Resistance, religion and identity in Ojitlan, Oaxaca, Mexico

Jeffery, Susan Elizabeth

Susan E. Jeffery

Resistance, Religion and Identity in Ojitlan, Oaxaca, Mexico

Abstract

This dissertation analyses resistance to a regional development programme, which centred on the construction of a dam at Cerro de Oro, Ojitlan, Oaxaca, Mexico and the resettlement of the affected Chinantec population into an area of Uxpanapa, Veracruz. The resistance of the people of Ojitlan took various forms over a seven year period (1972-9), including political action, a syncretic millenarian movement, a reassertion of traditional forms of community fiestas and passive resistance to resettlement. Ojitlan has been affected by national economic and political changes since before the Spanish Conquest. Large plantations established in the tropical lowland areas in the 19th century ceded place to small "ejido" communities, set up under land reform in the 1930s. Control of land and the economic relationships of production are seen as factors affecting the patterns of resistance in Ojitlan. The dissertation reviews the anthropological literature on resistance and on ethnicity. The series of forms of resistance studied can be seen as multiple cultural articulations - attempts to "bridge the gap" between the established Ojitec life and the "modern" systems of work and life introduced by the development project of the Papaloapan River Commission. The Ojitec struggle with modernity involved dealing not just with the question of resettlement in the collective ejidos of Uxpanapa, but also with the reforms promoted in the Oaxacan Catholic Church. The traditional ritual of indigenous Catholicism offered a sphere of legitimate agency and autonomy for the Ojitec in the face of new models of agency and power. The dissertation suggests the usefulness of the concept of resistance, tempered with an analysis of accompanying processes of accommodation to change. Evidence from the 1990s indicates that ethnic identity continues to be important in political resistance to the state in Uxpanapa, a sign of the resilience of forms of Ojitec culture.

Resistance, Religion and Identity in Ojitlan, Oaxaca, Mexico

by

Susan Elizabeth Jeffery

Ph.D. in Anthropology

University of Durham
Department of Anthropology

Submitted 2001

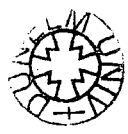


Table of Contents

List of Maps and Figures

Maps

Figures

***

Introduction

Ojitlan first struck me as a gold-rush frontier town of the classic Wild West – loud, "good time" music blaring out in the streets, a bar at every corner, drunks and frequent fights – I hated it! On my first Sunday in town, men started drinking early in the afternoon. Some drank until they fell over. They lay where they fell until the rain woke them or until someone carted them home. I wrote that the drinking seemed joyless, the men just became increasingly morose and truculent until they ended up fighting and were taken to jail to sleep it off. Later that night a man was stabbed to death in one of those drunken fights just across the road from where I was staying. On my second Sunday in Ojitlan, the priests were violently attacked and ejected from the church.

My decision to do research in Ojitlan had been made after I read an article by Barabas and Bartolomé in Critique of Anthropology (1974). My interests were already focused on the anthropology of religion and on Mexico. I wanted to carry out an ethnography that would also allow me to examine cultural transformation in the face of change. I was stuck rather restlessly between wanting to study a distinctive culture and system of classification and wanting to acknowledge processes of economic and social change. I wanted to do both.

As an undergraduate my interests had come to focus on Mexico, partly because I had taken a regional course on Latin America and partly because I had managed to spend three months summer vacation in Mexico doing fieldwork for my undergraduate dissertation. That was summer 1974, which I spent in a village in Tlaxcala, Mexico, linked to a programme of Latin American students doing field research for a Masters degree under the tutelage of Hugo Nutini. So when it came to the question of Ph.D. research, I had already got to grips with Spanish and wanted to return to Latin America, if not to Mexico.

My initial contacts in Mexico in September 1976 were with a number of anthropologists (including those who had worked in the area) with whom I was able to discuss their current research and my interests. My practical contact with my future area of study was through Elizabeth Allen, a Geography postgraduate at Durham who was carrying out research on contrasting settlements in the Papaloapan River Basin. I wanted to work in

Ojitlan, where the people were facing resettlement because of the proposed construction of a dam. Liz helped me with my introductions to the Papaloapan River Commission, including letters of recommendation signed by Jorge Tamayo, the Chief Executive himself. At that time, the resettlement zone was closed to all outsiders, so I needed an official pass. I visited the Commission's regional headquarters in Ciudad Alemán,[1] stayed in their official visitors' residence and was introduced to some of the key middle level officials running things in Ojitlan. I was also offered the use of their residence in Ojitlan, where I arrived on Monday 11th October 1976.

As I had spent the summer in the state of Tlaxcala, Mexico, only two years before, I felt that some familiarity with the country would give me confidence in the new setting. I remember thinking that Ojitlan, because it was relatively more isolated, with higher use of indigenous languages, would be a very good place to study an indigenous and distinctive culture. Tlaxcala, much closer to Mexico City, was very integrated into the regional capitalist economy. Ojitlan, despite all the changes, would be a more "authentic" indigenous culture. My first impressions of Ojitlan were a terrible shock and I spent the first four months regularly contemplating and researching alternative sites for fieldwork.

For my first week, I was based in the Commission's residence in the *villa* (main village centre) of Ojitlan, though I spent four of those days out on a visit to communities between Ojitlan and the neighbouring village of Usila. The residence was in a commanding position with a balcony at the top of the main street. Near it and all along the main street were miscellaneous shops, three pharmacies, three restaurants, two billiard halls and many *cantinas* (bars). In my first letter home from Ojitlan, I compared it to the way the gold-rush frontier towns were portrayed in some of the old "Westerns". Now I might compare it to a version of the last days of Sodom and Gomorrah – or the frantic revelling while Rome began to burn. Although the violent events were both dramatic and interesting, they made it a difficult time to be a stranger arriving asking questions.

[1] The town was named after Miguel Alemán, President of Mexico at the time of construction of the first dam (also named after him) in the area at Temascal.

My first movements in Ojitlan were with the PRC's support and using their facilities. Although I always made it clear to people that I was a student researching their language and way of life - not working with or for the Commission - inevitably I was associated with the latter. During my first month I made a number of visits on horseback to a wide range of the rural communities of Ojitlan and also to the neighbouring inland *municipio* (village, administrative district) of Usila. I was accompanied by an employee of the Commission, called don Beto,[2] an older Spanish speaking man, who had accompanied many of the engineers and other officials on visits before. The visits were of three or four days' duration and involved my staying in different family households in the communities. There was no advance warning for them. Don Beto and I would arrive and he would ask people he knew for accommodation for us for the night. I was in search of a place to live, both a house and a community, where I could begin to build some relationships for research.

After my first week in the Commission's residence, I hired for a month a room, including food, connected to a household at the entrance to one of the more indigenous sections of Ojitlan. It was the room rented by the two Mexican anthropologists, Lucero and David, who had carried out the studies in 1972-3. Don Abelino and his wife, an elderly couple, owned it and he was a very ambivalent landlord. Several months later, I wrote home describing his behaviour, which I could see more clearly once I had left his house:

> His behaviour was at once friendly and hostile. He very often brought the topics of conversation round to outsiders, how everyone who has stayed in his house had treated him well, how he respected foreigners even though his friends asked him why he let them stay in his house, how the people of my country must be richer and more cultivated than here. ..... I have since learned that his opinion of outsiders is that they only come to exploit the people of Ojitlan and so one should try to extract as much money as possible, exploit them back.
>
> This opinion of his does not lead him to refuse contact with outsiders. On the contrary, he likes to have control of the situation, have them living in his house and talking to him. He *seems* an ideal informant for an anthropologist – an old man, who knows the "old ways", but also speaks enough Spanish to be able to communicate with those who do not understand the Ojitec language. However, Abelino is very careful to deny that he knows anything about the customs and history of the village. Only "the ancients" knew this, he repeats. At the same

[2] I have changed the names of people to protect their identity, except where their names had already been made public (as in the millenarian movement and in newspaper stories).

> time he keeps me talking, intimating that he knows a lot that he could tell if he wanted. He *seems* to be willing to give information, but in fact says little, although he regularly complains about rising prices. He acts offended and neglected if I don't spend time chatting to him and then when I do set aside a good hour or so he insinuates that I am using up his time when he ought to be working or doing something else. Sometimes when I try to ask some specific questions, he just gets up and says he has to go and do a job somewhere.

There were times when he was more relaxed and chatty and he invited me to a wedding of a relative of his. However, overall the relationship was a difficult one. There were a variety of rumours circulating about me, which I heard from different people. One said that I was learning the language in order to sell it; that once the Ojitecs had been moved out of Ojitlan, the *gringos* (North Americans) or Japanese would move in and I was the advance party; another that I was like Jesus wandering around visiting people's houses; another that I would be injecting the women so that they couldn't have children. I was asked more than a few times if my country was near Italy (where the priests were from) and was I from the same place as them, did I know anything about them? I was often reminded that foreigners had to be careful in Mexico, because otherwise things might happen to them.

I continued my visits to different communities with don Beto and after a month at don Abelino's, I moved to the *ejido*[3] of Paso Limón. On my visits, I had decided on the house of the (part-time) baker of Paso Limón. He was a peasant farmer with ejido land. The household consisted of an elderly couple, their daughter and her four children. They all spoke the indigenous language and also some Spanish. The house was situated on the main path through and because they were bakers, there were plenty of visitors to buy bread when they made it. Paso Limón was in the second stage of resettlement, so I calculated they would not be moving while I was there, but would nevertheless be affected by it. As an indigenous community with some resident *gente de razón*[4] (people of reason), I could examine the interaction between the ethnic groups. They had also locked the priest out of the community chapel, even before the trouble in the Ojitlan church. The community was also divided over resettlement. It seemed a possible place to study indigenous responses to the dam and the processes and reasons for divisions.

---

[3] The ejido was established under the land reform laws, where farmers had the use of land as members of the community (ejido), but could not sell or rent it. This is discussed in more detail in Chapters 1 and 3.

[4] This was the term used locally to refer to people of European descent who spoke only Spanish. I explain this further in later chapters.

The ejido was set in a beautiful location, close to the river, and the people seemed quite friendly. After Ojitlan, where the tap water was unreliable and the people were often ambivalent, it seemed a good move.

I arranged to stay for a month, from mid-November to mid-December, but I was still looking for another fieldwork site completely. Whenever I left Ojitlan – on trips to Ciudad Alemán, Mexico City, Tuxtepec, Oaxaca – I was looking for alternative sites for research, such as Totontepec in the Mixe area of Oaxaca (where I made two visits) or San Pedro Sochiapan in the Chinantec hills (on which the INI[5] gave me data). I was looking for somewhere more isolated and more stable reflecting a concern of the 1970s, which is probably less significant for researchers today. Yet whenever I started discussing Ojitlan with fellow professionals, I would remember the interesting side of the place and indeed the reasons why I chose it. Fellow professionals were always very interested in the situation, as I was – I just hated living there.

Gradually though, things got easier. I stayed on in Paso Limón for another month and started to settle in. In my first few weeks I established key relationships with all the different groups within the community, which was critical to ensure my access to the full range of views. I lived in a household associated with one faction (anti-priest; anti-resettlement), was invited to be a godmother to a baby in the other faction (pro-resettlement; pro-the priest) and regularly visited a household de razón to collect milk. As I had compadres in the pro-resettlement faction, I had to honour the ideal of visiting, trust, friendship and respect. There were times of high tension, when my household of residence was upset and fed up at this, though my argument of visiting my comadre was also unassailable. When I visited the de razón household, the elderly head of household would always invite me to have a coffee and a chat and this facilitated my access into the de razón world and attitudes. In Paso Limón, in fact, people were not so keen to make money from me – they did not want to charge me for where I lived and they refused to accept payment for the milk. This was a great relief. The community of Paso Limón became my base for my fieldwork and I lived within the family household. I also continued to visit other communities within the territory of Ojitlan and Usila.

[5] INI – the National Indigenous Institute, which ran schools and other community programmes in indigenous communities.

In contrast to Ojitlan, I found that in Paso Limón, partly because of my initial contacts with all the groups, people tended to be friendly or at least neutral. Although I was regarded with curiosity, people did not stare at me in a hostile manner and members of my household were an excellent aid to fending off annoying drunks. I was a guest in my household and therefore in the community. I gradually became a kind of adopted daughter and would often go out with a young child (of my household) in tow, as did the local women. After Ojitlan, my associations with the Commission and the concomitant suspicion, I felt that I needed to make myself available to people so that they could observe me and begin to trust me more.

In my field research, I used a variety of methods, from participant observation to informal and more formal interviews. After I had been established in Paso Limón for a few months and was a regular feature in that community, its networks and Ojitlan, it was much easier to make contacts. I would join in activities and also accept invitations to visit, take part in prayers, go to meetings and take photos of people's special occasions. I worked "part-time" on many of the crops, such as maize, tobacco and coffee. I also developed friendly contacts in Ojitlan, including an indigenous[6] woman shopkeeper on the main street, whose shop became a favourite place for catching up on local events and watching the world go by. I eventually grew to like even the main village centre of Ojitlan and the music blaring out from the bars.

Although I was still an outsider, I think that I became accepted as a student, rather than as someone with suspicious connections to the Papaloapan River Commission. I still maintained my friendly contacts with the Commission (whose employees were all Mexican nationals), but visited the offices infrequently. As I became more established, I had to be careful not to become a source of information for the Commission. This was firstly in order not to betray trust, but also because my view would still only have been a partial one and I did not want to risk any Commission action or decision being influenced by my partial view. On my visits to Uxpanapa, I travelled with the Ojitecs and politely refused any offers of lifts with Commission officials to avoid long conversations with them. In the tense meeting described in Chapter 8, one of the engineers talked to me afterwards, asking me why the people did not want to stay to help with that maize harvest. I had to say to him "It's better to ask them for their reasons". I

[6] By indigenous, I mean someone whose first (and most commonly used) language is Ojitec.

tried to say it kindly, but he took it as a rejection. I genuinely did not want to be "involved" as an intermediary. I also knew that I was being observed by some Ojitecs and that a long conversation would have looked suspicious and would also have been overheard.

I took part in the routines of household and community as the basis of my research. This participant observation was complemented by informal interviews, where I might take some brief notes at the time. I would write up more detailed notes whenever I could and as soon as possible. Sometimes, I spent a series of interviews constructing someone's genealogy, as a way in to discuss different topics. I conducted some more formal interviews with, for instance, the eijdo officials on the history of the ejido when I also examined documents. As time went on, I became increasingly absorbed into social networks, duties and obligations. Where at first I accepted invitations with enthusiasm, later on it became a bit of a chore, because it had become obligatory and I had to go or cause offence. While at first I was always alert on ritual occasions, later I would get bored or tired or fall asleep like anyone else.

At first, I had hoped to learn and use the indigenous language of Ojitec. However, although I grew to understand a lot of phrases and parts of conversation, I found the language too difficult to use myself because it is tonal. Perhaps with structured tuition I would have grasped it, but everyday in the field I could not repeat the tonal variations accurately enough. My attempts to learn the language remained a favourite topic of conversation (and amusement) and people were very pleased that I was trying. I carried out my research using Spanish with some help in translation from bilingual Ojitecs where necessary. There were some long stretches of time when I spoke no English at all. I wrote letters home in English, but my field notes gradually became more Spanish than English. I remember one occasion in 1978 on a visit away from Ojitlan, after six months of full-time Spanish, meeting some American evangelists (from the Summer Institute of Linguistics) and struggling, almost tongue-tied, with the unfamiliar intonations of English. I remember not liking the sound or feel of speaking my own language.

After about six months, I had my first big "row" with Maria, the daughter of the household. I was late back "home", when I promised I would arrive earlier in order to

help clear the house for the DDT sprayers who were disinfecting houses in an anti-malaria campaign. Because I was late, Maria had left my bed inside the house (albeit covered over with a mat to protect it and my things), while everything else had been moved outside. I was fed up that my bed was left in the house (and had therefore been sprayed with DDT), while she was fed up that I hadn't been there to help. After a heated exchange, we called a truce. I felt exhilarated as the big "row" seemed a watershed in my process of acceptance into the normal way of things. Later on, I was used as a decoy in a romantic liaison of hers. One of our neighbours used to come by regularly, ostensibly to flirt with me, but really to flirt with her. It eventually ended in trouble when she got pregnant again but he refused to acknowledge the baby.

For secondary sources, I was able to consult the Papaloapan River Commission's publications and other data in their library in Ciudad Alemán; the Archive of the Convento del Carmen in Mexico City, which held papers by Weitlaner and Rubel; and other libraries as well as sources offered by fellow anthropologists in Mexico. I established good contacts with the INI centre and Mexican anthropologists in Guelatao, Oaxaca and visited there intermittently for reading and discussions.

I returned from fieldwork in September 1978 and began writing up. My grant lasted me until March 1979 and then I began a job as a Research Assistant on a project (on vulnerability to natural disasters) at Bath University in July 1979. From then on, a combination of factors meant that I was unable to work successfully on the dissertation for a sufficient length of time to make progress. I had moved to Bath, while my first supervisor, Norman Long, had moved to the Netherlands. I lacked focus and support. Theoretically, I felt stuck. I wanted to examine class, gender and ethnicity; to present a study of a distinctive culture and religion; to do justice to the young Mexican anthropology that emphasised class relations; to examine ethnicity and resistance to regional development. Intermittently, during the eighties, I would relaunch my efforts – a visit to the Netherlands to visit Norman Long in 1985, a visit to Judith Okely (formerly of Durham) in Colchester in 1990. After becoming a secondary school teacher, (firstly of Social Studies, then of Religion and Philosophy) in 1984, I found it more difficult to find good stretches of time to work. During the 1990s, I gradually began to accept that the Ph.D. would not get written. I regretted it, but began to feel that

it was too late. It is difficult to attribute causes over a long period of time. The reality was that I lost my way and I lost my confidence.

My renewed enthusiasm and confidence came with a term's fellowship at Harris Manchester College, Oxford, funded by the Farmington Institute. The Farmington Institute for Christian Studies funds sabbaticals for RE teachers to carry out research and I was accepted to carry out a project on the Mexican Day of the Dead during the summer term of 1999. I had chosen the topic deliberately with a view to using some of my Ph.D. research. During that term, Ralph Waller, Principal of Harris Manchester College, convinced me that I could still finish the Ph.D. if I wanted to. A family friend, Fiona Campbell, who had recently finished hers, added her voice to the argument. I contacted Durham in July 1999 and was allowed to register again with the support of the Department of Anthropology.

I think that this dissertation is still worthwhile, despite the lapse in time, for several reasons. Firstly, there is a story to be told of the people of Ojitlan during the process of accommodation and resistance to the Cerro de Oro project. My material supplements and develops the work of the anthropological studies of 1972-3. That way of life and that place has now changed – people have been relocated in Uxpanapa or elsewhere. Secondly, I carried out a detailed ethnographic study and also documented economic and political relationships and changes. I had access to a wide range of sources. This means that I have a great deal of material that can be analysed very well using contemporary anthropological theory on resistance and ethnicity.

In the ethnographic material that follows, I have used the ethnographic present tense to refer to activities and beliefs current at the time of my fieldwork from October 1976 to September 1978. Unfortunately, it has not been feasible to up-date my material with more recent fieldwork. I have been working full-time and have been unable to take (or finance) leave long enough to carry out fieldwork in sufficient depth. However, recent discussions with Colin Clarke, Professor of Geography in Oxford, offered valuable insights into contemporary ethnicity, religion and politics in the state of Oaxaca. A review of relevant websites has also provided some interesting clues on how the resettlement and resistance has developed, indicating that ethnicity may have become increasingly important as a focus for resistance to the state and regional authorities.

There is certainly potential for a further stage of interesting research on the Ojitec in Uxpanapa.

I would like to thank many people who have contributed to the development of this thesis over such a long period of time. In the 1970s, my first supervisor, Norman Long helped me to set up and develop my research in Mexico, supporting me with discussions and contacts. Judith Okely and the late David Brooks, both formerly at Durham, always took a friendly interest in my work. I am greatly indebted to my adopted family in Paso Limón, Ojitlan for their friendship and generosity. Many other Ojitecs and Mexican anthropologists were kind and helpful to me. Family, friends and colleagues have encouraged me. From the late 1990s, I must thank people in Oxford - the Farmington Institute and its Director, Martin Rogers, for offering me the sabbatical thinking time; Ralph Waller, Principal of Harris Manchester, who not only revived my confidence in the thesis, but allowed me to stay intermittently at college to work and use the Bodleian. Hugh and my parents have contributed much by being themselves and being there. Finally, my second supervisor, Simon Coleman, has guided me skilfully through my own material and anthropological theory to finish this present dissertation. I am enormously grateful for his constructive questioning, advice and support throughout the process, though, of course, any errors remain my own.

Susan Jeffery
May 2001

Chapter 1: History of Ojitlan – Land and Peoples

The Chinantec and (within that category) the Ojitec have a long history of interaction and communication with different ethnic groups. Ojitec identity has been forged in that interaction. The history of the distribution of land, and economic and political relationships since the mid-nineteenth century, are important in that they help to explain the patterns of resistance and alliance in contemporary Ojitlan. Land is an important source of wealth and the control of land was threatened by the Cerro de Oro dam and the proposed resettlement. This brief historical overview makes it clear that there have been many contacts between Ojitlan, other indigenous ethnic groups and national groups and forces. This history and the nature of their relationship with the wider economy affected the people's responses to the Cerro de Oro project. There is also significant economic differentiation amongst the Ojitec themselves and I shall attempt to trace some of the origins of this, as this also affected responses to the Cerro de Oro project.

Early History

Archaeological evidence points to settlements in the lowland Chinantla as far back as 500 BC. This lowland area includes Ojitlan, Valle Nacional and Tuxtepec, now the main town of the area. Analysis[1] of sites in Ojitlan suggests that hundreds of years before the Aztec conquest, there were links with both the Mixtecs (at Monte Alban) of Oaxaca and the people of the Gulf coast of Mexico, such as the Totonacs.

The Aztecs are said to have conquered the Chinantla in the mid-fifteenth century and collected tribute. However, the Chinantec rose in rebellion and were already trading with the "free" republic of Tlaxcala, when Cortes invaded Mexico. The Chinantec, like the Tlaxcalans, fought alongside the Spanish against the Aztecs. Diaz reported that 1500 Chinantec warriors supported Cortes in his campaign in Cempoala (Weitlaner, 1939:199). There is therefore evidence of longstanding connections between the Chinantec of Ojitlan and other ethnic groups within the region.

