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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
RIVERSIDE

The End of the Plantations and the Transformation of Indigenous Society
in Highland Chiapas, Mexico, 1974-2009

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Anthropology

by

Jan Rus III

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Thomas C. Patterson, Chairperson

Dr. Carlos Vélez Ibáñez

Dr. Ronald Chilcote

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This Dissertation of Jan Rus III is approved:

Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

Acknowledgments

In the course of composing this dissertation, I received generous, thoughtful, patient assistance from more people than I can begin to thank. With apologies to anyone I may miss, let me at least make a start.

First, in the Tzotzil-Maya *municipio* of Chamula, Chiapas, I owe most of what I know about surviving the crises that have broken over Chiapas's indigenous people since the 1970s to my sons' godparents, my compadres Mateo Méndez Aguilar, María Gómez Monte, and María Méndez Aguilar. In addition to Mateo, his wife María and his sister María, through the years my wife Diane and I eventually became compadres as well with Mateo's and María's children and their spouses – Mariano Méndez and Dominga Pérez Jolkotom, Marcos Méndez and Verónica Pérez Jolote, Lucía Méndez and Lucas Patixtán Joljex, Salvador Méndez and Dominga Jiménez Méndez, and Verónica Méndez and Juan Jiménez Patixtan – and I am grateful to all of them, and now a third generation, their children, for taking our family into theirs.

It has been a long time since most ethnographers stopped using the term “informant” for those on whom they rely to learn about foreign ways of life. Aside from the unfortunate undertone from detective stories of one who furtively passes along inside information, the term implies that what the cultural native provides is merely raw material which the clever ethnographer then elaborates into a scientific analysis. At least in my experience, the relationship is far more personally and intellectually complex. While my compadres have answered questions that I have asked – some of them, as they occasionally gently remind me, more than once – from the very beginning of my attempts

to learn their language and understand their experience they have also anticipated questions I did not know enough to ask, and shared with me their own very astute analyses of the politics and culture of their community, as well as of the economics and politics of the wider world as it affects them. I am of course responsible for what I have written here, but it is clear to me that my description and analysis of their way of life has always been drawn in large measure directly from their own. I am more grateful than I can say.

Beyond our first compadres and their families, with time my family and I acquired a wide network of shared Chamula friends. All of these chapters bear traces of these relationships, but the surveys that are the bases of Chapters 2 and 5 in particular would not have been possible without them. In both cases, the work went on over a number of years, involved many helpers, and was undertaken to provide information that community members agreed could be useful both to preserve a record of what had happened to them, and perhaps to support community petitions to the state and to independent funding agencies. Much of this material has been published in pieces in Spanish, and some of it in Tzotzil (see Rus and Rus, forthcoming.) In addition to the Méndez Aguilar family and their neighbors, none of this further elaboration would have been possible without the close collaboration of Salvador Guzmán Bakbolom, who was my companion and editor on all of the work in Tzotzil, and who took part in the three surveys that are the basis of Chapter 2. Others who played important roles in gathering, analyzing, and publishing these collective studies were Pascual López Calixto, José Hernández González, and Manuel Pérez Pinar.

Several of the chapters (especially 2, 4, 5 and 6) also grew out of larger, multi-researcher projects. In those cases, I benefitted not only from my colleagues' help in developing the questions and methodology, but from their suggestions as the studies went on, and then their acute comments on my texts. For Chapters 2 and 4, support was provided by the National Science Foundation (SBR-9601370, "Rapid Social and Cultural Change in Southeastern Mexico"), in collaboration with George Collier, Jane Collier and Diane Rus. For Chapter 2, I also inherited the 1974 economic survey forms of my original collaborator, Robert Wasserstrom, which proved invaluable. Chapter 5 was undertaken while I was a visiting fellow at the Center for US-Mexico Studies of the University of California, San Diego (2002-03), and continued with summer support in 2004 from the Centro de Investigación y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social (CIESAS), and then from 2005 to the present from the Centro de Estudios Superiores sobre México y Centroamérica (CESMECA) and the Instituto de Estudios Indígenas (IEI), both of San Cristóbal. In addition to Diane, Ian Zinn worked on the project with us in 2007. For Chapter 6, Diane and I were partially supported for two summers by the Jacobs Fund of Bellingham, Washington, and then in collaboration with James Diego Vigil of the University of California, Irvine, by a pilot grant from University of California/MEXUS and the UCLA Center for the Study of Urban Poverty. Polly Vigil and Carlos Ramos also participated in this second period. Finally, the two oldest chapters (1 and 3) were developed while I worked for the Instituto de Asesoría Antropológica para la Región Maya, in San Cristóbal.

Beyond my immediate collaborators, there are many to thank in the community of

scholars and activists in San Cristóbal for support, advice, or comments on all of my work during the years when these chapters were written. Chief among them are the late Andrés Aubry and Angélica Inda de Aubry, colleagues in the Instituto de Asesoría Antropológica para la Región Maya, where Diane and I worked full-time in the second half of the 1980s, and continued to have a home during the summers from 1990 through 2007. Together with Andrés we developed the model of collaborative community research that we used as long ago as the 1970s. Although as a *Campesinista* and Zapatista Andrés was firmly opposed to the urbanization and long distance, off-farm migration that are the subject of several chapters here – and constantly questioned us about whether in studying them we were not somehow legitimizing and perhaps encouraging them – he continued to offer support and careful readings of drafts until the end of his life.

Others in San Cristóbal who helped particular chapters get written are Dolores Aramoni Castellanos, Sonia Toledo Tello, Anna Garza Caligaris, María Elena Fernández Galán (and Kees Grootenboer), Gracia Ímberon, and Jacinto Coello Ímberon, all of IEI; Daniel Villafuerte Solís, María del Carmen García, Mercedes Olivera Bustamante and Cindy Reyes Angulo of CESMECA; and Araceli Burguete Cal y Mayor and Xóchitl Leyva Solana of CIESAS. Others in Chiapas who opened their homes, shared their work, and answered endless questions are Pablo Ramírez Suárez and Silvia Peña, Gaspar Morquecho, Vernon and Carla Sterk, Al and Sue Schreuder, Francisco Millán Velasco and Virginia Calhoun de Millán, Susana Ekholm, Ámbar Past, Matilde Moreno, Justus Fenner and Marta Ramírez, Robert and Miriam Laughlin, and Jan de Vos.

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My deepest thanks for all the work and years embodied in these pages are to my wife Diane Rus, and our sons Juanito (*K'ox Xalik* in Tzotzil) and Jacob (*K'ox Sav*.) Taken separately, the papers here were individual projects; taken together, they overlapped and were years of our lives together as a family.

Last of all, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my friend

and advisor Michael Kearney. *Gracias por todo.*

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The following chapters contain material drawn from the previously published, copyrighted articles listed. In each case, the chapters here have been substantially revised and/or updated from their published form. I am grateful to all involved for permission to use this material.

Chapter 1

"Local Adaptation to Global Change: The Reordering of Native Society in Highland Chiapas, 1974-1994, *Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe/ European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 58, 1995, pp. 82-91.

Chapter 3

"The Struggle Against Indigenous Caciques in Highland Chiapas, 1965-1977," in Alan Knight and Wil Pansters, eds., *Cacique and Caudillo in 20th Century Mexico*, Institute for Latin American Studies, London/Brookings Institution Press, Washington, D.C., 2005, pp. 169-200.

Chapter 4

"A Generation of Crisis in the Chiapas Highlands: The Tzotzils of Chamula and Zinacantán, 1974-2000," with George A. Collier, in Jan Rus, R.A. Hernández and S.L. Mattiace, eds., *Mayan Lives, Mayan Utopias*, Boulder: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003, pp.33-61.

Chapter 5

"La migración de trabajadores indígenas de los Altos de Chiapas a Estados Unidos, 2001-2005: El caso de San Juan Chamula," with Diane Rus, in Daniel Villafuerte and María del Carmen García, eds., *Migraciones en el Sur de México y Centroamérica*, Mexico City: Miguel Ángel Porrúa Editores, Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas, Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO)-Costa Rica, Organización Internacional de Migración, NCCR-Suiza; 2008, pp. 343-382.

Chapter 6

"Rapid Urbanization and Migrant Indigenous Youth in San Cristóbal, Chiapas, Mexico," with Diego Vigil, in John Hagedorn, ed., *Gangs in the Global City*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007, pp. 152-183.

For Michael Kearney

I first met Michael Kearney at a conference about undocumented migration in 1981 or 1982. As I remember, he talked about becoming involved with migration when friends from the Mixtec community where he had long worked in Oaxaca showed up at his door in Southern California asking for help. For those who knew him, his response will seem completely in character: when a friend needs you, you don't rest until you've done everything you can. But no one could have predicted where this solidarity would take him. Over the next three decades, until his untimely death in November, 2009, he did groundbreaking work on the migration of indigenous people from Latin America to the United States. Not only descriptive, ethnographic work of the very highest order on the migrants from Oaxaca, not only theorizing that produced concepts that would soon come into general use to understand the growing international migration of indigenous people throughout the Americas ("transnational community" and the idea of "Oaxacalifornia" were his and his collaborators', chief among them his wife Carole Nagengast), but untiring, generous engagement with the struggles of the peoples of Oaxaca themselves. This engagement took many forms, from personal kindnesses to individuals, to helping the indigenous people of Oaxaca organize themselves in new ways beyond their local communities, on both sides of and across the border, until today they are among the most politically effective indigenous peoples in the United States as well as Mexico.

After that first encounter in the early eighties, I met Michael again in the early 1990s when the first Mayas from where I worked in Chiapas came to *my* door. What to

do? What to tell them? I asked around, and everyone suggested they and I talk to Michael. He had advice and contacts and made phone calls. Most of all, he was generous and upbeat, and in a short time helped them get, as he said, “squared away.” But he helped not only my friends, he also helped me. Over the next eighteen years we talked regularly about Mexico, about migration, and about being anthropologists. Most of all, he counseled me on research and writing, and among other things played a major role in my finishing this dissertation.

Everyone who knew Michael has a story – many stories – about his kindness. I think what he demonstrated through his own life, most of all, was that our activism and scholarship, our roles as human beings in solidarity with each other and as intellectuals trying to understand the forces that move all of us, can be the same thing, that they can flow out of being attentive to those around us in our everyday lives and welcoming the opportunities they bring us. I always felt like he saw knowing me as an opportunity, and I realized long ago that he made everyone feel that way. Like so many, I deeply miss him.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The End of the Plantations and the Transformation of Indigenous Society
in Highland Chiapas, Mexico, 1974-2009

by

Jan Rus III

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Anthropology
University of California, Riverside, December 2010
Dr. Thomas C. Patterson, Chairperson

For most of the century before the 1970s, the Tzotzil-Mayas of highland Chiapas, Mexico, depended for their livelihoods on seasonal migratory labor in the commercial agriculture of Chiapas's lowlands. Whether picking coffee on the plantations of Chiapas's southern coast and mountains or in its northern lowlands, growing corn and beans as sharecroppers and day laborers on the cattle and grain estates of the central, Grijalva Basin, or cutting cane in that same basin, indigenous men from the highlands spent an average of six months a year working outside of their communities to make Chiapas's commercial agriculture among the most prosperous in Mexico. In return, the

income they took home made life possible for their households in the densely populated, less fertile “traditional” communities of the highlands.

And then beginning in the 1970s, as a result of stagnating commodity prices, rising expenses, and credit and foreign exchange difficulties, Chiapas’s plantations began to fail. Over the next two decades, while Chiapas’s indigenous population was doubling, the demand for seasonal agricultural laborers actually declined. The result was growing stress on households, communities and the state as a whole. Based on participant observation, demographic and economic surveys, and life histories, this dissertation traces the effects of this stress as it worked its way through Chamula, one of the signal Tzotzil *municipios* of the Central Highlands. It is divided into three sections. The first characterizes the macroeconomic change in Chiapas from the 1970s through the 1990s and the economic adjustments by households as men and women found new ways of making money to replace what was lost with the decline of agricultural labor. The second traces political change as dissidents in the *municipio* first combated the authoritarian, *cacique*-ruled local government from the eve of the crisis in the 1960s through the 1970s, and then were increasingly drawn into extra-communal economic and political organizations by their new economic activities in the 1980s and 1990s. Finally, the third section describes the extension of migratory labor to the United States beginning in 2000, and urbanization of the Chamulas and other highland indigenous people from the mid-1970s through 2009.

**The End of the Plantations and the Transformation of Indigenous Society
in Highland Chiapas, Mexico, 1974-2009**

Dissertation in Cultural Anthropology
Jan Rus

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Introduction

The End of the Plantations and the Transformation of Indigenous Society in Highland Chiapas, Mexico, 1974-2009

By the 1970s, many anthropologists believed they had almost completed the task begun three decades earlier of describing to the last detail the ways of life – the cultures – of the Maya communities of highland Chiapas. Dozens of researchers, many fluent in the local Tzotzil and Tzeltal languages, had conducted exhaustive, interlocking investigations of the communities' internal economies, forms of civil and religious government, family structures, child-rearing practices, and belief systems. Given the broad similarities of the cultures from one community to the next, and the fact that they had changed only slowly over the years of study, many concluded that they had been stable for a much longer period of time, perhaps for centuries. Given as well their hypothesis that the reason for this continuity was a tendency of Maya communities to resist outside influences and maintain their internal equilibria, they went on to predict in somewhat circular fashion that the Maya culture they had described – and with it, their descriptions – might well remain recognizable for some time to come.¹

Within just a few years of the anthropologists' confident pronouncements, however, the communities began to implode. By the mid-1970s, all fourteen of the indigenous *municipios* of the Central Highlands were torn by factional fights, many of which turned violent, some deadly. Even before the end of the decade, the stronger factions had expelled hundreds of members of the weaker in two of the *municipios*

¹ E.g. Vogt (1966: 17-20; 1969: vii, 588-614), McQuown and Pitt-Rivers (1970: 10-14.)

(Chamula and Chalchiguitán), and within a few years more expulsions had become an epidemic across the highlands, occurring in all fourteen *municipios*. By the early 1980s, thousands of other Tzotzils and Tzeltals had begun to abandon their native communities voluntarily, moving in almost equal numbers to new urban *colonias* ringing San Cristóbal de Las Casas, the small Spanish-speaking city that was the highlands' marketing and administrative center, and to settlements of homesteaders in the Lacandón Jungle to the northeast (see the maps on pages 21 and 62.) By 2000, San Cristóbal had grown from 30,000 in 1970, to over 160,000, more than 60,000 of the new inhabitants Tzotzils and Tzeltals from the surrounding highlands. The population of the Lacandón Jungle, meanwhile, exploded from 5,000 in 1970 to 250,000 in the early 1990s as highlanders joined indigenous immigrants from throughout Chiapas in seeking a place to make a secure living. An historic transformation of the indigenous societies – or now, perhaps more accurately “society” – of highland Chiapas was underway. What had happened? How could the anthropologists have been so wrong? What is the status of the regional indigenous society of central and northern Chiapas today, and where does it appear to be headed?

Re-imagining the Highland Communities

The thesis here, explained in more detail in Chapter 1, is that what undermined the traditional highland communities² in the mid-1970s, and touched off the cascade of

² In this dissertation “community” is used interchangeably with “municipio,” which is the smallest territorial division of Mexico, analogous to a township, or small county in the United States. During the colonial period, indigenous people in Chiapas were divided

changes that followed, was the collapse of plantation agriculture. Just a century earlier, Chiapas had been an isolated backwater, an agricultural – or perhaps more accurately, simply a rural – place that produced almost entirely for local consumption. During the worldwide boom of tropical agriculture during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, however, the state’s abundant, cheap land, its climate, and the encouragement of a favorably disposed national government willing to forgive taxes, build roads and help secure local labor made it a premier region for investment by Mexican and foreign entrepreneurs alike. By 1910, Chiapas was host to the world’s largest rubber plantation, almost 100 major coffee plantations, and also produced important quantities of tropical hardwoods, cacao, and bananas and other tropical fruits. Over time, some of these products – rubber and hardwoods, for instance – would decline. But others always replaced them. By the 1950s, of Mexico’s thirty states, Chiapas was one of the top three in sugarcane, cacao, and commercial maize and beans, and one of the top five in tropical fruits, rice, and later cotton.

Most of all, however, Chiapas was known for its coffee. From the mid-1890s on, it was consistently responsible for approximately half the national harvest. Before the oil boom of the 1970s, coffee regularly accounted for ten to twelve percent of Mexico’s

into *beneficios*, each of which was managed as a separate entity by Dominican friars. Although some of these had pre-Columbian origins, others were compound groups made up of two or more original villages. Tied to small valleys in the rugged mountains of the highlands, most spoke distinctive dialects of Tzotzil or Tzeltal. After Independence in the 1820s, these “comunidades” were sometimes elevated to the status of legal “municipios” – and sometimes demoted back again. In what follows, “community” usually refers to this historical unit. However, in chapters 2, 4, 5 and 6, “community” also refers to a smaller social and territorial division within the *municipio*/community of Chamula. The meaning in those cases will be clear from the context.

foreign exchange, so through most of the twentieth century, Chiapas's coffee by itself provided approximately five percent of the country's total exports.

For the plantations that produced these crops to exist, from the very beginning the state's indigenous people had to be yoked to them as laborers. In the lowland regions where the plantations were founded, this meant indebting indigenous people and tying them to the land (perversely, usually their own land, now expropriated) in order to use them as resident workers. In the more populous Central Highlands, it meant inducing people to participate in seasonal migrations to provide the vast infusions of labor needed for the various harvests. At first this required government intervention, principally new taxes, which forced highland men to seek wages like those paid by the plantations to avoid jail. But if they failed to pay their taxes and were arrested – a fairly good possibility because civil authorities could collect a commission when they caught someone without a tax receipt – their debts and fines were likely to be sold to a plantation, in which case they were sent off to work in the lowlands anyway.³

When this system of coerced labor migration began in the 1890s, highland people at first resisted. They hid and fought, and if caught tried to run away. They continued to resist right up until the Revolution began in Chiapas in 1914. By the end of the Revolution, however, after six years of forced labor drafts, violence and famine, when the plantations started up again in the 1920s, indigenous men finally began to seek the security of seasonal plantation work voluntarily. Over the succeeding decades, as they became more and more dependent on this migratory labor, their communities gradually

³ On the lowland plantations, see Toledo (1996, 2002) and Bobrow-Strain (2007); on contracting in the highlands, Rus (2003), and Washbrook (2006, 2007.)

became different places. Through the nineteenth century, it had been necessary for a portion of their populations to emigrate in every generation as their numbers surpassed the carrying capacity of their limited lands. Now, however, sustained by the steady, if low, wages of plantation work, their populations could remain rooted in their home *municipios* in the highlands, and for the first time in a century they began to grow. As their numbers increased and became denser, in turn, their dependence on the plantations also grew. But in a seeming paradox, even as they became more dependent, with rising numbers and steady work, the collective wealth of their communities, although still extremely low, grew as well. As a result, even as they spent more time in the lowlands, even as their subordination increased, manifestations of indigenous culture in their *municipios* in the highlands blossomed. Documents and testimonies alike attest that religious fiestas became more numerous and elaborate; clothing for both men and women became more expensive, incorporating more materials purchased outside of the communities; and strangest of all, in the decades just before the middle of the twentieth century, it even appears that as men's job searches were limited to almost automatic yearly migration to the *fincas* as plantations are called in Chiapas, in some *municipios* a higher percentage of men were monolingual in Tzotzil and Tzeltal – that is, fewer spoke Spanish – than two generations earlier. (Wasserstrom 1983: 156-239; Rus 2004a.)

Not that the highland Maya ever stopped resenting, and resisting, the *fincas*. According to testimonies, anyone who could find alternative work that paid as well, or almost as well, without requiring migration grabbed it and never went back to the *fincas*. Nevertheless, by the middle of the twentieth century, the “traditional” communities had

on the whole been absorbed into the plantation economy. By the 1970s, some 100,000 indigenous men – approximately 80 percent of the state’s entire adult male indigenous population – were migrating around Chiapas each year to serve on the lowland plantations.

Highland Chiapas’s ethnographers, with their intense focus on the “inside” of indigenous communities and the present, never recognized this subordination of the region’s communities to the plantations, or the transformation it had made in those communities in just a few decades. The cultures the ethnographers saw around them in the communities where they worked were assumed to be very old simply because they were “indigenous,” and they had neither the tools nor the inclination to probe their histories. It did not occur to them that the communities they studied might have become *more* “traditional” in the recent past. But neither, with only one exception, did they attempt to understand the importance of migratory labor in the present.⁴ When it was mentioned at all, such labor was typically dismissed as “supplementary employment,” and described as part-time, elective work that indigenous men undertook only to earn “extra” cash to buy the few things their households could not grow or make for themselves. Seasonal plantation labor was “outside” of traditional culture, and thus not a subject of ethnography as they understood it. Indeed, although almost all of the men in such well-studied communities as Zinacantán, Chamula, Tenejapa and Oxchuc were away from home as agricultural laborers for at least six months a year from the 1950s

⁴ The exception before the end of the 1970s was Ricardo Pozas (1952a and b, 1977 [1959.]) See Rus (2004b) for a discussion of the reasons for, and political consequences of, this neglect.

through the early 70s, contemporary studies of their “community cultures” almost uniformly depicted their principal economic activity as *milpa* agriculture – small field production near their homes in the highlands of the traditionally associated crops of corn, beans, squash and chiles – an activity that in actuality typically provided less than a fifth of their yearly income.⁵

And then in the mid-1970s, as Chapter 1 below describes, the plantations began to fail, taking with them stable, seasonal agricultural labor. The factionalism, expulsions and emigration that followed this trauma have already been mentioned, and will be covered in more detail in each of the chapters below. But out of the collapse also came redefinitions of the roles of men and women (Chapters 2 and 4), religious conversions, the rise of a new political consciousness and a restructuring of power (Chapters 3 and 6), and eventually for many – although not all – the invention of new places in Mexican society not (or not solely) as agricultural workers and indigenous people tied to a particular community, but as urban dwellers, long distance migrants, and increasingly self-consciously indigenous citizens aware of, and willing to fight for, their rights on regional, state and national levels (Chapters 3, 5 and 6.)

Taken together, all of this, in turn, suggests that with the end of plantation labor, the corporate indigenous communities of just three decades ago, after first imploding, may now be beginning to fade in importance. They still exist physically, and are still important sources of affiliation and identity. But their role as the principal social

⁵ The first to demonstrate this low contribution of highland *milpas* was Wasserstrom (1976, 1983.) See also D. Rus (1990) and chapters 1 and 2 below.

organizations of indigenous people in the highlands, and eventually their status as providers of identity, may be in the process of being superseded. For most of the time since the 1970s it has been unclear what would succeed them; there was too much economic dislocation, too much struggle both within indigenous society and with the “outside,” and simply too much disorder to discern patterns. But as things have quieted in the last few years, the outline of a new equilibrium seems to be emerging.

The Transformation of Indigenous Society of the Highlands

On the eve of the rapid changes of the last thirty five years, in the early 1970s, the fourteen indigenous *municipios* of highland Chiapas appeared at first glance to be as closed and as complete in themselves as their ethnographers had described them. Each spoke a slightly different dialect of Tzotzil or Tzeltal, and most people were monolingual. Each had its own civil government, their officers chosen by closed, almost secret groups of elders, as well as its own religious leaders and cycle of celebrations. And in each men and women wore traditional forms of dress that distinguished them from the people of other *municipios*. The communities were also “closed” in the sense that their members tended to focus their social and cultural lives inside, on each other. They married within their communities, tended to resolve their disputes among themselves, and in many cases prohibited outsiders from spending more than a night at a time in their lands. Most of all, they defined themselves in contrast to each other. Although they might both speak Tzotzil, being from Zinacantán was a completely different identity from being a Chamula.

This, again, was the way the communities *appeared*. But beneath this surface, they were also labor reserves, “homelands,” to which the plantation state granted a certain amount of internal autonomy in return for their stability as a source of workers. Even that qualified autonomy was largely an appearance, however. As the first part of Chapter 3 argues, the long-term leaders of the highland communities, the senior elders, or scribe-*principales*, were compromised by their ties to the ruling party and state and in effect managed their communities by the state’s leave and in its stead. Seeing through the trappings of self-government and “traditional authority” to the real sources of this power in the indigenous *municipios* was a breakthrough the native opposition within those communities made that the “traditional” ethnographers never did.

What, then, of the “transformation of indigenous society” of the dissertation’s title?

In a first sense, there is the destructive, or deconstructive, transformation that began with the communities’ implosion following the failure of the plantations in the mid-1970s, and that continued through the succeeding decades of strife and confusion as the indigenous people of the highlands struggled to understand what had happened to their communities and to re-establish a stable society. It is not inaccurate to say that during the decades since the 1970s, highland indigenous society has undergone – is still undergoing – a process, multiple processes, of reconstructive transformation.

In a second sense – really a subsidiary of the first – there is the transformation of the old anthropological image of Chiapas’s highland communities that began in the 1970s when a younger generation of anthropologists began probing their economic dependence

on plantation agriculture and the covert political dependence of their traditional leaders and government on the state – an analysis brought up through the crises of the last thirty-five years in Chapters 1 and 3 below.⁶ Today it is impossible to look at the historical communities of the period before the 1970s and not see them as integral parts of Mexico's economy and society instead of as the isolated, virtually autarkic mini-states depicted in the older ethnography.

Finally, third, there is the transformed, trans-communal, trans-linguistic regional indigenous society of the highlands whose shape is just now becoming visible. In ways no one expected when emigrants began leaving the highland communities in the mid-1970s, in both the Lacandón Jungle and the Central Highlands, increasingly unified, regional indigenous societies have emerged.⁷ The autonomous region of the Zapatistas in the Lacandón is well known.⁸ The even larger, more heterogeneous society that has spread gradually, but still unevenly, across the highlands, on the other hand, is still barely recognized. For now, perhaps it is sufficient to mention some of its highlights.

Beginning in San Cristóbal, by now as many as 100,000 indigenous people live in

⁶ E.g., Rus and Wasserstrom (1976, 1980), Rus (1975), Wasserstrom (1976, 1983), García de León (1979.) All of these drew inspiration from, among others, Wolf (e.g., 1955), Stavenhagen (1969), and Favre (1973.)

⁷ I would not want to divide these too sharply from each other. Each does have its own structure and leaders, but the Tzotzils and Tzeltals in each region have many relatives and friends in the other. Moreover, many of the Zapatistas who took part in the January 1, 1994, occupation of San Cristóbal actually walked into the city from the surrounding *colonias*. Finally, in San Cristóbal and the highlands, even the most entrepreneurial, conservative indigenous people admire and respect what the Zapatistas have done. See Peres Tzu (2002.)

⁸ For the history of the Zapatista movement and regional organization, see among others Leyva and Ascencio (1996), Harvey (1998), and Baronnet, Mora and Stahler-Sholk (nd).

the ring of some 300 *colonias* surrounding the city, which is itself expected to reach a total population of 200,000 in the census of 2010. These new urban Mayas usually know Spanish – virtually everyone under 35 is bilingual. In their *colonias*, however, *within* urban indigenous society, the *lingua franca* is Tzotzil, and religious services, government and school meetings, and most business transactions are conducted in that language. This acceptance of Tzotzil as a common language is even more remarkable because among the urban indigenous are people whose original language is Tzeltal, and even a few who speak Ch’ol and Tojolabal Maya. To participate fully in their new communities, and signal their distinction from San Cristóbal’s ladinos, many of them also attempt to communicate in Tzotzil. Meanwhile, the residents of the *colonias* include people drawn from all fourteen of the highlands’ indigenous *municipios*, who now are not only neighbors, but increasingly intermarry across community and linguistic lines. Each indigenous *colonia* has at least one church, and in their collective territory there are as well several massive Protestant and one all-indigenous Catholic church. These serve the entire indigenous population of the city and each can have up to 1500 worshippers on Sundays. *Colonia* residents also own modern markets, pharmacies, hardware and auto parts stores, a funeral parlor, and are served by a small but growing number of indigenous doctors, dentists and lawyers. Many of these services are advertised in Tzotzil and occasionally Tzeltal on local radio stations.

The rise of this very visible, heterogeneous urban indigenous society and culture, this new Mayan city, would be noticed immediately by someone who had been away from the region over the last generation and a half. But other changes that might harder

to detect at first may be even more far-reaching. Almost before anyone realized it, sometime in the last decade San Cristóbal became the *de facto* capital of the Tzotzil-Tzeltal highlands. Economically, the wealthiest people from the various *municipios* now have houses in the city's *colonias*, and in addition to their businesses in their native *municipios* also own stores and other establishments in the city. The indigenous owners of the bus and truck lines that tie the region together also live in the city, as do the indigenous employees of the region's banks and governmental institutions. Religiously, as conflicts in the *municipios* between traditional religion on the one side, and Protestantism and institutional Catholicism on the other diminishes, the large urban churches are also assuming a regional role.⁹ Finally, politically, the governing elites of most of the outlying *municipios* now have second houses in the city, and many recent municipal presidents – the highest constitutional officials in the *municipios* – have lived at least part time in the city during their terms of office, forcing their rural constituents to travel to the *colonias* of San Cristóbal to conduct community business or settle disputes in a traditional hearing. Increasingly, region-wide political decisions for all of the *municipios* are also made in San Cristóbal's *colonias*. In an early example, in 2002, two leaders each from the seven indigenous *municipios* immediately north and east of San Cristóbal (six of them Tzotzil and one Tzeltal) that with San Cristóbal comprised the

⁹ Although not discussed in this thesis, the urban indigenous community may be beginning to assume a leading role in traditional religion as well. Thanks to the presence of non-governmental organizations that support traditional medicine, there are already offices for traditional curers and a museum of traditional medicine in San Cristóbal. As indigenous university students and young urban dwellers take an interest in Maya heritage, in the last year there have also been meetings with traditional Mayan priests from Guatemala and Yucatán in San Cristóbal to discuss the unity of Mayan religion.

Central Highlands' federal congressional district, met in secret in one of the *colonias* to choose a consensus indigenous candidate for *diputado federal* (congressman.) They then organized the candidate's campaign, supported by over US\$100,000 collected from indigenous supporters, and elected the first Tzotzil congressman ever to represent San Cristóbal and its environs. (Morquecho 2002) In subsequent years, the same group, plus representatives from other *municipios* who are not in the congressional district, but who do have houses in the city, have met to choose candidates for municipal president (mayor) of San Cristóbal itself.

While there is prosperity and progress for many in the city, however, it is also true that within this emerging regional indigenous society there are significant class divisions, and that they may be widening. A walk around San Cristóbal's *colonias* makes it clear that many still live in deep poverty. Official numbers and percentages are not reliable, but as an indication, in 2005, more than 10,000 families in San Cristóbal, perhaps 50,000 people, received help from the federal assistance program Oportunidades, the qualification for which is proof of "extreme poverty."¹⁰

Meanwhile, if San Cristóbal is its *de facto* capital, the implication is that the Tzotzil-Tzeltal highlands as a whole is more and more a unified region whose lines of gravity flow toward the city. Increasingly, again, the elites from the various *municipios* are based in the city. The corollary of this, however, is another aspect of the "transformation of indigenous society" in the region as a whole: as more educated, bilingual, ambitious community members have left the countryside, more and more the

¹⁰ SEDESOL (2005b.) There is no way to tell from the raw figures what portion of these families are indigenous. A second limitation is that many of the poorest never apply.

municipios, but especially their smaller, rural hamlets, are in danger of becoming a sort of rural ghetto for those unable to work, for the elderly, and – most painfully – for mothers who have been left with their children while men embark on more and more distant, drawn-out migrations looking for work. As Chapter 2 below shows, the poverty in our Chamula sample hamlet is extreme – objectively, even greater than in the early 1970s. Most families live below, many far below, the United Nations cut-off for “extreme poverty” of one dollar per day per person. To some extent, this neediness is ameliorated by an array of programs of direct aid instituted in the last decade by the national and state governments – monetary assistance to women with children, to the elderly, to small farmers, and free materials to poor families to improve their houses. But it is far from sufficient, and many fear that its long-term effect will be to create lasting dependence.

Most important of all is that since the collapse of the *fincas*, there is simply not enough work for the population. This is not a new phenomenon in economic and social history – the fate of the rural population of Mississippi after the end of the plantations, or of the countries of Central America following the same 1970s downturn in commodities that affected Chiapas come to mind (see for example Williams 1986.) Given the long ethnographic record in highland Chiapas, and the increasingly thorough historical and economic studies of recent years to provide a context, seeing how this transformation plays out over the coming decades, seeing what the Tzotzils and Tzeltals make of their region, is going to be fascinating.

Organization of the Dissertation

The chapters that follow began not as pieces of a dissertation, but as a series of occasional papers about the extraordinary changes set in motion by the break in the material basis of the indigenous communities of highland Chiapas that began in the 1970s. They were occasional because I had not set out to study the contemporary transformation of the highland communities. It was a theme that lay off to the side, or perhaps off the end, of my interest in the ethnohistory of the *municipio* of Chamula from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth. Except in the most diffuse way, even after I began writing them, I did not consider these essays part of a new unified theme, the overarching change in the indigenous societies of highland Chiapas of the last thirty-five years. Instead, each was a discrete, one-off attempt to document a change that seemed too important to leave unremarked. The six chapters are divided into three sections, the first about changes in the economic base of communities and households, the second about changes in politics and social organization largely as a result of those economic changes, and the third about the two innovations, undocumented migration to the United States and urbanization, that seem to have done the most to push overall change in regional Tzotzil and Tzeltal society over the last decade.

On the most basic level, the thesis is an empirical report on the impact of the decline of the plantations on the Tzotzil and Tzeltals. Insofar as its first purpose is descriptive, and that it builds on participant observation, surveys, and interviews with those undergoing the changes it describes – that is, data from the present collected through fieldwork– it has much in common with a normal ethnography.

But it is also an historical ethnography that attempts to situate the lives of its subjects in terms of a longer historical period than would usually be part of everyday awareness. This consciousness of long-term context and change has at least three sources. First, it is a product of the extraordinary growth of historical research in Chiapas over the last generation. In the mid-1970s there was essentially nothing to read about the history of Chiapas beyond narratives of battles and coups, and the feats of generals, bishops, and political leaders. Today there are dozens of books and articles about most of the state's regions from the present back to the late nineteenth century, with the frontier steadily pushing deeper into the past.

The other two sources are more personal. The second consists of the collective knowledge of the past that I absorbed from the elderly men and women, both indigenous and ladino, that I began interviewing regularly in the mid-1970s. The oldest of these were born in the 1880s, and had strong memories extending back to the early 1900s. Over time, I was allowed to see much of the past through their eyes.

The third source, foreshadowed in the sentences above, is that I have now myself been observing life in highland Chiapas for a long time. I first traveled in a truck to a coffee plantation with contract workers in 1974, and first worked with sharecroppers in the fields of a corn plantation that same year. This last summer, as I talked to urban Tzotzil-speakers in San Cristóbal about the history of their move to the city, I realized that none of the men under approximately forty had either of these experiences. It is a privileged perspective from which to watch the transformations they and their families have been making.

Chapter 1

Macroeconomic Change and Native Society at the End of the Plantation Period, 1974-1994

In the months after Chiapas's Zapatistas, almost all of them Maya peasants, leapt onto the world stage on New Year's Day, 1994, observers both in Mexico and abroad looked to Chiapas's extreme poverty and history of racist, authoritarian politics for an explanation of their uprising. The result was a series of lists of the state's social and economic ills, and the implicit argument was that the cumulative weight of these conditions finally became too much for indigenous people to bear and they cracked. Bad conditions made the rebellion inevitable.

Certainly the cruelties and inequalities of Chiapas society were shocking. As the list-makers pointed out, of the Mexican states, Chiapas led – or shared with neighboring Oaxaca the lead – in such dubious categories as infant mortality, illiteracy, and percentage of houses without running water, electricity, or floors; only one of thirty states, it accounted for almost a third of Mexico's unresolved agrarian reform claims; and even according to the national census, sixty percent of its workers earned less than the minimum wage of US\$ 3.00/day, forty percent less than half of that. Meanwhile, politically, we were reminded that Chiapas, through most of its history a majority indigenous state, had never had an indigenous governor, senator, federal representative, state or federal judge, or, for that matter, priest or bishop¹¹; that according to national and

¹¹ This long drought finally ended following the rebellion. For the 1994 federal elections, the government established two new congressional districts in the overwhelmingly

international human rights monitors, it was tied – again with Oaxaca – as the Mexican state with the most official violence; and that in much of its territory local bosses and landowners made not even the pretense of enforcing their rule "officially," instead relying openly on *guardias blancas*, hired gunmen, to get their way.

While all of these observations were true, however – and sixteen years later many are still true – the exploitation, repression and poverty they described had existed in one form or another for almost five hundred years. As a result, at the end of the accounting, we were still left with the problem of explaining why there should have been an uprising at just this moment. What had changed? Was there any respect in which Chiapas's society in the 1990s was different from decades past? Was it not possible to fit the uprising – and the widespread sympathy with which even indigenous people who did not rebel greeted it – into a coherent picture of recent Chiapas history?

In fact, of course, economic and political conditions were at the root of the rebellion. What had changed was not the deprivation of the vast majority of indigenous people on some absolute scale, and certainly not their relative position with respect to other sectors of society. Rather, after a period of slow but noticeable improvement from the 1950s through the beginning of the 1970s, conditions for most people began to deteriorate rapidly in the mid-1970s, and then took an even more negative turn starting in the early 1980s. But the processes by which this deterioration influenced native society were more dynamic than can be conveyed by simply enumerating negative indicators,

indigenous Central Highlands, and the region's two largest political parties, PRI (Partido de la Revolución Institucional) and PRD (Partido de la Revolución Democrática), nominated Maya candidates. PRI won both seats. By 2004, 480 years after the arrival of Catholicism, Chiapas also had its first two Tzotzil priests.

and were related synergistically to a social and political crisis that was hardly ever mentioned by those looking for the roots of the rebellion: the erosion in the basic unit of native social organization, and thus of state control, the local, so-called traditional community. Over the decades before 1994, such communities were increasingly challenged for the loyalty of their members by other kinds of local and regional organization more attuned to native people's changing economic and political needs. What appears to have occurred in Chiapas from the mid-1970s on, and with even greater urgency during the 1980s, was nothing less than the beginning of a re-organization of the state's native society. Each region of the state experienced this historic shift somewhat differently. The recently colonized Lacandón Jungle, for instance, where the Zapatistas arose and have their base, had moved farther and faster than the historical communities of the Central Highlands that had provided the largest share of the colonists. Nevertheless, in its basic outline, the causes and direction of change appear to have been similar throughout the state. The following pages take up the situation in the Tzotzil and Tzeltal *municipios* closest to San Cristóbal in the Central Highlands, and then the final section will attempt to draw parallels with other regions.

The Economic and Political Ecology of Chiapas's Traditional Communities

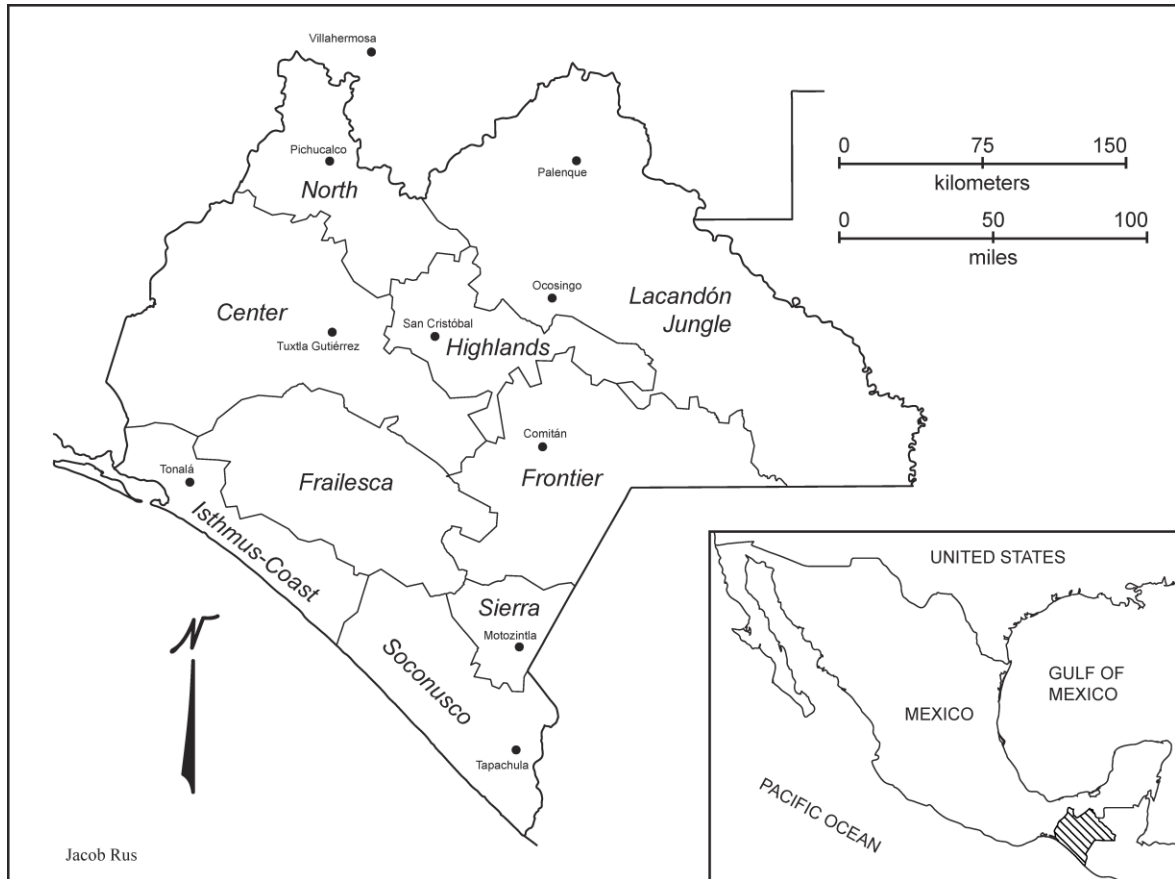
Over the course of its history, but particularly during the century from the 1880s to the 1980s, Chiapas's development was strikingly dualistic. On the one hand, the export agriculture that provided almost all of the state's income grew up on large private estates

in the sparsely populated lowlands.¹² On the other, most of the workers who provided the seasonal labor for that agriculture were drawn from the densely populated, land-poor Maya communities of the highlands. The struggle over land and labor between these two regions, the struggle to bring them into alignment, was the single greatest driver of the state's history during the twentieth century. Among those most affected were the highland Maya.

At the end of the nineteenth century, when lowland agriculture began to take off, great pressure had to be brought to bear on the highland native communities to force them to provide workers. Expropriation of "excess" communal lands, followed by head taxes, vagrancy laws, and the imposition of virtual martial law in indigenous regions were some of the preconditions established by the late nineteenth century state; debt-contracting, even the sale of debtors as virtual slaves were some of the methods. By the 1920s, following the deprivations of the Revolution of the 1910s, the highland Maya had become sufficiently dependent on seasonal lowland labor so that the process of hiring workers could proceed with much less coercion (although in some sub-regions – the Simojovel Valley, for instance – there continued to be abuses of debt, *tiendas de raya* (company stores), and extra-judicial jailing as late as the 1970s.) Essentially, after the Revolution highland people, driven by land poverty and the lack of work in their home region, came to accept the idea of working regularly as migrant laborers in the lowlands

¹² Chiapas has always been first among the Mexican states in coffee, producing one third to forty percent of the national total. Through the 1970s, it was also the third state nationally in corn, with more than 8 percent of the total. In addition, it was first in the production of cacao and one of the first five in beans, cotton, bananas and sugar. All of these crops depended on migrant indigenous labor.

Socioeconomic Regions of Chiapas



The Central Valleys consist of most of the Center and Frailesca, and the southwest corner of the Frontier. The coffee-growing region of the southwest consists of the Sierra and Soconusco and the adjoining corner of the Frailesca. The northern coffee growing region extends across the northern edge of the Highlands, and adjoining areas of the North and Lacandón Jungle. All the *municipios* listed in Table 1.2 are in the Highlands.

to "supplement" the corn they could grow on the limited lands of their home communities.

As compared even to other regions of Mexico where capitalist agriculture depended on migratory labor, this reliance on workers from Chiapas's highland indigenous communities had special advantages for the state's large landowners. Because the migrants lived in and identified with poor, egalitarian communal societies in the

highlands, they could be paid much less than workers who had to maintain themselves in the "national society." Indeed, if they could earn just enough over the course of a five or six month season to pay for their families' yearly supplies of corn and beans, the great majority of highland migrants were satisfied. Moreover, precisely because they did identify themselves so strongly with their communities of origin and always returned to them, they represented neither a burdensome population that the lowland landowners had to support during the long periods when their labor was not needed, nor, later, a threat as suitors for agrarian reform land because, although they might work on the same estates for decades, legally they remained non-residents.

From indigenous people's point of view, meanwhile, this complementarity between highland migrant labor and lowland commercial agriculture also had its "advantages." Contrary to the popular belief that Chiapas's highland Maya are subsistence farmers, the evidence suggests that as their populations have grown it has been more than a century since the people of most communities have been able to derive more than a fraction of their livelihood from their own lands.¹³ The very survival of such communities has thus depended on their participation in the migratory labor stream. Essentially, seasonal lowland labor "subsidized" "traditional native communities" in the highlands for which there was no longer (if there ever had been) a sufficient resource base. Stated another way, over the course of the twentieth century, most highland native communities came to depend on a land base that was neither their own property nor even

¹³ See Viqueira 1999, 2002: 261-310, 334-374. (In an earlier version, the first article here was provocatively entitled "'¿Por qué hay indios en Chiapas?")

in their own region. Economically, they essentially became "bedroom" communities for lowland agricultural workers.

As the relationship of population to arable land in the communities of the highlands grew even worse between the mid-1950s and late 1960s due to rapid population growth, the stability both of individual communities and of the highlands as a whole were never threatened because lowland agriculture was also growing rapidly during this period and seemed almost endlessly able to provide work for as many migratory laborers as the highland communities could provide.¹⁴ By the end of this long period of stable growth, at the beginning of the 1970s, it can be estimated that there were somewhere between 125,000 and 150,000 adult indigenous workers in Chiapas. (Table 1.1) Discounting the less than half of household heads who theoretically held enough land to feed themselves without having to become migrant workers during this period (Table 1.2), and the approximately eight thousand families who lived as permanent residents on the combined coffee-corn-cattle *fincas* in the state's northern lowlands (see Olivera 1979), this meant that by the mid-1970s there were approximately 60,000 to 75,000 heads of indigenous households who depended entirely on the state's migratory labor stream. Of these, some 20,000 found work for up to fifteen weeks per year

¹⁴ Cancian (1972) documents the expansion of the agricultural frontier in the Central Valleys in the 1960s – and its effect on indigenous sharecroppers. It should also be noted that the first settlements of Tzotzils and Tzeltals from the Highlands in the Lacandón Jungle were formed during this period. At least early on, however, such settlements had the reputation of serving more as outlets for political activists and dissidents than as destinations for overflowing highland populations. This clearly changed the mid-1970s when the numbers of migrants moving to the jungle exploded as a result of the economic changes in the center of the state described later in the text. (See Leyva and Ascencio 1996.)

producing corn as sharecroppers on the large private estates of the central valleys. (Table 1.3) Another 40,000 spent a similar amount of time harvesting coffee on the large plantations of the northern foothills and Soconusco, or southwestern coast and mountains (and even then were not enough to do the work: another thirty thousand indigenous workers had to be drawn from nearby villages in Guatemala.) (Table 1.4) Finally, although the number of laborers required to cut sugarcane is more difficult to calculate because much of the production was unreported, anecdotal evidence suggests that during the main months of the *zafra* as many as 10,000 mostly Mayan workers were also employed in the state's cane plantations. Altogether, then, there was an annual demand for some 100,000 migrant workers in Chiapas, of whom perhaps 60,000 to 75,000 were local indigenous people. While some of these jobs overlapped in time, many were complementary, which meant that lowland cornfield workers, for instance, could also cut cane or pick coffee. It is a peculiar use of the term, but this situation amounted to something like "full employment."

This economic interdependence between highland workers and lowland agriculture had a political dimension as well. Among the advantages that large landowners derived from employing highland community members as migrant workers was that socially and politically, the communities from which they were drawn were extremely stable, even conservative. They were also firmly under government control. Each of these facts deserves a closer examination.

Table 1.1: Chiapas's Indigenous Population and Work Force, 1970-1990

Year	Overall State Population	Indigenous Population (%)	Non-Indigenous Population (%)	Number of Indigenous Workers/Corrected Number*
1970	1,569,053	502,097 (32%)	1,066,956 (68%)	±125,500 / ±157,000
1980	2,084,717	604,568 (29%)	1,480,149 (71%)	±151,000 / ±208,500
1990	3,210,496	847,751 (26%)	2,362,745 (74%)	±212,000 / ±312,000
Change:	+104%	+69%	+121%	+69% / +104%

Sources: IX, X y XI Censos Generales de Población. (The number of indigenous workers (column 4) was calculated supposing one adult worker for every four people. According to Morales Coello et al. (1978:104), the rate of dependence in the highlands in 1975 was 2.89, meaning that every worker maintained 2.89 other people.)

*Given that only 4% of Chiapas's population in 1990 was born outside of the state, the overall population increase between 1970 and 1990 (column 1) was necessarily due to the high local birthrate. Since there is no reason to assume that the birthrate of the indigenous population was lower than that of the non-indigenous--on the contrary--we can only conclude that there is a systematic underestimation of the indigenous population in the 1980 and 1990 censuses (column 2.) Accordingly, the corrected number of indigenous workers was calculated supposing that the increase in the total indigenous population over the twenty year period was at least the same as that of the overall state population, that is 104%. It should be noted, however, that the increase in the number of indigenous workers could well be even greater because: (1) the indigenous population during the 1970s and 80s was extremely young (median age in 1980 = 15 yrs), which would lead to an extremely high proportion of young adults by 1990; and (2) by 1990, indigenous women also tended much more to participate in the cash economy than twenty years earlier, meaning that there would be more adult workers in the same population.

**Table 1.2: Land Tenancy and Demographic Growth
in Indigenous Communities of the Highlands, 1980-1990**

Municipios:	Population, 1980	% de families with less than 2 hectares (1983)	Population, 1990	Pop. Change, 1980-90
Altamirano	12,099	-	16,980	+40%
Amatenango	4,425	79.3%	5,681	+28%
Chalchihuitán	5,564	<50.%	9,442	+70%
Chamula	31,364	87.%	51,757	+65%
Chanal	5,019	10.5% (86% <5 has)	7,195	+43%
Chenalho	18,400	-	30,680	+67%
El Bosque	8,396	-	13,973	+66%
Huistán	13,340	<50.%	17,669	+32%
Mitontic	4,913	78.5% (100% <5 has)	5,783	+17%
Oxchuc	24,879	27.3% (95.6% <5 has)	34,868	+40%
Pantelhó	9,305	-	12,975	+39%
San Andrés	10,591	40.3% (96.2% <5 has)	15,303	+44%
Tenejapa	20,642	39.9% (76.3% <5 has)	27,217	+32%
Zinacantán	13,006	~90.% (?)	22,392	+72%
Totals:	181,943	56.5% (1983)	271,915	+49%

Sources: Population: X and XI *Censos Generales de Población*; Land Tenancy: Amatenango: Ejea Méndoza (1985:101); Zinacantán: Wasserstrom (1976:7); all others: Perezgrovas, 1985, reported in López (1993:80-97.) According to the conservative conclusions of Leal Flores et al. (1978: 49), in the mid-1970s approximately 75% of the families in the communities of the Western-Central subregion of the Highlands (Chamula, Chenalhó, Mitontic, Pantelhó, San Andrés and Zinacantán) had no land. Nor did 33% of the families in the communities of the Eastern-Central subregion (Amatenango, Chanal, Huistán, Oxchuc, San Cristóbal, Tenejapa and Teopisca.) In these same areas, 30% of all men migrated outside of the Highland region to do agricultural work, 34% from the Western-Central subregion, and 25% from the Eastern-Central (Leal Flores:55.)

Note: In most of the Highlands, under traditional crop rotation, the minimum amount of land necessary for a family of four to provide its own yearly supply of corn would be at least four hectares – 2 in cultivation and two fallowed. Using chemical fertilizer, two hectares might suffice, at least for a while.

Table 1.3: Estimation of the Yearly Flow of Migratory Laborers from the Central Highlands to the Corn-Producing Estates of the Central Valleys, 1970-1986

Years	Laborers/Year
1970-74	20,050
1975-77	19,350
1978-80	17,650
1981-82	14,890
1983-86	10,900
1987-88	13,800

NB: These figures are derived from a consideration of production levels, degrees of mechanization and fertilization, and changes in the organization of work and ownership in the Central Valleys. They include both indigenous sharecroppers and day laborers

Table 1.4: Coffee Production and Demand for Seasonal Labor on Private Properties in Chiapas, 1973-1993

Years	Production (Metric Tons)*	Seasonal Workers**	Seasonal Workers by Región:	
			Southwest	North
1973	56,352	80,845	70,740	10,105
1974	56,352	80,845	70,740	10,105
1975	46,800	67,140	58,750	8,390
1976	60,000	77,470	67,790	9,680
1981	52,992	76,025	66,520	9,505
1982	76,648	109,960	96,215	13,745
1983	72,560	105,000	91,875	13,125
1984	59,044	84,705	74,115	10,590
1985	74,196	106,445	93,140	13,305
1986	77,590	111,315	97,400	13,915
1987	77,485	111,165	97,270	13,895
1989	60,724	87,115	76,225	10,890
1990	65,905	94,550	82,730	11,820
1991	66,319	95,145	83,250	11,895
1992	67,114	96,285	84,250	12,035
1993	67,821	97,300	85,135	12,165

Sources: 1970-76 Production Figures: Velasco S. y Matus (1976: tables 74, 82); 1982-87: Thompson González et al. (1988:225-6); 1990: INEGI (1991:130-131.)

*For our purposes, we assume that the private properties that hire seasonal workers are responsible for a constant 60% of production during the whole period.

**The amount of seasonal labor required on private properties is calculated from the amount of production as follows: 1 quintal of coffee = 46 kilos = 11 man-days of work; 90 man-days = 1 worker; therefore, 8.1818 quintales, or 376.4 kilos = 1 worker. If, then, 54% of the man-days are performed by seasonal workers, .54 x the total number of workers = the number of seasonal workers.

As to the stability and conservatism of their communities, although a majority of the highland Tzotzil- and Tzeltal-Mayas earned most of their livelihood as migrant agricultural laborers through the early 1970s, ideologically they continued to *think* of themselves as subsistence corn farmers. Accordingly, they looked at their income from migratory labor as a supplement, culturally irrelevant to what they considered their true, “essential” identities as members of closed, “traditional” communities of corn farmers. Not only, then, did they think of themselves primarily as “Chamulas” or “Zinacantecos” or “Huistecos” rather than “Tzotzils,” much less “indigenous people” or “migrant laborers,” but they focused their social, political and religious energy within those communities. Men's and women's lives and ambitions, as anthropologists of the time so well documented, were trained on being upright, correct members of their communities, and, if possible, rising through the ranks of those communities' civil and religious offices to become respected elders. In the eyes of such people, the world beyond their communities was just that, “beyond,” “outside,” “foreign.”

From the point of view of Chiapas' landholding and political elite, the beauty of this cultural and political isolation, was that, first, it meant that their workers took relatively little interest in political affairs in the regions to which they migrated. This despite the fact that they might spend a third to half of their lives there. Second, given the high degree of authority exercised within their communities by traditional elders – and the high degree of voluntary compliance to the decisions of those elders – it allowed the state's political and landowning elite to control entire communities indirectly by co-opting or suborning a relatively small number of native leaders.

