

⁴⁶ Of the 10,753.6 hectares that are put aside for “*conservación y protección*”, 7,223.31 were “*areas con vegetación no comercial*”, 1,219.42 were areas of low productivity and 1,553.13 were “*baja densidad y/o bajas existencias*”. Thus, 9995.86 hectares (93%) of the forested areas that were put aside for conservation and protection were done so primarily based on the profitability of the areas. (PMF 2000 : 32)

Table 1.0: Classification of the conditions and/or uses of forested areas

Clave	Uso y/o condición	Area (ha)
1	Terrenos no forestales	293.93
1.1	Areas agrícola-pecuario	219.25
1.2	Areas con infraestructura forestal	5.64
1.3	Area frutícola	4.31
1.4	Centros de población	26.36
1.5	Cuerpos de agua	2.16
1.6	Graveras (Bancos de préstamo)	1.01
1.7	Claros naturales (Pastizales)	35.19
2	Terrenos de apt. preferentemente ftal.	285.75
2.1	Areas con uso agrícola-pecuario	37.58
2.2	Areas perturbadas con vegetación secundaria	248.17
3	Terrenos forestales	20,161.4
3.1	Areas para conservación y protección	10,753.6
3.1.1	Areas con pendientes mayores al 100%	730.58
3.1.2	Areas con vegetación no comercial	7,223.31
3.1.3	Areas de baja productividad	1,219.42
3.1.4	Areas de baja densidad y/o bajas existencias	1,553.13
3.1.5	Areas de baja rentabilidad	0.00
3.1.6	Regeneración juvenil	27.21
3.2	Areas de restauración	18.27
3.2.1	Areas c/alto nivel de deterioro edáfico	18.27
3.2.2	Areas con aprovechamiento reciente	0.00
3.3	Areas de producción forestal	9,389.50
3.3.1	Areas de producción maderable.	9,389.50
TOTAL		20,741.1

Source - PMF 2000 : 32

Indeed, in carrying out the PMF, the DTF's job is to execute various aspects of "sustainable forestry" through scientific forestry techniques. Executing the plan partly means taking environmental precautions such as not cutting near rivers and streams in the area that is currently designated for forestry production (10,000 acres). However, as they expressed it to me, the *Técnicos* top priority is to keep the trees healthy so that the community is able to make money from them over the long term. Trees are, in fact, treated by these *Técnicos Comunitarios* largely as a commodity and the forest often as an area for profitable trees to grow. The focus of their management techniques are to "sustainably" harvest as many commercially valuable trees as possible. Protecting these trees from pests and fires, which are seen as the main threats to them, and creating conditions which allow them to regenerate are the main environmental priorities. Further, this regeneration takes place in conditions of quasi monoculture since tree planting does not match the primary forest in terms of tree diversity. Thus, in the area where the community is working, and on which it concentrates its attention, taking care of the forest has largely come to mean attempting to maximize profits by allowing the trees that the market currently values to thrive. For example, a *Técnico Comunitario* pointed out to me that they always cut down the trees that have any organisms on them that could take their water supply – such as fungi. I asked if he was afraid that this practice would affect the ecosystem and he told me that that was what the conservation area was for (field notes Oct. 12th, 2005).

Thus, in Altamonte, nature is often treated as "natural capital". This is undoubtedly connected to the scientific forestry training that the engineer, other technicians and *comuneros* have received, the creation and execution of the state-approved PMF, the experience of the community with the private company (CFO) from 1940s to the 1970s and the desire for significant material gains from forestry by the community. It is also reinforced on a day-to-day level by the discourses and practices connected to their commercial forestry practices. For many in Altamonte del Zopi, the forest, has in fact, become largely a place for monetarily valuable trees to grow and to be exploited "rationally" according to criteria of "sustainability" as defined by the state and scientific forestry techniques. Thus, through community forestry, the commodification of nature (McCarthy and Prudham 2004) that is intimately related to the reductionist vision of scientific commercial forestry (Scott 1998 and 1995 ; Shiva 1993) occurs. Further, it is also

evident how this form of development emphasizes “tradable goods” and the growth of GNP and incorporation into the neoliberal economy (Petras 1997).

The PMF process is also part of the state’s attempt to monitor forestry communities to ensure that their practices are “sustainable”. The SEMARNAT not only approves and sets the criteria for appropriate PMFs, but also sends its own people to forestry communities periodically to make sure that the PMF it has approved is being followed. If the SEMARNAT is either unsatisfied with the plan or believes that it is not being followed correctly, it can cancel the community’s licence for forest exploitation. Tree-cutting would then become illegal and could be reported to the Federal Attorney’s Office of Environmental Protection (PROFEPA). The *Comisariado* and/or others caught cutting trees down could be imprisoned and fined. Illegality would also mean losing access to government/NGO funding and technical support.⁴⁷ Thus, the community’s participation in forestry formally takes place in a context in which their “control” over the forest is based on them following procedures and meeting criteria that are determined, monitored, and enforced by the federal government.

In practice, however, the state does not have the resources to constantly patrol all the forests in the country. In fact, Klooster (2003 : 100-103) cites this as a weakness of previous forest conservation policies which attempted to coercively limit rural people’s access to the forest. In order for the state to meet its environmental and economic production goals, and to maintain a certain control of its territory (as opposed to, for example, areas in Chiapas, largely controlled by communities that are part of autonomous indigenous movements such as the Zapatistas), the state therefore needs to create subjects who *want* to abide by these guidelines and it must constitute itself as an ally to communities. As Mosse points out, in contemporary development, the state often tries to accomplish ‘rule’ “*through complicity and the hegemony of trust and mutual interest*” (2005 : 13). Its financial power is extremely useful in establishing and reinforcing this “complicity” and “hegemony of trust”.

⁴⁷ Community members expressed to me that they were afraid that that might happen.

4.1.3 The State, Government and Environmental Discourse

4.1.3.1 Using Material Power to Govern

Competitive commercial forestry involves technically complex and expensive processes and therefore creates dependence by communities on outside sources, such as the state and/or NGOs, for subsidies and technical assistance. Indeed, the constitution of the state as an ally is reinforced by the financial and technical support that the state provides communities for forestry projects. In 2005, Altamonte del Zopi received over 500,000 pesos (approx. \$55,000 CAN) worth of assistance for 3 projects from one SEMARNAT program alone (PRODEFOR 2005 : 2). This funding does not include that received from PROCyMAF for the creation of a community development plan or that received for the intercommunity seminar led by Altamonte. In Mexico, this financial and technical support for community forestry *“is generally predicated on a certain compliance with norms, adherence to certain discourses, and participation within an institutional framework, which validates and legitimizes the state”* (Hébert and Rosen 2007 : 14). Funding should therefore not be seen merely as a “carrot” or a way to bribe indigenous communities into compliance. In following procedures such as the PMF, territorial ordering (*ordenamiento territorial*) and forestry certification – which are often seen as a means to funding from government agencies and NGOs – communities are pulled into a web of discourse and practice in which the state is constituted as an expert and an ally. One way that state forestry institutions try to attain complicity with their agenda is through the cultivation of a specific “forest culture”.

4.1.3.2 Whose “Forest Culture”?

As mentioned in Chapter II, the idea of the forest as a valuable commodity to be exploited by indigenous communities dates back to at least the Porfirian “liberal” era at the turn of the twentieth century. However, it did not deeply penetrate the countryside of Oaxaca until the concessionary era in the late 1940s when there was an attempt by the government and private companies to “develop” the region through commercial forestry. According to the discourse of many non-governmental, communal and academic actors, these private companies contributed little to the communities, exploiting them economically and degrading them environmentally with the support of the government. According to the

published work of one NGO worker who has worked extensively with Oaxacan Forestry Communities, including Altamonte del Zopi:

These years of exploitation of the communities' forests deeply affected the dignity and integrity of the communities, creating a system of corruption of community authorities through gifts and bribes that influenced decisions with reference to volume, cutting areas, length of contracts, and timber prices. Various government institutions were complicit in the corruption, such as the Secretaría de Reforma Agraria (SRA) and the Secretaría de Agricultura y Recursos Hidráulicos (SARH).