[1] Castillo and Arechavaleta, 1973; Delgado, 1956; Weitlaner, 1939.

The consolidation of Spanish control over the area in the sixteenth century probably involved a fairly radical transformation of the Chinantec social system, partly because of the reorganisation required for Spanish administration and partly because of the decimation of the indigenous population by disease. In 1579, there remained only 10,000 of the 100,000 Chinantec population at the time of the Conquest (Weitlaner, 1939:199). Settlements, prior to the Conquest, had been small and perhaps moveable because of the demands of swidden (slash and burn) agriculture. The Spanish congregated these small settlements into larger ones, which became centres of local government administration and for the collection of taxes.[2] The Spanish political and military control was accompanied and reinforced by the activities of the missionaries, who were mainly friars from the Dominican Order in the early years.

Very little is known about the lowland Chinantla/Ojitlan for the 17th, 18th and early 19th centuries, though it is likely that the indigenous population continued to cultivate land with simple technology (such as hoes) for subsistence and in order to pay taxes, under the swidden system. They also engaged in hunting, gathering and fishing activities. It is likely that there were trading links with neighbouring ethnic groups (as had been revealed in the earlier archaeological record). However, the territory of Ojitlan in a semi-tropical climate with few settlements was probably very inaccessible and uninviting to "outside" entrepreneurs at this period, in contrast, for instance, to the dryer, more temperate valley of Oaxaca, which was divided into estates for the Spanish under the *encomienda*[3] system. It is likely that large stretches of land were forested in Ojitlan and that space allowed a long period of fallow from the first clearing of a swidden field to the second clearing.

The Plantations

Contemporary inequalities in wealth and land ownership can be traced back to the arrival in the area of commercial entrepreneurs from places such as the Canary Islands, Cuba, Spain, Canada, as well as Mexican nationals. This began in the mid-nineteenth century. The descendants of these people are known locally as *gente de razón*, literally

[2] The countryside then seems to have been sparsely populated until the 1930s agricultural reform, which created numerous small settlements again.

[3] The *encomienda* was a grant of land by the Spanish government to a private person, who had then to pay taxes to the King of Spain. The land grant "included" the indigenous population, who worked on the land for the encomienda owner (Friedlander, 1975:54).

"people of reason", a term used for Mexicans of foreign descent who speak Spanish and no indigenous language. The means by which these outside entrepreneurs *de razón* established control over large tracts of fertile land is not clear. However, their appropriation of land was helped by the laws of the Reforma, which required registration of land. Many indigenous communities were unaware of the law or unable to follow the procedures necessary and so land which had been alienated from them, often by force, passed legally into the hands of the dispossessors. Most of the land cultivated by the entrepreneurs would have first required deforesting and their sources of labour for this are unknown. It seems unlikely, however, that the indigenous population would have worked for them in the early stages, unless force were used. At the turn of the century, the Chinantec would run and hide if they saw an outsider.

Much of the land thus appropriated was fertile lowland and was converted to large-scale commercial cultivation, mainly of tobacco. Some of the dispossessed indigenous people seem to have worked on the newly established plantations, although many of them moved to carry on a subsistence cultivation on non-plantation fields, in the main the hillsides and less fertile land. The main labour force on the plantations prior to the revolution was probably made up of contract labour. Although some of the contract labour came voluntarily, the vast majority of workers were brought to Ojitlan against their will from the Mixtec hills and other parts of Mexico. They were transported to the relatively inaccessible tropical plantations, where communications were difficult, and were locked up at night to prevent them from escaping.

The large estates which developed cannot be characterised as capitalist – at least in so far as contract labour, virtual slave labour, was used. This kind of productive regime also existed in Valle Nacional and may well have been widespread in the lowland Chinantla at this time. The situation in the lowland Chinantla contrasts markedly with the sierra of Oaxaca where, according to Young (1978:135), the penetration of merchant capital preceded capital investment in production. In the territory of Ojitlan, capital investment in production seems to have come first, perhaps partly because of the fairly flat, fertile land and its accessibility via river transport from the regional capital of Tuxtepec. The new entrepreneurs brought with them their own trading links for the marketing of their produce.

The first major "resistance" activities recorded in Ojitlan occurred during the Mexican revolutionary period of 1910-1920. The main impact of the revolution at this time was probably the freeing of the "imprisoned" contract labour on the plantations. An Ojitec, Sebastian Ortiz, is remembered locally for organising supporters to free the contract labour on the plantations of Las Pochotas, La Esperanza, Paso Limón, Santa Rosa Pie del Cerro, El Platanal, Monte Bello and Ideal Arriba.[4] Large numbers of the freed contract labourers joined the revolutionary armies, as did some of the indigenous inhabitants of Ojitlan (Rendón, 1973:14).

However, many older people of Ojitlan today speak of the revolutionary period mainly in terms of the troop movements through their territory and the fear and uncertainty that they felt. This seems to have been a generalised fear of all groups, rather than taking sides. The revolutionary period does not therefore provide a "foundation myth" for more contemporary resistance.[5] The inhabitants of the rural areas of Ojitlan would hide in the forest and uncultivated areas whenever troops were known to be nearby. Their fear of thefts and sequestration of goods by the armies led them to build small shelters in the forest or other inaccessible areas where they hid their maize, animals and other items of importance to them. It is said that in Ojitlan there was little of the destruction and fires that characterised the state of Veracruz at this time. Indeed, the relative quietness of Ojitlan was the reason for at least one capitalist entrepreneur to flee from Veracruz inland to Ojitlan. There was no radical redistribution of land at this time and the agrarian reform was not implemented until the era of President Lázaro Cárdenas from 1934-1940.

After the revolution freed the contract labour on the large estates in the Ojitlan area, alternative methods of labour recruitment came to predominate, which drew in neighbouring ethnic groups. The landowners would send men to recruit poor, indigenous peasants from the *sierra* or hill territory. These workers – Cuicatecs, Chinantecs,[6] Mazatecs – would arrive on the lowland estates for the tobacco season,

---

[4] From a discussion with Ortiz's son in Ojitlan and from an account written by the Inspector of the "Sebastian Ortiz" primary school in Ojitlan.

[5] Perhaps, more accurately, the revolution provides an ambivalent reference point, open to different interpretations.

[6] Weitlaner and Castro (1954:26) note that this temporary annual migration included Chinantecs from as far away as Mayultianguis, who travelled annually to work on the tobacco harvest in Usila and Santa Rosa (Ojitlan).

often bringing their own cooks and baskets of *totopos* (dry, toasted tortillas) to tide them over the first few weeks. They would return to their own villages at the end of the tobacco season. Other workers came from the *villa* (municipal centre) of Ojitlan. Some of these were recruited under the system known as *las capitanas* (the captains) (Rubel, 1950). The capitanas were women with a certain grasp of Spanish who were appointed by landowners to seek out workers for the tobacco. A capitana might take 100 or 200 workers at a time to the estate and earned 15 or 20 centavos for every person she recruited. These workers remained residents of the villa of Ojitlan and spent only the period of work on the estate.

Some Ojitecs lived in small settlements on the estates. The plantation allowed them land for subsistence cultivation on payment of rent in kind – a proportion of the harvest. These peasants also appear to have worked periodically on the tobacco. Apart from the few very big landowners (probably the owners of the plantations of Santa Rosa, Monte Bello, Los Angeles and El Ideal represented in a map of 1910),[7] there were smaller entrepreneurs de razón who rented land from the former and recruited labour for their own tobacco crops. At least one wealthy Tuxtepec family owned land in Chinantec territory, as did at least one family from the city of Veracruz. A number of Chinantec were themselves small landowners. The plantations and commercial farming created wealth for outside entrepreneurs and increased economic differentiation. They also provided some economic opportunities (such as renting land, growing some tobacco) for those Ojitec living in small communities on the fringes of the plantations.

Other large-scale commercial crops grown in the area were bananas and coffee. In the 1920s the US Standard Fruit Company had seven banana plantations in the Tuxtepec area, one of which was at Las Pochotas, Ojitlan (Rendon, 1973). Other large-scale growers sold their produce to Standard Fruit, who collected it by river barge. The river was the major method of transport and Tuxtepec functioned as *el puerto de la sierra* (the port of the interior). Coffee from the Canadian-owned plantation of Flor Batavia (in Cuicatec territory) was sent by mule to Santa Rosa and then by barge to Tuxtepec.

Trading with the indigenous Chinantec was mainly monopolised by the itinerant Zapotec traders of the sierra and appears to have involved only the selling of the products of the sierra and not the buying of Chinantec products. These (male) traders

[7] Espinosa, 1910.

used to travel on foot from Zapotec villages such as San Pablo Macuiltianguis and San Juan Analco, carrying loads on their backs which at the outset weighed up to 3 ½ *arrobas*[8] (Weitlaner and Castro, 1973). A trading trip might last 16 days. They brought sleeping mats, earthenware jars and cooking vessels, hammocks and sandals to sell to the local Chinantec. Some traders reportedly travelled by train from Oaxaca to Cuicatlan and then continued on foot via Quiotepec to Usila, Ojitlan and Tuxtepec. The Cuicatecs from Teutila, San Andres Teotilalpan and Rio Hondo brought large tins of *aguardiente* or cane rum (either on their backs or on mules) to sell in Ojitlan. There appear to have been no Chinantec itinerant traders. It is also remarkable that there was and is no system of weekly rotating markets or *tianguis*, such as is found among the other cultural groups of Oaxaca (Bevan, 1938; Beals, 1975).

The Land Reform of 1934-40

Many of the alliances and problems highlighted by the Cerro de Oro project can be traced to the land reform and formation of the *ejidos.*[9] Although the Agrarian Reform Law was passed at the time of the revolution, there was very limited implementation of it until the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas, 1934-40. In Ojitlan, almost all the *ejidos* were formed in the decade of the 1930s and three quarters of those between 1934 and 1938. An Ojitec named Gilberto Castro was a particularly important stimulus to agrarian reform in the area. From about 1932 he was active in encouraging plantation workers and other landless groups to form their own *Comités Particular Ejecutivo Agrario* (Special Agrarian Executive Committees) and to make requests for grants of land from the large estates. Castro was very successful in arousing enthusiasm for land reform - so successful that he was assassinated on the orders of a group of landowners.

The process of land reform and its problems can be illustrated by telling the story of the founding of one particular ejido, that of Paso Limón, Ojitlan. Prior to the start of the agrarian reform, Paso Limón had been a small community of about 10-15 households situated at the foot of the hills on the perimeter of an estate. Most of its residents had come originally from the villa of Ojitlan in search of work on the estates and had

[8] An *arroba* weighs 11½ kilos.

[9] *Ejido* is the name for the community formed through the allocation of territory under the post-revolution land reform laws. A group of landless people had to put in a petition and land was allocated to the group as a community. Individuals farm the land as members of the community and cannot sell or rent it.

decided to stay. They combined small-scale subsistence agriculture (on land rented from the estates) and work on the tobacco plantations with hunting and gathering activities. Some of the men, led by one Miguel Salazar, took up Castro's advocacy of land reform and formed their own Agrarian Executive Committee in 1932.

In 1935, two delegates from this committee travelled to the city of Oaxaca to request land to form an ejido. The Governor of Oaxaca accorded them provisional possession of the land in 1936, which was confirmed in 1938 by a Presidential resolution. After the state governor's decision in 1936, the Paso Limón group moved away from the foothills to take possession of the fertile lowland and began to build a new settlement. During the period from 1932, when the original Agrarian Executive Committee was formed by a small group of perhaps 10 or 15 men, to the 1936 occupation of land, the number of would-be *ejidatarios*[10] swelled to about 30 (among whom one woman was named). By the time of the 1938 Presidential resolution, 94 people were recorded as eligible for ejido land in Paso Limón.[11] The growth in number of potential ejidatarios between 1932 and 1938 can largely be explained in terms of migration from the villa of Ojitlan. Once the move for reform was under way, many landless people in the villa staked their claims to ejido land in communities where they had friends or relatives. It is not clear exactly at which point they moved permanently to the new outlying communities, but it was probably between 1936 and 1937. The Basic Census was carried out in August 1937 and it recorded 373 inhabitants in Paso Limón, of whom 56 were heads of families and 94 had rights to ejido land.

The fact that a small core of resident activists were later joined by new migrants helps to explain to a considerable degree the unequal distribution of ejido land. Those who were most active in the early days obtained more and better land than the later arrivals. It was also these "original" families and their supporters who remained entrenched in their opposition to Cerro de Oro and resettlement, when the descendants of the "new migrants"/poorer families began to respond to the waged labour and resettlement opportunities. This is discussed further in Chapters 3, 6 and 8.

---

[10] An *ejidatario* is a member of the ejido community with rights to use the land.

[11] Much of the detailed information on the formation of the ejido comes from documents in the possession of the *comisariado ejidal* of Paso Limón. Some documents, such the Basic Census of 18.8.1937. were copies obtained from the originals in the Archive, Delegación Agraria, Oaxaca. The descendants of the original families named in those documents farm much of the best quality ejido land today.

According to the Presidential Resolution of 1938, the ejido of Paso Limón was granted 935 hectares, land which was appropriated from three different private landowners. Of the total land allocated, 563 hectares was good agricultural land, which was to be divided amongst the 94 eligible. The other 372 hectares was less fertile, often hilly, land to be reserved for the collective use of the ejidatarios for the raising of livestock. (Much of this land has since been parcelled up and is under maize or coffee.) One hectare of land was reserved for the school. The owners of the expropriated land were given until January 1940 to vacate the new ejido territory and the ejidatarios had to vacate non-ejido land by the same date. Some idea of the size of pre-land reform estates can be obtained by looking at the three estates which lost land to the ejido of Paso Limón. One was of 1800 hectares, another of 352 and the third of 11,254 hectares. Out of the latter estate (in addition to the portion for Paso Limón) 6 ejidos were formed, benefiting more than 300 ejidatarios.

Some of the founding members of other ejidos were migrants from outside the territory of Ojitlan. A group came from Tlacoatzintepec (in the hills beyond Usila) in 1934 in search of land and helped to found the *ejido* of El Malotal in 1936. Tlacoatzintepec suffered at that time from a shortage of land and the migrants may well have got wind of the moves towards land reform in the area of Ojitlan. Migrants also came from Santiago Tlatepusco (near Tlacoatzintepec) to El Malotal, although most of the Tlatepuscans seem to have settled to found the neighbouring ejido of Pueblo Nuevo in 1936. To this day the language spoken in these two ejidos differs slightly from that of Ojitlan, though the two are mutually intelligible.

Although the territory to be included in each ejido was clearly defined on paper, the actual boundaries on the ground were not clearly stated. This means, in the present day (1970s), that except where the boundary is a natural one (such as a river or stream) there is often conflict. About 50% of ejidos in Ojitlan have boundary disputes, mostly with neighbouring ejidos and some with adjoining private property.[12] This internal conflict may be one factor making it more difficult for Ojitlan ejidatarios to unite for political purposes.

[12] Personal communication from Alvaro Lucero M., Mexico, 1976.

The Development of Small-Scale Tobacco Cultivation

Before the implementation of the land reform, most of the tobacco cultivation in Ojitlan had taken place on the large estates although some smaller amounts of produce also reached the market from the minor landowners and from those who rented land from the estates. Once some land had been redistributed, the new ejidatarios began to sow some tobacco of their own if the land they received was suitable as, for instance, the fertile flat land close to the river in Paso Limón and Santa Rosa.

The credit necessary for this crop was supplied by private individuals, known as *habilitadores*, to whom the bundles of dried tobacco leaves were also sold. There was a chain of habilitadores. The "big men" were based in Tuxtepec (at least one was Spanish and all were gente de razón). Each big man worked through a number of middlemen in Ojitlan (some Ojitec, some not), who dealt with the producers directly. Sometimes there were two middlemen in the chain between the big men and the producers. A number of these middlemen were also themselves tobacco producers, who in effect ran small enterprises employing waged labour on their own crops while also travelling as habilitador to the other smaller producers with whom he dealt. At least three men in Paso Limón were habilitadores for producers in the neighbouring inland village of Usila.

When the tobacco had been harvested and dried, it was sold to the habilitador and each one in the chain received an agreed rake-off, passing the produce on to the next one at a higher price. Some former middle habilitadores claimed that their gains were small because the tobacco would dry and lose weight between their receipt of it and their handing it on to the next in the chain. I am inclined to give little credence to this story since almost all former habilitadores are relatively wealthy in the present day. The largest profits (reportedly quite phenomenal) went to the big men, who made fortunes from this business which they invested in land or in commerce in Tuxtepec. The smallest profits went to the direct producers.

One of the big men in Tuxtepec was Mauricio Gonzalez, who took over from his godfather, Manuel Palomares, when the latter returned to his home country, Spain, after having made his fortune from tobacco. Mauricio himself made a lot of money in the

same fashion until Tabamex[13] took over in the early 1970s. At the present time Mauricio owns three cattle ranches and two ice factories in Tuxtepec among other business interests. He maintains his ties with Ojitlan now through cattle in arrangements with several local gente de razón small capitalists, whereby he buys cattle that his Ojitlan partner looks after and fattens. When the animals are sold, Gonzalez deducts his original capital investment from the proceeds and splits the profit with the other.

The fact that some of the middle habilitadores of tobacco were Chinantecs is of significance since it belies a simple concept of the Chinantec as a homogenous ethnic group. It is clear that although they shared a common culture, their economic interests diverged and that from the 1930s, if not earlier, it is possible to talk of a class structure within the Chinantec population. It is also possible to talk of a certain alliance of interests between the more entrepreneurial Chinantecs and some of the gente de razón, which worked to the detriment of the poorer indigenous population. It is therefore misleading, at least as far as the discussion of the economy is concerned, to talk in terms of ethnic categories to the exclusion of divisions along class lines. The latter do not follow the former.

There are suggestions that the Chinantec habilitadores were as adept at exploiting the indigenous population as their de razón counterparts, if not more so. The former, speaking the indigenous language and probably stressing their "indianness", may well have been able to minimise potential friction between themselves and the direct producers. Certainly I have seen this tactic employed in comparable transactions in the present day. One habilitador from Usila, now himself a property owner and cattle rancher, used to fix his scales such that the arroba (which should be 11½ kilos) that he bought from the direct producer might in fact weigh as much as 20 kilos, the value of the difference adding to his profits. He would also give free drinks of aguardiente to the producers and later they would drink away their earnings at the habilitador's *cantina* (bar) where prices might be inflated and other tricks played. It is likely that such exploitative techniques were also used by habilitadores de razón, but probably with less success because they were unable to manipulate people by the appeal to common ethnic bonds and interests.

---

[13] Tabamex is the Mexican government agency, which supplies credit to tobacco producers and buys the crop. It was founded in the early 1970s.

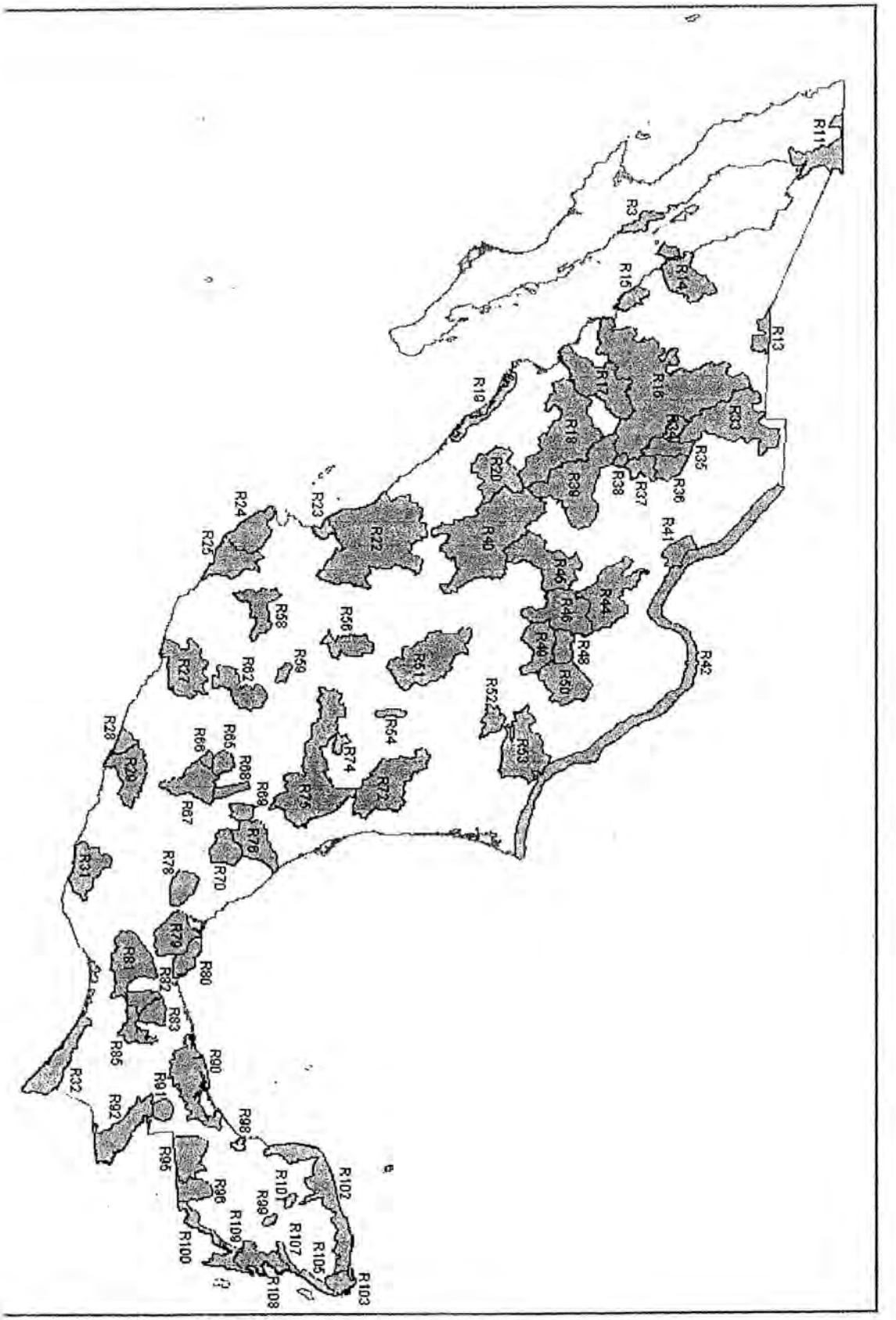
Some Implications for Contemporary Resistance

As the analysis proceeds, it will become clear that relationships and alliances developed through the cultivation and marketing of tobacco on the fertile lowland were historically very important. These relationships were both mutually beneficial and ambivalent, linking the wealthier and some of the poorer inhabitants of a community such as Paso Limón. The resistance to Cerro de Oro in Paso Limón emerges as an alliance based, not on ethnic bonds, nor on class interests, but based (at least partly) on the labour relations of tobacco production in the community. The poorer groups with less advantage from the "tobacco alliance" were often the first to modify their resistance to the resettlement project and take up the offer of land in Uxpanapa.