As an anthropologist, I must admit that it has taken some time to become comfortable with this image of the conservative, "traditional" community as not just an inter-dependent part of the plantation system, but as in some sense a creature or even ward of that system. Nevertheless, given the dependence of Chiapas's plantations on migrant indigenous laborers, and given the large numbers of men involved, it is no accident that those who have governed the state have found it expedient to encourage the maintenance of the "traditional communities." As long as they were able to control the handful of men at the pinnacle of each of those communities, they could count on the compliance of their members. Accordingly, whenever there was a conflict between "traditional" native leaders and innovators or dissidents within their communities, the state threw its authority behind those who defended "tradition" and the status quo. At the same time, then, that the traditional community was the place where Indians sought meaning for their lives and took refuge from the surrounding society, it was also the basic unit of state control.¹⁵

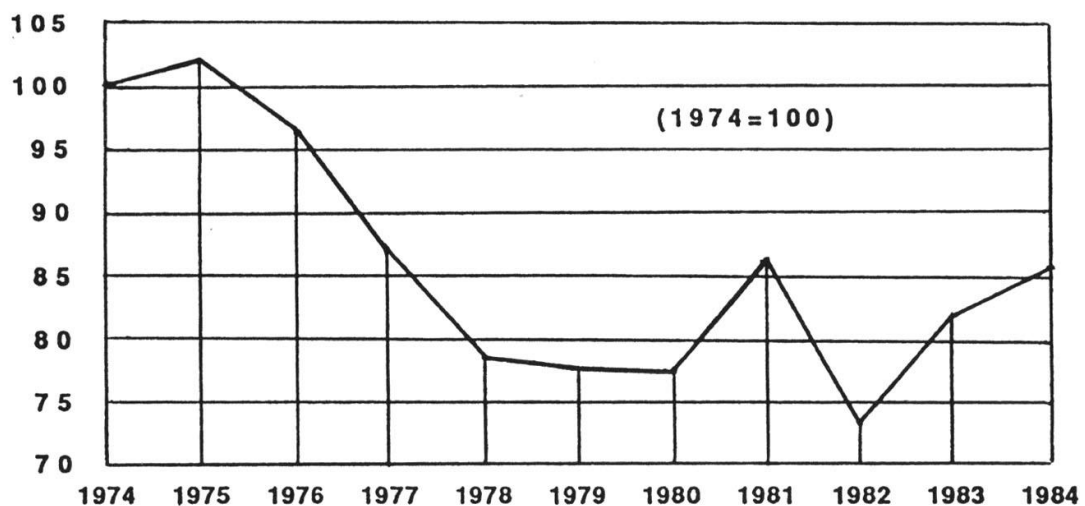
What Changed in the 1970s and 80s

The traditional communities of the highlands having become so dependent on migratory labor in the lowlands for their economic survival, they were particularly vulnerable to the series of crises that overtook Chiapas's agriculture during the late 1970s and 1980s.

¹⁵ For further discussion of the history of this ambivalent nature of highland Chiapas's Maya communities, see Rus 1994, 2005, and Rus, Hernández and Mattiace (2003: 1-26.)

The first major change in lowland labor requirements occurred in the mid-1970s as a result of the oil boom. Borrowing against newly discovered oil reserves, Mexico suddenly had access to great resources. At the same time, world prices for grains were declining as a result of competition among the United States, Canada, Argentina, France, Australia and other big producers for newly opened markets in, among other places, the Soviet Union. To take advantage of the declining prices – and corn had dropped below the level of its own support prices for Mexican farmers – Mexico began using its new credit to purchase corn on the world market. At the same time, hoping to redirect land, labor and capital to more export-oriented products, the state began reducing the guaranteed prices of corn and other basic grains. Corrected for inflation and currency changes, guaranteed prices, which had been steady in the early 1970s before rising to ten year peaks between 1974 and 1976, declined steadily thereafter, bottoming out in 1982 at

Graph 1: Index of Guaranteed Prices for Basic Grains, 1974-1984



Source: BANAMEX, *Examen de la situación económica de México*, v.LX. n.709, xii/1984.

less than three quarters its their 1975 value. (Graph 1) In response, the large private landowners of Chiapas's Central Valleys who produced corn using indigenous migrant sharecroppers, but who had also begun investing in tractors and chemical inputs during the good years of the mid-1970s, instead of continuing to increase the amount of corn they planted to take maximum advantage of both technology and labor, held their acreage steady and cut back on the number of indigenous sharecroppers they engaged. In other words, they substituted technology for labor. At the same time, they also accelerated the conversion of fallowed cropland to permanent pasture to take advantage of rising cattle prices and government encouragement of stock-raising in the form of easy credit. Under these circumstances, corn production on private estates in Chiapas stagnated during the late 1970s, while the state's cattle herd doubled from just two million head in 1970 to over four million by the early 1980s. More important for our purposes here, the stagnation of corn production on private lands under conditions of increasing technification and conversion to cattle meant that some 5000 migrant sharecroppers' and corn day-laborers' jobs – 25 percent of the total migrant jobs in corn-farming in central Chiapas – were lost between 1976 and 1982. (Since no one has ever kept track of indigenous employment and unemployment in Chiapas, such figures can only be calculated approximately from total production statistics and estimates of the amount of labor invested in each unit of production.)

While at any other time such a massive job loss might have been catastrophic, in this case the impact was softened, at least for some, by the extensive programs of public works in Chiapas and the neighboring state of Tabasco that had begun at the turn of the

1970s and that peaked between 1976 and 1982. At the same time the state was reducing price supports for grains, it was investing oil-backed international loans in the construction of refineries, hydroelectric dams, urban improvements, and roads and bridges, especially in the oil states of southeastern Mexico. As a result, according to government statistics, by 1980 almost 17,000 new jobs had been created in the formal construction industry in Chiapas. And if anything, the increase was even greater just over the border in the region of Villahermosa, Tabasco. As it happened, the highland Maya who had lately worked as sharecroppers in Chiapas's Central Valleys were often just the sorts of men who spoke enough Spanish and had enough experience dealing with non-indigenous people to get these jobs, and from testimonies it appears that many of them landed on their feet (see Cancian 1992, Thompson González et al. 1988: 232.) But not all: older men, men who did not speak Spanish well, and men who were not able or willing to adapt to working in semi-urban construction jobs, having been dropped from corn sharecropping, were in many cases forced to fall back on coffee picking instead – work which was less well paid and in which there was, as a result of their presence, now great competition for work.

Nevertheless, on the whole the communities of the highlands seem to have broken even from the economic changes that occurred between 1976 and 1981. As George Collier and Daniel Mountjoy (1988) found, there did begin to be significant changes in family relations and community customs during these years as some men both had more money from employment in the formal economy, but were at the same time forced by the conditions of that employment to be away from home for longer periods of time. Women

and children in particular suffered as they tried to adapt to these longer absences, and received relatively less male support. Data from Chamula suggests that, perhaps to avoid such absences, there also began to be the first "leaking" of families to urban life during this period (D. Rus 1990; see also Chapter 2 below.) But in all these respects, worse was to come...

In 1982, following the decline of world oil prices, Mexico fell into a deep financial crisis, which in turn led to a depression through the rest of the 1980s referred to in Mexico as *la crisis*. As a condition for receiving refinancing from the United States, the government imposed sharp limits on public spending, and among other things infrastructure projects were abruptly ended. By 1985, the next year for which there are figures, not only had the 17,000 formal construction jobs dwindled to fewer than three thousand, but thousands of other workers who had provided services to construction sites and to the well-paid construction workers – everyone down to the operators of popsicle carts – had been largely unemployed since late 1982. And unlike 1976, this time there was no easy transition to new kinds of work. Private landowners in the Central Valleys had briefly expanded their production of corn in 1981-82, on the eve of the collapse, in response to SAM (Sistema Alimentario Mexicano), a federal program to try to recover the self-sufficiency in basic grains that had slipped away in the 1970s. Like other government programs, however, SAM was a victim of the new austerity, and in 1983 the growers again cut back both production and demand for workers. Nor this time did coffee labor offer much of a refuge. Not only were there now thousands of former corn sharecroppers and construction workers from Chiapas seeking coffee work, but the

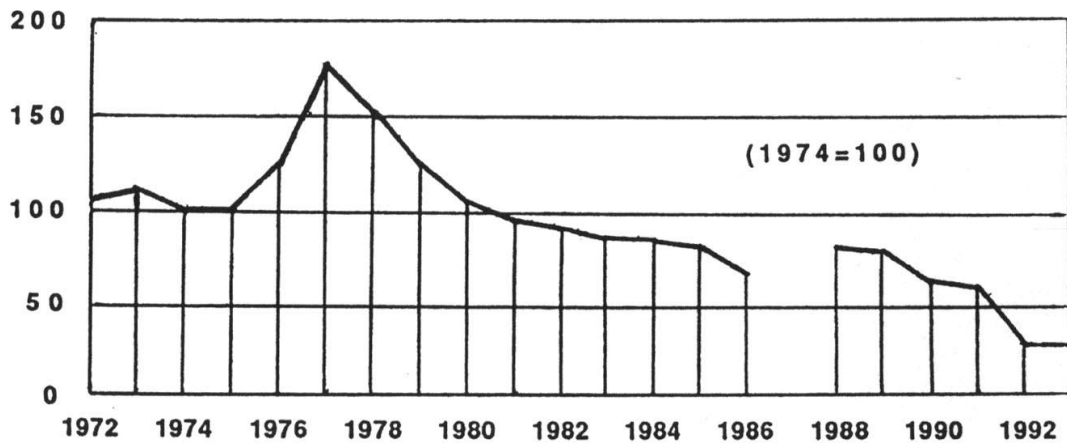
massive influx of refugees from Guatemala's civil war, many of them from the same villages that had provided migrant workers to Chiapas's coffee plantations for generations, was also beginning to be felt. By the mid-1980s, there were estimated to be more than 200,000 Guatemalans in the state, 100,000 of them in the coffee growing region of the southwest. As a result, if there had been 12,000 to 15,000 indigenous men from highland Chiapas working on the plantations of the state's southwestern corner in 1980, by 1983, precisely when they needed jobs as never before, demand for their labor had all but disappeared.¹⁶ (Tables 1.6 and 1.7.) Under the new conditions, instead of being hired in San Cristóbal and given a wage advance and bus ticket to the plantations, prospective Tzotzil and Tzeltal coffee workers from the Central Highlands had to pay their own way to the *fincas*, and then shape up at the gate with Guatemalan refugees to compete for work. As a result, according to testimonies, the wages actually paid on the plantations fell as Chiapas's workers were forced to accept wages set by the desperate Guatemalans. Many became discouraged; testimonies describe men buying bus tickets to the coast with money they had borrowed from local loan sharks at 20 percent monthly interest¹⁷, and then walking from plantation to plantation without finding work before giving up and catching a bus – or even walking – the 150 miles home. There was still

¹⁶ The number of Tzotzils and Tzeltals officially contracted to work on the coffee *fincas* of Chiapas's southwest shown in Table 1.7 is only an indicator of the actual flow of workers between these two regions. In fact, during the 1970s, all of the official labor contracts recorded in San Cristóbal corresponded to just fifteen of the region's 53 plantations of more than 200 hectares. Astorga Lira (1985: 34) suggests that the officially hired may represent as little as one third of the total number.

¹⁷ During the preceding two decades, lending rates within highland communities had held at five percent/month. During the rapid inflation of the mid-1970s, they rose to twenty percent for non-relatives, and have since rarely been less than ten percent/month.)

work for some 13,000 to 15,000 men on the coffee plantations of Chiapas's north, where Guatemalans were less of a presence, but of course competition for jobs was fierce, and these plantations already had the reputation of being more exploitative than those of the southwest.

Graph 2: Index of Coffee Prices in New York, 1972-1993



Sources: 1972-83: García G. y Montes Llamas (1988); 1981-86, 88-89: Secretariado de Integración Centro-americana (SIECA), cited in *Excelsior*, México, D.F., 17-vii-90; 1988-1993: Organización del Café, as reported by Data Resources, in the *Los Angeles Times*, 21-iii-93.

The final blow to migrant agricultural labor occurred in 1989, with the collapse of world coffee prices. (Graph 2) Some coffee was still harvested on the large plantations that customarily hired indigenous pickers during the 1989-90 and 1990-91 seasons, but the price was so low that many owners stopped maintaining their coffee trees, thereby eliminating approximately half of their labor costs (or, in terms in which it is not usually expressed in Chiapas, half their laborers.) By 1991-92, many had stopped harvesting coffee altogether: the price had been below the cost of production for so long that they

were bankrupt.¹⁸ From having employed 30,000 highland Chiapas migrants in 1980 (out of their total of 80 to 90,000 seasonal workers), coffee plantations employed perhaps 25,000 in 1983, 15,000 in 1988, and apparently virtually none after 1990.

Altogether, then, migratory agricultural labor, which had employed 60,000 to 75,000 Chiapas Mayas in the early 1970s, was by the early 1990s down to perhaps as few as 40,000 to 50,000 workers (including cane-cutters, whom we have not discussed here.) Meanwhile, the population of working age men in the officially recognized population of

**Table 1.5: Seasonal Workers from Guatemala
in the Southwestern Coffee Zone, According to Various Sources**

Year	No. of Guatemalans Employed in Coffee	Source
1974	30,000	Claude e Yvon Bataillon, '74
1978	20,000+	Sindicato de Trabajadores Indígenas, in Morales Coello (1978:202)
1979	32,000	Pohlenz y Castillo Burguete, '79
1982	40,000	Gobierno del Estado de Chiapas, Plan de Gobierno, '82
1985	65,000	Barrios, CNC, '85
1985	64,000	Ortiz Arana, Servicio Migratorio, '85
1990	75,000	Mosquera, '90

Source: Summarized in Mosquera (1990: 70-72), except for the 1978 STI estimate. All of these figures were calculated with different methods.

¹⁸ As it happened, Chiapas's coffee harvest fell by "only" about 20 percent between the harvests of 1987-88 and 1992-3, largely because in addition to the handful of large plantations that employed migrant workers, following the 1982 crisis there were also tens of thousands of small producers (in their vast majority indigenous) who continued to harvest their small groves even after the price fell below the cost of production because they vastly undervalued their own labor.

Table 1.6: Numbers of Tzotzil and Tzeltal Workers vs. Documented Workers from Guatemala Contracted to Work in the Coffee *Fincas* of the Southwestern Region*, 1979-1992

Year	Workers Hired in San Cristóbal	Documented Workers from Guatemala
1979	15,329	-
1980	14,140	-
1981	13,981	-
1982	7,082	-
1983	11,612	-
1984	10,902	35,848
1985	10,024	46,298
1986	9,740	49,835
1987	9,500	34,919
1988	7,900	52,712
1989	0	52,176
1990	0	55,870
1991	0	59,134
1992	0	60,944

Sources: For the region of San Cristóbal: 1983-86: STI figures reported in Robles Ramírez (1987:97); 1987-92: STI, in Martínez Velasco (1994:133). For documented migrants from Guatemala: Martínez Velasco (155).

*The Southwestern Region encompasses the large *fincas* of the Sierra Madre and Soconusco that hired their workers through the official hiring agency, the Sindicato de Trabajadores Indígenas (STI.) On the map, it consists of the Sierra and Soconusco, and the *municipios* of Concordia and Angel Albino in the southern end of the Frailesca.

Tzotzils, Tzeltals, Tojolabals and Ch'ols had grown from the 125,000 to 150,000 range of the mid-1970s to somewhere between 210,000 and 320,000 by 1990. (See Table 1.1 for an explanation of the variation in estimates.) After generations of readily available migratory agricultural labor for all who wanted it, Chiapas's Maya had fallen to only twenty to thirty percent participation in such labor in just fifteen years. What did the now "excess" agricultural workers do for a living? And, to an anthropologist perhaps equally interesting, what did this change mean for the condition and future of the traditional native communities and cultures of highland Chiapas?

Native Responses to *La Crisis*: 1. Mostly Economic

The Tzotzils' and Tzeltals' first response to this economic dilemma was to intensify the use of resources directly under their own control. Thus, for example, increasing numbers of women – rising to 60 percent in some communities – began producing artisan goods for the growing tourist market after 1982. At the same time, there was also a sharp intensification of agricultural production on lands within the native *municipios* themselves. Small-plot coffee growing, corn farming, and flower raising – all activities that had existed before the crisis – flourished as never before after 1982. In the case of coffee, the total number of small farm, *pequeña propiedad*, producers in the state – mostly Indians with less than 2.5 hectares – grew from approximately 45,000 in 1982 to more than 70,000 by the beginning of the 1990s. And in the case of corn-farming, production on communal, *ejido* land actually increased by 22 percent in the native *municipios* of the Central Highlands between 1982 and 1983 -- even as it was declining by 10 percent on privately held lands in the Central Valleys.¹⁹

Perhaps more important than the fact that these newly intensified activities provided an economic alternative, however, was the long-term effect they had on social stratification and polarization within communities that formerly thought of themselves as egalitarian. Here the case of corn is particularly instructive. As George Collier (1990) has documented for Zinacantán, those who could afford to use fertilizer and herbicides to intensify their production after 1983 were able to increase their yields from fifty to one

¹⁹ The evidence for this is inferential, and comes from the fact that this was the approximate increase of corn production in mostly ejidal *municipios* in 1983, and the approximate decrease on that portion of mixed private property-*ejido municipios* that corresponds to their percentage of private property. (INEGI 1986:1792ff.)

hundred percent, while at the same time planting the same plots year after year instead of fallowing them after three or four crops as they had done in the past. But such intensification required capital, and as a result within a very few years those who had been able to afford fertilizer and other inputs at the beginning of the crisis had managed to buy, seize in lieu of unpaid debts, or permanently lease the lands of their less fortunate neighbors. Those who lost their lands through this process of concentration – or who had never had any land – were, in turn, now faced with the choice of either staying on in their native communities to become impoverished laborers for their landholding neighbors, or joining the exodus that had begun in the early 1980s.

Seen from a step further back, what was happening was that the former migrant workers had been thrown back on the insufficient land bases of their home communities, and had essentially begun to compete for control of them. The intensification of corn farming, with its attendant concentration of property and expulsion of "excess" population, was one form of this competition. Money-lending and its consequences were another. Interest rates for loans within native communities, again, reached 20 percent per month after the financial crisis of 1982. Those without capital needed loans for everything from purchasing fertilizer, to financing their job searches, to buying medicine. But with wage work hard to come by, the outcome of such loans was now frequently the forfeiture of property used as collateral and the emigration of the borrower.

Economically straightforward as this concentration of property and wealth might seem from outside, socially and politically its effects within traditional communities could hardly have been more corrosive. When most highland men were still migrant

laborers, economic divisions within communities, although certainly present and important, were muted. Solidarity was forged out of a sense, however stylized, of shared poverty and suffering. Under the new conditions of the 1980s, however, those who had capital began openly to treat communal land as simply another commodity. Those who had few resources, on the other hand, as they began to lose their toe-hold in their communities, not only became the individuals most likely to emigrate, but also those most likely to join Protestant and other dissident movements and denounce the iniquity of their communities' wealthier members. The result was a period of factionalization and intracommunal violence that had no equal since perhaps the beginning of the Revolution in the 1910s (see Rus 2004a, 2005; Collier 1989, 1994a.)

Meanwhile, three other categories of economic response to the crisis other than intensification of activities within native communities should also be mentioned. The first was to maintain residence within the community, but look farther and farther afield for work. Functionally, this alternative was not so different from the labor migrations of the past, except that the distances were now often much greater and the absences much longer. In the mid-1980s, such migrations may have had Mexico City or Cancún as their destinations. By the early 1990s, the very first Tzotzil pioneers began to appear as undocumented factory workers in California and tomato pickers in Florida, many of whom stayed away from their wives and children for up to three years at a time. Their sacrifices did make it possible for their families to live what appeared from outside to be stable, "traditional" lives within their home communities. But the psychological costs to

all involved were enormous.²⁰

The other two categories were migration to the city, and migration to new agricultural colonies. The first of these, urbanization, was the single most common alternative to intensifying economic activity within the home territory. At the same time that Chiapas's urban population was increasing from 700,000 to more than 950,000 between 1980 and 1988, the population ratios of one region to another in general remained the same, indicating that rural people were moving to the nearest city or large town within their own regions.²¹ Most Tzotzil and Tzeltal urban migrants, for example, settled in San Cristóbal, where the population grew from 60,000 to 90,000 during the 1980s, virtually all of the difference Mayas from the neighboring *municipios*.²²

²⁰ See Rus and Guzmán 1996. (Postscript: As we shall see in Chapter 6, migration to the United States expanded enormously beginning at the end of the 1990s. In 1997, there were estimated to be no more than 5000 undocumented Chiapanecos in the U.S. By 2007, following several years when Chiapas was the single largest source of Mexican migrants, there may have been as many as 400,000, among them up to forty percent of men 15-34 years of age from some highland Tzotzil and Tzeltal *municipios*.)

²¹ The only real exception to this generalization is Tuxtla Gutiérrez, which drew immigrants from all over the state as it grew from 166,000 to 295,000 over the course of the 1980s.

²² In the mid-1990s, in the midst of these changes, it was difficult to quantify the various diaspora. However the city of San Cristóbal, which had virtually no indigenous residents in the late 1960s (one was forced to assume non-Indian clothing and become a "ladino" to remain in the city), was by 1990 surrounded by sixteen formally constituted Indian *colonias*, the earliest founded in 1973, containing some 20,000 representatives of all the communities listed in Table 1.2. (Calvo Sánchez 1991:56) By 2000, there were as many as 70 *colonias* with perhaps 60,000 indigenous inhabitants, and on the eve of the 2010 census estimates for the number of colonies run to 300, and the total of indigenous migrants from 80 to 100,000 (out of a population of approximately 200,000 for the city as a whole.) (See Chapter 5.) Meanwhile, out of more than 250,000 recent settlers in the Lacandón Jungle in 1990, there were approximately 80,000 migrants from the Central Highlands, in their majority Tzeltals and Tzotzils.

Table 1.7: The Growth of Urban Centers in Chiapas, 1970-1990

City	1970	1980	1990	Change, 1970-90
Tuxtla Gutiérrez	70,999	166,476	295,608	+316%
Tapachula	108,056	144,057	222,405	+106%
San Cristóbal	32,833	60,550	89,335	+172%
Comitán	39,006	54,733	78,896	+102%
Totals	250,894	425,816	686,244	+175%
[State as a whole:	1,569,053	2,084,717	3,210,496	+105%]

Sources: IX, X y XI Censos generales de población.

Almost without exception, this first generation of urban Mayas settled in *colonias* of people from the same community who bought a piece of land collectively, most often under the auspices of a religious group, Protestant or Catholic. Such *colonias* were highly organized. Typically, regular religious services segued into *asambleas* where decisions were made about community affairs. Economically, the new settlers found niches in the informal sector – selling artisan goods to tourists, for instance, or working as laborers on construction sites, or re-selling produce purchased from their rural brethren who preferred to unload their remaining merchandise at a discount at the end of the market day rather than spend the night in the city. Here too there was a great deal of cooperation, even communalism, within *colonias* and between *colonias* of the same community of origin and/or religious affiliation. *Colonos* helped one another (and later-arriving recruits) find jobs, and in many *colonias* established credit clubs that functioned as cooperative banks.

Seen from another perspective, of the approximately 250,000 natives of the communities shown in Table 1.2, between the mid-1970s and late 1980s some 60,000 became Protestants. Over approximately the same period, to defend its flock, the Catholic Church trained 3,725 native pastors, *catequistas*, to serve the same population. (Lomelí nd: 87, 91)

The fourth category of economic response during the 1980s – and the second kind of new highland Maya communities – were the agricultural *colonias*. In many organizational ways, these were similar to the urban colonies, differing only in economic activity and location. Such colonies have been established on lands acquired through purchase (as in the case of the urban colonies, often with the help of a religious denomination, although various independent peasant groups also purchased *fincas*, as haciendas and plantations are called in Chiapas), through settling national lands with the promise of eventual title (principally in the Lacandón Jungle, where the number of new settlements ballooned in the late 1970s and 1980s, the population growing from approximately 5000 at the end of the 1960s to 250,000 by the early 1990s), and, in some few cases in the late 1980s and early 1990s, on low country land purchased by the government and deeded over to people resettled from communities loyal to the ruling party, PRI, in the highlands.²³ In all of these cases, decisions and sometimes even work were accomplished cooperatively, just as in the urban *colonias*.

Native Response to *La Crisis*: 2. Mostly Political

Obviously, there was extraordinary variety among these new kinds of community. In addition to being liberationist and traditionalist Catholics, and many kinds of

²³ This paragraph briefly recapitulates land redistribution before 1994. After the Zapatista Rebellion, however, the situation became considerably more complicated. Hundreds of thousands of hectares were invaded after January 1, and many of these as well as non-invaded lands were purchased from their original owners and deeded to groups of campesinos, some rebels and some not. For what is still the best accounting, see Villafuerte Solís, Meza Díaz, Ascencio Franco, García Aguilar, Rivera Farfán, Lisbona Guillén and Morales Bermúdez (1999.)

Protestants, they might be members of independent organizations, radical political parties, or the governing PRI, and they might be located on the outskirts of cities, in the jungle, or on recovered haciendas. And that is not to speak of the novel combinations of attributes: Some of the most politically radical *colonos* in San Cristóbal, for example, entered the 1990s as Pentecostals who belonged to an alliance of socialists and communists, but by the end of that decade many had pulled back from political activism and converted to Islam. In short, almost any generalization could be contradicted. Three broad observations, however, do seem warranted.

First, virtually all of the new communities have from the beginning been proudly, even ostentatiously "indigenous." Their members left their communities of origin suddenly and in large groups, reassembling on the "outside" without having the time or necessity of shedding their cultures or languages. In most new colonies, meetings were from the first conducted in native languages, and when schools opened, the colonists demanded bilingual teachers. By now (2010), some *colonias* are in their second and even third generation, and still maintain indigenous identities. Indeed, as time has gone on, ethnicity – and an emerging pan-Mayan ethnicity at that – seems to have become a basis of higher levels of organization and opposition to the state.

Second, because the new *colonias* were consciously chosen, voluntary communities, decision-making within them has typically been consensual, democratic, and characterized by open meetings. In the case of urban *colonias*, in particular, where migrants have been able to choose among a multitude of new settlements, and where residence in one *colonia* or another does not generally determine work, educational or

other opportunities, irreconcilable differences between factions has typically led to schism and the formation of new "daughter" communities. In order to preserve the strength of numbers, then, consensus is necessary.²⁴

And third, none of the struggles or innovations or successes of any of these communities have occurred in isolation from the others. In this sense, all of native Chiapas has been a vast experiment in political organization and community building over the last thirty-five years. By this time, every original, "traditional" community has former members who have experienced all of the new kinds of community, with the result that there is probably not a family in the highlands that does not have brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, who participate in each of the new kinds of organization. All of these people are in contact, visiting each other, talking, weighing strategies and alternatives. The result is a new kind and degree of mobilization that has yet to be fathomed (see Aubry 1994.)

Meanwhile, all of this new organization has occurred against the backdrop of traditional communities that have continued to become more stratified, polarized, contentious places over the last few decades. One hesitates to make predictions, but given the degree of mobility of Chiapas' Maya, the degree of interaction among members of "traditional" and "new" communities, and the continued economic pressure on traditional communities with inadequate resource bases, it seems likely that the more open, democratic nature of the new communities is likely eventually to flow back and

²⁴ Lest too idealized a portrait be conveyed of such new communities, it should be noted that there are exceptions to this democratic, consensual model. Some fraction of *colonias*, in fact, have reproduced the *cacique*-run model of their members' communities of origin (see Morquecho 1992.)

change the social structures of the traditional communities as well. One sign that this is already happening is that by the end of the 1990s the leaders of many of the most conservative *municipios* in the highlands, among them Chamula, had begun to make their peace with members of non-traditional religious groups – people they would have expelled from their home communities just a few years before. Another is the rising vote for opposition political candidates, even in the local elections of *municipios* where just ten or fifteen years ago the winner was determined once the community's elders had named their candidate.

Some Final Observations

What seems to be playing itself out under the new economic and demographic conditions that have reigned in Chiapas over the last three and half decades is the end of the state's closed corporate communities; or, at least, the end of the era in which the vast majority of the state's Maya were members of such communities. For most of a century, these communities sustained themselves by providing the workforce for agricultural chores on lands that belonged to others and serving as "bedroom communities" for the state's migratory laborers. As plantation owners and economic planners found other, less labor-intensive uses for these lands in the 1970s and eighties, and as population increases within the old communities produced many workers more than could be employed, the maintenance of these reservoirs of native workers became increasing problematic, and finally untenable. There was no way for most of their members to make a living if they remained within them, and for those who found alternative work in the city or who

acquired land in distant *colonias*, it became unreasonable to think of "commuting" as they had done when work outside of their homelands was seasonal and temporary. As a result, the populations of the traditional communities have in a sense been "shaking out" over this period, getting down to a more reasonable population density. The first stage of this process was increased stratification within the old communities, accompanied by the emigration (or expulsion) of those who lost out in the competition for resources. The next was the organization of new communities "outside" of the historical spaces occupied by indigenous people. The third – and this is where things seem to have been since the end of the 1990s – is the emergence of a new, regional-level indigenous society and identity.

At the same time that the "traditional communities" were until recently the focal points of the Mayas' social identity and the "containers" of native culture, however, they were also the primary unit through which the state exercised control of the native population. To the extent that there was native protest of economic and political conditions in earlier periods, it was mediated – and muted – by the corporatism of the traditional communities themselves and by the corporate nature of their relationship to the state. As native people have been forced out of such traditional communities over recent years, however, they have necessarily broken with this system of mediation and control. Members of new urban and agrarian *colonias* are by definition outside of and away from the embrace of traditional community government. Meanwhile, by the very nature of their new lives, they are soon caught up in struggles over land, social and cultural space, and political power in their new environments. As it now stands,

however, Chiapas's non-indigenous elite – those who control the apparatus of the state – are still in the process of forging institutionalized ways of dealing with these conflicts. Indeed, since the economic foundations began to be knocked from under the traditional communities in the 1970s, the state has not only done nothing to remedy the loss, but has offered only repression to control indigenous people's resulting – and increasing – dissatisfaction and anger. In the shadow of this neglect, Chiapas's Maya have increasingly taken charge themselves of defining what the new relationship will be, suggesting that the contest between indigenous people on the one side, and non-indigenous people and the state on the other, is likely to remain hard-fought and unpredictable for some time to come.

Chapter 2

When Crisis Became Status Quo: Survival Strategies of Households in Chamula, 1974-1998

When Chiapas's plantation economy began its downward slide in the mid-1970s, the indigenous communities around the state that had been built on a foundation of seasonal rural labor entered a period of crisis. During the first few years, as we have seen in Chapter 1, farm work was to some extent replaced, at least for younger and more bilingual men, by jobs in the vast government-financed infrastructure projects of the 1970s oil boom – dams, refineries, bridges and highways – and the allied, semi-urban activities that grew up around them – food carts near construction sites, truck and van transportation between rural areas and cities, construction of workers' housing in urban *colonias*, and the provision of services within the *colonias*, from open air barbers to shoe repair shops. But the infrastructure boom proved ephemeral. When the Mexican financial system collapsed in the late summer of 1982, construction jobs and much of the economy that indigenous people had built around them disappeared. Through the rest of the 1980s, all working Mexicans suffered under the austerity program imposed by the International Monetary Fund and the U.S. Treasury as a condition for renegotiating Mexico's debt. But it was especially hard on rural people, and among them particularly the indigenous, who experienced what the government saw as a sort of "benign neglect." The belief was that since such people lived in a largely self-provisioning economy, for the time being they could grow their own food and take care of themselves. All the government considered it was denying them were "new" goods and services – schools,

clinics, better roads – that they had known only for a few years, and thus would be less likely than other Mexicans to miss. Meanwhile, the government would concentrate its diminished resources on holding down the prices of staples and maintaining services in the cities, and thus avoid what it considered the more dangerous possibility of unrest among the urban poor. Twenty-five million members of peasant families were essentially put to one side and told “Wait here, we’ll get back to you when we can.”

This chapter and Chapters 4 and 5 are about the reaction of one small sample of indigenous *campesinos* in highland Chiapas to those years and the ones that have followed. As it happened, after a period at the end of the 1970s when the families of migrant, seasonal laborers who had never been without a way to make a living suddenly felt as though the floor were slipping away beneath them – a feeling that was increased by the crisis of 1982 – by the end of 1983 people had begun to adjust. New ways of making do were discovered, and new kinds of social organization and political awareness grew up around those new activities. In one way, as we shall see, the government that opted for benign neglect was right: rural people on their own found solutions to the problems of getting food and money. But in another way, it proved to be profoundly mistaken: when the state was finally able to “get back” to the rural poor at the end of the 1980s, they had become a different people, much less willing to defer to politicians and bureaucrats, much less patient with the corporate state.

This chapter focuses on the economic adaptations indigenous people were forced to make beginning in the mid-1970s, and more specifically, on changes in ways of making a living. Although its purpose is not so much to explicate the social and cultural

changes that accompanied occupational shifts, where appropriate, some of the more notable of these will be mentioned as the text moves forward. The social and political consequences of the “crisis that became status quo” beginning in the second half of the 1970s will be discussed in more detail in the chapters that follow.

The Sample Community

The community that provides the focus for this chapter and Chapters 4 and 5, called here Ch’ul Osil (“sacred land”), is in fact one of the older, traditional settlements in the Tzotzil-speaking *municipio*, or township, of Chamula. Listed in place names and found on maps in the nineteenth century, it was at the beginning of the 1970s one of 109 *parajes*, or hamlets, scattered through the oak forests and craggy limestone mountains and cliffs of the *municipio*’s approximately 140 square miles (Gossen 1974: 10.) Immediately north of the Spanish-speaking regional capital of the Central Highlands, San Cristóbal, Chamula is a composite community made up of three pre-Columbian Tzotzil towns that were resettled together, “reduced,” just over the hill from San Cristóbal in the 1540s to serve as the city’s principal source of tributary labor. Through almost three centuries of the colony (until 1821), and then more than 160 years of Mexican independence, this was its function. From the beginning the largest indigenous pueblo in Chiapas, with a population of approximately 20,000 in 1970, Chamula provided the construction workers who built San Cristóbal’s buildings, the agricultural laborers who tended its fields, and with other indigenous communities, the muleteers and bearers who carried its commerce. Beginning in the 1880s, it was also the largest source of the debt

laborers who were to be the highest value export of San Cristóbal's merchants and labor contractors from then until the last quarter of the twentieth century.

Ch'ul Osil's role in this division of labor was largely given by its location. In the western end of Chamula, immediately above the colonial road between San Cristóbal and Chiapas's central lowlands, the men of Ch'ul Osil were bearers through most of the nineteenth century, and perhaps earlier. Conscripted into caravans of dozens of men, each carrying a load set by law at 105 pounds, they took the temperate fruits, wheat flour and bread, cheeses and cured meats of San Cristóbal out of the highlands, and brought back virtually everything that the region did not produce – imported oils and wine, lowland fruits and vegetables, sugars, cotton textiles and thread, and small metal products.¹

Despite Chamula's integration since its founding into the economy of San Cristóbal and central Chiapas – and through them, into the national economy – however, in the 1980s, the belief that indigenous communities truly were, as they sometimes liked to see themselves, closed, self-sufficient, virtually autarkic mini-states was still a strong one among Mexico's political and economic authorities.² Mexican anthropologists had been arguing for at least two decades that this view was mistaken, and had anyone been listening, ethnographers and rural economists had actually demonstrated the dependence

¹ For more on cargo-bearing and its relationship to other kinds of indebted labor after the 1890s, see Rus 2003; for more on the relationship of coerced labor to the form of the “corporate communities” of the highlands, see Wasserstrom 1983, and Rus, Hernández and Mattiace 2003:1-26.

² For Mexico as a whole, see Hewitt de Alcántara 1984; for Chiapas, Rus 2004b.

of indigenous communities on the surrounding society by the 1970s.³ In the case of highland Chiapas, a region-wide study of the economic basis of indigenous communities sponsored by the federal government itself just before the crisis of lowland agriculture in the mid-1970s had shown that collectively the region's Tzotzils and Tzeltals only gained approximately 20 percent of their annual food from their own lands.⁴ The way they really made their living was as seasonal migrant laborers in the commercial agriculture of the lowlands.

That 1970s study serves as the baseline for this chapter. One of the research sites was Ch'ul Osil, where Robert Wasserstrom (1976, 1980) conducted an exhaustive survey of the community's households in 1974. Covering the years 1970-74, what he learned (as we shall see in more detail below) was that of Ch'ul Osil's 138 male heads of household,⁵ all but 15 earned most of their yearly contributions to their families' livelihood by rotating through a series of seasonal agricultural jobs in Chiapas's lowlands, some of them 200 miles distant from their homeland. To be sure, some 80 percent of them also

³ On the case for symbiosis, for Chiapas see Stavenhagen 1969, Favre 1973, and Palerm et al. 1993; for a discussion of the impacts of these demonstrations on national discussions of the peasantry, see Kearney 1980, 1996:61-69, 73-113.

⁴ "Proyecto de Estructura Agraria en Chiapas," Centro de Investigaciones Ecológicas del Sureste, San Cristóbal, Chiapas. On the impact of land tenancy in highland Chiapas, see Table 1.2.

⁵ In Wasserstrom's study, there were actually 148 households. In the resurveys of 1987-88 and 1996-98, however, our Ch'ul Osil consultants could not identify ten of them. They may have left soon after his 1974 survey and been forgotten (although this seems unlikely), their names may have been misrecorded, or they may have been members of neighboring hamlets who were misidentified. In any case, the economic activities of those ten households exhibited virtually the same distribution as the 138 men left, so percentages are not significantly affected.

planted corn on their own land in Chamula, and a small fraction of those grew flowers and vegetables for sale as well. But for Ch'ul Osil as a whole, all the households taken together in 1974 were collectively able to provide little more than 5% of their families' annual food requirements from their own fields (Wasserstrom 1980: 9.) Fortunately for us, Wasserstrom captured a portrait of this dependent economy, presumably much as it had been for decades, during the last three years before the crises that changed it forever.

The two resurveys of Ch'ul Osil that followed this early 1970s starting point, in 1987-88 and during the summers of 1996-98, provided snapshots of the community at important points during the transition that followed. The first, conducted by Diane Rus and a team of Ch'ul Osil associates, described the community well into the years of the so-called "lost decade" following the 1982 national financial crisis, when community members had begun to develop new survival strategies to supplement stagnating migratory agricultural labor (D. Rus 1990; Gómez Monte, D. Rus and Guzmán 1990.) In addition to documenting the reorientation of men's labor that had occurred in the thirteen years since Wasserstrom, Diane Rus's study demonstrated an even more far-reaching shift in women's work. Whereas in the early 1970s only one woman had participated in the cash economy, selling ceremonial clothing to indigenous officials and their wives, by 1988 a majority of the women of Ch'ul Osil were producing textiles for the tourist market and/or doing various kinds of wage work. Rus and her collaborators made another discovery as well. In 1974, Wasserstrom had focused closely on male migrant laborers and the ways they provided for their households. No female-headed households were mentioned. In the 1987-88 survey, however, out of 231 households, 23 were headed by

women – widows, abandoned wives, and women who had never married.⁶ Some of these households, moreover, appeared to be longstanding, and had gone unreported in 1974.

The third survey, in 1996-98 by Diane and Jan Rus in collaboration with many of the same community assistants as the two earlier studies, revealed Ch'ul Osil to be still dependent on work outside of the community, but moving ever farther away from its plantation past. Begun two years after the start of the Zapatista Rebellion on January 1, 1994, and just a little more than a year after the collapse of the Mexican *peso* that same December as a result of financial deregulation and speculation in the run-up to NAFTA, the survey's three summers coincided with the period of lowest real wages and investment in Mexican agriculture since the 1930s. By 1996-98, almost a third of the population descended from Wasserstrom's 1974 sample, 121 out of 353 households, entire lineages, had *emigrated*. Most of the movement had come after the early 1990s as families seemed to give up on making a living on their insufficient communal lands and moved to new urban *colonias*, to rural collectives on national land in Chiapas's lowland forests, and most tragically, to shanty-towns of agricultural day laborers and small share-croppers on the margins of other peasants' *ejidos* -- communal lands -- in the Central Lowlands.

⁶ In Diane Rus's published analysis (1990), there were 246 households. In 1996-98 we and our collaborators discounted 15 of these for being (1) not actually natives or residents of Ch'ul Osil, or (2) being duplicates of households that were already in the census under a different name. This second is especially noteworthy. There are only a few names and surnames in Ch'ul Osil, and they are constantly reshuffled and repeated. In the 1996-98 census, for instance, out of 813 adults, there were 37 women whose given name and first surname were "María Gómez." Going to the second surname, there were still 14 named "María Gómez Monte," and 3 of those were born in 1951. Only by going to parents' and husbands' names, and nicknames was it possible to sort them out. Even our colleagues from the community found it hard to avoid confusion.

A last methodological note about the sample used to trace change across the twenty-eight years from 1970 (the first year of Wasserstrom's survey) to 1998 (the last year of Rus and Rus): Rather than take the territorial unit "Ch'ul Osil" as the subject community, the following pages use "descendant households" as their sample. That is, the 1987-88 and 1996-98 studies are about the households that were in Wasserstrom's 1974 study *and their descendants*.⁷ There are two advantages of this method over simply conducting fresh censuses of the territory of Ch'ul Osil – as do, for instance, the decennial national censuses. The first is that the community's boundaries have changed twice since 1974 (a continuing redefinition that would be true of most Chamula hamlets.) In recent decades, the qualification to be a recognized *paraje*, or *comunidad*, in highland municipios has been 'a collection of houses with a primary school.' As the population has doubled twice in the last fifty years, and interest in education has increased, new schools – and thus new hamlets – have constantly formed. In addition to a new school, to achieve *comunidad* status, the residents must also organize a committee to administer the school, as well as committees for health, water, and road construction. Present-day hamlets are thus defined not so much as fixed spaces, or bounded pieces of land – as would have been the case before the 1950s – but in a larger sense as jurisdictions, as

⁷ This actually reflects the way people in Ch'ul Osil themselves count their community's members. Those who have moved away are not, by that fact alone, considered to have given up membership. Rather, emigrants are divided into two categories: "sojourners" who still at least return to the community to visit their ancestors' graves on All Saints Day, Todos Santos, at start of November ("xtal ta santo," "those who come for All Saints"); and true emigrants who never return even for Todos Santos and thus are considered to have cut all ties ("batem 'o," "definitively gone.") Those in the first category may even serve religious offices in the community, although they no longer have land there, and would not count as inhabitants in the national census.

collections of families who take responsibility for serving in the school and other committees that bring recognition and resources from higher levels of government.⁸

In the case of Ch'ul Osil, the result of this continual redefinition is that the hamlet of Wasserstrom's 1974 survey has by now fissioned into three daughter hamlets. The first and largest is still called Ch'ul Osil, and occupies the heart of the old territory. The second, which appeared in the mid-1980s and was recognized in the 1990 national census, resulted from a division of the original space following the construction of a second primary school. And the third, which emerged in the mid-1990s, was formed when a group of Ch'ul Osil's most western families joined families from two neighboring hamlets to form a new school – and hamlet – on adjacent lands drawn from the three original hamlets.

Beyond avoiding the vagaries of boundary changes, the second, perhaps even greater advantage of using “descendant households” to define a sample population is that there has been, again, significant out-migration since 1974.⁹ Utilizing a territorial definition as the national census necessarily does, those who have moved away are of

⁸ The number of hamlets in Chamula has been constantly, if usually slowly, changing for centuries. Historically, people began to move out of the pueblo of Chamula into a handful of outlying, territorially defined *parajes* in the 1770s. As late as the national census of 1940 there were still only 35 of these. Using the school-based definition since the 1970s, the number was 129 in 1998, and at this writing (2010) 148.

⁹ Emigration from Ch'ul Osil, as from the rest of the highlands, has ebbed and flowed through the decades. Thus many from Ch'ul Osil migrated to a newly granted ejido at the start of the 1950s and again in the early 1970s. Along with changing boundaries and perhaps haphazard counting, this perhaps explains the variability in official census results: 456 inhabitants in the 1940 census; 333 inhabitants in 84 households in a 1951 count by the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (Archivo Histórico del Centro Coordinador Indígena Tzeltal-Tzotzil, 53-1951-3); and 608 inhabitants in 152 households according to a 1956 INI census (Pozas 1977: v.1: 7, 68.)

**Table 2.1: Population of Ch’ul Osil, 1974, 1988, 1998
(1974 inhabitants and their descendants)**

	1974	1988	1998
Households	138	231	353*
Adults in census	276	445	813
<i>[Presumptive Total Population**</i>	<i>690</i>	<i>1155</i>	<i>1765]</i>

*The 353 households consist of 329 headed by men (12 with plural wives), 24 headed by women, and include 119 adult children, 16 of them girls who married but later divorced and returned to their parents’ homes.

**This calculation assumes a household size of 5. According to the Banco Nacional de México, the typical rural household in 1999 had 5.1 members (Banamex lxxv, May 1999:179), while the 2000 national census put the average for the municipio of Chamula at 4.81 (INEGI 2001, “Chiapas: Chamula: Promedio/ocupantes/vivienda.”) (Based on the internal evidence of the surveys that compose this table, if the number of households was doubling in 18 years or less, half the population should have been under 18 during at least the last two surveys. This is only possible with presumptive populations that at least double the observed number of “adults in census” – that is, individuals *18 years of age or older* on the middle line of Table 2.1 – which in turn requires households of five.

course not counted in Ch’ul Osil. This, in turn, would have – has – tended to disguise the astounding population increase that Ch’ul Osil and other highland communities have experienced over the last three decades. As line one of Table 2.1 demonstrates, between 1974 and 1988 the number of households in the population descended from Ch’ul Osil’s 1974 households grew from 138 to 231. This is an overall increase of 67.4 percent in 14 years, or a growth rate of 3.75% a year. Assuming households of more or less constant size, at this rate Ch’ul Osil’s descendant population would have doubled over the course of just 19 years, by 1993 -- sooner if the explosion started before 1974, as it surely did.¹⁰

¹⁰ This rapid demographic change is largely due to a sharp decline in child mortality in the 1960s and 70s. Before the mid-1960s, older women in Ch’ul Osil report that they lost approximately one third of their children in the first five years of life – that is, a child mortality rate of as much as 330 per 1000, higher than the 283 reported for Sierra Leone, currently the most extreme national rate in the world (Mexico as a whole is 28/1000, the US 8/ and Cuba 7/) (WHO 2005.) In the extended family of my closest collaborators, the mortality rate was 40 percent in the generation born from the mid-1950s to 1970, versus

That is, by 1992 half the population would have been under 19 years of age. Even more astonishing is the increase during the decade between the second survey in 1988 and the third in 1998, when the leading edge of the wave of children born in the 1970s and 1980s was reaching reproductive years. During those ten years, the number of descendant households increased by 52.8 percent, from 231 to 353, a growth rate of almost 4.33 percent a year. Assuming, again, average households of constant size, had this rate of increase continued for six more years (as it undoubtedly did, even accelerating as more members of the earlier boom came of age), by 2004 half the descendant population would have been 16 years of age or younger.¹¹

In the national censuses of Chamula and its neighbors from 1980 to 2000 (Table 2.2), the rapid demographic growth we see in Ch'ul Osil is visible across the indigenous highlands in the change from 1980 to 1990. Between 1990 and 2000, however, when it is clear from Ch'ul Osil's descendant population that the population explosion in Chamula actually accelerated, it appeared from the national census that the rate of growth had instead declined sharply. According to interviews in Ch'ul Osil, many who migrated to the *colonias* of San Cristóbal and Chiapas's national lands during the 1980s maintained houses in the home community and in 1990 were still counted there rather than in the places to which they had migrated. Not until the 1990s did large numbers of these

less than 5 percent (50/1000) for children in the same family born from 1975 on. Obviously, government programs beginning in the 1950s – sanitation, potable water, vaccinations – are responsible for this change, giving lie to the government's implicit claim in the 1980s that indigenous people would not miss development programs with which they supposedly had little experience anyway.

¹¹ According to the national census, half the residents of the municipio of Chamula were under 16.7 years in 2000 (INEGI 2001: "Chiapas: Chamula: población: pirámide.")

**Table 2.2: Population Change in the Sixteen Indigenous Municipios of Highland Chiapas, 1980-2000
(In order of their growth during the 1990s)**

Municipios:	1980	1990	Change, 1980-1990	2000	Change, 1990-2000
Zinacantán	13,006	22,392	+72%	30,042	+34%
Mitontic	4,913	5,783	+17%	7,595	+31%
Chalchihuitán	5,564	9,442	+70%	12,187	+29%
Pantelhó	9,305	12,975	+39%	16,319	+26%
San Andrés	10,591	15,303	+44%	18,911	+24%
Tenejapa	20,642	27,217	+32%	33,217	+22%
Amatenango	12,099	5,681	+28%	6,623	+17%
Chamula	31,364	51,757	+65%	58,920	+14%
Chanal	5,019	7,195	+43%	8,143	+13%
Oxchuc	24,879	34,868	+40%	37,895	+ 9%
Huistán	13,340	17,669	+32%	18,689	+ 6%
Altamirano*	12,099	16,980	+40%	22,157	+30%
El Bosque*	8,396	13,973	+66%	14,633	+ 5%
Chenalhó*	18,400	30,680	+67%	30,876	+ 1%
Totals:	181,943	271,915	+49%	316,207	+ 16%

Sources: X, XI and XII *Censos Generales de Población* (INEGI.)

*Altamirano, in addition to its “traditional,” highland region, also extends into the Lacandón Forest, and was a recipient as well as an expeller of migrants. Chenalhó and El Bosque were both scenes of fighting and massacres after the Zapatista rebellion, and in 2000 still had large numbers of refugees in other municipios. Their populations may also have been under-counted as a result of continuing conflict and/or resistance to the census. If those two are excluded, the collective change from 1990 to 2000 is +19%

emigrants definitively shift their primary residences to their new homes, in the *colonias*. As a result, the population explosion that they and their children represented during the 1980s, and still represented during the 1990s, was not perceived as an extension of the population explosion that had begun in the places they had left. Instead, as Tables 2.2 and 2.3 show, it appears that the population explosion in much of the highlands tailed off between 1990 and 2000. As we saw in Chapter 1, however, rapid population growth was, along with the declining plantation economy, a determining factor in the crisis in the “traditional” indigenous municipios of the highlands. The use of “descendant

**Table 2.3: Population Change in the Indigenous Highlands, 1950-2000
(Municipios of Table 2.2)**

Year	Collective Population	Change from Previous Census
1950	90,346	
1960	113,356	+25%
1970	139,540	+23%
1980	181,943	+30%
1990	271,915	+49%
2000	316,207	+16%

Sources: VIII, IX, X, XI, XII Censos Generales de Población (INEGI).

households” makes that relationship more visible.

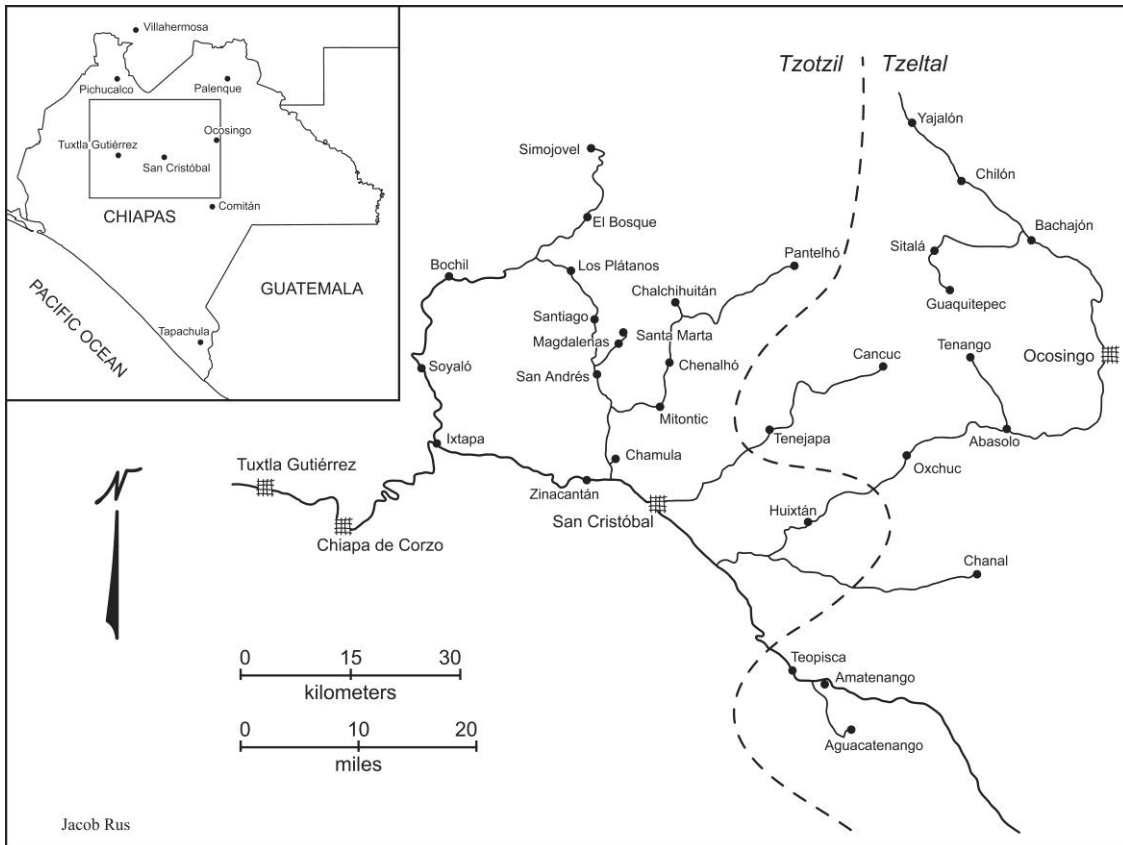
Finally, a last, cultural, reason for choosing “1974 descendant households” as our sample is that the emigrants’ adaptations in the diaspora are an extension of the overall community’s reaction to the crises of the last three decades. Since those who have left are still typically in close contact with relatives and friends who stayed in Ch’ul Osil, for at least the present generations their experiences with new kinds of work, social organization and lifestyles are part of the collective knowledge shared by all.

The Status Quo Ante: Ch’ul Osil Households up to the mid-1970s

Reconstructing Tzotzil and Tzeltal household economies before the mid-1970s is complicated by the fact that the available ethnographies up to that period do not mesh with the careful economic studies that only began to be available afterward. As a way into this discussion, let us begin with the basic organization of households, the gender division of labor.

Through the early 1970s, all ethnographies of the Tzotzils and Tzeltals agree that work was sharply divided between men and women. Men planted corn and beans on

Tzotzil and Tzeltal Municipios of the Highlands and Near Northern Lowlands



their land in the highlands, and did “supplementary” work outside of the community to get money for whatever their families could not grow or make for themselves. They also served periodically in their communities’ hierarchy of civil-religious offices, or “cargos,” and spent considerable time participating in fiestas and the cult of the saints. Women, in addition to caring for small children, were responsible for all the chores associated with the home and preparing food, including washing clothes by hand, carrying water, cutting and carrying firewood, daily grinding of several kilos of corn with a stone *mano* and

metate, and patting out and cooking scores of tortillas.¹² In the case of Chamula, women also cared for their families' sheep, and turned the wool into the sturdy clothing that all Chamulas wore.

Although not incorrect as far as it goes, this description of work and the division of labor was from a perspective almost wholly contained within the boundaries of the communities themselves, and was largely normative: ethnographers asked community members how they made a living, observed the work they did around their neighborhoods (where the ethnographers had typically set up shop), and then recorded the results. Ideally, Tzotzil and Tzeltal men thought of themselves as corn farmers, and if asked how they made a living, that was their reply. All of their origin myths, all of the definitions of manliness and work itself, were derived from corn farming, so to the ethnographers, the reported economy fit functionally with the projective culture. Unfortunately, however, as a consequence, the role of outside work, work by definition performed out of sight of the community, got short shrift.