(López-Arzola 2005 : 112-114)

In the discourse of many of those who advocate for community forestry, this “shameful” era of private commercial forestry is often contrasted with community forestry, which they portray as “empowering” and environmentally positive (See ASETECO 2003 : 38-42 ; Chapela and Lara 1995 : 9-13 ; López-Arzola 2005).

While there seems to be a consensus among actors that this type of forestry was less “participatory” and “sustainable” than communal forestry and that communities often received less than their fair share of profits, other actors emphasize what they see as the *positive* legacy of the concessionary period. A high-ranking official in the Oaxaca State Forest Administration (*Dirección Forestal de Oaxaca*) insisted on the fact that these private corporations had positive effects on the culture of communities and considers them a very important factor in the success of communities such as Altamonte. *“I want to point out that the fact that they worked with those [private or state] companies influenced them a lot, because we have other communities with the same potential that to date haven't risen, so this culture generated by these companies was really important”* (I 32).

According to this informant, an important part of what accounts for the success of Altamonte and other communities in community forestry is the cultural influence of the private company (CFO). The community's experience with the concessionaire (CFO) may well have contributed to the perception of trees as a “resource” to be extracted in large quantities for profit. Though some important differences exist, there is also some continuity between the forest culture developed in communities during the concessionary and

communal eras of forestry development in Altamonte⁴⁸. Both involve a particular relationship to, and understanding of, their surrounding environment which is connected to a search for monetary income through “scientific” commercial forestry. Community forestry, however, necessitates and facilitates a deeper entrenchment of this particular “culture” as more *comuneros* are actively involved in the process from top to bottom. Indeed, the participatory nature of community forestry may well lead to greater subjectification of those who are “participating” in the process than other “top-down” models of development (See Kesby 2003).

This same informant went on to say that: *“It’s fundamental, the fact that Altamonte worked with these companies and that once they appropriated the process they already had this capability, this vision”* (I 32). Thus, according to him, successful appropriation of the forestry process is partly dependant on a certain amount of continuity of the private commercial forestry vision.

CONAFOR openly promotes a particular “culture” connected to forestry and thus invests resources to actively foster a vision of trees as a resource to be exploited “sustainably”. The federal agency states on its official webpage that part of its mission is to develop what it calls “forest culture” by fomenting *“a consciousness about the caretaking, preservation and sustainable use of forests”* (CONAFOR 2006). Such a policy seems to be positive environmentally. However, the idea that CONAFOR must actively foment a forest culture among indigenous communities also denies that the communities themselves have one of their own. Further, questions of what gets defined as “sustainable” by the state and what is seen as degradation have recently been problematized by scholars of Mexican community forestry. Gauvin-Racine (2005 : 134 and 137) has pointed out that for activities to be considered “sustainable”, they have to be scientifically manageable, while those that are not organized based on the specific criteria of “western” rationality and that don’t produce monetary income, such as swidden agriculture (*milpa*) are not. Mathews points out that *“government officials have vilified traditional agropastoral uses of fire”* and that *“this official fire discourse flies in the face of voluminous evidence that many fires are not*

⁴⁸ One major difference pointed out by those who support community forestry and CBNRM in general is that, in theory, companies have less of an interest in long-term profitability than communities and this theory

destructive, and that they are set for deliberate purposes and controlled” (2005 : 795-796). Again, through this vilification, the more monetarily profitable forestry is encouraged, while swidden agriculture is portrayed negatively. In light of these critiques, fomenting “forest culture” can come to mean the promotion of “tradable” or “profitable” goods. It can also be seen as an attempted imposition of neoliberal forms of environmental management on indigenous communities. For these communities, adhering to state definitions of sustainability, at least publicly, may be necessary if they wish to maintain control over their resources and gain access to government funding (Mathews 2005 ; Hebert and Rosen 2007 : 20-21).

4.1.3.3 The Forest as Gold Mine

It is therefore not surprising that the dominant environmental discourse both within and outside the community values forest for the material benefits that it brings the community. In fact, the community has likely recognized the material value of the forest for a long time. However, the extent of the commodification, and the representation of the forest as valuable purely for the profits that can be attained through its exploitation, is quite striking in Altamonte. Indeed, much of the discourse that I heard portrayed the forest as a commodity to be “cultivated” so that profits from it would last over the long-term. In my discussions with *comuneros* I often heard the forest referred to in monetary terms as a “mine” or “treasure”. People were keen to explain to me how they had recently come to understand its “true value”.

The following excerpt of a conversation with a *comunero* reveals the strength of “forest culture” in Altamonte that mirrors the idea of the forest promoted by CONAFOR: “*For us the forest is everything, because that is what we live off, it is our mine, therefore for us now, we have to take care of it*” (I 22).

This *comunero* values the forest for the economic benefits that it can bring to the community and states that they should preserve it for that reason. A member of the *Comisariado* explained to me that intervening in the forest was how to best protect it, citing the fact that another community did not intervene in its forest and all of its trees became

seems to be confirmed in the case of Altamonte.

infested with pests. When I responded that I had heard this argument many times in community forestry circles, but that it seemed strange to me, as the forests had survived for so long without this kind of intervention, he responded like this:

It's possible, but it has its advantages and disadvantages. It can survive, but we can't take out any of the resources. Rather, it is just there, it has a **potential value**, but one can't take it out. A forest in which one intervenes, one can take from it. **It's growing like money in the bank, one takes out the interest and the capital stays there.**

(I 65, my emphasis)

The commodification of the forest is obvious in this metaphor. According to this discourse, a forest that is "just there" only has potential value, whereas one that is being exploited in a "sustainable" fashion is "money in the bank gathering interest". This actor, who was trained by Finnish foresters (along with approximately 20 other men in the community), has significant silvicultural knowledge and is clearly an important leader in the community. He seems to see the forest principally as a place for profitable trees to grow. In fact, among the nearly all of the more prominent members in the community, this vision seems to be quite strong.

A researcher at the *Instituto de Estudios Mijes* (Mixtec Studies Institute) in Ciudad Oaxaca, who works on indigenous cultural issues was concerned about the domination of the economic sphere in Altamonte and other communities that practice commercial forestry.

I think that the main problem, from my perspective is that the economic project has overtaken the cultural and social perspectives [...] I get the impression that the people of Altamonte have been forgetting their own cultural focus. In other words, they are seeing the forest more as a place where there are trees that can be transformed through a company and less as a geographical location, a part of their territory which is inhabited, as with the rest of the territory, by something supernatural or by distinct supernatural forces [...] I think that this, the cultural aspect is one of the things that has been changing most.

(I 64)

According to this researcher, the development of a forest culture in communities such as Altamonte may therefore have important cultural implications. For many indigenous communities, the forest is directly related to the supernatural world; the development of the “forest culture” promoted by CONAFOR can therefore have significant cosmological implications for indigenous communities such as Altamonte.

The prominence of a commodifying discourse and support for the state-sponsored community forestry model in Altamonte makes sense given that the community has been involved in commercial forestry for the last 60 years and that it has reaped significant economic benefits from timber exploitation over the last 25 years. Adherence to certain aspects of a commercial “forest culture” and “scientific forestry” have enabled Altamonte to gain the significant material benefits mentioned in Chapter II. It is also a means to give people jobs in their community (which seems to have staved off emigration to a certain extent). Currently it also finances aspects of traditional festivities and communal gatherings (*convivencia*) which participants expressed were important for keeping the community united. It is partly for these reasons that Altamonte is seen as a model by promoters of community forestry.