This historical overview helps to provide background to two other important aspects of the local Chinantec worldview. The past, before land reform, is represented as a struggle when "times were hard" and rich outsiders lived well, while others suffered. However, relatively few Ojitec are recorded as active in the revolutionary resistance. A more common reaction, especially in the rural areas, was fear of all outsiders/armies and hiding till the trouble had gone. Secondly, the Mexican government is often perceived as good, though access can be difficult. Both the ejido and Tabamex were good things from the government. The ejido required effort from the Ojitec (via their local mediators) to realise the good government plan in the face of opposition from landowners. The distance of government may contribute to this positive perception of it. The model is of the government as good, though it may take great effort from ordinary people to reach it. Some of the millenarian messages in 1972-3 suggested that if one could only "get through" to the President and by-pass selfish mediators then the Cerro de Oro project could be stopped. The Cerro de Oro project and resettlement in Uxpanapa was, in fact, like no other government initiative in Ojitlan. It threatened to disrupt, rather than work with, local economic and political relationships. It relied upon and planned to enforce an authority that was completely extra-local, where possibilities of negotiation were extremely limited.

Map 1: Mexico – Location of the Cerro de Oro and Miguel Alemán Dams and Reservoirs – no. R78

(Source: http://www.conabio.gob.mx/marinas/hidrol.html)



Chapter 2: Resistance

Introduction

In 1972 there began a major programme of state intervention in Ojitlan with the aim of building a hydroelectric dam at Cerro de Oro and resettling the affected population. This intervention would have very wide-ranging effects on Ojitec economy, culture and society as no other government initiative had done before. It is clear, from Chapter 1, that the peasant farmers of Ojitlan were not an isolated ethnic group and were already linked into the wider national economy. Most of the land was divided into ejidos under national land reform, there was a mixture of subsistence and commercial agriculture, and farmers in the fertile lowlands worked with credit and technical support from the government agency, Tabamex. However, the Cerro de Oro plan was radically different. The Cerro de Oro proposal was first made in 1948 and had been opposed in every local election campaign.[1] In 1972 - after rumours, a Special Study Commission set up by the government and a Committee Against the Dam set up in Ojitlan – a Presidential decree was issued on 30 August, which stated officially that the Cerro de Oro dam was to be built. Resistance to this project and the proposed resettlement continued and took a variety of forms, which will be discussed throughout this dissertation.

Political parties and peasant unions, most prominently the local branches of the PRI and CNC,[2] campaigned against the proposal to build the Cerro de Oro dam. At the point when the political resistance had failed to change the plan and the Presidential decree had been issued, a millenarian movement provided a further strand of opposition to the project. The movement developed from the point on 10th September 1972 when an indigenous peasant farmer declared he had seen apparitions of the Great God Engineer, who told him that the dam could not hold. Later he reported seeing the Virgin of Guadalupe and the cave associated with this vision became a centre for pilgrimage. This movement had dissolved within about 18 months. After the unsuccessful religious movement, some of the Ojitecs (including the "prophet" of the millenarian movement) became involved first as waged labourers in the resettlement project and then as

[1] Ewell and Poleman, 1979:84. I examine the history of the project in Chapter 6.

[2] PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) is the party which has governed Mexico since the revolution; and CNC (Confederacion Nacional Campesina) is its affiliated peasant organisation. The local CNC had organised the Committee Against the Dam.

members of the new *ejidos colectivos*[3], where there was further resistance to new farming methods. This resistance included planting individual subsistence plots of maize and eventually refusing to farm collectively. Some of this resistance used traditional cultural forms as, for instance, when Ojitecs refused to prioritise saving the collective rice harvest over returning to Ojitlan for the festival of Todos Santos or Day of the Dead.

The new increased intervention of the state in the local economy through the Cerro de Oro dam and resettlement plan was changing existing power relations and undermining the previous roles/influence/economic power of some major local entrepreneurs in politics and farming. Previous state interventions to help the peasants had often allowed scope for local entrepreneurs to reposition themselves advantageously within the "chain of benefit". This was the case, for instance, with the government agency Tabamex, where some local entrepreneurs became government agents providing credit and support for tobacco growing, where previously they had offered private credit. The political resistance at the level of municipal politics in Ojitlan was led by those local entrepreneurs who benefited from current economic and political relationships. Initially local opposition to the project was total, but as government agencies pressed on, promoting the advantages and opportunities, the opposition became more fragmented. In the ejidos, the best established ejidatarios with good land and the families allied to them continued to resist resettlement, while others with less to gain from existing relationships opted to try resettlement.

The officials of the Comisión del Papaloapan (Papaloapan River Commission) on the dam and resettlement project were explicitly opposed to the local entrepreneurs, whom they saw as the "exploiters of the peasants." The resettlement would separate the peasants from the exploiters (defined as "owners of private property" and "*mestizo*[4] merchants"). These exploiters would not have access to land or marketing opportunities there.

---

[3] The *ejido colectivo* was a system whereby each ejidatario had individual rights to land, but the land was farmed not individually but as a large unit with community access to credit, machinery and chemical inputs. This is discussed in Chapter 8.

[4] A term used nationally in Mexico by educated analysts. It is in some ways equivalent to gente de razón. It implies people (often of mixed race, part-indian) whose orientation is towards the national economy, society and culture. Ojitecs did not use the term.

A further initiative from outside (as perceived locally) hit the people of Ojitlan when local Catholic priests tried to implement reforms within the church. The priests faced considerable resistance, were refused access to some local chapels and in 1976 were forcibly ejected from the main church building in Ojitlan. Rival groups of "good Catholics" organised their own prayers and festivals. An interesting variety of forms of everyday resistance to change could be observed in the local farming communities. Some groups of Ojitecs resisted both resettlement and the church reforms. One form of this resistance was the revitalising and renewal of indigenous traditions, such as community festivals, that were under threat from both state and church interventions. At the same time, some of the Ojitecs who became pioneers of the resettlement programme were also supporters of the "modernising" project of the Catholic priests. The links between these political/economic and religious forms of resistance will be examined, as will the alliances formed for and against the "modernisers" of the Papaloapan River Commission and the Catholic Church. As the process of resettlement developed, the interactions between the government agents and pioneer settlers led to new forms of resistance and changing alliances.

In 1976, when my fieldwork began, resistance was palpable in Ojitlan and took many forms. I have found that the concept of resistance has been essential for understanding processes of change and stability in Ojitlan and the varied responses to agencies and initiatives from outside the *municipio* (administrative district). In this study, I shall develop an analysis of resistance, which will emphasise the following points.

Resistance is certainly a useful concept, yet at the same time I wish to avoid fetishising it. The term can mean many different things, though limits obviously do exist. It is important that resistance is seen as part of the total system of power relations. Changes in economic and political relations may generate the conditions for resistance to form and flourish. Conversely, an analysis of resistance can highlight those economic and political changes and reveal how they present pressure points for particular groups. Resistance can be articulated or expressed in many different ways. Some forms of resistance may reinforce each other, whilst some may be mutually contradictory. Different models of agency and power need to be examined and compared to see how they do or do not articulate with one another. Forms of resistance are part of the system of power, which they challenge, although it is important to avoid reifying the system of power in the analysis. I will also examine the cultural content of forms of resistance

with reference to the whole economic, political and cultural context. I am particularly interested in the extent to which specifically religious activities may provide symbolic forms of resistance to people denied other means of resistance.[5] Religion in Ojitlan has traditionally been an important sphere of local agency. Much of the ritual is organised by local people and their prayer leaders, with (until the attempts at reform) the priest's occasional involvement, mainly in festivals, rites of passage and services in the main church. The millenarian movement made the site of the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe (a cave) a focus of pilgrimage and challenged the authority of the church. The incorporation of the Virgin into the millenarian resistance can be seen as an attempt to appropriate symbolically the legitimacy of the nation, in support of the people against a government that is mistaken.

Resistance can vary from the overt events of protest (physical resistance and public demonstrations, such as stoning and ejecting priests from a church) to everyday actions. Here I would include resistance as a more subtle form of reappropriation or reinterpretation of the discourses and actions of the powerful and apparently dominant. An example of this would be the way that some Ojitecs greet each other jokingly as "*Ingeniero*"[6] with smiles and gestures of mock admiration. Furthermore, in the resettlement zone of Uxpanapa, ejidatarios learned to use collective ejido procedures to resist Commission workers, for instance by insisting that the wishes of the majority of ejidatarios be respected and secondly by using the official Bank's calculations to decide that it was not worth harvesting a crop of maize (as discussed in Chapter 8). Resistance can also range from the conscious to the unconscious. What unites all these ways of thinking about resistance is an analytical concern with human agency and the creative ways (on many levels) in which people try to exercise power through different strategies, as can be seen, for instance, in the work of the Comaroffs (1991), Abu-Lughod (1990) and the Osellas (1999).

Further points about the groups studied are important. In the Ojitlan situation, the "dominated group" is in fact heterogeneous, divided by ethnicity and by community of residence, perhaps in other significant ways too. I intend to analyse both the dominated groups doing the resisting, and the agents of domination. There are various agents of

[5] Millenarian movements are an example of this as discussed, for instance, in Christian, 1987; Kaplan, 1990.

[6] *Ingeniero* (engineer) was the term of address used for most technical experts from the Papaloapan River Commission.

domination to be considered, including the government workers of the Papaloapan River Commission, the economic/political elites of Ojitlan and perhaps the Catholic priests. However, it is not always easy to distinguish between the dominated and the agents of domination.

I shall discuss and develop a concept of culture that allows a significant degree of agency, especially creativity. The recognition of and analysis of contests over symbols is one important area. Whilst I acknowledge that culture does have a very strong, shaping effect on a person, my initial experience of Ojitlan emphasised that resistance can take the form of claiming "not to believe" in tradition. At first people would often deny that they believed certain "traditional beliefs" (in particular "stories" about the supernatural and spirits in nature), but later when I knew them better, it seemed to me that they clearly did believe at least some of them. Their rejection of the culture seemed to be part of the way they wanted to present themselves to me (yet another outsider), perhaps to promote a "modern" self-image or to avoid requests for further information. A major form of resistance, however, later came to be reasserting tradition as community fiestas. We need a concept of culture, therefore, that allows for the social/cultural structuring of the person and allows for agency and struggle, without an over-emphasis on individual rational choice and decision-making. Indeed, agency and resistance are not always located in the conscious mind at all (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991; Keane, 1997).

Power and Resistance

A central concept within the literature on resistance is power, in several senses. In the first sense, the struggle over cultural symbols (and also over economic and political resources) is unequal and some groups have a greater capacity/power to enforce their meanings on others. The Comaroffs, in their study of the process of colonisation of the southern Tswana in South Africa, emphasise the long battle between the southern Tswana and the nonconformist Christian missionaries for the possession of salient signs and symbols (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991: Ch. 6). Their general discussion recognises that there are regularities in the results of these contests over symbols, that certain groups (such as class fractions, ethnic minorities) tend to gain and sustain control. So, there is resistance and meanings are contested, but not in a context where *any* result is possible. On the contrary, the contest occurs in the context of structured

relationships, where patterns of dominance are likely to be reasserted, while some modifications in signs/symbols/meanings take place.

In their formulation of a system of power relations, the Comaroffs emphasise, for instance, that colonialism is "a process in political economy and culture" and that political, economic and cultural dimensions are "indissoluble aspects of the same reality" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1997:20). They regularly argue the need to recognise material production as a feature of the system (as part of their criticism of the postmodern focus on representations and consciousness), but they do not allocate a determining role to any aspect of the system of power relations. Like other writers referred to here (Abu-Lughod, 1990), they wish to avoid reductionist theories of power and prefer to emphasise the complexities of processes involved in power and resistance. Ortner's comments on Bourdieu (Ortner, 1984:148) seem equally applicable to the Comaroffs. Ortner notes that (in Bourdieu, 1977) the system is not broken up into base/superstructure or any other chunks or levels, with primacy assigned to one. The analytic effort is not to explain one chunk of the system by referring it to another, but to explain the system as an integrated whole by referring it to practice. The language is that of dialogue and dialectic, not of unilateral forces or causes.

In a second sense, the definition of power and its location is broadened within the literature on resistance. Abu-Lughod argues that studies of resistance have implications for our concepts and theories of power. We should use resistance as a diagnostic of power (Abu-Lughod, 1990:42). By this she means that, *pace* Foucault, resistance can be used "as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, find out their points of application and the methods used" (Foucault, 1982:209, 211). Both Foucault and the Comaroffs locate power in the consciously articulated and the everyday, taken-for-granted aspects of life. By examining everyday and local resistances, we can identify a range of specific strategies and structures of power and avoid reductionist theories of power.

Abu-Lughod's examples of everyday strategies of power and resistance include that of Bedouin women's resistance to particular arranged marriages that show the elder kinsmen's power and control over marriage. She emphasises that "power relations take many forms, have many aspects and interweave" (1990:48). Power relations work through restrictions on women's movements and everyday activities; through a moral

system that defines superiority in terms of particular characteristics (such as autonomy) that men are structurally more capable of achieving and through elder kinsmen's control over productive resources. She emphasises that it is not helpful to formulate a hierarchy of significant/insignificant forms of power, as it would distract from an analysis of how they might interweave.

Scott's study of peasants in Malaysia provides further ethnographic examples of everyday ("normal") peasant resistance to everyday exploitation by their landlords (Scott, 1985). These examples include: slander, foot dragging, sabotage; "letting it be known" that they might boycott working for landowners who use combine harvesters; strategies to maximise workers' income from threshing involving waste and therefore loss to the landowner. These forms of everyday resistance have several features in common. There is little or no coordination or planning; they are often a form of self-help; they avoid any direct symbolic confrontation with authority. Scott often seems to emphasise the "individual" nature of everyday resistance, though these routine actions are "generally underwritten by a subculture of resistance" (Turton, 1986:44). He notes that the public posture of the poor is of deference and conformity (avoiding symbolic confrontation), while "backstage" there is continuous testing of the limits. In fact, Scott emphasises that "the success of de facto resistance is often directly proportional to the symbolic conformity with which it is masked" (1985:33).

However, there are symbolic aspects to the poor's resistance in that they resist by promoting their worldview within which *tolong* (mutual help between conceptual equals; in practice help from the rich to the poor) is valued. This worldview is shared by both the rich and poor, who take part in "the same community of discourse" (ibid:140) albeit "discourse at a distance" (ibid:146). This sharing of worldview, including tolong, is under strain because of economic changes, which are strengthening the position of the rich. Exactly who is helping whom in *tolong* relations is always a contested social fact, each party claiming to be the more generous. The institution of tolong itself still operates as a cultural constraint on the unrestrained economic power of the landowners.

Scott's work encouraged similar research, ranging from analyses of peasants in 18th century Poland to 1980s China (cf. Colburn, ed., 1989). This has led some writers to

claim that the everyday resistance described by Scott "is a universal (or at least universally modern) phenomenon" (Vickers, 1992:305).

Power, then, can be seen as a many-sided, often elusive and diffuse force. It is always implicated in culture, consciousness and representation, according to the Comaroffs. Power can, for instance, "inscribe" itself on the body through habits of movement, gestures of submission or dominance, or ornamentation (Hale, 1997:393, referring to Foucault). So too resistance. Resistance uses the same channels and media as power, pushing back at the dominant expressions of power and also finding alternative modes of expression, as in Abu-Lughod's examples below.

The focus on "resistance as a diagnostic of power" can help to detect historical shifts in structures and methods of power. In the Bedouin society studied by Abu-Lughod, there is a subtle shift from kin-based power towards power resulting from participating in the expanding capitalist economy and markets. This shift is reflected in changing forms of resistance. Abu-Lughod discusses how lingerie for younger women has become a form of resistance to elders of both sexes – it is an indicator of an increased emphasis on individual qualities/attractiveness and the individual couple in marriage, connected with the lessening of links between two kin groups. This resistance (to kin-based power) through lingerie presages new forms of economic power in a consumer, capitalist society, which will, in turn, implicate those young people in capitalist social and power relations. Christian's analysis of a millenarian movement also highlights a historical change in power structures in the Basque region of Spain in 1931 (Christian, 1987). The visions and messages are to be understood as a response from a traditional farming Euskera-speaking area to short- and longer-term changes in the political and economic environment. These changes included a new government, which appeared hostile to the Church, and longer-term changes in new industrial employment and power relations. Christian suggests that the farm people felt under ideological and economic siege from the new government, its civil governors, its schoolteachers and new industrial development. The appearances of the Virgin appeared to provide a "solution."

There is an interesting contrast evident in these previous examples of resistance. The Bedouin women using lingerie are (or feel they will be in the future) in an advantageous position and their resistance to the elders looks forward to their access to new forms of economic power in a consumer, capitalist society. Lingerie presages a feeling of future

empowerment in a changing society. In contrast, the Euskera-speaking peasants' resistance through millenarianism stems from their feeling disadvantaged and disempowered by recent economic political changes. It is an altogether more desperate resistance, more of a rearguard action against negative change. Scott uses this phrase about the Malay peasants of Sedaka whom he describes as using tradition as a kind of rearguard action against full capitalist relations (1985: 240).

In Ojitlan, the resistance to be documented was triggered mainly by state intervention in the local economy with a view to building a dam to flood the area, combined with a radical resettlement programme. A study of the different stages of resistance to the dam will highlight changes in economic and political relations, as some groups reduce/change their resistance, linked with their increasing participation in the regional and national capitalist economy. Some groups of peasants and their sons (those with very little access to land) changed from total opposition to the project to, firstly, waged labour in the resettlement zone of Uxpanapa and, secondly, participation in the new collective ejidos. Their loyalty to economic/political relationships in Ojitlan was outweighed by the new economic opportunities offered by the Papaloapan River Commission. Nevertheless, they continued to resist the Commission in various, different ways and new forms of resistance developed from their interaction with Commission workers in the resettlement zone, as shown in Chapter 8.

Resistance, therefore, throws light on historically changing power structures and highlights "pressure points" for particular groups who respond differently. This is also shown in Kaplan's (1990) case-study of responses to colonialism in Fiji, where she contrasts the chiefly ritual response with that of the "people of the land" in the Tuka millenarian movement. Furthermore, resistance is not to be seen as a reactive force somehow independent of or outside of the existing system of power (Abu-Lughod, 1990:47; referring to Foucault, 1978:95-96). Forms of resistance are produced by local power relations and are part of the system of power, which they challenge. Abu-Lughod notes how one form of Bedouin women's resistance uses locally-given traditional forms of poetry, which "in some sense at least, have been produced by power relations and cannot be seen as independent of them" (Abu-Lughod, 1990:47).

In Abu-Lughod's example, women's resistance through poetry occurs in a particular kind of oral, lyric poetry. These poems/songs, called *ghinnawas* (little songs), are

recited mostly by women and young men, usually in the midst of ordinary conversations between intimates. The resistance lies in the expression of sentiments of vulnerability and romantic love, which are subversive as they violate the moral code of honour (autonomy and *no* vulnerability to others) and modesty (romantic love as immodest and immoral). This moral code itself, which must prevail in normal public discourse, is seen as perpetuating the unequal structures of power. Resistance, therefore, is not independent of the system of power, which it challenges. Abu-Lughod's analysis is particularly valuable, because of the detailed material on everyday strategies of power and resistance and because of her insistence on resistance as a diagnostic of power.

At the same time her article epitomises one of the weaknesses of the focus on resistance – that of the risk of romanticism. Abu-Lughod's comments on everyday resistance suggest that, despite her critique of romanticism, she herself is prone to it in the way she considers the resisting Bedouin women in her study to be special. She states that everyday resistance poses several analytical dilemmas; firstly we need theories "to give these women *credit* (my emphasis) for resisting in a variety of creative ways". One of her final points is to acknowledge a feeling that there is something admirable about resistance and to suggest that we can best *respect* (my emphasis) everyday resistance by "letting their practices teach us about the complex interworkings of historically changing structures of power" (1990:53).

One major dilemma, for Abu-Lughod, is how to theorise the women's consciousness. It would be equally unsatisfactory (she writes) either to misattribute a feminist consciousness (because they resist) or to allocate them "dismissively" a false consciousness (because they both resist and support the existing system of power) (Abu-Lughod, 1990:47). The dilemma of whether or not to attribute a "feminist" consciousness is surely a false dilemma. It seems to me that in this discussion Abu-Lughod falls prey to what Brown (1996) describes as an excessive focus on resistance. The fact that the women both resist and support the existing system of power should, at one level, be no surprise. Everyone does! The question should rather be about the balance between resistance and compliance (and perhaps about interaction, as in "the long conversation" analysed by the Comaroffs, 1991: Ch.6). If the dilemma is rephrased from the external categories of "feminist" or "false" consciousness towards the broader question of how to theorise consciousness (cf. Comaroffs, 1991:30), then this seems a more fruitful and open-ended approach, indeed one that is more likely to

meet Abu-Lughod's own plea to "let their practices teach us about the complex interworkings of historically changing structures of power"(Abu-Lughod, 1990:53). We need to be aware of the temptations to focus excessively on power.

Michael Brown (1996) offers an interesting critique of the popular analytical focus on resistance. He argues that occupational reasons may be part of the concept's popularity in that helping to give voice to resistance can make ethnography seem "really a form of high-minded public service" (1996:730). Brown contends that myopic, indiscriminate use of the term has led to some "ethnographic thinness" which suggests that some more interesting analytical possibilities are being missed, for instance, zones of complicity and creativity. He ends with a plea to recognise complexity and avoid an excessive focus on power and domination. It is important to recognise also reciprocity, altruism and the creative power of the imagination (ibid:734). Sahlins goes further and mocks what he calls the "neo-functionalism of power", whereby cultural forms are "explained" by power and resistance, hegemony and counter-hegemony (Sahlins, 1993:15-17). In his view this classification in terms of domination fails to provide adequate explanation of cultural forms and means that everything that could be relevant to power is considered to be power. He lists some culprits in provocative after-dinner-speech-style, among which are Bedouin lyric poetry (obviously a reference to Abu-Lughod's material mentioned above), women's fashions in La Paz and the scatological horseplay of unemployed Mexican-American working-class males. One reason that this list makes such a good set of after-dinner jokes is that it does contain examples of everyday practices, which appear to be glorified with a grand role in society in these analyses through applying "trendy names and concepts", such as hegemony. Making fun of the apparently pompous is always popular. There *is* a useful serious point in noting the risk of over-emphasis on power. However, the interest in the "apparently trivial" is surely a strength of anthropology and a welcome result of the recent focus on creative agency and practice.