To correct the ethnographic image, let us turn to our sample hamlet. As Wasserstrom's 1974 study demonstrated, while it was true that families in Ch'ul Osil produced their own clothes and most of their own vegetables and fruit, it was also true that they depended on seasonal migratory labor for almost 95 percent of their yearly supply of corn and beans. At its most basic level, the reason for this was the extremely small size of landholdings in the hamlet. The conventional figures for the amount of corn

¹² This version of the division of labor, including the identification of outside work as strictly supplementary, can be found in, among others, Villa Rojas writing on Oxchuc, 1942-44 (1990:145-218); Guiteras-Holmes on Chenalhó (1961: 24-62); Vogt on Zinacantán (1969:127-142); and Hermitte on Villa Las Rosas/Pinola (1970:11-12).

and beans needed to feed a family of five for a year in rural Chiapas is 800 kilos of the first and 150 of the second. In the highlands of Chamula, 7200 feet above sea level and higher, with uncertain weather and tiny fields that make most technology inefficient, yields have historically been below 500 kilos/hectare for corn and under 90 kilos for beans.¹³ Thus to grow enough food for a year, a household would need to plant on average approximately 1.6 hectares. Using corn to stand for all the food crops typically planted together in Ch'ul Osil, by traditional methods corn can only be grown for three years out of six without exhausting the soil. To plant 1.6 hectares, then, a family would actually need access to 3.2. But jumping ahead, as Table 2.6 shows, the 79.7 percent of Ch'ul Osil men in Table 2.4 who raised corn on their households' own land in the highlands planted on average only .32 hectares each. Only 3 out of 110 planted more than one hectare, and thus had even a chance of being self-provisioning. At best, then, from his own land the average Ch'ul Osil farmer could only expect to receive approximately 20 percent of his household's yearly demand for corn (.32 hectares X 500 kilos/hectare =160 kilos of the 800 they needed.) But Wasserstrom found yields in Ch'ul Osil were even lower than the Chamula average: from 1972 to 1974, Ch'ul Osil farmers actually received on average less than 200 kilos/hectare, so with .32 hectares, they

¹³ By comparison, mechanized fields in lowland Chiapas get up to 6000 kilos/hectare, and the national average yield in the U.S. in 2008 was more than 9600 kilos. (In traditional Mesoamerican agriculture, corn and beans are grown in the same field, the beans planted after the corn is a couple of feet high so they can use the cornstalks for structure. Squash are regularly planted in the same field, and occasionally other cultivars such as onions and cilantro.) (On annual household demand for corn, see Stuart 1990.)

harvested only 64 kilos on average – just 8 percent of what they needed.¹⁴ Looked at another way, for the 138 households in our version of the 1974 survey, if each household needed 800 kilos/year of corn, the community’s total demand would have been 110,400 kilos. In fact, only 110 families planted corn in the highlands (the other 28 households, 20 percent of the total, had no land, and thus would have had to find outside work no matter what.) Those 110 planted a total of 33.9 hectares. Under optimal conditions, had they harvested 500 kilos/hectare, the total production would have been 16,950 kilos, a little over 15 percent of the total demand of 110,400 kilos, or 19 percent of the needs of the 110 families that planted fields. At 200 kilos/hectare, they would have harvested just 6,780 kilos, 6 percent of the collective demand, or less than 8 percent of the demand of the 110 corn-farming families. Good year or bad, highland corn farmer or not, doing seasonal migratory labor outside of Ch’ul Osil would not have been “supplementary” but fundamental for the community’s men, the very basis of their families’ livelihood. The situation was the same in all the other parajes of Chamula that Wasserstrom surveyed, as well as those of neighboring Zinacantán that he surveyed soon after (Wasserstrom 1983: 156-215.)

To obtain their staples, then, and money for much besides (sick care and medicines, occasional meat, manufactured goods like sewing needles, hoes, machetes and axes), 123 out of 138 (89 percent) of the Ch’ul Osil’s male heads of household worked from five to eight months a year (the average was 6.3), rotating through combinations of

¹⁴ Of the eight Chamula hamlets Wasserstrom surveyed, Ch’ul Osil suffered the lowest yields. The other seven averaged 473 kilos/hectare (1980: 8.) Ch’ul Osil residents in later years reported that their yields returned to the historical norm.

Table 2.4: Numbers and Percentages of Ch’ul Osil Men Engaged in Various Economic Activities, 1974 (n=138)

<u>Own Cornfield</u>	<u>Sharecrop Cornfield</u>	<u>Coffee Plantation</u>	<u>Other Ag. Wage Labor*</u>	<u>Other Wage Labor**</u>	<u>Alcohol Producer</u>	<u>Street Vendor</u>	<u>Flowers/ Vegetables</u>
110	68	55	33	6	15	1	11
79.7%	49%	40%	24%	4%	11%	1%	8%

“Own cornfield” refers to corn grown on family-owned lands in the highlands; “sharecropped cornfields” were generally planted in the 1970s on land let out by private estates in the lowlands.

*Includes working for lowland sharecroppers, cane-cutting, and working for neighbors on highland cornfields and other crops.

**Includes part-time road work and construction (“albañil”).

distant agricultural jobs (see the map in Chapter 1): corn sharecropping and working as laborers for corn share-croppers in the Central Valleys (where the heaviest workloads were March-April, June, late July-early August, and September-October), coffee-picking in the mountains of the North and the Sierra and Soconusco (October-January), and during the emergencies of bad years, cane-cutting in the Central Valleys and the lowlands north of the Central Highlands (November-May.) In between trips during the spring and summer, they also planted their small home fields and gardens. Most did at least two of these seasonal activities, a few three (the average was 2.16). Less tied to the seasons, a small percentage of men also worked for a few months at a time on road construction, or occasionally got longer-term maintenance jobs on the coffee and sugar plantations.

The prolonged male absences associated with migratory labor immediately suggests two further adjustments to the old normative ethnography. First, with respect to women, unlike such nearby regions as the highlands of Guatemala and Oaxaca, indigenous women and children in the Chiapas highlands did not participate in labor migrations. Culture in Chamula and its neighbors had long since adapted to the problem of protecting women during men’s migrations, perhaps all the way back to when men did

forced worked as bearers during the colonial period, by mandating that for the sake of modesty and to avoid offending the saints, women and children should avoid contact with – stay out of the reach of – outsiders. If there were no men from their families to accompany them, “decent” Chamula women of the early 1970s would not have considered going to a distant market, and would have thought twice about attending the market in the pueblo of Chamula itself. Going into the city without a chaperone would have been almost unthinkable. Given that in the recent past raids on hamlets by non-indigenous thieves were not uncommon during periods when everyone in the highlands knew that most men were away working, women also lived close to each other for mutual protection.¹⁵

The fact that women did not migrate, and that they were semi-sequestered, did not mean, however, that they were unable to do the physical chores assigned by the normative division of labor to men, or that they were submissive. On the contrary, during the extended periods when men were away, women were in charge of their households, responsible for making decisions and performing chores supposedly assigned by the division of labor strictly to men, among them attention to highland fields, at the least during emergencies caused by weather or pests, repairs to the walls and roofs of their

¹⁵ Traditionally, Chamula was virilocal, with young families building their houses near the man’s parents. When men were away, women looked to the senior woman in the house group, typically their mother-in-law, as the person who would speak to outsiders, make decisions and manage the family’s resources. Until the latest generation of adults, there were also strong taboos that had to be kept by wives while their husbands were away. So that her husband would not become sick and die, for example, a woman was forbidden to wash her hair or woolen clothing during his absence lest his anchoring “presence” in his home be attenuated. Of course, after a few weeks this also made women less attractive to other men.

houses, or maintenance of household altars. Although the rules of modesty tended to limit them to their households and hamlets, women in Ch'ul Osil and elsewhere in the highlands, especially senior women, exercised a fair degree of autonomy. Given the fact that they lived in a society of women roughly half the year, it could hardly have been otherwise.

The second adjustment to the old ethnographic image of the Chamulas and their neighbors is that men's normative preoccupation with religious offices and fiestas speaks to the periods when they were home – and perhaps to the times when ethnographers were actively watching them as well as to the ethnographers' own interests. But most men were home, a place of rest and relaxation, half the year or less – in many cases much less. Without diminishing the importance of religion, in terms of men's lives, of where and how they spent their time and what they thought about, conventional ethnography's emphasis on the time and energy spent on fiestas and the saints, and on the extent of men's knowledge of the sacred, to the virtual exclusion of their practical economic and political knowledge connected with lowland labor undoubtedly distorted their experience. Although it was often omitted from the “classic” ethnographic record,¹⁶ questioning of the men of Ch'ul Osil for the purposes of our surveys revealed sophisticated knowledge of price – and wage – trends in corn, beans, coffee and sugar; close knowledge of the

¹⁶ Exceptions in the highlands of Chiapas are the works of Ricardo Pozas (1952a and b), Frank Cancian (e.g., 1972), and Mercedes Olivera (1979). Recent publications (e.g., Lewis 2009) show that the findings of other anthropologists from the Instituto Nacional Indigenista that focused on labor organization and economic and political relations between indigenous people and Chiapas's elite during the 1950s were suppressed (e.g., de la Fuente 2009 (original: 1954-55.))

labor and land rental practices of scores of major planters; and a working knowledge of labor organizations, minimum wage laws, and the agrarian reform – and the implications of all these factors for the choices they had to make each year about where to work.¹⁷ Given the importance of this information to men’s ability to make a living, it could hardly have been otherwise.

This is not to say that the old normative description of life in Chamula and the surrounding municipios before the crises of the mid-1970s did not contain general truths. Men believed, or wanted to believe, that they were subsistence corn farmers, and if they ever inherited enough land, or were offered land by the government, many gave up migrating and became just that, full-time corn farmers. Similarly, the gendered division of labor, and women’s deference to men, were real. Although gender rules were more flexible and responsive to changing circumstances than appears from essentialized descriptions, women knew they risked rebuke if men were present and they appeared to flout the roles assigned to them, or too publicly challenged male authority. And finally, of course religious observance and ritual were fundamental to men’s and women’s daily lives. All of these cultural norms were about to be tested, however, and few, perhaps

¹⁷ Unfortunately, data to correct the older, normative ethnography came after the end of the “classic” period of ethnographic “community studies” in highland Chiapas from the 1950s through the early 1970s, and have never become the bases of a full holistic re-description and analysis of “community culture.” Instead, the reconsideration of local culture and its connection to economics and history has proceeded piecemeal since the 1980s, led by new studies of the role of women (e.g., Nash (1970), Rosenbaum (1993), Eber (1995)), of the influence of elite landowners and politicians on supposedly sovereign, “indigenous” political institutions (e.g., Wasserstrom (1983: 156-239), Rus (1994, 2004b), and of the struggles of indigenous people against the religious, political and economic repression both inside of their communities and in the larger society (Toledo (1996, 2002), Garza (2002), Bobrow (2007.)) For an overview, see Viqueira and Ruz (1995.)

none, were intact by the late 1990s.

The Crises Since the mid-1970s: Men's Responses

By the time of the first resurvey of Ch'ul Osil in 1987-88, the overall employment crisis in indigenous highland Chiapas was more than a decade old, and the depression that began in 1982 half a decade. People had already gone through several stages of adaptation. Our resurvey thus came several years into an on-going process. To recapitulate briefly community members' accounts of the years after 1976 when subsidies for corn farming were first reduced, lowland work for sharecroppers did not fall-off completely.¹⁸ But the chance to make a relatively good living sharecropping, to "get ahead," virtually disappeared. Through the mid-1970s, ambitious men from Ch'ul Osil and other highland communities had rented 3 hectares or more from lowland estates, and then borrowed money and hired crews in their home *municipios* to help cultivate their large fields. In one extraordinary case, a daring young man from Ch'ul Osil rented 27 hectares in 1974 and hired 17 full-time workers to farm them.

Two factors changed this panorama. First, as we saw in Chapter 1, with corn's profitability falling and cattle's rising, landowners wanted to use as much of their land as possible for cattle instead of corn. Accordingly, while in the past they had been willing to let indigenous sharecroppers clear land of chaparral and then cultivate it for up to four

¹⁸ Gómez Monte, D. Rus and Guzmán 1990; life history interview with Mateo M.A., Ch'ul Osil, 2 August 1989. (Note that Cancian (1987) and Collier (1987) reported similar changes to those described here in the Tzotzil municipio of Zinacantán during the 1970s and eighties, and Köhler (1987) in Chalchihuitán.) (See Nájera Aguirre and López Arévalo (nd) for a clear summary of Chiapas's agricultural decline from 1981 to 2007.)

years before taking it back and turning it into permanent pasture, now they cut those periods to three years, and in one reported case even two. Given the enormous outlay of labor necessary to clear virgin land, this made sharecropping much less profitable. And second, the interest charged on money borrowed from indigenous moneylenders – money that sharecroppers needed to buy seed, hire crews and get themselves through until they could sell their crops in the fall – doubled and in some cases quadrupled. In the past, money had been lent within communities at 5 to 10 percent simple interest a month. But late in the summer of 1976, Mexico devalued the peso by one third, the first devaluation in almost a quarter century, and then a few weeks later allowed it to float. By the end of the year, it was worth less than half of its pre-1976 value. In response, interest rates from lenders within communities surged from 5-10 percent to 15-20, meaning that over the course of a six to eight month season the lowest interest a borrower could pay would be 90-120 percent-- but that it could be as much as 120-160 percent. Meanwhile, corn prices were still controlled by the government and were only adjusted for the 28-30 percent annual inflation from 1976 to 1981 twice a year, at the end of June and the beginning of January. Sharecroppers who harvested in October were caught between inflation-depreciated prices if they sold right away, or two or three months more of high interest if they tried to hold their crops until January. One bad crop – or year of unexpectedly low prices – and a sharecropper might never get out of debt.

And then such a year happened. Relative to the good years through the first half of the 1970s, corn prices were low from 1978 on, and were to remain low through the 1980s. But in 1982 they fell through the floor, the price of corn even after adjustment for

inflation dipping to only 73 percent of what its value had been in the mid-1970s. To make matters worse, in 1982-83, many landowners, under financial pressure themselves, did not forgive a portion of their sharecroppers' rents as they had often done during bad years in the past. According to men in Ch'ul Osil, 1982 was the year that finally drove even many of the most determined of the old entrepreneurial sharecroppers out of corn farming. In 1983, many were for the first time in their lives unemployed.

Despite these decidedly negative circumstances, although corn sharecropping declined steeply in the late 1970s, and again in 1983, it did not disappear. A sharecropper and his sons who had remained free of debt could still feed a household with what they could plant and cultivate by themselves. If they had resources and could afford fertilizer and herbicides, they could also increase their yields on a given amount of land while decreasing the amount of labor they had to expend or hire. Most of all, they tried to avoid borrowing. As Table 2.5 shows, there were more sharecroppers in Ch'ul Osil in 1988 than 1974. Based on testimonies, the increase appears to have come in the second half of the decade, and with just a few exceptions, none of the sharecroppers were any longer planting more than they needed for their own use.¹⁹ Meanwhile, the absolute number of agricultural laborers, a category that had formerly meant mostly wage

¹⁹ Of the surviving men from the 1974 survey, 39 percent were lowland sharecroppers in 1988, vs. 53 percent of the 77 young men new to the 1988 survey were sharecroppers. Approximately one quarter of the "old survey" men who had left sharecropping in the late 1970s and early 80s never returned to it, while by the end of the 1980s it had again become a popular activity with young men. But of the "old" men sharecropping, 36 percent used chemical fertilizers and herbicides, versus only 17 percent among the young men. This suggests that the older men still sharecropping at the end of the 1980s were in general the more successful ones, many with resources from other activities, while by that same time there was again corn farming work for poorer, young men. We shall look more closely at the young sharecroppers below in the section on emigration.

Table 2.5: Numbers and Percentages of Ch’ul Osil Resident Male Household Heads Engaged in Various Economic Activities, 1974, 1988, 1998

	Own Cornfield	Sharecrop Cornfield	Coffee Plantation	Other Ag Wage Labor*	Other Wage Labor**	Alcohol Producer	Street Vendor	Flowers/ Vegetables
1974 (n=138)	110 79.7%	68 49%	55 40%	33 24%	6 4%	15 11%	1 1%	11 8%
1988*** (n=208)	159 76.4%	88 42%	25 12%	37 18%	35 17%	12 6%	28 13%	44 21%
1998 Residents*** (n=205)	154 75.1%	46 22%	0 0%	92 45%	27 13%	0 0%	27 13%	95 46%

*Includes working for lowland sharecroppers, for neighbors on highland cornfields and other crops, and for occasional sugar cane-cutting.

**Includes construction (“albañil”), vehicle driver, assistant to driver (fare-collector, loader), janitor, gardener, policeman.

***In 1988, as the text explains, it was not easy to define “permanent emigrants,” but the n=208 here includes approximately 40 heads who first lived outside the community in the 1980s, but were not defined as permanent emigrants until 1998. In the 1998 survey, there are 205 male household heads still resident in Ch’ul Osil, and 122 male heads firmly established outside of the municipio of Chamula.

laborers for sharecroppers, remained virtually the same in 1988 as 1974 despite the rising population: hardly anyone new entered this activity. By the end of the 1980s, in other words, there were more sharecroppers, but planting less land and not hiring extra workers. (The number of men working in “other agricultural wage labor” increased sharply in the 1990s (see Table 2.5, last line.) But by 1998 this no longer referred mostly to laborers for lowland sharecroppers from their same community in the highlands, but to workers in highland flower and vegetable fields, or to general day laborers in the Central Valleys – a tragic fate to which we shall return in the section below on emigration.)

If sharecropping corn had become a self-provisioning activity in the 1980s, with most participants having little expectation of sales for profit, the second most important

source of outside income for Ch'ul Osil's men, the winter coffee harvest near the Guatemalan border in the Soconusco and Sierra, all but closed out. From the planters' perspective, profitability had been undermined by declining world prices beginning in the mid-1970s, and by controls on foreign exchange that came in with the peso devaluations of 1976-77, leaving the "international" peso overvalued and forcing Mexican planters to cut prices even more to remain competitive. When refugees from Guatemala's civil war began fleeing into the coffee-growing region in ever larger numbers in 1980-81, the major planters eagerly gave them work at a fraction of what they had paid migrants from highland Chiapas. According to our Ch'ul Osil consultants, in 1982, unlike previous years, the labor contractors in San Cristóbal who worked for Soconusco and Sierra plantations, instead of hiring workers on staggered contracts for a month or two at a time throughout the season as they had in the past, stopped giving contracts, with their wage advances and transportation expenses, soon after the harvest began in October: no more highland workers were needed. Contracting for the southern plantations recovered somewhat from 1983 to 1988, although first to two thirds and then half of their 1970s levels. Worse was yet to come: with the collapse of the world coffee market in the summer of 1989, labor contracting in the highlands for the southern plantations, an important activity in San Cristóbal since the late nineteenth century, closed forever.

Before the 1980s, seasonal coffee labor in the Soconusco and Sierra had been an economic mainstay of 40 percent of Ch'ul Osil households. After many men missed the 1982-83 season altogether, the next year most found coffee-picking jobs on the small plantations of the foothills and lowlands north of the Central Highlands (see the map in

Chapter 1.) Work here had never been protected by contract. As a result, no transportation costs were provided, wage advances were modest and the wages themselves were less than on the major plantations of the south. But coffee workers were relieved to take what they could get, and by the time of coffee's final collapse in 1989, this is where all of Ch'ul Osil's diminishing number of coffee pickers were working (see Table 2.5.)

In sum, then, from the late 1970s through the late 1980s, work or pay – or both – in the major “outside” agricultural activities that had occupied the men of Ch'ul Osil through most of the twentieth century contracted sharply. With households to feed, and a large younger generation coming on, how did men and their families respond? (We shall discuss women's response in the next section.)

The first response was intensification, as we can see in the first and last columns in Table 2.5 (“own cornfield” and “flowers/vegetables,” both referring to crops grown on family-owned land in the highlands): families fell back on land and resources under their own control, or activities like artisan production that they could conduct without depending on outside inputs. In the case of men, for several years after 1983 this meant planting every available piece of ground in the vicinity of their houses with corn. As Table 2.6 illustrates, the total area in corn in Ch'ul Osil increased from 33.9 hectares in 1974 to 69.5 in 1988, when corn was grown even in the strips between houses and the patches around fruit trees. According to our consultants, the amount of land in corn had been even greater between 1983 and 1986, before men began shifting from corn to flowers and vegetables that would fetch a higher price per hectare cultivated. By 1998, the amount of land in corn had declined even farther, falling back almost to 1974 levels

Table 2.6: Area Planted in Corn per Household on Ch'ul Osil Land

Number of Hectares	Number of Households:		
	1974	1988	1998
3+	0	2	0
1 - 2.99	3	11	10
.5 - .99	26	48	22
.25 - .49	46	57	39
.125 - .24	4	4	87
.125>	31	28	10
Total Households	110	150	168*
Total Fields	105	173	166
Total Area	33.9 hect.	69.5 hect.	40.7 hect.
Avg Field Size	.32 hect.	.40 hect.	.25 hect.

*(1) The figure for households farming highland corn in this table do not match those of men farming their own land in Table 2.5 because of ambiguities about whether young husbands farming with their fathers should be counted as separate households or not. In 1988 they were not so counted, and in 1998 they were. The household figures are thus indicative, but not precisely comparable. The numbers of fields and hectares are, however, comparable for all three periods.

(2) The number of fields is less than the total of men's and women's fields in Table 2.12 for reasons that are explained in the notes to that table.

(see Table 2.5, bottom line, and Table 2.6), while the number of households dependent on flower and vegetable growing had more than doubled. The profitability, at least for a while, of flower and vegetable growing in the highlands accounts, again, for the revival of agricultural wage labor among Ch'ul Osil resident household heads in 1998: more than half of highland-based agricultural laborers were by this time working for their horticulturalist neighbors in local fields, or in greenhouses in the neighboring *municipio* of Zinacantán.

The other two activities that increased significantly during the crisis years of the 1980s were non-agricultural wage labor and street vending. In both cases, these were activities favored by younger men new to the work force, and generally more comfortable in Spanish than their elders. Some of the non-agricultural wage work was still based in

the *municipio* of Chamula – for example, working as a driver or helper in a truck or passenger van – and thus did not represent major changes in families’ lives. Indeed, through the 1980s, even the most geographically distant, disruptive jobs were almost all in the informal sector – pushing a popsicle cart, for example, or working as *media-cucharas* (hod carriers) – work that did not require permanent absence from Ch’ul Osil. So while some men might rent a room and stay in the city for several weeks at a time to be near their work, their families could remain in their homes in the countryside.

As time went on, however, both non-agricultural wage work and street vending tended to pull men into the city, and then into migration away from Ch’ul Osil and the rural milieu altogether (as we shall see in Chapters 5 and 6.) Although the *number* of men in these two categories was not much different in 1998 from 1988, from testimonies it is clear by the late 1990s many of the wage workers and vendors included men who stayed for long periods in cities outside of the highlands. Of the 27 “vendors” still counted as resident in the community in 1998, for example, eight had acquired market stalls or semi-permanent *puestos* in the plazas and on the sidewalks of cities from Tuxtla Gutiérrez to Palenque and Villahermosa (versus only 1 in 1988) – stalls that, with short breaks to visit their families in Ch’ul Osil, they occupied most of the time (see Chapter 5, Tables 5.7, 5.8 and 5.9.) Like the seasonal agricultural migrants of the past, such men struggled to keep their families in Ch’ul Osil, to provide for them a “traditional” Tzotzil life. But their absences were longer, and if it is possible, their lives and those of their wives and families tended to become even more separate from each other than had been the case with the old agricultural migrants. (As we shall see below in the section on

emigration, having a *puesto* or stall eventually pulled many men – and some couples – away from Ch’ul Osil permanently.)

Finally, the last general trend of note – and one for which the data are only anecdotal – is that as work in general became harder to find and more precarious, many families borrowed money. The sharecroppers who lost their stake during the downturn in corn prices in 1982 have already been mentioned. Others borrowed to plant vegetables and flowers, and still others to finance job searches in San Cristóbal and other cities. Still a last group, thinking, according to testimonies, that the downturn would be short-lived, borrowed money simply for living expenses. To borrow in Chamula, one has to put up collateral – land, animals, a house – and the stories are that many poorer families lost their small footholds in the community in the 1980s as a result of not being able to repay loans. Our consultants told stories of specific families that left Ch’ul Osil permanently following the loss of their land and houses. In the past, most “commercial” borrowing, particularly of the kind that led to loss of collateral, was with moneylenders in Chamula’s *cabecera*, or head town. But during the crisis, there was also a significant amount of borrowing followed by foreclosure within Ch’ul Osil itself. One clear effect of this is the concentration of land in the hands of a few families that had more liquid capital than their neighbors at the beginning of the crises – even though originally it may not have been much more. As Table 2.6 shows, in a community where only 3 households had been able to farm more than one hectare of their own corn in the highlands in 1974, by 1988 there were 13. By 1998, in addition to the 10 shown in the table planting more than one hectare of highland corn, there were 9 more not shown in the chart who cultivated up to

three hectares of vegetables and/or flowers. Meanwhile, although the total number of highland farmers increased only moderately from 1988 to 1998, the number of households resident in Ch'ul Osil planting only minimal amounts of land – less than .12 hectare – doubled, and the number with no fields at all increased from 28 in 1974, to 41 in 1988, to 64 in 1998.²⁰ Even as population increased and the average land available per household necessarily declined, in other words, better-off households were inexorably capturing larger shares of the land available.

A second effect of borrowing and foreclosure, not surprisingly, was a simmering estrangement between families of lenders and borrowers, particularly the relatives of borrowers who had lost inherited family land and been forced to leave. As we shall see in Chapter 3, the growing inequality of these years, and the resentment it caused, was one cause of Chamula's increasingly factionalized, violent politics from the 1970s on.

The Crises Since the mid-1970s: Women's Responses

By the time of the deepest crisis in men's employment, 1983-84, a handful of women in Ch'ul Osil had already been doing embroidery piecework for a clothes designer in San Cristóbal since 1976. Never many, 12-15 at most, for a few hours every week they applied assigned adornments to blouses, skirts and jackets for sale to San Cristóbal's modest flow of tourists and for export to the U.S. Meanwhile, in surrounding *municipios* during the same period, there was a revival of traditional brocaded, naturally dyed *huipils*, or traditional blouses, for sale through cooperatives sponsored by the

²⁰ The number of landless households was calculated by subtracting households with land in Table 2.6 from total families in 2.13

national government in what was already a growing market in North America and Europe for indigenous art. When men's livelihoods collapsed, these trends came together with a third, the diversion of cultural tourism from the Maya highlands of Guatemala to the neighboring highlands of Chiapas caused by the Guatemalan civil war. By the winter and spring of 1983, the growing demand for indigenous women's weaving and embroidery in San Cristóbal, the infrastructure that had been developed to commercialize indigenous art, and the suddenly urgent need for income in the communities of seasonal agricultural workers in the mountains surrounding the city combined to touch off a boom in artisan production that has never abated (Morris 1991.)

No one remembers exactly when Ch'ul Osil women began selling artisan products in the streets and plazas of San Cristóbal, but testimonies focus on that first winter and spring of men's unemployment, 1983. The first merchandise consisted of small pottery objects (clay dolls, small, plain pots) and woolen goods that Chamula women had always made for their own families (sleeved ponchos for men called *xaketail*, "jackets," and small shawls.) Although authentic, these goods had only moderate acceptance in the market. Within a year, however, the women who had been embroidering pre-made blouses and skirts began embroidering traditional Chamula clothing as well, particularly cotton blouses. The new style took off, first as a tourist good, and then as clothing for the women of Chamula themselves. By 2008, virtually all Chamula women wear cotton blouses with fancy embroidering around the neck and arms -- and cover their mouths with the palms of their hands and laugh at pictures of the plain cotton and woolen clothing they wore just 25 years ago.

During the first months of this new commerce, in late 1982 and early 1983, women took their own products to the city, traveling in small groups for safety, often with their older children. Already by the summer of 1983, however, they had begun to coalesce into mutual aid communes, taking turns carrying the group's goods to the city. (Chapter 4 will discuss the organizational history of these groups in more detail.)

Meanwhile, husbands, after first resenting and even disrupting their wives' participation in the artisan market (destroying their products, for instance), came to recognize by the end of 1983 that since they had little other work, perhaps they too should help with the commercialization.²¹ By the second half of the 1980s, most of the men working as street vendors, *ambulantes*, in Table 2.5 were actually selling their own families' artisan products – a fact which perhaps explains why for the time being they remained rooted in Ch'ul Osil, where their merchandise was produced by their wives, mothers and sisters, rather than drifting into more or less permanent residence in the city as itinerant vendors of most other products tended to do.

In 1974, as Table 2.7 demonstrates, Wasserstrom found only one woman in Ch'ul Osil making money from textiles – a fact confirmed by oral histories. By 1988, however, as can be seen in the table's last column, 36 percent of the women in Ch'ul Osil were producing artisan goods for sale. As the table also demonstrates, in 1988 some were still making the transition from weaving traditional wool garments for sale (which still occupied 9 percent of them), while others were transitioning from embroidering their

²¹ Men and women later agreed that in addition to men's worries about the dangers women faced when they carried products to the city, and their distress at the taboos this violated, they were also unhappy that while they were unemployed their wives were now handling most of the family's income

Table 2.7: Numbers and Percentages of Women Engaged in Weaving and Embroidering for Sale 1974, 1988, 1998

	Traditional Wool Weaving	Embroidery, Tourist Goods	Embroidery, Maquila (Piece Work)	Spinning Yarn for Others	Total Artisan Work
1974					
(n=138*)	1 .7%	0 0	0 0	nd nd	1 .7%
1988 Residents					
(n=192**)	17 9%	31 16%	52 27%	4 3%	69 36%
1998 Residents					
(n=312)	13 4%	22 7%	110 35%	9 3%	138 44%
1988 Emigrants					
(n=22)	1 <1%	2 9%	3 27%	1 3%	6 41%
1998 Emigrants					
(n=127)	0 0	6 5%	9 7%	3 2%	10 8%

*This is the number of households, not the number of women.

** On this and subsequent lines, n = number of women for whom data are available

own tourist goods to full-time piece work. By 1998, this last form of production predominated, with 110 of 312 women, 35 percent, working essentially full-time as embroiderers on manufactured goods. Called *maquila*, under this arrangement the unfinished garments were delivered to them in bulk, and then they returned the embroidered goods to the contractor or industrialist for a payment per piece which, when we made the calculations in 1998, worked out for most women to approximately US\$ 1.20 for a day of 10 hours of embroidering. Only the fastest workers could hope to make as much as US\$ 1.50. After almost fifteen years of full-time embroidering by that point, many of the women complained of blurred vision, of having to work into the night with

25-watt bulbs to finish their quotas, and of the loss of the freedom to move around during the day and do different jobs that they had in the past.

Exploitive and constraining as embroidery piece work was, however, by 2010 the women of Ch'ul Osil and a handful of other hamlets who started the industry in the early 1980s had been joined by hundreds, perhaps thousands, of indigenous women from throughout the highlands with no other source of income than embroidering. By now, their work decorated not only blouses and jackets, but pajamas, tee shirts, pillows, and – a new garment in 2009 that women asked us to explain to them -- bikinis. With the price of industrial embroidering driven down by these numbers of workers to levels even below those of the late 1990s (in absolute, and even more in inflation-adjusted terms) – approximately US\$ 1.00 a day – many of the best embroiderers in Ch'ul Osil have abandoned *maquila* and gone back to full-time work on indigenous Chamula clothing. This they market directly to tourists on the streets of San Cristóbal – or, through *ambulantes*, to foreigners at tourist destinations all over Mexico, from Cancún in Yucatán, to Rosarito in Baja California. The pay is less certain than piecework, and fluctuates unpredictably with tourism. But at current rates of pay, piecework has become untenable. (In Table 2.8, the two categories of embroiderers shown in Table 2.7 for 1998 are consolidated, and then broken down by age group. As the table shows, well more than half of the 119 embroiderers are in their childbearing years – mothers 21-40. If there were a chart comparing men's and women's activities, it would further show that a very large percentage of these women who embroidered full time to help feed their families were the wives of men who were absent from the community for reasons of

Table 2.8: Numbers and Percentages of Women Embroiderers Resident in Ch’ul Osil, by Ten-Year Age Cohorts, 1998

Age (birth year)	Number of Women	Number Doing Paid Embroidery	Percentage of Embroiderers.
15-20 (1978-1984)	40	7	18%
21-30 (1968-1977)	91	43	47%
31-40 (1958-1967)	66	28	42%
41-50 (1948-1957)	63	23	37%
51-60 (1938-1947)	20	8	36%
61-70 (1928-1937)	15	4	27%
71-80 (1918-1927)	13	4	30%
81+ (<1917)	4	2	50%
Total	312	119	38%

work – wage laborers, sharecroppers, and in more recent years, undocumented workers in the United States. These are women struggling to feed their children with their work.)

Meanwhile, at the same time women were developing artisan production into a new source of income after 1982, during those desperate years immediately following the economic collapse they also attempted to squeeze as much as possible out of older, more traditional activities. Women in Chamula, for example, had always kept small flocks of sheep for their wool.²² After having declined for many years as some items of woolen clothing (e.g., men’s shirts, ponchos for boys) went out of fashion, the hamlet’s total flock grew rapidly following the crises of 1976 and 1982, as Table 2.9 shows. In addition to wanting wool to clothe their families and for their new artisan projects,

²² Pozas (1977: v.2: 251-254) gives Chamula’s total flock in 1940, when the population was 16,010, as 35,163, so for each family of 5 there would have been approximately 11 sheep.

Table 2.9: Traditional Women’s Occupation: Sheepraising.

Year	Percentage of Households with Sheep	Number of Sheep per Household	Total Sheep
1974	45% (63 of 138)	7.6	478
1988	60% (154 of 246)	7.0	1078
1996	34% (79 of 232*)	7.4	585

*205 headed by men, 27 headed by women.

increasing numbers of women also tried selling it during the 1980s, as can be seen in Table 2.10. By the late 1990s, however, as women invested ever more of their time in embroidering tourist goods instead of making clothes for their families, used clothing that arrived in bales from the developed world began to replace all traditional Chamula men’s wear except for one outfit for formal occasions. Accordingly, demand for wool fell, and the numbers of sheep declined in the 1990s as fast as they had risen in the 1980s.

Other intensification adaptations that became sources of income in the 1980s, as Table 2.10 illustrates, were a series of traditional gathering activities and artisan skills that women had always performed, although usually only for their own households. These included, in addition to selling wool, collection and sale of compost and *juncia* (the first refers to forest mulch, the second to a pine needle floor covering used in both indigenous and Ladino homes in highland Chiapas for fiestas), splitting and selling firewood, and pottery making. Of these, firewood vending is perhaps emblematic of the tragedy of women’s attempts to monetize their traditional work in general. Beginning at dawn, women who sell firewood spend two to three hours sawing into sections the trunks of trees felled by male relatives, and then splitting them into the thin 18 inch sticks used in cooking fires. These are then bundled into 30-40 pound loads and carried by

**Table 2.10: Other New Paid Activities for Women
1974, 1988, 1998**

	<u>Traditional Curer/Shaman</u>	<u>Compost, Juncia</u>	<u>Selling Wool</u>	<u>Pottery- Making</u>	<u>Selling Firewood</u>	<u>Store Owner</u>	<u>Fixed Point Vendors</u>	<u>Money- Lending</u>
1974								
(n=138*)	nd	nd	7	1	6	0	nd	nd
	--	--	5%	<1%	4%	0	--	--
1988 Residents								
(n=192)	21	12	35	5	42	6	4	1
	11%	6%	18%	3%	22%	3%	2%	<1%
1998 Residents								
(n=312)	23	0	11	1	58	10	19	1
	7%	0	4%	<1%	19%	3%	6%	<1%
1988 Emigrants								
(n=22)	3	0	0	1	0	nd	1	nd
	14%	0	0	5%	0	--	5%	--
1998 Emigrants								
(n=127)	2	0	0	0	0	nd	8	nd
	2%	0	0	0	0	--	6%	--

*Diane Rus conducted historical interviews to elicit data for 1974; findings should be considered tentative.

tumpline to markets in the pueblos of Zinacantán or Chamula, both an hour walk from Ch’ul Osil. The pay in 1998 for the entire 5-6 hours of work, including the walk home from the market? US\$.50. *Juncia* and compost, sold for the most part to Ladinos, pay equally badly. Despite this, almost 60 women were doing these two gathering and peddling jobs in 1988 and 1998, most, not surprisingly, from the poorest households in the community, many of them female-headed.

Women who founded small stores, in every case in Ch’ul Osil just a table in the doorway of their houses with a few soft drinks, cookies, perhaps matches and some vegetables, made little more. But on the good side, they could “tend” their stores while

embroidering, adding the equivalent of US\$.10 to .25 per day to their incomes. Women curers were equally modestly paid, and might only be hired to pray over an ill person once a week or less.

Finally, the last of the new activities in Table 2.10, “fixed point vendors,” refers to street vendors who have established semi-permanent sites in markets and on urban sidewalks. Although Ch’ul Osil women began selling goods in San Cristóbal’s plazas in the 1980s, as of 1998 there were no fulltime female itinerant street peddlers corresponding to the male popsicle and artisan sellers (by 2010 this is no longer true.) Among 1998 residents, however, there were three women who regularly sold in the artisan market in Chamula; twelve who sold artisan goods with their husbands from taxed street posts²³ in San Cristóbal, and one more in Palenque; and three who operated flower or vegetable stands in San Cristóbal. Among the husband and wife pairs in particular, some of these vendors were among the higher earning residents. Two couples made as much as US\$ 1,200 per year. The rest made US\$ 800/year or less – half of them, much less.

With the exception of the two women who participated in artisan sales with their husbands, none of the women’s occupations described above were really viable “jobs” except in the context of the deep depression from the early 1980s to 1998 when even a small amount of extra money could help a family with its daily tortillas.

Beyond the intensification – and monetization – of “traditional” women’s activities, as households began doing more farming without hiring non-family members, particularly in the highlands, women increasingly worked alongside their husbands in the

²³ In areas where street vendors have “fixed” spaces, they pay a “derecho de plaza” to the city.

**Table 2.11: Percentage of Women Engaged in Agricultural Work
1988, 1998**

	Own Cornfield	Sharecrop Cornfield	Ag. Wage Labor	Flowers/ Vegetables	Total Ag. Labor.
1988 Residents (n=192)	35 18%	19 10%	8 4%	10 5%	46 24%
1998 Residents (n=312)	100 32%	6 2%	13 4%	16 5	116 37%
1988 Emigrants (n=22)	3 14%	7 32%	0 0	0 0	9 41%
1998 Emigrants (n=110)	17 15%	28 25%	13 12%	6 5%	33 30%

various crops – corn, vegetables and flowers. Older community members say this was also the custom *ati vo'ne*, in the old days, in periods when men could not find full-time migratory labor (it appears that this was last true during the period immediately following World War II.) From expressly *not* helping their husbands in their corn fields through the 1970s (although as we saw earlier, women did do men's work when men were absent), by 1988 women were not only aiding men their highland fields, but working with them in sharecropped corn in the Central Valleys as well. More than that, as Table 2.11 demonstrates, by 1988 four percent of the women in the Ch'ul Osil sample were working as agricultural wage laborers themselves. Our community associates agreed that many men in Ch'ul Osil would by that point hire a woman to hoe and help with the harvest as readily as they would hire a man, in part because the standard wage for a woman was a little more than half that of a man. Perhaps equally important, however, was that the

women available in Ch'ul Osil were often more reliable than the remaining men willing to do day-to-day agricultural labor. Workers were usually paid in corn for work in the highlands, but if they asked for money a man received US\$ 2.00/day (again, less than the minimum wage of approximately US\$ 3.00), while women were paid US\$ 1.00/day.

Finally, in Table 2.11, note the significant decrease in the number of resident women who were accompanying their husbands to the lowlands to do sharecropping between 1988 and 1998, and the concomitant rise in the number of women who were taking care of their own cornfields in the highlands (see also Table 2.12.) This shift in women's agricultural work was a reciprocal of the change in men's labor between 1988 and 1998 which is hidden in the categories in Table 2.5. What was happening was that as men resident in Ch'ul Osil pulled out of lowland sharecropping between 1988 and 1998 (a decline by half, 42 percent to 22 percent -- from 88 men to 46), many threw themselves into intensified highland vegetable and flower growing and used their former highland corn lands for that purpose. Meanwhile, although the numbers of men who worked as street vendors and non-agricultural wage laborers did not increase from 1988 to 1998, over that decade those who did these jobs were drawn farther and farther into at least part-time residence in urban places. As their absences from Ch'ul Osil become longer and less predictable, their wives were increasingly pressed into taking over highland farming chores that through the 1970s had been the exclusive province of men.

In terms of the old division of labor, perhaps the most remarkable shift of all is that demonstrated in Table 2.12 from exclusively male cultivation and management of a household's highland fields to an increasingly equal role for women. This was the clear

Table 2.12: Number of Highland Cornfields Cultivated by Men versus Women*

	1974	1988	1998
Men's fields	110	159	130
Women's fields	(1)	35	99
Percent women	<1%	18.0%	43.2%

*The numbers of men's + women's fields in this table is greater than the total numbers of fields in Table 2.6 (e.g., for 1998, 130 + 99 = 229 vs. a total of 166 in Table 2.6.) The explanation is that our assistants disagreed firmly about who was the primary keeper of particular fields, and as a result some fields were counted twice, as belonging to both a man and a woman. Even some wives and husbands disagreed about who took primary responsibility. The important point about this dissonance, and about Table 2.12, is that the trend line for women's fields is clearly up since 1988, and men's down.

trend in 1998. Although we have not completely resurveyed Ch'ul Osil since then, according to testimonies the change-over has now come to pass: most highland corn farming in Ch'ul Osil today is reportedly done by women. This is not, however, an empowering shift but a pathetic one. Already in 1998, as Tables 2.11 and 2.6 suggest, as fields were becoming women's they were shrinking in size. As Chapter 5 argues, since 2000 men have been increasingly drawn – or forced, depending on one's perspective – into long distance labor migrations, not just to the United States, but to labor sites on the Gulf Coast and in Central and Northern Mexico. As a result, wives are more and more left home alone to take care of their children and do alone everything that used to be done by couples.

Emigration

Packed tightly together, Chamula and the other Tzotzil and Tzeltal *municipios* of the Central Highlands enclose relatively small arable territories that were already straining the limits of self-sufficient agriculture early in the nineteenth century. In fact,

Chiapas's leading historical demographer has concluded that most of the region's communities had achieved equilibrium between their populations and the number of people they could support from their own lands by 1820 (Viqueira 2008.) From then until the end of the century they were forced in each generation to shed population through emigration to maintain this equilibrium. Only with the arrival of lowland plantations in the 1880s, and with them the possibility of feeding themselves from work outside of their own spaces, did the populations of the highland *municipios* again begin to grow.

Given the steady increase in their numbers from the turn of the twentieth century on, for a rural population, the people of the highland *municipios* had by the 1970s become quite densely packed. With the decline of plantation agriculture since then, emigration, in abeyance in the region for almost eighty years, reasserted itself with a vengeance. In the case of Ch'ul Osil, more than one third of the descendants of people who had lived in the community in 1974 had moved somewhere else by 1998 (Table 2.13). From testimonies, these departures appear to have come in well-defined stages as different groups within the community responded to the deteriorating economic conditions.

(1) The first to leave, beginning immediately after the 1974 survey, were not the most desperate economically – in fact, they were only indirectly victims of the economic crises. Rather, they were households caught up in the violent expulsion of Protestant and liberationist Catholic political dissidents that started in November, 1974 (see Chapter 3.) Some ten young Ch'ul Osil couples, all with bilingual and in some cases literate husbands, were caught up in these purges and those that followed over the next five and a

**Table 2.13: Population of Ch’ul Osil, Residents vs. Emigrants
1974, 1988, 1998**

	1974	1988	1998*
Households: Resident	138	191	232
Emigrant	-	[40]	121
Individuals: Resident	690	955	1160
Emigrant	-	200	605

*Men headed 205 of the resident households in 1998, women 27; men headed 118 of the emigrant households, women 3.

half years. Their first offense was the ambition to participate in new commercial opportunities (especially stores and trucks) that had become available to Chamula’s political elite beginning in the 1960s. But in banding together to claim a share of these new activities, they challenged the elite’s political hegemony, and for that they were exiled. A handful, five families, settled with the first wave of Chamula migrants to San Cristóbal in the mid-1970s (see Chapter 6.) By the early 1980s, the other five families had become homesteaders in *nuevas colonias agrícolas* (“new agrarian colonies”) founded and underwritten by their churches on “national lands” (*terrenos nacionales*) in the Chimalapas rain forest along Chiapas’s western border with the state of Oaxaca. Having converted to Protestantism in the course of their political and economic struggle, these families, although exiled, and by some reviled, nevertheless maintained contact with their relatives in Ch’ul Osil, and eventually became the vanguard of Ch’ul Osil descendants to migrate as undocumented workers to the United States (see Chapter 5.)

(2) If the first group of emigrants, the *expulsados*, were forced to leave for complicated political, economic and religious reasons, the second group of twenty families, who emigrated between 1983 and 1988, were men who had found non-

Table 2.14: Numbers and Percentages of Men Engaged in Various Economic Activities in 1998, Ch'ul Osil Residents vs Emigrants

	Own Cornfield	Sharecrop Cornfield	Coffee Plantation	Other Ag Wage Labor*	Other Wage Labor**	Alcohol Producer	Street Vendor	Flowers/ Vegetables
1998								
Residents (n=205 ⁽¹⁾)	154 75.1%	46 22.4%	0	92 44.9%	27 13.2%	0	27 13.2%	95 46.3%
1998								
Emigrants (n=132 ⁽²⁾)	29 22.0%	49 37.1%	0	17 12.9%	17 12.9%	0	12 9.1%	10 7.5%

*Includes working in greenhouses in Zinacantán, for neighbors in highland corn, vegetables and flowers, and for lowland landowners and share-croppers.

**Includes vehicle drivers, assistants to drivers (fare-collectors, loaders), janitors, gardeners, and six federal soldiers or state policemen.

(1) NB: The 1998 residents are still doing 2.15 jobs/man, almost exactly the same number as in 1974, whereas the emigrants have specialized and are doing almost exactly 1 job/man.)

(2) Includes 116 heads of household, 16 unmarried young adult males.

traditional jobs within a year or two of the 1982 crisis, and who for several years thereafter moved back and forth between the home community and the “outside” for reasons of work. The largest group of these were street vendors. At first they peddled popsicles and candy, but by the latter part of the period many had shifted to selling their wives’ and neighbors’ artisan products in such tourist centers as Villahermosa, Palenque and Cancún. As Table 2.14 shows, in 1998 most peddlers continued to be based in Ch’ul Osil. Of the twelve who had become permanent emigrants, only three were still itinerant street peddlers: five had relocated permanently to tourist centers, where several now owned artisan stalls (and hired migrant salespeople whose families remained in Ch’ul Osil), three owned stalls in the market of San Cristóbal, and one more had a stall in the nearby Ladino town of Teopisca. All but two of these emigrants made less than US\$ 700

of profit a year from sales in 1998. But those last two, with their wives, appear to have earned more than US\$ 2000 per family, and had become examples to all of the opportunities that lay outside of the traditional community.

During the same years that street peddlers were testing life in cities, three male household heads tried homesteading land and planting coffee in the Lacandón forest. They left Ch'ul Osil in 1984, and although they returned every two or three months to visit their families, they were essentially emigrants until the world coffee market collapsed in 1989. This collapse radicalized many in the jungle and was an immediate cause of the 1994 Zapatista rebellion (see Rus, Hernández, and Mattiace, 2003: 11-15.) All of the Ch'ul Osil migrants, however, abandoned their *cafetales* and returned to the highlands empty-handed just as their first crop, now worthless, ripened in 1989.

Both of these groups, the street vendors and the homesteaders, were still coming back to Ch'ul Osil every year to celebrate *Todos Santos* at the time of the 1988 survey, so for their neighbors their status as emigrants was ambiguous: they no longer lived full time in the community, but they did participate in its ritual life. Only their later decisions about where to reside with their families determined whether their neighbors in retrospect considered them “permanent” emigrants in the 1980s or not.

(3) and (4) The two largest groups of emigrants left Ch'ul Osil for the Central Valleys during the second half of the 1980s, and especially after 1990. By the end of the nineties, most were employed in corn farming, but there the similarity between them ends.

The first, larger and poorer category, consisted of mostly young families with no

land in Ch'ul Osil – not even a house site – and with little prospect of ever being more than laborers for their neighbors if they stayed in the highlands. All eleven of the emigrant agricultural wage laborers in Table 2.14 are in this category, but so are almost half of the 49 emigrant sharecroppers: 18 sharecrop less than half a hectare, four others between one half and one hectare. Their real jobs were working as laborers for the landowners where they had been given small plots to sharecrop. Even many of the 29 emigrants categorized as farming their own land are little more than agricultural day laborers: 12 of those in this category planted one half hectare or less of their own land -- 7 much less -- all of it in Ch'ul Osil. Such men were actually reverse migrant laborers who lived outside of the community, but commuted back to it several times a year to cultivate a tiny plot of corn. In all, of the 132 emigrant adult males, 116 of them household heads, 45, all heads, were essentially lowland agricultural laborers.

The economic situation of this new class of emigrant lowland laborers can only be described as distressed. Adjusted annually for inflation, through the 1990s the federally-set rural minimum wage in Chiapas always returned for a little while each year to approximately US\$ 3.00/day (Aguirre Botello 2005.) But away from the best coffee plantations, agricultural workers were never paid that much. In most of the state, men who earned a money wage of US\$ 2.00/day in 1998 considered they were doing well. From our survey, Ch'ul Osil's emigrant corn workers received 1.50. As dire as that sounds, their living conditions were even worse. In the past, migrant laborers from Ch'ul Osil had spent more than half of the year away from the highlands in order to provide a life for their families in their home community. But 33 of these 45 family heads were

Table 2.15: Percentage of Emigrant Women Engaged in Agricultural Work 1988, 1998

	Own Cornfield	Sharecrop Cornfield	Ag. Wage Labor	Flowers/ Vegetables	Total Ag. Labor.
1988 Emigrants (n=22)	3 14%	7 32%	0 0	0 0	9 41%
1998 Emigrants (n=110)	17 15%	28 25%	13 12%	6 5%	33 30%

classified as emigrants precisely because they were not able to earn enough from their labor to maintain households in the highlands and travel back and forth from the lowlands to visit them.²⁴ Instead, they brought their wives and children with them to the lowlands, where they lived in clusters of improvised shelters around the big towns in the corn belt (particularly Villacorzo, Villaflores, and Concordia – all in the Frailesca region of the map in Chapter 1) and at major crossroads, behind gasoline stations. Forced to look for work a week, or even a day or two, at a time, they also reportedly experienced many days without work. According to our assistants, their children spent their days in the fields with them instead of attending school. Certainly their wives also worked: as Table 2.15 demonstrates, 28 of 110 women emigrants were working alongside their sharecropping husbands in 1998, and 13 more as agricultural wage laborers. The typical wage for a woman in the lowlands was up to US\$ 1.00 a day.

Perhaps the saddest part of the deterioration of conditions for Ch’ul Osil’s

²⁴ The other twelve – the same twelve who planted small fields in Ch’ul Osil – were residents of San Cristóbal’s colonias, mostly expelled Protestants, who regained access to their inherited lands in the late 1990s

lowland corn laborers from the mid-1980s on was that unlike earlier decades, most of the landowners who employed them were no longer their neighbors who were sharecroppers, and most of the land they worked no longer belonged to large private farms. Instead, they now worked for *ejidatarios* -- other poor rural people who had taken the land over through agrarian reform. *Ejido* (agrarian reform commune) holdings increased greatly in the Central Valleys after the early 1980s as government programs offered large landowners compensation in return for shedding lands that were no longer profitable. The amount of land held by *ejidos* jumped again after 1994, when vast tracts of the lowlands were invaded in the wake of the Zapatista Rebellion and eventually came into the hands of peasant communities (see Villafuerte Solís et al. 2002.) So the emigrant Ch'ul Osil agricultural laborers were more often than not working day-to-day for other peasants. Forced by necessity to leave Chamula, they and their families had moved into the bottom of a new, deracinated rural labor force of the Central Valleys.

It must be noted that of the 92 agricultural wage laborers shown in Table 2.14 who were still resident in Ch'ul Osil in 1998, at least 60 performed essentially the same work as the emigrants who lived in lowland shantytowns. They too were itinerant lowland corn workers. The difference was that as of 1998 they, along with their wives, many of whom were full-time embroiderers, had not yet given up the struggle to maintain their families in Ch'ul Osil. But they were balanced on the knife edge of having to leave.

The second, better-off category of lowland corn farming emigrants included the households of eight men who in the wake of the 1994 Zapatista Rebellion were invited to join new *ejidos* formed on invaded estates and national lands at the far eastern and

southern edges of the Central Valleys, and fifteen households more of entrepreneurial sharecroppers who in the late 1990s had again begun to rent lowland fields – often from the same neighbors who had been favored with large tracts of *ejido* land. Each of these subgroups merits attention.

The members of the new, post-1994 *ejidos* were for the most men in their late thirties or older who were already relatively prosperous. Given the radicalism of the groups that participated in the 1994 land invasions, when the government began indemnifying the former owners and providing titles to peasant groups it attempted to create at least some loyal PRI *ejidos* (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, the government party) in the affected regions. Thus in the case of Ch’ul Osil, following the 1994 state and federal elections, 20 loyal PRI supporters were invited to join a new *ejido* in the municipio of Villacorzo, more than 120 road miles from Chamula.²⁵ In addition to receiving 10 hectares apiece, they were offered financing for their crops and help to build new houses and a school. Within a year, the community of “Nuevo San Juan Chamula” had taken shape. By 1998, however, only eight of the twenty invitees lived full time on their new land; six others had left sons to manage their lands and remained in Ch’ul Osil or traveled back and forth during the growing season as they had always done in the past. The last six kept houses in the new *ejido*, but neither farmed the land nor lived in the houses. In fact, only four of the *ejidatarios* or their families used all or most of their

²⁵ Ironically, the gift of *ejido* land was meant as a pay-off for loyalty during the bitter, post-rebellion 1994 elections – but then the very loyalists from throughout Chamula who had helped keep the municipio in PRI hands were rewarded in a way that removed many of them from Chamula for all future elections. Meanwhile, their former neighbors who stayed behind were left with even more bitter feelings about the PRI.

land. The rest rented their land out and used the income to become moneylenders, buy vehicles, or finance petty commerce.

The fifteen new entrepreneurial sharecroppers of the late 1990s, meanwhile – those who rented more than five hectares with the intention of selling a large part of the harvest -- all rented from members of the “Nuevo San Juan” *ejido* who were their neighbors in Ch’ul Osil and in several cases their relatives. Part of what made sharecropping profitable for them was that their landlords gave them more favorable, reliable terms than the large ladino landowners for whom the last generation of entrepreneurial sharecroppers had worked at the start of the 1980s. In fact, the two sides were more like partners, one supplying land, the other labor, and sharing the risk.

(5) Finally, the last class of expatriates are a small number of “retired,” and especially widowed parents and grandparents who left during the 1990s to join emigrant

**Table 2.16: Resident versus Emigrant Adults* in 1998,
By Ten Year Age Cohorts**

Age Cohort (birth year)	Total	Resident	Emigrant	% of Cohort Emigrated
15-20 (1978-1984*)	105	83	22	21%
21-30 (1968-1977)	225	154	71	32%
31-40 (1958-1967)	184	106	78	42%
41-50 (1948-1957)	149	108	41	28%
51-60 (1938-1947)	71	45	26	37%
61-70 (1928-1937)	31	26	5	16%
70 + (1927 and earlier)	19	19	0	0%
Totals	784**	541	243	31%

*Adult = 18 years of age or married. Thus the youngest age category consisted of people born in only three years (1978-80) who were 18, plus a handful of extremely young marrieds, the youngest born in 1984 and only 14 years old for the 1998 survey.

** In addition to the community members enumerated in this table, there were 10 residents and 21 emigrants for whom age information was sufficiently ambiguous not to list them. There are thus 551 total residents, and 264 emigrants, and the total adult population in the survey is 815.

**Table 2.17: Resident versus Emigrant Adults* in 1998,
By Ten Year Age Cohorts and Gender**

Age Cohort (birth year)	Resident:		Emigrant:	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
15-20 (1978-84)	36	47	13	9
21-30 (1968-77)	82	72	44	27
31-40 (1958-67)	56	50	41	37
41-50 (1948-57)	64	44	22	19
51-60 (1938-47)	25	20	17	9
61-70 (1928-37)	17	9	1	4
70 + (Before 1927)	14	5	0	0
Totals (n=784)	294	247	138	105

*Ages were not certain for 9 resident and 7 emigrant women, and 1 resident and 14 emigrant men. There were also ambiguities about the identities of several unmarried men. These were included in Table 2.14 to try to give a full account of employment, but are excluded for purposes of the population count here.

descendants who had settled in stable situations where they could take care of their elders. Three of the five emigrants born before 1938 in Tables 2.16 and 2.17 were widowers; nine of the 26 born between 1938 and 1947 were widows, and one was a widower. Given the strong feelings of intergenerational, lineage solidarity in Chamula, as time goes on and the emigrant communities become established, one would expect more elderly parents to emigrate to be with sons' and daughters' families.

A last note on the effects of migration: Table 2.18 is an accounting of all descendant Ch'ul Osil women and men, residents and emigrants, by ten-year age cohorts counting backwards from 1998 when the last survey of the community was finished. In the table as a whole, there is a significant imbalance between the two genders, with all women outnumbering all men roughly 55 to 45 percent. But the imbalances among those born between 1968 and 1977, and between 1948 and 1957 are particularly marked, with 21 percent more women in the first cohort, and 27 percent more women in the second.

Table 2.18: Ratios of Women to Men in the Total Descendant Population, Both Resident and Emigrant, 1998

Age (birth year)	Women:		Men:		% difference, men vs women
	Number	% of adults	Number	% of adults	
15-20 (1978-84)*	49	6.1%	56	7.1%	+9%
21-30 (1968-77)	126	16.1%	99	12.6%	-21%
31-40 (1958-67)	97	12.4%	87	11.1%	-13%
41-50 (1948-57)	86	11.0%	63	8.0%	-27%
51-60 (1938-47)	42	5.3%	29	3.7%	-17%
61-70 (1928-37)	18	2.3%	13	1.7%	-26%
70 + (Before 1927)	14	1.8%	5	.6%	-60%
Totals	432	55.2%	352	44.8%	-18.5%

*The definition of “adult” is 18 years of age and older, or married. This first line thus includes everyone 18-19 years of age, and everyone 15-17 who is married.