However, over the medium and long term, environmental, cultural, social and even economic consequences of the promotion of this culture in Altamonte and all over Mexico are uncertain and potentially harmful. There seems to be a significant danger in Altamonte of *“the creation of one-dimensional forestry paradigm, and the destruction of the multidimensional knowledge systems of forest dwellers and forest users”* (Shiva 1993 : 18). At this point, it is quite clear that the forest culture which is promoted by CONAFOR, and which is strong in Altamonte, fits well with the neo-liberal model in that it leads to the commodification of the forest and to practices which prioritize the needs of the market. Further, environmental discourse, including forestry law and its application, not only constitute the relationships between community members and “nature”, but also constitute actors in specific relationships with each other.

4.1.3.4 State as Environmental Ally

As Shore and Wright (1997 : 7) have pointed out, policy has increasingly become a sort of “*charter for action [...] creating whole new sets of relations between individuals groups and objects*”. Mexican forestry policy has played an important role in governing relationships between state institutions, forestry communities and the environment. Through community forestry policy and practice in Mexico, state agencies such as the SEMARNAT are constituted as experts and allies in forest management while traditional indigenous knowledge and ways of perceiving and relating to the forest become less valuable.

As one *comunero* told me:

I think that right now [the community technical administration team] is marking [which trees to be cut] well, because being approved by the [SEMARNAT] means that, yeah, they are ok. What they are doing is sticking to reality, because the [SEMARNAT] is like a watch that is keeping track, or an indicator that says ‘here you’re doing well’ or ‘here you need to fix this.’

(I 20)

The SEMARNAT, a state agency, is portrayed here as the authority over the proper use of the forest - as the marker of what is sticking to “reality.” It becomes the “*watch*” that keeps track of whether the community is actually taking care of its forest properly. Through community forestry, the state agency is thus constituted as the holder of expert environmental knowledge. The state agency’s ability to cast itself in such a light is somewhat surprising given that the state has quite recently played an important role in policies that many feel have damaged the forest and that have contributed to the marginalization of the indigenous communities of the region (López-Arzola 2005 : 112-114, Klooster 2003).

Further, there seems to be a consensus among informants that the community had taken care of its forest well for 300 years before a private company, the CFO, entered the community in 1948. Part of what is perceived as valuable about the environmental expertise of the SEMARNAT and other “forestry” experts is that access to their technical

knowledge and support holds the promise of significantly more material gains from the forest than the community has had in the past. The dominant discourse holds that the professionals inside state and NGO agencies have knowledge and techniques that will allow the community to earn significant monetary income through forestry and related businesses over the long-term.

The agency's authority as a scientific forestry expert, however, does not go completely uncontested. For example, part of what is demanded by the government as a condition for the approval of a forestry plan is that communities plant a certain number of trees. For the government, a tree planting policy makes sense on various levels. As tree planting is often considered positive environmentally, this policy provides good "green" publicity for government-sponsored community forestry programs. It also means that communities must seek land on which to plant commercially valuable trees, and it is often land that had previously been used for agriculture that serves this purpose. The effect of this policy is therefore completely consistent with the neo-liberal development model: land which has previously been used to grow food of less monetary value, such as corn or other vegetables, and for self-subsistence, is converted to land for the growth of trees which are valuable in national or sometimes international markets.

However, members of the DTF told me that it did not make sense for the community to have to plant as many trees as was legally required by the SEMARNAT because Altamonte's silviculture system, taught to them by Finnish foresters, allows the pines to naturally regenerate themselves. Tree-planting, on the other hand, is technically difficult, expensive and, according to these communal technicians, makes little sense for Altamonte. A technician also told visitors from another community that the best way to protect the streams and rivers would be to cut a little bit in areas surrounding them in a precise way to assure proper regeneration; but this practice also goes against the regulations of the SEMARNAT (field notes Oct. 19th, 2005). The same technicians that made these complaints also said that they follow the guidelines, despite their reservations, in order to maintain a good relationship with the SEMARNAT; and that they are proud to fulfill their obligations, even though they do not think that these particular policies are good for their

community.⁴⁹ Being careful not to be overly confrontational, these community members were essentially arguing that the standardized national guidelines are not always adapted to their situation. They were also implying that they have significant knowledge about the appropriate scientific forestry techniques for their forest.

As Mathews (2002 : 23) points out, communities in Oaxaca have learned throughout the 20th century that the “*quality of their management of the forest was a political tool, and that they could claim control of the forest by claiming to be the legitimate guardians of the forest*”. *Comuneros* may therefore themselves try to claim a form of expert status in scientific forestry management, partly as a strategy to maintain control of their resources in the face of threats from the government, private industry or other communities. At the same time, this understanding that they need to be perceived as legitimate guardians of the forest may also contribute to public adherence to state definitions of “sustainability” and to environmental management guidelines and regulations (Mathews 2003 ; Hébert and Rosen 2007 : 21).

4.1.3.5 An Intercommunal Struggle and Environmental Moral Authority

This struggle for an environmental moral high ground was very evident in a recent territorial dispute between two other neighbouring indigenous communities in Oaxaca – San Miguel Aloapam and San Isidrio Aloapam. San Miguel, a community heavily involved in state-sponsored community forestry, claimed they needed to log an area that is disputed by San Isidrio because it was infested with pests (*gusano descortador*). San Isidrio, on the other hand, is part of the Consejo Indígena Popular de Oaxaca-Ricardo Flores Magón (CIPO-RFM), a group which openly opposes neoliberalism and the Mexican state in its current form (CIPO-RFM undated-a). The community accused San Miguel of “*indiscriminantly logging the forest causing irreversible damage to the ecosystem contributing to a lack of water for the communities in the region*” (CIPO-RFM undated-b, my translation). Among the people that they hold responsible for this situation are officials of the SEMARNAT and CONAFOR (CIPO-RFM undated-b, my translation). San Isidrio

⁴⁹ There is of course a high risk of “ethnographic effect” in such conversations as community members may well fear that saying the wrong thing could threaten their relationship with SEMARNAT.

also held a “*meeting/coming-together*⁵⁰ *in defense of the forest and communal life to share their love for mother earth [...] and listen to experiences of resistance against the capitalist system*” (CIPO-RFM undated-c, my translation). The discourse in this conflict shows that both communities claim a high standard of environmental care as part of their justification for their territorial claims. Further, San Isidrio’s “alternative” discourse accuses the SEMARNAT and the CONAFOR of complicity in environmental degradation and places their struggle for the protection of the environment in the context of “*resistance against the capitalist system*”.

In Altamonte, however, many seem to take particular pride in maintaining a good relationship with the state. For historically marginalized communities, acceptance by the state can be seen as a sign that they are moving in the right direction. The community’s forestry engineer commented to me that when he first started working for the community, he didn’t feel very “accepted” in government agencies, but that now when people from Altamonte arrive at the agency they are called in right away (field notes Nov. 18th, 2005). He is proud that the community has earned a certain status in these agencies. Part of how Altamonte maintains this status and positive relationship with the state is through active participation in government programs and through the promotion of the dominant “state-friendly” discourse in intercommunity settings.

4.1.3.6 “Participation” in State Forestry Programs

The state sets up a framework in which state agencies are working with communities in a “participative” framework towards the goals of sustainable development. An example of this framework is the CONAFOR’s *Programa de Ordenamiento y Fortalecimiento de la Autogestión Silvícola* (PROFAS) which came into existence in 2004 to execute aspects of the 2003 Forestry Law. The official general objective of the project is to:

Order and strengthen sustainable forest management; starting with the definition of forest regions and the integration of forest management units; to improve the planning of activities and administrative simplification; and to achieve the efficient management of forest resources; prioritizing the

⁵⁰ *Encuentro*

organization of the silviculturalists so that they contribute to sustainable forest development.