Brown is right (as is Sahlins) to encourage us to be wary of an excessive focus on power, domination and resistance. Abu-Lughod's article illustrates both the strengths of Brown's argument (see my comments above) and also some of its weaknesses. Brown argues that there is a risk that "trivial oppressions" (such as fashion) and resistance to them may be considered on a par with more serious (by implication more real) oppressions, such as poverty or ethnocide. Abu-Lughod's example of lingerie as a form

of resistance, however, *is* interesting, trivial *and* important in that it is diagnostic of a major change from kin-based power relations to those based upon increasing participation in the capitalist economy. The economic, political and social changes that lingerie highlights will *not be trivial* in their impact upon people's lives. This example reminds us that the micro-operations of power permeate all aspects of life and that even the apparently trivial can be valuable as a diagnostic of power. In my own study of Ojitlan, dancing in community fiestas became a symbolic form of resistance to attempts to reform local Catholicism and, by extension, part of resisting threats to community and tradition posed by the regional development plan of the Papaloapan River Commission.[7]

Flirting could be seen as another example of "trivial oppression". It is the focus of an exchange between Yelvington and the Osellas (1999:457-460). It is certainly also an interesting example of the micro-operations of power and raises questions of how to theorise power, resistance and agency. Yelvington emphasises flirting and sexual abuse as phenomena of male control and criticises the Osellas for coming close to the "tendency to read resistance into so much that one wonders how dominance exists at all". The Osellas, in contrast, seek to analyse transfers of power in the flirting interactions between men and women (in rural Kerala, South India). Power "oscillates precariously" between a flirting pair, they state; "power is not a one-way street". The Osellas argue that the line between flirting and sexual abuse is hard to draw, with considerable ambivalence in the middle ground. Yelvington sees the whole continuum, flirting to sexual abuse, as a means of male control of women. From his Trinidad study, he argues that although there may be resistance by women in the form of flirting, this eventually leads to negative consequences for them and their reputation. On the other hand, flirting enhances men's reputations and power.

One of the reasons for the disagreement here may be that the Osellas suggest a more complex concept of female agency, which may be more subtle and indirect (than male agency). Yelvington says "We have to ask why women can never be sexually aggressive subjects in their own right" – the answer for him being male control and domination. Yelvington could be accused of tautology here. The Osellas say that women may initiate flirting by giving off subtle signals of interest or openness and the writers refuse to see this "as indicative of a lesser agency than a shouted comment".

[7] See particularly, Chapters 4 and 7.

They criticise Yelvington for holding an "aggressive, action-based" concept of agency, which stresses directness and ignores the subtlety and indirection of female agency. The fact that they are dealing with different cultural areas must be remembered in this exchange. Nevertheless, the Osellas make a very interesting contribution to the debate on concepts of agency. It raises the possibility of different actors' models of agency and power (here male and female) interacting within a situation, which may be missed because of the analyst's own assumptions. In Ojitlan, one very low-key mode of female agency and resistance involved mediating between men to reduce conflict.

Concepts of agency, power and resistance are further advanced by Keane in his study of representational practices in Anakalang society, Sumba, Indonesia. He suggests that the (Western) focus on agency as located in biologically distinct individuals is limited. In his analysis the relevant locus of agency can change in interaction – from living individuals to disembodied ancestor to clan. Agents are not to be seen as fully autonomous, rational subjects because of this potential for transformation of their identity, for instance from individual body to collective agent (clan) identified with the ancestors. Participants *interactively* define themselves and each other (Keane, 1997:7). The Anakalangese exercise power in "scenes of encounter" (involving formal ritual action) where there are interactions between people and their words and their material objects, all of which are prone to hazards and the possibility of failure.[8] Sources of authority, legitimate agency, social and economic power do not necessarily cohere and a great deal of effort (not fully conscious) is needed to bring them together for a successful result.

Keane's discussion reiterates, in various ways, how resistance is part of the system of power relations. In marriage negotiations (an example of a scene of encounter), for example, one side may resist the "excessive" demands for prestations, while the other side may express disappointment at the "small" counteroffers made. These resistances are expressed, partly in rhetoric, as difficulties to be overcome, such that the negotiations can be held to be a real achievement (Keane, 1997:162). The resistance of others is part of the hazard and potential for any action to "go wrong", thus emphasising that ritual is far from an unproblematic acting out of cultural rules or texts. Resistance

[8] So, too, in community fiestas in Ojitlan, there are hazards and the possibility of failure for the elected officials of the fiesta, especially if the entertainments are considered inadequate (cf. Chapter 4).

is therefore an inevitable feature of interactions and an integral part of the system of power relations.

Keane warns against a reductive focus on resistance to external forces. He suggests that it has become common to view "local" exercises of power in places like Anakalang as forms of resistance to external forces. However, he writes that the state is only one of the things that the Anakalangese consider in scenes of encounter, where they draw on a range of sources of power and authority in facing *one another* (Keane's emphasis). He explains the layers of government affecting Anakalang, but insists that the relationship is not simply one of local resistance against oppressive forces from outside. "When people find themselves at a disadvantage in local terms, they may try to make use of the alternative social identities and legal procedures introduced by the state" (Keane, 1997:47). His analytical interest remains on the interactions between the Anakalangese themselves.

A review of some of these forms of resistance seems to invite the comment that some are internal features of a relatively stable system of power relations, while others are indicative of impending change within the system. Therefore, resistance through oral, lyric poetry (ghinnawas) in Bedouin society, and resistance within marriage negotiations in Anakalang would seem to be internal features of a system of power relations, which allow us to develop a more complex concept of agency within a culture. Keane focuses on this form of resistance, though stability is never total stability. However, we could isolate a second form of resistance, such as resistance in the form of lingerie in Bedouin society and millenarian movements in the Basque region of Spain (Christian, 1987, see below) and in Ojitlan. Whilst these are clearly features of the existing system of power relations, they are also a diagnostic of the process of and potential for historical change in power structures. For want of better terms, we could refer to "stable" resistance and "critical" resistance though we may find the line between them difficult to draw. Both "stable" and "critical" resistance can take everyday forms, especially perhaps in relations between the sexes as can be seen in Ojitlan. These are useful reminders of the many-faceted concept of resistance.

The major forms of overt resistance in Ojitlan - the millenarian movement, the resistance to the Catholic priests' reforms, the refusal to resettle or the refusal to work fully in the collective ejido – are all examples of "critical" resistance. They are

diagnostic of wide-reaching changes in economic and political relationships. Long-term changes in Ojitlan meant that there was growing pressure on slash-and-burn agriculture because of increasing population on a limited land base. Ejidatarios were becoming more involved in the national capitalist economy through growing some commercial crops, selling surplus subsistence crops and doing waged labour where available. The Cerro de Oro dam threatened established relationships, while offering government help which had in the past been occasionally good (the ejido and Tabamex), but also frequently unreliable. The millenarian movements used existing cultural forms to speak out loudly against this major threat. As this movement developed and dissolved in Ojitlan, the impact of the Cerro de Oro project continued to be felt in community relationships in which cash became an increasingly important feature. There was an increase in relationships mediated by cash as Commission workers paid for meals, provisions and services; goods to be covered by compensation were given a price and well-paid waged labour in the resettlement zone became available. The later forms of resistance in Ojitlan oppose the loss of autonomy, reciprocity and community entailed in the Commission's version of capitalist modernity. The links with resistance to Catholic Church reforms are very interesting, as both raise questions of mediation and patronage. All of these forms of resistance are responses to changes within unequal power relationships, although it is important to remember that not all responses were resistance and that, for instance, there was a significant group of Ojitecs who supported the Catholic reforms.

The question of multiple responses to changes within a system of unequal power relations is discussed by Kaplan (1990), who examined the "multiple cultural articulations" which occurred with colonialism in Fiji. She argues that the Tuka millenarian movement and the chiefly ritual-political articulation are similar phenomena - both used Fijian and colonial categories to develop responses to the new situation. The chiefly response was "routinised" by the colonial authorities into a form of indirect rule, because it privileged the colonial authorities – in contrast to the Tuka movement which, because it threatened the colonial authorities, was classified and reified as a cargo cult (itself a colonial category, rather than an analytical category). In this analysis she makes some interesting observations about creative human agency in the colonial encounter. The Tuka movement "could be seen as a complex of accommodation and resistance, constituted and even empowered in relation to terms of colonial discourse" (Kaplan, 1990:11). Navosavakadua, the prophet of the movement, used the terms and

categories of colonial order in order to resist them – for instance, he redefined Jesus and Jehovah as Fijian Gods; he offered immortality (or invulnerability) to followers in the face of Christian promises of life eternal. "Navosavakadua's very agency was constituted in relation to the forms of power of the colonisers of Fiji" (ibid:14) and this was a source of the strength of the resistance. So, too, the Ojitlan millenarian movement used the terms and categories of the Papaloapan River Commission in its use of the authority of the Great God Engineer to challenge the construction of the dam and enlisted the support of the local/national symbol of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

Kaplan also introduces the concept of 'space' (as gaps in time or space or practice, which will always exist) between contact and hegemony, where creative historical agents make new articulations between systems of meaning. The articulations which privilege the powerful will be routinised, while others will be categorised as "cults" or "*fanatismo*" (religious fanaticism, a term used about resisting Ojitecs by Commission engineers in Ojitlan).

The question of "multiple cultural articulations" in a context of change is an interesting one for Ojitlan, as it enables us to consider the full range of forms of novel agency; not just resistance, but also the "cultural articulation" of the priests' supporters. It helps to focus some important questions about the forms and categories of the power of the new dominant group of Papaloapan River Commission officials. How did Commission (government) authority and the Catholic church (priests' reforms) shape Ojitec experience and redefine agency in this new "modern" field of social and cosmological relationships? The new order led to changes in the model of agency of key figures, such as President of the ejido and prayer leader, and their sources of authority.

The material so far discussed on power and resistance has concentrated on concepts of power, systems of power relations and the meaning of actions, whether of domination or resistance. It would seem to emphasise the cognitive aspects of power and resistance. Whilst the previous writers would not deny the emotional content of actions, the emotion is not directly described or analysed. In contrast, Christian has described power in terms of the "energy" generated in a millenarian movement, with visions and messages. Working from secondary sources, he develops an interesting side-theme about the power of the emotion generated in resistance. Christian writes that visions

provide a new power, an immense potential for mobilising people. At times, he uses metaphors and language from the world of Physics to describe the phenomenon, as in:

> the atmosphere... (of the area in June 1931) can be likened to that of a cloud chamber in which the air has been supersaturated so that even the slight radioactive emissions become visible to the naked eye...Another way to conceptualise this kind of power is to think of it as the conversion of potential to kinetic energy. The potential energy lay in the daily devotions... energy deposited and invested in the form of daily rosaries, novenas,...energy banked through churches....This energy, ultimately stored in individuals themselves, was mobilised in the audience at Ezquioga by the perceived threat of the Republic and the possibility of an immediate divine presence (Christian, 1987:143-4).

Whilst Christian's analysis concentrates on how the defining and tapping of this new power provides a "scan of society" (as in Abu-Lughod's "resistance as a diagnostic of power"), he also develops this mystical image of power. Studies have tended to concentrate on cognitive aspects of resistance. It is interesting that a writer using exclusively secondary sources should indirectly raise the question of how to theorise the emotional content of resistance. Certainly, Christian offers a useful reminder that emotions are involved and channelled through symbols in forms of resistance.

Kertzer (1988) also examines the relationships between symbols, ritual, power and resistance. He reminds us that the powerful (and the powerless) are recognised by symbols and that ritual is a means of arousing and channelling emotions in support of the legitimacy of an authority/leader. Kertzer follows Geertz's broad use of symbol as "any object, act, event, quality or relation which serves as a vehicle for a conception", where the conception constitutes the meaning of the symbol (Kertzer, 1988:185, citing Geertz, 1966:5). Indirectly, Kertzer also raises questions about agency. Ritual is defined as "any symbolic behaviour that is socially standardised and repetitive" (1988:9) and it serves not only to channel emotion, but also to guide cognition and organise social groups. A recurring theme is the way in which symbols are used to define the individual's sense of self and identity.

Ritual serves to link the individual to society and can bind a group together, allowing the expression of allegiance to the group without requiring common beliefs. Kertzer echoes the distinction made by Fernandez (1965) between "social consensus" (agreement about the appropriateness of certain actions in particular circumstances) and

"cultural consensus" (agreement on the meaning of the action) (Kertzer,1988:68). Ritual can build solidarity without requiring the sharing of beliefs. This is because of the properties of symbols and here Kertzer cites Turner's threefold formulation of – *condensation* (diverse ideas, which interact and become synthesised into a new meaning), *multivocality* (the same symbol may be understood by different people in different ways – this is essential for "social consensus") and *ambiguity* (no single precise meaning, but complexity and uncertainty of meaning) (Kertzer,1988:11). The solidarity of a group is, therefore, produced by people acting together, not by people thinking together. In fact, people may well have a "formless mass of conflicting beliefs" (1988:68). Keane also makes this point, that people may participate effectively in scenes of encounter without sharing the same explicit beliefs (Keane, 1997:232). The reminder that identification with a group may not imply common beliefs may be very useful in the later analysis of participation in alliances for and against the priests in Ojitlan. Some Ojitecs, associated with the pro-priest alliance through kinship and economic ties, were nevertheless very upset at the changes that were made to the ritual associated with death (considered in Chapters 4 and 7).

Kertzer, therefore, emphasises the importance of ritual in providing legitimacy for the powerful. Ritual channels feelings, defines identity and promotes solidarity of the group (without requiring common beliefs). At the same time that ritual can promote the legitimacy of the powerful, it can also be used to promote the solidarity of sub-groups within societies (Kertzer gives the example of the Orangemen in Northern Ireland) and can help to increase social division. Ritual can furthermore be a basis for resistance and revolt, especially when there is no traditional mechanism for large-scale political organising and, for instance in colonial societies, when military resistance was not possible. In Ojitlan, there was limited scope for peasants organising as the CNC in Mexico is affiliated to the ruling party, PRI, and really aims to transmit government ideas downwards rather than to serve peasants' views of their interests. Several of the important forms of resistance in Ojitlan were through religion and ritual (the millenarian movement and the reviving of community fiestas). Other examples of resistance through ritual include Gandhi and the salt march as ritual in India; the funerals of blacks killed in apartheid South Africa and the Native American Ghost Dance rituals in the nineteenth century USA.

Kertzer develops Turner's concepts of symbol and ritual and applies them to the broad study of power and politics. One of his aims is to criticise assumptions in political science about motivation and rational action in politics. He endorses Geertz's criticism of interest theory, which latter oscillates between a narrow emphasis on rational calculation and an equally superficial historicism, which suggests that human's ideas "reflect" or are "conditioned by" their social commitments. Kertzer asserts that "People are not merely material creatures, but also symbol producers and symbol users" (1988:8). This contribution to the discussion about concepts of agency will be examined further below. His emphasis on emotion as a factor in human action and motivation is valuable.

One further interesting area is Kertzer's discussion of how political groups or parties may compete for association with particular symbols, often linked with national traumas of the past such as wars. In Italy after the Second World War, for instance, political parties struggled with each other to appropriate the symbolism of the wartime anti-Nazi resistance. Party sections were named after martyrs of the resistance and parties competed on national (war-linked) holidays to do public ritual displays identifying the party with the resistance (Kertzer, 1988:170-1). Kertzer emphasises that it is the ambiguity of symbols that allows the meaning of symbols to be extended in this way from one referent to another. In a second example he notes how the fierce competition in 1890s France between the Church and the republican State for the symbol of Joan of Arc led to a bitter, and sometimes violent, battle of symbols, rather than harmony in the name of one ambiguous symbol, dear to both sides for different reasons. The struggle over symbols has also sometimes been violent in Ojitlan, as for instance when the priests and their supporters were attacked in the church in Ojitlan. One of the reasons for the attack (examined in Chapter 7) was that the priests were trying to reduce the visibility and significance of images within the church, while the protesters wished to reinstate the images.

Kertzer's analysis is, broadly, an application in politics of the symbolic anthropology of Victor Turner, who himself was trained "in the Max Gluckman variant of British structural-functionalism, influenced by Marxism" (Ortner, 1985:130). Like Turner, Kertzer acknowledges conflicts and divisions in society and examines how the use of ritual and symbol helps to hold things together. Like Turner, he is interested in how symbols actually operate in the social process. He writes, for instance, "ritual fulfils

important organisational needs, it helps provide legitimacy at the same time as it mystifies actual power relations, it facilitates popular solidarity even where consensus is conspicuously absent, and it leads people to conceive of their universe in certain ways" (Kertzer, 1988:153). Ritual has this function for revolutionary movements, new regimes and established political organisations alike though it is important not to over-emphasise the power of formalised ritual. All of the aspects of ritual in the above quotation apply in the ritual of community fiestas in ejidos such as Paso Limón, Ojitlan, although I would dispute the extent to which power relations are actually mystified. It might be more accurate to suggest that power relations are expressed in this ritual context, but that they are mitigated (rather than mystified) because the equality of people is also emphasised. Ritual and symbol are important features of resistance in Ojitlan.

In my study of resistance in Ojitlan, I will examine a variety of forms of resistance from the overtly religious along a continuum to the overtly political; from organised, more collective resistance to everyday, more individual resistance. Most forms of resistance are what I have called "critical" resistance above in that they are diagnostic of wide-reaching changes in economic and political relationships. I will set these forms of resistance in context, both in a cultural context and in the context of the system of power relations. In Ojitlan, there are two interweaving aspects to the system of power relations: firstly, the hierarchy of local (regional) economic and political relations; and secondly, the roles and power of the regional development agency, the Papaloapan River Commission. The major resettlement programme and economic restructuring of Cerro de Oro/Uxpanapa, combined with the interaction of different cultures, mean that the instability and radical change for Ojitlan is perhaps more akin to "colonial encounters" than case–studies set in the "normal" pace of capitalist development (such as Abu-Lughod, 1990; Christian, 1997; Scott, 1985).

My intention is to compare different (group) actors' models of agency and power to see how they do/do not articulate with one another, the extent to which they are mutually compatible or contradictory. Agency within a system of power relations may creatively both support and challenge it (ambivalence). Models of agency may be redefined in this process as in the case of the prayer leader and the President of the ejido in Ojitlan/Uxpanapa. Finally, a study of forms of resistance can help to diagnose changes in power relations. My case-study covers a seven-year process of various forms of

resistance, some forms overlapping in time, some covering several geographical areas and some located in one. The result is an interesting sequence, where changing forms of resistance are diagnostic of changes in underlying power relations.

Concepts of Culture

The contest over symbols, seen in Ojitlan's millenarian movement, is an example of a common theme (if not always overt or emphasised) within anthropological studies of religion in Central America and Spain (though not confined to that area). A particularly useful early theoretical development, which Ortner locates in the political economy school of the 1970s (Ortner, 1984:142) was the recognition that there may be struggles for control over cultural forms and symbols (Kertzer, 1988:71). There are, for instance, many ethnographic examples of the community patron saints (or other saints) being appropriated by or linked with particular groups during the festivals held in their honour (for instance: McKevitt, 1991; Crain, 1992). In Ojitlan, the two religious factions (for and against the reforming priests) held rival religious processions and prayers during the festival of Santa Rosa, each side claiming the Virgin and carrying their picture of her in procession.

The Comaroffs examine the long struggle between the southern Tswana and nonconformist Christian missionaries for the possession of salient signs and symbols. Each party, for example, tried to draw the other into its own scheme of things with regard to the location of buildings (the mission house, the chief's house) and the overall pattern of settlement. (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991: Ch. 6) The Comaroffs introduce the idea of a long conversation with arguments to refer to the interaction between the missionaries and the Tswana over a long period of time. This is a very useful metaphor emphasising the dialogue between the two groups, which is punctuated with struggle at particular points. There is a dialectic of challenge and riposte (Bourdieu 1977:12). A limitation, perhaps, is that it tends to emphasise an image of language and meaning.

The literature on resistance, with its emphasis on the struggle over signs and symbols, implies a particular concept of culture, that (the Comaroffs argue) we owe to critical postmodernism. Culture is therefore not to be seen as a closed determining system, but as "a set of polyvalent practices, texts and images that may at any time be contested." (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991: 17) The Comaroffs draw on the concepts of hegemony

and ideology from Gramsci via Stuart Hall (1988) in order to analyse patterns of dominance and resistance. Hegemony is defined as:

> that order of signs and practices, relations and distinctions, images and epistemologies – drawn from a historically situated cultural field – that come to be taken for granted as the natural and received shape of the world and everything that inhabits it (Comaroffs, 1991:23).

It is the dominant, taken-for-granted world view. Within that context, different social groups can hold different ideologies (defined as world views) and they (both groups and ideologies) may compete. When an ideology becomes absorbed into the dominant world view (hegemony), it no longer appears as ideology (contestable), but appears natural (true, uncontestable). The Comaroffs quote de Certeau (1984:46): "Hegemony at its most effective is mute; by contrast, all the while, ideology babbles on" (Comaroffs, 1991:24.). The power of hegemony, therefore, lies in what it silences. The Comaroffs emphasise the usefulness of this concept of hegemony in analytic practice.

Culture is implicated in and supported by the established economic and political system. As hegemony it is taken for granted. Changes in the economic/political system create opportunities for resistance and for culture to appear open to challenge, then to be defined as "ideology". The use of Gramsci's concept of hegemony by the Comaroffs and Hall allows for a more complex view of lived culture, which is also clearly located in economic and political relations.