**The total adult population in this table is 784, vs. 813 in Tables 2.5 and 2.15. Almost all of the difference is ambiguity in the ages of 16 women and 15 men, who thus could not be listed with their age cohorts in this table. Based on ages of spouses and children, these 31 unlisted adults appear to be spread evenly across the four age groups from 1968-77 to 1938-47, and thus do not appear to affect the imbalances. Even if only all of the men, or only all of the women fell into *one* age group, however, the significant imbalances in the two age groups mentioned in the text would not be affected.

Again, the table includes all descendants that any of our eight collaborators, working in groups of two to four, could remember, including those who had moved away.

Essentially there were some twenty men between 21 and 30 years of age whom no one recalled at all in 1998, and another twenty between 41 and 50. These were not simply emigrants, men whose names were remembered, but about whom there was no data, but missing men, blank spaces who came to no one’s mind.²⁶ The most likely explanation is

²⁶ There is also a noticeable deficit of men in the two over-61 age cohorts, which total between them 32 women and 18 men. The explanation here is not missing men but deceased ones. Half of men’s lives were spent doing hard labor in the tropical lowlands,

that they were men who left at young ages, and never sent news or returned. Historically, young males from Ch'ul Osil have first sought independent migrant labor at around 16 years of age; by 18, all but the disabled or most well-off were working someplace "outside." Most young men marry within a couple of years of that first migration, when they have an independent income, so between 16 and 21. Thus men who were 41 to 50 in 1998 (born between 1948 and 1957) would have crossed the migration and marriage threshold between 1964 and 1978, and men who were 21 to 30 in 1998 (born 1968-1977) between 1984 and 1998. Both cohorts thus came of age during the vast changes in the economy and employment beginning in the 1970s, and the working hypothesis is that therein lies the explanation for their "disappearance." But paradoxically, the circumstances under which each group left the community are contradictory.

The coming of age of the first cohort, in 1968-77, coincides with the great boom in public works and other construction of the 1970s. The Angostura Dam in Chiapas's Central Valleys, for example – which eventually flooded land where many Chamulas had sharecropped – was begun in 1969 and finished in 1975, and was immediately followed by the multi-year construction of the Chicoasén Dam just downstream. Around the region by the early mid-1970s, there were also refineries under construction, and major projects of renovation in all the cities. Many Chamulas worked on these projects, and anecdotally I know of cases in which young men who were drawn to them as adolescents in the 1970s (including the oldest son of my colleague Salvador Guzmán), married Ladinás and never returned home. Until we can trace some of Ch'ul Osil's "lost boys"

and many fewer survived beyond their 50s: of the men in the 1974 survey born before 1937, 61 percent had died by 1998 vs. 37 percent of the women.

we cannot be sure this explains their absence, but it seems a good possibility: they were drawn out of the community by increased opportunity

The coming of age of the second cohort, on the other hand, those who became men between 1984-98, coincides with the years of response to the depression that began in 1982-83. By the second half of the 1980s, community members now recognize that a major emigration from Ch'ul Osil was under way. The missing young men of this era appear likely to have been boys who left the community because of their families' lack of work and neediness, found a niche somewhere else, and simply never came home.

What of the men in the cohort between these two cohorts, those between 31 and 40 years of age in 1998? Born between 1958 and 1967, these men would have come of age between 1974 and 1988, meaning that many of them would also have been migrating and marrying during the oil boom, but many (those after, say, 1981) near its end. Not yet established outside of Ch'ul Osil and Chamula, it seems likely they would have returned home when the crisis hit, and that during the immediately succeeding years they would have been part of the economic intensification within Ch'ul Osil. When emigration started a few years later – near the end of the cohort's youth – they would have been married, and if they left would have left with their families.

Until these hypotheses can be tested by interviewing Chamula emigrants from the 1970s and early 1980s, they must remain hypotheses.

A further observation about Table 2.18, however, appears to corroborate that there are missing men. A corollary of the deficit of men in the cohorts born from 1948 to 1957 and 1968 to 1977 is that there would not have been enough eligible young men

**Table 2.19: Women’s Marital Status* in 1998,
Comparing All Women to the Age Cohorts Impacted by “Missing Men”**

<u>Age (birth year)</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Never Married</u>	<u>Marriages Annulled</u>	<u>Heads of Household</u>	<u>Total w/o Husbands</u>	<u>Polygynous Marriages.</u>
Impacted Cohorts:						
21-30 (1968-77)	126	21	6	1	28	3
41-50 (1948-57)	86	2	7	9	18	9
<hr/>						
Totals, Impacted Cohorts Only	212	23	13	10	46	12
Totals, All Women Age 21 and Older	383	27	17	24	68	20
<hr/>						
Impacted Cohorts as % of All Women	55%	85%	77%	42%	68%	60%

*Definition of categories: (1) Never Married: never lived with a husband (NB most Ch’ul Osil women wed by age 20; half by age 18); (2) Marriage Annulled (in Tzotzil, *sutem*, “returned”): women divorced or abandoned before having children, typically unlikely to find a subsequent husband; (3) Head of Household: Single woman with children – either divorced, abandoned, or widowed (of the 24 female heads, XX were widows older than; (4) Total without Husbands: This is the sum of never married, annulled, and female heads of household: Single women, mothers or not; (5) Polygynous Marriages: Second or third wives in households with more than one wife. (Our database cannot easily distinguish first wives in polygynous households from single wives. The point here is that there were many unattached women in the two impacted age cohorts, and a multiple marriage was their best chance of marrying at all.)

locally for the women in those age groups to marry. Nor, at least through the 1980s, could women easily leave the community to find husbands elsewhere. As Table 2.19 illustrates, the women of these two cohorts have indeed had much higher rates than other women of never marrying, of being abandoned or divorced, or of joining polygynous households. Together, the two cohorts constitute 55 percent of all the adult women in Ch’ul Osil, but include 85 percent of the never married, 77 percent of those abandoned or divorced before having children, and 60 percent of those involved in multi-wife households. If it is a tragedy that several dozen young men from Ch’ul Osil appear to

have disappeared into the general Mexican population during the economic booms and busts since the 1970s, the tragedy is doubled by the almost equal number of young women, restricted by custom to the community space where they were supposed to be sheltered while they raised their children, but where instead they have been consigned to lives without husbands and children, as aging “daughters” in the houses of their parents, and then “aunts” in the households of their siblings. (Significantly, 17 unmarried women in the younger of these cohorts – out of 28 – have emigrated, almost all of those our associates could trace to the *colonias* of San Cristóbal.)

Impoverishment and Community

In 1974, Robert Wasserstrom found that by working approximately six months a year as migrant laborers the men of Ch’ul Osil were able to acquire the corn and beans their households needed to survive, and that the greater part of a household’s other basic needs – clothing, household goods – they either manufactured themselves or purchased and bartered inexpensively from neighbors. Given the resulting rustic appearance of virtually everything they owned, and the simplicity of their diet, it was perhaps understandable that many observers took communities like Ch’ul Osil to be self-sufficient. Of course, the cultural distinctiveness of such communities – their monolingualism in native languages, their traditional dress, their distinctive religious and political systems – also helped convince many outsiders that they must be self-sufficient: the very persistence of such traits was taken to be proof of their minimal contact with the

surrounding society. Establishing that they were dependent on the wider economy, and in fact fully integrated into it, required setting aside preconceptions and carefully reexamining both their concrete interactions with the “outside” – the comings and goings of migrant workers, for instance – and the sources of their daily tortillas.

That said, it is nevertheless true that the indigenous communities of highland Chiapas in the early and mid-1970s were very different from the places occupied by most Mexicans. They were essentially dormitory communities, homelands in the South African sense, for workers on Chiapas’s plantations. In Ch’ul Osil, all but 15 out of 138 families depended on poorly paid, if reliable plantation labor.²⁷ With everyone earning very similar subsistence incomes, and having little or no land, to the extent anyone had any security, it came from converting this uniformity of need into solidarity and mutual support. In the first instance, this meant keeping lineages together so that their members could count on each other in times of scarcity. After immediate families, it meant maintaining good relations within the local hamlet, where one’s neighbors constituted a web of cousins, in-laws, and *compadres* on whom one could depend. Economic and even physical safety came from the strength of these relationships, and community members continually reaffirmed their ties to each other through collective work projects and public

²⁷ As Table 2.5 demonstrated, only three out of those 138 households had even a chance of feeding themselves from their own fields. As for the 15 household heads who did not migrate, they included three well-respected shaman-curiers, and twelve distillers of clandestine alcohol (who also included the three owners of more than one hectare of land.) None of these men made much more than their plantation-worker neighbors; all also planted small cornfields inside the community and did physical work similar to other men. The advantages of their jobs were not so much economic distinction as relief from the necessity of migrating.

ritual.²⁸

How have the people of Ch'ul Osil done at adapting to their changing circumstances since the mid-1970s? As we have seen, through 1998, even at the most basic economic level, the answer was complicated. A small number of households had shifted into full-time participation in the cash economy and by the late 1990s were receiving sufficient profits from farming and/or wages from other work so that securing a year's supply of corn and beans was no longer their primary economic goal. Instead, they had begun to cross into the lowest levels national patterns of consumption, desiring and buying such things as bicycles, sewing machines, stereos and small televisions.

The vast majority of their neighbors, however, continued to struggle just to gather enough to feed themselves. In 1998 supplying a household with corn and beans took the same amount of land that it had in 1974 – 1.6 hectares of cultivated land in the highlands, or 1 hectare of one's own land or 1.2 hectares of sharecropped land in the lowlands. But at 1998 prices, it was also possible to buy a year's supply of corn and beans for approximately US\$ 240, actually less in terms of the minimum wage than in 1974.²⁹

²⁸ That this local solidarity could be subverted at the level of the municipio and region and converted into state control of indigenous people and other campesinos is a theme taken up in the next chapter.

²⁹ The relationship of corn prices to indigenous wages is complex. Although tortilla prices were subsidized in Mexico through 1998, and have been controlled since (see Appendini (2008) for a brief, clear history), and corn prices were not subsidized or controlled, the price per kilo of tortillas has always been double or more the price of the corn it took to make a kilo of tortillas. Hence through the 1990s the people of Ch'ul Osil always bought corn, not tortillas. In 1998 dollars the world prices for corn were US\$ 82.60/ton in 1998 versus US\$ 469/ton in 1974 (actually, the guaranteed price to producers in Mexico in the early 1970s was even higher, approximately 50 percent above the world price (see McMahon 2008, O'Mara and Ingco (1990:20).) Rural laborers in

Most households – although not all – that did not have land were able to scrape together this amount through work for others. But for them, ironically, life was not only more difficult than for the better off of their neighbors, but for almost 80 percent of households, more difficult than for the households of plantation workers a quarter of a century earlier. Then a man alone had been able to earn enough for a meager level of subsistence for his household from predictable plantation work. Now men and women both were forced to work for money in order for their households to eat, and not only did many of their jobs pay less than in the past, but they were often much less stable.

If households in Ch’ul Osil were beginning to live in two distinct economic and social realities by the late 1990s, where should the division between those with enough and those without be placed? And what impact did that division – indeed, all of the changes discussed so far – have on community solidarity and durability, as well as on relations with the state and society outside of Ch’ul Osil?

Table 2.20 breaks down Ch’ul Osil households’ cash income from all sources, including farming, into levels corresponding roughly to multiples of the federally-mandated rural minimum wage. In the table’s notes several possible breaking points are suggested between those who were beginning to participate in national patterns of

Chiapas’s cornfields, however, could choose to be paid a constant wage in corn through the 1970s, which smoothed out years of expensive corn like 1974-76 (see Cancian 1965: 49-51); after 1982, however, wages in corn actually increased for a while as the price declined (Cancian 1992: 259, n.5.2.) All of this considered, the price of corn declined from the 1980s through the early 2000s. Corrected for inflation, the price of beans also declined steadily from 1982 through the 1990s (Serrano 2004:16.) (Since 2006 – outside of the period under consideration in this chapter – the world price of corn corrected for inflation has risen as a result of the ethanol boom to 3 times its 1998 price, with grave consequences for the budgets of households like those of Ch’ul Osil.)

**Table 2.20: Annual Household Cash Income from All Sources, 1998,
Expressed in Contemporary U.S. Dollars**

Dollars/Year	Number of Households	Percentage of Households
\$6000	1	.3%
\$3500-4000	4	1.2%
\$1875-2500	7	2.0%*
\$1125-1875	18	5.3%
\$ 750-1125	36	10.5%**
\$ 375- 750	74	21.6%***
\$ 187- 375	64	18.7%****
<\$187	138	40.4%
Totals	342	100 %

*Adjusted for inflation, the level of absolute poverty as defined by the World Bank would have been US\$ 1.04/person/day in 1998. For a household of 5, this was equal to US \$1898/year. (However, it was also proposed that in middle-income countries like Mexico it should be more, in 1998 an inflation-adjusted \$1.66 person/day, in which case the minimum yearly income to remain above absolute poverty would have been US\$ 3030.)

**If the legal minimum rural wage in Chiapas in 1998 was 30 pesos/day, approximately US\$ 3.00, in a year of 250 work days (50 weeks x 5 days), one minimum wage would have been US\$750.00/year. (Chiapas rural economist Daniel Villafuerte (personal communication) argues that a rural household of 5 in Chiapas needed 2 minimum wages, US\$ 1500, to cover its minimum needs.)

***Historically, agricultural wages actually paid to indigenous people in Chiapas have been one half to two-thirds of the legal minimum wage. This higher end of the range on this line is approximately the wage paid to the migrant laborers in Wasserstrom's 1974 survey, in which case the yearly wage would have been approximately US\$ 500.

****Finally, the actual amount of cash necessary to buy 800 kilos of corn and 150 kilos of beans for a family of five in Chamula in 1998 was US\$ 240.

consumption, those who lived at a subsistence level, and those who were below subsistence. Table 2.21 takes a second look at this same division, while attempting to distinguish the strategies households used to secure a year's supply of food. The table is structured as a sieve: beginning at the top with the 352 descendant households, at each step, corresponding to a subsistence strategy, it subtracts those households that were earning enough by means of that strategy to feed a family of five in 1998. The first to be subtracted are the twelve highest earning households from Table 2.20 – households that

**Table 2.21: “Sieve of Subsistence”:
Numbers and Percentages of Descendant Households with
Sufficient Cash Income and/or Crops to Feed Themselves, 1998**

Total Number of Households:	352	100 %
Minus: Households above the level of extreme poverty (in 1998, equal to US\$ 1.04/person/day; for a family of 5 = US\$ 1875/year)	- 12	3.4%
Minus: Households with the annual cash income to pay for the year’s supply of corn and beans (US\$ 240/year for 5 persons.)	- 226	64.2%
Minus: Households with less than US\$ 240 cash income, but sufficient cornfields to provide 800 kilos of corn and associated beans:*	- 54	15.3%
Minus: Households with some combination of cash income and cornfields equal to the value of 800 kilos of corn and associated beans:	- 16	4.5%
Equals: Households with enough resources to feed themselves:	= - 308	87.5%
Which leaves: Households without visible sufficient resources:	= 44	12.5%

* That is, 1.6 hectares of highland cornfields of their own assuming harvests of 500 kilos per hectare; slightly less than 1 hectare of lowland cornfields of their own assuming harvests of 1000 kilos/hectare; or 1.2 hectares of lowland rented cornfields [rents averaged 30% of the yield, so a profit of 800 kilos required planting 1.2 hectares to pay the 400 kilos of rent.]; or some combination of own and rented land, highland and low, equal to expected harvests of 800 kilos of corn and the associated 150 kilos of beans.

by 1998 had begun to move beyond mere subsistence. It should be emphasized that the bottom of the range of these top households – those earning US\$ 1875/year – were actually just at the US\$ 1.04/person/day used by the UN and World Bank to define extreme poverty.³⁰ Calling these families “better-off” is obviously extremely relative.

³⁰ The UN World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen, 1995, described “extreme” or “absolute poverty” as “severe deprivation of basic human needs including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information.” Inadequate access to any two of these factors as defined by the summit (e.g., houses with dirt floors constituted inadequate shelter) was characterized as “absolute poverty.” In 1998, Ch’ul Osil fell below the standards on five and possibly six of the seven. Based on

Even more striking, however, is the position of the 226 households with cash incomes of US\$ 240 to US\$ 1875 – that is, from US\$.13 to US\$ 1.03 person/day. From Table 2.20, it is apparent that the 18 households at the upper end of this range are those making US\$ 1125-1875. If these 18 are subtracted, the remaining 208 households are getting by on less than US\$ 1125/year. The cash income available to these households per person per day is US\$.13 to .62.³¹ There is no way to overstate how precarious this is. Many households also had small corn plots to supplement their cash, but even for those daily life was a desperate struggle for food. Even the slightest downturn in the market for embroidered goods, or the demand for a commodity as ill-paid as firewood in nearby towns, or for a week or two of agricultural day labor, and dozens of households might have gone hungry: US\$ 240/year in cash income leaves no margin for error.

And what of the 44 households at the bottom of Table 2.21 that had neither sufficient land, nor apparently sufficient cash income for subsistence? How were they eating? Reviewing their survey forms, 13 of these households were headed by elderly couples or widows, and although counted as independent units actually received food from their children; 8 more were headed by very young couples who worked, and thus ate, with their parents; and a final 4 were single young men living alone in houses they

cost of living indices, in 1993 the World Bank set the limit of absolute poverty as US\$ 1.08/person/day or less, and currently sets it at US\$ 1.25. But the WB also suggested that in middle income countries like Mexico it should be higher, currently US\$ 2.00. By these three standards, figuring backward or forward for inflation, in 1998 the limit would have been US\$ 1.22, or \$1.04, or \$1.66. (World Bank press release 2009/0065/DEC; Wikipedia “Extreme Poverty” and “Poverty Threshold,” accessed 3/24/2010.)

³¹ Under US\$.50/day/person is a level of deprivation described as “ultra poverty.” Worldwide in 2006, 78 percent of the ultra poor lived in Sub-Saharan Africa, only 7 percent in Latin America (Ahmed et al., 2007.)

had built in expectation of marrying, but apparently still partially dependent on their parents. But that still left 19 households in 1998 – approximately 100 individuals – with no apparent source of food other than the charity of their neighbors.

As for the divisions that accompanied these differences of income, if a few households were beginning to consume like poor national Mexicans, for those who only earned the minimum necessary to buy corn and beans, the style of life – the level of consumption – was essentially what it had been in the early 1970s: outside of food, they spent very little in the surrounding economy. Visibly, the differences between better and worse off neighbors in 1998 were muted: instead of thatched, wattle-and-daub houses, all families lived in houses built with subsidized sheet metal roofing and cement blocks; instead of local earthenware for cooking and water storage, all women used cheap but durable aluminum pans and plastic water jugs; and instead of traditional, homemade clothing, the wealthiest boys and men may have had some items of dress bought at discount stores, but they and all other males had also come in just two decades to rely on inexpensive used clothing from abroad. There was, in other words, an appearance of manufactured “modernity” that lay over the community like a blanket and to some extent disguised its poverty and divisions.

But underneath the blanket the divisions were real and were deepening, making the community of shared poverty of a generation earlier hard to sustain. Indications of the new division already mentioned are that a few households with more resources had for some time been foreclosing on the land of those who defaulted on loans; that dozens of households had been forced to emigrate to the corn growing regions of the Central

Valleys where they inhabited shanty-towns of impoverished day laborers; and that two dozen men in the youngest generation of adults had left as teenagers to look for work and never returned. Simply put, there were too many in need, and neither the community nor many of its lineages were any longer capable of providing a safety net for everyone.

In the following chapters, we shall see the effect of these pressures on the increasingly bitter political divisions within the *municipio* of Chamula as a whole, but also in the struggle by some to make “community” work in the smaller arena of Ch’ul Osil, building new cooperatives, and joining increasingly radical opposition political groups, and worker and peasant unions in an attempt to recover some of the security that had formerly come from lineage and hamlet.

Chapter 3

Dissent, Religion, and Exile in Chamula: The Struggle to Democratize the “Comunidad Revolucionaria Institucional,” 1965-1977

For more than forty years, from the mid-1960s to the mid-2000s, the Tzotzil-Maya community of Chamula was notorious for its outbursts of religious violence. Repeatedly over those years, community members, led by local elders, rounded-up and drove from their territory relatives and neighbors who dared to convert from the local religion known as *tradición*, a hybrid of Mayan beliefs and folk Catholicism, to Protestantism or even orthodox Catholicism. By itself, the size of this continuing purge – according to the definition one chooses, anywhere from 2,500 to 30,000 people by the 2000s¹ – would have attracted the attention of the press and public. That the expulsions were often accompanied by beatings, sexual assaults, and burnings of houses and fields gave them a lurid fascination that made them irresistible to newspapers in Mexico and around the world.²

¹ The lower figure supposedly counts only those who experienced violence personally, and is preferred by the government because it tends to minimize the phenomenon (e.g., Ángel Robles, personal communication 1994). The higher estimates begin with those that dispute the government’s accounting of those “actually expelled,” putting the real total closer to 15,000, and move on to others that include all Protestants and orthodox Catholics who reside outside of the community (up to 25,000), and finally still others that count all expatriates on the grounds they left to avoid the violence (30,000 -- or more). (See successively Morquecho 1994: 50, Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé 2001, Alonso González 1997: 57, and Bonner 1999: 87.) The remaining population of the *municipio* of Chamula according to the 2000 census was some 58,000.

² “Mexicans Convert as a Matter of Politics,” *Wall Street Journal*, 1-vi-88; “Ancient, Modern Beliefs Clash in Hills of Chiapas,” *Los Angeles Times*, 7-v-92; “The Defiant

Although the expulsions were almost continuous over those four decades, the meaning ascribed to them by outsiders, particularly other Mexicans, changed radically between the first years and the last. In the early period, the attacks on Protestants in particular (the expulsions that attracted the most attention) were widely considered a lamentable side-effect of an indigenous community's justifiable, even noble, attempt to defend itself against North American missionaries. Indeed, many of the articles from the 1970s concluded that the violence was ultimately the fault not of the Chamulas – both sides of whom were characterized as simple peasants easily swayed by religious fanaticism – but the foreign missionaries who had supposedly duped some of them into trading their ancient culture for Protestantism.³

By the mid-1980s, however, the meaning of the expulsions had been stood on its head. Particularly in the Mexican media, they came to be portrayed as the fault of ruthless local power-brokers – *caciques* – who cynically incited their followers against dissidents of all stripes, not just Protestants, in order to preserve and enhance their own positions and privileges.⁴

Although in a general way this shift coincides with a larger shift in Mexico's popular political narrative between the 1970s and 1980s from one in which the principal

Return,” *Los Angeles Times*, 15-ix-94. See also footnotes 3 and 4 below.

³ E.g., “Los Extraños, indeseables en el país Chamula,” *Excelsior*, Mexico City, 15-iii-75 (p.A-1); “Extranjeros y políticos hacen tambalear la cultura indígena,” *Uno Más Uno*, 15-ii-78; “El Instituto Lingüístico del Verano, arma extranjera de sometimiento y disolución,” *Proceso* #149, 10-ix-79 (cover headline).

⁴ E.g., “Javier Tushum, el mayor *cacique* de Los Altos, Chis.” *Uno Más Uno*, Mexico City, 18-vi-83; “Las Expulsiones, una manera caciquil de deshacerse de las víctimas,” *Tiempo*, San Cristóbal, 4-viii-85; Estrada Martínez 1995.

villain was always the U.S. to one that, without forgetting the U.S., increasingly focused attention on the iniquities of the ruling PRI (the Partido Revolucionario Institucional) and the Mexican political class, both explanations left indigenous people like the Chamulas strangely divorced from the rest of Mexico. In both, indigenous political systems and leaders were viewed as essentially autonomous, outside the historical processes that were understood to govern politics elsewhere in the country. Whether they were defending their insular community against foreigners, or using their exotic religious beliefs to fight off rivals among their own people, Chamula's elders were viewed as making their decisions according to the peculiar logic of their own culture, independent of any outside influence. Similarly, according to both explanations, the goals of the dissenters were viewed as primarily religious, focused on salvation, and thus distinct from those of other Mexicans who during these same years were waging a secular battle against the PRI and its bosses.

The argument here is that both of these purely religious explanations are superficial, and ultimately mistaken. Instead, as the Mexican corporate state fell into crisis in the late 1960s and 1970s, and citizens began struggling for more open, democratic regimes at the state and national levels, the Chamulas, like many other poor, rural Mexicans, began fighting the same battle locally. At bottom political and economic contests, these struggles eventually took the form of religious fights in Chamula and many other indigenous communities because of the peculiar way the corporate state had grafted itself onto local civil and religious structures since the 1930s. Even that penetration did not make the religious wars of the last three decades inevitable, however.

Instead, as we shall see by concentrating on the early years of the Chamula conflict, the political and economic dissidents who came to be construed as religious dissidents were pushed into this transformation not only by the local *caciques* with their idiom of “traditional” power rooted in religion, but also by the well-meaning decisions of outsiders with their own interests to promote, among them the state government, officials of the PRI, and Catholic and Protestant missionaries.

One last thing must be said. The violence of Chamula’s bosses and their followers against their dissident relatives and neighbors over the last four decades are often cited as proof not only of the strength of the Chamula *cacicazgo*, or political chiefdom, but of the “traditionalist,” anti-democratic tendencies of the indigenous people of highland Chiapas in general. If we focus less on the expellers than the expelled, however, the same evidence could just as well serve to prove the opposite. How many others have fought so persistently, and at such cost, against corporatism, the PRI, and *caciquismo* as the thousands of Chamula *expulsados*? Rather than monolithic, repressive supporters of the one party state, the indigenous people of Chamula, viewed through their religious dissidents, could just as well be seen as heroes of the national struggle for a more pluralistic, open society.

“La Comunidad Revolucionaria Institucional”

At least from indigenous people’s side, no one set out deliberately to construct the *cacicazgos* that dominated most highland Chiapas communities during the second half of the twentieth century. On the contrary, during the years after the Revolution ended in

1920, many communities acted explicitly to prevent the rise of leaders who were anything but servants of their fellows. In Chamula, for instance, the largest and most important indigenous *municipio* in Central Chiapas, even before the Revolution ended local elders (*principales*) set new qualifications for holding municipal office that they thought would make it impossible for a powerful man, or small group of men, ever again to commandeer the communal government. They had experienced such *caciquismo* during the decade and a half prior to the Revolution as a handful of bilingual bosses had dominated the community, occupying the “constitutional” offices of *presidente municipal* (mayor), *juez* (judge), and *regidores* (council members.) Selected by regional ladino authorities, these officials had enforced the new tax and vagrancy laws of the 1890s, creating debts that by 1910 had forced more than two-thirds of Chamula’s men into seasonal labor on Chiapas’s lowland plantations. These same officials also collaborated with the planters and labor contractors in pursuing and arresting community members who managed to flee the plantations and return home before working off their debts. Eighty years later Chamulas still recalled stories of how the officials of this period ‘sold their brothers to the Ladinos’ (Rus 2003, 2004; Washbrook 2004.)

To prevent such abuses, Chamula’s elders decreed that in the future only older men who had served in the community’s highest religious offices, men who were themselves acknowledged as elders and whose ambitions were thus limited to respect within the community, could ever again occupy the “constitutional offices” recognized by outside authorities. To guarantee that those chosen would not go behind other Chamulas’ backs to make deals with outsiders, the elders also decreed that constitutional officers had

to be monolingual, and thus unable to communicate with Ladinos by themselves.

That the post-revolutionary state could permit Chamula's government to quarantine itself in this way was due in part to the fact that after 1920 indigenous officers were no longer needed to enforce debt labor. Under the new regime, conscripting and disciplining indigenous workers were in the hands of private contractors, *enganchadores*, working in concert with the low-level ladino officials, the *secretarios municipales*, who managed indigenous communities' relations with the state and outside world. These interlocking private and public administrations were in turn backed up by bands of armed men whose members sometimes worked as private *pistoleros*, sometimes as state police. Not that much coercion was needed to make indigenous workers comply. After the privations of the Revolution, most indigenous men returned voluntarily to the relative security and regularity of seasonal migratory labor after 1920. That wages were high during the decade's coffee boom certainly eased this acceptance. Even when the depression of the 1930s began, however, and wages, working conditions and hiring practices all became more exploitative, Chamula's traditional old men chose not to intervene in relations between Chamulas and the "outside." Instead, they pulled the community's boundaries even more tightly around themselves, keeping labor contracting outside of their territory, but otherwise refusing to involve themselves in contesting its abuses.⁵

If Chamula's post-revolutionary leaders had succeeded in limiting corrupting

⁵ There was considerable variety in the way local communities adapted to these new conditions -- including variation in the degree of activism of their governments. (Rus 2004.)

connections to ladino economic actors and the state, however, they had at the same time crippled their own capacity to respond to the possibilities (few as they may have been) of agrarian reform, labor organization or political participation beyond municipal borders. As it happened, it was the national, Mexico City branch of the ruling party, at the time known as the PNR (Partido Nacional Revolucionario), that first saw the opportunity this isolation represented. When the national PNR under President Lázaro Cárdenas set out to take control of Chiapas away from the state's reactionary political elite (also called the PNR) in the 1936 gubernatorial election, its agents realized that the votes of unorganized, excluded indigenous people could be used to swing the contest. Promising restitution of communal lands and higher wages and honest labor contracting through unionization, the Cardenista agents secured the indigenous communities' commitment to vote the national PNR ticket – a commitment which they guaranteed would become reality by sending mounted, armed platoons to collect indigenous communities' ballots on election day. With the Cardenista candidate duly elected and inaugurated at the end of 1936, the national PNR's representatives established agrarian reform committees in indigenous communities, founded a regionwide Union of Indigenous Workers (Sindicato de Trabajadores Indígenas, STI) to be the sole legal agent for all migrant workers, and organized permanent PNR committees in indigenous *municipios*. To make sure Chiapas's elite bowed to the new political order, over the next three years the Cardenistas confiscated strategically-situated *fincas* (as landed estates are called in Chiapas) and turned them over to their workers or neighboring communities. Through the STI, they also made it impossible for plantations to secure workers without going through the

Cardenista union. By 1937, the Cardenista branch of the party was able to exercise centralized, national control over Chiapas for the first time since before the Revolution.⁶

In Chiapas, as in the rest of Mexico, the Cardenistas now set about institutionalizing their ties to the workers and peasants. In the case of highland Chiapas, this meant forging a new relationship to the indigenous communities. They began by ordering the indigenous *ayuntamientos* (town councils) to name young, bilingual men to represent them on the boards of the STI, the regional agrarian reform committee, the National Peasant Confederation (Confederación Nacional Campesina, CNC), and as delegates to the state Departamento de Protección Indígena if they hoped to benefit from any of these institutions. In the case of Chamula, the *ayuntamiento* responded by appointing eight very young *escribanos* (scribes) 16 to 21 years old to these positions at the end of 1936. From the perspective of the conservative *principales* who oversaw the *ayuntamiento*, boys this young presented no challenge to the strictures excluding from power those who had not served religious offices or who were bilingual. In any case, the new positions were not constitutional municipal offices, but were represented to them as little more than translators (see Rus 1994.)

Despite the traditional authorities' lack of concern, however, over the course of Chiapas's two Cardenista governorships (1937-40, 1941-44) the power of the young scribes in Chamula and the other highland *municipios* steadily increased. Beginning in 1939, indigenous *ayuntamientos* – under the threat of exclusion from the agrarian reform

⁶ As these changes were occurring in 1937, the PNR changed its name to PRM (Partido Revolucionario Mexicano.) It became the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) in 1946.

– were compelled to accept them as shadow municipal presidents. In deference to the seniority requirements of communities like Chamula, they were formally called *escribano del presidente* (president’s scribe) within their *municipios*, and were careful to defer to the elder *presidentes* and *ayuntamientos* in local interactions. Outside of their communities, however, the state now treated the young scribes as their people’s legal authorities for such purposes as filing documents or representing them in official settings.

The final step in the process of consolidating the young scribes’ hold on the highland communities – and through them, the hold of the national party – came in 1943 when the Cardenistas, certain that a conservative turn in national politics during the early 1940s meant that they would lose Chiapas’s governorship in 1944, encouraged the scribes to request offices in their communities’ traditional religious hierarchies. Over the next few months, these still very young men assumed ritual functions normally undertaken by men 15 to 20 years older, men who in most cases had been saving money for decades to underwrite the fiestas and gift-giving associated with religious office. The scribes were able to skip these years of waiting because they had government salaries. On the one hand, for the elders, this precocious service, with its explicit bow to the traditional route to local authority, made the scribes *principales* in their own right and resolved the contradiction between their youth and growing power. On the other, over the succeeding years it opened the way for the scribes themselves to combine the secular power originally conferred on them by the ruling party with the religious and cultural authority of native elders. They were not yet *caciques*, but the barrier which the *principales* had tried to erect between community leadership and employment by – and

subordination to – the state had been breached.

Meanwhile, from 1944 to 1951, a series of conservative governors did roll back many of the Cardenista reforms in Chiapas, among other things, disbanding the STI and freezing agrarian reform. Through this period, the young “scribe-*principales*” distinguished themselves by defending their communities’ interests. When the conservative municipal government of San Cristóbal, for example – historically the dominant political authority in the highlands – attempted in 1946 to impose a tax on indigenous people bringing goods to the city’s market, Chamula’s scribe-*principales*, led by their most audacious member, Salvador Tuxum, organized a blockade of the roads entering the city from the indigenous *municipios*. With the help of the scribe-*principales* in other communities, the Chamulas then imposed a boycott on food sales to the city that finally forced the city government to lift the tax. Similarly, when Chiapas’s largest liquor producers secured a state-supported monopoly in the late 1940s and attempted to compel indigenous communities to buy only their own over-priced products, the scribe-*principales* organized resistance. First they helped start a clandestine trade in non-taxed *aguardiente* distilled by Ladinos put out of business by the monopoly. Then within months they and their associates began producing homemade *aguardiente* of their own. When the state treasurer and monopoly responded by sending armed patrols into Chamula and other *municipios* to seize the illegal stills, Salvador Tuxum and the Chamula scribe-*principales* rallied an armed resistance.⁷

⁷ Rus 1994: 280-284; Lewis 2004, 2005. Interviews with Salvador Tuxum, 7-xi-1976; F.L. (1940s-50s treasury agent), 14-i-1976; M.B. (supplier of raw sugar to *posh* distillers, 1949-54) 20-i-1976.

By 1951, when the National Indianist Institute (Instituto Nacional Indigenista, INI) established its first regional Coordinating Center in San Cristóbal, the scribe-*principales* had been accepted by their neighbors as the chief men in almost all the highland communities. In recognition of this, to facilitate its projects, INI (acting on the advice of the former Cardenistas), hired them in 1952 as its first bilingual teachers, health workers, agricultural agents, and managers of its cooperative stores. When the indigenous labor union (the STI) and agrarian reform were revived a year later, the scribes filled their councils of directors as well. Particularly prominent in all of these activities were the Chamulas, who, as leaders of the largest of the highlands' indigenous *municipios*, represented 25 percent of the region's Tzotzil and Tzeltal people. In the mid-1950s, again led by Salvador Tuxum, the Chamulas became the first indigenous people to buy trucks and begin transporting from region to region the fruit and vegetables their neighbors grew in the highlands, and the corn they sharecropped in the lowlands. When soft-drink bottlers realized the potential of the indigenous market at the end of the 1950s, Tuxum and his sons were also invited to be the first exclusive distributors in an indigenous community of Coca Cola, Pepsi Cola, and eventually beer.

Government jobs, trucking, and various commercial ventures with ladino partners, these were the "visible" activities of Tuxum and his colleagues. Throughout the region, however, as the scribe-*principales*' cash incomes increased, they also began lending money, rapidly supplanting ladino merchants and landowners as indigenous people's "bank." In the case of Chamula, by the early 1970s, when the *municipio*'s population stood at just over 20,000, Salvador Tuxum's family alone was calculated to have been

earning more than U.S.\$ 70,000 per year just from its “above ground” activities, principally government salaries and the distribution of bottled drinks. Most of this income, however, was almost immediately lent to other Chamulas at interest rates of 5 to 10 percent per month to finance sharecropping, petty commerce and religious offices. The accumulated capital which the Tuxums had on loan by that time may already have reached half a million dollars.⁸ Although none of them had more than this, many of the region’s other scribe-*principales* had by this point also become wealthy men.

The Contradictions among Development, Corporatism and “Tradition,” 1952-1965

By the mid-1950s Salvador Tuxum and his circle in Chamula, and many of the scribe-*principales* in other *municipios*, had gone far beyond being “servants to their fellows.” In addition to their economic power, they continued to dominate the municipal presidencies and posts representing their communities before the state. As “traditional elders,” they also commanded the systems of beliefs and sanctions which indigenous people had historically used to enforce solidarity and closure in order to defend themselves from the outside world. The combination of these powers enabled the scribe-*principales* to define their secular, even personal, opponents as enemies of the community itself, and the evidence is that increasingly this is what they did.

The struggle over *aguardiente* (*posh* in Tzotzil) was the first great example of this subversion of cultural defenses for personal gain. During the 1940s, indigenous religious

⁸ Interviews with Marcelino and Juan Tuxum, 11-viii-1975. For comparison, the minimum rural wage in Chiapas in the 1970s was approximately U.S. \$2.50/day, and most Chamulas were paid as little as half that.

officials throughout the highlands had been allowed to sell untaxed *posh* to defray the costs of their offices. When the state treasury changed course in 1949 and authorized the state's largest distiller to establish the taxed monopoly, and then began sending bands of mounted revenue police, *policías fiscales*, into the indigenous hinterland to seize clandestine rum and then later clandestine stills, the armed defense that Tuxum and his cohort organized was at first communal and popular. Traditional elders had used the proceeds of untaxed alcohol sales to pay for the religious fiestas they sponsored, and other community members saw the armed defense as a just protection of their territory and rights. By 1952, however, Tuxum and his associates were not only organizing the resistance, but had begun charging their own "tax" to defray the costs of the defense, and had themselves become partners in clandestine indigenous stills. Most of Chamula's *posh*-making was done in the rugged eastern half of the *municipio*, away from the unpaved roads that carried traffic through the town center. As the state pressed its battle against black-market liquor, the producers and Tuxum's associates among the scribe-*principales* made this eastern region a no-man's land. Outsiders were excluded, and the majority of residents who were not involved in the *posh* business were constantly watched to make sure they did not become informers. Meanwhile, the elders, urged on by the scribe-*principales*, authorized several executions of Chamulas suspected of being "spies" during the early 1950s, most in the east.⁹ In addition to earning income from

⁹ Interviews, M.M. (Chamula distiller), 17-xii-1975; M.B., 20 and 23-i-1976; Manuel Castellanos (INI) 19-ix-1975; Daniel Sarmiento (Chiapas Secretario de Gobierno, 1985-1988), 9-ix-1976. See also Lewis 2004, 2005, 2009. (In the early 1970s, when INI believed there were some clandestine 360 stills in Chamula, the *municipio*'s *posh* makers were still paying U.S. \$5.00/month to the scribe-*principales* to keep the state away.)

pressing the “posh war,” then, the scribe-*principales*, with the blessing of Chamula’s religious elders and community, had acquired the power of life and death over those who opposed them. At first, such executions were performed in pursuit of “community” goals. But as the scribe-*principales*’ personal interests became entangled with the struggle over *posh*, and then with the flow of commerce in the community, many come to believe that an important share of the reputedly thirty executions over the course of the 1950s and sixties benefited primarily the scribe-*principales* themselves.

Not all of the scribe-*principales*’ opponents were executed, of course. The common accusation against those who broke ranks, or who challenged the community’s leaders, was that they had gone against the wishes of the community’s saints, and that their retribution threatened disaster for all. For minor acts of non-conformity, the culprits could be jailed and forced to apologize. More serious breaches could lead to the imposition of costly religious office, fines, or exile from the community. Only in the most serious cases were the accused killed (see Pozas 1977: v. II, 61-72; compare Nash 1970.)

Officials of the state government, and more specifically the Departamento de Asuntos Indígenas (Department of Indigenous Affairs) in the highlands, appear to have been aware almost from the beginning of what was happening in Chamula, and privately they lamented the scribe-*principales*’ growing excesses. They also knew, however, that in addition to the private benefits the scribe-*principales* were deriving from their positions, they were essential to the state. For one thing, their ability to impose “traditional” discipline made it possible to maintain order in Chamula by maintaining

good relations with just a handful of leaders. Indeed, through the good offices of barely three dozen scribe-*principales* scattered throughout the highlands, the state was able to govern 90,000 Tzotzils and Tzeltals. Moreover, the PRI depended on the scribe-*principales* to channel entire communities' votes into the PRI column in elections – a relationship signified by the fact that from 1954 on the head of Asuntos Indígenas was also the official “PRI delegate” to the highland *municipios*.¹⁰

Given the obvious injustices, however – and perhaps just as important, the increasingly open subversion of the communal ideals of egalitarianism and of public office as a service – it is not surprising that by the early 1960s there were signs of a backlash in indigenous communities throughout the highlands. In Chamula, one of the first of these was the appearance of Protestantism, particularly in the eastern hamlets that had been most oppressed during the “*posh* war.” Indeed, many converts explicitly recognized that part of what initially drew them to Protestantism was its condemnation of alcohol.¹¹ The first to challenge the scribe-*principales* openly, however, appear not to have been Protestants but young entrepreneurs. By the early 1960s, these included not only men who had taken advantage of the expanding road system in Chiapas's lowlands over the previous decade to become share-croppers and colonists on newly opened lands,

¹⁰ The importance of Chiapas's indigenous votes in national elections could be seen in the 1988 presidential election, when Carlos Salinas de Gortari was credited with 97 percent of the vote in the federal district encompassing Chamula, 41,000 more than all his opponents combined. Chiapas as a whole gave him 79 percent of its votes, a margin of 330,000 over his opponents that could be used to offset losses and narrower margins elsewhere. (Comisión Electoral del Estado 1991.)

¹¹ Summer Institute of Linguistics, *Party Line* (newsletter of the Mexican Branch, Huntington Beach, California) 1963-1966; Steven 1976, Gossen 1989.

but others who, as opportunities for commerce grew along with the network of roads, began growing vegetables, fruit and flowers for market and participating in inter-municipal and even inter-regional trade. Slight though this trade was at first in absolute terms, by the second half of the 1960s men who just a few years earlier had been carrying bags and boxes of produce in buses and passenger trucks belonging to Ladinos had begun to buy their own trucks and become full-time merchants. Although never great in numbers – in the 1970s they were much less than five percent of the economically active in highland *municipios* with access to the new roads – in the communities where they emerged they represented a new class of relatively independent actors. (Collier 1989: 116ff.; Wasserstrom 1980: 4, 25ff.; Nash 1970:72ff.) As time went on, some expanded their activities to such related fields as store-keeping, and money-lending.¹² Already by the second half of the 1960s, their independent economic means were bringing them into conflict with the scribe-*principales*.

The second category of people almost inherently at odds with the scribe-*principales* was the growing number of young elementary school graduates. In the case of Chamula, where INI had in 1952 given its first teaching jobs to sixteen former scribes, none with more than two years of formal schooling and some barely literate, by 1975 more than five hundred community members had graduated from the sixth grade – at that time the qualification to become an INI *promotor*. Although the federal and state governments had managed to absorb more than three hundred of these school graduates

¹² On the expanding agricultural frontier and production, Cancian 1972; on changes in economic activities, Wasserstrom 1976, 1980, Collier 1989, 1994b, D. Rus 1990, Cancian 1992, Rus 1995.

as teachers, health workers, and agricultural extension agents, that left almost as many with frustrated ambitions. Since the scribe-*principales* generally saw to it that their own relatives were the first employed by the government (eighty percent of Chamula's *promotores* in 1975 were related to the original scribes; this rose to one hundred percent in neighboring Mitontic), they increasingly became the targets of this frustration. Even young school graduates who had jobs, however, tended to be dissatisfied with their situation. Despite qualifications as good as or better than all of the original scribes, their chance of attaining an equally important rank in their communities was virtually nil, foreclosed by the incumbency of the former scribes themselves and by their preference for their own sons and nephews as their successors.¹³

In sum, the problem was that the historically centralized, hierarchical structures of Chiapas's indigenous communities – the very structures that had lent themselves so well to the state's and ruling party's efforts to manage the state's indigenous people as corporate groups – did not adapt so well to the pressure for openness and democratization coming from the growing numbers of entrepreneurs and school graduates. Instead of welcoming new economic actors, or making room for ambitious students, the scribe-*principales* in many highland communities used their powers as traditional elders, particularly their ever more entrenched control of religion, to obstruct and undermine these groups. The first recourse throughout the region was to force “upstarts” to take on expensive religious and civil offices, *cargos*. If that did not succeed in subordinating them (and as the numbers of ambitious young men began to outrun the *cargo* positions,

¹³ Modiano and Pérez 1976, Diane Rus fieldnotes 1975, Pineda 1996.

this was increasingly the case), the scribe-*principales* began countenancing attacks by their neighbors on the stores and property of this new class on the grounds that they were "profiting at the community's expense." In several well-documented cases from the 1960s and early 70s, these attacks led to the intimidation and even murder of young, innovative men and women on the grounds that they were "undermining community solidarity," when in fact their chief offense seems to have been competition with the scribe-*principales*.¹⁴

The problem was that most community members continued to believe in "community" and egalitarian solidarity – beliefs encouraged, more than a little self-servingly, by the scribe-*principales* as long as they were allowed to define them. The fact that the *principales* themselves had become wealthy from owning trucks and stores and lending money was a permitted exception to the general rule because they, after all, served the community and therefore "needed" extra resources to fulfill their function. Later entrants to these activities, however, were accused of "just working for themselves," and thus of being unworthy. From the perspective of many of the new entrepreneurs and educated young, on the other hand, the scribe-*principales* were increasingly perceived as hypocrites who used religion and "community" as a pretext to keep power and wealth concentrated in their own hands.

As the 1960s proceeded, then, there were growing numbers of ambitious young men (and a few women) who, often despite having served *cargos* and fulfilled the demands of "tradition," felt frustrated by their inability to become the equals of the

¹⁴ E.g., Chamula: Rus (1994: 295-296); Amatenango: Nash 1970. For the less-pronounced case of Zinacantán: López Pérez 1985.

former scribes, or even to pursue freely opportunities that were formally open to them. Manifestations of the resentment of such people began to appear around the region almost simultaneously around 1960, two of the first being the sudden rise of Protestant conversions and religious conflict in the northern Tzeltal region (especially the *municipios* of Oxchuc, Bachajón and Yajalón), and the murderous factionalism that overcame the southern Tzeltal *municipio* of Amatenango. (See the map in Chapter 2.) Similar conflicts burst into the open soon after, in the mid-1960s, in the Central Highlands *municipios* of Zinacantán, Chamula, Mitontic, Cancuc, Chanal and Tenejapa.¹⁵ Although each of these cases took on its own particular characteristics as a result of different local histories, economic niches, and even the personalities of the leaders involved, in important ways the battle was everywhere the same. Essentially, it was a result of the contradiction between the centralizing, authoritarian influence of the state's administrative policies of the previous thirty years, leading to the creation of the scribe-*principales*, and the democratizing tendency of its development policies from the early 1950s on, which encouraged the rise of a class of younger men too numerous and ambitious to find places the former scribes' hierarchical corporatism.

The Gathering Resistance, 1965-1970

The first important confrontation between Chamula's scribe-*principales* and the

¹⁵ For the northern Tzeltals, Beekman and Heffly 1968, Esponda (1986, 255ff); Manuel Castellanos interviews 1975; Amatenango: Nash 1970; Zinacantán: Wasserstrom 1983:173-175; Chamula: Tzotzil Histories, #22 (March 1990), #435 (Sept. 2000) (in J. and D. Rus Fieldnotes); Mitontic: "Letters to Supporters" from Ken and Nadine Weathers, Summer Institute of Linguistics missionaries, 6-i-1965, 7-xi-1965; Cancuc, Chanal, Tenejapa: Manuel Castellanos interviews 1975, Esponda 1986: 267ff.

groups that eventually formed the community's opposition occurred in 1965 when a handful of young men from the *municipio's* eastern hamlets petitioned the federal government personally, without going through the *ayuntamiento*, for a new, direct road from their region to the city of San Cristóbal. To that point, all truck roads in Chamula had been routed through the *cabecera* (or municipal head town), more or less in the center of the *municipio*, and from there had radiated out to the various hamlets. Ostensibly the reason for this was so that the community's government could watch who drove in and out of the *municipio* and defend the *posh*-making east from raids by the police and army. Not coincidentally, however, forcing traffic through the *cabecera* also allowed the scribe-*principales* to keep track of the merchandise being moved and ensure that it was carried in their own trucks. Unfortunately, for his efforts the man who carried the petition to Mexico City was "disappeared" – garroted, according to eyewitnesses, by members of the *ayuntamiento* acting on orders from the scribe-*principales*. His offense was having "undermined the community's traditional unity and respect for hierarchy."¹⁶

With this crime, the scribe-*principales'* confirmed what would be their standard response to attempts to open up Chamula's economy and politics. Appealing to community solidarity and "tradition," they would unleash swift, unanswerable violence against anyone who questioned their authority. Also confirmed, unfortunately, was the pattern of the state's reaction to their increasing tyranny. In this case, as in virtually all

¹⁶ The murder occurred on 4-x-1965 (Chamula Tzotzil Histories #'s 22 and 435; interview, SLC, 15-x-1975. All in Rus Fieldnotes.) *La Nación* (25-vi-1974) summarizes the young dissidents' version of events. An alternate version, believed -- and spread discreetly -- by members of the *ayuntamiento* who participated in the killing was that the "execution" was for having gone to the authorities in Mexico City to collect a bounty for informing on Chamula's clandestine liquor producers. (Interview, MT, 14-viii-1975)

others of the same kind, the interest of the Indian affairs bureaucracy in preserving the rule of the former scribes outweighed its duty to investigate and prosecute their crimes. Arguing that the fate of the missing courier was impossible to determine and thus unprosecutable, the state did nothing.¹⁷

Although this murder may have postponed by a few years the construction of the road to Chamula's eastern hamlets, and perhaps even delayed open organizing by the community's dissidents, those same dissidents took from it the lessons that future protests should involve so many people that no one could be singled out, that they should make their case so openly, frontally, that it would be difficult to deal with them in secret, individual attacks; and that they needed allies outside Chamula to make sure they were not ignored by the state.¹⁸

Just over three years later many of the same challengers were involved in a more widespread mutiny that attracted the attention of the governor of Chiapas himself. In the fall of 1968, Chamula's municipal president, one of the original scribes from the Cárdenas period, decreed that each household in the community should contribute thirty pesos (US\$ 2.40 – the equivalent at the time of two days' wages) toward the construction

¹⁷ Interview, Mariano Ruiz (jailed for the murder in 1971), 28-x-1975; Peter Haviland interviews with dissidents and the father of the murder victim, viii-1975 (Harvard Chiapas Project Files, HCPF). (Through the late 1950s and early 60s there were other cases of young entrepreneurs beaten for lending money, and according to testimonies at least one man who was killed for questioning the fact that the leading scribe-principales owned land in each of the community's *ejidos*.)

¹⁸ The Catholic "Misión Chamula" was founded 13-v-1966, and began its first "reflection" groups in eastern Chamula that October. (Iribarren 1980:1-2) The first note of a small Protestant congregation is from the same eastern hamlets in March, 1965. (Bonner 1999:58)

of a *cabildo*, or town hall. Within weeks as much as 100,000 pesos (US\$ 8,000) was collected. However, when months passed and no construction began, a group of young entrepreneurs and teachers from the same eastern hamlets that had asked for the new road in 1965, seeing an opportunity to expose the high-handedness and graft of the scribe-*principales*, mobilized their neighbors to protest. Some 3000 of them gathered in one of San Cristóbal's outlying plazas and prepared to march to the city center in what was to be the first indigenous demonstration in the city since the 1930s. Panic-stricken that this "invasion" might be a prelude to violence, even a "caste war," local Ladinos appealed to the state government for immediate aid to head off the protesters. This the state managed by immediately promising funds from its own Departamento de Asuntos Indígenas, supplemented with a contribution from the Instituto Nacional Indigenista, to return all of the money that had been collected and finish the new *cabildo* at no cost to the community. To calm tempers, the state also agreed to build the long delayed eastern access road. Above all, the state government was at pains to preserve the legitimacy of its agent, Chamula's *presidente municipal*, even repaying out of its own funds missing money that he had apparently skimmed from the original collection. To make this support even more clear, during summer vacation after the 1968-69 school year, when it would be difficult to organize a protest, INI fired all the teachers who had been involved in the demonstration.¹⁹

¹⁹ Interviews, Manuel Castellanos, former director of Asuntos Indígenas, 8-viii-1975, 25-iv-1976; Peter Haviland interviews with Miguel Kashlan, opposition leader, viii-1975 (HCPF); "Letter to supporters" by Ken and Eileen Jacobs, Summer Institute of Linguistics missionaries, v-1968. According to Kashlan, the government gave 100,000 pesos for the *cabildo* and 60,000 for a new school. (NB: Although there had been

Despite the state's efforts to head off Chamula's growing opposition movement, however – and despite even more extreme measures by the *principales* themselves, who around the turn of the year 1968-69 managed to convince many of the protesters' neighbors that the 1968 march was nothing less than an attempt to overthrow the community's religiously-based unity, thus provoking violent factional disputes in several of the *municipio*'s hamlets – the movement not only survived, but became even more determined. It also acquired an external ally, the “Liberationist” Catholic diocese of San Cristóbal, which was going to help escalate the struggle to a new level.

The “Misión Chamula”

Soon after being named bishop of Chiapas in 1961, Samuel Ruiz had become convinced that the indigenous people who were almost half of his flock were Catholic in name only, and that rather than “parishes,” their communities should be considered “missions” and “re-evangelized.” The “Misión Chamula,” inaugurated in May, 1966, was one of the pilot projects of this new policy. According to his letters to supporters, Father Leopoldo Hernández, the leader of the mission, undertook his task with the view that the Chamula “tribe” was not only isolated from the rest of Mexico, but that except for a superficial sprinkling of Catholic customs dating from the century of the conquest, was virtually untouched by the civilizing influences of Christianity and the West. Accordingly, his mission would offer them both religious instruction and a range of

Catholic reflection groups in the rebellious eastern hamlets for a year and a half before the *cabildo* rebellion, there is no suggestion that the priest or Church played any role. See Iribarren, 1980: 6ff.)

practical aid that included lessons in pig and chicken farming, a clinic, and courses on child-rearing and personal hygiene.²⁰

Condescending as Father Hernández may have been, the material benefits he offered might in any case have attracted many community members to the “new” Catholic Church. Unknown to Father Hernández, however, the Misión Chamula’s greatest draw came from the fact that it stumbled into the community at just the moment when a large cohort of frustrated young people were coming up against the limitations imposed by the scribe-*principales*. By training native *catequistas*, or lay leaders, and then providing meeting-places in hamlets away from the *cabecera* where they could discuss community problems and what to do about them, the mission inadvertently provided the dissidents with both external backing and legitimation. Such support had not been available before the 1965 road conflict, and even the 1968 *cabildo* controversy occurred before the mission was fully established. But by April, 1969, Father Hernández reported that there were 15 *catequistas* in Chamula, meeting regularly with 830 “Christians,” and that for the first time a strong alternative voice was beginning to be heard regularly in local affairs. According to the testimonies of the participants, it was at these meetings, dedicated to *conscientización* (consciousness-raising) that many of them began to think critically about the manipulation of religion for political ends in Chamula, and to contemplate a community in which the consensual decision-making and sharing of

²⁰ On Ruiz, see Tangeman 1995, Rolland 1996, Womack 1999. In his first letter to his supporters, Hernández wrote that the Chamulas were “stubborn and hard-headed, indifferent to pain, given to criminality and drunkenness,” and that in “...the four centuries since...Hernán Cortés...they have remained independent, governed by their own laws and obeying only their elders.” (cited in Iribarren 1980:1) Also see O’Connor 1970.

resources that many believed were Chamula deepest ideals could be realized. It was also at these meetings, and in the contemporaneous documents of the Misión Chamula, that Chamula's scribe-*principales* were first referred to as *caciques* and their power related to the authoritarian structure of PRI and the one-party state.²¹

This kind of independent thinking was just what Chamula's bosses most feared, but at the same time it provided them with the means to arouse their followers. Claiming that the *conscientización* sessions were creating divisions and undermining Chamula's unity, and that, moreover, by celebrating in outlying hamlets the priest and catequistas were neglecting the saints in Chamula's central church, the scribe-*principales* demanded that the meetings stop before the saints' wrath come down on the entire community. Waves of fear and anger swept the *municipio* during 1969, eventually leading to death threats against Father Hernández and his ladino collaborators. Finally, at a community meeting called by the *ayuntamiento* in the *cabecera* on October 7, 1969, a leading speaker made it explicit: for the spiritual and physical safety of the community, Father Hernández and the nuns and lay persons who helped him, must be shot if they did not abandon Chamula. To ensure their safety, the bishop withdrew them on October 12.²²

²¹ Iribarren 1980: 6ff; "Testimonios de atropellos en Chamula, el 15 de octubre al 23 de noviembre de 1974," dictated by expelled catequistas, San Cristóbal (11 pp. ms); Rus notes on meeting of the diocesan "Equipo Tzotzil" about the Chamula case, 27-viii-1975; interviews, Sister Miriam, Misión Chamula, and F. José Luis Argüelles, O.P., interim priest of Chamula, ix-1975.