(Tenorio 2005 : 14, my translation)

In Oaxaca, as many of the “silviculturalists” are indigenous communities, the project brings these communities together to create larger *Unidades de Manejo Forestal* (Forest Management Units or UMAFORs), to be able to conduct larger-scale studies⁵¹ and to manage the country’s forests more efficiently. Forestry communities are, therefore, to be organized by this program in a way that they contribute to “sustainable forestry development” as defined by the state. This can be seen as a form of government, as the state is guiding indigenous communities’ environmental management in a specific direction.

Another more specific goal of the program is to:

[...] generate structures of silviculturalists at the local level with a self-management orientation, so that they are recipients of programs operated by CONAFOR particularly : reforestation, tree nurseries, health, soil, fire, community vigilance, through the Forest Management Units (UMAFORs).

(Tenorio 2005 : 15, my translation)

The use of “self-management orientation” (*carácter auto-gestivo*) in the context above is also quite illustrative of the idea of “participative” development in the forestry sector. These organizations are to have a “self-management” orientation, yet the program explicitly declares that they are to be organized in a way that contributes to (what the state defines as) “sustainable forestry development”. The “self-management” that this program seeks to promote is one that leads them to become recipients of *state* programs, through management units (UMAFORs) that were created by *state* law. Programs such as this, therefore structure “participation” within a framework of compliance to and guidance from the state. Indeed, as Vincent states, participation implies playing a game “*the rules to which are already established*” (Vincent 2003 : 3).

⁵¹ Participation in such studies has in fact become mandatory for forestry communities (SEMARNAT 2003 : *Artículo 62, II*)

Thus, as part of this project, each region of a state forms a working group whose workshops and organizational costs are financed by PROFAS. In the PROFAS workshop that I attended, the meeting was facilitated by a promoter from the SEMARNAT who had set the agenda. The first points on the agenda were speeches from government actors who spoke about the point of the program and the benefits of the programs. Some of these state officials and professional engineers spoke of “us” or “we”, referring to the forestry sector and comparing “their” sector to others. For example, a CONAFOR official, explaining the benefits of the UMAFOR project, stated that associations of coffee producers and the cattle industry don’t represent “our interests” (field notes Nov. 14th, 2005). In creating these sectoral categories, state institutions are constituted as having shared interests with these groupings of communities in that they are all in the same “sector”. Further, these divisions (which are being created not only by use of this language, but also through the practice of these “sectoral” workshops) imply that communities heavily involved in other sectors have divergent interests. These programs and interactions may therefore “*fragment poor communities into sectoral and sub-sectoral groupings unable to see the larger social picture that afflicts them and even less able to unite in struggle against the system*”⁵² (Petras 1997 : np).

At the same time, the discourse of participation in this framework allows communities to be held responsible for ensuring the success of the “sector” and for their own well-being. In the same workshop, a CONAFOR official told community members: “*Some say that the government should support, should give everything, but it is you (community members) that need to work. The government isn’t the solution. You are.*” (field notes Nov. 14th, 2005)

This discourse portrays communities as responsible for their own situation. It also discourages action to try and attain more from the state or that addresses the structural inequalities in Mexico.

In a sense, this way of framing the situation is also “empowering” as communities are told that they are the “solution” to their “problems”. However, according to Henkel and Stirrat (2001 : 182), it is important to look at not only how much people are empowered but also

⁵² According to Petras, this is one of the effects of the proliferation of NGOs and micro-enterprises.

for what they are empowered. In this case, what communities are “empowered” to do is work within the neoliberal state’s framework of “sustainable development” and integrate themselves into large markets. They are not empowered (and are arguably disempowered to) challenge the state and/or look for other options.

Another potential benefit of PROFAS for the government is that communities, such as Altamonte, may help bring others into the fold of state-sponsored forestry. Indeed, this CONAFOR official explained that part of the idea of the project is that communities who are participating in “sustainable community forestry” can work with their surrounding villages which are not, to try to get them on board (field notes Nov. 14th, 2005). Shortly afterwards, a professional engineer explained that working together, forest communities can be more effective; he gave the example that if a neighbouring community doesn’t control its pests, they will affect “your” community. The program therefore encourages links between localities, with the goal of promoting compliance with the state’s development and environmental management norms and laws. Communities such as Altamonte that are considered “models”, play a particularly important role in this regard. In the meeting itself, the President of the *Comisariado* of Altamonte officially welcomed everyone, passed out sheets and played a leading role in the discussion. Along with another community, Altamonte also represents their region on the state committee (field notes Nov. 14th, 2005).

4.1.4 Altamonte del Zopi in Intercommunity Settings

Indeed, for government agencies, Altamonte is a “model”, as the community is committed to forestry; has made significant material gains through its enterprise; and maintains a very cooperative relationship with state institutions connected to forestry⁵³. Not only does Altamonte lead by example, but the community also plays an important promotional role for community forestry in intercommunity settings such as the PROFAS workshops mentioned above. The government therefore encourages, sponsors and helps organize processes through which communities who are not as committed to state-sponsored “sustainable development” models can learn from communities such as Altamonte. In such settings, the dominant sustainable development discourse is spread not only by

professionals – including accountants, forestry engineers and state officials who seem to often attend and/or facilitate these events – but also by members of “model” indigenous communities.

One such setting, which I documented, was an “intercommunity seminar” in which 22 members of another Oaxacan community (who were also recording with a video camera) visited the Altamonte’s forestry area for three days to learn about the communal enterprise. This particular seminar was financed by the federal government program PROCyMAF. The seminar opened in the work camp where the DTF have an office and a meeting room. The president of Altamonte’s *Comisariado* and a *Promotor* (promoter) from the CONAFOR sat side by side facing the 22 representatives of the visiting community. After a word by the President of the *Comisariado*, who said that he was there to share about the process of development in Altamonte, the state official spoke briefly, asking that the visiting community put into practice some of what they would learn from Altamonte. He then shook hands with the president of the *Comisariado* of Altamonte and left. The alliance between Altamonte and the CONAFOR had thus been symbolically and verbally recognized (field notes Oct. 19th, 2005).

Throughout the rest of the weekend, the visiting community was given guided visits and presentations on the various aspects of Altamonte’s forestry enterprise, principally by a member of the *Comisariado*, the forestry engineer and his assistant, and the enterprise’s head accountant (a professional hired from outside the community). These tours included guided visits to a fire control tower, the tree nursery, the saw mill, the water bottling plant, and to sections of the forest exploitation area. There were also presentations on the accounting practices in the community, as well as Power Point presentations on Altamonte’s forestry enterprise.

The environmental discourse that emerged in this seminar was interesting in that it not only largely mirrored the dominant global environmental discourse, but even, at times, made reference to it. One aspect of this discourse was the question of responsibility. As one of the members of the *Comisariado* said: “*There is concern (for the forest) at the*

⁵³ They were involved in a dispute with the *Secretaria de Haciendas* in the early 90s, however, the struggle

international level. It is our responsibility to take care of it [...] Now there is more consciousness, before we could cut without thinking, now we cannot [...] things have evolved" (field notes Oct. 20th, 2005). This member of the *Comisariado* and members of the DTF also pointed-out measures that Altamonte took for environmental protection including: not cutting near waterways⁵⁴, prohibiting hunting and outlawing "clandestine" logging. A member of the DTF also portrayed agriculture as negative in that it involved the burning of trees (field notes Oct 20th, 2005). This discourse therefore places indigenous communities in a particular position of responsibility for addressing global environmental concerns and portrays Altamonte as a community which is fulfilling those responsibilities. However, the member of the *Comisariado* also criticized "environmentalists" who proposed leaving the forest untouched. "*The environmentalists say don't even cut one tree [...] well then give us jobs and benefits/profits*"⁵⁵. A member of the DTF said "*the forest needs the hand of man*" (field notes Oct. 19th, 2005).