Scott's research in the village of Sedaka, Malaysia, aimed to investigate the lived experience of class for the peasants (Scott, 1985). He carried out empirical research on the consciousness of the subordinate class of peasants, with a view to considering Marxian concepts of "false consciousness" and Gramsci's concept of hegemony (Scott, 1985:38-40). His detailed case-study shows how the poor refuse to accept the categories and the definitions of situations as seen from the rich point of view. For instance, they deny that poverty is linked with the laziness and immorality of the poor (ibid:236-40). Scott seems to be redefining hegemony, such that it "does not imply the wholehearted support of existing inequity, but at most a realisation that certain changes are impossible to achieve and that it is therefore wise to forget about them or, more precisely, not to press for them" (Galjart, 1990:344). Thus, referring back to the

Comaroffs/de Certeau above, hegemony may be mute "onstage", but "offstage" the silence is broken by critical discussion and more understanding of the inequalities.

The approach of the Comaroffs can be linked back to Bourdieu's Outline of a Theory of Practice, which Ortner (1985) sees as marking a turning point in the development of practice-oriented approaches in (English-speaking) anthropology. Bourdieu's concept of culture, the *habitus*, allowed for a more interesting and less calculating human agent.

Bourdieu's *habitus* is defined as a "system of dispositions" (1977:72, 214). The disposition is "the result of an organising action" and disposition also designates a way of being, a habitual state (especially of the body), a predisposition, tendency, propensity or inclination. The *habitus* contains:

> systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor (1977:72).

Bourdieu discusses the "sense of honour" in the Kabyle society of Algeria, as an example of a disposition, which is "inculcated in the earliest years of life and constantly reinforced by calls to order from the group". He further states that:

> What is called the sense of honour is nothing other than the cultivated disposition, inscribed in the body schema and in the schemes of thought, which enables each agent to engender all the practices consistent with the language of challenge and riposte, and only such practices, by means of countless inventions, which the stereotyped unfolding of a ritual would in no way demand (1977:15).

For the Comaroffs and Bourdieu, hegemony and *habitus* operate at the level of the unconscious to guide the members of a social group in successful participation as a member of that group, without them consciously following rules. Scott's reformulation of hegemony suggests rather more conscious manipulation of symbols and cultural ideas by the poor peasants. There is still a taken-for-granted level of hegemony, but Scott argues that this is conscious rather than unconscious. Nevertheless membership of the community of Sedaka involves sharing a worldview which has a collective (unconscious) aspect and is not simply a matter of consciously manipulating symbols or

following rules. To what extent is Scott's reformulation of hegemony easier to apply *within* one culture or one "community of discourse" rather than in situations of contact between different cultures as in the colonial settings of S. Africa (the Comaroffs), Fiji (Kaplan) and Ojitlan? In these latter examples, contact between different cultures helps to highlight the unconsciously taken-for-granted on both sides.

All of these theorists (Bourdieu, the Comaroffs, Kaplan, Scott) give emphasis to a dialectic between the parties in a social setting. In the Kabyle dialectic of challenge and riposte over honour (Bourdieu,1977), the differences between the parties are not clear cut, so that each can play on the ambiguities and uncertainties inherent in the situation. The results of any exchange can not be predicted and this points to the creativity in the interaction, expressed by Bourdieu as "necessary improvisation" and "countless inventions". In Scott's study, there is a continuing struggle between the rich and the poor over the meaning of the interaction between them within the institution of tolong. The rich try to emphasise payments to the poor as discretionary to avoid accusations of "stinginess", while the poor try to transform these into rights to which to which they can automatically lay claim to avoid the humiliation of asking for alms. Although the results of these exchanges cannot be predicted either, the dialogue is being transformed by the changing economic relations of the green revolution and this is leading to a reduction in the important ambiguity of who is helping whom.

The Comaroffs refer to Bourdieu's phrase "the dialectic of challenge and riposte" in their analysis of the colonial relationship between two different cultural groups, the southern Tswana and the nonconformist Christian missions in S. Africa. This dialectic involves struggles over power and meaning *between two different* groups, characterised by attempts to dominate and responses of defiance. During this process or dialectic, some meanings become shared and conventional, while others are contested. Chapter 8 of this dissertation presents an interesting example of this process or dialectic between the Commission workers and the Ojitecs in the collective ejido in Uxpanapa.

Keane, like Bourdieu and the Comaroffs before him, emphasises that ritual action is not simply a matter of acting out cultural texts or rules; hence his use of the term practice to distance himself from that view and to denote the creativity in agency. Keane's study focuses on culture as representations. He states that:

> ...representations exist as things and acts in the world. They are enunciated in speech events, enacted in rites, embodied in clothing, and portrayed in physical media; they circulate as goods and live in the forms of human delegates. A medium of representation is not only something that stands 'between' those things that it mediates, it is also a 'thing' in its own right. I want to stress the importance of the ambiguity introduced by the embodied character of representations (1997:8).

Keane also emphasises that culture is not to be found solely in "disembodied discourse or rhetoric", but must include the examination of concrete forms and practices. He is keen to emphasise a material aspect to representational practices in culture (as part of a critique of linguistic anthropology), but does not thereby allocate a privileged status to material objects and production. Production is not the "real infrastructure disguised by cultural superstructure", but is of equal importance with other aspects of life. Keane develops a very sophisticated analysis of human agency. His challenge to the (Western) focus on agency as located in biologically distinct individuals and his insistence that the locus of agency can change in interaction directs us helpfully away from a too-limiting interest in the rational, choice-making agent. His discussion of the constitution of the "modern subject" in the next section is also extremely valuable for the analysis of changing cultural practices in Ojitlan.

Culture, Agency and Resistance

It may seem self-evident that to understand the dialectic of a cultural change, it is important to examine the context of change, yet it is useful to emphasise this. The context has been best defined in terms of the economy, politics and ideology/culture by the Comaroffs and Christian among others. In Christian's (1987) study of the millenarian movement in the Basque region of Spain, the short-term context was a change of government, proclaiming a republic, while the longer term context of change was in economic relationships. New industry bringing immigrant labour to the area, especially to the cities, presented a challenge to the traditional, agrarian economy and values. There was a struggle between competing ideologies: on the one hand rural, patriarchal Catholic ideology with its respect for traditional authorities; on the other, urban Republicanism, often liberal and atheist. Christian observes that both parties recognised the visions' potential to resolve the crisis in competing ideologies. For the farm people, feeling powerless, under siege and having lost the democratic debate/election, the visions seemed to provide the only remaining response they could

make. In Ojitlan, the millenarian movement began at a similar point after conventional political protests had failed.

Analysis of the context helps to explain why some visionaries and messages were played up and others played down. Christian comments that "the cultural content of the messages is as much a consensual product of followers and the wider society as of the leaders, prophets and the Saints"(1987:163). Accordingly, we should focus our analytic attention on the audience, message-takers and message-transmitters, as much as on the charismatic figures.

For the Comaroffs, the salient context is the colonial encounter. They have a particular interest in "the colonisation of consciousness and the consciousness of colonisation" (1991:xi). As part of their analysis of context, they examine the literary and public discourse in nineteenth-century Britain about natives and the role of the evangelists. This discourse informed the consciousness of the missionaries, their perception of themselves and their mission. Much of this discourse could be seen to be part of hegemony as they define it above, with probably some parts of the discourse more open to discussion and dispute than others (and therefore defined as part of an ideology).

The Comaroffs develop the concept of a chain of consciousness, a continuum from conscious to unconscious with ideology at the conscious end and hegemony at the other. They suggest that the most critical area of interest for the analysis of resistance is the area between conscious and unconscious; that is, that area of partial recognition "where people find it difficult to put their finger on what is wrong", where hegemony begins to lose its grip. These glimmers of new consciousness lead to new experimental practice, creative yet fumbling responses, as in the examples of cargo cults and other millenarian movements (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991:31). This is where a sense that something is wrong rises to explicit consciousness (ideology) and a reply is formulated.

My study shows how in Ojitlan there is a struggle for the identity of the Ojitec or, as Keane puts it, a struggle to "constitute the modern subject" (Keane, 1996:138). His analysis of the discourse and processes of conversion to Christianity on Sumba resonates with the struggle for identity in Ojitlan. Keane notes that the process of constituting the modern subject on Sumba involves "disentangling illicit conflations of words, things and persons" and that this is critical for the insertion of the modern

subject into an emergent political economy. The Ojitlan priests were trying to separate prayers from images, hospitality, dancing and drinking. The Papaloapan River Commission was trying to separate Ojitecs from their *fanatismo* and their low technology, subsistence-based agriculture. Both the Commission and the Catholic Church were trying to shape Ojitec experience and redefine agency for the "modern subject". The analysis of Ojitec resistance to both of these "missions" will contribute to a critical understanding of the processes of modernity.

In one example, Keane (1996) considers the clash between the traditional Sumbanese and Protestant missionaries over their different perceptions of authentic speech and mediation with God. The Sumbanese priests do formulaic prayers, pray with their eyes open and make offerings. The Protestant missionaries face God directly (rather than through the mediation of the ancestors) and only use talk, with no offerings. Both parties accused each other of lack of deference. There was also a dispute over the ritual use of objects. Mutual accusations of lack of respect and inauthentic speech were a key feature of the division between the supporters and opponents of the priests' reforms in Ojitlan. The resistance to the priests challenged their authority and accused their catequista representatives of lack of deference, lack of knowledge and inauthentic speech. Keane argues that the mutual accusations on Sumba stem from Protestants and traditional Sumbanese "dwelling on different loci of agency"(1996:159). In the analysis of Ojitec resistance which follows, it will important to compare Ojitec and "modern" models of agency and power.

Studies of resistance have tended to focus on those who are resisting, whether it be Abu-Lughod's Bedouin women, Christian's Basque farm people or Hale's *pretos velhos* (old-slave spirits speaking through their mediums, Hale, 1997). These groups are all relatively powerless and dominated within their local power structures. They may be defined in varying ways by criteria of sex, race, class or class fraction, rural/urban and/or regional geographical location.

By contrast, the Comaroffs choose to analyse the experience, consciousness and motivation of the agents of domination, in their case-study the missionaries. They rightly note that this group has been much overlooked in previous studies, which have tended to relegate the agents of domination to the category of faceless reflexes of political and economic processes. This insight may have been prompted by the nature

of their material in that the writings by and sources on the nineteenth-century missionaries are more plentiful than they are on the Tswana. Nevertheless, it is a valuable point and one which I will pursue in my analysis (in Chapters 6 and 8) of the attitudes and strategies of the workers in the Papaloapan River Commission in Ojitlan/Uxpanapa.

This raises a further question of how to define the different groups to be analysed. For the Comaroffs, the distinction between the dominant and the dominated seems to be satisfactory. However, perhaps the dominated themselves are internally heterogeneous and may be differentiated as of different ethnic groups or of different class fractions or indeed of different sexes. In this case, the "long conversation" between these dominated groups will also be significant. In the ejido of Paso Limón, for example, the group choosing early resettlement (the "pioneers") and the group refusing to move can both be described as dominated (in relation to the Papaloapan River Commission). They remained in dialogue, through links of kinship and compadrazgo, and there is a process over several years that can be analysed as a long conversation. The division between the two groups, like the two Ojitec responses to the Catholic priests (for and against) may be linked to some ethnic differences and different positions in local class alliances.

Chapter 3: The Ojitec

San Lucas Ojitlan is situated in the district of Tuxtepec in the north-east of the state of Oaxaca, Mexico. It lies in *tierra caliente* (hot country) in the lowland area of the Papaloapan river basin, between the hills of Oaxaca and the coastal plain of Veracruz. The climate is hot and humid. There is rain throughout the year with very heavy rains in August and September and a short dry season in May.

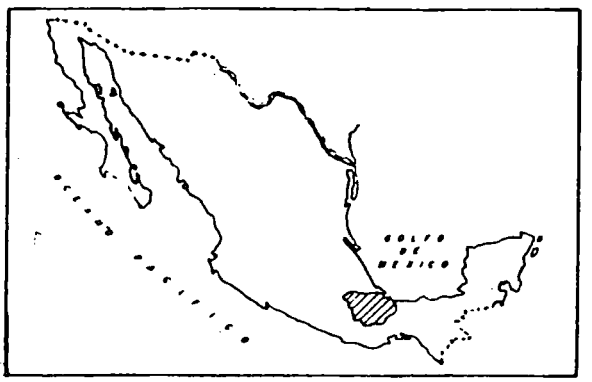
According to the 1970 national census, Ojitlan has a population of 19,568, who live in more than 50 communities within an area of 595.81 square kilometres. The villa is the administrative and commercial centre of Ojitlan, from where buses leave for the regional capital of Tuxtepec 55 kilometres away. There is regular movement between the outlying communities and Ojitlan. People travel to Ojitlan to buy a wide range of materials, from food/clothing to agricultural inputs/credit to medicine. They may visit the doctors, the local authority offices, their relatives or friends. Most visits have multiple purposes. Family and friends of those in the outlying communities may make the return visit for fiestas during the dry season, when travelling is particularly easy.

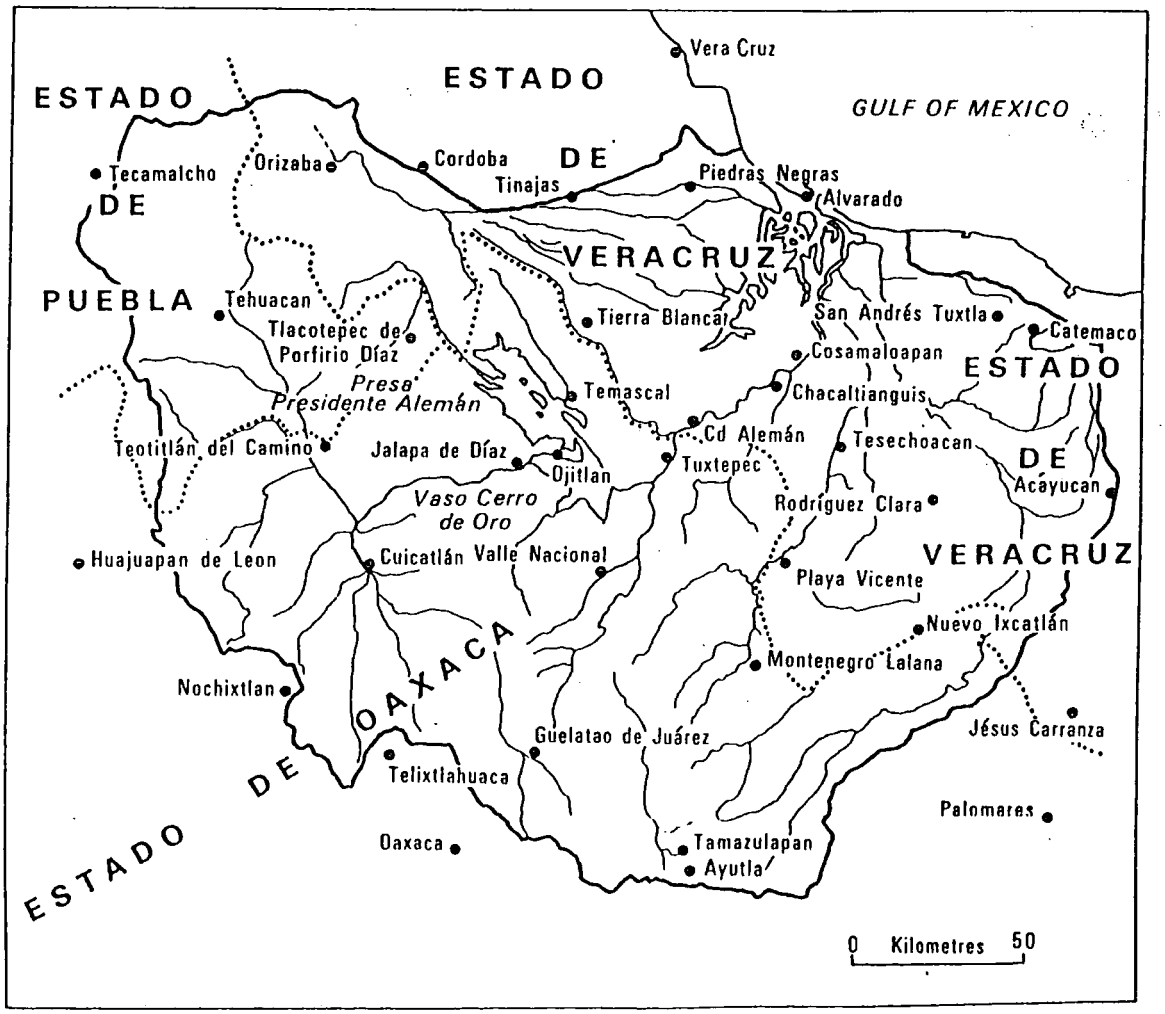
The main tarmac road from Ojitlan to Tuxtepec was built in 1954. Before this, the main means of transport were the river and tracks/paths. There are two major rivers, the Santo Domingo and the Usila, which join within the territory of Ojitlan. The river is still a very important means of transport for communities such as Usila, upriver from Paso Limón, to which there is no road access. Since 1972, the Papaloapan River Commission has built dirt roads to many of the communities of Ojitlan. Unfortunately, the roads are impassable in the rainy season because of the mud, but in the dry season some trucks and more comfortable large estate cars carry passengers between the communities and Ojitlan.

There is an unequal distribution of land (both quality and quantity), which is one of the bases of economic differentiation within Ojitlan. There are 32,100.6 hectares of ejido land and 6,314.3 hectares of private property. The fertile, good quality land is not distributed evenly between the two sectors. At least half of the private property is good quality pastureland, while only 200.6 hectares of *ejido* land is so classified. Private property includes very little poor quality land, while the ejido territory has 12% of land,

Map 2: The Location of Ojitlan in the Papaloapan River Basin, Mexico.

(Source: Clarke, 2000:48)





which is adequate neither for agriculture nor for pasture for animals (México, Censos Agrícola-Ganadera y Ejidal, 1970). The main economic activity on private land is cattle raising, with commercial crops of secondary importance.

In the example of the community of Paso Limón, there are three categories of access to land – the *libres* (free) owners of private property; the ejidatarios, with usufruct rights in particular plots of ejido land; the *avecindados*, those who qualify for ejido land, but do not have any. They are landless and include the sons of ejidatarios. After the initial resistance to the Cerro de Oro dam project, some of the men in this latter group began to take up employment opportunities in the resettlement zone of Uxpanapa.

On the ejidos, the peasant farmers carry out a subsistence agriculture producing maize and beans for household consumption, while any surplus is sold. Where circumstances allow, they supplement this by the cultivation of cash crops such as tobacco, rice, coffee, *chile gordo* (green, literally fat, chile) and sesame seeds and by wage labour for fellow ejidatarios or for small landowners. The many fruit trees provide avocados, mangos, oranges, lemons, coconuts, bananas, plantains and guavas for household consumption and for sale within the local community.

A total of 3,963 people speak only the Chinantec[1] language (monolingual); 8,448 are bilingual in Chinantec and Spanish; 6,865 speak only Spanish; and 292 speak other indigenous languages (México, Censo Nacional de Población, 1970). Fluency in Spanish among adults is an indicator of some degree of involvement in the national capitalist economy. All primary school children are taught Spanish in school.

The Communities

Most of the communities in Ojitlan are ejidos, but a small number are formed around the larger estates of private property. The latter are typically small settlements (known as *congregaciones*), where the estate workers live and have subsistence farming plots of their own. The estate workers in these communities are often not Ojitecs, but

[1] The official census makes no distinction between the variations of Chinantec spoken in different parts of the Chinantla territory. The generic term Chinantec is used for all.

descendants of people who came originally from the hill territory (Cuicatec or Chinantec) in search of work on the tobacco plantations.

Land is an important source of wealth in Ojitlan. Those who control land are advantageously placed in local economic and political relations. The political leadership within the ejidos often falls to those with good land resources. Control of land (whether ejido or private property) is therefore a source of power and this was threatened by the proposal to build the Cerro de Oro dam. Access to a stable supply of the necessary labour is also important. The larger estates solved this potential problem by housing a group of resident workers in the small communities mentioned above. All farmers, however, need to secure their labour supply and build up relationships within their communities for this purpose. These labour supply/exchange alliances are also important politically within and beyond the community.

The ejidos with some good quality fertile land near the rivers have usually been involved in some cash-crop agriculture, which has drawn them closer to the national capitalist economy. These communities, such as Santa Rosa and Paso Limón, have more fluent bilingual Spanish speakers. Those ejidos with poorer land have been relatively more isolated, with less to buy and sell. Their residents tend to be less fluent in Spanish. The villa of Ojitlan is the administrative and commercial centre, but nevertheless some of its inhabitants are less fluent in Spanish than members of the outlying communities engaged in commercial agriculture.

Identity and the Use of Ethnic Categories

My original interest lay in the Ojitlan who had generated the millenarian movement. This millenarian example of resistance had drawn on specifically indigenous Ojitec culture, combined with other, broader themes and appeals to national symbols. On my arrival in Ojitlan I was struck by how pervasive was the use of ethnic categories, yet the Ojitec do not form a homogeneous ethnic group. The variation in fluency in Spanish is one indicator of differentiation within the ethnic group and this raised the question of how to define the Ojitec.

Being "Chinantec"[2] in Ojitlan

The most significant ethnic division in Ojitlan is between the indigenous Ojitec and the *gente de razón.*[3] The indigenous Ojitec speak the indigenous language or have parents who speak it. Even if a person of Ojitec descent does not speak the indigenous language they will not be considered as *gente de razón.* Thus, being Ojitec is not simply a matter of shared language and culture, but also of kinship and origins. Even those who actively seek to escape "being Ojitec" remain so through their family ties.

Being Ojitec also implies the possession and practice of certain skills. For women, this includes making tortillas, gathering of wild plants for food or medicine, knowledge of the environment and at least some farming skills. For some older women, it may still include weaving or traditional embroidery. For men, this includes farming skills, hunting, fishing (if living near a river), making simple tools and knowledge of the environment. Indigenous people are likely to mock someone who has to buy services and goods, because they lack the skills or are lazy. They will laugh at the *campesino-compra-maíz* ("peasant farmer who buys maize", although many in fact have to at some point in the year) and severely criticise the woman who buys tortillas instead of making them. Identity is also expressed through participation in fiestas and life cycle events. With increasing interventions from outside (government and priests), indigenous Catholicism has become an important sphere for local agency and identity. There are, therefore, clearly positive aspects to being indigenous Ojitec and people take pride in these.

At the same time, there is also a general tendency among the indigenous population to define themselves in terms of their difference from gente de razón. In Spanish, they refer to themselves as *paisanos,* a term which has connotations of ignorance, backwardness, poverty and of being exploited, although it can also be used positively to indicate solidarity or a common place of origin.[4] The indigenous people usually use the term gente de razón in a tone of hostility or sarcasm, though in dealing with the actual individuals they are generally polite and often submissive. These differences between

[2] Barabas and Bartolomé (1974) and other analysts use this term.