²² Iribarren 1980: 8ff; Haviland notes (HCPF); interview, F. Argüelles, Chamula, ix-1975. (In their complaint to the government, the *caciques*' pretext for expelling the mission was "damage to historic church buildings caused by pig-sties and chicken coops." Within Chamula, however, the claim was that the priest and *catequistas* were causing differences of belief in the community, and divine punishment would fall on all.)

Relocated to San Cristóbal, the mission nevertheless continued its activities. By the beginning of 1970, the number of catechists in training had doubled to 30. Meanwhile, Father Hernández and the priests in other parishes had begun to understand more about the hold the *caciques* and “witch-doctors” (*brujos*) of Chamula and its neighbors had on their flocks. One basis of their power was clearly financial. To combat this influence, in early 1970, the priests and their collaborators founded a Tzotzil credit union, or *caja popular*. With 30,000 pesos of seed money from Catholic Relief Services (approximately US\$ 2500), the *caja* advertised loans at 3 percent interest a month, as compared to the 10 percent per month typical community members paid to the *caciques*. By the mid-1970s, the *caja* had more than 1000 members from six *municipios*, half of them Chamulas, and had savings – and loans – of more than 500,000 pesos (US\$ 40,000).²³ This was indeed a great boon to the “new Catholics” of the Central Highlands – and of course, an incitement to the *caciques*.

The Path of Elections, 1970-1974

Although state and federal agencies had come to the scribe-*principales*' rescue during the *cabildo* strike, reconfirming their power, by 1970 neither INI, nor Asuntos Indígenas nor the state government were satisfied with the leadership of Chamula. Once a useful tool, the scribe-*principales* increasingly seemed to many a liability. They had become both too grasping and repressive, especially of the younger leaders whom INI itself had trained. Perhaps worst of all, they had become too independent of those in the

²³ Interview, Sister Miriam, 7-ix-75. A large percentage of the Chamula borrowers were expelled from the *municipio* after 1974.

state government who considered themselves to be their superiors. It was time to ease them out. The agent of this change was Dr. Manuel Velasco Suárez, PRI's candidate for governor in 1970. A resident of Mexico City, but scion of one of San Cristóbal's most illustrious families, during his fact-finding visits and campaign Velasco had heard about the Misión Chamula from both Bishop Ruiz and his own relatives. Concurring with the opinion of many state officials, they informed him that the scribe-*principales* had become the single largest "obstacle to progress" in their *municipios*. Among his staff, Velasco let it be known that as soon as he was elected he would distance himself from the "gangsters" (*hampones*) who ran the indigenous hinterland, beginning with Chamula.²⁴

The manner of disposing of them would be free elections in their own *municipio*, and the means would be the young dissidents now organized around the Misión Chamula.²⁵

²⁴ It is interesting that Velasco called them *hampones*, "gangsters." Since 1968, the diocese had begun to refer to Tuxum and his associates as *caciques*, but since that was outsiders' preferred pejorative term for PRI leaders in general, Velasco appears to have felt he had to find another to distance Chamula's bosses from PRI and justify the purge he was preparing.

²⁵ Among the stories about this election are that the bishop, frustrated in his dealings with Chamula's *caciques*, lobbied the incoming governor and his sisters, who were old friends (S.M., 8-ix-1975); that the leaders of the 1968 *cabildo* rebellion went to the director of INI and got his approval for the candidacy of a bilingual teacher (Peter Haviland interview, Miguel Kashlan, 28-viii-1975); that Velasco alone decided to depose the *caciques*, whom he considered unsavory (interview, Daniel Sarmiento Rojas, later Chiapas's Secretario de Gobierno, 9-ix-1976); and that Ángel Robles, chairman of Velasco Suárez's campaign in the highlands and then his director of Indian affairs, himself made the decision to whittle down the principal Chamula boss, Salvador Tuxum, to open the community to change (conversation with FP, 3-i-1976.) It should be noted that these are local, highland narratives. There is also a national narrative, which is that when Echeverría assumed office at the end of 1970, he and his team encouraged strengthening opposition political parties, at least to a point, and channeling political fights into elections as a way bringing them under control. (Segovia 1974: 53-58) Early in Velasco's term, his son-in-law, Manuel Camacho Solís, also wrote about the necessity

The drama began with the municipal elections that followed Velasco's own election in the fall of 1970. The Chamula dissidents, supported by Father Hernández, put up the first opposition candidate ever to run for office in Chamula. They also mounted the first political campaign, complete with loudspeakers mounted on a pick-up truck that traveled the rutted dirt roads near the municipal center promising young, honest leaders. Judging from participation in the 1968 protest and the testimonies of participants in this campaign two years later, it may well be that more than half the population of eastern Chamula and perhaps almost as many in the west supported the insurgents. It is hard to be certain because although the insurgent candidate won a majority of those who came to the *cabecera* and stood in line to be counted on election day, the idea of elections with actual voting was still a novel one, and most Chamulas – the “silent majority” – did not come to town to vote. Instead, they appear to have assumed that the choice would be made as in the past, by a consensus of the *principales* meeting in secret. During and after the new, “open” election, the *principales* and other traditionalists protested that the community's customs and the will of the majority had been violated. But the state Departamento de Asuntos Indígenas, which managed the vote, disallowed their complaints, and the results stood.²⁶

The winning candidate was a young bilingual teacher who had participated in the Misión Chamula discussion groups and invested his savings in the *caja popular*, but who

of curbing the “feudos” of local *caciques* in order to consolidate the regime. (Camacho 1974: 93ff.)

²⁶ The count was 1,290 for the insurgent candidate, to 480 for the *principales*' nominee. Interviews, Salvador Osob, scribe-*principal*, 8-vii-1975; SLC, Chamula federal employee, 15-x-1975.

also belonged to a respected family of traditional elders. In some sense, then, he straddled the divisions in Chamula, and his election offered a way to open power in the community without a complete rupture with the past. Unfortunately, his election led to declarations of triumph by the opposition, which believed itself – and with the support of the bishop and governor, for the time being appeared – to have become strong enough to wrest control of local government from the bosses. This impression was further strengthened when, in response to the *caciques*' complaints about being overridden in the election, Asuntos Indígenas (which early in 1971 was absorbed into a new agency, PRODESCH, Programa de Desarrollo Socioeconómico de los Altos de Chiapas) acted on the Chamula activists' accusation that the *caciques* and their henchmen were behind the 1965 murder of the road petitioner. The PRODESCH officials ultimately responsible for this were Ángel Robles and Pablo Ramírez, idealistic young lawyers who had been students in the San Cristóbal seminary at the start of Bishop Ruiz's term, and who had joined the Velasco government in the hopes of modernizing and humanizing indigenous development programs. Fourteen members of Salvador Tuxum's clique of scribe-*principales*' were investigated, and finally Tuxum and four of his subordinates were arrested and spent seven months in jail awaiting trial.²⁷

As it happened, this was to be the high point for the Chamula opposition for the next 25 years; after the spring of 1971, it never won another battle within the *municipio*.

²⁷ Iribarren 1980: 8ff. Interviews, Sister Miriam, 7-ix-1975; Mariano Gómez López, Chamula President 1970-73, 12-viii-1975; Manuel Castellanos, former head of Asuntos Indígenas, 4-ix-75; Mariano Ruiz, one of the accused murderers, 28-x-1975. (Ramírez returned to Chiapas from Mexico City following Velasco's victory, invited by Robles to help direct PRODESCH. Interviews 1-ix-1990, 21-ix-2003.)

Following the arrest of the *caciques*, Chamula's *ayuntamiento* and remaining elders essentially went on strike, refusing to convey the government's orders to the community, and insisting that all requests for their cooperation be relayed through the men in jail. They also threatened to withhold the entire highland indigenous vote from the PRI. The new young president of Chamula, realizing the physical danger he would be in if he were believed responsible for the bosses' arrest, backed away from his original supporters and Father Hernández, took his money out of the *caja popular*, and claimed to have been neutral all along. Realizing that it could not govern Chamula – and perhaps not the highlands as a whole – as long as indigenous officials refused to cooperate, the state government backed down. The prosecutor's office responsible for arresting the *caciques* quietly passed to their defense attorneys the names and whereabouts of those who had accused them of murder so that they could "convince" them to withdraw their complaints. Convince them they did, and the jailed men were released – with a letter of congratulations from the governor.²⁸

After they were freed, Chamula's *caciques*, their impunity confirmed, let it be known that Father Hernández and the most prominent leaders of the opposition would be killed if they set foot in the *municipio*. Although they stayed away, Hernández and his followers did not give up. The Misión Chamula continued to train *catequistas* and to conduct discussion meetings in Chamula hamlets. In addition, between mid-1972 and

²⁸ Interviews, Daniel Sarmiento, 9-ix-1976; Mariano Ruiz, 28-x-1975; and PR, vii-1983. On 23-iii-1973, Governor Velasco wrote to Salvador Tuxum to salute him on his release, adding "I never doubted your good intentions... and express to you my best wishes for your prompt reintegration into everyday life...[where] out of a desire to serve others, you can continue to seek the welfare of your community as you have done for many years." (Copy supplied by Salvador Tuxum.)

mid-1973, it conducted seven intensive *cursos de líderes* for young Chamulas. Ten-day sessions during which groups of more than 30 lived together in a Catholic retreat center in San Cristóbal, these courses dealt with the planning of community projects, interregional indigenous alliances, the Mexican Constitution and the rights of citizens, government development programs and their implications for local people, and ways of activating communities and taking collective action. There was also extensive discussion of how to democratize community government and what to do about Chamula's approaching 1973 elections (Iribarren 1980: 13ff; Morales 1992.)

The answer was for the entrepreneurs' and young teachers' party to again run their own candidate. This time, however, no one on the official side, neither INI, nor PRODESCH, nor the state governor, was interested in permitting the election of a compromise candidate. Instead, the *caciques* of Chamula would name the new president, and the institutions of the state would support their decision. This created some awkwardness because certain democratic forms had to be respected. At the "primary" election on September 13, when by law the "pre-candidates" for municipal president would be narrowed down to one, who would then become the PRI candidate and the presumptive winner of the final election, the supporters of each candidate assembled themselves into lines, and PRODESCH's representative counted them. According to all observers, there were more than 1500 people in the dissidents' line, against 425 for the *caciques'* candidate. (Again it could be argued that most traditional people did not understand or believe in open elections, and had not come to vote.) But then the PRODESCH man began disqualifying opposition voters, removing those who "lived in

another *municipio*” (traditionally to be a “Chamula” had been an ethnicity, not a description of residence, and Chamulas resident in other places – always considered a temporary condition – had even held office; moreover, many of those disqualified were living outside of the *municipio* in response to threats), who were “unmarried women” (although this is not an ineligible category), who were too young (based on appearance), and finally, when there were still more opposition voters, those who in the PRODESCH official’s opinion seemed drunk. Eventually, the *caciques*’ candidate was declared the winner, but the representative of PRODESCH had to be spirited away to protect him from the angry crowd.²⁹

The reaction of the dissidents was immediate. Within a day, 150 protesters in eight large trucks went to sit-in at the state capital in Tuxtla. After contacting officials at every level, including send a delegation to Mexico City itself, eventually, out of embarrassment, the state government granted the protesters a re-vote, to be held on November 18. This time PRODESCH came to supervise the elections with the support of a company of federal troops. When the lines were formed and the dissidents’ candidate was again clearly ahead, PRODESCH’s director, Ángel Robles, decreed that to make sure there would be proof of the results and no more complaints, the voting would be by paper ballot. Tokens representing their candidates were distributed to those in each line, and two ballot boxes produced to receive the tokens. As soon as the voting was finished, Robles collected the boxes and, refusing to open them or count the votes in

²⁹ Iribarren 1980: 24-26; interview, SLC, 15-x-1975; Haviland notes (HCPF.) (According to Ramírez himself (14-ix-1975), the problem was arranging the selection of the president so that it was in accord with the *form* of state election laws, but did not violate most Chamulas’ expectation that the elders would make the choice.)

Chamula, insisted they had to be taken to the state capital, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, for tabulation. Certain they had won, the opposition celebrated anyway. When the official results finally came back ten days later, however, the PRI candidate was credited with the victory, 1,540 to 725.³⁰ Planning for new protests began that same day.

The Path of Protest, 1974

After a series of heated meetings in the first weeks of December 1973, the opposition announced they would try one last time to hold a fair election on the day new municipal authorities were to take office, December 31st. To that effect, they sent a petition to the governor in mid-December promising they would turn out in force either to vote or to protest. Ángel Robles and Pablo Ramírez of PRODESCH, accompanied by the highlands' federal deputy Jorge Ochoa, surprised them, however, inaugurating the new municipal president a day early, on December 30th. Their puppet in office, the *caciques'* power was fully restored. When 2000 protesters assembled anyway on the morning of the 31st, the young PRODESCH officials who had hoped to democratize the highlands returned with federal troops to disperse the crowd, in the process arresting eight leaders of the anti-*cacique* faction, among them Catholic *catechistas* and the leaders of Chamula's small Presbyterian and Adventist congregations.³¹

³⁰ Iribarren 1980: 26ff; "También los chamulas se organizan para defender sus derechos," *La Nación*, 11-vi-1974; interviews, protest leaders, Haviland notes (HCPF); interviews, Pablo Ramírez, 9-x-1975, 14-xi-1975; "Resumen de la situación en el Pueblo de Chamula," petition presented to Mario Moya Palencia, federal Secretario de Gobernación, Mexico City, 2-viii-1974.

³¹ *La Nación*, 11-vi-1974; Iribarren 1980: 25-26; Gossen 1989; Bonner 1999: 58; petition

Far from stopping the opposition – a reaction it is hard to believe the government expected – these events made them even more determined. Meetings of Catholic and Protestant dissidents continued in both Father Hernández’s residence San Cristóbal and the homes of the movement’s leaders in the outlying hamlets of eastern Chamula, and by February, 1974, Hernández had convinced them that they needed a more powerful, politically astute voice to represent them nationally in the struggle with Chiapas’s PRI. Specifically, he argued they should meet with the leaders of the conservative, traditionally Catholic opposition party, PAN (Partido de Acción Nacional). And so on May 15, the spring planting over, a commission of both *catequistas* and Protestants went to Mexico City and met with PAN’s national president, federal deputy José Ángel Conchello. Conchello, in turn, came to Chiapas in early June, and in a mass meeting in the plaza of Chamula on June 9 declared that the only way out of Chamula’s problems was a new, honest election, supervised by both national parties, PRI and PAN. On returning to Mexico City, he and a commission of PAN members of congress presented this plan to the Secretary of Internal Affairs (Gobernación), Mario Moya Palencia, who, according to them, replied that a new election between the current municipal president of Chamula, as PRI’s nominee, and a candidate from PAN seemed to him the best solution as well. He would consult with the authorities in Chiapas.³²

presented to Gov. Manuel Velasco, “Resumen de la situación en el Pueblo de Chamula,” 19-viii-1974 (updated version of the petition presented to Moya two weeks earlier.)

³² The chronology of these events is as follows: ii-1974: decision to ask for PAN’s help (Haviland interview, Domingo Díaz Gómez, defeated candidate from 1973, 25-viii-1974); 15-v: commission goes to see Diputado Conchello (Haviland interview, Miguel Kashlan; Iribarren 1980: 26); 26-v: PAN leaders come to reconnoiter; 9-vi: Conchello

And there, in interminable consultation, matters remained. Evidently Moya Palencia did communicate with state officials in Chiapas, because one of them warned the Chamula dissidents that if they were to regain control under the auspices of PAN, it would be the ruin of the *municipio*; they would be completely cut-off from state and federal aid and services.³³ Later, on August 19, when the dissidents surrounded Governor Velasco at a public event to present yet another petition, he rebuked them for “seeking solutions for the affairs of Chiapas outside of the state of Chiapas,” and said that if there were wrongs to be righted, he himself would convene a tribunal of Chiapanecos to do it.³⁴

Despite these promises, which eventually came to nothing – indeed, undoubtedly knowing they would come to nothing – the dissidents sent another petition to Moya Palencia, and on August 29th still another joint delegation of Chamula Catholics and Protestants went to Mexico City to seek an audience. Neither effort got any response. Finally, on September 14, when President Luis Echeverría made a swing through Chiapas, the same committee pushed through the crowd at one of his stops and tried to

and PAN commission return to Chamula, meet protest leaders, and form PAN committee in Chamula at a mass public meeting in the cabecera (*La Nacion*, 11-vi-1974; Iribarren 1980: 27); 14/vi: PAN diputados Conchello, Fernández de Cevallos and Medina meet with Secretario de Gobernación Moya Palencia to propose a new election in Chamula, Moya promises to consult with officials in Chiapas (Velasco is consulted, and, concerned about a recent armed uprising in Chamula’s neighbor San Andrés Larráinzar, replies that he wants a peaceful, complete solution) (*La Nacion*, 25-vi-1974); 2/viii: Chamula dissidents present petitions to Moya Palencia, who says there will be another election, supervised by PRI and PAN, with the current municipal president as the PRI candidate, vs. a candidate to be nominated by PAN. (Iribarren 1980: 26-27)

³³ Haviland interview, Father Hernández, 14-viii-1974 (HCPF).

³⁴ “Resumen de la situación...”, petition to Velasco, 19-viii; Velasco’s answer was recorded and transcribed by Haviland (HCPF).

talk to him, only to be cut off by the governor who pulled Echeverría away, warning that “these people are well-known troublemakers.”³⁵

And with that, the path of legal protest, of acting as though higher authorities would restore Chamula’s brief experiment with democracy if only they knew the facts, was at its end. Clearly, the governor of Chiapas, and now the secretary of internal affairs and president, did know what was going on, and clearly they supported the decision to restore Chamula to its *caciques*.

Meanwhile, throughout this period of petitioning and protest by committee, life within Chamula itself remained relatively peaceful. Although Father Hernández was not permitted to reside in the community, he again came to the church regularly for baptisms and masses. The work of the Misión Chamula also continued, with courses for youth and leaders in San Cristóbal, and religious services and *conscientización* meetings in Chamula’s hamlets. The Protestants also continued to meet and proselytize, albeit discretely.

Elsewhere in Chiapas, however, 1974 was a year of turmoil. In the spring, there were bloody invasions of Ladino-owned lands in San Andrés Larráinzar, Chamula’s neighbor to the north, followed by a mass exodus of Ladinos from the *municipio*. Battles over land also occurred in northern Chiapas and along the edges of the Lacandón Jungle, and early in the summer the army suppressed a vanguard of guerrillas from the Frente de Liberación Nacional (FLN) deep in the Lacandón, leaving no survivors. Meanwhile,

³⁵ “Informe del resultado de la entrevista con el Dr. Manuel Velasco Suárez, Gobernador de Chiapas,” to Moya Palencia from Domingo Gómez López, PAN-Chamula, 20-viii-1975; texts of the other petitions can be found in Haviland notes (HCPF); Iribarren 1980: 27.

over the year between the autumns of 1973 and 1974, the diocese of San Cristóbal, at the invitation of the governor and his collaborators in PRODESCH, had been preparing a *congreso indígena* to be held in October, 1974, in honor of the 500th anniversary of the birth of Bartolomé de Las Casas, Chiapas's first bishop. Working through the *catequistas*, groups of indigenous activists had gathered regularly throughout the state to prepare for discussions of education, health, economic development, and democracy. For months before October, it was clear that the indigenous delegates planned to air deep, long-standing grievances. But it was also clear that PRODESCH and the state government actually wanted this to happen; that they assumed most of the complaints would be directed at the "old," "paternalistic" policies of INI, while their own supposedly more participatory, democratic approach would be viewed favorably.

For their part, Chamula's catechists, preoccupied all year with their own struggle, had not participated in the meetings leading up to the congress. In September, however, they came to the congress's organizers and laid out what had been happening in Chamula. It has never been clear who proposed what happened next. With the press and delegates gathered in San Cristóbal for the *congreso indígena*, scheduled for October 14 to 17, on October 13th 150 Chamula dissidents accompanied by two busloads of students from the Normal Mactumactzá, the teachers' college in Tuxtla Gutiérrez that traditionally served the children of campesinos and workers, occupied Chamula's municipal building to call attention to the government's – and more specifically, PRODESCH's – "authoritarian, hypocritical" treatment of the democratic movement in the *municipio*.³⁶

³⁶ It is generally agreed (e.g., Iribarren 1980: 29ff) that two anthropology graduate

Having drawn that attention, incensing the governor and PRODESCH, the students pulled out at midday. A couple of hours later, Ángel Robles, pistol in hand, arrived with federal troops, and together with Chamula's officials they stormed the building and cleared it of the Chamula protesters, beating and throwing them down two flights of stairs and leave several unconscious.³⁷

Whether the Chamula anti-*caciquistas* hoped to ignite a wider protest, or thought that at least they would gain enough attention at the beginning of the *congreso indígena* to be worth the pain, they had not anticipated the violence of the reaction they provoked. Over the next week, the municipal president and *caciques* convoked all of Chamula's past civil and religious leaders to a meeting in the *cabecera* at which they claimed to have discovered the existence of a plot by the catechists, Protestant pastors and their followers to defeat traditional religion once and for all by burning Chamula's temple and all of its

students, Antonio García de León and Liza Rumazo, who had been participating in Father Hernández's *conscientización* meetings and helping with the organization of the *congreso indígena*, invited the students to the sit-in. Father Hernández, for his part, denied any part in planning the demonstration, leading some fellow clergy to wonder if he had made a mistake in mobilizing what was inevitably going to be a violent demonstration, or whether he had just lost control of the movement.

³⁷ Iribarren 1980: 29ff. According to Morales (1992: 250-51, 255), Chamulas had not participated in the year of preparation for the *congreso*, and appeared to have joined at the last moment when they realized they could gain support for their struggle. (NB: Four days after suppressing the demonstration in Chamula, Ángel Robles gave the *congreso*'s closing address -- Gov. Velasco having decided to stay away from the event he had instigated. Robles concluded by declaring "We know that in the heart of our Indian brothers there is no hate, no rancor. You have endured four centuries of much injustice. Some think that these meetings are to stir up our communities' conflicts with the mestizos. This is not the spirit of Fray Bartolomé [de Las Casas.] Fray Bartolomé's spirit is that we all feel we are brothers, that all feel we are all men, that we all have the same rights, and this is what Gov. Manuel Velasco Suárez has said too." (In Morales (1992: 354.))

saints. This the traditionalists proposed to prevent by striking first. The custom in Chamula is for all members of the community to return to their native hamlets on the evening before All Saints' Day, November 1. With its family gatherings and veneration of ancestors, this is the most solemn of the community's religious celebrations. So November 1 was set as the day to round-up dissidents and expel them from Chamula. Rumors of this plan circulated, and PRODESCH called two meetings with the leaders of all the factions to try to head off confrontation, the second on October 31. But the "traditionalist" leaders refused to accept a truce and stormed out of the meeting. The next morning, as planned, the headmen in Chamula's hamlets called local assemblies to pass on news of the plot to destroy the temple. They then began three days of round-ups in which more than 160 men and forty women and children were dragged from their homes, beaten, bound and taken to the *cabecera*. Many of their houses were then burned. The diocese heard about the round-ups almost as soon as they began, and spent the next two days trying to get the state government to send troops to stop the violence. Finally, on November 4, Ángel Robles went with soldiers and trucks to retrieve the prisoners, delivering them to a cane plantation in the lowlands with orders not to return home for at least three months. That same day the PAN headquarters in Chamula's *cabecera* was burned, and two days after that, in the presence of Ángel Robles and the municipal president, the Catholic chapels where people had participated in *conscientización* sessions were pulled down and burned.³⁸

³⁸ Iribarren 1980: 30ff; interviews, Ken Jacobs, Protestant missionary, 29-iv-1975, 2-iii-1976; FP, 3-i-1976; "Relación de datos relacionados a la liberación del pueblo de Chamula," signed depositions from victims of abuses in Chamula, 1974-76, from the

Although some of the 160 to 200 expelled men and their families slipped back to their homes over the succeeding months, most – with women, children and dependent elders as many as 800 people – waited in San Cristóbal to see what would happen. PRODESCH and the state government, for the time being, took no more action. The Catholic diocese, however, refused to accept either the expulsions, which were unprecedented, or the limitations imposed on pastoral work and cast about for ways to bring pressure on the Chamula authorities. On February 1, 1975, the bishop, after consultation with the council of priests and nuns working in the Tzotzil region, announced that no more baptisms would be celebrated in Chamula until the expulsions were rescinded, some of the chapels restored, and priests and catechists permitted to visit outlying hamlets.³⁹ Neither side would yield, and Carnival, Easter Week and the spring saints' days passed without religious services. Finally, in early June, Ángel Robles and PRODESCH negotiated a provisional compromise that would allow the Church visit some hamlets – after giving notice to the municipal authorities – in return for performance of baptisms and the presence of priests at fiestas. Nevertheless, there were still threats to the Dominican priest who tried to make these visits in late July. For their part, the Chamula *catequistas* expressed their willingness to withdraw the two most contentious of the diocese's earlier demands – the reconstruction of chapels, and the denial of baptism to those who had not attended their courses – if they could just be

Dominican Sisters, La Primavera, San Cristóbal.

³⁹ Chamula traditionalists believe baptism is essential to children's survival. Extraordinarily high infant mortality rates (above 200 per 1000 in the 1960s) both made baptism more urgent and, paradoxically given that it clearly did not always work, reinforced the belief.

granted the third: the right to return home and meet with their congregations. But it was already late. Of 26 hamlet *conscientización* groups that existed in October, 1974, only eight were still functioning by August, 1975.⁴⁰ The initiative – and soon the repression – would now pass to the Protestants.

Expulsion, 1974-1976

Before the November 1974, expulsions, Liberationist Catholics, Protestants (mostly Presbyterians, but also small numbers of Seventh-Day Adventists) and some traditionalists had participated as equals in the opposition movement in Chamula. Among themselves, religious differences were far less important – and far more recent – than the politics of dissent that had united them since the second half of the 1960s. After their expulsion, however, each group was forced to fall back on its own support network. The largest, the more than 500 Catholics, were now dependent, as they had never been before, on Father Hernández.⁴¹ As we have seen, well into 1975 he and the diocese, in

⁴⁰ Iribarren 1980: 29-37; “Relación de datos...” op.cit.; interview, F. Argüelles, 4-ix-1975.

⁴¹ There is a great deal of ambiguity -- even mystery -- about the numbers of the various congregations. The Catholics reported 830 total members and 15 catequistas in 1969, doubling to 30 catequistas or catequistas-in-training in 1974, and suggesting the number of members may have doubled as well. In October, 1976, members of the Misión Chamula claimed there were 1750 *expelled* Chamulas, with the implication that all -- or at least most -- were Catholics. (Iribarren 1980: 3, 37; “Qué el PRODESCH y la Presidencia Municipal de Chamula nos respeten,” offset flyer, La Primavera, x-1976.) Contemporary reports of the numbers of Chamula Presbyterians, meanwhile, say there were 120 in 1969 (Steven 1976: 137), and in mid-1974, when it became dangerous to hold services inside Chamula, perhaps 200 worshipping weekly in a missionary house in San Cristóbal (Steven, 137.) By early 1976, there were still only 2-300 attending services regularly, but 1000 “in the Protestant orbit” (interview, Ken Jacobs, 2-iii-1976.) There are no available reports on the numbers of Adventists.

turn, struggled directly with the Chamula *caciques*, believing they could pry the *municipio* open by withholding the sacraments, particularly baptism. Most of all, the diocese never believed – or acted as though – the *expulsados* of 1974 were anything but short-term refugees, and the corollary of its struggle to get them back to their homes was that it spent relatively little energy making them comfortable in San Cristóbal. The Dominicans provided a chapel for Tzotzil-language services, but as for shelter and jobs, the *catequistas* and their followers were more or less on their own. Unfortunately, when the diocese finally did arrive at an accommodation with the *caciques* that restored limited Catholic services in June, 1975, the agreement did not make the hamlets that had actually carried out the expulsions any more receptive to the *expulsados*' return. As a result, while some of the *expulsados* filtered back to their homes, most were unwilling to risk their own or their families' lives by meeting or continuing their political activities.⁴²

Meanwhile, the Adventists, who were the most radical and smallest congregation (numbering only a dozen or so families), at first received little support at all, political or material. They had not been converted by foreign missionaries, but by one of their own who had become an Adventist while working on a coffee plantation. Although the few

⁴² Most Catholic *expulsados* lived in precarious constructions in a swampy pasture in Barrio Tlaxcala, on the northern edge of San Cristóbal. The debate over whether -- and how -- to exert pressure on Chamula's officials to readmit them continued through the summer of 1975. On August 27, I was invited to speak to the assembled priests and nuns of the Tzotzil region, and cautioned against reinstating the ban on baptism, which had led many traditionalists to blame the catequists for endangering their children's lives, and in return to threaten the lives of the catechists and their families (Rus 1975) As it happened, many of the clergy themselves believed it was inappropriate to use the sacraments as a political tool, and baptisms were not discontinued. Unfortunately, the Church had no other pressure it could exert on the *caciques*, and soon after ended the Misión Chamula and largely withdrew from the community.

mestizo Adventists in San Cristóbal helped as much as they could, providing menial jobs and helping find land to rent for shelters, and although the national church eventually provided relief, the Adventist *expulsados* were largely on their own. Given their scant alternatives, they did return to their homes as soon as possible, and after a period of quiet, by early 1976 were again actively proselytizing.⁴³

Finally, the Presbyterians, numbering from 150 to 200, received the warmest reception of all. Kenneth and Elaine Jacobs, Summer Institute of Linguistics missionaries who had been working for over 20 years on a Chamula-Tzotzil translation of the Bible, allowed many to stay on the land immediately surrounding their own house. The mestizo members of the local Iglesia Presbiteriana, a long-standing and shunned minority in San Cristóbal, also lent the land adjacent to their church, and Presbyterians throughout Chiapas immediately sent food and clothing. Within weeks, Presbyterians in Mexico, Canada and the U.S. also provided aid, as did the Reformed Church in America. Although they were given more of a welcome than the other expellees, however, the Presbyterians also longed to return home. Accordingly, through mid-1975 they participated in meetings with the Chamula authorities arranged by PRODESCH, and appear to have been hopeful that if not the state then the Catholic diocese would have success in securing permission for their peaceful repatriation. Even without permission, however, many began returning to their homes early in 1975 to plant corn. Although the negotiations between the diocese and the *caciques* would have benefited them as well, neither Protestant group was as inhibited about returning to Chamula as their Catholic

⁴³ Testimony of Domingo López Ángel (Bonner 1999: 86-88; also Alonso 1995: 92-94), interview with Mateo Méndez, 26-viii-1976.

brothers – or practicing their religion openly when they got there – because it was not *their* churches that continued to challenge the *caciques* directly, politically. Even beyond that, however, they had begun to conceive of the risks they ran, and their suffering, as part of “God’s plan” for the redemption of Chamula. This new approach of desisting from – or perhaps better, dissimulating – the political struggle, but holding firm to the religious change that was an even more fundamental challenge, was summed up by their pastor in early 1975:

As you return, it will be for some at the risk of death. ...If any of you are killed, it is the responsibility of those who remain to bury the dead. But you are not to retaliate. God is the One who has set the elders in authority over us, therefore we must pray for them. They are part of God’s plan. ...God has made Himself responsible to take us to His goals for our lives and will give us what he has planned for us. (Cited in Steven, 1976: 156.)

By the autumn of 1975, most of the Presbyterians expelled in November 1974 were living quietly in their hamlets, discreetly proselytizing and increasing their congregations.⁴⁴

Despite the fact that almost all Presbyterians had returned home, however, their pastor, Miguel Kashlan, one of the fieriest leaders of Chamula’s political opposition since the mid-1960s and a member of the delegation that had gone to Mexico City to solicit aid from PAN in 1974, refused to allow either his congregants or their non-indigenous supporters to forget that many *expulsados*, Catholic as well as Protestant, remained in exile. Fearing that this mass of fellow Christians would not be able to return safely to

⁴⁴ Steven (1976: 155-160), Bonner (1999: 50-59). Summarizing shifts in congregation membership during this period, one Protestant advocate claims the Catholics were more concerned about politics than souls, which is why the evangelical church “won” the Chamula converts. (Alonso González 1999: 17ff.; compare Morquecho 1992: 26.)

Chamula, he argued that the Presbyterian Church should begin making provisions for several hundred of them to resettle more or less permanently in San Cristóbal. Not all had yet “opted for Presbyterianism,” he went on to explain, but most soon would. He was talking about the largely unsupported, still refugee Catholics, and his words proved prophetic. The Catholic clergy and Bishop Ruiz, who still considered all Chamulas to be Catholics and hoped to redeem every one of them by changing the *municipio*’s political culture, continued to hold out for repatriation over resettlement. Over the course of the next year, however, Catholics from the most hostile hamlets, afraid to return home, increasingly drifted away from the Catholic Church to the Presbyterian, whose efforts to secure land and city jobs better met their immediate needs as *expulsados*.⁴⁵

Despite these shifts beneath the surface, surveying the situation in Chamula at the end of 1975, the directors of PRODESCH had reason to feel relieved. With the *caciques* – and thus PRI – again securely in control, and the bulk of the *expulsados* quietly returned home, it seemed they had finally recovered from the tumultuous experiment with electoral democracy at the beginning of the 1970s and regained the *status quo ante*. Chastened by the experience, they had now become firm advocates of the rule of “custom” and “consensus” – that is, of the *caciques*. Opening communities like Chamula to elections for which its people were “unprepared” had allowed meddling outsiders – Father Hernández, PAN, the organizers of the cabildo takeover, Protestant missionaries –

⁴⁵ Kashlan quotes in Esponda (1986: 336-7) and Bonner (1999: 59); also see Gossen 1989. These expelled “believers” unable to return to Chamula through 1975-76 were a large part of the 1750 expulsados still considered to be Catholics by members of the Misión Chamula in the Fall of 1976 (see fn.36.)

to divide them in ways that not only hurt individuals, but set back “development.”⁴⁶

Unfortunately, the peace in Chamula during 1975 and most of 1976 was just a lull in the violence. With the opposition movement geographically scattered and demoralized, there was no candidate to contest the *caciques* in the September 1976 pre-election. Nevertheless, the *caciques*, having seen how much a witch-hunt could strengthen their rule, organized a new mass expulsion starting on August 15. Since there were very few practicing Catholics in Chamula by this point, those apprehended were almost entirely the less aggressive Protestants, more than 600 men, women and children. The abuses were even worse than in 1974, with scores of severe beatings and several rapes. PRODESCH was surprised by the violence and failed to react for more than two days. Finally, on the third day, Ángel Robles organized a “rescue caravan” to free the victims from Chamula’s jail, the rescue vehicles being trucks on loan from the United Nations to state development projects and painted with the UN insignia and blue color. Two raped and severely beaten young women he rushed to the hospital in his own car.⁴⁷

This expulsion was a watershed in Chamula politics. Within weeks, the national

⁴⁶ Interview, Pablo Ramírez, 14-xi-1975. (By this time, PRI committees had been established in each hamlet of Chamula so that in 1976 they could act as “transmission belts” to communicate the party’s candidate for municipal president to “the bases.” This was explicitly intended to supplement the now “declining” networks used “traditional leaders” (i.e., scribe-principales/caciques) “in the past.”)

⁴⁷ Although Chamulas who witnessed, but did not participate in, the round-up told me later that Robles had undoubtedly saved lives coming when he did, the fact that he transported the victims out of the *municipio* and housed them temporarily in newly-constructed buildings for raising rabbits -- described by the *expulsados* as “cages” -- caused many of the *expulsados* and their advocates to brand him a collaborator in the expulsion. There were also complaints to the UN about “its role” in rural violence in Chiapas. (Interviews, MMA, 15 and 25-viii-1975; Rus and Wasserstrom 1976, 1979.)

Presbyterian Churches of Mexico, the U.S. and Canada, as well as the Reformed Church in America, had put up funds to buy land and resettle the refugees outside of Chamula, just as Miguel Kashlan had suggested a year earlier. Four hectares were purchased on the northeastern edge of San Cristóbal, and the Presbyterian *colonia* of Nueva Esperanza began accepting settlers in late September 1976 – the first community of people wearing indigenous clothing and speaking a native language to live in San Cristóbal since the colonial period.⁴⁸ Although a diocesan petition dated in October claimed that there were still 1750 homeless Chamulas *expulsados* in San Cristóbal – by implication, Catholics – almost all were beginning to settle down by that point, and most had already become Presbyterians. Just three months later, in January 1977, the diocese could find only one small group of Catholics still meeting clandestinely in Chamula, and virtually no Catholics among the Chamula refugees in San Cristóbal.⁴⁹ The Misión Chamula had evaporated.

Like a chain reaction, the founding of Nueva Esperanza and the conversion of the majority of Chamula's dissidents to Protestantism in the fall of 1976, changed the way they were perceived and treated by the region's other political actors. Meetings between the diocese, PRODESCH, the *ayuntamiento* of Chamula, and representatives of the *expulsados* continued through November, although they regularly ended in stalemate or

⁴⁸ Within days after the expulsion, Miguel Kashlan's idea of purchasing land to resettle the *expulsados*, perhaps in the northern lowlands of Ocosingo, was being discussed by the Protestant missionaries (interview with Garald van Engen, 27-viii-1976.) The purchase on the edge of San Cristóbal was arranged within another week (Esponda 1986: 408-9; Vernon Sterk, personal communication.)

⁴⁹ "Qué el PRODESCH y la Presidencia Municipal de Chamula nos respeten," offset flyer, La Primavera, x-1976; Iribarren 1980: 40-44.

the *ayuntamiento* walking out. Despite the Catholic Church's role as a protagonist in these discussions, when the directors of PRODESCH realized in late 1976 that almost all of the Chamula refugees had by that time become Presbyterians, they suddenly stopped pressuring the traditionalists to permit them to return home.⁵⁰ The fact that a new governor had been elected in August and was to take office in December may have influenced this decision: he would soon be replacing the staff of PRODESCH, and responsibility for resolving conflicts in Chamula was already passing to new hands. Perhaps equally important, however, the national discussion of Protestantism and its supposed role in dividing indigenous communities and undermining national culture was at its peak at the end of 1976, making the *expulsados* far less sympathetic as Presbyterians than they had been when they were mostly Catholics. The impact of anti-Protestant sentiment was perhaps heightened in the Chamula case by the fact that both of PRODESCH's directors were, as ex-seminarians, inclined to view Protestant *expulsados* not as victims but provocateurs. After ten years of political struggle, the fact that the Chamula dissidents had converted to Protestantism suddenly made it possible to write

⁵⁰ Iribarren 1980: 40. Protests and picketing about the denial of religious freedom in Chamula continued in San Cristóbal and the state capital, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, through October and November. Finally, in December there was a meeting between the leaders of the *expulsados* and the principal elected officials of Chamula, mediated by the leaders of PRODESCH and the state prosecutor. According to an open letter published by the exiles, the meeting ended when Ángel Robles told them that because their fight was no longer "political and economic as it had been in 1973" [in itself a surprising admission], but had become a matter of irresolvable religious differences as a result of their own decision to convert to Protestantism, he could no longer help them. To their protests, they reported that he dismissed them saying "vayan a tierra caliente, bola de atarantados." ("Otra Vez Nos Volvieron a Engañar," offset flyer, La Primavera, xii-1976.)

them off.⁵¹

As for the *expulsados* themselves, faced with these reactions, and absorbed in building houses, a church and new lives in Nueva Esperanza, they became, at least for a while, less concerned about politics within Chamula. After 1976, the contest for political control of Chamula seemed for the time being to have subsided.

Politics, Religion and “La Crisis” of the 1980s

Although there was one localized episode of expulsion in Chamula in late 1977, two more in 1978, and one in 1980, within the *municipio* the six years from late 1976 until late 1982 were the quietest of the last three decades. Soon after the founding of Nueva Esperanza, Presbyterian and Adventist *expulsados* formed three more *colonias* near San Cristóbal, and by 1980 there were some 3000 Chamula converts living on the outskirts of the city (Iribarren 45-50; Estrada Martínez 1995: 39ff.; Aubry 1991: 77; see also Chapter 6 below.) These were the years of Mexico’s oil boom, and although the crisis in agriculture deepened, throwing many Chamula farm laborers out of work, as we have seen the federal government was making vast investments in infrastructure, creating tens of thousands of construction and other urban jobs in Chiapas and surrounding states. Tourism also grew rapidly, employing many thousands more building hotels and

⁵¹ Robles and Ramírez were finally replaced in September, 1977. For contemporary views of evangelization in indigenous regions, *Proceso* 10-ix-79, 1-x-1979. Speaking of the Chamula case in particular, *Punto Crítico* (Mayo 1979: 24-25) described the “luchas intestinas ‘religiosas’ de San Juan Chamula” as an example of Protestant missionary “manipulación ideológica conducente a dividir comunidades...y desvirtuar sus luchas.” On PRODESCH’s views of Protestant converts in Chamula, interview, Pablo Ramírez, viii-1983.

providing services in such international destinations as Cancún, as well as sites like Palenque and San Cristóbal in Chiapas. The tourism boom also benefited producers of native artisan goods, and the peddlers who sold them. Chamula's *expulsados*, completely by chance, were in a position to catch these economic waves. Most found work in San Cristóbal in the public market, in construction, in service jobs, and in various kinds of petty commerce; others worked in construction throughout southeastern Mexico. By the early 1980s, the *expulsados*' new *colonias* were visibly more prosperous than the hamlets they had been forced to leave (Rus 1995, Collier 1994b.)

Meanwhile, although putting distance between the *expulsados* and Chamula's *caciques* and their followers had created a kind of exhausted ceasefire in Chamula, the enmity between the two sides was if anything deeper – and deepening. With the dissidents' conversion to Protestantism, what had originally been a political rift, and then a split between political bands who still recognized each other as broadly Catholic, became a passionate religious divide, with each side viewing the other as allied with dark forces and evil. The traditionalists saw the Protestants' rejection of the saints and the veneration of the ancestors not only as profoundly offensive, but as endangering the survival of anyone who did not fervently oppose them. The Protestants, having suffered expulsion, felt that their own righteousness had been annealed in martyrdom, and despite the risks, redoubled their efforts to slip back into Chamula to convert and save the souls of as many of their brethren as possible (see Sterk 1991.)

The tense standoff between the *expulsados* and traditionalists was broken in 1982. When world oil prices, and then Mexican finances, crashed that spring, government

infrastructural investment also collapsed, and with it the better part of construction work. Over the next decade, what little federal investment there had been in Chiapas's agriculture also ended. Throughout the highlands, indigenous people who depended on work outside of their own territories were suddenly thrown back on the resources of their over-populated home *municipios* (Collier 1994a, Rus and Collier 2003; also Chapter 2 above.) This, in turn, led to two further consequences that were to shape politics in the highlands for the next two decades and beyond.

The first was a sharp rise in factionalism and conflict within indigenous communities as people fought over insufficient resources. In most places, this strife remained “political” as “out” groups allied themselves with opposition political parties and independent organizations in their struggle to wrest a share of land, commerce and government aid from local elites identified with PRI – elites increasingly considered selfish and unjust. In Chamula, however, opposition also polarized along the religious lines established in the 1970s. On one side were the *expulsados* and their continuing stream of converts (about whom more in a moment.) On the other was the party of the “*caciques*,” now increasingly led by the sons and younger allies of the original scribe-*principales*. In addition to many other acts of violence, between late 1982 and 1990, the conflict between these groups led to 34 episodes of expulsion in Chamula involving well over 1000 direct victims. Several thousand more left the community out of fear. The *caciques* had learned that periodic witch hunts and a state of continuous fear strengthened their control of the community. Willing to do whatever was necessary to prolong their hold on Chamula, PRI and the state did nothing to stop the expulsions until the 1990s,

and even then did not succeed: expulsions continued into the late 2000s (Rus and Collier 2003: 46-51; Morquecho 1992: 23-33, 77-79; Estrada Martínez 1995.)

The second consequence of the economic crisis of 1982 was the increasing urbanization of indigenous people during the 1980s, and with it growth in the indigenous population that lived beyond the *caciques*' reach. Recognizing that the Chamula *expulsados* had found an economic and social niche in San Cristóbal, impoverished indigenous families from throughout the region – not just Chamulas, but Tenejapanecos, Huistecos and the rest – migrated to the city in the hope of imitating them. Like the original *expulsados*, perhaps because the model seemed to work, such people tended to convert to Protestantism and occasionally Liberationist Catholicism and establish religiously-based *colonias*. Between 1982 and 1990, 12 new *colonias* were added to the four from the late 1970s, and the city's indigenous population had grown to some 20,000; by 1998, there were 23 officially recognized *colonias*, 15 more in formation, and an indigenous population of almost 40,000.⁵² Faithful to their migration's – and movement's – roots in the Chamula expulsions, the leaders and political organizations of these urban migrants have for the most part continued to define themselves by their opposition both to the *caciques* in their original communities, and to the PRI.⁵³ Rather than considering that they have broken their ties to their communities, most – particularly

⁵² Although as the decade went on the new *colonias* tended increasingly to be Pentecostal rather than Presbyterian or Adventist. There were also some Catholics. For the history of San Cristóbal's *colonias* during the 1990s and 2000s, see Chapter 5 below.

⁵³ In part this self-representation as *expulsados* – refugees with nowhere else to go – was necessary at least through the early 1990s to justify their presence in the city to their increasingly reluctant Ladino hosts. (See, e.g., Gutiérrez Gutiérrez 1996.)

the Chamulas, who remain a majority – continue to take an interest in changing the culture and politics of those communities. Protestant pastors and Catholic *catequistas* based in the city's *colonias*, for instance, travel continuously through the hinterland preaching for change. And when the state and federal governments were forced, beginning in the late 1980s, but especially after 1994, to make room for indigenous state legislators and then federal congressmen, urban migrants and their organizations, while they may not have won all the elections, had the regional reach to shape the contests.⁵⁴

Even after losing the national presidency in 2000, the PRI has managed to retain control of Chamula and most of the other Tzotzil and Tzeltal *municipios* of the highlands. But the cost has been high as those communities have continued to be torn by factionalism and characterized by a high degree of internal repression. Meanwhile, the urban indigenous, historically marginalized and excluded not only by their *municipios* of origin, but by the PRI and state government, continue to increase and their influence to spread. Ironically, the regional, pan-Mayan consciousness and politics that are growing out of their experience– both led, at least so far, by the *expulsados* and their descendants – promise to dominate the highlands' foreseeable future.

⁵⁴ Aramoni and Morquecho 1997; Morquecho 2002; see also Kovic 1997; Viqueira and Sonnleitner 2000: 199ff.

Chapter 4

Recentering “Community”: Household and Hamlet versus State Control in Chamula, 1982-1998

According to Tzotzil and Tzeltal friends, when the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional occupied San Cristóbal on January 1, 1994, two waves of emotion swept through the communities of the surrounding highlands. The first was fear. Especially after the Zapatistas' attack on the army barracks above San Cristóbal on January 3, and the armed forces' retaliatory bombardment of the neighboring mountains during the days that followed, people were terrified that the violence of the war was going to reach out and engulf them too. In response, most stayed in their houses and tried to avoid identification with either side. Although this sense of immediate danger diminished after a couple of weeks, most agree it took months finally to fade away.

Close behind and curiously contradicting the fear, however, was a kind of nervous elation. As it became known that the Zapatistas were mostly indigenous – indeed, mostly Tzeltals and Tzotzils – people remember feeling a sudden mixture of joy and expectation, like "smiling down into our shirts," as one put it. (Peres Tzu 1996) None of those who reported sharing this reaction admitted having been aware of the EZLN before January 1; some even aligned themselves eventually with “traditionalist,” pro-government forces in their communities opposed to the Zapatistas. But this initial exhilaration seems to have been beyond politics. Part of it, undoubtedly, was ethnic pride: confronting the army and state, many felt the Zapatistas had struck a blow for all indigenous people. From continuing conversations with close friends over the years before and after 1994,

however, I am convinced there was something more at play.

Since the mid-1970s, the Tzotzil and Tzeltal-speaking people of highland Chiapas had undergone rapid economic and social change that had shifted the ground under the social and cultural institutions that formerly gave their lives predictability and meaning. Not only had their ability to find work and make a living become uncertain, but doubt had crept into such everyday matters as the proper roles within families and local settlements of men and women, elders and juniors. The legitimacy of community leaders and the meanings of community membership had also moved. The result was an abiding sense of anxiety as people were continually forced to redefine and reorganize themselves to meet the new circumstances. For a moment, at least, the Zapatistas' rebellion, and the federal government's abrupt decision to seek a negotiated settlement after less than two weeks of fighting, broke through this anxiety, joining people from opposing political currents in the common hope that the long-term crisis of highland Chiapas's indigenous society might at last have turned, that conditions might finally begin to improve.

Unfortunately, as it happened, the events of early 1994 did not end the crisis. Although the ills that afflicted Chiapas's indigenous people received a great deal more publicity in the years immediately following the rebellion, militarization, broken negotiations, deliberately polarizing aid programs, and deepening divisions within indigenous communities themselves added new complications, eventually forcing more and more indigenous people into opposition against the forms of local government – and the social compact – that had ordered their communities for generations.

The following pages attempt to relate these changes in, for want of a better term,

the “mood” of the indigenous people of the highlands during the 1990s to their struggle to come to grips with deteriorating economic conditions from the late 1970s on, and the increasing alienation of many from a government they had become convinced was less interested in helping them surmount those conditions than in retaining its own control of them and their communities. The chapter builds on earlier chapters’ summaries of the economic crises that overtook the highlands beginning in the late 1970s, and of the political and religious battles within communities as people increasingly responded to those crises by turning away from the top-down, hierarchical governing structures of the corporate state. Returning to Ch’ul Osil for concrete examples, the chapter reviews the economic and organizational experiments of community members during these years, and the ways the state and the municipal elite beholden to it attempted to channel and control those experiments, and if they could do neither, then to thwart them. Although the chapter draws its examples from the history of one hamlet in Chamula, over more or less the same period similarly innovative attempts to adapt to the new economic and political conditions of the crisis years and their aftermath were occurring throughout the sixteen *municipios* of the Tzeltal-Tzotzil Highlands.¹

The Dependence of the Highland Tzotzils and Tzeltals

As we saw in Chapters 1 and 2, before the 1980s the Chamulas and their

¹ The sixteen *municipios* are the fourteen predominantly indigenous *municipios* of Table 1.2, which together are expected to have more than 400,000 inhabitants in the 2010 census, plus the largely ladino *municipios* of San Cristóbal and Teopisca, which now have large immigrant indigenous populations. In the case of San Cristóbal, indigenous people are predicted to be half the population in 2010, or more than 100,000 inhabitants.

neighbors had depended for decades on seasonal migratory labor in Chiapas's lowlands to feed themselves. At first, in the late nineteenth century, great pressure had to be brought on their communities to force them to participate. Communal lands were expropriated; new taxes were imposed that compelled men to seek cash wages; non-payment of taxes – or of the loans taken out at exorbitant interest rates in order to pay the taxes – led to arrest and the sale of one's debt to labor contractors; and finally, debt-labor itself was policed and enforced by the state under the guise of defending the “legal contracts” between laborers and their creditor-owners. Although they chafed under these conditions, and resisted when they could, by the 1920s Tzeltal and Tzotzil men's participation in seasonal labor on the lowland plantations itself had for the most part become routine.² Driven by land poverty and the lack of work in their home region, conditions which had led to a devastating famine when lowland agriculture collapsed during the Revolution of the 1910s, and finally by the fact that migratory labor allowed them to maintain their families in the highlands instead of the entire family having to emigrate, they reconciled themselves to spending half of their lives away from home on lowland plantations.³

Ironically, after World War II, at the same time that Mexico as a whole experienced strong economic growth – a circumstance that might have been expected to increase labor demand all over the country and eventually improve the lot of even migrant agricultural workers – this thrall of Chiapas's indigenous people to the state's plantations actually deepened. With slightly improved conditions of sanitation and public

² Rus 2003, 2004a; Washbrook 2004 and nd.

³ Leal Flores (1978: 49), Wasserstrom (1976: tables; 1983: 201ff.); also Table 1.3 above.

health, the populations of their communities in the highlands grew steadily through the 1950s and 1960s, aggravating their already unfavorable ratios of people to land. But meanwhile, lowland agriculture was also expanding, and readily absorbing all of the migratory laborers the highland communities could produce. In effect, the rising demand for workers in the lowlands paid for the communities' population growth, but in the process made them even more dependent on the plantations as their populations grew.

Bound – and increasingly bound – as they were on lowland agriculture, the Tzeltal and Tzotzil communities of the highlands were particularly vulnerable to the downdrafts that overtook Chiapas's commercial agriculture during the 1970s and 1980s. As we saw in Chapter 1, from reductions of support prices for corn and beans and restraints on the profits of coffee plantations brought on by foreign exchange controls in the late 1970s, through the privileging of cattle over corn and the replacement of indigenous Chiapanecos with desperate Guatemalan refugees in the coffee region in the early 1980s, to the national financial collapse of 1982 that adversely affected all agriculture, over the course of a decade the demand for migrant labor steadily declined. By 1983, a significant percentage of the seasonal workers on whom Chiapas's plantations had been built, indigenous men from the highlands who over time had become almost completely dependent on the money they earned in the lowlands, were for the first time in their lives experiencing widespread unemployment.

Unfortunately, tragically, the last of these crises, the prolonged depression that began with the financial crisis of 1982, left the Mexican government without resources to cushion the deprivation that followed. Even if there had been funds, the U.S. Treasury

and International Monetary Fund, which lent Mexico the money to cover its international obligations (“bridge loans” for debts mostly to U.S. banks that cost Mexico up to 30 percent/year), demanded in return that the government sharply curtail public spending. As a result, from late 1982 to 1989, into the teeth of a continuing population explosion, social and development expenditures by the Mexican government declined precipitously. In Chiapas, federal budgeting for all rural and agricultural development programs decreased in real terms every year but one during this period, finally bottoming out in 1989 at only 11.8 percent of the 1982 total. Nationally, federal expenditures in agriculture declined by 55.4 percent from 1980 to 1988, and commercial bank lending to agriculture by 53.5 percent.⁴ Investment in the countryside was, simply, written off for the decade. Meanwhile, support prices for agricultural products, for instance corn, already being reduced from the mid-1970s on, fell in real terms by 41 percent between 1980 and 1989. Meanwhile, appropriations for infrastructure – and with them, construction jobs – were for all practical purposes zeroed out. In short, no help could be expected from the state. If anything, agriculture and rural people were expected to continue producing, and thereby to subsidize the rest of the economy.

Maintaining Discipline during the Crisis of the 1980s

If spending in rural places declined precipitously between 1982 and 1988, how did the state maintain – or at least, hope to maintain – control? The answer is carrots and sticks: on the one hand, tactical disbursements to the class of local *caciques* we met in

⁴ For Chiapas, see Villafuerte Solís 1991; for national figures, BANAMEX 1989.

Chapter 2 to hold their loyalty, and then to count on them to maintain discipline in their territories. And on the other hand, for the places *caciques* failed, or where their authority was attenuated, fast, direct repression via the state police and army. Let us take each prong of this strategy in order.