This discourse frames the problems in a way that leads to a specific form of development, community forestry, as the only solution. The problems of poverty and environmental degradation are to be solved by resource extraction through scientific planning and management which leads to jobs and profits that can be used for services. The objective thus becomes "*to get the maximum out of the soil*" and to "*cultivate the forest*", (member of DTF, field notes Oct. 20th, 2005). In order to practice efficient forestry, presenters commented on the usefulness of aerial photographs and of territorial planning (*ordenamiento territorial*), "*a tool which allows for good management*", "*adequate use*" and is "*a way to decide which parts are used for what*" (member of *Comisariado*, field notes Oct. 19th, 2005). Based on the forest management plan and the discourse of many community members, it seems that these tools are principally used to determine the most economically efficient use of the forest. "Making the best use of the soil" and "cultivating the forest", in Altamonte implies relating to their territory based on market criteria in that they plant the species that are valued most by the market and harvest the most profitable areas.

was lead by a member of another community (ASETECO 2003 ; field notes Sept. 23rd, 2005 ; I 30)

⁵⁴ Despite the complaint of the technician mentioned above.

⁵⁵ *beneficios*

This “intercommunity seminar” also served a promotional role for the state-sponsored community forestry model. In fact, according to a high official at the CONAFOR Oaxaca office, this is the main reason that they sponsor such exchanges.

So the idea of an exchange of experiences, of an exchange of communal experiences is that [the visiting community] sees that they can do these activities for themselves [...] that they can do it, that they can administer, that they can distribute their resources, that they can make profits, that they can make profits that they can use for their own benefit.

(I 61)

It is thus not surprising that many of the presentations and tours were also sprinkled with “inspirational comments” like “*when there is the will, you can (succeed); with a little enterprise, campesinos can do it*” (member of the *Comisariado*, field notes Oct. 19th, 2005); “*desire to move forward is the most important thing*” (Member of the DTF, field notes Oct. 20th, 2005) or “*when human beings work together, and make goals they can (succeed). I think that you can do it too with your resources. Work together as a team in harmony*” (Member of the DTF, field notes Oct. 19th, 2005).

Although presenters did not portray community forestry as easy during this presentation, it was portrayed as positive environmentally and as providing significant benefits for communities that engage in it. Further, the fact that, in Altamonte, profits had been declining and that the community is facing significant pressure to become more efficient and to stay competitive was not mentioned once⁵⁶.

The discourse in this seminar regarding the relationship to the state was also particularly interesting. A member of the *Comisariado* mentioned at one point that maintaining the roads was the responsibility of the state and that it wasn’t doing its part (field notes Oct. 19th, 2005). This was one of the few critiques I heard of the state while I was in the community. The other aspects of development were generally portrayed as the community’s responsibility. At one point, during a power point presentation about what Altamonte has achieved through forestry, a member of the *Comisariado* said that “*the government doesn’t have the resources to give us jobs*” (field notes Oct. 19th, 2005)

implying that it was up to communities to create their own opportunities rather than expect more from the government and that community forestry was a great option to do this.⁵⁷ At another point in the seminar, while giving a tour of Altamonte's forests to the community, he commented that neighbouring communities in the area "*don't even let the state officials or police in*" comparing them in a negative light to Altamonte (field notes Oct. 19th, 2005).

Seminars like this are, therefore, very desirable from the perspective of state agencies. They promote state-sponsored community forestry and are a demonstration that the state has a positive relationship with indigenous communities. First of all, a state agency official is seen alongside the leader of an indigenous community and they are symbolically allied. Further, Altamonte models the dominant sustainable development discourse that I have outlined above in this chapter. Altamonte also serves as an example, a success story in community forestry, in that they show other communities the gains that they have made.

The discourse of the community in this seminar, however, leaves little room for the idea that the state should, in fact, be providing these services or even jobs to its citizens or that communities should work towards change at the state (or structural) level. It also leaves limited space for ideas about communal and environmental well-being that are not based on scientific planning, for which external "experts" are not necessary, and that do not imply significant dependence on the (inter)national market. Indigenous people are held responsible for their own "development", even though the structure of this development is such that they are expected to become competitive in unpredictable capitalist markets with limited capital and resources with which to adapt to these fluctuations. Though, in Altamonte, the pressures of the being in this market are felt acutely, they were not expressed in the intercommunity seminar.

Through the examination of dominant environmental discourse in this seminar and in other contexts thus far, I have argued that the discourse surrounding community forestry is commodifying in that the value of the forest is largely defined by the market. Further, through this discourse and the process of community forestry the state is portrayed as an

⁵⁶ I participated in the entirety of the seminar except for a small part of one presentation.

⁵⁷ It is worth noting the parallels between this discourse and that of the CONAFOR official in the other intercommunity setting, mentioned above.

expert and an ally and maintains a significant amount of control and influence over the process, including the ownership of definitions of environmentally “sustainable” practices. Indigenous communities, on the other hand, are held largely responsible for their own “development” and the protection of the environment based on criteria largely established (and enforced by) the state.

4.2. A Blast from the Past: An alternative vision

A difference in opinions in the community was alluded to by one *comunero* who said:

For me, all the natural resources are like the hen that lays golden eggs [...] I would like everyone to agree on this [...] there is a percentage of people [in the community] that don't value it. I can't say what percentage, but yes there are people that don't appreciate what the forest resource is.

(I 20)

This is both another example of the dominant commodifying discourse (the hen metaphor) and also a recognition that this understanding of the environment is not shared by everyone in the community. Indeed, the perception of the forest as a potential monetary resource is not hegemonic within the community.

An older woman in the community I spoke with has a different opinion about the way that the community is interacting with the environment and in fact compared it unfavorably to community/environment relationships of the past.

If there is not work in the company, there isn't any, but in the field there is, in the field there is. One can work it. What's happening is that the youth don't know how to work the field. The youth don't work in the field, neither man nor woman work in the field [...] The youth don't even know what it is to cultivate the earth. They don't know how to work with machines, nor with oxen [...] They don't know, so this is what is lost [...] This is now disappearing; in thirty years this will be a history.

[...]

People no longer appreciate the earth, because they don't want to work it [...] They don't believe in the earth anymore, because they only believe in

studying. They think that without studying they can't live, but they don't know anything about the earth, because the earth also sustains us.

(I 19)

This woman values farming much more than other actors whom I spoke with who were more involved with the forestry company. She bemoans the fact that knowledge of farming practices is being lost and also sees this as threat to the sustenance of the community, portraying work in the field as constant and always available as opposed to work in the enterprise which she sees as more ephemeral or fragile. She also has a completely different vision of what a forest should look like and how it should be treated.

It hurts me seeing the trees being cut [...] because I saw my *monte* when, before the exploitation, I saw the *monte* beautiful, beautiful. Sometimes one burned it [...] but just lightly, so then the forest was beautiful. The *monte* was beautiful and now they are exploiting. Now they don't burn it, but now it's dense, because before it was really beautiful the mountain. So I saw this when I was ten or eight years old and now I am hurt to see the *monte* destroyed. But others don't feel this pain, they don't feel the love for the trees, for the earth, for nature. Now with the exploitation, they are destroying the water, the places where water surfaces [...] the birds, nature. It really hurts me.

(I 19)

This woman paints a much uglier environmental picture of the current forestry practices in the community and a brighter picture of those of the past, now condemned in dominant discourse. For example, in this interview excerpt, the "light" burning of the forest is portrayed as positive and as creating a beautiful *monte*. This runs completely against the official and dominant vilifying discourse of "slash and burn" agriculture as one of the principal destructive forces in the forest (Mathews 2005, Hébert and Rosen 2007). It also contradicts the dominant discourse that portrays community forestry as non-destructive and as the best way to protect the environment.