[3] I use indigenous and Ojitec to refer to the "Indian" population of Ojitlan. Although many de razón families are well established over several generations or more, their outside origins are always remembered.

"offstage" and "onstage" comments point to some resistance to this negative classification of paisano. Scott (1985:40) sees "offstage" mocking of the exploiters as evidence that "elite claims are contested at the level of consciousness, if not at the level of 'onstage' acts."

The indigenous people of Ojitlan display embarrassment, at times considerable, at the fact that they speak the indigenous language and/or that their command of Spanish is rudimentary,[5] despite positive aspects to being indigenous Ojitec. Some bilingual couples forbid their children to speak Ojitec (believing that it will hamper them learning Spanish); others speak only Spanish to their children, only using Ojitec when the adults are alone (if then) or perhaps when the man is drunk. Some indigenous people who are not very fluent in Spanish tend to speak the latter with the indigenous intonation and some also in a fairly high tone of voice. This sounds feminine in Mexican national terms and means that such speakers may be labelled as *choto/tsa huan* (homosexual). This intonation, the high tone of voice and the mistakes made through lack of fluency in Spanish are common subjects for jokes among the younger de razón groups.

Monolinguals in Ojitec, and bilinguals who are not very proficient, have a very distinctive way of laughing - with lips pressed close together and, particularly for women, the hand over the mouth. This close-lipped laugh is a response, not only to a funny situation, but also to situations involving confusion, embarrassment, lack of understanding (for instance of Spanish) and is also used instead of saying "No" to a request from a stranger that the household is unable to meet. This distinctive kind of close-lipped laugh is an example of power "inscribed" on the body (Hale, 1997:393, referring to Foucault, 1979). It is recognised within the community as a gesture of helplessness and inability to respond. It is seen frequently as the indigenous population is subjected more and more to situations and problems that their traditions, knowledge and linguistic abilities do not equip them to solve.

---

[4] The Ojitecs do not generally use the term Ojitec unless a specific point about Ojitlan is being made. A more common phrase in Spanish would be "Somos paisanos de acá" – "We are paisanos from round here."

[5] Such an embarrassment is not so widespread in other parts of indigenous Mexico, such as among the Zapotecs of the Sierra Juarez and the Mixes of Totontepec. In both of these areas, which I visited (although my impressions may be superficial), the local language was often used in preference to Spanish (even where both languages were spoken) and was explicitly recognised and valued as a "secret" means of communication between indians, when non-indians were present whom they wished to remain ignorant of their conversation.

When talking in Ojitec, the speech of bilinguals is peppered with Spanish phrases or interjections such as *vaya, por eso*, as well as insults like *cabrón, chingada*. At the end of a statement or command in the local language a bilingual may add "Oyiste?" (Did you hear?) to another bilingual, as if the Spanish ending were a magic formula, which might make the message stick.

From the Ojitec point of view, the gente de razón speak Spanish as their only language and are often of lighter skin than the indigenous population (though not always, since the Veracruzanos (from Veracruz) of African descent are also considered gente de razón). The gente de razón are of Spanish or other foreign descent and at the present time many of them are landowners and are also engaged in business or commerce. Language and descent appear to be the important criteria for defining gente de razón, though the term also has connotations of wealth and power.

The Ojitec refer to other Chinantec groups in terms of their place of origin, as in *tsa jinh* (people of Usila), *tsa ma jah* (Tlacoatzintepec) and *tsa con jueh* (San Pedro Sochiapan). There appears to be no term in the indigenous language that refers to all Chinantec speakers, nor do the Ojitecs use the Spanish term chinanteco. They do not seem to see themselves as part of a Chinantec unit that would include very different and sometimes distant peoples such as those of Lalana to the south and Yolox to the west.

Barabas suggests that this lack of identification with a "Chinantec unit/culture/people" is a result of the administrative divisions in the Chinantla, which were created in colonial times "with the aim of disorganising the ethnic groups and facilitating domination" (Barabas, 1977:222). Certainly at the present time the Chinantla falls into four administrative districts, each of which includes ethnic groups other than the Chinantec.[6] Whilst there are connections between neighbouring Chinantec communities, such as Ojitlan and Usila, Ojitlan has far stronger ties with the district capital of Tuxtepec than with distant Chinantec communities such as Yolox.

Thus, although the terms Chinantec and the Chinantla are used in the literature by anthropologists and by some agencies of government, there is no sense of unity to be detected among the people so designated. The term Chinantec itself is used more by

[6] The four are: Tuxtepec (including the Chinantec, Mazatec and Cuicatec peoples); Ixtlan (Zapotec, Chinantec); Choapan (Chinantec, Mixe); Cuicatlan (Chinantec, Cuicatec).

outsiders, such as Commission workers from the state of Veracruz and by inhabitants of Tuxtepec. It is also used by a few indigenous people with a considerable degree of "outside" experience, often including secondary education. Such is the case of an *usileño* (a person from Usila), who had read Weitlaner's (1973) account of Usila which is in the library in Tuxtepec. Another example is a teacher, employed by the Instituto Nacional Indigenista[7], whose training had given him a wider perspective on ethnicity. The naming and definition of groups is an example of the exercise of power. As this study will make clear, the Ojitec resisted, in various ways, the attempts by government and other outside agencies to name, define and mould them.

The Ojitecs clearly distinguish themselves from the Cuicatec people of the hills to the west, who are referred to as *tsa kin*. Many Cuicatecs used to work seasonally on the tobacco plantations in Ojitlan and the term *tsa kin* can be used to refer to any poor and shabby indigenous person from the hills (but not if that person is Chinantec.)[8]

The Ojitecs whom I knew well often, in practice, expressed pride in their specific, indigenous knowledge and skills. They also showed this pride in relation to other indigenous ethnic groups. They seemed more ambivalent about their abilities in situations involving the gente de razón or experts from the Papaloapan River Commission, in whose spheres they knew they were not highly valued. It may be more accurate to state that the Ojitec struggle with and (strategically) resist this negative classification of themselves. At times, however, feigning ignorance may be a good strategy to avoid demands being made upon oneself. The Ojitec do not fully accept this negative identity, though neither can they fully ignore and reject it as it is pervasive in the regional economy and society. On more than one occasion indigenous Ojitecs have commented to me on their treatment to the effect that "they (gente de razón) think they are dealing with brutes, who don't understand anything" (but we can see what they are up to!). This statement refers to situations where Ojitecs understand that they are being undervalued or badly treated, but choose to let it pass without comment to the perpetrator. However, I do not think that the Ojitecs always "see through" the negative identity as fully as Scott's material (1985:240) might suggest. This may be because of the influence of ethnic categories in Ojitlan, which at times generate different

[7] National Indigenous Institute – the national government agency overseeing the integration of indigenous groups into national life, discussed in Chapter 5.

perceptions of a situation. This is in contrast to Scott's case study, where the inhabitants of Sedaka all belong to the same ethnic group.

Being Gente de Razón in Ojitlan

The attitude of the gente de razón to the indigenous population ranges from contempt to condescension. In de razón households "indian" jokes are fairly common and people may use terms of abuse to each other such as "*indio perro/india perra*" (indian dog).[9] They will also imitate the mistakes and lack of fluency in Spanish shown by many indigenous people. This imitation is almost a recognised party piece, which usually causes great amusement in de razón circles. The Ojitec language is considered a complete aberration and no attempt is made to learn it. De razón children can at times be more intolerant than their elders and may behave very haughtily with older Ojitecos or even shout at monolingual indians in Spanish in the hope that if they only speak loudly enough they will be understood. The gente de razón also tend to affirm that they are of a different blood, sometimes of a different race from the indigenous people, and I have heard it said that on these grounds they consider themselves to be unaffected by Ojitec witchcraft.

To be gente de razón is to feel oneself superior to the paisano in any number of possible ways, whether it be intelligence, looks, education, wealth, fashion, skills or simply ability to speak Spanish. The Spanish verb "hablar" is often used by gente de razon without the object (Spanish language) to indicate a grasp of Spanish. Thus, one may hear "Son paisanos, pero hablan." (They are paisanos, but they speak.) The clear implication here is that "normal speech" or speaking properly is speaking Spanish and that all other forms of speech must be "marked" in their deviation from the norm by adding a specific object. The unmarked category is the norm. Another frequent usage in Ojitlan is "Ya habla, ya comprende un poco." (Now s/he speaks, s/he understands a little.) Here there is an equation made between speaking Spanish and the ability to understand. There are variations on this theme, all of which associate Spanish with reason, comprehension, civilisation, culture and "normal human behaviour".

---

[8] Incidentally, I was placed in this particular category, rather than with the *gente de razón*, and I acquired the nickname of *hye kin ti lu* (woman of the hills with a thin neck).

[9] The indian-animal link is also expressed in a comment I heard fairly regularly from the indigenous Ojitec : "No somos brutos." (We are not brutes/animals).

Since many gente de razón are engaged in capitalist enterprises, either as owners or wage labourers, they tend to have a more single-minded attitude towards their environment, based on their orientation towards profit and monetary rewards. They pour scorn on the Ojitecs' activities, which do not seem to display this orientation, but which rather indicate a multiple use of the environment. The de razón view is that the indigenous people do not know how to work, since they spend time in activities not obviously geared towards monetary return. They thus dismiss, as activities for children, the long hours which the Ojitecs may spend in the river catching shrimps by hand in the dry season. Equally, they do not participate in hunting or gathering activities, though will often buy a portion of the product if given the opportunity.

The gente de razón tend to concentrate their energies into cash-crop agriculture, cattle raising or commerce (and, for some, the professions). Their women usually concentrate on household tasks and child care. The gente de razón obtain goods (be it food, clothing services or tools) by buying either from the indigenous population or from outside specialists, rather than by expending their own labour. Indeed, many do not have the necessary skills. This extends even into the area of ritual, where gente de razón may request a local Ojitec prayer leader and his group to lead the cycle of prayers after a death in the family. In the riverside communities there are long established, if ambivalent, relationships between the two groups.

Agriculture and Economic Relationships

Private Property

The major source of income on private property is cattle raising. There are many and varied arrangements, whereby non-farmers (such as local professionals – doctors, vets, teachers) and non-residents (relatives in Tuxtepec or Mexico City) buy cattle, which are raised by others for a share of the profits. Cattle are considered a good investment, because you can utilise a large amount of land with a small labour force. Also the cattle can walk to market (or at least to the nearest transport to Puebla or Mexico) when the rains make roads impassable for vehicles.

Rice, chile and maize are grown as commercial crops on private property. A farmer without a reliable labour force will choose maize, which is less delicate and labour-intensive than chile or rice. Resident estate workers and/or godchildren and

compadres[10] count as reliable workers. Small scale capitalists do not grow tobacco, partly because labour is no longer cheap and because the introduction of Tabamex has removed the possibility of significant extra profits through providing credit to smaller producers. The level of technology used on the estates is higher than in the ejidos. Some small capitalist farmers own tractors for their own use and to hire. They are used for preparing the soil and clearing pasture. All other tasks (sowing, weeding, harvest) are still done by hand. Agricultural innovation from outside comes through this private property sector, whether it be in the form of chemical inputs, new seed varieties or a refined breed of cattle. The small capitalist farmers of Ojitlan have access to suppliers/markets in Puebla, Veracruz and Mexico.

Ejido Land

Agricultural activities on the ejidos fall into four categories of subsistence agriculture, commercial agriculture, hunting/fishing/gathering and, most recently, cattle raising. On the ejido land, the basic unit of production is the ejidatario and his immediate family household. This also includes any relatives/friends with whom he has regular arrangements to help him. Ejidatarios carry out a subsistence agriculture of maize and beans to meet the needs of the household. Any surplus is sold locally. Subsistence agriculture uses a very low level of technology. Land is prepared using an ox-drawn plough (owned by a few farmers in a community). Crops are sown by hand, weeded with a hoe and harvested by hand with machete. Household labour is used on subsistence crops, especially maize, and the work is planned to avoid the need for waged labour. There is a family festival atmosphere when the maize is harvested. If extra help is needed, it will be on a reciprocal basis with another household (or payment in kind) and cash will not change hands. The climate is such that it is possible to have two harvests of maize per year.

The sexual division of labour assigns women primary responsibility for domestic tasks and child-care and men primary responsibility as farmer/breadwinner. However, most women take part in agricultural work when domestic tasks allow or when the household has a particular need. Older women in extended family households may devote a lot of time to agriculture, leaving a daughter/-in-law in charge of the domestic sphere. Whilst

[10] Compadre is the term used between parents and godparents of a child. It indicates a special relationship of mutual respect and support. This is discussed further in the following section on Indigenous Catholicism.

women participate in farming, they are not usually seen as "farmers", but rather as helpers or workers within male-controlled enterprises. Ploughing and care of horses/cattle is man's work, but apart from this women can carry out all other agricultural tasks. Some tasks in the tobacco season are more likely to be done by women, such as removing and classifying dried tobacco leaves. In fact, women comment that the tobacco season is good for gossip because the workers stand (in the rows of tobacco removing new shoots) or sit (sorting dried tobacco leaves) close together for long periods of time. "Women as only housewives/mothers" tend to be confined to the gente de razón, though they can be found among the wealthier indigenous Ojitec too.[11]

Much "subsistence" land is cultivated under the slash and burn system, whereby land is left fallow for several years (ideally four) in a rotation. After four years the vegetation is high enough to stop the sun reaching the soil and therefore there is very little low-level weeding required. The vegetation is cut and burned at the end of the dry season in May. On poorer quality land or land on an incline, there is no ploughing which would loosen the soil and create a risk of erosion. Straight lines are obtained using lines of thread and the seed is sown using a *palo sembrador* (planting stick) amidst the ash from the burning.

Chemical inputs, such as fertilisers and insecticides, are used for commercial crops like tobacco and chile as this forms part of the credit arrangements for the crop. After the quality of land, the primary factor considered in a decision to grow a commercial crop is the household labour force. A peasant farmer will not sow tobacco (even if he has the land) unless he can count on an adequate labour force (his household, supplemented by very reliable others). If he does sow tobacco, he may sow a field in several stages so that the household can cope as far as possible with minimal outside help. Ejidatarios have labour-exchange relationships with other families or individuals to ensure a reliable supply of labour. Whether payment or labour exchange is involved the understanding is that "x" will work on "y's" tobacco crop before helping anyone else. These relationships are built up and relied upon over many years. Such labour-exchange relationships may also be important for other exchanges of services/goods and

[11] Cf. Jeffery, 1980 for further discussion of gender.

for provision of help in emergencies. The relationships may be further cemented through *compadrazgo*[12] and are inevitably also important in local politics.

Some ejidatarios have coffee plants, which are a very good source of cash income. In 1977, when prices were high, workers were able to insist on half of what they picked as their wages. Those who need help to harvest coffee try to use family or exchange labour to keep the benefits close to home.

The indigenous Ojitec have an extensive knowledge of their natural environment, which they employ in hunting and gathering activities. The use and development of these skills involves an investment of time, which the gente de razón do not see as important or meaningful. Whole days may be devoted to a trip (on foot) to the hillier, uncultivated areas to collect wild produce such as *tepejilote* (a very tasty kind of wild corn), leaf vegetables, mushrooms, creepers, fruits. Several women may set out on a collecting expedition. Men are more likely to collect things on their way back from somewhere else (a maize field or hunting), whilst women will set out (several together) on a collecting expedition for the day. Moving through the environment, they are extremely observant, noting and discussing the states of different plants and changes in vegetation. In passing a stream, they inevitably stop to look for snails. After washing clothes in the river, they will often spend an extra hour (in season) catching shrimps to take back for a stew. A trip to weed the maize field will be combined with collecting wild leaf vegetables, which grow among the maize. Men dig up *barbasco*[13], a type of wild yam which is sold to a government agency, Proquivemex.

Indigenous men in the riverside communities traditionally fish using an *atarraya,* a bell shaped net with weights at its lower perimeter which is thrown over the fish in shallow water. The fish are trapped within the bell and are threaded on a line which the fisherman carries at his waist. Men often combine bathing (washing) in the river with fishing, just as women combine washing clothes with catching shrimps. Modern innovations include the use of a harpoon stick and goggles. In Paso Limón, there is also the example of at least 30 men fishing using *chinchorro* (two large nets placed across

[12] Compadrazgo is the term for the institution and relations between the parents and godparents of a child.

[13] Barbasco (Dioscorea composita) is a type of wild yam found in the forest. Steroids extracted from it are used in medicine, especially contraceptive pills. It is collected in a limited season to conserve stocks. It is possible, though hard work, to dig up 40 or 50 kilos a day, which in 1977 was paid at 2.50 pesos a kilo. An average day's agricultural waged labour was 50 pesos.

the river, trapping fish in between). This is discussed further in Chapters 5 and 6 as the tradition was revived as part of the re-creation of community to resist resettlement.

Cattle raising is seen by the indigenous Ojitec as a form of saving that can be realised quickly if there is a necessity in the family, for instance, an illness. Some tobacco profits have been invested in cattle. After the compensation for goods[14] was paid, many farmers invested some of that money in cattle, but the ejido pasture was inadequate and their knowledge of cattle raising very limited. One solution was to buy an animal, but then pay rent for it to be kept on the seller's pasture until fattened for sale.

The Political Organisation of the Ejido

The political ideal of the ejido, was that it would be a community of farmers, with equal rights (access to land as long as they *use* it, no sale or renting allowed) and responsibilities to the community (for instance, attending the *fatigas* or communal work parties). There are regular meetings (assemblies) of ejidatarios, where discussions and decisions take place on community issues. All major decisions are voted on by all the ejidatarios in an assembly. The assembly is the highest authority within the community, where community opinion is articulated and any important papers must be signed in that assembly. Where the ejido has constructed a meeting hall, that building becomes the site where important decisions are made and papers are signed. All ejidatarios should attend, including those who are avecindados. A committee is elected to oversee ejido business, of whom the most important members are the *comisariado ejidal* (representative of the ejido) and the *agente policia* (police agent, concerned with enforcing law and order, reminding people of their communal obligations – such as to attend the fatiga). The assembly elects other committees as needed, for instance for school liaison and to run the community fiestas, such as for the Virgin of Guadalupe.

In ejido meetings, deference and respect to ejido leaders is shown in listening quietly to them speaking. The tone of voice conveys respect and some speakers show their knowledge of Spanish in using a rather flowery language of deference. I have seen this

[14] The ejidatarios to be affected by the forthcoming construction of the dam at Cerro de Oro were compensated in cash for their non-movable items such as trees, constructions, houses. They had the choice of either being paid for their house or having a house built for them in Uxpanapa, the resettlement zone. Once compensation had been paid, it gave to some people the largest amount of money they had ever received in their lives. Many tried to invest at least some of it, but there were also cases where much of the cash appears to have been frittered away on drink and extravagant living.

latter used to address the community schoolteachers in assemblies. In general, a polite, quiet, listening manner is seen as a sign of deference and respect. Children should respect their parents and other elders; workers should respect their employers. Compadres should respect each other and that relationship is characterised by a warm, welcoming hospitality, trust, courtesy and exchanges of goods/services for mutual benefit. An interesting example of showing respect occurred when an elderly man died, the father of an important local politician, and many men of the community took it in turns to carry the coffin twelve kilometres to the graveyard in Ojitlan. The family could easily have afforded to hire a truck, but did not. In this example, the men showed respect by their physical presence and efforts, by giving time and accompanying the body.[15] One further aspect of respect refers to "knowing one's place" in society. Those who step over the boundaries of their correct role in society risk losing respect. Important boundaries here are the division of labour by sex/age. There is also a hierarchy of respect linking the more (economically) powerful and less powerful, which is difficult to define clearly, but which was, for instance, flouted by some of the men who became catequistas in support of the reforming priests.[16]

Some government organisations have tried to reinforce the community by offering fair prices for products and allocating money to communal funds. Proquivemex, for example, is a Mexican government agency which allocates 20 centavos (in 1977) per kilo of barbasco collected to the ejido communal fund to be used for community purposes only, such as buying fencing. Tabamex requires that tobacco farmers are organised in groups, with one representative liaising on their behalf over credit and supplies.

As noted above, there are two categories of access to land – the ejidatarios and the avecindados. Some women are ejidatarios, but in general the plots are passed between men. Most women are landless though they work on the land of their fathers, husbands, sons or other male relatives. There is no prohibition on women inheriting land or rights to land, but in a situation of land scarcity and with the prevailing assumption of the male as breadwinner, the tendency is for women to be passed over in favour of their brothers for inheritance of family or ejido land. In theory ejido land should be reallocated by the

[15] This mode of relationship, acompañar – to accompany, is discussed further in the section on ritual relating to death in Chapter 4.

[16] Some of the catequistas were seen as yesterday's "little boys" and "poor, hopeless drunks" who had not earned the respect they were claiming as catequistas. This is discussed in Chapter 4 and 7.

ejidal committee upon the death of an ejidatario. In practice the land is usually passed on to his son and endorsed by the committee. As indicated in Chapter 1, the distribution of quality and quantity of ejido land favoured those who were the first to petition for it. Their descendants have continued to benefit from this. Later arrivals to the ejido received less or poorer quality land and their descendants were the first to take up waged labour opportunities in Uxpanapa and elsewhere, thus fragmenting resistance to the dam at Cerro de Oro.

From time to time, there is a fatiga of ejidatarios to attend to tasks in the community. These include: cultivating a field of beans for the school, doing minor repairs to teachers' houses, mending footbridges (of creeper) over streams, clearing overgrown paths to other communities, repairing the roof of the ejidal assembly hall. The ejido of Paso Limón has a large conch shell, which is blown to signal the start of a fatiga or in case of an emergency. When the conch is blown unexpectedly, ejidatarios go to the house of the comisariado ejidal to see if they are needed. On one occasion, a seriously ill woman was carried to Ojitlan at night by ejidatarios in a hammock. Ejidatarios also periodically contribute a fixed sum of money towards various community activities, including school outings and events. The libres contribute money towards the school, but do not take part in the work parties.

Some ejidos had built their own meeting halls or chapels. Paso Limón had both. In 1976 the chapel in Paso Limón was made of concrete and boasted two images of the Virgin of Guadalupe. One had belonged to José Muñoz, an indigenous landowner, and the other had been given to the community by Manuel Palomares, one of the major tobacco habilitadores based in Tuxtepec, who had sent the image to Paso Limón by barge along the river.