Significantly, the one government expenditure on indigenous communities that did continue during the crisis were funds paid directly to town councils, or *ayuntamientos*, to underwrite municipal budgets. Called CODECOM funds (Convenio de Confianza Municipal, Municipal Confidence Agreement), these revenues were first offered in 1980-81, the last high years of the oil boom. At first, in the era of abundant budgets and government largesse of the late 1970s, CODECOM was proffered as a step toward the eventual “decentralization” of development funding and public administration, toward permitting local governments to choose and administer projects appropriate to, and popular with, their own constituents. In practice, the new funds represented a sharp break in the long history of municipal self-government in the indigenous highlands. Before 1980, the annual budgets administered by Chiapas’s indigenous *ayuntamientos* had come entirely from local taxes and fees, and were never more than the low hundreds of dollars per year (for the case of Chamula, see Table 4.1.) With CODECOM, however, *ayuntamientos* were suddenly administering hundreds of thousands of dollars per year.⁵ Not only did this change the sectors of government over which indigenous

⁵ Although I have not had access to records of the initial CODECOM expenditures in Chamula, the *ayuntamiento* of neighboring Zinacantán received 11 million pesos, US\$440,000, between 1980 and 1982 (Cancian 1992:46). Chamula’s population in those years was approximately twice Zinacantán’s, so proportionally both to population and later budgets, Chamula’s CODECOM grant would probably have been some US\$

**Table 4.1 Disbursements Administered by the Chamula Ayuntamiento
1975-2008 (in contemporary dollars)**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Dollars</u>	<u>President of Mexico</u>
1975-76 average	239.37	Echeverría (1971-76)
1977-79 average	214.21	López Portillo (1977-82)
1980-82 average	293,564.00*	
1983-87	– **	de la Madrid (1983-88)
1988	134,261.00	
1989-92 average	372,624.00***	Salinas (1989-94)
2003	5,131,901.00	Fox (2001-06)
2008	10,375,595.00	Calderón (2007-)

*1980-82: Composed of US\$ 231.84 in regular municipal funds, and US\$ 293,333 in presumptive CODECOM funds (see footnote 5 above.)

**No figures were found for Chamula's budget during the deepest years of the crisis from 1983-87. Narrative sources, however, say that Chiapas's state government expenditures – the source of municipal funds – diminished by 50.9% from 1983-88. This appears in line with the figures here (González Garrido 1988:56-59.)

***In addition, Chamula received US\$ 240,098 in PRONASOL funds in 1992, which the *ayuntamiento* apparently co-administered. (González Garrido, 1992:61.)

Sources: 1975-82, normal municipal expenditures: INEGI, 1986, cuadro 4.5.4; 1980-82 CODECOM expenditure: extrapolated from Cancian 1992; 1988-92: González Garrido 1992:66); 2003: *Encyclopedia de los municipios de México*, 2003; 2008: Sabines, 2008.

people themselves had authority, but almost immediately it changed as well the relationship of local governments to their constituents.⁶

900,000 to 1 million.

⁶ To take just the case of Chamula, historically, “traditionally,” every adult male had been expected to contribute a share of the labor for roads, schools, etc., in his own hamlet, and hamlets had been expected to contribute to *municipio*-wide projects like work on a town hall or clinic. Beginning in the 1950s with the Instituto Nacional Indigenista, the state often provided funds for the materials for such projects. With CODECOM, however, *ayuntamientos* themselves began to pay for materials and even some of the specialized labor (skilled masonry, for example.) With the great increase in municipal funds in the 1990s, eventually most of the work on community projects was also paid, and *abtel ta komon*, or communal labor, was more and more limited to the most local projects among

In its first three, flush years in Chiapas, CODECOM provided funds for a wish list of municipal construction projects – new town halls, paved central plazas, public restrooms. In the expectation that the funding was going to be on-going, to guarantee the open, progressive administration that CODECOM was ostensibly intended to foster, Chiapas's state government in 1980-81 directed municipal governments to form inclusive panels from all sectors of their populations to choose projects and administer the money. Not only should everyone benefit, but the role of the state and federal governments as the source of the funds – and of the harmonious development they would bring – must be clear. In Chamula, the municipal president (mayor) at the time took great pains to disburse the money transparently so, he would later say, no one could ever claim he had taken advantage. Every expense was covered by a receipt, and no money was used without the participation of the *ayuntamiento* and the local advisory board. The experience in other *municipios* seems to have been the same.⁷

With the crash of 1982, however, and within a few months a change of governor,

neighbors. Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter, the opportunities for favoritism in hiring, various forms of graft, and bad feelings under the new system are obvious – and have all occurred. (Note that although the total amount of money administered by indigenous *ayuntamientos* in the 1980s was great, considering the size of the populations and their needs it was actually not much at all. In the case of Chamula, US\$ 250,000 per year divided among 40,000 inhabitants comes only to some US\$6.00/person/year.)

⁷ In neighboring Zinacantán, where there was a fierce factional split, one side identifying itself with PRI and the other, by default, with the rival national party PAN (Partido de Acción Nacional), the state went so far at first as to distribute the CODECOM funds separately to each of the factions. (Cancian 1992: 46-47, 136ff.) Beginning in 1983, however, when CODECOM was transformed from a development fund into a much more straightforward reward for loyalty, membership in PRI became an unspoken requirement to receive funds.

CODECOM quickly came to serve another function, at least in rural Chiapas. With rapidly spreading poverty and unrest, it became less about development and affording a shared, communal experience in participatory decision-making and more nakedly a means of providing municipal elites with carrots they could use to hold the loyalty of their constituents – loyalty to themselves, to the state and federal governments, and ultimately to the PRI. Conversely, withholding funds from those who challenged – or simply refused to bow to – authority became a way to enforce discipline.

Of course, CODECOM had always been intended by its federal and state sponsors to hold the allegiance of local elites. In fact, when it was first extended in highland Chiapas, at the beginning of 1980, municipal presidents and *ayuntamientos* had been informed that among the purposes for which they were expected to use funds, they were authorized to begin paying themselves salaries as compensation for their service. In indigenous communities, where civil and religious offices had always been considered a sacred *encargo* or commission accepted by adult men in return for honor and prestige, this was a wrenching break with the past. In some communities, notably Chamula, municipal presidents and *ayuntamientos*, wary of the jealousy they knew paying themselves would cause, at first refused.⁸ The new state governor and administration that took office at the end of 1982, however, knowing that with diminishing resources it was going to be more difficult to hold the loyalty of local officials, insisted in early 1983 that all *ayuntamientos* accept the salary. When Chamula's president still resisted, he was

⁸ Or, at least in terms of public attitudes, it was a break. As Chapter 3 argued, despite the supposedly disinterested nature of service, beginning in the late 1930s officers in many indigenous *municipios* had actually profited handsomely from extra-official opportunities that came with their terms of office (see Rus 1994.)

promptly removed for insubordination, and an improvised election staged in which a more compliant candidate was chosen.⁹ Under US\$ 100/month in 1983, the salaries grew each year until by the late 1990s they had reached more than US\$ 2000/month for the leading officials.¹⁰

From the several hundred thousand dollars per year channeled to Chamula through CODECOM in 1980-82, funding declined during the harshest years of austerity between 1983 and 1988, finally settling at about half of its pre-crisis level. But the money never came close to disappearing: its importance as a “positive” link between the state and federal governments and local administrations was too great. After the national elections in 1988, with a new president and government painfully aware that they had come close to losing control of the countryside (for the first time, there was a significant rural vote against the PRI in 1988), federal grants to *municipios* increased rapidly beginning in 1989, and continued increasing through the 1990s. In Chiapas they surged again following the 1994 Zapatista rebellion when guaranteeing the fealty of indigenous people became even more critical. By the second half of the 1990s, as reflected in Table 4.1, in addition to CODECOM Chamula’s *ayuntamiento* participated in the administration of all infrastructure funds spent in the *municipio*, as well as major parts of the state allocations for education (especially school construction), health (clinics, water projects and latrines) and culture (construction of a cultural center, and funding of entertainment at fiestas.)

⁹ Personal communication, Pablo Ramírez Suárez, 2010.

¹⁰ Interview with Manuel P.P., 5 July 2008.

But economic inducements were not the only, or even the principal, way the state attempted to maintain control of Chiapas's indigenous people after 1982. Unrest in rural areas had begun almost a decade before the 1982 collapse with land invasions in regions where sharecroppers and *acasillados* – resident, indebted workers – had been deprived of farming rights or driven off of land on which they had depended for decades so that the landowners could convert it to cattle-raising. During the mid-1970s in the highlands, there were notorious confrontations between Tzotzil campesinos and, first, landowners and their hired gunmen, and then the army, in San Andrés, Chamula's northern neighbor, in 1974 (Guzmán and Rus 1990: 15-17), and in Simojovel, 10 miles further north, in 1975 and 1976 (Tello 1996: 101-122.) Each time many were killed, homes and fields were destroyed, and scores of indigenous people displaced. During the same period, in late 1974, the army "dislodged" – razed to the ground – 38 entire *colonias* of Tzeltal and Ch'ol homesteaders who had taken up the government's offer a decade earlier to resettle in the Lacandón Jungle, but who now stood in the way of a lucrative lumbering concession (de Vos 2002: 109-131.) Throughout the 1970s there were also violent confrontations between the people of Venustiano Carranza, a Tzotzil *municipio* south of Chamula, and major landowners who continued to refuse, after more than three decades, to relinquish lands that had been granted to the community under the federal agrarian reform (Harvey 1998: 91-118.) In all, according to the careful reconstruction of one anthropologist and human rights activist, the repression that grew out of these and other cases in Chiapas led to the assassination of 165 indigenous and campesino leaders between 1974 and 1987, 107 of them in the greater Tzotzil-Tzeltal-Ch'ol region of the

highlands and adjacent lowlands. (Burguete 1987)

Much of this violence, again, began before the crisis of 1982, when the state still had ample funds to try to co-opt and calm peasant rebels. In fact, it has been convincingly argued that Chiapas's original version of CODECOM was specifically designed as an inducement to indigenous communities – and especially to their elites – to make sure that the radical, independent political organizations that had helped organize protests and land invasions elsewhere did not become established in their *municipios*. (Cancian 1992: 46) Both CODECOM's local funding boards and indigenous *ayuntamientos* were enjoined to be vigilant for these groups, and if they appeared to exclude them.¹¹

After the crash, however, aside from the residual monies from CODECOM, most of the work of maintaining order fell to the deputized gunmen of the cattle associations, to the state police, and to the army. The governor imposed by PRI for the period 1983-1988 was General Absalón Castellanos Domínguez, a Chiapas landowner who as commander of the army in the state had been in charge of much of the repression since

¹¹ Most prominent of these were CIOAC (Central Independiente de Obreros Agrícolas y Campesinos), OCEZ (Organización Campesina Emiliano Zapata), and the Unión de Uniones, all of which operated in the Lacandón and in the *municipios* around the edges of the highlands. In a slightly different category was the Casa del Pueblo, which mobilized the Tzotzils of Venustiano Carranza. Although it had some outside advisors, it was essentially a native group. Leaders and activists in all of these organizations were assassinated during the 1970s and 80s (see, e.g., Amnesty International 1986: 64ff.; and Burguete 1987.) (Keeping these organizations out of the densely populated *municipios* of the central highlands had been one of the state government's reasons for at first appropriating CODECOM funds to Zinacantán's dissident faction separately from, but at the same rate as, to its PRI elite (see footnote 9.))

the mid-1970s.¹² With Castellanos' elevation, Chiapas's indigenous people were going to have to adapt to the depression of the 1980s under the gaze of a soldier who still had carrots at his disposal – but who was also unafraid to set them aside and use the stick.

Coming to Grips with the Crisis: Economic Innovation in Ch'ul Osil in the 1980s

As we saw in Chapter 2, the first response of the inhabitants of Ch'ul Osil to the collapse of 1982 was to intensify the use of resources directly under their own control, and this holds true for all the communities in the highlands for which we have reports. Throughout the region indigenous people sharply increased agricultural production on lands within their own *municipios*.¹³ In addition to planting corn for food, activities like small-plot coffee growing and flower cultivation that had existed before the crisis, but that had involved relatively small numbers of participants, flourished as households sought crops that could earn them a livelihood on restricted amounts of land. In the case of coffee, the total of small-holding (*pequeña propiedad*) producers in Chiapas – mostly indigenous growers with less than 2 hectares – rose from approximately 45,000 in 1982 to some 75,000 just ten years later. (Harvey 1998: 176ff.) In the case of flower-growing, it was soon after 1980 that the cut flower business in Zinacantán, already several decades old, grew from a handful of families supplying local markets to extensive greenhouses sending flowers daily in Zinacanteco trucks as far as Mexico City. (Haviland 1993) In the case of Ch'ul Osil, where flower-growing had only been a minor activity before 1982,

¹² See Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights 1992.

¹³ For Chamula, see Diane Rus (1990); for Zinacantán, Collier and Mountjoy (1987), and Cancian (1992); for Chenalhó, Eber (2003).

by 1984 local men had begun supplying the Zinacanteco truckers with flowers. By 1988 more than one fifth of households grew flowers commercially, and by 1998 almost half (see Table 2.5.) As for corn, production on *ejido* land in the native *municipios* of the highlands increased 22 percent between 1982 and 1983, even as corn sharecropping declined sharply on the privately held lands in the Grijalva basin where highlanders had formerly worked.¹⁴ At the same time, as we saw in Chapter 2, women who had traditionally woven clothes for their families began in almost explosively increasing numbers to produce weavings and embroidery for San Cristóbal's growing tourist market. From only one woman in Ch'ul Osil who made money from textiles in 1974, by 1988 more than one third of all adult women had become commercial weavers and embroiderers (Table 2.7.) Similar growth was experienced throughout the highlands (Gómez Monte and D. Rus 1990, Morris 1991, Y. Castro Apreza 2003, Eber n.d.)

Each of these new economic alternatives, in turn, led inexorably to organizational changes. From their members' perspective the "traditional" corporate communities contained in the indigenous *municipios* had been focused inward and largely self-defensive, pooling the resources of rural laborers and small plot farmers to preserve a safe cultural and social space in a harsh world. From the state's perspective, as we saw in Chapter 3, corporate communities had also provided social control. Now, as community members were forced to pursue new livelihoods and develop new ways of organizing themselves and relating to the surrounding society – and even more as they began

¹⁴ The decline on private lowland farms appears to have been more than 10 percent. The evidence for this comes from comparing the increase in corn production in 1983 in *municipios* where all land was ejidal to the changes in production in those *municipios* where property was *both* private and ejidal. (INEGI 1986:1792ff.)

forming bonds with organizations outside of their *municipios* that could help them with such practical problems as commercialization and obtaining credit – those with an interest in preserving existing community structures and the status quo (and this of course includes both municipal authorities and the state) began to perceive these new alternatives as threats. As the 1980s progressed and the more effective of the outside organizations increasingly took over roles that had formerly belonged to the now austerity-crippled, largely absent state, animosity between those who managed the old community structures and those who had begun looking outside of the community for economic and political support only grew.¹⁵ Let us look at two of the new economic alternatives taken up by the people of Ch’ul Osil, artisan production and colonization of national lands in order to plant coffee, and the conflicts that grew out of them.

Artisan Production and Independent Cooperatives

When a few of them began selling their traditional weavings and embroidery in San Cristóbal at the end of the 1970s, the women of Ch’ul Osil had no intention of organizing themselves in new ways, much less of entering politics. Their only interest was in earning a little extra money from work they already knew how to do, and could do without leaving home. Nor did they have any political goals when within just a couple of

¹⁵ Since the 1980s there is an extensive literature about the growth of “independent,” or “mid-level” (i.e., between the state and the populace) organizations and linkages during the 1980s, from specific descriptions of their history in Chiapas (see especially Harvey 1998, or the case studies in Rus, Hernández and Mattiace 2003), to more general and theoretical treatments of their importance in Mexico (e.g., Fox 1996; Foweraker and Craig 1990.) For an ethnographic treatment of the same set of phenomena in indigenous regions elsewhere in Latin America, see Fischer 2008.)

years of finding a steady market, the first handful of artisans realized that they were duplicating efforts by traveling individually to deliver their goods, and began taking turns carrying the production of the whole group to the city.¹⁶ Nor was there any larger plan when within just a year or two more, by the start of the 1980s, many of them began working together in each other's patios so they could watch their children collectively and thus concentrate better on their work; nor when, at about the same time, they began purchasing yarn and other materials together in bulk. What was remarkable about this collective of women artisans was that it had formed spontaneously and grown organically, with little outside intervention. Remarkable as well was that at the same time similar informal organizations of women artisans were forming elsewhere in the highlands (Eber and Kovic 2003, Jolom Mayaetik 2007.)¹⁷ Then in 1983, with the crisis upon them and many of their husbands unemployed, the women of Ch'ul Osil's patio embroidery and weaving groups first entrusted some of their products on consignment to the federal government's artisan commercialization project, FONART (Fondo Nacional de Artesanías), for sale outside of the highlands (Gómez Monte and D. Rus, 1990). Almost immediately thereafter, they also began to reach out to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and independent political and economic organizations – all of

¹⁶ The first market was an American woman who visited Ch'ul Osil regularly in 1977-78 to buy the women's work. When she returned to the U.S., she put them in touch with a store owner in San Cristóbal who would continue to purchase from them. By 1980, they were marketing goods to several small tourist stores.

¹⁷ Major credit for the growth of the women artisans' movement goes to a young American, Walter F. Morris, who began in the 1970s to advise women about which products would have success in the market, to revive traditional designs, and to connect artisans with FONART. He later founded Sna Jolobil, "the house of weaving," an independent marketing cooperative, mentioned below. (See Morris 1991.)

which they had just heard about for the first time – for credit to carry them over while they waited for payment for the consigned goods, for advice about other markets, and for help with purchases of materials.

Unfortunately, despite their independent organizing and self-reliance, under the conditions of 1983, with a more suspicious, defensive government in charge of Chamula, these tentative contacts with the outside were construed as a threat by the local authorities. Artisan groups like that of Ch’ul Osil had been tolerated as long as they were merely circles of women who came together to weave, watch their children and do some communal marketing. But when they began to reach out to similar women’s groups in other *municipios*, and most of all, when they began to join with those groups to seek aid from outside of the *municipio*, they were accused of evading the municipal government’s authority to conduct all relations with the outside, and thus undermining community solidarity and collective security. In the context of a community already hyper-vigilant about such contacts as a result of the still on-going expulsions of political and religious dissidents, this was dangerous territory. In the case of Ch’ul Osil, it was in 1984 that the *ayuntamiento* first chided the husbands of some of the artisans about their wives’ possible contacts with Protestant and “Liberationist” Catholic organizations anathema to Chamula “tradition,” and wondered whether they were still men enough (perhaps alluding to the fact that many had been unemployed) to control their women. In fact, some of the non-governmental organizations that had begun aiding highland artisans were religious, while others were affiliated with opposition political movements. Those most influential among the women of Ch’ul Osil, however, were actually sponsored by feminists and

Central Mexican and European solidarity projects. While in 1982-83 the men of Ch'ul Osil had themselves opposed their wives' earning money and being in contact with Ladinos and the city, however – and might have heeded the *ayuntamiento* – by 1984 some had gone to work helping their households' women commercialize their products and had no intention of stopping what had become their households' principal livelihood.

Unable to derail the increasingly organized artisans of Ch'ul Osil and the surrounding hamlets, in 1985 the Chamula *ayuntamiento* passed along a second warning to the women – by then affiliated with women from other municipios in the independent cooperative Sna Jolobil – that they should avoid “any further” involvement in “politics.” When this admonition also failed, in early 1987 the authorities summoned the leaders of Ch'ul Osil's artisans to the municipal center – essentially, arrested them – and interrogated at length them about their activities. In particular, they wanted to know why “simple women” had become affiliated with “non-traditional,” “outside” organizations, and just what all of those organizations were. The authorities insinuated that they must have a political motive, and that it must be subversive; that their group of weavers and emroiderers must be an offshoot of the independent political organizations that had become powerful since the 1970s, and might be the vanguard of an attack on the caciques' own control of Chamula.¹⁸ Although the *municipio* had CODECOM funds and

¹⁸ The groups the local authorities – and state government – were most concerned about were the radical independent political movements behind land invasions beginning in the 1970s in Simojovel and Carranza, at the extreme northern and southern ends of the Tzotzil region, as well as the Lacandón Jungle (see Chapter 1, Map 1) -- some of which eventually merged with the organizations that became the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, the Zapatistas. As far as I know, none of these groups were active in the high highlands of Chamula. But that there were non-government organizations and

the authorities could have secured the goodwill of the women's artisan groups (which were desperate for support) for very little, they offered them nothing. They seem to have believed they could have their way through intimidation. The result, inevitably, was a growing sense of alienation and even hostility on the part of the people of Ch'ul Osil with respect to the "traditional" *ayuntamiento* and *caciques* in the *cabecera* of Chamula.

Homesteading in the Jungle and Coffee

At the same time that many of the women in Ch'ul Osil were organizing and seeking outlets and support for their textiles, a handful of their husbands were striking out as homesteaders in the Lacandón rainforest where they hoped to grow coffee. Homesteading of the Lacandón by indigenous people from throughout Chiapas – Tojolabals

independent political movements in the highlands of the 1980s, some of which did explicitly offer themselves as alternatives to an increasingly unresponsive, remote state, is beyond question. Among politicized organizations that had an impact in Chamula and neighboring municipios were COLPUMALLI, an independent economic organization which sponsored a flower producers' cooperative in Zinacantán, and that many Ch'ul Osil horticulturists joined in 1992 after being denied aid and forbidden to organize in Chamula; and SOCAMA (Solidaridad Campesina-Magisterial, "Peasant-Teacher Solidarity"), founded in the 1980s by rural teachers from the radical wing of the National Teachers Union (Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación, "National Union of Education Workers"), which sponsored artisan and horticultural groups among non-PRI Chamulas. More careful about their political aims, but considered enemies by the Chamula caciques precisely for their dedication to democratic, egalitarian projects were Catholic non-governmental organizations like DESMI (Desarrollo Económico Social de los Mexicanos Indígenas, "Social Economic Development of Mexicans of Indigenous Descent") and CHILTAK ("Companions"); and, most sensitive of all, Muk'ta Vinik ("Great Man"), a multi-purpose cooperative affiliated with CRIACH (Consejo Regional de Indígenas de los Altos de Chiapas, "Indigenous Regional Council of the Chiapas Highlands") the majority Protestant organization of Chamula exiles in San Cristóbal, which accepted covert participation by non-Protestant dissidents inside of Chamula. Still other groups that were explicitly non-political, but which were treated with suspicion by Chamula authorities for the very reason that they were non-governmental, included Sna Jolobil. (Collier 1994b; Harvey 1998)

Table 4.2: Population Growth in the Municipios of the Lacandón Jungle, 1950-2000

<u>Municipio</u>	<u>1950</u>	<u>1960</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>2000</u>
Ocosingo	13,940	19,800	34,356	39,852	121,012	171,495
Las Margaritas	18,390	24,689	32,524	25,316	86,586	97,389
Altamirano	4,655	5,783	8,354	12,099	16,980	22,157
Totals	36,985	50,272	75,234	77,267	224,578	291,041

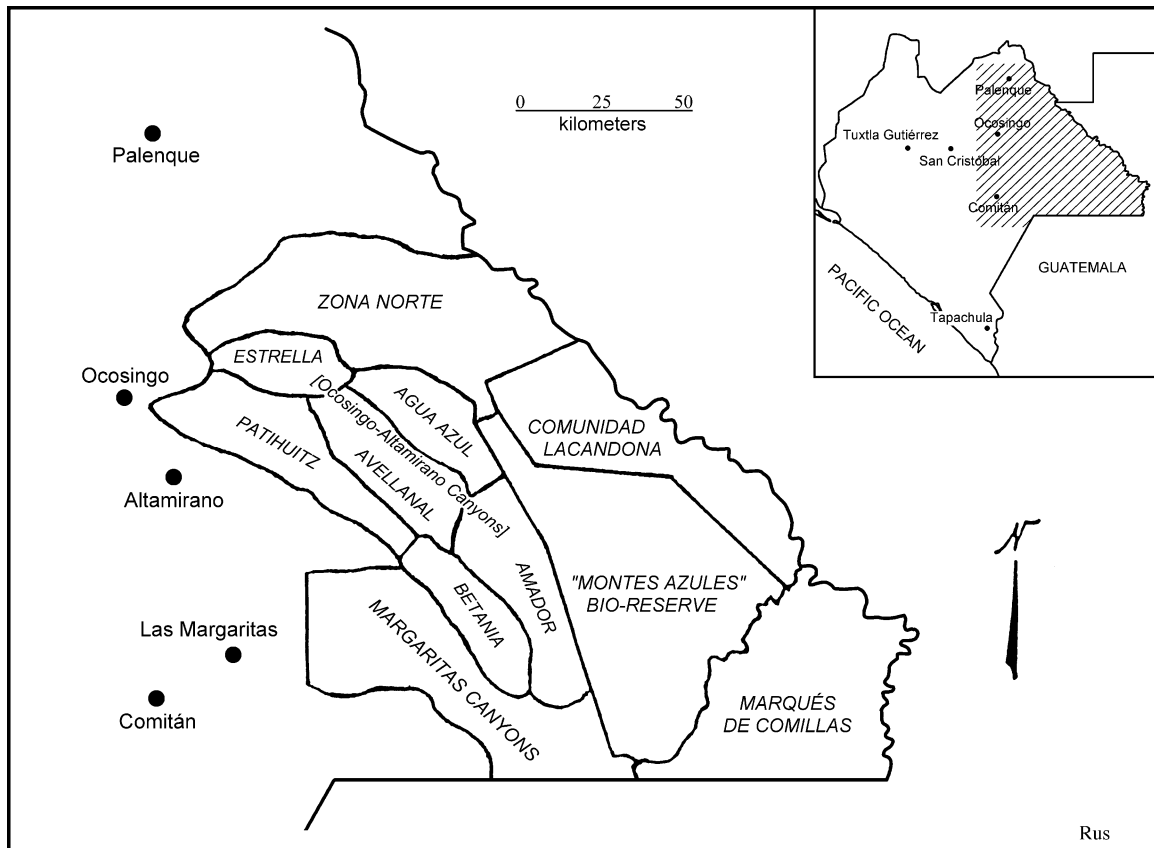
Sources: IX, X, XI and XII Censos Generales de Población, 1960-2000

and Ch'ols from the north and east, Mames from the southern border area with Guatemala, and Tzeltals and Tzotzils from the highlands – had actually been proceeding slowly since the 1950s. Not until the desperation following the crisis of 1982, however, did the trickle of migrants become a flood. Over the next very few years, some 80,000 Tzotzils and Tzeltals from the highlands – although probably fewer than 1000 of them Chamulas – joined the rush, participating in the establishment of hundreds of new colonies on “national” lands. They were encouraged in this by the federal and state governments, which from the 1960s on had promoted such homesteading as an escape valve for unemployed rural workers.¹⁹

The explosive growth of settlements in the Lacandón Jungle, their neglect by the government that had enticed their people to become colonists, and the subsequent mobilization, radicalization and rebellion of those people on January 1, 1994, have been

¹⁹ Of the hundreds of colonies, seven, all along the Guatemalan border east of Comitán, were composed of Chamulas, the first few of whom arrived in 1964, but most in the 1980s. (Duncan Earle 1988: 256-257; Calvo et al. 1989; Leyva 2003) (In addition to the Lacandón, during the 1980s Chamulas also founded colonies on national lands in the Chimalapas forest, along Chiapas’s western border with Oaxaca, and in the municipio of Villacorzo, on the inland side of the Sierra Madre.)

Regions of the Lacandón Jungle



amply described elsewhere.²⁰ The first small colonies through the mid-1970s were founded within a few kilometers of where the roads ended at the municipal head towns around the forest's northern and western perimeters. Late arrivals like the men from Ch'ul Osil, however, had to go to the far end of the extensions of those roads and walk much further to reach unoccupied land. In their particular case, they entered by truck via the muddy track along the Lacandón's southern edge, and then walked ten hours more

²⁰ The by now classic source on the region's political organization is Harvey 1998. For inside views, see also Leyva and Ascensio 1996, and Legorreta 1998, and for more recent developments, Baronnet, Mora and Stahler-Sholk nd. For a comprehensive history of the colonization of the Lacandón, de Vos 2002.

through trackless jungle to the east, passing several other colonies on the way, before reaching unclaimed land. (In the map, their colonia was located between the southern end of the Montes Azules Bio Preserve and the Guatemalan border.) Like almost all of the homesteaders, the men of Ch'ul Osil were betting that coffee would lift their families out of poverty. So, at least apparently, was the federal government: when all other rural development programs were cut after 1982, the national government's Instituto Nacional de Café (INMECAFE) stepped up its promotion of small plot coffee cultivation as the salvation of the peasantry in much of southeastern Mexico. Coffee plants were offered for free, as for those in range of vehicles were regular visits from extension agents, and insecticides, herbicides and fertilizer were still subsidized. To men most of whom had picked coffee at some point in their lives, and who knew the wealth of the major planters, the chance to grow a crop that could replace the work they had lost over the previous decade, and let them be independent in the process, was an inviting one.

Coffee bushes take five to seven years to mature, so each of the Ch'ul Osil men, in addition to clearing approximately a hectare for his first coffee and building a permanent shelter, also had to clear land for corn and other crops to feed himself and whatever family members were with him while he waited for the coffee trees to bear. This was corn for consumption in place, not for commercialization: ten hours walk to the roadstead made it uneconomical to carry jungle corn to the outside world.

By early 1984 the Ch'ul Osil men had planted their hectare each of coffee seedlings, and over the next five and a half years they assiduously cared for them while also cultivating corn and making other improvements on their land. They were close

enough to the border with Guatemala so that on several occasions indigenous refugees fleeing the Guatemalan violence crossed their land, on one occasion with a Guatemalan patrol in pursuit. Feeling a sense of brotherhood (“They’re *indios* just like us,” more than one said), they hid the refugees, and when Mexican army patrols and immigration officers later came looking for them, gave the Guatemalans articles of Chamula clothing and claimed that there was no one in the *colonia* but Chamulas. (See Earle 1988 for similar stories.) In addition to learning of the Guatemalan terror, the Ch’ul Osil colonists experienced discrimination and theft themselves at check-points set up by the Mexican immigration service and army, and were also occasionally intimidated by patrols of soldiers who, they said, seemed to think all indigenous people were political dissidents and should be treated hostilely.

Meanwhile, they became part of the new society growing in the jungle, joining with neighboring *colonias* to send delegations to the state capital to ask for a road, and over the years participating in larger *asambleas*, or town hall meetings, of all the *colonias* in their section of the jungle. Through the *asambleas*, they came in contact with the independent organizations operating in the jungle – in their region, the Unión de Uniones, one of the organizations in conflict with the government elsewhere – and with the Unión’s efforts to organize self-defense forces, lobby for roads, clinics and attention from the government, and tie the region’s *colonias* together for mutual aid. These Ch’ul Osil men had all participated in the expulsions of Protestants and Liberationist Catholics from Chamula in the 1970s, and all later agreed that the degree of democratic participation and community building among strangers that they experienced in the jungle was new to

them. When they returned to the highlands, they confessed to being changed by the experience.

If Ch'ul Osil's women artisans had run afoul of Chamula's *caciques*, the hamlet's Lacandón Jungle coffee growers were undone by national priorities that gave little importance to their interests. At the end of 1988, President Carlos Salinas de Gortari took office, and almost from the first day began campaigning for adoption of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA.) By this time, the officially recognized hectares of productive coffee in Chiapas had increased by two-thirds since 1983. In fact, since much peasant coffee planted after the 1982 crisis had still not rendered its first crop, it seems likely the total number of hectares was actually much more.²¹ Coffee prices worldwide at this point had been governed since 1962 by the International Coffee Organization (ICO), a marketing cartel to which Mexico had never belonged, but whose prices and national quotas it had always accepted in return for a stable world market.²² But with rapidly expanding coffee harvests at the time of Salinas's inauguration as a result of the government's promotion of small plot coffee-growing through the 1980s,

²¹ The official figures for total hectares of coffee in Chiapas in 1980 and 1989-90 are 142,000 and 243,000, respectively, and 45,000 and 75,000 producers. However, in 2001 there were reportedly only 240,000 hectares but 107,000 censused producers (Comisión para el Desarrollo y Fomento del Café en Chiapas 2009.) Given that little new coffee was planted after the coffee crisis began in 1989, and that it seems likely many *cafetales* already planted in 1989-90 that were not yet in production were abandoned – as were many *cafetales* in production – this number of producers seems more accurate for 1989-90 as well, while it seems possible that there were many thousands of hectares of coffee that never were counted.

²² For historical reasons, Mexico had long avoided international alliances and cartels. Just as it never belonged to the ICO, it never joined OPEC (the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries), although it has always gone along with the prices and national quotas.

and a world price that had been declining since 1987, Mexico's national coffee marketing institute, at Salinas's direction, began making deals in early 1989 to sell coffee at lower than cartel prices to Eastern European countries that were not parties to the ICO agreements. Some argue that the purpose was to destroy the existing ICO agreement, which with growing production worldwide may have been heading for a crisis anyway, and then in the renegotiation that was expected to follow secure a larger quota for Mexico. Others point out that Salinas, in undermining the ICO cartel, was establishing his and Mexico's free trade credentials with the Bush administration as part of the negotiation of NAFTA.²³ Whatever the case, within months the ICO's regulated market ceased to exist, and in the general scramble for market share, by June 1989, world prices plummeted. From a price in New York that had averaged above US\$ 1.30/pound for many years under the ICO, prices plunged to US\$.60/pound by the time the Chiapas harvest began to come in at the end of that first year – and much lower, about US\$.30, to producers in rural Chiapas. Even in low wage Chiapas, this was less than the cost of production. The price continued lower every year before eventually bottoming out under US\$ 0.50 in New York in 1992. (USDA 2003)

At those prices, the Ch'ul Osil homesteaders' first marketable harvest, already on the trees in the late summer of 1989, became worthless. With no roads out of their section of the jungle, whatever utility they could have gotten out of the crop's reduced price would disappear in transportation costs. By the end of the year, a pound of coffee was trading for a pound of corn in the settlements in the interior of the Lacandón. When

²³ See, e.g., Lewis 2005: 13 ff.; Saxe-Fernández 1994: 333-334; for a summary of coffee's troubled history in Mexico since 1989, Renard 2010.

the Ch'ul Osil homesteaders returned to the highlands during what should have been their first harvest during the winter of 1989-90, they were disillusioned that they may have lost the six years of labor that had gone into reaching that point. As it happened, after some visits to check on their homesteads through 1990, when the price failed to recover, they abandoned their coffee groves for good.

PRONASOL and the Attempt to Recapture the Countryside

Since the 1930s, when Chamula had first cast its own votes in federal elections, the *municipio* had always voted in block for the official party eventually known as the PRI (see Rus 1994.) But in the presidential elections of 1988, everyone in Ch'ul Osil with whom I spoke said quietly that they had voted against the PRI and for the leftwing coalition candidate, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas. These were members of traditionalist families, men and women who had invested their lives in the civil-religious hierarchy of their *municipio*, and who as recently as the beginning of the 1980s had participated in the expulsion of dissident Protestants and Liberationist Catholics – including close relatives – from their hamlet. In a way no one who had observed their loyalty to Chamula's authorities, and through them to the PRI, would ever have anticipated as recently as the time of those expulsions, they had become profoundly disaffected. The causes were not hard to find: locally, they resented the intimidation of the artisans' group and the lack of sharing of CODECOM funds, and at the state and federal levels, the men who had become homesteaders, and who had by this point been waiting for four years for promised roads and extension support in the jungle, resented the broken promises, and

perhaps, the feeling of having been tricked into moving to the jungle. Others also harbored resentment: street vendors for the constant struggle against city governments and unions – all run by PRI – that made it impossible to find a place to sell without paying a bribe; former – and current – sharecroppers for lowered prices for corn and other crops; and men and women in general for the mismanagement of the economy and years of inflation that had made feeding a household even more precarious than it had always been. Beyond general dissatisfaction with the PRI, however, in the jungle the homesteaders had experienced democratic *asambleas* and radical independent organizations – experiences they talked about with their neighbors, and contrasted with the vilification of those same activities and organizations by Chamula's authorities. The women artisans who had been oppressed by their own *ayuntamiento* and found help among the independent cooperatives of San Cristóbal had similar stories. For the first time among people who had never been dissidents, the authorities were called into question, and the idea seems to have spread that an alternative was possible.

In fact, apparently through fraud, only a symbolic handful of opposition votes were recorded for Ch'ul Osil's ballot box in 1988– or for Chamula as a whole – and Carlos Salinas de Gortari won the *municipio* by more than 90 percent. But the people of Ch'ul Osil had become skeptical of authority, and for the first time had broken the taboo about expressing their skepticism.

Over the next five years, from Salinas's inauguration on December 1, 1988, through 1993, he and the PRI would be at pains to win back control of the peasantry that they had begun relinquishing when they decided to put rural Mexico on hold in 1982-

83.²⁴ During the 1980s, Chiapas's state government had offered few carrots to retain the loyalty of rural people and had relied more on sticks. Now they would attempt to reverse tactics. In addition to CODECOM, Salinas's government founded a program called Solidaridad, or the Programa Nacional de Solidaridad, PRONASOL. Recycling funds the government received from the privatization of Mexico's "para-state" enterprises (the national telephone company, steel mills, sugar refineries, a bus manufacturer, various food processing industries, mines and banks), PRONASOL gave grants through the various instances of government, federal, state and municipal, to neighborhoods, cooperatives and "civil society" activities in general to help them "make the transition" to, and become "self-sustaining" in, the neoliberal, market-driven economy Salinas hoped to construct. At the same time, the government also hoped to secure the political support – and votes – of enough of Mexico's "popular classes" to guarantee the ascendance of Salinas's free-enterprise version of PRI for many years to come. (See Dresser 1992.)

Realizing that the austerity of the 1980s had eroded the state's and party's ties to the poor, the rural poor in particular, and that throughout the country organizing from below like that which had occurred in Chiapas was essentially sweeping the countryside out from underneath the PRI, Salinas was particularly intent on re-enrolling those affiliated with independent organizations in institutions controlled by the government. As governor in Chiapas during most of Salinas's presidency, Patrocinio González Garrido became known for being particularly effective at using PRONASOL funds to

²⁴ Carlos Salinas was the Secretary of Planning and Budget during the de la Madrid administration from 1983 to 1988, and played a major role in implementing the austerity program.

implement this new policy of cooptation (Morquecho 1992; Harvey 1998: 183ff.; J. Rus and D. Rus n.d).

For the women artisans of Ch'ul Osil, who as participants in the independent cooperatives of the crisis years 1983-1988 had been unfunded but also without debt, the first contact with PRONASOL came in the first quarter of 1989. Representatives of the state DIF (Desarrollo Integral de la Familia, Integral Family Development), a new development agency directed at women, offered them PRONASOL loans in return for joining a new central artisan cooperative to be run by the state government. The loans would be given in the form of state-provided raw materials and a rotating fund on which they could draw for expenses, and in return for accepting they would agree to accept state-dictated product choices and rely on a new state agency to market their goods on consignment. Unfortunately, the materials were of poor quality (including wool: DIF purchased inferior fleeces from elsewhere in the state and forced its affiliates to accept them even though they had good wool of their own); the rotating fund was touted as having put US\$ 10,000 at the women's disposal, but could only be drawn against with great difficulty; and after all, sales went badly. Over the course of a little less than a year and a half, the women found themselves unable to repay the cost of the wool and other materials assigned to them, whereupon the cooperative's state headquarters embargoed the goods they had put up on consignment so they would 'realize this is not a charity and take it seriously.' The leaders of the group endured numerous trips to the state capital to try to work things out. Most destructive of all, however, before they finally gave up, suspicions grew within the group that their own leaders were keeping the proceeds of the

group's imagined sales, and that they had also probably benefitted from the much advertised "ten thousand dollar" rotating loan (they had not, no one had.) Just fifteen months after having accepted PRONASOL funding, the informal organization the women had nurtured throughout the 1980s disintegrated. Although a very small number of them shifted into other government-sponsored artisan groups, the majority withdrew to poorly paid home-work embroidering for contract clothing assemblers. (See Chapter 2 above; Gómez Monte and D. Rus 1990; D. Rus 1990).

Not all failed so completely, but grassroots organizations and initiatives throughout the highlands experienced similar patterns of cooptation, political subordination, and technical incompetence as PRONASOL engaged them beginning in 1989. Many had formed in the early 1980s around extremely local, communal efforts to survive the economic crises. Flower-growing groups, transportation collectives of owners of mini-vans and pick-up trucks, community water projects – because times were so difficult, PRONASOL support was difficult for any of these groups to resist. Yet those who accepted help had as well to accept government technical advice (about finances, products, materials, and commercialization) and had to affiliate with the PRONASOL Solidarity Councils (Consejos de Solidaridad). These formed on the municipal, regional and state levels, supposedly to decide in common how funds should be distributed. Invariably, however, the local councils were controlled by the same municipal *caciques* who had managed CODECOM, and were transparently nothing more than new mechanisms for re-imposing government and ruling-party discipline.

The effects of these policies in communities throughout the highlands, as they had

been in Ch'ul Osil, were polarizing and destructive. In Chamula, a *municipio* already splintered by violent political and religious divisions, and where people had become even further polarized during the 1980s between "haves" who had access to government largesse, and "have nots" who had by this time suffered not only the collapse of the rural labor market since the 1970s, but – as with Ch'ul Osil's artisans – had been repressed when they attempted to organize within the structures of the traditional community, PRONASOL only aggravated divisions. Burned by this new reminder that the state did not have their best interests at heart, the ironic effect of PRONASOL was that many have-nots redoubled their search for "independent" sources of aid, and increasingly came to think of themselves not only as enemies of their local bosses, but of the state and federal governments that kept the bosses in power. As now happened in Chamula, in *municipios* throughout the region those who had bad experiences with PRONASOL, or who had been excluded, increasingly looked outside of their *municipio* for help from independent regional organizations.

If the purpose of PRONASOL had been to bring highland Tzotzils and Tzeltals back into "official" institutions, then, at least as often it had the counter-effect of fostering greater cynicism with respect to the state, and of actually promoting independent organizing. Increasingly, people throughout the region who for the first time had now come to think of themselves as dissidents affiliated with opposition groups, knitting together regional networks of opponents to the local bosses, to the state and federal governments, and to the PRI.

It should be remembered that general economic conditions for the people of the

highlands were still deteriorating after 1989. Moreover, the abrogation of Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution in 1992, ending the agrarian reform – another of Salinas’s reforms meant to encourage private markets – crushed the hopes of many Tzotzils and Tzeltals for restitution of ancestral lands in the highlands, or title to lands they had colonized in the jungle. The increasingly exclusionary access to government aid, coupled with the González state government's growing repression of independent organizations between 1989 and 1993, only increased anger and pessimism about the future.²⁵ In the words of one of the Ch’ul Osil artisan leaders as she surveyed her family's economic hardships, her community's increasing polarization and violence, and the government's bloody-minded rationing of help: *sokem li balamile*, "the world has broken down."

The Zapatista Rebellion and its Immediate Aftermath, 1994-1998

Such was the backdrop against which the people of the *municipios* close to San Cristóbal received news of the Zapatista Rebellion. For years, as the crisis had unfolded, families and groups of neighbors had pondered, in intimate and often despairing discussions, whether there were viable alternatives to abandoning their homes to reestablish their lives elsewhere. Suddenly, after January 1, 1994, conversations turned to detailed considerations of the Zapatistas' and government's negotiating positions and of “how,” not “whether,” indigenous people could reclaim a sense of control of their lives.

²⁵ González himself, meanwhile, was judged by Salinas's government to have done such an exemplary job of controlling dissidence in Chiapas that he was made federal Secretario de Gobernación (head of internal affairs, including security) in early 1993. After the Zapatista rebellion, however, his tenure in Chiapas looked much less successful, and within days he was forced to resign.

The course of events in Chamula during this period illustrates some of the responses to these new conditions. Political power in the *municipio* always having been highly centralized, and having become even more rigid as PRI *caciques* repressed opposition groups through the 1970s and 80s, those who wanted to change local politics had no illusions about making the *ayuntamiento* more pluralistic, much less overthrowing it. Chamula's bosses were deeply entrenched, and given the *municipio's* size and importance in the region,²⁶ they could continue to count on the almost unqualified support of the state and federal governments. Accordingly, Chamula's dissidents, some of whom by this point had taken part in independent organizations since the 1970s, intensified that participation in 1994 in the conviction that they had a better chance of receiving aid and "being taken into account" on the regional level rather than within Chamula. Many of those who lived outside of the *municipio*, especially Protestants and Liberationist Catholics in the new *colonias* that ringed San Cristóbal, constituted a fairly compact voting bloc and as such attempted to negotiate with both PRI and the opposition parties in the 1994 elections for president and state governor. They offered their votes in exchange for various concessions, especially support against Chamula's *caciques* that would permit them to return safely to live in the *municipio*. Those who lived inside of Chamula, on the other hand, having participated clandestinely in independent organizations since the late 1980s, placed much of their hope for change in the wider negotiations around the government's dialog with the Zapatistas. They thus took heart in

²⁶ Through the 1960s, Chamula represented about 20 percent of the indigenous population of the Highlands, and is still more than half the population of the predominantly Tzotzil of the region's three federal congressional districts (See Viqueira and Sonnleitner, 2000.)

late January, 1994, when virtually all the independent organizations of rural poor in the state joined together in CEOIC (Consejo Estatal de Organizaciones Indígenas y Campesinos, State Council of Indigenous and Peasant Organizations) to speak with one voice about the needs of indigenous people. Then in July, people from Ch'ul Osil themselves participated in a convention of representatives of indigenous, peasant, urban neighborhood and non-governmental organizations convoked by still another new organization, AEDEPCH (Asamblea Estatal Democrática del Pueblo Chiapaneco, Democratic State Assembly of the People of Chiapas.)

The federal government, faced with the Zapatista rebellion, realized that despite PRONASOL it did not have bridges to many (perhaps most) of Chiapas's indigenous people and rural poor. It therefore made a show of negotiating with both CEOIC and AEDEPCH in 1994. Under cover of the negotiations, however, it also undertook a multilevel struggle to reassert control in anticipation of the upcoming presidential elections. By the Spring of 1994 federal funds were pouring into Chiapas for road building, health care, education and community development projects, land purchases and agricultural production grants – in all, US\$6 billion more over the three years after 1994 than during the three before. Even the independent organizations represented in CEOIC and AEDEPECH found it difficult to resist these blandishments, and many were co-opted into becoming little more than conduits for federal funds.

At the same time, however, the state was also militarized. After the immediate build-up to fight the Zapatistas, formal military reinforcements kept coming until by summer one third of Mexico's 180,000-strong army was stationed in Chiapas, largely in

new bases and encampments in indigenous regions. Following months of caution leading up to the August 21, 1994, elections for president of Mexico and governor of Chiapas, as soon as the elections were safely won by the PRI, the government unleashed a campaign to discredit human rights groups, clergy and journalists who criticized its strategy, and punish those on the local level who had campaigned and voted against PRI.

Throughout the highlands, these government efforts to reimpose PRI hegemony deepened even further the divisions within communities and led to increased violence. According to testimonies, in Chamula, for instance, many, particularly in the western half of the *municipio* that included Ch'ul Osil, had voted against PRI and for the candidates of the left, opposition party (the PRD, Partido de la Revolución Democrática) in the congressional elections of 1991. They voted for the PRD again in the presidential election in August, 1994. As in 1988, in both 1991 and 1994 their votes were undertallied. But they were not unnoticed: they *did* serve to identify pockets of dissidents to Chamula's authorities. Within weeks of the 1994 election, the leading citizens of the offending hamlets were summoned to the town hall and put on notice that since they were "against the government," they would be excluded from all government aid administered by the *ayuntamiento*. In the words of the municipal president, "We are not about to permit *partidoetik* [political parties] and *orkanisasyonetik* [organizations] to come in and cause divisions in Chamula!"

The aid denied PRD supporters in Chamula was substantial because the budget administered by Chamula's *ayuntamiento* in 1995 amounted to US\$3.2 million. Stung by their exclusion, 46 hamlets in western Chamula (out of the *municipio*'s 119 in 1994)

formed an independent organization of their own in November, 1994 and attempted to deal with state and federal agencies directly, without the *ayuntamiento's* mediation. Despite innumerable days waiting in government offices, however, their requests were systematically misplaced, delayed, or postponed pending further study; in short, denied.

Even more ominously, in October, 1994, stories circulated that Chamula's PRI authorities had used municipal funds to acquire automatic weapons and ammunition and had paid 100 young men US\$ 1000 for the year from PROCAMPO (funds intended to ease the impact of NAFTA on small farmers) to become the private army of the local PRI. Armed with automatic weapons and cell-phones, by the spring of 1995 these "soldiers" had set-up roadblocks throughout western Chamula. Meanwhile, opponents of PRI – particularly PRD-affiliated Protestants in the western hamlet of Arvensa, who had taken advantage of the confusion of 1994 to return home – were by this point also armed. The inevitable explosion came on November 18, 1995, when PRI's "PROCAMPO army" surrounded the principal concentration of PRD-Protestant houses in Arvensa, firebombing and shooting. The Protestants fought back, and when the smoke cleared there were, according to the state police, six dead in what the government downplayed as an "intra-communal fight over religious differences." Belying this mild description, however, confidential reports from the PRI side had it that the number killed was actually in the twenties, mostly PRI "soldiers," while the Arvensa dissidents, in appeals to human rights agencies, claimed the total dead had come to 28 (Aramoni and Morquecho 1997.) Things could have been much worse: by early 1995, not only Chamula but the entire highlands were bristling with military-grade weapons in the hands of civilians. Credible

testimony from several *municipios* had it that individuals in the state PRI were responsible for distributing these arms through local bosses. Nevertheless, Arvensa was by far the worst incident in the highlands through 1995.

After the denial of aid, the paramilitarization of their hamlets, and then the shoot-out in Arvensa, open political opposition and PRD voting declined precipitously in Chamula. When prominent men suspected of having supported PRD were asked in mid-1995 to sign the nomination papers of the PRI candidate for municipal president as an act of public submission, most acceded. Privately, they continued to speak against PRI, and even to participate clandestinely in meetings of opposition political parties and independent organizations in San Cristóbal. But such activity was too dangerous to be engaged in openly – and too costly in terms of exclusion from government programs.

Meanwhile, economic conditions for most highland Tzotzils and Tzeltals, as we saw in Chapter 2, remained depressed. Corn prices were low and still declining, pay for weaving and embroidery was held down both by relatively inelastic demand and rising numbers of women needing work, and although coffee prices rebounded in 1994, among small producers the benefits were limited to those who had been able to plant on lands where they lived, and thus had not been forced to abandon *cafetales* on distant homesteads following the 1989 crash. What did change was that emigration to cities, to new agricultural colonies in the forests around the state, and to shanty-towns of agricultural laborers in the central valleys, all of which had been high during the early 1990s, slowed and then appears to have stopped for a while after the 1994 rebellion. For a couple of years, everyone waited, in suspense, to see if life was going to get better. But

by late 1996 and 1997 they knew it was not, and emigration accelerated. Rising numbers of people could no longer wait for life within their home region to be fixed.

1998, After the Acteal Massacre

During 1997, in the Tzotzil municipio of Chenalhó on Chamula's northeastern border, a bitter intra-communal struggle raged between paramilitary forces loyal to the PRI and two pro-Zapatista groups, one peaceful followers of the "Word of God," the Abejas, and the other a Zapatista "Base de Apoyo," or grassroots support group. Many of the issues in Chenalhó were the same as Chamula: impoverishment from lost work since the 1970s, rapid demographic growth, mobilization of an underemployed, disempowered population by rival religious groups and independent organizations, and over it all, a local elite intent on maintaining control of the *municipio* and continuing to reap the benefits of its ties to the state and PRI. After several violent confrontations between supporters of the *bases de apoyo* and the paramilitaries through the spring and late fall of 1997, on December 22, a black-clad, masked paramilitary force representing the local PRI surrounded an isolated chapel in the hamlet of Acteal where several score of the Abejas were meeting and praying. Over the course of several hours, the paramilitaries murdered 45 of the Abejas with guns and machetes.

The story of Acteal is well known, and immediately became a symbol of Chiapas's unresolved peace talks and the national government's refusal to conduct honest negotiations with the Zapatistas and mobilized indigenous people in general. After more than seventy years of PRI hegemony at the national level, there is good reason to believe

that revulsion at what happened in Acteal played a role in the party's loss of the presidency in 2000. Within a few months of the murders, eighty-nine supposed "paramilitaries" were arrested and sentenced to long prison terms. But their families and supporters never stopped insisting that most of them were actually apolitical Presbyterians who were easy scapegoats because Protestants were unpopular in Chenalhó. In 2009, after more than a decade in prison, the Supreme Court released many of the men sentenced on the grounds that the case against them had never been proven. This, in turn, led many supporters of the Abejas – and the Zapatistas – to recall the cover-up of the government's role in arming and aiming the paramilitary force, and to point out that with the likely eventual release of all the convicts it appeared the army and state hoped the whole grim episode would be forgotten and never properly investigated. Among other indisputable facts that had never been properly explained, there was a detachment of state police – actually, soldiers along with the army general who commanded them, all seconded to the state police – less than 200 meters away throughout the killing, and yet they did nothing to stop it. Who had committed the murders – and who had given the order? What had they intended to accomplish? Aside from private and journalistic investigations, it appears Acteal will join many other instances of official violence in Chiapas that will probably never be cleared.²⁷

Although the facts of the Acteal case are still disputed by partisans on various sides, however, the impact of the killings in the surrounding *municipios* could not have

²⁷ The most complete contemporary reports were Hernández Castillo 1998 and CDHFBC 1998. In 2007, a revisionist view of the massacre appeared, leading, many believe, to the eventual release of some of the prisoners (Aguilar Camín 2007, CDHFBC 2008.)

been more clear. The paramilitary force in Chenalhó had appeared at about the same time as those in surrounding *municipios*, and its arms, amount of funding, connection to the local PRI, and tactics of intimidation were all familiar to Chenalhó's neighbors. Shaken to think that such a massacre could occur in their own communities, indigenous people around the highlands – under pressure from the now chastened state and national PRI – began putting away (or hiding) their assault weapons and taking steps to “destensar,” “unwind,” the violence.

In Ch'ul Osil, however, which before the depression of the 1980s had been a model of the “traditional,” obedient hamlet, the process of unwinding went even further. When they had participated in the violence of expelling their brothers and sisters who were Protestants and Liberationist Catholics in the 1970s and early 1980s, the traditionalists of Ch'ul Osil believed that they were defending the community against the wrath of angry saints, that the divisions they thought the community's political dissidents and religious converts were creating would eventually destroy the solidarity that protected all. Now in 1998, after almost a generation of pauperization, neglect and repression by the state and by Chamula's own *caciques*, as well as experiences with self-organization that had led them to believe a more secure future for their families and local community lay with independent organizations rather than continued fealty to the bosses in Chamula's *cabecera*, Acteal convinced them the time had come for a break. “We asked for aid, but they sent the wrong kind: we asked for fertilizer and credit, they sent guns and bullets,” was the refrain. As a result, instead of simply joining the pressure throughout Chamula to put away the weapons before another massacre happened, the

people of Ch'ul Osil sent out invitations to all of those they had expelled since the mid-1970s, Presbyterians, Seventh-Day Adventists and Liberationist Catholics, as well as all other emigrants from the community, many of whose reasons for leaving were unclear. "Come back to Ch'ul Osil for a reconciliation," they asked, "jmeltz'ankutik li jk'ope." During the week before Easter, as many sons and daughters of Ch'ul Osil as they could muster met on the basketball court of the school, with each religious group asked in turn to offer a prayer according to its own lights for peace in their collective family. Together they then visited all of the traditional sacred sites in the hamlet, water holes, caves and mountain tops, and repeated their prayers. When they got back to the basketball court, there was a great feast until nightfall. Within a month, some of the expelled returned, at least part time. The spell of the "comunidad revolucionaria institucional" appeared broken.

Chapter 5

The Migration of Indigenous Workers from Highland Chiapas to the United States, The Case of Chamula, 2001-2005

Although it has only been widely recognized for the last five or six years, workers from the Tzotzil-speaking *municipio* of Chamula in the Chiapas highlands have been migrating to work in the United States since the end of the 1980s.¹ The difference now is that what was once a small number of pioneers has become a significant demographic and economic movement, with 15-20 percent of the *municipio*'s population of 15-34 year old men in the North by the end of 2005.² In this Chamula is following a pattern that has become established throughout rural Chiapas since the end of the 1990s. In 1997, the state was 27th among federal entities in remittances. By 2003 it had jumped to 12th, and in 2005 to 11th. Most observers agree that since the Revolution of 1910 there has never been such a mass exodus from any Mexican state.³

¹ E.g., "Más de 3000 chamulas laboran en Estados Unidos," NOTIMEX, 2i-v-2001; "Una de cada tres familias en Chiapas depende de remesas," *La Jornada*, 24-xii-05; Rus and Guzmán, 1996.

² When this chapter was originally composed, in the fall of 2005, of some 265 men in Ch'ul Osil between 18-34 years of age, 43, or approximately 16 percent, were in the United States. In 2006, this number reached its peak, 61, or almost a quarter of all young men, and from then until 2010 has declined slightly. From testimonies, the percentages from hamlets in the center and along the southern boundary of Chamula are much higher.