I think that work, as it has come with the companies, [people] say: 'lets go work' [...] Then others come from far and say: 'No, why are we killing ourselves here, its better that we go to the United States, there one earns more, there we won't work as much and one earns more [...] Before, as this didn't exist so close, one got used to being poor, to humility, but now

everyone is awake, but a false awake. Yes, it's a false awake, because we are abandoning the real, the best and we are grabbing onto and choosing the worst. Yes, rich, but, I think, I see it like this.

(I 19)

Here, she makes a connection between paid work with the enterprises (both private and communal) and migration in the sense that they are all connected to how much people value paid work. For her, this strong desire for paid work and monetary wealth is connected to a “false awakesness” in which people are making poor choices; choices that lead to material wealth, but also to letting go of what is most important, including a specific type of connection to nature and the earth.

Many, both within the community and outside it, may write such a discourse off as a romantic view of the “good old days”, and as that of someone who fears change. In fact, this woman, herself, was hesitant to do an interview with me, saying that as she was an old woman and that she didn't know anything about the forest. This reaction makes sense in that the kind of knowledge and opinions that she has are essentially unvalued in the present context by many actors.

However, while her vision of the past may be somewhat romanticized or “utopian”, this kind of utopia can provide space to challenge the dominant discourse. In other words, this vision of the past provides her with a sort of ammunition to break out of the limits of present system of government and the dominant discourses of community forestry surrounding the environment (Hébert 2006, personal communication). It is, thus, particularly interesting that she points out that a part of the reason that she feels this pain (and others don't) is that she saw it in a different way when she was young. Many others are not old enough to have seen it how it was before it had been logged.

Another reason that she may have such a divergent vision is that, as an older woman, she has been largely shielded from dominant discourses and practices⁵⁸. As a woman, she is not present in the communal assemblies and has not worked in the enterprise, nor has she been formally educated as have many of the younger women. These same factors also

⁵⁸ Although one man who refused to do an interview with me also held somewhat of an alternative discourse.

marginalize her within her community and make her opinion less valued. Indeed, development discourse permeates Altamonte unevenly. Men who hold more political power are also those most involved in the enterprise and the assemblies. This reinforces the inequality which then (re)reinforces the strength of the discourse.

Nonetheless, despite the strength of the commercial and commodifying “forest culture” in the community of Altamonte del Zopi, there are other discourses that exist that contradict it, not only in other communities as shown above, but also within Altamonte itself. Such discourses are more likely to exist and be expressed at the margins of the community as exemplified by the woman quoted extensively here.

4.3 Chapter Conclusion

The dominant environmental discourse surrounding community forestry in Altamonte defines the boundaries for specific problems such as environmental degradation and poverty (Rose 1999 : 34). It also subtly limits the “possible field of action” (Foucault 1982 : 790) of their solutions as communities are strongly “guided” towards working along side state institutions and producing in (inter)national markets. The Mexican state and international institutions thus accomplish ‘rule’ by working through the aspirations and interests (Dean 1999 : 16 ; Mosse 2005) of indigenous communities. Community forestry is offered by its promoters as a way that communities can maintain elements of their identity and a certain form of autonomy while also making material gains. However, as we have seen, participating in community forestry actually affects their autonomy, identity and relationship with their surrounding environment. This chapter explored some of the intricacies of this environmental discourse.

One key theme that emerged in the discourse of various actors in multiple settings was the commodification of the environment. In the PMF created by the community’s DTF and in the verbal discourse of community members in various settings, the forest is treated largely as a potential monetary resource. In fact, the value of the various elements of the community’s surrounding environment is largely determined by the market. The community’s relationship with the forest is also influenced by the state’s criteria for

“sustainability” and “forest culture” which are themselves quite monetarily focused and are largely based on a reductionist scientific commercial forestry vision.

Further, through these discourses and the practices of community forestry, the state is constituted as an expert and an ally. In providing financial and technical assistance, state agencies are portrayed in a favorable light and are able to influence the forestry process. The state also *formally* controls important aspects of forestry practices by deciding which communities and projects are eligible for subsidies and even forestry licenses. Communities which participate in commercial forestry are, therefore, often dependant on the state for financial support, technical expertise and the legalization of their particular forestry practices. The state also has an element of control over market conditions. Currently, the federal trade policy which includes low or nonexistent tariffs on timber from important producers (ie. the USA, Canada and Chile) puts pressure on communities to become more competitive. Thus, as forestry becomes more important to communities, so does the importance of good relations with state agencies.

Yet, despite the importance of the market and state in the process and outcomes of forestry, the dominant discourse of both community members, the state and other professionals often hold communities themselves responsible for both their own “development” and environmental protection. Those who spread this discourse often use it with the intention of empowering communities or community members and it can undoubtedly have this effect. However, it must be kept in mind what these particular discourses and practices empower communities to do (Henkel and Stirrat 2001 : 182) and what they do not empower them to do. Through participation, communities such as Altamonte are empowered to participate in large markets by producing tradable goods. They are not empowered (and are arguably disempowered) to look at structural change beyond their community; to actively oppose the neoliberal state that they are increasingly intertwined with (and dependant on for support) or to organize their community more autonomously from the market or the state.

I have also shown how Altamonte and the state collaborate to bring other communities into the fold of state-sponsored forestry. The government sponsors and helps organize processes through which communities who are not as committed to state-sponsored “sustainable development” models can learn from communities such as Altamonte. In such settings, the

dominant sustainable development discourse is spread not only by professionals, including accountants, external forestry engineers and state officials who attend and/or facilitate these events, but also by members of “model” indigenous communities such as Altamonte.

That is not to say that people in Altamonte never challenge the state’s environmental discourse. *Comuneros* in Altamonte seem to perform an awkward balancing act between asserting themselves, proving that they themselves have “expert” knowledge on environmentally positive “scientific” forestry practices, and in showing support for (and adhering to) state environmental management guidelines. The fact that this environmental moral high-ground is seen as an important strategic asset by communities to support their claims over land was made clear in looking briefly at a conflict between two other communities (see also Mathews 2005).

Further, the discourse coming from one of these communities provides an example of an “alternative” discourse, which accuses the CONAFOR and the SEMARNAT, the main government agencies associated with community forestry, of complicity in environmental degradation. Alternative discourses also exist within Altamonte, particularly on the margins of the community, which challenge the dominant vision. One alternative perspective explored in this chapter is that held by an older woman who expresses that many in the community have lost touch with the earth and nature in their search for material wealth. The discourse emanating from San Isidrio and from this woman in Altamonte challenge aspects of the neoliberal government that I have attempted to describe here by providing alternative perspectives. By laying out contrasting perspectives, these discourses both elucidate the existence of this web of government and show that it has limits.

CONCLUSION

At the outset of this thesis I pointed out that neoliberalism is now facing strong resistance from social movements in Mexico and the rest of Latin America and that one of the most recent hot spots of this resistance is Oaxaca. At the same time, since the 1980s (when the Mexican state took a drastic neoliberal turn) forestry has been one of this state's favored forms of development in marginalized regions by. This context, along with a body of critical development literature (Escobar 1999, 1996, 1995 ; Sachs 1999 ; Gauvin-Racine 2005 ; Mathews 2005 ; Mosse 2005 ; Watts 2003 ; Cook and Kothari [eds.] 2001 in particular), and the analysis of the data I collected, has inspired my critical approach to this form of development. Thus I have focused on discourse and sought to explore the power dynamics involved in this process.

However, it must be noted that Altamonte's involvement in this form of development has brought significant material benefits to the community, seems to have led to an improved quality of life for many and, likely, an improvement in the "self-esteem" of the community. In fact, Altamonte, has generally been studied as a "model" for this kind of development in the region (See Garibay 2004 ; ASETECO 2003). Though there are significant problems and inequalities in the community – one of the most pressing being the marginalization of women – the community is taking important steps to address them. The CFE creates a means of livelihood for many men in the community which likely contributes to a stronger and more unified community life that could potentially be mobilized towards larger political goals. Further, in the formal management of the forestry enterprise, the community retains a large amount of control. This thesis does not intend to take away from these achievements. Indeed, in the context in which Altamonte finds itself, the community's accomplishments are impressive.