The Chapel in the Community of Paso Limón

The fiesta of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Paso Limón, celebrated in the chapel and in the community, is older than the ejido itself and dates from the mid-1920s. At that time, José Muñoz's wife was very ill and the couple travelled to Mexico City, both for medical treatment and to pray for her recovery at the Basilica of the Virgin of Guadalupe. At the Basilica, they made a promise to the Virgin to continue devotion to her back in Paso Limón. They returned with an image of the Virgin and built a small

chapel to her near their home. Muñoz initiated the fiesta in the Virgin of Guadalupe's honour and himself met all the costs of the event, including food for the people and fireworks. He invited the members of the small indigenous community around him and other neighbours. The fiesta grew year by year and people would come to set up stalls from Ojitlan and Huautla. The priest came to say mass.

The Virgin of Guadalupe is the patron saint of Mexico and a symbol of the nation.[17] The story is that after the Spanish conquest she appeared on December 12th 1531 to a humble Mexican peasant called Juan Diego. She asked him (in his indian language, nahuatl) to tell the Bishop of Mexico that she wanted a shrine to be built for her on that spot. The Bishop was sceptical and asked for a sign, at which she told Juan to pick some roses of Castile on the hill. Juan took them to the Bishop in his cloak and when he handed them over, found that there was an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe imprinted on his cloak.[18] The Bishop was then convinced. In one interlude in the story, the Virgin cures Juan's uncle who was very ill and contemporary Mexicans believe, as did Muñoz, that she has healing powers. The brown-skinned Virgin of Guadalupe has been seen as protectress of the indians and a mediator between the Mexican people and God. She was a symbol of the struggle for independence from Spain and is appealed to for help in natural emergencies, especially floods (Turner and Turner, 1978: 40-102)

When Muñoz was dying some ten years after the start of the fiesta he gave the image of the Virgin to the recently formed ejido and the ejidatarios built their own chapel, a simple wood and palm structure, to house it. The ejidatarios elected annually a committee to organise the fiesta and each ejidatario donated money towards the cost of the celebrations. The fiesta of the Virgin of Guadalupe in its present form therefore virtually coincides with the foundation of the ejido and may perhaps have been important as a means of creating a "community" out of the separate families who came together then. At the time, it may also have been a symbolic statement about their new rights and status as independent ejidatarios.[19]

---

[17] She was also an important figure in the Ojitlan millenarian movement of 1972-3, as discussed in Chapter 6.

[18] Echoes of this story appear in the Ojitlan millenarian movement, for instance - the messages are received in the indigenous language by an ordinary peasant, the Great God Engineer is said to wear an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe on his back.

[19] Many other ejidos in Ojitlan have developed community fiestas in honour of patron saints.

One of the Presidents of the chapel (essentially a caretaker post) decided to raise money to build a "proper" concrete structure. Over a period of time the necessary cash was collected and a builder was hired from Tuxtepec to oversee the construction by the ejidatarios. The new chapel was completed by the late 1960s (possibly earlier). In 1970 the son of a local de razón cattle rancher and tobacco grower paid for a small vestry to be built on to the chapel and in that year he also met the full cost of the fiesta, as Muñoz had done. Apart from that year the fiesta was always funded not by individuals, but by equal contributions from the ejidatarios.

The Virgin of Guadalupe was considered the patron and protector of the community and in particular of the ejido. The priest of Ojitlan was invited to say mass in the fiesta, but he did not necessarily come on the main day. Apart from the initial sponsorship by Muñoz, the fiesta has always been under community control and celebrated as a community event. Mass was not essential. However, it seems that if the priest did not come in the middle of the fiesta, he would come around that date and there were always many baptisms at the time. In the past, the priest would have a drink or two (of alcohol) and even join in the dancing. Music and dancing were early established as integral parts of the fiesta. Much time, energy, money and devotion had been invested in the chapel and the fiesta, which had been celebrated in the ejido without a break for forty years. The chapel embodied the relationships of cooperation within the community and between the community and wealthier traders or farmers. The Catholic Church had not financed or helped in any way with its construction and therefore was deemed to have no jurisdiction over the chapel, beyond that which the community considered acceptable. The chapel in Paso Limón, therefore, was more than a simple consecrated space for worship. It was a symbol of the community, particularly of the ejido, and had been built by the men living there.

Agency, Power and Resistance

A preliminary review of the ethnography so far indicates some themes that are important for the later analysis of resistance. Access to land (both in quality and quantity) is unequal and is the foundation for economic and political hierarchies within the rural communities of Ojitlan. Those without adequate access to land tend to work as full or part-time agricultural waged labourers, unless they have already migrated to the cities in search of work or obtained other jobs through education. The political

organisation of the ejido lies in the hands of those with the greater economic resources. The political leaders in the communities, therefore, are those with the greatest interests to defend. It is perhaps not surprising that they have opposed the dam and resettlement project. The poorer groups, gaining least from the economic status quo, were the first to show interest in resettlement.

Most of the communities in Ojitlan are ejidos. Authority within that community is vested in the assembly of ejidatarios, where important decisions must be taken. This concept of legitimate authority/political agency refers not just to decisions taken in the presence of the ejidatarios, but also to the place where the meetings are held. Legitimate agency on behalf of the ejido can be delegated to individuals there and nowhere else. This became an important focus of debate after some ejidatarios left to work in Uxpanapa, as decisions taken elsewhere were considered illegitimate and without authority.[20]

There are varying definitions of community. The boundaries of a named community may include neighbouring owners of private property. These libres may contribute economically to support the primary school and other community events. Participation in ejidal assemblies and fatigas is essential for the ejidatarios (mostly men) and is an indicator of being a full member of the ejido community. Those who were absent in Uxpanapa were often unable to participate and were criticised in assemblies for failing to meet their obligations. At a later stage of resistance (discussed in Chapter 8), some of the Uxpanapa absentees turned against the collective ejido and they renewed participation in fatigas and took part in the community chinchorro fishing as a gesture of commitment and reconciliation to their home ejido of Paso Limón.

Community buildings were emphatically regarded as common property built and/or paid for by the residents of the community. They were a space/sphere for legitimate agency on behalf of the insiders, where outsiders had no legitimate authority without consent articulated in the assembly of ejidatarios.

The forms of resistance which developed were all in defence of land and the use of land and also in defence of community. The land and community that many Ojitecs were defending were, of course, theirs through previous government action and the laws of

[20] Cf., for instance, Chapter 8.

the agrarian reform. The Mexican state had been active in constructing rural communities through, for instance, the ejido, and later through agencies reinforcing the concept of community by allocating money to communal funds, as in the case of Proquivemex. Many of the names of Ojitlan ejidos referred to nature or described some aspect of the geographical location. In contrast, the ejidos of the resettlement site of Uxpanapa were known either (temporarily) by numbers or by the names of men (engineers, politicians, regional or national figures). The naming of the new communities of resettlement in Uxpanapa thus constructed them and the Ojitec as part of the nation. Alonso notes how this process makes the presence of the state palpable in everyday life (Alonso, 1988:41). The break with Ojitlan was expressed not only in the naming, but in the grouping of communities, in that several ejidos from Ojitlan might be put together in one large ejido. Also people from one ejido in Ojitlan might be resettled in three different ejidos in Uxpanapa.

The following chapter examines indigenous Catholicism and, in particular, some of the ritual practices which helped to construct a sense of community. Just as indigenous Catholicism helped to construct a sense of community, so too indigenous Catholicism became a mode of resistance when these communities were threatened by the Papaloapan River Commission and the reforming priests of Ojitlan.

Chapter 4: Indigenous Catholicism and Ojitec Autonomy

Most people in Ojitlan see themselves as Catholics, although a very small number belong to a Protestant group. For the indigenous Ojitec population, Catholicism is embodied in ritual practices, images of the Virgin and the saints and in other visual symbols. They do not possess a detailed knowledge of official Catholic doctrine, but do observe life-cycle rituals (at baptism, marriage and death) and take part in local and regional fiestas.[1]

Indigenous Catholic ritual provides a sphere of agency within which Ojitecs see themselves as relatively autonomous beings with important moral responsibilities and obligations. Ojitec knowledge and skills are valued within this framework, as are their decision-making powers, initiative and creativity (in stark contrast to valuations within economic and political spheres, when de razón criteria and judgements may predominate). Relationships between different groups and categories of people and non-human parts of the Ojitec world are expressed, reinforced, and validated within this context. Indigenous Catholic ritual also became a site of struggle between rival factions in the mid-1970s, after some had more or less violently rejected the reforming efforts of the two Ojitlan priests.[2] Before that the 1972-3 millenarian movement, discussed in Chapter 6, used indigenous Catholic ideas and forms to protest against the resettlement project.

Many ritual contexts present a picture of Ojitecs working together and sharing with common aims, regardless of economic or political status. In community fiestas, the ritual specialists are recognised and respected for their traditional skills (making candles or *popo*[3]) whether they be poor or wealthy. The candles and popo are made by those with the interest and the skill to do it – some older men and the *rezandero* (prayer

[1] I have taken part (at least once, frequently more often) in all of the ritual described here and discussed the meanings with many different participants.

[2] The reforming priests were of the Salesian Order and followed the approach of the recently appointed (1975) Archbishop Carrasco of Oaxaca. Clarke (2000:204) notes, following Norget (1997) that the Archbishop's approach "stressed spiritual rebirth, an abrupt change of life, and abandonment of ideas and vices standing in the way of an individual's spiritual and social development and self-empowerment." These ideas are indeed close to Protestantism, as was argued by the opponents of the reforming priests in Ojitlan.

[3] Popo is a frothy drink made from cocoa and maize. The Ojitec term for it is chi ro.

leader) make the candles, while a group of women of varying ages makes the popo.[4] People from neighbouring communities take part in each others' fiestas. In particular, all Ojitecs are equal in the face of death and they share the same relationship with the dead. Relationships of rivalry and conflict do not prevent people from attending a wake, especially if it is an elderly person who has died.

In contrast to many economic and political settings, Ojitecs are not overtly subordinate to the gente de razón within the framework of indigenous Catholic ritual. On the contrary, gente de razón may rely on neighbouring Ojitecs to lead household prayers for them, especially in the nine days following a death. The important skills and knowledge in these contexts are Ojitec skills and knowledge. Literacy or a fluent grasp of Spanish, for instance, are not requirements for meaningful participation in the ritual (though they are important for the senior official posts of the community fiestas). Only Ojitecs know how to make popo. The only non-Ojitec essential to the proceedings is the Catholic priest, though in practice he is far more frequently absent than present. The only ritual which absolutely demands his personal participation is baptism. On all other occasions, the rezandero (or the civil authorities in the case of marriage) and the people themselves can successfully meet ritual requirements. The obligation and desire to attend Ojitec rituals can take precedence over other kinds of commitments to non-Ojitecs. In 1977 and 1978, for instance, Ojitecs working in Uxpanapa abandoned the rice harvest to return home for *Todos Santos* (All Saints, also known as the Day of the Dead), to the great consternation of officials of the Papaloapan River Commission.

Ritual, however, does provide opportunities for displaying fruitful contacts with non-Ojitecs, as for instance, in the contents of the altar at Todos Santos. Pilgrims to non-Ojitec fiestas activate their outside contacts to obtain shelter for the night and renew acquaintances that could be useful in other ways. In the case of San Andres Teotilalpan, these contacts stem from the period of large-scale tobacco cultivation in Ojitlan, when the Cuicatecs came to work seasonally.

---

[4] These ritual specialists, like the traditional rezandero, have learned and practised their skills through helping on ritual occasions and have become recognised as experts over a period of time by the community. They have, in effect, served a community apprenticeship and receive their authority from the recognition of the community. This is in contrast to the priests and their catequistas, who arrive as ready made experts, having received all their training outside the community and owing allegiance to outside authorities.

A number of events in the Catholic year are celebrated, including Palm Sunday, Easter and Christmas. Particular emphasis is given to the fiesta of Todos Santos (All Saints). Two main fiestas are held in the municipal centre of Ojitlan (the fiesta of Santa Rosa and that of San Lucas), while many of the outlying rural ejidos also celebrate other fiestas in their communities. In addition, there are two major fiestas outside Chinantec territory, at Otatitlan (also known as Sanctuario) and San Andres Teotilalpan, which attract large numbers from Ojitlan.

Two priests were responsible for the parish of Ojitlan in October 1976. They would say mass and conduct other services in the church of Ojitlan or in the chapels in the communities. The rezanderos lead prayers on the many occasions when they are required (as in the nine days of prayers after a death or in community fiestas) when the priests are not present. They embody the indigenous Ojitec model of legitimate ritual authority, earned through community apprenticeship, and authentic ritual speech in mediation with the divine.[5] Rezanderos practise in their own right and are not considered to be merely a substitute for the priests. The rezandero is usually a man, although women are not in theory excluded from this role. In practice however, if a woman carried out the role regularly it would tend to conflict with her domestic duties.

The rezandero leads the prayers in Spanish or Latin, often using cheap printed booklets which are generally available in Mexico. Rezanderos of different communities also copy prayers from each other so that, in addition to the printed booklets, they also carry pieces of paper with prayers written down by hand.[6] The Bible is not used or referred to in traditional Catholic ritual in the communities. There is therefore no "ordinary" talking or language (as in sermons or discussions of ideas/texts) used in indigenous ritual. The rezandero addresses God through formulaic prayers with an intonation reserved especially for ritual. This intonation is distinctively nasal and echoes the intonation of the indigenous language. During prayer sessions, the rezandero is accompanied by a group of mainly unmarried girls and a few women, who know the words of the chants, responses and prayers.

---

[5] The contrast with the reforming priests' catequistas discussed later echoes the dispute (over authentic speech and mediation with the divine) between the traditional Sumbanese and Christians as analysed by Keane, (1996:138-143)

[6] On several occasions I was asked to copy down prayers for a rezandero, because " your handwriting is good."

Many rezanderos do not speak or understand Spanish very well and it is likely that they do not fully grasp all that they are reciting. Certainly the Latin prayers are understood by no-one. However, a detailed understanding of the prayers is not required either from the rezandero and his group or from the rest of the assembled company. Many of the women not in the prayer group do not know the words of prayers and only join in on the few phrases that they do know. The men (with the exception of the rezandero) rarely participate actively in prayer sessions at all and are not familiar with the words of prayers. Religious devotion is fundamentally "women's work" and they pray, as it were, on behalf of the whole community led by a few male specialists. Most men accompany the bereaved household by drinking and chatting outside the house.

The important point about the prayers is that they occur and that a few people (principally the rezandero) know exactly what must be done in the ritual and do it correctly. The majority of the assembled company has only a rudimentary knowledge of Catholic doctrine and judge the prayers as correct by the familiar intonation, the time spent on them, the number of prayers said and the observance of the ritual acts (such as the lifting of the cross, the decoration of the altar, the sprinkling of holy water).

Hospitality, the giving and receiving of food and drink, is a key feature of indigenous Catholic ritual. It is especially important in the rituals of the life cycle, where hospitality is an integral part of the ritual and is as crucial as the religious observations. Hospitality is also important in community fiestas, where those who accompany the candles to the chapel are given popo or food before they do so. In addition, the various specialist workers for the fiesta are also fed by the community for the duration of their work. The main fiestas in the municipal centre of Ojitlan are no longer characterised by hospitality in the way that they were in the system of *mayordomías* prior to 1968.[7] The fiesta entertainments in Ojitlan are now run on a commercial footing and neither food nor drink is offered free to all participants. The religious processions are organised by groups attached to the church. These larger fiestas (especially that of Santa Rosa)

[7] This was a hierarchy of religious posts, involving sponsoring festivals, through which one moved to become an *anciano* (elder) of Ojitlan. The mayordomías were linked in a system with secular posts in the municipal offices. Barabas and Bartolomé (1974:85) suggest that the system of mayordomías was suppressed "by local mediators" in 1968, because it regulated access to the Council of Elders who were opposed to the Cerro de Oro project. Being a mayordomo involved a significant expense. Some Ojitecs in 1976 suggested to me that the high cost of fulfilling the posts was an important factor in the ending of the system.

remain, however, important marketplaces where stalls of all kinds are set up. This is also true of the non-Ojitec fiestas at Otatitlan and San Andres Teotilalpan.

Before the formation of the ejidos in Ojitlan in the 1930s, the municipal centre of Ojitlan was the seat of fiestas and the focus of religious life. After the ejidos were formed, many new communities took themselves a patron saint (often the Virgin in one of her many manifestations) and celebrated their own fiestas in addition to those in Ojitlan itself. Gradually, community chapels were built and very often the patron saint's image was donated by a businessman (such as an habilitador or trader) with local connections. From the beginning the ejido fiestas were financed by an equal contribution from each ejidatario (regardless of their economic resources). This was in contrast to the mayordomías in Ojitlan where there was some redistribution of wealth as a result of fiesta sponsorship. The mayordomos were chosen from the wealthier Ojitecs and they had to meet all the expenses of the fiesta between them. In the ejidos, with their ethos of equality, the fiesta was financed equally by all.

In the next section, I will examine the rituals of indigenous Catholicism, examining life cycle rituals first. All of the life cycle rituals are important for building and strengthening relationships within a community. It is the ritual concerning death that most involves the whole community. The celebrations of baptism involve only the child's immediate family (parents and grandparents), while marriage, though involving a large celebration in theory, does in practice often not mean that, especially in view of the number of elopements.[8] The ritual concerning death, however, potentially involves the whole community since all who wish to pay their respects attend. Invitations are not issued, except to the women who are asked to help with the cooking. This ritual is also particularly interesting in that here Catholic and non-Catholic beliefs and practices clearly form integral parts of the same ritual. Prayers held on the anniversary of a death are also examined.

The final section concerns annual ritual events of importance. These include the fiesta of All Saints, when celebrations are very clearly <u>for</u> the dead and not simply in remembrance of them. On this occasion the living and the dead of the community are

[8] My impression from informants is that there had been an increase in elopements, a number of which involved the girl joining her boyfriend in Uxpanapa. This undermined the authority of parents, but also avoided the expense of the wedding celebrations.

reunited through sharing in the food on the household altars and in the hospitality of visiting each other's abodes. The fiesta of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Paso Limón is discussed as an example of the many community fiestas held in the territory of Ojitlan. A second community event (though not celebrated in all communities) is the sequence of *Posadas*, culminating on Christmas Eve with the celebration of the birth of Christ at midnight.[9] Two important fiestas occurring outside Ojitlan are visited by Ojitecs, because the saints of the two places (Otatitlan and San Andres Teotilalpan) are considered to have special powers to cure the sick. Both places were also considered to be exemplars of good Catholicism by Ojitecs opposed to the priests' reforms.

In my view, indigenous Catholicism constructed a sphere of agency for Ojitecs, within which they could act autonomously without subordination to other ethnic groups. This contrasted with their subordination in economic and political spheres. Ojitecs exercised considerable control of the ritual and could rely on the local rezandero where the priest was unavailable or unwilling to take part. Indigenous Catholic ritual became an important site of struggle for those Ojitecs resisting the reforming priests and resisting resettlement. The resistance to the priests' reforms came to focus on ways of mediating and appealing to divinity, the authority of ritual specialists and appropriate modes of relationship within a community. The resistance to resettlement was also expressed (partly) through renewed commitment to indigenous Catholic rituals, particularly to Todos Santos and community fiestas.

Indigenous Catholicism

Baptism

The baptism of a child is the occasion for creating a strong ritual relationship between the child's parents and the couple chosen to be *padrinos* (godparents). Traditionally, the parents and godparents take the child to the church on a Sunday or fiesta day and ask for the child to be baptised. No prior arrangements are made with the priest. This practice is common in other parts of indigenous Mexico, where I have observed long queues of parents and godparents waiting at a fiesta for the priest to baptise their

[9] The Posadas involve prayers and socialising in different households during the nine days before Christmas, as described later in this chapter.

children.[10] After the baptism has taken place, the party returns to the parents' house where the padrinos are offered a meal, drink and the celebration continues.

The relationship between the parents and godparents of a child (who thereby become compadres) is a sacred one, ideally characterised by mutual respect, courtesy and hospitality. Compadre/comadre becomes the preferred term of address between them and this emphasises the special relationship. The parents' criteria for choosing godparents varies. Some choose to cement friendships through compadrazgo, while others attempt to develop or cement their network of political and economic ties. Many do both. As the processes of resistance and resettlement developed, with the polarisation of communities into opposing factions, the relationship of ritual respect between compadres was sometimes critical in bridging the gap between groups and facilitating communication at times of crisis.[11]

The godparents should take an interest in the welfare of their godchild and help in any way they can when necessary. In return the godchild should show great respect. A continuing exchange of presents and services should be part of the godparent-godchild relationship. Wealthy godparents can be of great service to a poor peasant godchild, if they honour their commitments, while a poor godchild can be called upon to run errands or provide unpaid help to the godparents. At the same time, if the social gulf between the parents and godparents is too great, the latter may not feel obliged to honour their commitments and there is a risk involved in choosing too high above oneself in the social ladder. Those who have served a term as one of the elected municipal authorities in Ojitlan may find that, at the end of their term of office, they have more godchildren than they can remember, because political advantage is also sought through compadrazgo. This political compadrazgo was threatened by the priests' reforms, which insisted that parents and godparents attend classes for several weeks before the baptism. This is one example of how the Catholic reforms, discussed further in Chapter 7, threatened to undermine the ritual expression of existing relations of power.

[10] One example was the village fiesta of San Luis Teolocholco, Tlaxcala in the summer of 1974. I spent three months in the neighbouring village of San Antonio Acuamanala, Tlaxcala, carrying out research for my undergraduate dissertation in Anthropology.

[11] Cf. for instance, the case of the Paso Limón ejidatarios discussed in Chapter 8.

Godparents may effectively adopt a godchild, who will live and work with them and who may be educated at their expense. The situations in which this may occur include the following: if the godparents are childless; if the godparents have only male children, they may adopt a goddaughter; if the godparents have only female children they may adopt a godson. In all of these situations, adoption is a strategy by which godparents can add to their household labour force and also correct an imbalance of the sexes if they wish to. A lone woman in a household of men and boys will be particularly keen for extra help, as many of her tasks cannot be performed by males. Finally, godparents may also adopt a godchild, who is left an orphan and whose relatives would not find it easy to take him in.