³ In the early 2000s remittances to Chiapas – at the time the best indicator of the number of migrants – rose so quickly that some questioned the validity of the data, wondering if the dollars being wired to the state were not *narcodólares* on their way to Central America, or the remittances of Central American migrants being sent for pick-up to Mexico's southern border (*La Jornada*, 6-vi-05.) By the second half of the decade, however, surveys conducted by the Colegio de la Frontera Norte along the U.S.-Mexico

In an attempt to contribute to the evaluation of this migration, the following pages present a preliminary survey of the migrants from one community in the *municipio* of Chamula conducted during the summers of 2003-05. Ch'ul Osil's first "modern" migrants ventured north in 2001. As Table 5.1 shows, news of their relative success – and of that of those who followed them – led to an increasing number of new migrants over the next four years, through the period of the survey. Meanwhile, as of 2005 only a few of the migrants have yet returned home: 49 of the 57 who had left as of August 2005 – 86 percent – were still in the North. Moreover, of the eight who were no longer in the U.S. fulltime, two had become *polleros* who now traveled back and forth as many as ten times a year. Only 6 community members – 11 percent – had returned home apparently to stay. If the Ch'ul Osil case follows the example of indigenous communities elsewhere in Mexico, as many as half of the migrants will never return home for more than short visits (see Fox and Rivera 2004).

Broadly conceived, statewide research on the macroeconomic context and impact of this massive transfer of workers from Chiapas to the United States is just beginning. But the reorientation of the state's rural labor force, much of it indigenous, will also have – is already having – profound effects on the economies, class structures, family

border (*Encuesta sobre Migración en la Frontera Norte de México, EMIF-Norte*: COLEF, e.g., 2007) had made it clear that from 2002 on Chiapas was one of the principal contributing states to Mexico's total U.S. migration, and that after 2006 it was the single largest contributor with approximately 14 percent of the yearly total. (See also Nájera Aguirre and López Arévalo 2009.) (Another, tragic, indication of the surge in migration from Chiapas and Mexico's south is the change in origin of migrants found dead in the Arizona desert. In 1990-99, 11.7 percent were from the far south; in 2000-2005 it had risen to 24 percent, more than half, apparently, from Chiapas (Rubio-Goldsmith et al. 2006:41.))

organizations, cultures, and politics of local communities and micro-regions. The following pages attempt to document the beginning of this more intimate side of transborder migration.

Migration from Chamula to the United States: How it began

Although economic conditions for indigenous people in the highlands have deteriorated over the last thirty years, that by itself is not sufficient to account for the sudden rise of migration since the end of the 1990s. If need were the only determinant, it should have begun several years before it did. Nor is it the case that the Chamulas and their neighbors have only recently learned of the possibility of moving to the U.S. I personally heard stories about Chamulas crossing the northern border as long ago as the 1970s, and have written elsewhere about undocumented Chamulas in California in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Rus and Guzmán 1996). So neither can the explanation for the surge in migration simply be learning that the possibility existed. How, then, does one explain the current boom? In addition to the economic and demographic factors carefully documented by others (see Villafuerte and García (2006), Villafuerte et al. (2002)) and corroborated in the present survey, there have been some more general developments in recent years that appear to have encouraged the decision to migrate. Among these are greatly increased information about the mechanics of undocumented migration to the U.S.; increased – if still minimal – economic security for families with absent husbands and fathers (and so far almost all the Chamula migrants have been men); and finally, changes in what might be called the “mood” of highland communities, in

their level of hopefulness and optimism. Before moving on to the survey itself, let us simply enumerate these more diffuse factors, all of which should be explored more deeply in the future.

1. Increased information: The first massive movement of Chiapanecos to the U.S. came not from the Altos but from Chiapas's Coast and Sierra, where agriculture and infrastructure were seriously damaged by floods in 1998 and 1999, and severely impacted as well by the collapse of world coffee prices after the 1998 season. As Villafuerte and García Aguilar (2004, 2006), and Hernández Castillo (2004) have documented, by the early 2000s many campesino villages in both regions were virtually without young men. Many Chamulas worked as migrant laborers in these regions, often alongside these same young men, and with a one or two-year delay followed them North.

Meanwhile, by the end of the 1990s, thousands of other Chamulas, both emigrants and those whose families still lived inside the *municipio*, were working in cities, some in Central and Northern Mexico. Several men from Ch'ul Osil described to us hearing about the experiences of fellow, non-indigenous workers who had already been to the U.S. At least one told us that as he reasoned, if he was going to be working so far from home anyway (he worked at the time in a factory in León, Guanajuato), he might as well go all the way North and make enough money to be able to stop migrating.⁴ From interviews, younger men's experiences working in cities outside of Chiapas, where they contact with other workers their own age, also led many to begin thinking of themselves

⁴ Others have also reported that indigenous workers encounter less discrimination as "mexicanos" in the U.S. than as "indios" in Mexico, leading many to conclude that they might as well go all the way North (Velasco 2005: e.g., 77 ff).

in terms that went beyond the local community, as “workers” as much as “Chamulas.”

Finally, as it became increasingly dangerous at the end of the 1990s for Central Americans headed to the U.S. to cross into Mexico on Chiapas’s Pacific coast, many of them began coming through the central valleys and highlands. By 2000 such migrants were sometimes transported in open trucks belonging to expatriate Chamulas, and occasionally stopped over in Chamula *colonias* on their way across Chiapas. Contact with these migrants became another source of information.

2. Increased (if still minimal) economic security for families: More than 85 percent of Ch’ul Osil’s migrants so far have been men – a percentage reflective of Chamula as a whole. One limitation on men’s distant, long-term migration until very recently was that families had so little economic security, so few sources of food and income, that men expressed reluctance to go so far from their wives and children that they could not return quickly if the family’s *milpa* or stores of food failed.⁵ Two changes have diminished this reluctance. The first is women’s increased participation in the cash economy – a factor that may have made it easier for men to seek urban work as long ago as the second half of the 1980s. The second, more recent change is that since 1998 the government has been offering monetary supports to mothers with school-age children under the Progresa and then Oportunidades programs. From interviews accompanying

⁵ Historically, the extended family, and then the indigenous community itself had provided safety nets for poor households. During their year of office, religious cargo-holders in Chamula, for example, are responsible for providing one meal a day for anyone who comes to their house. In recent conversations, however, people expressed shame about having to rely on this charity, as they also did about depending too much on extended family members in a period when everyone’s income tends to be more monetary than products from subsistence agriculture.

the survey, it appears that the minimum level of security these funds provide to women and children might have encouraged some men to take the risk of longer migrations and absences.⁶

3. Changes in expectations: A last factor, more difficult to pin down, was the growing conviction of Ch'ul Osil's people after 1998 that in spite of the Zapatista Movement, ultimately nothing was going to change in Chiapas – or at least, not change fast enough for them to continue waiting. Friends of ours in the community who had seriously discussed migrating to the U.S. in 1992 and 1993 decided after January, 1994,

⁶ Thirty-three of Ch'ul Osil's 50 male migrants are married with children. Although data were not collected on their wives' incomes, of these families data do exist on non-migrant for 23 of the wives. They fall into three categories: 12 (52%) do *maquila* embroidery, 5 (22%) sell cut firewood or do agricultural labor for wages, and 6 (26%) do unpaid housework only. There are other differences among these groups: the first averages 28.4 years of age, including 6 women under 25, and has 2.5 children each; the second averages 33.4 years of age, includes no women under 25, and has 4.4 children each; and the third averages 24.5 years of age, and has 3.2 children each -- including 3 women under 24 with 3 children and one woman 27 with 6. To characterize them briefly, the first group are young women with a few, probably young children, obliging them to take on "extra" work they can do in their houses; the second are older women with many children and a need for significant extra income, leading them to seek work outside of their homes; and the third are very young women with many children, and perhaps no time for extra work. Meanwhile, Oportunidades funds are distributed in cash for food (170 pesos/month/family – US\$ 17 -- in the first half of 2005), and to support children in school. In this second category, cash is given to the mothers of school-children younger than 18 in the third year of primary school or higher, starting at 115 pesos/month for third year students, rising to 230 pesos/month for sixth year (SEDESOL 2005a: 12-18). (No higher grades are currently relevant in Ch'ul Osil, where there were 111 eligible third through sixth grade students enrolled in September 2005). That is, funds go to schoolchildren normally 8 years of age and older. This makes it unlikely that the youngest mothers would receive much money beyond the food allowance. The maximum amount a family could receive for food and school supports in early 2005 was 1055 pesos/month, US\$ 105.50. All of these payments were distributed via a bank card – an important reason for locating a Banamex/Citibank ATM in Chamula's head town in March, 2006. As surveying progresses, it is hoped there will eventually be complete information on the ages and educational status of migrants' children.

to be patient a while longer, to see if with the rebellion the Mexican government and nation would finally take account of indigenous people's misery and come to their aid. This belief was encouraged for several years by new economic projects and credits offered by the government to win indigenous supporters. As a result, from 1994 to 1998 men and women in Ch'ul Osil applied for loans for flower-growing and marketing, artisan development, home-building, and land purchases, as well as help from various small credit programs channeled through their municipal government. Unfortunately, support was slow to come, or was siphoned off by municipal officials and their followers, or required kickbacks, or was denied to those who were reluctant to support the PRI party machine. Finally, according to many, the government's complicity in the Acteal massacre in December, 1997, convinced them that they had been mistaken, that after all nothing was going to change (see Pérez Tzu 2000: 265-266; Rus and Collier 2003). Many of those who migrated to work in cities outside of Chiapas after 1998 were men and women who had drawn this conclusion, and men from this earlier migration are disproportionately represented among the U.S. migrants since 2001 (see Tables 5.7 and 5.8).

Clearly, many elements account for the sudden jump in the numbers of Chiapanecos who have migrated to the U.S. in the last several years – economics, politics, family situations, information, even *estado de ánimo*, or morale. All of these merit closer investigation. What follows is a first step in this investigation. For now, it does not focus directly on the reasons people have migrated or on their decision-making processes, but on the migrants themselves as a segment of Ch'ul Osil society: who they

are, how they move North, and, at least in a preliminary way, how their migration, with its absences and remittances, affects those who stay behind in Chiapas.

Who migrates

When Chamulas began crossing the northern border in significant numbers in the late 1990s, the first large groups appear to have come from the northern *colonias* of San Cristóbal, along the San Cristóbal-Chamula boundary, and the adjacent communities just over that line in the *municipio* of Chamula.⁷ From their places of residence, such migrants were clearly among the most urban-oriented Chamulas, and from interviews and anecdotal evidence (no surveys are known for this zone), it appears the great majority had urban work experience. On the San Cristóbal side, almost all were Protestants, although there is a significant Pentecostal and Presbyterian population in the neighboring communities on the Chamula side as well. From interviews, it also appears that in many cases these early migrants were led to the U.S. border by Chamula Protestants from expatriate settlements in the central valleys and Chimalapas border region with Oaxaca. This was the case in 2001 with the two migrants from Ch'ul Osil who were to serve as examples for all those who have gone since. Young men, 23 and 25 years old, they seemed little alike: one had a wife and child, the other was unmarried; one had last worked as a sharecropper, the other selling artisan goods on the street in Villahermosa; neither seems to have spoken Spanish particularly well – both had only finished the third year of school. What they had in common was that within a year of arriving in the U.S.

⁷ Rus and Guzmán (1996); interviews with Chamula *pollero* FLG 7-viii-2005.

Table 5.1: Summary of the Flow of Migrants from Ch’ul Osil to the United States

Closing Date	New Migrants	Cumulative Total	Notes: “What people said after each migrant’s first year”
1996	1		Went north when he got out of state prison, and has never returned. Sends regular remittances to his wife and 5 children, who now live in the Protestant <i>colonia</i> of Betania.
v/2001	2	3	One returned in ’02 and built a large cement block house, then went back north, taking 5 compadres. The other sends ~US\$ 100/month to his father.
vi/2002	5	8	One sends US\$ 500 to his wife every second month; the others have all paid their debts, built new houses (one with 10 rooms), and bought stoves and refrigerators. All were still in the U.S. in 2005.
vii/2003	6	14	After the first year, on 18 year-old had US\$ 4000 in the bank, and bought a house lot for US\$ 1500 on which he built a house for his mother; others were sending regular remittances of US\$ 2-300/month, and calling their wives regularly by cell phone. All were still in the U.S. in 2005
viii/2004	20	34	The first two women went, to join their husbands, and leaving small children with their own mothers. The older one owed US\$ 4000 from the failure of her truck crops. Of the men, two were sending US\$ 2-300/month; four others were sending little or nothing – “they’re just starting out,” “they’ve had bad luck,” “illness,” “just inept,” or “don’t know...” Six have already come home, three within the first month, all now with big debts.
viii/2005	23	57	One of those who only went at the end of August, ’04, has already paid his US\$ 2000 travel costs, plus another US\$ 7000 debt; 23 more went just this last spring, and it is said 80 more are already making plans to follow next spring.

Notes: Virtually all of the departures have been during April and May, in time to make it to the first U.S. harvests, while avoiding the hottest months for crossing the deserts of Arizona and New Mexico.

both had prospered, at least in Ch’ul Osil terms. The older, married one was sending US\$100 /month to his father, who in turn maintained his wife and child. The younger,

unmarried one, sent enough to his parents (reputedly US\$ 2-300/month) to build a 9 x 7 meter, brightly painted, cement-block house during his second year. Hearing of this success, by the summer of 2002 five more men were ready to go, including two of Ch'ul Osil's few secondary school graduates. After they too found success, the numbers increased every year.

For purposes of understanding how the decision to migrate North spread through Ch'ul Osil after 2001, those in the survey are divided into three cohorts: 2001-03, 2004, and 2005. At this point, again, it is not possible to provide the precise reasons each migrant made the trip. The surveys summarized here were conducted with their neighbors and relatives, not the migrants themselves, and second-hand accounts of motives are necessarily unreliable. However, comparing the characteristics of the migrants as groups to the volunteered comments about them by the survey's assistants, it is possible to get a picture of who the migrants are, how the profile of new migrants has changed over the years, and perhaps at least in a general way how they made their decisions. Perhaps it is also possible to begin to see how new migratory networks take root, and say something about the future of migration from Chamula. For purposes of the first part of this exposition, comparing the three cohorts, discussion will focus on Tables 5.2 through 5.9.

From quick inspection, the first cohort (2001-03) is distinguished from those that follow in several ways. From Table 5.2 it can be seen that there were no women and that most of the migrants were men in their 20s. In fact, all but three were 22-28, and of the three who were adolescents, two were younger brothers of older migrants and the third

Table 5.2: Migrants' Ages, Marital Status and Numbers of Children

	Age	Men:		Women:		Dependent Children
		Single	Married	Single	Married	
2001-2003	16-20	2	1			
	21-30	2	8			15
	31-40					
	41-50					
	Totals	4	9			15
2004	16-20	3	2	1		2
	21-30		7	1		23
	31-40		3		1	16
	41-50		1			6**
	50-56		1			10**
	Totals	3	14	2	1	57**
2005	16-20	7		2		
	21-30	1	7	1	1	19
	31-40		2			6
	41-50		2			9
	Totals	8	11	3	1	34***

Notes:

*Years run from August to August, corresponding to Chiapas field seasons.

**The dependent status of the children of fathers older than 41 is uncertain. It is *supposed* that the 25 children of fathers younger than 30 are all minors, as would be the majority of the 16 of fathers between 30 and 41. But the data are incomplete.

***32 children 15 years of age or younger.

was a married 18 year old with a wife and child. From Table 5.3, it is also clear that the migrants were significantly better educated than others in their age group in Ch'ul Osil. In fact, only one had less than 3 years of primary school, and he was a young man who had left Ch'ul Osil as a child to accompany his father, a sharecropper in the central valleys, where he grew up among Spanish-speakers.

Economically the migrants are not a random sample of the community either.

Tables 5.4 and 5.5 about property and income divide the migrants into two groups, those who were old enough – 18 years or older – to be counted as adults in the 1998 economic

**Table 5.3: Educational Level of Male Migrants,
and Comparison to the Level of Non-Migrants (expressed in percentages)**

Highest Grade Completed	Migrants: 2001-03 (n=13)	2004 (n=7)	2005 (n=21)	Non-migrants: 21-30 (n=84)
6+	53.9	28.6	61.8	22.3
3-5	38.5	57.1	9.5	26.0
<2	20.7	14.3	19.0	47.5

Notes:

(1) The 1998 database only contains secure information on schooling for people born after 1974. As a result, the control group in the right hand column, the “non-migrants,” consists of non-migrant men 21-31 years of age in 2005 who were included in the 1998 survey and who were still resident in Ch’ul Osil. Although the ages of the migrants run from 16 to 56, a plurality were 21 to 31 years of age (25 of 50.) 15 were younger than 20, and counting the isolated 1996 migrant, 10 were older than 31.

(2) Of the 7 migrants with no schooling, two were older than 35 -- that is, born before 1970. The other 5 were 17-22 years of age and had become migratory farm laborers with their fathers in the late 1980s and early 1990s, before reaching school age.

(3) There are no data on schooling for 14 of the migrants, in all cases either men older than 40 whose schooling none of the consultants could remember, or very young men who were excluded because they left Ch’ul Osil before finishing primary school, and community consultants did not agree about the highest grade attained.

(4) Of the seven women, the numbers and percentages of school attendance are: 6th grade or higher: 2 (28.6%); 3rd-5th grade: 1 (14.3%); no school: 4 (57%).

survey, and those who were too young. In the case of the “olders,” one can compare the landholdings (Table 5.4) and cash income from work (Table 5.5) of the migrants themselves in 1998. In an adjoining column, one can see the figures for the households the younger migrants belonged to in 1998, those of their fathers and mothers. As Table 5.4 shows, despite their higher than average educational level, the migrants’ own households had a greater tendency to be landless in 1998 than the community’s households as a whole: 70.7 percent had .12 hectares or less in that year – that is, a house site or less – as compared to 56.2 percent of all households. This might lead us to conclude that the migrants’ were drawn especially from Ch’ul Osil’s poorest households. Actually, however, it reflects the fact that most of the migrants who were counted as “adults” in 1998 were still fairly young and had not yet inherited land from their parents.

**Table 5.4: 1998 Landholdings of Migrant versus Non-Migrant Households
(households expressed in percentages)**

Land (hectares)	All Households (n=353)	Households of Migrants 18+ in 1998 (n=22)	Paternal Households of Migrants <18 in 1998 (n=28)
2.5+	8.9	4.5	10.7
1.0-2.49	6.3	0	10.7
.25-.99	28.8	22.7	67.8
0-.12	56.2	70.7	10.7

Source: Rus and Rus, Ch'ul Osil economic survey notes, 1996-98.

Notes:

(1) "All households (n=353)" includes both resident and emigrant families, many of which still possess property in the community.

(2) For migrants who were 18 years of age or older in 1998 (n=22), the landholdings reported are those of their own households; for those who were younger than 18 in 1998, and who as a result were not in that year's survey (n=28), the landholdings are those of their parents, at least some of which they will eventually inherit. There were no 1998 data of either kind for 7 of the migrants.

(3) ".12 hectares," in the last row, is the amount of land community consultants define as the amount occupied by a house, its patio and a small garden. 2.5 hectares is slightly less than a family of 5 needs to grow a subsistence crop of corn and beans; better 3.2 (see Chapter 2.)

Looking more closely, five of the 12 in the landless category were sons of parents who owned from 7 to 20 hectares, placing them in the upper 5 percent of households.

Assuming they will eventually inherit at least a hectare of their parents' land, 31.7 percent of the "adults in 1998" group will be in the upper 15 percent of households in landholdings, and only 9 among the migrants who were adults in 1998, or 45.4 percent, would be in the category of owning a house site or less. The more secure status of the migrants' extended families in general is illustrated by the parental families of those under 18 years of age in 1998, the "younger" migrants who were still 25 or under in 2005. Only 10.7 percent of these parental households were landless, while 21.4 percent had more than a hectare.

Table 5.5: 1998 Cash Income of Migrant versus Non-Migrant Households (income expressed in multiples of the daily minimum wage*, households in percentages)

Cash Income (in multiples of the minimum wage)	All Households (n=342)	Households of Migrants 18 yrs + in 1998 (n=16)	Parental Households of Migrants <18 yrs in 1998 (n=31)
1.5+	8.8	18.8	19.4
5-1.5	32.1	31.3	38.7
0-.5	59.1	50.0	45.2

Source: Rus and Rus (2004: 12ff).

*Adjusted every year, the minimum wage in rural Chiapas always remains approximately US\$ 3.00/day.

**“N” here represents resident and emigrant households in 1998 for which income data were available.

As a group, then, despite the fact that they are currently land-poor, the migrants' households stand to have more land than most of their neighbors. Meanwhile, as Table 5.5 shows, even at fairly young ages in 1998, those who became migrants tended to have slightly higher cash incomes than the general run of households – that is, income from work outside of the community. Only 8.5 percent of Ch'ul Osil households (almost always with more than one worker) received 1.5 minimum wages or more in 1998 (or approximately US\$ 4.50/day), but 18.8 percent of the migrants' households had that level of income.⁸ At the bottom, 59.1 percent of all 1998 households received less than one half of a minimum wage, with slightly more than the 50 percent of migrant households at that level. As with the table for land ownership, the corresponding figures for the 1998 parental households of migrants younger than 18, the third column, show them to have

⁸ Of the total of 59 migrants, 26 were 18 years or older in 1998, and were thus in the survey under their own names. For 29 more who were younger than 18 in 1998, it was possible to make a connection to 1998 households through their parents. The four who could not be identified had married in from other communities (2 cases), or were not identifiable from the information available on their parents (2 cases).

**Table 5.6: Economic Stratification and Migration:
Comparison of Subsistence Income of Migrant versus Non-Migrant Households
(households expressed in percentages)**

Income from All Sources	All Households (n=342)	Households of Migrants 18+ in 1998 (n=17)	Parental Households of Migrants <18 in 1998 (n=27)
Sufficient for subsistence* (=1 minimum wage)	51.0	64.7	74.1
Insufficient for subsistence (<1 minimum wage)	49.0	35.3	25.9

*"Sufficient for subsistence" is the income great enough to provision a family of 5 with the minimum of corn and beans for one year, taking into account the sum of cash income, harvests from the family's own land, and harvests from rented land minus the amount paid in rent. One adult, full-time minimum wage turns out to be approximately equal to this amount. (See Chapter 2.)

NB: There were 462 households in the 1998 survey. Of these, 288 were resident in the community. The other 174 were post-1974 emigrants – most of them post-1985 emigrants – or young, recently married couples still without significant independent income.

been substantially more prosperous than the community as a whole (column 1) or the other migrants. Taken as a whole, migrants clearly tended to be drawn from the middle level and above of the income structure.

Table 5.6 summarizes these economic data and, again, compares all 1998 households to those of first the older migrants, and then the parental households of the younger migrants. The table assumes that one minimum wage (or approximately US\$ 750/year) was enough money to buy a household of five what it needed to survive for a year. Therefore, the upper line, "sufficient for subsistence," represents the combination of cash income, corn and beans from their own lands, and corn and beans from rented lands, equal to the amount of corn and beans that a household could purchase with one minimum wage per year. If this is Ch'ul Osil's "middle class," it is of course an

extremely impoverished one: the lowest incomes of this group are equal to US\$.40/day per family member, well below the US\$ 1.00/day per family member qualified by the United Nations as the minimum of “extreme poverty.” Meanwhile, the second category, “insufficient for subsistence,” represents households with *less* than one minimum wage per year. The number of households in this lower category is stunning: as Table 5.6 shows, almost half of all Ch’ul Osil households in 1998 subsisted on less than the equivalent of one minimum wage. Among the adult migrants 18 years or older, however, the corresponding figures were 35.3 percent below this survival line, and 64.7 percent above, and among the parental families of younger migrants incomes were even higher. The migrants, in other words, tended to come from households that were slightly better off than most in Ch’ul Osil.

In sum, the migrants tend to be young, under 30, and to have significantly more education than others the same age. Largely as a result of their youth, they tended in 1998 to have less land than all adults, but they also earned more from wage work than the average adult, and tended to be more successful providing for their household needs.

Why the migrants go

As for the reasons these men risked the trip, in every case of married men or men older than 20 for which there are comments, the reasons were economic – debts, or the heavy responsibilities of maintaining wives and children without a steady income in Chiapas. In Table 5.2, all of those in the first years of the migration, 2001-03, were said to be responding to these pressures. Most were men in their mid-20s, married, with

children. Three of the 4 who were unmarried at the time of migration were younger men (17-18-23) who accompanied older relatives who did have children and debts. Only one man, 25, had neither children nor debts and seems to have gone just to earn and save money.

By the time of the second cohort of migrants, in 2004, the reasons for leaving had become more complicated. There were more younger men, either traveling with relatives or going to meet brothers and cousins from the earlier cohort; there was one divorced man whose primary motive for leaving was said to be to get away from his wife and family; there were for the first time men older than 30 years of age, all of them with several children – the oldest, 48, with 10; and there were for the first time three women, one going to the U.S. to meet her husband, and the other two sisters, one escaping an abusive husband and the other along as her companion. In general, this could be said to be a less “adventurous” group, a group that because of its youth, gender, or large number of children depended on the certainty of being able to follow Ch’ul Osil relatives who had already established themselves in the U.S. in order to make the trip themselves. In fact, in the cases of the youngest and oldest men (under 20 and over 40), and all the women, there was someone waiting at the final destination in the U.S. (The eight migrants who have not stayed in the U.S. include six from this group, and two from 2005. Two of these were young women, the others were all men with at least two children. Two were caught by the Border Patrol within a short time of arriving and returned home (although others, more motivated, were also caught at least once and still made it back into the U.S.) Still another was run over by a tractor and can no longer work. What most

distinguishes all eight, however, is that seven had never worked outside of Ch'ul Osil before going to the U.S., and the eighth had lived in Ch'ul Osil all his life while working as an *aparcerero* in the central valleys. Many migrants are described as homesick and continually lamenting to their families that they wished they could come home, some even crying on the phone. But these eight appear not to have been as hardened for the loneliness of extended absence as those with previous experience of distant migration within Mexico.)

By the third cohort, 2005 (Table 5.2, C), the relative dependence of the migrants on relatives who had gone ahead was even more clear. The 23 migrants this year included relatively more young men and women going to meet relatives (7 men under 20, 4 women), and men over 30 with multiple children (n=4). Only 6 of the 23 were men in their mid-20s whose profile matched that of the “pioneers” of 2001-03. This shift from young men in their prime to other categories of migrants matches the pattern of migration from other communities: At the beginning, the migrants are pioneers who figure out how to get to the U.S. and find places to live and jobs. Once established, they are followed by younger and older relatives and friends who take advantage of the networks they have laid down, as well as by their own wives and occasionally sisters. To some extent, the educational background (Table 5.3) of the three cohorts reflects this shift: All three cohorts are better educated than their peers who stayed at home. But the first cohort was weighted to those with at least 6 years of primary school, and correspondingly good Spanish. In 2004 and 2005 together there were five (17.9 percent) who had never attended school, and 3 – including 2 of the women – who were said to speak no Spanish.

Table 5.7: Place of Last Employment Before Migrating

2001-2003 (n=13)	Tuxtla Gutiérrez	1
	Villahermosa	3
	México, D.F.	1
	Urban total	5 (45%)
	Chiapas Central Valleys	6
	Rural total	6 (55%)
	Adolescents, no previous work	2
2004 (n=19)	Villahermosa	5
	Oaxaca	1
	Cancún	2
	Urban total	8 (42%)
	Ch'ul Osil/Highlands	8
	Chiapas Central Valleys	3
	Rural total	11 (58%)
2005 (n=23)	Villahermosa	3
	León, Guanajuato/Tijuana	1
	Urban total	4 (17%)
	Ch'ul Osil/Highlands	13
	Chiapas Central Valleys	6
	Rural total	19 (83%)

Tables 5.7 to 5.9 reflect the Chamulas' struggle to find a place to make a living in the years before migration to the U.S. began – and the urban knowledge that appears to have encouraged migration to the North. As Tables 5.7 and 5.8 together demonstrate, the last place of employment for all the Ch'ul Osil migrants in 2001-03 was outside of Los Altos, and almost half the jobs were not agricultural. After their success had demonstrated the feasibility of migrating to the U.S., they were joined in 2004 and 2005 by increasing numbers – and percentages – of men and women whose work experience had been limited to the Highlands and Ch'ul Osil itself. Moreover, while some of the

Table 5.8: Last Employment before Migrating

2001-2003 (n=13)	Street vendor (various cities)	4
	Construction work (Mexico City)	1
	Sharecropper (Central Valleys)	5
	Ejido farmer (Central Valleys)	1
	Adolescents, no previous work	2
2004 (n=19)	Street vendor (various cities)	8
	Sharecropper, day-labor (Cent.Valleys)	2
	<i>Ejido</i> farmer (Central Valleys)	1
	Vegetable/flower growing (Ch'ul Osil)	2
	Day laborer (Ch'ul Osil)	1
	Charcoal seller (Ch'ul Osil)	3
	Embroidery contract work (women)	2
2005 (n=23)	Street vendor (various cities)	4
	Sharecropper, day-labor (Cent.Valleys)	6
	Vegetable/flower growing (Ch'ul Osil)	7
	Firewood seller (Ch'ul Osil)	1
	Storekeeper (Ch'ul Osil)	1
	Candle maker (Ch'ul Osil)	1
	Embroidery contract work (women)	3

new migrants with experience limited to Ch'ul Osil had participated in entrepreneurial activities like flower and vegetable growing, or owning a store, others had more humble jobs as laborers, producers of firewood and charcoal, while the women had participated in contract embroidery. Taken together with the shifts toward a lower educational level, and toward more younger migrants, older men with children, and women, this again suggests a sort of “democratization” of the migrant population as time has gone on.

An interesting detail about the two migrants in Table 5.8 who were *ejidatarios* in

**Table 5.9: Migrants' Jobs in 1998*,
and their Last Jobs before Migrating in 2001-2005**

-Of the 24 for whom there are data about employment in 1998, the jobs were:

<u>Ch'ul Osil/Highlands (n=12)</u>	
Vegetable/flower growing (Ch'ul Osil)	6
Subsistence corn (Ch'ul Osil)	4 (3 men, 1 woman)
Embroidery contract work (woman)	1
State police (Highlands)	1
 <u>Central Valleys (n=7)</u>	
<i>Ejido</i> farmer	1
Sharecropper	5
Farm laborer	1
 <u>Cities (n=5)</u>	
Street vendor (various cities)	4
Soldier	1

-The last employment of these same 24 individuals before leaving Mexico (2001-2004) were:

<u>Ch'ul Osil (n=8)</u>	
Vegetable/flower growing (Ch'ul Osil)	2
Subsistence corn (Ch'ul Osil)	2
Firewood seller (Ch'ul Osil)	1
Wood cutter (Ch'ul Osil)	1
Embroidery contract work (women)	2
 <u>Central Valleys (n=8)</u>	
Sharecropper	5
Farm laborer	3
 <u>Cities (n=10)</u>	
Street vendor (various cities)	8

*To have been in the 1998 survey, individuals had to be adults in that year – that is, 18 years of age or older, or married. Of the 57 migrants in the current study, 30 met these criteria. There are data about 26. The youngest of these people in 2005 was 25 years of age.

the central valleys, one in 2001-03 and the other in 2004, is that while they were absent each rented out portions of his 5 hectares of *ejido* land to much poorer, less educated Ch'ul Osil men in order to help pay for his trip north and feed his family. From

interviews, it appears this pattern of *ejidatarios* renting their land to the landless while they themselves migrate North is well established in large sections of the state. Over time, it could well lead to increasing the inequality between *ejido* members and sharecroppers, not to speak of eventual conflicts over the land.

A second interesting detail is that of the male migrants old enough to have held jobs in Mexico before leaving for the U.S., 16 of 49 (32.7 percent) worked as street vendors (among other things of chewing gum, popsicles, and artisan goods) in major cities immediately before departing.

Comparing the Chamula migrants' employment in 1998 to the jobs they held during the year prior to their departure for the U.S. (Table 5.9), one sees a shift in just those few years from rural lives based predominantly in the highlands to urban lives and work. Because only adults were counted in the 1998 survey, the table is able to track only those U.S. migrants who were 18 years of age or older in 1998. Nevertheless, it shows clearly that Ch'ul Osil's independent agricultural producers – the vegetable and flower growers and small corn-farmers who together were the largest category of future migrants in the 1998 survey – had mostly lost their place by the year before they departed for the U.S. From 12 small farmers in 1998, the number had dwindled to only 4 during the year before departure. Three of the displaced farmers had found more dependent work in Ch'ul Osil, the two men as firewood cutters and sellers, and the one woman as a contract embroiderer. The other five had left Ch'ul Osil, one becoming a sharecropper and another a day laborer in the Central Valleys, and the other three becoming street vendors in cities. The 1998 *ejidatario* and soldier had also become street vendors, and one of the

1998 street vendors settled in Mexico City as a construction worker (*albañil*.) In sum, as agriculture failed, small producers were often left with large debts (in several cases more than US\$ 2,000), which in turn tended to drive them away from the highlands, and ultimately away from agriculture even before they decided to move to the U.S.

Looking at Tables 5.2, 5.7, 5.8 and 5.9 together, U.S. migrants whose last jobs in Mexico were urban tended to be older men and to have more children. Between the lines, it is possible to read in their histories the hardships that scores of Ch'ul Osil men faced in the 1990s when they were forced to find work elsewhere in Mexico and support their wives and families with remittances. Eventually, many families like these followed their husbands and fathers to the city, with the result that there are now *colonias* of Chamulas in cities throughout southeastern Mexico. By 2000, again, approximately one quarter of Ch'ul Osil's people had emigrated permanently to such colonies. But we are concerned here with men whose families had *not* left Chamula, and who were thus themselves still anchored in the *municipio*. Whether as street vendors in cities, or laborers in places like León and Torreón (two common destinations for men from Ch'ul Osil), such men had become members of a floating population of single, impoverished urban laborers. Almost without exception, those who returned to Ch'ul Osil from such jobs told stories of making more money than in the campo, but also of being discriminated against at work and in the street – of being paid less at work, and even branded “Guatemaltecos” by authorities who detained them and demanded bribes to set them free. Writing of the internal migration of indigenous people, others have pointed out that given the discrimination they face from other Mexicans, many eventually find it easier to move on

to the U.S. where although they also face discrimination, it is as “Mexicans” and does not lead to being paid less or given worse jobs than other Mexicans (see Cohen 2004).

How the trip is organized and what it costs

If the first migrants from Ch’ul Osil had traveled with *polleros* and migrants from Chamula Protestant colonies in Chimalapas and San Cristóbal, by the third year they were accompanying *polleros* from nearby *comunidades* in Chamula, and by the summer of 2004 there were two *polleros* in Ch’ul Osil itself. As we have seen, at the same time there was a change in the profile of Ch’ul Osil’s migrants from adventurous younger men to increasing numbers of adolescents, older men, and women. The community had begun to be confident of the migration; it was on the way to becoming “normalized” as an integral part of the community’s life.⁹

This brings us to questions about how much migration costs, how it is paid for, how long it takes to start making a profit on the other side, and to some extent, about the entire chain of exploitation of indigenous migrants, which extends from the employers in the U.S. and the U.S. economy as a whole down to those in local communities in rural

⁹ To this point, the northward movement of new migrants from Ch’ul Osil is organized by cell phone calls among family members and friends. As a result, most of those who went to the U.S. in 2004 and 2005 already knew where they were going to live and work before they left Chiapas. These intimate, atomized networks do not yet appear, however, to have coalesced into the kinds of transnational communities or more formal organizations others have described among Guatemalan indigenous migrants (Burns 1993), who came in larger, home community groups through the Sanctuary movement in the early 1980s, or among Oaxacan indigenous migrants (e.g., Kearney and Nagengast 1989, Velasco 2002), who began extending North from solid communal bases in Baja California in the 1980s. One advantage of observing the Ch’ul Osil migration from its beginning is that such secondary organization can be traced as it develops.

Table 5.10: Average “Fare” from Ch’ul Osil to Destination in U.S.

2001 (n=1)	2,000 dollars
2002 (n=5)	1,620 dollars
2003 (n=6)	1,465 dollars
2004 (n=11)	1,827 dollars
2005 (n=21)	1,815 dollars

Mexico who lend the money to migrate.

As Table 5.10 demonstrates, between 2001 and 2003, the average “fare” from Ch’ul Osil to the North decreased. Everyone agrees that the reason for the decline was that local *polleros* from Chamula began to enter the market. In 2001, community consultants were sure of the price paid for only one of the migrants, who had traveled with a guide from Cintalapa (Chimalapas). In 2002 and 2003, however, all of the migrants but two – who dared to make the trip by themselves – went with *polleros* and groups from nearby hamlets of Chamula. Then in mid-2004, after two men from Ch’ul Osil became *polleros*, paradoxically the average price increased. Two factors seem to account for this change. The actual price of the trip to the border, and then to be smuggled across and on to a destination in the U.S., seems to have increased from approximately US\$ 1,500 in 2001-03 to 1,800 in 2004-05.¹⁰ At the same time, one of the Ch’ul Osil *polleros* in particular began to do a considerable portion of the lending for the trip himself. Community consultants agreed that he encouraged his clients to take out

¹⁰ With increased border enforcement, by early 2007 the fee just to cross the border had increased to approximately US\$ 3000, or 33,000 pesos (*New York Times*, February 9, 2007; on the relationship of increased U.S. enforcement to rising costs to cross see Gathmann 2004).

Table 5.11: Reported Sources of Loans, and Interest Rates, for 2005 Migrants

Lender	Quantity:		Total	Monthly Interest Rate
	Number	Average		
Family	1	1,500 dlls	1,500 dlls	0
Family	4	1,800 dlls	7,200 dlls	5%
<i>Pollero</i>	5	1,920 dlls	9,600 dlls	10%
Loan shark	5	1,790 dlls	8,950 dlls	10%

Notes:

(1) Secure data do not exist on the ways 8 of the migrants paid for their trips, although community consultants believed they had borrowed the funds from loan sharks.

(2) Although the amounts borrowed between 2001-2004 are known, interviewing about the sources of the funds and the interest rates was not consistent at the beginning of the survey, and in 2005 the team decided it would be unreliable to return to those years and re-do the questions.

(3) There was only one *pollero*, in Ch'ul Osil in 2005, so all *pollero* loans were by that individual. He also lent at least US\$ 5,800 in 2004. There is no data on earlier loans he might have made; it is said that there were many, including to migrants from other communities.

more than the minimum amount in order to have enough to live on for a few weeks once they reached the U.S. This is reflected in Table 5.11, showing the different amounts borrowed from different lenders in 2005. Two of the lending *pollero*'s debtors, relatives, borrowed US\$ 1,800. The other three borrowed 2,000. Those borrowing from other sources borrowed 1,800 or less.

The size of these loans, and the high rates of interest, in turn, determine who profits from remittances, at least at first. As can be seen from Table 5.11, two thirds of the loans to be smuggled North (10 of 15) carried interest rates of 10 percent *per month*, and most of the other third – from family members – were at 5 percent. If the principle was not reduced, to keep up with the interest alone on a US\$ 2,000 loan at 10 percent would oblige a migrant to pay US\$ 200/month. Anything less and the difference was added to the total debt (there is no compound interest: unpaid interest is simply added to

the amount that must be paid back before the borrower can start repaying the principal.)¹¹ What this means is that generally migrants sacrifice as much as possible so that they can pay back their loans as quickly as possible. But since it typically takes at least a few weeks to settle into a job and receive a first paycheck (if everything goes well), the first couple of payments on a US\$ 2,000 debt are likely to be just accrued interest. Assuming a migrant with a debt of US\$ 2,000 paid only one month of extra interest, and then paid US\$ 200 every month thereafter, it would still take 30 months to repay the loan, and the total payment would be more than US\$ 5,600. If a migrant could make payments of US\$ 300/month, an extremely difficult task¹², it would still take 11 months and cost more than US\$ 3,000 to fully cancel the loan.

¹¹ The logic of this is that the lender is due “rent” only on his original \$2,000 or whatever portion of it still outstanding. Unpaid interest has to be made up, like unpaid rent, but cannot itself generate interest. Interest is recalculated each month as 10 percent of the amount of the original loan still outstanding as the month begins.

¹² At the then current U.S. national minimum wage of \$5.15/hour, a full-time worker earned US\$ 824/month (US\$ 9,888/year). After state and federal income taxes, Social Security and Medicare, and federal unemployment insurance are deducted, this works out to approximately \$710/month. By carefully controlling expenditures for rent, food, car-fare and other necessities, minimum wage workers may have as much as US\$ 300 left. If some of this amount is discounted for eventualities, something less than that is available to remit. Meanwhile, agricultural workers often do not work full-time all year, and newly arrived workers often find only part-time jobs, so earnings would be less. Then too, there are costs associated with sending money. Mexico’s PROFECO (Protección Federal del Consumidor) and U.S. migrant advocacy groups recently found that even with improvements in the cost of money orders to Mexico via the U.S. Postal Service and Western Union, the charge was still approximately 10 percent (*FNS News*, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, 3-i-2006), cutting further into migrants’ ability to remit. In recent years migrants have begun using banks in the U.S. to send remittances via ATMs in Mexican banks – another purpose for the Banamex/Citibank branch in Chamula. But the relatively few Chamulas in the U.S. who have access to banks and ATM cards charge their compatriots only slightly less than the traditional money-order companies to use their accounts.

This leads to two further observations. The first is that those in communities like Ch'ul Osil who profit most spectacularly from migration are the *polleros* and moneylenders. Of Ch'ul Osil's two *polleros*, for example, the one who only leads migrants to the border made one trip per month in 2004-05, taking 10-12 clients each time.¹³ The total cost to reach a final destination in the U.S. from Chamula was US\$ 1,800, and our consultants understood that he received approximately US\$ 200 from each migrant for his services just to get them to the border. His total income was thus US\$ 2,000-2,400/month. In 2005, after just one year as a *pollero*, he had a new brick house, refrigerator, stove, television, and Nissan Tsuru. The second *pollero* made six trips per year, taking 8-10 clients at a time. But unlike his colleague, he took his clients across the border and on to Florida. For this he himself received most of the 1,800 fare paid by each migrant, or US\$ 14,400-18,000 every two months. He also lent money for the trip, and in 2005 reputedly had more than US\$ 10,000 out on loan at a time, meaning that he was receiving approximately US\$ 1,000/ month in interest

¹³ There are a number of different ways to make the actual "travel arrangements" for crossing the border. The simplest is to pay a *pollero* in one's home community who then guides all the way to a final destination in the U.S. Others are to travel to the border with or without a guide, and then meet a *pollero* who gets one across the border and, often, on to a destination in the U.S. The U.S. half of this trip can be paid for ahead of time, through the guide's connections if one travels with a guide; by a loan from the smuggler at the border, who then sells the debt to a contractor in the U.S., to be worked off over a fixed time; or "on delivery" to a destination in the U.S., with the migrant paying the smuggler and his "crew" on arrival by calling a relative or friend to come "bail out" him or her from the crew's safe house. Most Ch'ul Osil migrants seem to be using the first method, doing the entire trip with one *pollero*. Those who traveled with the Ch'ul Osil guide only as far as the border prepaid the trip in Ch'ul Osil, and were then handed off along with their payment to a smuggling "crew" affiliated with the guide at the border. The one exception is a Ch'ul Osil migrant known to have borrowed money from a smuggler at the border and then been "sold" to a labor contractor.

Table 5.12: Yearly Totals of New Loans in Ch’ul Osil for Migration to the U.S.

2001 (n=1)	2,000 dollars
2002 (n=5)	8,100 dollars
2003 (n=6)	8,790 dollars
2004 (n=20)	36,540 dollars
2005 (n=23)	41,745 dollars
Total, 2001-05	97,175 dollars

The figure for new loans each year is the total of loans that consultants were certain had been made, multiplied by the average value of the loans whose amount could be ascertained. Thus for example, for 2005 there are details about the loans to 15 migrants, but it is certain that 23 migrants in all received loans. The value, then, is the average of the 15 loans (US\$ 1,815) multiplied by 23 comes to US\$ 41,745.

payments. Together, then, his monthly income was between US\$ 8,200 and 10,000. He too had a large new house, a new Dodge pick-up, a Nissan sedan, and had recently paid the bride-price for a second young wife.

The second observation is that a significant portion of remittances, which according to much of the optimistic World Bank and government propaganda supposedly helps lift families out of poverty, does not actually go to the migrants’ families at all, at least for the first year or two, but to money-lenders.¹⁴ Comparing Table 5.11 and 5.12, in the fall of 2005 the new migrants from that year had borrowed a total of US\$ 41,745. Taking into account that a few were paying interest of 5 percent/month, but most 10 percent, collectively they would have been remitting some US\$ 3,664.50/month *in interest alone*. Assuming that the 2004 migrants were still repaying approximately half their loans, they would have been sending home another US\$ 1,800 in interest. The total

¹⁴ For example, Ratha (2003), and the critiques of, e.g., Kapur (2003), Sicilia (2004), and Havice (2004).

interest, then, assuming all the years before 2004 were paid off¹⁵, would have been approximately US\$ 5,400/month. All of this appears to have gone to fewer than ten lenders, most of it to three. This toll of repaying smuggling loans is reflected in Table 5.16, showing the average ranges of monthly remittances reportedly received by Ch’ul Osil families in 2005. The 2005 cohort, those with less than a year in the North, managed to send their families an average of only US\$ 53-75/month, while those who had migrated in 2003 and earlier, with two or more years in the U.S., sent on average between US\$ 142 and 215/month. In part the difference may be that new migrants experience more unemployment and work at less well-paying jobs – although it is also true that by now many new migrants from Ch’ul Osil move directly into jobs arranged by those who have preceded them. In sum, then, it seems that by far the largest factor in determining the difference is cost of repaying “travel loans” during the first year or two. The time it takes to repay these loans, in turn, also enters into migrants’ decision to stay the North for three years or longer: the financial benefits for themselves and their families do not truly begin until they have paid off their creditors.¹⁶

¹⁵ The three collaborators in an earlier publication (Rus and Guzmán 1996) borrowed a total of US\$ 3000 before their 1991 trip to the U.S. By the time they had paid it off four years later – after the collapse of the peso/dollar exchange at the end of 1994 – they calculated they had paid approximately US\$ 17,000.

¹⁶ Of course the high cost of crossing the border is itself a side effect of the drastically increased enforcement on the U.S. side, beginning with the erection of walls near El Paso-Ciudad Juárez in 1993 and San Diego-Tijuana in 1994 (see Angelucci 2005). As the expense and danger of entering the U.S. climbed, workers who might formerly have returned seasonally to Mexico began finding long-term jobs and staying. A further element in the decision to remain longer, even permanently, is the crisis of agriculture mentioned earlier in the text which has forced many rural workers like those of Ch’ul Osil to join the U.S. labor market as a long-term alternative.

Migrants' experience in the North: Where they go and what they do

The question about where Ch'ul Osil's migrants have crossed into the U.S. is an easy one: as of 2005, all have walked across the border in the desert between Sonora and Arizona. Where they have gone has also become easy to answer. As a network of contacts with jobs and places to live has developed, what began as a migration to the two Southeastern U.S. states of Georgia and Florida has increasingly become concentrated in just one city, West Palm Beach on Florida's southeastern coast. Here they joined an already considerable community of Mayas from Guatemala and earlier migrants from Chamula, finding work in the service industry or in nearby citrus groves and other agriculture.¹⁷

Table 5.13: Place of First Employment in the U.S.

2001-2003	In 2003 interviews, nobody in Ch'ul Osil knew the names of destinations in the U.S., even those who were receiving remittances were uncertain. According to 2005 interviews, migrants from those earlier years who were still in the U.S. were all in Florida.
2004	Georgia – 5 migrants; Unknown – 17 migrants (although most believed there were in Florida.)
2005	Georgia – 2 migrants; Florida – 18 migrants (all West Palm Beach -- consultants believed that most migrant from earlier years were also there.) Unknown – 3 migrants.

¹⁷ Just inland of West Palm Beach, on Florida's east coast, is Indiantown where an important community of Guatemalan Mayan refugees was established in the 1980s (Burns 1993). Many of the first Chamula migrants traveled to the U.S. with Guatemalan Mayas, using the Guatemalans' networks once they arrived to find work and places to stay (Rus and Guzmán 1996). An even bigger community of Chamulas is said to exist in Tampa, on Florida's west coast, where there is reputed to be an area of several blocks known as "Bik'it Chamu," "Little Chamula."

Table 5.14: Male Migrants' First Employment in the U.S.

	Year of first migration:			Total
	2001-03	2004	2005	
Farm labor	9	3	9	21
Gardener/yard crew	-	-	1	1
Construction	1	3	-	4
“Chicken factory”	1	-	-	1
Unknown	2	16	8	26

Notes:

(1) Since the sample is small, the six women who stayed more than a few months in the U.S. and found work, are not included. All six did farm labor, accompanying their husbands or brothers.
 (2) These figures do not reflect changes in employment after the migrants' first year. However, in several cases the later, 2004-05 migrants who did NOT do farm work as their first job were merely following relatives from the 2001-03 who themselves began as farm workers and then moved to better jobs. It has proven difficult to secure consistent data about changes of employment – a theme that warrants future study.

As for work, with the exception of 3 men with sixth grade or better educations who somehow found jobs installing utility poles for an electric company in Georgia soon after arriving in 2004, almost all have started in seasonal agricultural labor. In this too the people of Ch’ul Osil are following the pattern which finds most new indigenous arrivals beginning in the fields. If they follow the pattern of those who preceded them, as they stay through one or two winters without regular agricultural work, many can be expected to transition to urban jobs (Fox and Rivera Salgado 2004).

Remittances

Studies elsewhere have shown that over time remittances tend to decline as migrants begin to remake lives in their new communities and their native places fade into the distance. Clearly this is not the case yet for migrants from Ch’ul Osil, where the movement is still new and most migrants appear to be sending home as much as they can to maintain their families. Indeed, as Table 5.15 demonstrates, at the end of Ch’ul Osil’s

Table 5.15: Average Monthly Remittances to Family Members in 2005

Year of First Migration:	2001-3 (n=13)	2004 (n=14)	2005 (n=16)
No remittances	1	5	10
50-99 dollars/month	3	2	3
100-199 dollars/month	2	-	-
200-299 dollars/month	6	6	2
300 dollars +/month	1	1	1
Unknown	-	2	4

Notes:

(1) Beginning in 2004, two men from the 2001-03 worked part-time as polleros. But in 2004 they were still sending US\$ 200-299/month as remittances themselves, so they are included them in the figures here.

(2) As of August, 2005, 9 of the 59 total migrants had returned home at least to visit, leaving 50 in the U.S. that month. Of those 50, there are data in the table above for 43.

fifth year of migration, family remittances have actually risen each year as migrants have paid off their loans and found more secure jobs. The few exceptions, migrants in their second and subsequent years who did not send money to their families, were all the subject of strong negative gossip. Two of the non-remitters from 2001-04 men were described as alcoholics who had trouble keeping jobs, a couple more were young men without wives and children who were condemned for not sending money regularly to their parents, and still another was described as having abandoned his family before going North – in fact, as having emigrated as a way of getting as far away as possible. However, 85 percent of male migrants for whom there was data were believed to be sending as much money as possible to their wives, children, or parents.

Table 5.16 views the impact of remittances sent to families on both an individual and community-wide basis. Community consultants were able to give only a range for the periodic remittances of particular migrants (e.g., “500-1000 pesos/month”), and only knew with relative security about the amounts they sent to their families, not to those who

Table 5.16: Range of Monthly Remittances to Family Members in 2005

Year of First Migration	Monthly Range, Cohort: minimum - maximum	Monthly Range, Individuals: minimum - maximum
2001-03 (n=13)	1,850 - 2,800 dollars	142 - 215 dollars
2004 (n=14)	1,600 - 2,300 dollars	114 - 164 dollars
2005 (n=16)	850 - 1,200 dollars	53 - 75 dollars
Total remits/year	51,600 - 75,600 dollars	
Total remits/hamlet/month		4,300 - 6,300 dollars

Notes: The calculations of ranges of remittances are based on the variations in remittances in Table 5.15. For this table if, for example, all the migrants in the 2001-03 cohort who sent remittances in the US\$ 200-299/month range – there were 6 individuals in that range – had sent US\$ 200, that would be the minimum possible for that group, or US\$ 1200/month; if all had sent 299 it would be the maximum, or US\$ 1794. The monthly range for all the migrants in a particular yearly cohort was calculated by adding the minimum totals and then the maximum totals for each sub-group. The range of individual remittances was then arrived at by dividing the minimum and maximum possible totals for each group of migrants (2001-03, 2004, and 2005) by the number of migrants in the group, for instance in the case of 2001-03, n-13. This operation gives us the average range of remittances for groups of migrants with the same number of years of experience.

had lent them money. What Table 5.16 attempts to show is how much these family remittances would be if in every case the quantity were the minimum named versus what it would be if in every case it were the maximum.¹⁸ The average of these minimums and maximums yields the range of the average remittance for migrants who departed in particular years. Note that Table 5.15 shows that some individuals sent quantities more or less than this range – e.g., in the 2001 group, where the range of the *average* was US\$

¹⁸ Accurate figures on remittances will perhaps eventually make it easier to calculate the total number of migrants. According to figures from 2005, the total remittances for Chiapas came to US\$ 674.65 million, more than triple the total of just four years earlier (Banamex, reported in *La Jornada*, 5-vi-2006). If as data from elsewhere in Mexico and Central America suggest each migrant remits approximately US\$ 200/month, or 2400/year, the number of Chiapas migrants in 2005 would have been around 280,000. If, however, migrants are sending less, as the Ch’ul Osil data suggests, whether because the overwhelming majority are very new migrants who have not yet found steady work, or have only found lower paying jobs, the number of migrants to amass the same total remittances could be considerably more.

142-215, three individuals sent US\$ 50-99/month, and one sent more than US\$ 300. Note as well at the bottom of the chart the total infusion of resources into Ch'ul Osil per month and per year. In a community where 80 percent of households in 1998 lived on less than US\$ 750/year (see Table 2.20), the addition of something between US\$ 51,600 and US\$ 75,600 per year to the community is a significant contribution. If the money were evenly distributed, assuming for a moment that the number of families had not changed since 1998, it would come to something between US\$ 179 and US\$ 262 /family/year. That is, it would more or less double the income of the poorest families. (And this increase in community income does not include, remember, the incomes of *polleros* and lenders, both of which receive a substantial share of the total income from U.S. migration.)

But of course, the income from family remittances is not distributed evenly. Fifty Ch'ul Osil migrants remained in the U.S. in August 2005. Counting husbands and wives, and sets of young brothers, they represented 45 households. Across all *those* households, the average yearly remittances for each migrant were 1,122 to 1,643 pesos. For the 13 households with migrants who had been in the U.S. for 3 years or more and had thus finished paying their loans – that is, for the families of migrants who left between 2001 and 2003 – the average was 1,704 to 2,580 per year. Meanwhile, for the approximately 230 households without a migrant, *pollero*, or lender, the direct income from migration to the U.S. was of course zero.

Considered from another angle, in the fall of 2005, 22 of the 25 married men and women still in the U.S. were remitting regularly. Altogether, between spouses and

children, they had 100 dependents. Assuming that the 18 unmarried men who also remit have families of 4 at home, that makes another 72 dependents. Add to these 172 dependents the 49 migrants still in the U.S. themselves, and there are 221 people in Ch'ul Osil directly dependent on U.S. incomes. With the *polleros* and their families there are 11 more for 232, not to mention the moneylenders and their families. In all, in just five years approximately one sixth of Ch'ul Osil's population has come to depend directly on migration to the U.S.

Discussion

For almost a century, until the second half of the 1970s, Chamula, like other indigenous communities in highland Chiapas, was tied to the plantation economy of the lowlands. Whether as contract laborers on lowland plantations or sharecroppers on mixed corn and cattle estates, Chamula men earned just enough during four to six months of migratory lowland labor to provision their families one year at a time. This profound dependence, in turn, encouraged them to develop strong, "closed" community structures that provided both for sharing of scarce resources among members and keeping them out of the hands of outsiders. Ethnographers who worked in Chamula and neighboring *municipios* through the 1960s described all of these communities as strongly centralized, hierarchical, and obedient to elders who had spent careers serving community offices and could be trusted to defend them from predators. They were also described as egalitarian, at least in ideology, with a strong tendency to sanction anyone who acquired slightly more and refused to share it, and punitive toward innovation that might upset the

precarious status quo. Last but not least, studies also portrayed a strong sexual division of labor. Men, following patterns of labor requisition established during the colonial period, migrated while women stayed in the communities' home spaces and managed their households. Later studies discovered that there was actually considerable economic stratification, or perhaps polarization, within such communities, with a small number of merchants, teachers, and others who had acquired some property on one side, and the 90 percent or more of community members who lived at a subsistence level on the other. Much of this polarization was eventually shown to be related to leaders' ties to the surrounding regional and national societies as brokers. But the overall image of local indigenous communities as socially "closed" and culturally "traditionalist" was clearly related to their place in the plantation economy.