It is also important to note that the community and the communal enterprise are, (as of December 2005), still organized largely according to the *Usos y Costumbres* system, which itself largely seems to be in contradiction with neoliberalism. Part of what this thesis has documented is how a "business perspective" is "clashing" with communal ways-of-being,

governance and perspectives traditionally connected to this system. As such, it is important to note that if the community chooses to make the changes called for by the “business oriented” discourse, they may indeed make more material gains and this may serve their interests better than other options currently available to them. I am not in a position to say which are the “right” decisions for the community and this thesis is not intended to convince community members to make one decision or another.

In the context of not only declining profits and demographic pressures in the community, but also regional, national and international political turmoil, this thesis rather seeks to illuminate the subtle power dynamics involved in the process of community forestry. I hope that this critique allows people in various relationships to community forestry – and possibly similar development projects in other places – to make decisions with a greater awareness of such dynamics. Specifically, this thesis has attempted to illuminate ways in which neoliberalism works through state-sponsored community forestry in Oaxaca.

The exploration here focused on the discourse and practices surrounding community forestry in Altamonte del Zopi. While certain elements of material power were explored – particularly how the state uses its financial resources to influence the process of community forestry and how free trade policies and the market put pressure on communities such as Altamonte – they were not analyzed in depth. Though it provided fruitful results, this choice of priorities was somewhat limiting. A detailed investigation of the circulation of material resources in community forestry from the World Bank to an actual community such as Altamonte would be useful in gaining a more complete understanding of the power dynamics involved in this process. Similarly, a detailed documentation of money flows within the enterprise and community over time would be useful.

The choice to do multi-site research was also limiting though it was essential to this study in that it allowed me to trace the discourse and practices of various actors in various settings. More time in the community and at work sites would likely have allowed me a deeper understanding of life in the community and the enterprise for different actors as well as access to more hidden, private, discourses – particularly “alternative” ones. Further, it would have been very informative to have been in the community and/or the office during the uprising in Ciudad Oaxaca in 2006 and throughout the whole process of creation of the

PDFC. It would also be extremely telling to return to the community multiple times over a number of years to see how the situation evolves. Given that the dominant discourse explored here calls for significant change in the community, it would be useful to document the course of the changes that actually take place over time as well as the evolution of that discourse. However, in and of itself, despite these limitations, this exploratory research has provided useful insights into some Mexican community forestry's power dynamics.

The basic theoretical foundations which were of fundamental importance to this exploration were Foucault's (2003 [1976], 1994 [1980], 1990 [1978], 1982) concept of power, as well as government and Dean's (1999) "how's of government". These texts allowed me to understand the execution of a specific kind of power and how it can be enacted subtly through discourse and practice. Escobar's (1999, 1996, 1995, 1992a, 1992b) exploration of the development discourse and Mosse's (2005) examination of government in contemporary development gave me important hints as to how this kind of power is executed in the specific context of development projects. Mosse's (2005) insights on rule through complicity and harmony of interests were particularly useful in analysing power dynamics in Altamonte del Zopi. Authors who look critically at the idea of "participation" (Vincent 2003 ; Kesby 2003 ; Cook and Kothari 2001 ; Hilyard et al. 2001) also provided important critical analyses which allowed me to better discern the dynamics of multiple processes and meetings which I witnessed and participated in. Finally, other scholars who wrote on community forestry in Mexico (ASETECO 2003 ; Bray and Merino 2003 ; Klooster 2003 ; Bray 2002 ; Bray and Merino-Pérez 2002 ; Taylor 2002 and 2001 ; Zabin 1998) were important in gaining a deep understanding of CFEs, as well as the history and larger context of community forestry in Mexico. Other more recent works (Antinori and Bray 2005 ; Bray 2005 ; Lopéz-Arzola 2005 ; Merino-Pérez and Seguro-Warnholz 2005) and more critical perspectives (Gauvin-Racine 2005 ; Mathew 2005 and 2002 ; McCarthy 2006 and 2005) were instrumental in further developing this understanding and in deepening my analysis when I returned from my field work.

These theoretical foundations allowed me to both formulate my research questions and provide some answers to them. It is useful here to restate these questions before demonstrating how they have been answered:

Does neoliberal government manifest itself through the discourse and practices of community forestry in Altamonte del Zopi? If so, how does neoliberal government manifest itself through processes within the comunal enterprise and the discourses of various actors about the operation and governance of the enterprise? Also, how does the environmental discourse of community forestry constitute the relationships between the community, the forest and the state?

As outlined in Chapter II, community forestry, which gives indigenous people a significant role in local forestry management, arose simultaneously to, and partly as a result of, the rise of neoliberalism in Mexico (and the world). However, as noted in Chapter I, internationally, neoliberal policies have gone through important changes: as the state was originally “rolled-back” it has been rolled out again in new neoliberal forms (Saad-Fihlo 2005) with the goal of better integrating populations into the market economy. The contemporary Mexican state provides some support for community forestry which allows indigenous people some control over forestry operations. At the same time, the state plays a role in “guiding” the behaviour of communities through community forestry in ways that are congruent with neoliberalism. The present examination of this form of “development” shows how aspects of neoliberalism are not necessarily “forced upon” indigenous communities by the Mexican state and NGOs, but that they are spread insidiously (and, at times, even unintentionally) through a complex web of government. I have thus attempted to document these power dynamics by looking at the discourses and practices of many actors involved in community forestry in multiple settings.

Through this research, I found that the discourses and practices surrounding community forestry constitute (1) various actors within the community and their relationships to each other; (2) the relationships between communal actors, state agencies, state employees and other professionals; and (3) the relationships between these actors and the environment – in ways that are congruent with various elements of neoliberalism as defined in Chapter I.

In Chapter III, I showed that through community forestry, *comuneros* are told that they need to change their way-of-being and act in a more “business-like” manner in order for the enterprise to become more productive and efficient. Similarly, according to the discourse of some NGO and government actors, the idea of “rationality” or what is “right” is used in a

way that validates actions or decisions based on a “business perspective”, while decisions based on other priorities are invalidated. I also pointed out that these discourses sometimes portray the economic sphere as separate from the others which can conceal the fact that changes for economic benefit have important effects on the other aspects of the community. These discourses, which promote *comuneros* acting more like “businessmen”, are spread by NGO and government workers, by some *comuneros* themselves, and by professionals within the community who overtly and actively seek these changes in *comuneros*’ behavior. Indeed, one professional was very open about this, both in interviews with me and in other settings. Further, through community forestry, *comuneros*’ relationships with each other are arranged in new configurations, similar to that of a private enterprise, as they assume roles as strict “bosses” and/or motivated/subservient “employees” in the CFE. Those who fill these positions face pressure to adapt their behaviour to fit these roles. The governance structure of the CFE has also been moving slowly towards a model that is closer to a private corporation. Many inside and outside of the community want to take this change much further as they seek to “free” the CFE from what they portray as the constraints of deep integration into the communal system of governance. Thus, according to these discourses – found in interviews and informal conversations with various actors, the community’s development plan and in meetings/training sessions – *comuneros* need to adapt their personal identities, ways-of-being, and relationships to each other, as well as their governance structures, in order to meet the needs of the market. They need to act more like business-men and the community enterprise needs to operate more like a private business. They need to “neoliberalize” themselves and their community.

Community forestry also creates specific relationships between members of the community and state agencies (and its employees) outside of the community. The state uses its financial power (supported by the World Bank), law-making ability/threats of punishment, and scientific expertise to directly impact community forestry in Altamonte. It spreads discourse in communities in multiple ways including training communal technicians and setting the criteria for “sustainable” forest management, acceptable PMFs, and access to funding for various projects. Further, through the environmental discourses documented in a variety of settings, state agencies such as the SEMARNAT and the CONAFOR are constituted as experts and allies to communities such as Altamonte del Zopi. Professionals

that work within the enterprise full-time or that lead particular state and/or NGO sponsored projects connected to forestry also have status and influence partly due to the kinds of knowledge (scientific and/or business related) that they hold which are valued in commercial forestry. In the formal governance structure, these actors generally have little power. However, based on the meetings and trainings I documented and the interviews I did with professionals and *comuneros*, the influence of the professionals through training and day-to-day accompaniment is significant. This influence comes partly due to the fact that they hold specific kinds of knowledge (scientific or business related) which are valued and recognized in the commercial forestry that is practiced in Altamonte del Zopi. There is also a risk that Altamonte could become (or already is) dependant on these outside actors for both knowledge and funding.

Through community forestry, a particular vision of the forest is also spread within (and even by) communities such as Altamonte. The state actively promotes a “forest culture”, which largely means promoting forms of forest management which are supposed to create monetary profits over the long term. State agencies’ projects and the criteria they set for obtaining permits and subsidies seem to be based on this commodifying vision of the forest. Indeed, state programs, as well as the state’s regulatory framework, affect the relationship between the members of Altamonte and the environment. Members of the DTF, including the engineer, who is originally from the community, are key “relays” through which specific forms of environmental knowledge and discourse pass into the community and its forestry practices. Thus, according to the dominant environmental discourse inside and outside of Altamonte, (as documented in my interviews with multiple actors, forestry plans and the community’s development plan) taking care of the forest has largely come to mean creating conditions which allow the most commercially valuable trees to thrive. The forest is thus largely commodified in the dominant environmental discourse explored here. However, this vision of the forest is not hegemonic, as other discourses exist which portray the community’s relationship with the forest in different ways. Such dissenting voices seem to be more easily found among more marginalized people in the community. The one which I explored in some detail was that of an older woman in the community whose vision directly challenges the neoliberal perspective, who lauds farming and who argues that monetary gains are currently given too much importance.

It is also important to note that being heavily involved in community forestry means that the community puts a lot of its energy into an activity which is connected to the (inter)national market. Indeed, the community's sense of well-being and status is now very connected to their enterprises' profitability. At the same time, the timber markets on which they are largely dependant are increasingly hostile and competitive, partly due to neoliberal trade policies. As profits decline and demographic pressures grow, the community is faced with stronger forms of "market governance" (Larner 2003): its leaders are faced with more pressure and harder decisions in order to keep making profits.

This pressure is currently felt quite acutely in the community as traditional communal structures and ways-of-being seem to be clashing with the needs of market. The dominant discourse in community forestry in Altamonte is calling for the indigenous community and its members to adapt themselves to meet those needs. Many who spread this discourse, seek to *empower* the community by framing the situation in a way that puts the community's destiny in its own hands. However, this same discourse subtly implies that it is *their* responsibility to change, that they are the problem, and that if they would only change themselves, things could be better for them. As such, these discourses can come to play a significant ideological and larger political role in contributing to indigenous communities' acceptance of structural inequalities. Further, it seems that, in Altamonte, many have (at least publicly) embraced an environmental vision which is congruent with neoliberalism. While this may a wise strategic choice by the people of Altamonte, as communities take on this dominant perspective, there is not only a danger of cultural homogenization and loss of diversity of knowledge, but also of an erosion of the potential basis for resistance. Moreover, community forestry may compromise communities' will or ability to openly criticize the state, or operate separately from it, as the process involves alliances with (and possibly a certain dependence on) state agencies.

This thesis illustrates that while community forestry can provide significant benefits to communities, part of what it does is keep traditionally marginalized people's energy and critical vision turned inward and guide them towards ways of being; of organizing themselves; and of interacting with the environment and the state that are quite compatible with the current neoliberal regime in Mexico.

In Oaxaca, strong mass movements (which currently face significant repression) are opposing the neoliberal vision as a whole; reclaiming the value of indigenous perspectives and ways-of-being; and calling for significant change to (and/or autonomy from) the state. More globally, Latin America moves to the “left” and the Mexican government clings to the tailcoats of a significantly weakened and extremely right-wing US government. In this context, the need for a deeper understanding of development practices and discourses becomes even more important, as it is partly through the subtle power dynamics of such processes that neoliberalism maintains its tenuous grip on Mexico. I hope that, by improving the understanding of these subtle mechanisms of government in a very specific context that this thesis will make a small contribution to the dismantling of neoliberalism in Mexico, Latin America and the World.

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Appendix I – Communal Governance Structure



Source – Power Point Presentation, *Director Técnico*, Altamonte del Zopi (modified).

Appendix II – Location of Altamonte del Zopi*



Source – PMF 2000 : 7

*Note: More detailed maps were not presented in order to protect the anonymity of the community and because of the sensitivity of such data in the context of ongoing territorial disputes with neighbouring communities.

Appendix III – 2004 Demographics (Age/Gender)

POBLACIÓN TOTAL 2004						
Grupos quinquenales de edad	Población Total	% Población Total	Hom	%Hom	Muj	%Muj
Totales	1724	100	831	48.20	893	51.80
0 – 4	159	9.22	90	5.22	69	4.00
5 – 9	221	12.82	99	5.74	122	7.08
10 – 14	262	15.20	142	8.24	120	6.96
15 – 19	178	10.32	91	5.28	87	5.05
20 – 24	188	10.90	93	5.39	95	5.51
25 – 29	120	6.96	58	3.36	62	3.60
30 – 34	92	5.34	43	2.49	49	2.84
35- 39	87	5.05	36	2.09	51	2.96
40 – 44	80	4.64	35	2.03	45	2.61
45 – 49	54	3.13	31	1.80	23	1.33
50 – 54	35	2.03	17	0.99	18	1.04
55 – 59	38	2.20	17	0.99	21	1.22
60 – 64	33	1.91	13	0.75	20	1.16
65 – 69	23	1.33	7	0.41	16	0.93
70 – 74	18	1.04	8	0.46	10	0.58
75 – 79	15	0.87	8	0.46	7	0.41
80 - 84	15	0.87	8	0.46	7	0.41
85 - 89	6	0.35	4	0.23	2	0.12
90 - 94	5	0.29	0	0.00	5	0.29
95 - 99	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
100 y más	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
No especificado	95	5.51	31	1.80	64	3.71

Source – PDFC 2005 : 20

Appendix IV – Summary of Planned Investments

PROYECTO	DESCRIPCIÓN	INVERSIÓN
Modernización del aserradero actual	Adquisición de maquinaria para la modernización del aserradero actual.	\$500,000.00
Adquisición de un aserradero nuevo	Compra de maquinaria y equipo para implantar un aserradero en San Bartola Coyotepec.	8,337,500.00
Aserrio de productos secundarios	Adquisición de maquinaria y equipo para el aprovechamiento de productos secundarios (bolo 1.25).	8,125,000.00
Planta de tratamiento de aguas residuales	Planta que funciona con digestores aeróbicos y plantas acuáticas.	1,500,000.00
Relleno sanitario	Manejo de desechos sólidos	1,000,000.00
Tratamiento de las aguas de descarga generadas por la planta envasadora de agua	Tratamiento de las aguas residuales	150,000.00
Transporte San pedro el Alto Planta Oaxaca	Adquisición de 10 camiones Torton para transportar 17 m ³ de madera en rollo.	8,500,000.00
Equipamiento de corte y extracción	Equipo de extracción por medio de cable aéreo	2,000,000.00
Reforestación	Reforestación de 10 hectáreas con 2500 plantas/has.	100,000.00
TOTAL INVERSION		\$ 30'212, 500.00

Source – PDCF 2005 : 115