For more than a generation now, since the beginning of the collapse of plantation agriculture, such local communities have been undergoing wrenching changes. Earlier economic surveys in Ch'ul Osil have traced the course of this change from the mid-1970s through the 1980s and 1990s. But the changes set in motion by the reorientation of indigenous labor from Chiapas's local economy to the wider North American market over the last several years promise to be the most dramatic yet. While a handful of households make enormous profits from lending to migrants and guiding them North, and another 15-20 percent with migrant members receive dollar remittances, 80 percent or more of households still do not benefit from the change, at least directly. Perhaps one third of these are families that have adequate incomes from various combinations of farming, street vending, remittances from labor in other parts of Mexico, and lately

Oportunidades, a federal program that since 1998 has distributed cash to poor families that keep their children in school. But that leaves at least half of the households in Ch'ul Osil falling behind. In the "new economy," the men in these households appear to depend on agricultural day labor, most of it paid at less than the legal minimum wage, and much more precarious than even the migratory agricultural labor within Chiapas of the past. Women, meanwhile, have been forced by these circumstance to enter the money economy as embroiderers in *maquilas*, most for less than one third the minimum wage for eight to ten hours of work per day. This increasing economic stratification reflects differences in education and ability to speak Spanish, with those in the lower half economically generally far behind those in the upper half in both categories.

Unfortunately, it seems probable that the current economic shift will increase this inequality and continue to undermine community life. During the hard times of the 1980s and 1990s, the class structure of Ch'ul Osil become more stratified as slightly more secure households lent money to and/or bought the land of their poorer neighbors, many of whom emigrated from the community for good. Left in Ch'ul Osil were now a larger group than in the recent past of families with more than 2 hectares of land – and a much larger group, more than half, with no land at all. Even though migration to the U.S. is still only five years old, the infusion of migrants' dollars has already started another cycle of this polarization. Migrants' families enlarge their own holdings by buying the lands of those who do not migrate, and who, more likely than not, do not have the linguistic and cultural skills ever to migrate.

Change appears to be coming in other ways as well. Although the data is still

only anecdotal, Chamulas from other communities say that returned migrants refuse to serve in municipal religious offices – those that, among other things, provide daily meals for the poor – saying “I didn’t do all that suffering in the U.S. to waste my money on fiestas.” Returned migrants do appear to be willing to serve in civil offices, perhaps in part because since the 1980s these are paid positions and substantially improve access to other kinds of government grants and loans. The claim of many is that migrants look at Chamula not as a community and identity that has to be maintained and protected, but as simply a place to live. The impact of this potential shift in belief bears close observation over the coming years.

Migration to the U.S. is relatively new in Ch’ul Osil. At the end of 2005 there were still only two married couples among the migrants, and no children yet born in the U.S. Since everyone assumed that the migrants would all come home after sojourns of a few years, there was no effort to construct long-term, U.S.-based communities. But the few migrants who have come home to visit have told their friends that after working for US\$ 6.00 or more an hour, they find it hard to imagine ever accepting Mexican wages again – especially those offered to Chamulas. If Chamula’s society and culture have been in flux these last thirty years as a result of the collapse of Chiapas’s plantations, the biggest changes appear to be yet to come.

Chapter 6

A New Mayan City: Rapid Urbanization and Community in San Cristóbal, Chiapas 1976-2009

“Gangs! Painting walls, smoking pot, drinking, committing assaults, etc., etc., they can be seen around the turn of every corner in San Cristóbal, and no human power has been able to stop them! ...it was one thing for the city government to worry about other things and make no provision for night patrols in the past...but now, with armed robberies, murders, sales of contraband, prostitution, drug running, and every other kind of crime everyday occurrences... we can no longer afford to delay!”

(Editorial in *La Foja Coleta*, San Cristóbal, June 27, 2002, in response to a wave of fear that hypothetical Mayan youth gangs were responsible for the city’s crimes.)

Just thirty years ago a sleepy regional marketing and administrative center, San Cristóbal de Las Casas in Chiapas’s Central Highlands has since the 1970s been the recipient of a massive rural-urban migration. The reasons for this movement are not unlike those that have brought rural people into most of Latin America’s cities over the last half century: too many people and too little work in the countryside, versus the chance to make at least a survival wage and perhaps find a better life in the city. What makes San Cristóbal’s case noteworthy, however, is that historically the city has been a defiantly *ladino* place, proud of its “Spanish” traditions and hostile to indigenous people, while almost all of the recent migrants have been Mayas from surrounding villages.¹ After nearly two generations of this movement, San Cristóbal has in effect become two cities, one Spanish-speaking and culturally, socially and politically conservative, the

¹ For discussions of “ladino” identity in San Cristóbal, see Sulca Báez 1997 and D. Rus 1998. For the history of urbanization – or its absence – in Chiapas, see Viqueira 2009.

other Maya, now urban in location, but still tied to rural, communal ways of organizing itself, increasingly conscious of its collective “indigenous” identity, and largely opposed to the ladino society that still discriminates against it.²

Even in brief conversations with San Cristóbal’s Ladinos, it soon becomes clear that many, perhaps most, feel they have been under siege through most of this transition, that the Mayan newcomers’ “pushiness” in making a place for themselves has been deeply and continuously resented. When violent street gangs (*pandillas*) began to be an issue in Mexico as a whole in the early 2000s, it did not take long -- as the quotation at the head of this chapter suggests -- for many of San Cristóbal’s Ladinos to conclude that their own feelings that their city was spinning out of control must be very like the fear of unemployed, unruly youth and increasing street crime in the much larger cities of Mexico’s center and north. Never mind that most of the offenses attributed to San Cristóbal’s supposed “Mayan youth gangs” -- standing around in groups on street corners in the evening, playing music loudly, drinking -- were not criminal. Indigenous youth *felt* dangerous, and it was not difficult to fuse the feeling of discomfort they engendered with the real increase in crime as the city has grown and become a major center of tourism with thousands of outsiders passing through every week.

This is not to say that there are not marginalized or disaffected Mayan youth in

² Sharing the city with these two societies there is arguably a third, largely self-segregated from the others, composed of the bureaucrats, aid workers, businesswomen and men, and laborers attracted from other parts of Mexico and abroad by San Cristóbal’s emergence as a major tourist destination over the last twenty years. There may even be said to be a fourth, that of the thousands of tourists who flock to the city during the summer and Christmas high seasons. Aside from a brief treatment in van den Berghe (1994), there is no systematic description either of these groups.

San Cristóbal; there are. Despite the relatively smooth transition to urban life of most of the tens of thousands of migrants over the last three decades, many are still struggling economically, socially and culturally. Even among those who appear to have adapted successfully, San Cristóbal's continuing exclusiveness and the persistent barriers to indigenous people in Mexico as a whole, have compelled the Mayas to maintain strong ethnically-based organizations to defend themselves, reinforcing a dual urban society. Perhaps the intermittent hysteria about "Mayan youth gangs" of the last few years is unwarranted. But the integration of the Maya -- and their children -- into the city is still an on-going process, incomplete and difficult to predict.

Indigenous Migrants to San Cristóbal

Over the last two decades, the impact of growing up as a poor migrant in a Third World city has increasingly attracted the attention of researchers. In Mexico, where the rural poor have been moving to Mexico City and a handful of major urban areas in the country's center and north for more than fifty years, such studies have an even longer trajectory (Lewis 1952, 2002; Arizpe 1975; Lomnitz 1977). Parallel processes appear to be at work elsewhere in Latin America for almost as long.³ While in many ways the cities of southern Mexico now appear to be following a similar course, in this region, where the rural populations are predominantly indigenous, the processes and cultural

³ The Mayas of Chiapas are perhaps the last large indigenous population in Latin America to begin urbanizing -- a process already far advanced in Central Mexico in the 1930s and 40s, Peru in the 1950s, and Guatemala in the 1960s and 70s (Morse and Hardoy 1992, Roberts and Lowder 1969, Roberts 1995; see also Viqueira 2009).

dynamics of urbanization appear to differ in important ways.⁴

San Cristóbal is a case in point. Despite its rich traditions – it was Chiapas’s capital from the 1520s until 1892 – the city had been left behind in the twentieth century. It was only connected by a paved road to the rest of Mexico in the 1950s, and from 1900 to 1970 its population only increased from 14,000 to 28,000.⁵ Meanwhile, the indigenous population of the surrounding Central Highlands more than tripled in the same period, from barely 40,000 in 1900 to some 140,000 in 1970. (Aubry 1991) More than neighbors to the cristobalenses, these Mayan villagers were the city’s principal resource. Too far off the beaten track to be a commercial hub, too high and cool at 7200 feet above sea level to be an agricultural center, San Cristóbal’s principal occupation since the last decades of the 19th century was contracting indigenous laborers for Chiapas’s lowland plantations, provisioning them for the trip (often several hundred miles), and then selling them “city goods” in return for the wages they brought back with them to the highlands. Protective of their precarious position as exploiters of indigenous people who at the same time surrounded and outnumbered them, during most of those decades, San Cristóbal’s ladino inhabitants enforced exclusionary, racist barriers within

⁴ It should be noted that the rural crisis and subsequent urbanization that have affected the region of San Cristóbal over the last twenty years have impacted all of southeastern Mexico (the states of Oaxaca, Chiapas, Tabasco, Campeche, Yucatán and Quintana Roo), both Mexico’s most indigenous region, and until the last 20 years by far its most rural. From 1980 to 1990, 3 of the 10 fastest growing cities in Mexico were from the southeast; from 1990 to 2000, 5 of 10. In 1998, of Mexican cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants, 8 of the 10 poorest in terms of individual income were also in the southeast. (Banamex 1998a)

⁵ For fuller versions of this general historical, political-economic background, see Wasserstrom 1983, and Rus, Hernández y Mattiace 2003:1-26.

the city. These made the city a privileged space for Ladinos, and an extremely hostile one for the indigenous. As late as 1952, for example, indigenous peoples were not allowed on San Cristóbal's streets after dark. Those who found themselves in town at sunset either had to make their way to the houses of ladino patrons or to a shelter maintained by the coffee workers' union, or risk being picked up by the police, kept in jail overnight, and then forced to perform such free labor as sweeping the streets and market in the morning. As for indigenous children, the relatively few in town on any given day in those years were either the servants or employees of Ladinos, and thus under their protection, or young people who had accompanied their parents to the city's market or a government office, and who would most likely return to their rural communities by nightfall. To the extent there were any street children, they were vendors of cigarettes and candies, shoe-shiners or errand boys -- all of them, at least in appearance, *Ladinos* (Villa Rojas 1976; Sulca Báez 1997; Sánchez 1995).

During the mid-1970s, as agriculture began to fail and strife increased within surrounding indigenous communities, however, San Cristóbal suddenly became a refuge for indigenous migrants who had little choice but to move to the city, despite all the obstacles. (It should be noted that most legal and administrative – “official” – discrimination against indigenous people had been lifted following the arrival of INI (Instituto Nacional Indigenista) in 1952. What remained by the early 1970s was what local people called “custom” – on both sides: Ladinos who continued to discriminate, often defiantly, expecting indigenous people to step aside for them on sidewalks, or example, or refusing to sit in pews with them at church, and indigenous people who still

preferred not to stay overnight in the city.) The first large group of migrants were the 1000 Protestants expelled from Chamula in 1976. Having distinguished themselves from their Chamula traditionalist rivals by becoming Presbyterians, the *expulsados* brought a triple identity with them to the city: Mayan, Protestant and refugee. The violent circumstances of their exile, their coherence as a Presbyterian congregation, and the fact that with the financial support of the Presbyterian Churches of Mexico, the United States and Canada, and the Reformed Church in America they were soon able to buy a piece of land on the northern edge of the city on which to resettle, left San Cristóbal's ladinos little choice but to accept their immigration to the city. Within four years, three other small Mayan Protestant *colonias* followed, all composed of people exiled from their home communities, and all notably self-reliant. By 1980, there were some 3,000 indigenous people living in the city more or less permanently (see Rus and Wasserstrom 1979; Gossen 1989; Sterk 1991; Aramoni and Morquecho 1997; Rus 2005).

Almost before anyone realized it, the barrier against indigenous residence in San Cristóbal had been broken. Since the economic and political conditions that were driving them out of their traditional niches remaining in force, the growth of the city's indigenous population continued, and then accelerated through the 1980s. By 1990, San Cristóbal had reached 90,000 inhabitants, perhaps 20,000 of them indigenous. By 2000, the overall official population was 120,000, with some estimates placing it as high as 160,000 – an increase of between 460 and 570 percent in just thirty years.⁶ Of this number,

⁶ Eight years after the 2000 census, some authorities of San Cristóbal's municipal government insist that the present population is now 200,000, and may be more than 220,000. (Rus interviews, 2005-07.)

approximately 60,000 were indigenous. More important to us here, of those 60,000, more than half were children under 18. (Aubry 1991:77; INEGI 1991:92; 2001).

If the city in which these indigenous children found themselves had a history of being inhospitable to indigenous people, by the 1990s they – Mayan children – had probably become its most numerous single population category. Despite their numbers, and their clear importance to San Cristóbal’s future, however, the city into which they moved, and in which they were coming of age, continued to bear the marks of the caste-like social divisions of the past. For one thing, indigenous people lived confined to identifiable, separate *colonias* around the edges of the city. In part, this was because land was expensive for indigenous newcomers, and it was easier to obtain a foothold as groups, collectively (more about the variety of these *colonias* below.) However, it was also clear that San Cristóbal’s “old” ladino inhabitants continued to think of indigenous migrants as second-class citizens and to discourage them from becoming close neighbors.⁷ In myriad small ways, they made it clear on a daily basis that indigenous people who presented themselves as such via their language and clothing, were not welcome in “ladino” stores, churches or downtown public spaces.

In response to this rejection by Ladinos over the last twenty years, urban Mayas have in turn developed their own parallel institutions, as well as self-affirming markers of indigenous *urban* identity. If just a few decades before Mayas had to relinquish their “indianness” to stay in San Cristóbal without being harassed, in the “new” city of

⁷ For a stubborn defense of the idea that San Cristóbal should be now and always remain a ladino city, see Gutiérrez 1996.

indigenous migrants, signs of Mayan identity became valued as a source of solidarity and resistance and were accentuated. In the new urban communities formed by indigenous people drawn not only from different *municipios*, but even different Mayan languages, for instance, the *lingua franca* is often not Spanish, but Tzotzil-Maya, the language of the Chamulas, the original and still most numerous migrants. To participate in community politics and religion, as well as signify their solidarity with their neighbors as against Spanish-speaking Ladinos, many speakers of Tzeltal-, Tojolabal- and Ch'ol-Maya learn Tzotzil, often *before* mastering Spanish. Similarly, new, “urban” styles of dress, particularly for young women, have incorporated make-up, new hair styles and fashionable shoes (rural indigenous women considered it shameful to wear more than sandals), while keeping traditional *huipiles* (embroidered or brocaded blouses) and wrapped, sashed skirts. Moreover, such signs of a stable (at least for now) urban, indigenous identity appear to have been strengthened since the 1994 Zapatista rebellion, when indigenous people in general felt a new, pan-indigenous sense of pride on seeing an indigenous force capable of confronting the government, army – and Ladinos. (Kovic 2005; Rus 1997; Peres Tzu 2002.)

The Stages of Urbanization

Despite their appearance as an almost continuous, undifferentiated settlement around San Cristóbal’s periphery, and the many characteristics which unite them, the city’s indigenous *colonias* vary widely in origin, internal organization, and social and cultural cohesiveness. These factors, in turn, have profound effects on the lives of their

inhabitants, and perhaps most of all, their children. Before moving on to discuss the *colonias* as environments in which to raise children, then, let us turn first to the historical roots of the differences among them.

Since the 1970s, three migratory waves have washed over San Cristóbal. Given the speed of economic, demographic, and social structural change, the countryside that each wave left – and the city that it entered – have differed significantly from one period to another. First wave migrants, in the second half of the 1970s, were, as we have seen, typically Protestant converts who were allowed to settle on the outskirts of San Cristóbal largely because they were viewed as refugees from religious persecution who had migrated involuntarily. (Gossen 1989; Estrada 1995) San Cristóbal's Ladinos seem to have been simultaneously moved by the plight of the *expulsados*, and convinced their sojourn in the city would be brief – that eventually they would return to their home *municipios*. Accordingly, the view of many Ladinos is that they *permitted* the *expulsados* to purchase ranches on the edges of the city to set up temporary camps; that it was a charitable, temporary – and thus revocable – solution to the refugees' plight.

Against expectations, however, these camps soon became permanent settlements. Built around a church, characterized by sharply defined borders and memberships, and governed through modified, though still recognizably “traditional” Maya civil and religious structures (i.e., civil-religious hierarchies) in which community members served voluntarily for a year at a time, such *colonias* functioned as virtual religious communes. New residents were provided with land and construction materials for their houses; earlier community members found jobs for those who followed; and, in general –

although they have never stopped protesting their expulsion from their ancestral homes – members of these first colonies kept to themselves. Their orderly, religiously oriented lives and unobtrusiveness, in turn, made them almost tolerable neighbors to Ladinos. Indeed, it was the commonly expressed opinion of San Cristóbal's elite start of the 1980s, congratulating themselves on their broadmindedness, that *expulsados* made ideal servants because they worked hard, were polite, and impeccably honest.

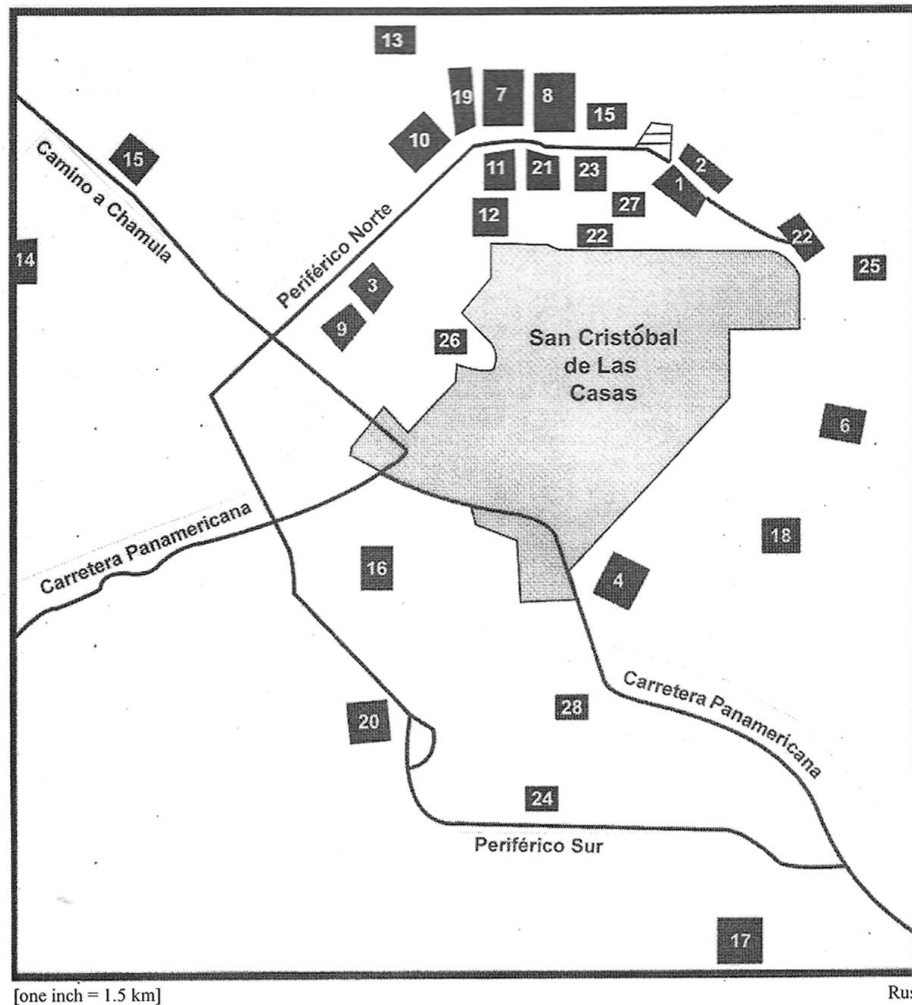
Although by the end of the 1970s there were still only four indigenous *colonias* with a total population of approximately 3,000, their historical importance, again, was that for the first time since the sixteenth century Mayas had managed to move into the valley of San Cristóbal *as Indians*, without relinquishing their own languages, traditional clothing, and customary forms of family and community organization. In retrospect, many Ladinos now perceive those first *colonias* to have been a kind of Trojan Horse for the massive immigration that was to follow. To the migrants who came after them, these first wave pioneers provided both a template for re-organization in the city, and in their demonstration that it was possible to be both Mayan and urban, a cushion to culture shock.

The second wave began with the economic crisis of 1982. Not only did demand for agricultural laborers contract sharply following the financial crash, but as government funds for infrastructure projects dried up, thousands of indigenous men who had been able to ride out the initial agricultural crisis and maintain their families in their home communities by migrating to distant construction sites also found themselves out of work. The intra-communal strife described earlier became especially sharp in this period.

(Collier 1994b: chaps. 5-6) In the face of the gathering depression and instability, San Cristóbal's *colonias* of Protestant refugees suddenly appeared to rural indigenous people as islands of prosperity. Having begun with nothing six or seven years earlier, many of the original Protestant settlers had by 1982-83 moved up from menial work in the market, or hod-carrying at local construction sites, to owning their own market stalls, or contracting independently for construction jobs within the *colonias*. Moreover, among the few industries that actually grew after 1982 was tourism, creating a demand in San Cristóbal for hotel and restaurant employees, and vendors of artisan products – not to mention artisans. All of this, in turn, increased yet again demand for market and construction workers (D. Rus 1990; O'Brian 1994; Eber and Rosenbaum 1993). Under these dual influences – rural deprivation and relative prosperity in the city – the indigenous population of San Cristóbal increased during the 1980s from around 3,000 to more than 20,000, and the number of mostly indigenous *colonias* on the city's outskirts from 4 to 16 (Calvo Sánchez 1990:56ff).

In addition to the different circumstances that drove them from the countryside, the second wave migrants moved, for the most part, into *colonias* with a different origin from those of the first wave. Unlike the virtual communes of 1976-81, almost all of the post-1982 *colonias* were formed on land purchased by indigenous entrepreneurs who already lived in the city – most of them first wave migrants. Often working with wealthy Ladinos who saw the chance to unload non-productive, relatively low-value land (pastures, swamps, rocky hillsides) for a relatively high price so that it could be subdivided among indigenous migrants, such indigenous brokers contracted for 10-20

San Cristóbal City Limits circa 1980 versus Indigenous Colonias



KEY

First wave colonias

1. Nueva Esperanza (1976)
2. Benito Juárez (1977)
3. Palestina (1977)
4. Cascajal (1979)

Second wave colonias

5. La Frontera (1980)
6. Fracción. La Garita (1983)
7. La Hormiga (1984)
8. Getsemani (1985)
9. Erasto Urbina (1986)
10. Prudencio Moscoso (1987)

11. Paraíso (1987)
12. Ampliación Tlaxcala (1988)
13. San Antonio del Monte (1988)
14. La Selva (1988)
15. Mazariegos (1980s)
16. Explanada del Carmen (1980a)
17. Aserradero (1984)
18. Santa Cruz (1980s)

Third wave colonias

19. San Juan del Bosque (1990)

20. Caridad (1993)
21. Fraccionamiento la Hormiga (1994)
22. 4 de Marzo (1995)
23. Patria Nueva (1996)
24. Molino de la Albarrada (1994)
25. Molino de Utrilla (1995)
26. Molino La Isla (1995)
27. Molino de Los Arcos (1996)
28. Salsipuedes (1994)

acre parcels, subdivided them, and then sold them to newcomers. More often than not, were pastors looking to form their own, new congregations out of the many indigenous

people moving to the city (examples are the *colonias* of Getsemaní and Paraíso⁸) – although another common pattern was for new, “daughter” *colonias* to begin as breakaway groups from established *colonias* and churches. (Ruiz 1996, Kovic 2005:21-43) It is noteworthy that even new migrants to the city who had *not* been Protestants before leaving their home *municipios* – and who had thus not been “expelled” – became Protestants on moving into these *colonias*. The model for urbanization included religious conversion, in part because it provided the newcomers with access to the first Protestants’ work and land networks, but also in part because through the mid-1980s it was still the supposedly involuntary nature of the Protestant Mayas’ move to the city that made their presence bearable to Ladinos. (Sullivan 1995, Gutiérrez G. 1996)⁹

Finally, the latest, third wave appears to have begun with the collapse of the international coffee market in 1989, and accelerated following the Zapatista Uprising of 1994. If the first wave had been led by bilingual, mostly younger people willing to change religions and run the risk of settling outside of their home communities, and the second largely of economic refugees attracted to the new residential and occupational

⁸ Ulrich Köhler (personal communication, 2004) found a similar process led to the founding of the secular *colonia* Prudencio Moscoso; and M. Peres Tzu adds the Catholic *colonia* of San Antonio del Monte (Rus interviews, 1991).

⁹ Among indigenous migrants to the city, researchers have noted that a disproportionate share after 1982 appeared to be women with children, either escaping unemployed, abusive husbands, or moving to the city’s *colonias* following abandonment by men who had not returned from labor migrations. Anecdotally, Protestantism is often credited in the former cases with helping “tame” men’s drinking and abuse and reuniting families. In any case, many of the most active, successful social, political and economic organizations in the *colonias* have been women’s groups. (Cantón Delgado 1997, Sanchiz 2004, Y. Castro Apreza 2003, I. Castro Apreza 2003)

opportunities opened by the first, this third wave seems to have consisted increasingly of simple refugees, both from economic conditions, and following 1994, from violence. The vertiginous fall of coffee profoundly impoverished tens of thousands of rural families that had depended on either their own small production or labor in the coffee orchards of others. Meanwhile, government support for other agricultural products was also sharply reduced. Under these circumstances, violence – land invasions, repression by gunmen hired by landowners and by the army and state police, and internecine strife within native communities themselves – remained high from the end of the 1980s on. After the 1994 uprising, however, it reached new peaks. Within the first four years after the uprising, as many as 5,000 direct refugees were driven into San Cristóbal, with perhaps another 15,000 moving to the city as their economic and social conditions worsened.¹⁰

Those who fled the countryside for the city during this period generally seem to have been less prepared for urban life than their predecessors. Poor, monolingual, often traumatized by violence, they moved, moreover, into a city already crowded with indigenous people with whom they had to compete for work, and inhabited as well by increasingly resentful Ladinos. That said, however, they also came into a space in which indigenous people had for twenty years been organizing churches, political advocacy groups and economic unions. After January 1, 1994, the leaders of all these organizations quickly recognized that the state was eager for indigenous allies, and

¹⁰ For example, following the 1998 Acteal massacre in Chenalhó, up to 2000 refugees came to the city from that *municipio* alone. Moksnes gives the total number of displaced persons from Chenalhó to all refugees as 10,000 out of a total population of 30,000. (Moksnes 2004)

certainly did not want to make more indigenous enemies. If there was a time to press the demands of the urban indigenous, this was it. Within that first January, indigenous peddlers who had previously found it difficult to gain spaces in San Cristóbal's municipal market expanded into the parking lots and sidewalks surrounding the market building and set up their own "liberated market." When the authorities failed to dislodge them, they took further initiatives, refusing to pay rental fees for their spaces, setting up impromptu stalls, and forming themselves into alliances with indigenous taxi drivers, *colonia* associations and churches (Peres Tzu 2000, 2002.) At the same time, all worked feverishly to enroll as many as possible of the refugees flooding into the city to strengthen their own organizations' membership.

These were the circumstances under which, in April 1994, the first indigenous invasion of vacant land occurred on the northeastern side of the city. The state, after an initial, failed attempt by the police to retake the invaded land, apparently feared that a more violent response would drive the invaders into the arms of the Zapatistas. Perhaps hoping as well that leniency would win the urban indigenous to the side of the governing party, the state essentially stood aside. When the invaders appeared to have won, more invasions followed. Since 1994, no new *colonia* has been formed that did *not* originate with an invasion. The days of indigenous people buying tracts of land for their settlements had ended. (Angulo 2003: 69-77) Eventually in every case – typically, during the months preceding elections – the municipal or state government organized the "regularization" of the invasions, paying off the original ladino owners and offering the invaders legal titles in return for small monthly payments over a number of years – and

their votes.¹¹ Of the 30 major *colonias* in existence by the end of the 1990s, nine had been formed this way. In addition to those that had been regularized, there were several dozen unrecognized, “irregular” ones, including two which were still little more than refugee camps (Bétancourt 1997).¹²

If the bulk of the third wave migrants were refugees from economic collapse or war, and in that sense more marginal than their predecessors, they soon became part of a city much more “indigenous” than that the earlier waves had entered. In the chaos, and frank extra-legality that prevailed after 1994, indigenous leaders increasingly challenged San Cristóbal’s old ladino society. Not only did new, more powerful indigenous organizations emerge from these confrontations, but informal and illicit economic activities also began to surface.

Adaptation to the City

Many of the physical differences among the various migrant *colonias* follow from the history presented in the last section. By now, the oldest ones, dating from the 1970s, are virtually indistinguishable in appearance from working-class ladino neighborhoods.

¹¹ Interviews with M. Peres Tzu (Rus interviews, 2000; see also Peres Tzu 2000, 2002.) One study put the number of such *colonias* at over 70 at the end of the 1990s. (Melel Xojobal 2000).

¹² In the most recent years, the number of *colonias* has continued to surge. In 2005, representatives of San Cristóbal’s municipal government identified 46 indigenous “colonias establecidas” with full urban services. By the summer of 2007, some of the same officials, as an expression of alarm at the city’s growth, were blurring the distinction between “colonias establecidas” and self-identified, distinct indigenous “asentamientos” with ambitions to become fully-serviced colonias. In the valley of San Cristóbal and its environs, there were now reputedly 317 of these. (Rus interviews, 2005-2007.)

The latest ones, on the other hand – which may be as new as last week – often consist of little more than ragged rows of lean-tos covered with plastic sheeting or the outer, bark-cuttings from lumber mills.

Beyond differences of physical appearance, however – beyond even contrasts in the levels of sophistication and prosperity of their residents – there is much that unites the *colonias* socially, economically and politically. Especially in the first two waves, the migrants tended to move to the city not as individuals, or even nuclear families consisting of two parents and their children, but as lineages: three or four generations of family members who continued to live together and have mutual responsibilities to each other.¹³ Surveys suggest that among first and second wave migrants, up to 90 percent of those from the *municipio* of Chamula, for instance, moved to the city with their spouses, and that male lineages including older parents and grandparents eventually reunited there within three or four years. Such lineages, interlocked with those of brothers and cousins, in addition to providing a ready-made “community” in the new environment, make it possible to organize economic activities (market stalls, construction crews, artisan groups, etc.) among related, trusted individuals. They also made it possible to care for children collectively. This, in turn, offers a clue about the relatively smooth transition of many children to the city: most, at least in the earlier waves, were still enveloped in

¹³ This appears to be true for those who came in through the mid-1990s as well. The situation of the latest third wave arrivals is as yet unclear, perhaps because they have not had time to settle down and unite their families, perhaps because they fled their homes in couples or as members of single household. Eventually, however, we would expect the same pattern to hold. (This description does not take into account families of single mothers, widows and abandoned women, anecdotally more common in the city than in the countryside. Follow-up surveys are needed (see Sanchiz Ochoa 1994).)

extended families, just as in the countryside.

In addition to family structures, migrants also brought with them a common civic and political culture, and social organization within *colonias* in many ways reproduces that of Chiapas's rural indigenous communities. Religion is at the center of local life, and although the *colonias* have become more pluralistic since the 1980s, for most residents the temple, chapel or mosque, with the mutual support it provides, is the most important institution beyond the family.¹⁴ As in rural indigenous communities, moreover, civil and religious government are closely related. Once a *colonia* achieves recognition from the state, either singly or with neighboring *colonias*, it is incorporated into the municipal organization of the city as an *agencia municipal*, with a part-time local official named from among the residents to act as a justice of the peace and chairman of the local council. Known as *agentes municipales*, many of these men are also Protestant pastors or Catholic catechists, thus uniting religious and civil authority just as in the countryside.

Finally, the third most important official institution in the *colonias* are the public primary schools. Indeed, recognition as an official "place" typically begins with the granting of a school, and parents are avid for a school as much for the measure of security that recognition gives to the *colonia*, as for the deeply felt necessity for their children to be educated. Fifty percent of all urban indigenous children under 16 attended school in

¹⁴ There are currently more than 20 different denominations among the *colonia* residents, from Roman Catholicism and Presbyterianism, which remain the two largest, through many varieties of Pentecostalism. In the last four years, Islam has also attracted urban indigenous converts, and the some 300 families of mostly Tzotzil Muslims in San Cristóbal make them the largest Muslim community in Mexico.

2000, as compared to less than 25 percent in rural communities. (Melel Xojobal 2000)

Censuses and surveys have still not distinguished the rates of school attendance for first and second wave migrants as opposed to those who have come to the city more recently. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that in the oldest *colonias*, particularly the Protestant ones founded in the 1970s, attendance is more than 75 percent, while for the most recent arrivals it is well below 50 percent, and may approximate the rates for rural indigenous children.

Not surprisingly given the existence of close, extended families, powerful religious institutions, and customary social control, life *within* the indigenous *colonias*, particularly the older ones, is relatively safe, not only for their residents but for passers-by. Crimes against persons like theft or assault are much less common than one might expect for the poorest precincts of a poor city. Indeed, for such a densely settled valley, with extremely poor people living within a mile of tourist hotels and the homes of the well off, there are virtually no reports of personal crime by indigenous people against non-indigenous. That said, however, *extra-legal* behavior – flouting of administrative, economic, and property laws...law-breaking that offends Ladinos – is not only widespread, but widely accepted. Examples are the very land invasions by which *colonias* are formed, the sit-ins to gain footholds in the market, the tapping of power lines and water pipes to satisfy *colonia* demands, and the blockades of streets and public buildings to force the government to charge indigenous *colonias* only nominal rates for electricity and water, for instance, or to withdraw unpopular taxes and fees. All of these activities lead Ladinos to feel they are living in a lawless, out-of-control environment, a

belief reinforced by every ladino candidate for municipal office since 1994, all of whom have called for the reimposition of an “estado de derecho” (“state of law,” essentially “law and order”), by military force if necessary – even as they negotiate favorable settlements with land invaders and indigenous organizers in exchange for their votes.

What all of these extra-legal activities have in common is that they are made possible by the fact that *colonia* members have been represented since the 1980s by a handful of powerful umbrella *sindicatos*, or “unions.” The oldest of these originated as advocacy groups for Protestant *expulsados*. Others are local branches of official, government unions that began representing indigenous migrants in the 1980s in the [vain] hope that they could co-opt them and moderate their activism. Still others, dating from the land struggles of the 1970s and 80s, drew large numbers of urban members after 1994 when they became expressions of the indigenous empowerment movement.¹⁵ Among the many functions of the *sindicatos* have been leading the fights for recognition of new *colonias*, for market space, and for lower utility rates described above. At the same time, they also compete with each other for members and power. Each group tends to represent the residents of a particular group of *colonias*, and to varying extents, to specialize in different economic activities. However, they have on occasion resorted to street-fighting and even arms to settle rivalries among themselves -- as, for instance,

¹⁵ Originally Protestant organizations are: CRIACH--Consejo de Representantes Indígenas de los Altos de Chiapas; and OPEACH--Organización de Pueblos Evangélicos de los Altos de Chiapas. “Official” union affiliates include CROC--Confederación Revolucionaria de Obreros y Campesinos; CROM--Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana; and CTM—Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos. “Indian movement” groups are SCOPNUR--Sociedad Cooperativa Pro-Mejoramiento de Nuestra Raza; and UNAL--Unión Nacional Lombardista. This is not an exhaustive list.

when one of the unions feels another is encroaching on its space in the market. (Morquecho 1992; Aramoni and Morquecho 1997). To indigenous migrants, the *sindicatos* have become the battering rams by which they have secured places to stay, jobs, and services in a city that has never been hospitable to them. To San Cristóbal's Ladinos, on the other hand, they are "mafias," or criminal enterprises. Nothing illustrates these opposing perspectives better than attitudes to the most powerful segment of every one of the *sindicatos*, the taxi and microbus owners and drivers.

At the beginning of the 1990s, San Cristóbal had some 100 taxis, the overwhelming majority, if not all, the property of Ladinos. Legal operation of a taxi or microbus required a route license (*placa*), and the number of these was sharply limited by the state. One of the demands of the indigenous organizations after 1994 was that their members be given more chances to profit from transport for which indigenous people, who needed taxis to travel between their outlying *colonias* and city center, had long since become the principal customers. Although the state did, grudgingly, increase the number of *placas* to 140, it responded far too slowly, and not before indigenous entrepreneurs took matters into their own hands. Within three years after the 1994 uprising, there were 600 taxis, and by 2000 there were more than 1100.¹⁶ The great majority of these were operated, at least at first, without route licenses, and were thus *piratas*, or "pirates;" and most of the *pirata* owners were indigenous. Repeated attempts by the state police to

¹⁶ One of the explanations for the great number of taxis is that purchasing a car is an investment within reach of many small investors. (D. and J. Rus interviews with taxistas, August 9, 1997, September 1997; *Foja Coleta*, San Cristóbal, January 23, 2001.) For comparison, the number of registered trucks and cars in San Cristóbal increased from 3500 in 1994, to 15,900 in 1999, to 17,000 in 2001. (*Foja Coleta*, January 6, 2001.)

regain control of taxi licensing during the second half of the 1990s by setting up roadblocks and seizing pirate vehicles led the indigenous *sindicatos* to mount counter roadblocks, effectively cutting the highways to San Cristóbal until the seizures stopped and impounded taxis were returned. Meanwhile, through the entire period from 1997 to the present, new *placas* were repeatedly granted in batches as political concessions to the urban migrant unions in return for their blocks of votes at election time.

Beyond organizing through the indigenous *sindicatos* to defend themselves economically, in response to a number of well-publicized robberies and murders of taxi drivers in 1997-98, the taxi owners and drivers also organized to defend themselves physically.¹⁷ Within months, every taxi had two-way, CB radio, and it was widely claimed -- and believed -- that almost all were armed. A distress call by a taxi driver, even a claim that a passenger had refused to pay, would, within minutes, bring a dozen or more fellow *taxistas*, including some Ladinos, who would surround the site and block all surrounding streets until the matter was resolved. This response was more certain and effective, in turn, than any of the police forces available in the highlands -- a fact which was quickly noted by all of the indigenous unions. By 1996, it was clear that all of the *sindicatos* were using their *taxista* sections as de facto police departments, defending the union's interests in market fights, for example, or sending three or four cars to summon union members involved in disputes with each other. Beyond that, however, when indigenous people were victims of crime, particularly in their own spaces, in the *colonias*, but eventually, anywhere in the city, it became more common for them to stop an

¹⁷ Rus interviews with M. Peres Tzu, August 27, 1997, December 15 and 18, 1998.

indigenous taxi to ask for help than to bother calling the police. In essence, by 1996-97, the *sindicatos*, with their police forces of taxis, had become the day-to-day government of the indigenous *colonias*.¹⁸

From the ladino point of view, this was obviously intolerable, especially because the “taxi-police,” if forced to choose between ladino and indigenous disputants, in every case known took the side of the indigenous.¹⁹ At the beginning of 2001, roadblocks jointly manned by the army and various state police corporations did manage to get firearms out of the hands of the “taxi-police.” Even armed only with clubs and lengths of iron pipe, however, they remain a potent force for peacekeeping and dispute resolution in parts of the city where the regular municipal police do not deign – or are afraid – to go.

Meanwhile, in addition to the “extra-legal” activities of the unions and taxistas acknowledged by all, San Cristóbal’s Ladinos also insist they engage, “without remorse,” in frankly illegal activities. It is claimed, for instance, that members of some of the urban *sindicatos* are involved with car theft rings, which repaint stolen cars and either sell them in indigenous *municipios*, or move them to other states; with trafficking in arms and drugs; and with transporting undocumented Central Americans across Chiapas. In the course of our interviews, credible indigenous witnesses did confirm that all of these

¹⁸ It should be noted that according to D. and J. Rus’s interviews, by 2001, the 1100-plus taxis were represented by more than fifty unions and associations. The largest had more than 100 units, while some of the smaller ones, united by common *colonia* or church membership, had as few as five.

¹⁹ For example, surrounding traffic accidents and forcing ladino drivers to pay damages before they can leave the scene. Many Ladinos tell of the municipal police arriving at accident scenes, finding the “taxi-police” had already arrived, and retreating without intervening. (Interviews, JPL, July 1999; PRS, August 22, 2004.)

activities go on in the city, in some cases even with the participation of union members. But none linked them to the unions *per se*.²⁰

The differences in interviewees' attitudes about legality and illegality are a bright line demarcating the division between San Cristóbal's two societies. From a ladino perspective, looking at indigenous organizations from the outside, the assumption appears to be that anyone who would engage in tapping a power line, for example, could just as easily steal a car. Colonia residents make much finer distinctions. Most have participated in, and all have certainly benefitted from, the land and market invasions, tapping of power lines, etc., described earlier -- all, strictly speaking, illegal actions, but all accepted and approved of by virtually all indigenous migrants. "Ladino law" is considered partial and unjust, and *colonia* members who are outraged by crime against persons within their communities -- and who would not approve of personal crimes against Ladinos either -- see nothing wrong with righting generations of exploitation and repression by turning the tables and taking advantage of Ladinos when they get the chance. Attitudes about smuggling migrants, weapons and drugs, and about the theft and resale of cars, also tend to be tolerant, though more complicated. Many from the *colonias* have themselves become undocumented migrants to the United States in recent years, making them identify more with the Central American migrants and their smugglers than with the state. Some have also purchased contraband guns, and many who would not steal a car might nevertheless be willing to buy one. As for drugs, cases of indigenous

²⁰ Smuggling of arms, drugs and Central Americans are described in numerous newspaper reports of arrests, e.g., *Foja Coleta*, San Cristóbal, 11 November, 2001, or *Cuarto Poder*, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, April 7, 1998. Also Rus interviews with SGB, August 26, 2003; and Rus with XJ, August, 2002.)

use of narcotics are few, but there does not seem to be an automatic rejection of the idea of moving them from place to place if it is profitable. Their moral view of these activities, in other words, does not coincide with the legal view. Unlike the “extra-legal” measures described earlier, however, which are pursued publicly by the *sindicatos*, it is widely recognized that involvement with smuggling foreigners, arms, stolen cars and drugs can lead to prison. If there is not an automatic rejection of these activities and those engaged in them -- evidenced, among other things, by the number of people who know about them without informing -- neither do the numbers who participate in them appear to be great.²¹

The Urban Environment and Indigenous Youth

In general, then, San Cristóbal’s indigenous youth are growing up in close, extended families, in urban *colonias* that in many ways still exhibit the solidarity and powerful social control of rural communities, and in a city-wide social, economic and political environment in which indigenous organizations -- the *sindicatos* -- provide almost an alternative municipal government. As a result, many signs of exclusion that might in other circumstances be indicators of marginality, and perhaps precursors to social pathologies -- residential segregation, indigenous dress, preference for native languages over the national standard Spanish, membership in new, minority religions, and, perhaps most of all, participation in various illicit activities -- are actually viewed as sources of strength by most of San Cristóbal’s indigenous residents. Indeed, since the

²¹ Rus, interviews with MP, April 26, 2003; *Foja Coleta*, San Cristóbal, January 9, 2003.

1994 rebellion, some markers of indigenous ethnicity have even been accentuated.

All of that said, there are also developments among some of the city's indigenous youth that disturb their elders. Reports of street-socialized children, alienated from the city's indigenous community, and excluded from its ladino one, are still isolated, but no longer unheard of. Two such groups concern us here. The first consists of the very young and very poor. Following the 1994 rebellion, there began to be stories about groups of children under 10 or 11 years of age hanging around alone in the market all day. This was undoubtedly not a new phenomenon, but for the first time the numbers -- several dozen -- had begun to attract the attention of indigenous observers. The children described had nothing to eat, and were given tortillas, vegetables and fruit by the market sellers, who said most of their mothers were single, abandoned women forced to work on the street as peddlers or beggars. Part of the market people's charity was self-defensive because some of the children had started to steal.²² Five years later, a non-governmental organization found 638 children working full-time on the street themselves, most of them newcomers since 1994. These were children *on* the street, not *of* the street, in the sense that most lived with at least one parent and returned to some sort of lodging at night. But half were unsupervised during the day, and even those that stayed close to a parent were, of course, not in school.²³ (Melel Xojobal 2000)

²² Rus, interviews with SB, *colonia* "Patria Nueva," August 4 and 11, 1998; JPL, July 30, 1998.

²³ This distinction between children "in" and "of" the street is made as well in a study of street children in Mexico City, which found that 90 percent of indigenous children on the street merely worked there; only 10 percent lived there full time. The proportion of street children to children working on the street among the non-indigenous was twice as high.

As time goes on, some of the children who have arrived in this last wave of migration may continue to find it difficult to adapt to the city. As poor as all indigenous migrants have been since the 1970s, survey data suggests that those who came after 1994 – now constituting almost half of the entire indigenous population of the city -- are even worse off. Sixty-five percent of these latest arrivals reported incomes of less than US\$ 260/year for families of four (including the value of subsistence corn-farming).²⁴ Since many of these most recent migrants live in refugee camps, invaded lands that have still not been “regularized,” or even regularized lands where they get their foothold by affiliating with a *sindicato*, they are among the city’s most vulnerable residents. Young children would appear to be particularly at risk. Inhabiting settlements in many cases still devoid of schools and other services, with poor, often traumatized parents displaced suddenly from the countryside, they are a new challenge for a city which through its first twenty years of receiving indigenous migrants left many of the organizational and adjustment aspects of urbanization to urban indigenous organizations themselves, supported only by Protestant and Catholic Churches.²⁵ As for the teens in this last wave

(Banamex 1998b)

²⁴ See Chapter 2 above; Melel Xojobal (2000: 43-46) reports that 37 percent of all families in the *colonias* fell below the level of “extreme poverty,” defined by the World Bank as US\$ 1.00/person/day. Melel does not break out the data to show differences by *colonia* or by date of arrival in the city. However, comparison to our figures suggests that the latest migrants are much poorer than the urban indigenous group as a whole.

²⁵ Several projects have arisen to ameliorate conditions for these newcomers. As of 2003, some of the more prominent were: Manos Amigas de Jovel, a residential project initiated by a Catholic priest with approximately 40 residents, some of whom are runaway street children, but the majority are from poor families who could not afford to send them to school; Don Bosco, a residential project operated by Salesian priests with close to 100

of migrants, since 2000-2001 many appear to be entering the undocumented stream to the United States after only brief stays in the city (more about this alternative in a moment.)

Paradoxically, the other group that appears to be becoming unsettled includes youth from the older colonies, including many of the first wave. In the early 2000s, stories began to circulate about groups of twenty and more teens meeting in the evenings at crossroads on the peripheral highway through the oldest northern *colonias*. By 2001, at least two of these congregations were being referred to in the [alarmist?] local press as *pandillas*, “gangs.”²⁶ Both groups were described as drinking, and perhaps smoking marijuana, and both were accused in the press of having participated in robberies in nearby ladino *colonias* – although never with any details. Local columnists also fretted that graffiti had appeared at various points around the city, and that here and there rap music was being played on boom boxes -- all signs, they worried, that the violent gangs that had already appeared in Tapachula, on Chiapas’s south coast, could be coming to the highlands. For all the alarm, however, there were no arrests to report, nor any crimes against persons that could be firmly attached to the supposed *pandillas*, nor, for that matter, anything that connected the graffiti to the very visible groups of indigenous youth. Nevertheless, the fact that the assembly points for these “gangs” were on the outskirts of three of the original, first wave *colonias* suggests that some indigenous youth who grew up in the city, perhaps were even born there, may be feeling alienated from the

street children and/or runaways; and El Mono Pintado, a project initiated by a U.S anthropologist to provide daytime activities for scores of children of indigenous street vendors.

²⁶ *Foja Coleta*, San Cristóbal, June 27, 2002, and August 7, 2002; Rus interview with M.P., April 26, 2003.

religious communities of their parents as well as the ladino society that still scorns them.²⁷ Also worrisome to local authorities is the fact that the illicit activities of some of the *sindicato* members are, of course, also based in some of the older colonias (though more in those of the second wave than those of the first.) Is there a connection between the groups of carousing youth and the very organized, clandestine activities of some of their elders? No one has yet shown that there is.

Whether any of these groups -- the poor children who hang out in the market, or the sets of teens who meet on the highway -- will eventually coalesce into street youth cultures, much less formal “youth gangs” in the sense they are understood in Mexico’s metropolitan areas or the United States is far from certain. On the one hand, there continue to be strong countervailing pressures from the solidarity and traditions of indigenous families and communities, as well as, now, from ethnically-based social and political organizations. In addition, indigenous people as a whole are ever more integrated into the city. On the other hand, racism and discrimination against indigenous people are still strong in the city, and there is still great poverty in the urban *colonias*.

The situation continues to evolve rapidly, and which way it goes in coming years may depend on some of the new influences that are constantly being introduced into the mix. Some of these in recent years are:

1. Undocumented work in United States: As of 1997, Chiapas was 27th of Mexico’s 31 states in the remittances (and presumably numbers) of undocumented migrants. Since 2001, however, migration to the north has taken off, and Chiapas is now

²⁷ Letter from M. Peres Tzu, May 10, 2003.

5th, with more than 300,000 mostly young, mostly indigenous people (out of a state population of 3.5 million) in the U.S. The highlands are a major source of this movement. (See Chapters 2 and 5; Banamex 2004: 151; Villafuerte 2004) Migration and its remittances are a source of advancement for indigenous people in the city, not least from the pride that comes from taking a chance and succeeding. At the same time, U.S. migration brings indigenous Chiapanecos in contact with U.S. urban fashions (about half are working in U.S. cities and suburbs, and living in Spanish-speaking barrios), as well with the smuggling rings related to their migration.

2. Contact with organizations in Chiapas that participate in various smuggling and illicit activities: Smuggling drugs and undocumented workers across Chiapas are activities that already appear to have organized, if numerically small, urban indigenous participation. Nevertheless, such activity necessarily brings indigenous people from San Cristóbal into contact with national cartels and smuggling rings. From interviews, so far the indigenous side of these interactions is managed by adult “investors” who own vehicles or grow marijuana, for instance, and who depend on ethnic solidarity and ethnically-based patterns of organization to manage their collaborators – factors which suggest both organizers and workers may continue to avoid being drawn into non-indigenous gangs. As far as one can tell, to the extent that young people participate in the indigenous side of these activities, they do so as junior members brought in by their elders, not as members of youth gangs. That said, in the course of interviews with returned undocumented workers, one young man described working for a syndicate of smugglers in California, delivering boxes of blank forms for green cards (legal immigrant

IDs), driver's licenses and social security cards up and down the state. The patterns of organization, contacts, and "fashions" of those groups are by now certainly known in the formerly isolated Chiapas highlands.²⁸

3. The presence of national and transnational gangs: Since the late 1990s, Mara Salvatrucha, a spectacularly violent Salvadoran gang with roots in Los Angeles, has operated on the Chiapas coast. By itself, the gang has little attraction for indigenous urban youth in the highlands. However, Mara's notoriety did attract a following -- the *maramaniáticos*, or "mara-maniacs" --among young, urban Ladinos in the state's two biggest cities, Tapachula and Tuxtla Gutiérrez, where there are now local gangs that imitate Mara organization, dress, hand signs, and tattoos. (*La Jornada*, Mexico City, 7 March, 2004). Perhaps these more local manifestations of Mara will act as a bridge to indigenous youth -- although, given that the *maramaniáticos* are Ladinos, it seems unlikely at the present time.²⁹

4. Finally, fashion and international youth culture itself: "Gangsta" fashions are

²⁸ D. and J. Rus, interviews, summer, 1998.

²⁹ At the same time, if the local press was, as mentioned earlier, alarmist about "gangs" in Chiapas, since 2003 the national and international media have been frankly alarming about the gang threat to the region as a whole, with repeated stories about the "potential" ties of Mexican and Central American street gangs to "international terrorism," and parallel stories suggesting that the indigenous movements of Latin America should perhaps be treated as "terrorist organizations." The danger of U.S. police, military and financial support for misguided repression in provincial Latin America latent in such charges should be sobering to all. (See for example "4 Presidents Seek Help in Gang Battle: Central American Leaders say the groups pose a hemispheric threat...", *Los Angeles Times*, April 2, 2005; "FBI Teams with Mexico to Probe International Gang: Effort to counter Mara Salvatrucha focuses on Chiapas State...", *Los Angeles Times*, April 15, 2005; "'War on Terror' Has Latin American Indigenous People in Its Sights," *Inter Press Service*, June 6, 2005.)

available to young people internationally, including to indigenous youth in Chiapas. “Gangsta rap” and rap video are on radio and television, baggy clothing is sold in local discount stores, tattoos have suddenly appeared on many young indigenous men’s arms and shoulders (and a few young women’s), and such customs as “tagging” are beginning to appear in San Cristóbal. Most of this in the *colonias* of San Cristóbal, as in high schools in the United States, is more an attitude and “look” than an indication of the presence of actual gangs – and this is a distinction those in the city quick to jump to conclusions should keep in mind. But at least the fashions of the youth gang, as a culture distinct both from the parents of indigenous youths and the ladino city that surrounds them, are present and beginning, tentatively, to exert their pull.

While the futures of the large, and growing, number of indigenous children on the street in San Cristóbal, or of the disaffected youth who live in what otherwise appear to be well-established, stable *colonias*, or, for that matter, of the young people who assist their older relatives in smuggling, invading land, etc., can of course not be known, what does appear to be true is that San Cristóbal’s Maya youth do not seem to exhibit the anomie as a result of the loss or devaluation of their culture that might be expected had their families migrated individually to urban centers (compare Moore 1978, 1991; Vigil 1988, 1993.) The fact that they have come in large, coherent waves, bringing their culture, village and family organization and pride with them, appears to have made them an example of what Oscar Lewis (1952) called “urbanization without breakdown.” In this respect, they appear to stand in contrast to urbanized peasants in many other parts of Mexico, where researchers have found that migrants often have great difficulties in

making places for themselves in a hostile and uninviting setting (Mangin 1970; Arizpe 1975; Lomnitz 1977).

Who's a Delinquent? Whose Rules? Some Final Thoughts

What is a gang? Do the ethnically defined *sindicatos* -- unions that secure land, jobs and services for San Cristóbal's indigenous migrants -- count? Do the bands of taxi drivers affiliated with the unions? What about the shadowy, multi-generational groups of indigenous men who deal in stolen cars, drugs, weapons and undocumented migrants? If these groups, organized along ethnic lines as Mayan people attempt to adapt to the city, and numbering from a handful of individuals in the case of the last to many thousands in the first, are all "gangs," does it stretch the meaning too far? What about the informal groups of young men, marginal in different ways, but all "alienated" by their very Mayanness from the city in which they live, who drink and harass passers-by on street corners in the city's markets and colonias? Are they precursors to gangs, incipient gangs, or already gangs?

Migration and adaptation to urban locales is a difficult process. For the formerly rural, indigenous peoples of Chiapas, the difficulty is compounded by a variety of historically specific obstacles. Thus while there are cultural resources and adaptation strategies that seem to be leading most to a relatively stable integration into San Cristóbal, clearly there are also transitional problems on the indigenous side, and continuing problems of mutual distrust and exclusion between indigenous people and Ladinos that could easily continue to be a barrier between the two groups into the future.

At the same time, even in a society like that of San Cristóbal, divided historically by ethnicity, neither of the groups, indigenous or ladino, is uniform. Community dynamics within the indigenous side of the equation -- differences in *municipios* of origin, in when and under what circumstances the migrants arrived in the city, in the kinds of family and community ties they brought with them, and in the kinds of organizations they joined after they arrived – will continue to have a great deal to do with how quickly and successfully individuals and families adapt.

As we have seen, some of San Cristóbal's indigenous young have become involved in groups whose activities neutral observers might describe as “extra-legal,” even “illicit.” As we have also seen, however, whether these activities are deviant or not depends greatly on one's perspective. In the long run, social harmony, and even security, in the city will perhaps depend most of all on the way the young migrants, especially the most marginal among them, adapt. But that, in turn, depends in great measure on the way the city receives them and the degree to which it is prepared to offer them positive outlets for their energy.

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