The Ritual Surrounding a Death

When a person is dying, close family maintain a vigil supported by compadres, relatives and neighbours at the bedside. Maize to be used for seed and any other seeds, such as tobacco, must be removed from the house before the person dies because otherwise the seed will not germinate. This is one of the many indigenous non-Catholic beliefs and practices found in this area of ritual. Candles are lit when it is clear the person is near death. Once the person has died, someone from the household (usually one of the men) will announce this in the community. The extent of the announcement will vary according to the importance and status of the deceased, but relatives, compadres, friends, godchildren and the rezandero are informed. Messages may also be sent to relatives in other communities which can involve, for instance, an eight hour return trip on horseback.

The deceased is laid out by the immediate family on a *catre*[12] or on several large planks supported by crates. The head may be bound with a red handkerchief, but not covered, and the body is covered with a white sheet. Someone (not a member of the household and the same sex as the deceased) is appointed to sweep the house in which the deceased lies and to put the rubbish behind the door. This same person also decorates the household altar and takes care of the lit candles there. Candles are also lit on the floor around the deceased and a glass of holy water is placed next to the body with a

[12] A *catre* is a simple indigenous bed, made with a wooden frame and sacking.

single flower in it.[13] The altar is decorated with *sintillo*, a foliage plant which is also used for decoration in the fiestas of All Saints. The rest of the room will be cleared except for seats and benches for the mourners.

Once the news of the death is out, mourners start to arrive at the house of the deceased. They bring candles (which they place on the altar or next to the body, unlit, for future use) and food (from rice, beans, sugar, coffee to chickens or turkeys) which is given to the bereaved family.[14] On arrival the mourner sprinkles holy water on the deceased using the flower in the glass and makes the sign of the cross. After this the women and children will either remain seated in the room or pass to the kitchen to offer their services there. The men leave the room to wait outside the house. The Spanish term *acompañar* is used for this mode of relationships, whereby visiting mourners "accompany" the bereaved household.[15] The term emphasises *time being with* those who have been bereaved, *sharing time* with them. The exact mode of accompanying is given by the sexual division of labour. The relationship of acompañar is always viewed positively and those who accompany are warmly welcomed. The ritual related to death is the life cycle ritual that most involves the whole community. Even when divisions in communities had become acute, it was still possible and accepted for people to attend the prayers and ritual for a deceased member of the opposing faction.

If the death occurred late into the evening, then the wake proper will be deferred until the next night. The main reason for this is that the mourners at the wake must all be fed by the household. If the death occurs late in the evening, there is not time to prepare the food, which involves a minimum of two-three hours work (including cooking maize, grinding it, making tortillas, killing chickens and preparing a stew, chopping firewood). This preparation is never begun before the death. The giving and receiving of hospitality is an integral part of the mourning, which was threatened by the priests' reforms. If the wake is deferred, prayers will still be held and coffee and biscuits will

[13] The flower is usually *li yin,* the yellow marigold or *flor de muerto* (flower of the dead), but I have seen a rose used.

[14] The kind and quantity of food donated by the mourners depends very much upon the deceased's standing and popularity in the community (and upon the resources of the mourners) as does attendance at the rituals.

[15] One source has used the term to refer to relationships in Todos Santos. "During these days, the living and the dead accompany, support and console one another." Salvidar and Salazar, cited in Sayer (1994:80).

be offered to the mourners. However, only close family and friends will hold the vigil for much of the night.

Three prayer sessions are usually held on these occasions, with breaks in between. During these prayers, *copal* (incense) may be burned in a tin of ashes in the room. With the exception of the rezandero and the males of the immediate family of the deceased, men do not participate in the prayers or help in the preparation of the food. It is only when a man of particular standing in the community has died that men will join in the prayers inside the house, and often then only on the third prayer. In general, though, the men spend their time outside the house, drinking, lamenting, talking politics and gossip – forming new alliances or cementing established ones. The priests' reforms, which demanded that men spend this time involved in prayers in the house, were attacking an important institution of informal male assembly for political and social purposes.

A stew of some kind, usually containing chicken or turkey, is served to all those who accompany the household. Men and women eat separately. There are often three or more sittings, one for the rezandero and the women praying, one for the men and another for the women who have cooked the food. The jobs of preparation allotted to the men include cutting wood for fuel, fetching water from the river, stream or pump, killing, washing and jointing the chickens and moving or rearranging furniture. In one case, men built a shelter outside the house under which the mourners would eat if it rained (there being no room inside the house).

The coffin is usually made by one or several local men from wood supplied by the bereaved family. If no other wood is available, several planks from the wall of the house will be used and later replaced. A few with the resources to do so may buy a ready-made coffin from one of the funeral parlours in Tuxtepec.

On the morning after the wake, the mourners who will accompany the coffin to the graveyard are given breakfast by the household. Some clean clothes of the deceased are placed in the coffin, including trousers (for a male) or a dress (for a female) for a pillow and red handkerchiefs at the feet. A red handkerchief is considered a form of protection for the living from evil influences, such as the "evil eye". It also provides protection for the dead as they go to a new and strange place. Candles and matches are placed with the deceased so that when s/he arrives in the darkness, they can light a candle to see.

The coffin is closed and tied with a rope, but not nailed down. The coffin is then taken to the graveyard in Ojitlan with four men at a time carrying it on their shoulders. A truck may be hired to take the coffin part of the distance, but if the deceased was a very respected figure, the coffin may be carried all the way. In one case, the coffin of an old and respected man was carried over 12 kilometres by the men from his community, though the family could well have afforded to pay a truck.

A funeral service in the church is not traditionally held, particularly not for those who have died in the outlying communities. The people observe their own rituals and say goodbye to their dead alone. In the graveyard, the coffin is opened up and the family and mourners say their farewells to the dead person, talking to him/her, embracing the coffin and sprinkling the body with holy water. Then the coffin is closed up and placed in the grave, which is filled in. Candles are lit on top of the grave and the mourners stay until they have nearly burned down. Once the candles have been lit, alcohol (aguardiente or a sweet wine) is offered to the mourners by the bereaved while they wait at the graveside.

After this the party returns to their community sometimes in a truck paid for by the family of the deceased and the mourners are invited to eat again in the bereaved household. If the close male relatives of the deceased stay in Ojitlan to drink at a cantina, some of the male mourners will accompany them. It may be only the women who return directly to their homes (although they may take advantage of the trip to Ojitlan to buy a few provisions). In the evening a further prayer session is held in the house. Altogether prayers are said for nine days in the house of the deceased, with the wake counting as day one. On the fourth day and the ninth day a full meal is served to the mourners, but on the other days only coffee and bread or biscuits or *tamales*[16] are offered.

On the fourth day the sweepings from the day of death are thrown out of the house, but not burned, and the house is swept again by the same person, who also redecorates the altar with fresh flowers and greenery. After this sweeping the bereaved family can bathe themselves – they cannot beforehand because they carry "air" from the corpse.

[16] Tamales are made from boiled, ground maize, which is fashioned into snack size portions. The maize will be flavoured, either savoury (with meat or beans) or sweet, then wrapped in a banana leaf and steamed. They are served up as leafy parcels with a tasty filling inside.

The sweeper is also given soap and detergent by the bereaved household with which to bathe and wash his/her clothes. Prayers are held in the early evening and a meal is served.

The prayers on the ninth day are as important as the vigil after the death, since the ritual is essential to cleanse the household of the "bad air" of the corpse and to raise the shadow (*hin*) which remains behind after death, when the spirit (*jme chi*) leaves the body. The ceremony is referred to as "lifting the cross". The bereaved household chooses a couple as padrinos (godparents) of the cross and it is one of them who sweeps the house again on the ninth day. They also redecorate the altar. A plantain may be cut down and cut into four to make four candle holders, each about eighteen inches high.

There are two crosses involved in the ritual on the ninth day. One is the wooden cross (made locally) to be set up on the grave and which is adorned with li yin or sintillo. The second is a cross made on the floor with powdered lime, *adobe* (brick dust) and charcoal. This cross should be set out on the floor underneath the deceased on the day of death (and covered over with a box) or it can be laid down on the ninth day. The important point seems to be that it is lifted on the ninth day. The cross is surrounded by li yin and candles are lit on the cross.

During the first prayer of the evening the padrinos of the cross kneel in front of the cross, each with a candle in their hand. Other mourners also hold candles. During the second prayer, the padrinos lift the powdered cross, following the instructions of the rezandero if they are not acquainted with the procedure. First, the flowers surrounding the cross are removed and put in a tin. Then the candles are removed in sequence. The *madrina* (godmother) removes the first candle, blows it out, hands it to the padrino who relights and fixes it in a similar position on the top of a box or crate. This is done for each candle. Then the powder of the cross is scooped up by the madrina in the same sequence as the candles and put into a piece of paper. The first cross has now been raised. People refer to it as the lifting of the cross (*levantar la cruz*).

Together the padrinos place the wooden cross on the floor in place of the powdered one and a glass of holy water is set at its side. The padrino hands around the tin of li yin and each mourner takes one. The madrina then moves back from the cross to the back of the room; she kneels and then kneels her way forward to the cross, crosses herself and using

the li yin sprinkles holy water on the cross and then moves to one side. The padrino does the same, followed by close relatives of the deceased and then by the other mourners. Some also kiss the foot of the cross as well. The li yin are collected back from everyone and will be taken to the graveyard the next day by the padrinos.

The next day the wooden cross, the powdered cross wrapped up in paper and the tin of li yin are taken by the padrinos to the graveyard. At the grave, the powdered cross is placed in the hole before the wooden cross and stones are piled at the base to make it doubly firm. The li yin are arranged on the top of the grave in the form of a cross and candles are lit. The mourners sit and talk while the candles burn down and then return to their community.

The ritual can be seen to have several aims, only one of which approaches official Catholicism, that of praying for the soul of the deceased.[17] The second aim, clearly related to more indigenous beliefs, is to remove the shadow and "bad air" of the dead person from the household (as in the sweeping, the bathing, the careful removal of the powdered cross and the candles). The "shadow" of the dead person is gradually detached from the house during the rituals and taken after the nine days to rest in the graveyard. Death and the dead person are considered potentially dangerous to those around them. The dead carry "bad air" or "bad wind", which fills the household of the deceased until the nine day ritual is complete. The sick and women who have given birth in the last 20 days should not take part in the nine day ritual or go near the corpse. If the sick do attend, the "bad air" can make them worse and cause their death. If a woman who has recently given birth attends, her baby may die.

The third strand in the ritual is the hospitality offered to those who accompany the bereaved household through the difficult time until the cross is taken to the graveyard, after which normal life can be resumed. During this process people help by sweeping the house and looking after the altar, by being padrinos of the cross, in praying and in food preparation or in the case of some of the men accompanying by simply being there outside, chatting and drinking. The mode of accompanying follows the established sexual division of labour. The importance of this hospitality is demonstrated by the fact

[17] This is the only aim fully sanctioned by supporters of the reforming priests. The priests disapproved of the sweeping and ritual to remove the shadow/bad air of the deceased. They also discouraged the extensive hospitality offered to mourners on the grounds that there was not enough focus on prayer. The bereaved women usually did more cooking than praying in the ritual following a death in the family.

that the wake will be postponed if there is not sufficient time to prepare a proper meal for the mourners. If there are many mourners in attendance, the wake can leave the women of the bereaved household and their chief female helpers in a state of near exhaustion from all the work involved. Yet although the women may mention their tiredness, they consider the work essential and do not grudge the time and effort involved. For the bereaved, the hard work and busy activity probably has a therapeutic effect in helping them through the first stages of their loss. At the end of each of the events, the bereaved family or their representative always thanks those who have accompanied on that occasion. This hospitality, which was challenged by the priests' reforms, became an important form of resistance to the "modern" ways that were promoted by the Catholic reforms and by the Papaloapan River Commission.

Prayers on the anniversary of a death

On the anniversary of a death, the household holds a prayer session in memory of the deceased and to pray for his/her rest in peace. These sessions may be held monthly in the first year after death and after that once a year. On these occasions the division of labour between the older women in the kitchen and the mainly younger women praying is even clearer than at other ritual events. Some of the women helping to prepare food do not participate in the prayers at all, whereas at a wake or the raising of the cross they will join in at some point.

The older woman of the household invites other women (including female relatives) to help her in the kitchen and invites the rezandero and his prayer group to say the prayers. The men of the household will probably be out working in the field until late morning (as may the women who come to help and accompany) but will spend the afternoon around the house helping with tasks if required. Other male relatives and friends may join them (the younger ones with a view to looking at or chatting with the girls in a break from prayers). The size of the gathering depends on the number of years since the death and on the family's connections. It is a friendly social occasion when everyone eats well.

The kitchen helpers arrive at about midday to start work. The first prayer begins in the early afternoon once the group has arrived, followed by a short rest, then a second session of prayers after which the prayer group is fed a chicken stew and tortillas by the

household. After the dishes have been cleared up, the women of the household participate in the third prayer while some, if not all, of the kitchen helpers go straight home. During the prayers, there are lit candles and flowers on the household altar and incense may be burned. A cross decorated with flowers is placed near the altar. Following the last prayer in Spanish, the rezandero hands a candle to the female next-of-kin to the deceased and recites a Latin prayer while she kneels. After this the ceremony is over and the women and girls return home.

Todos Santos

Todos Santos (All Saints) is a very important fiesta in Ojitlan, when people remember their dead in ritual and decorate altars in their houses for them. The dead are said to visit the living in their homes and the living visit the graveyard and tidy the graves. Todos Santos is a major fiesta and is probably the most important time for family reunions - more important than Christmas in this respect. In Paso Limón, nine evenings of prayers are said before the fiesta from 24th October to 1st November (inclusive). The girls of the prayer group meet in the chapel and then invite householders to offer to host one of the prayers. Each night after the prayers have been said, the household offers coffee and something to eat to the prayer group. In the evenings of 31st and 1st November candles are lit along the paths and tracks of the community for those souls who have no-one to light a candle for them. Candles are also lit on wayside altars and at crosses which mark where a violent death occurred. The candles and the nine evenings of prayers in different households mark out the immediate moral community.

People start to set up and decorate their household altars from about 29th October. Throughout the rest of the year the household altar is composed of several pictures of saints fixed on the wall, above a small shelf on which candles (as well as objects for safe-keeping) may be set. Some households have a larger altar where a small table is used instead of a shelf. The altar for Todos Santos is a much grander affair. To set it up, a table is placed against the wall under the saints and two poles of wood are stood up in front of it (one on each side) and tied to the rafters above. A piece either of thick creeper or a supple branch (such as from the orange tree) is fixed between the two upright poles in the form of an arch. A further cross-pole may be fixed above the arch to carry the fruit.

The two upright poles and the arch are decorated with two kinds of yellow flowers (flor de muertos and flor de Todos Santos) and sintillo. Hanging from the rafters above the altar and/or from the cross pole and from the top of the two upright poles there are mainly raw fruits and vegetables. These may include[18] coconuts, different kinds of bananas, yucca, oranges, guava, mandarin oranges, calabaza (squash), tamarind, string beans in pods, grapefruit, pomelo, lime, pineapple and bunches of dried tobacco leaves. They are tied up with string or creeper or if branches of fruit are cut, these are hung over the pole without the need to tie them.

On the table of the altar may be placed a variety of bought manufactured goods such as chocolate, chewing gum, sweets, lollipops, bottles of fizzy drinks, raisins, balloons. These items are put out especially for the dead little children. A dead child's clothes may also be hung up. Other items aimed more at the adult dead are bottles of beer and aguardiente, brandy, wine, a bottle-opener, cigarettes and matches. Also to be found are washing powder, soap for washing clothes and toilet soap as well as a variety of tinned goods such as tins of chiles, mackerel, sardines, tuna, pineapple, peaches, evaporated milk and tinned soft drinks. Other items include razor blades, a razor, medicine and ointments, jars of jam and olives, serviettes, money, salt, biscuits and the bread of Todos Santos, candles, *veladoras* (candles moulded in a glass) and incense. At least one candle or veladora burns on the altar throughout the fiesta. Some smaller items (or those that are difficult to hang) of raw produce also appear on the table such as grapes, apples (neither produced locally), potatoes, melon, papaya, peanuts, *chayote*, tomatoes, chiles, onions, herbs, *hierba mora* (a popular wild leaf vegetable), eggs, sugar cane, limes and mandarin oranges.

Home made goods present includes sweets made from coconut, chocolate, paper flowers, *nanches*[19] preserved in aguardiente. Tins growing maize and rice seedlings are very common items. Jars of flowers may also be placed on the altar or on the floor nearby. Finally, starting on 30th October, all kinds of dishes of cooked food and drinks are set out on the altar. One might find fried egg and rice, fried fish, fish stew, pasta soup, chicken stew, pork crackling, cooked shrimps, boiled yucca and boiled bananas.

[18] In the following description I outline the possibilities for inclusion on the altar. No household displayed every single item. In fact, the altars that I observed contained from about 20 to about 50 different items.

[19] A small yellow fruit. The combination of nanches and aguardiente is as potent as sloe gin.

New maize tortillas are put out each day. In addition, there may be *totopos* (toasted tortillas), *memelas*[20] of rice or beans and different kinds of tamales. Drinks include cups of coffee (black and white), milk, cocoa, *atole* and *pinole* (both drinks made from ground maize), cinammon tea, glass of water and coconut.

The altars should be ready by the evening of 30th October, since that night the young children who have died come to visit. Plenty of sweets and other foods that children like are on the altar that night. The following day, 31st October, is the day of the dead children. On 31st October, the day when the adult dead visit overnight, spicier foods are prepared and added to the display such as chicken or turkey with *mole* (rich, spicy) sauce, spiced sausage, fried bananas, chicken stew, boiled beans, fried beans, fried egg and cheese. A lemon may even be put out to go with one of the spicy stews. The following day is the day of the adult dead. The dead retain the tastes in food and drink that they had when living.

The bread made especially for Todos Santos forms an important part of the altar display. It is made by local bakers from white flour, eggs, sugar, fat and cinammon. The bread comes in various sizes, but all are in the shape of a human being, with head, arms, body and legs clearly discernible. The arms of the bread person are folded across the chest, leaving no doubt that it is a representation of the dead. The bread is also called *pan de muertos* (bread of the dead). Sometimes, faces made from flour and water are added to the bread. Because the bread is in human shape, it almost appears as if the dead themselves are sitting on the altar. The equivalent of several days' wages may easily be spent on this bread. Some of the Todos Santos bread is wrapped up in a square of material and hung above the altar. It is put up there for the dead "to carry away easily" when they visit.

The construction and contents of the altar reflect aspects of household organisation and household resources. In the creation of the altar tasks are allotted according to the accepted sexual division of labour. The whole household helps. The men obtain and fix the poles and arch in position and hang the fruit above the altar ("heavy work"). Men or older boys go out with the children to cut the flowers and fruit. Children decorate the parts of the altar that they can reach. The women spend much of their time engaged in cooking food to be placed on the altar, although they also add the finishing

[20] A memela is a tortilla folded in half with a filling added, sealed up and then fried.

touches to the decoration. The sexual division of labour amongst adults remains as clear as ever, though both boys and girls help with the decoration and enjoy it. The contents of the altar reflect not only the cash resources of the household (in the variety, quality and quantity of bought and manufactured goods), but also its resources in terms of social contacts and networks. At least some of the items on every altar are gifts from relatives, compadres or neighbours. Social networks are important for ensuring a good display on the altar and money to buy is no substitute.

If, for instance, a household has few fruit trees of its own, money is often not enough to obtain the necessary produce. A household with banana trees or orange trees may give some fruit to their compadres, relatives, neighbours or friends, but cannot necessarily be persuaded to sell some to others, especially if their supply is not that plentiful. It is also very difficult to buy chickens or turkeys in the community. Each household rears its own to meet its own needs (and to allow for gifts and wakes) and cash from a sale is considered a poor substitute for keeping one's own supplies in reserve. Selling a chicken is usually a sign that the household is desperately short of cash. Social ties are therefore very important in order to meet any shortfalls in the household's own provisioning. Women who make tamales or tortillas of yucca (the latter a particularly time consuming process) will also give some away, but rarely sell them. There is some exchange of these items between women in order to have variety on their altars without all of the hard work involved. The contents of the household altar in the mid-1970s still reflected relationships of reciprocity within the community, that many items did not have a cash price and could not be obtained with cash. This remained in contrast to the villa of Ojitlan, where increasingly, because of the activities of the PRC, everything had a price.

Relatives living outside Ojitlan may also visit during Todos Santos and they add their own contributions to the altar (usually goods which cannot be obtained locally), which indicate to all visitors that this family "has contacts". Parents should also give items for the altar to their children's godparents of baptism and godchildren should give presents to their godparents too, such as food or bread. Children are likely to boast to each other about how their altar is the better one. Adults do not appear to boast openly, although they do take great care to make the altar as splendid as they can. Finally, the contents of the altar should be seen as a tribute to the imagination of the women. As with most

other ritual events, there is much scope within the accepted framework for imagination and innovation.

During the fiesta of Todos Santos, the relationship between the living and the dead is represented as an easy joking one and there is an idiom of sharing and friendliness between them. It is quite acceptable to eat one's meal at the altar/table, if there is no other space, and to joke that the living dead are eating there with the dead. Before the fiesta, visitors to the house may ask humorously if the dead have arrived yet and be told that so far they haven't arrived or that so far only the living dead are here. Bananas and other fruit must be fastened securely above the altar, otherwise, it is said, they might drop on the heads of the visiting dead.

The ritual relating to death, in particular the symbolic structuring of the relationship between the living and the dead, is an important example of the syncretism in indigenous Catholicism. Official Roman Catholic doctrine encourages prayer for the soul of the deceased, but does not accept that souls visit the living, nor recognise Ojitec ritual to protect the living from the "bad air" produced by the dead. When the Ojitecs defended their communities against the PRC and the reforming priests,[21] they were defending not only their economic and political relationships with each other, but also their relationships with those who have died. In indigenous Catholicism, relationships between the living and the dead are friendly and stable (maintained through the appropriate ritual), not subject to the vicissitudes of relationships with the living. The Ojitec defended their relationship to the dead and the associated ritual as an aspect of their life beyond influence by the regional government or religious authorities. Resistance to resettlement allowed continued visiting of the rural graveyards (such as the one in El Nanche) that would eventually be flooded under the Cerro de Oro proposals.

Whilst everything placed on or around the altar at Todos Santos is clearly intended for the dead, it is equally clearly used up by the living. A dead man's favourite cigarettes may be on the altar but someone else will eventually smoke them. The living do not wait until the end of the fiesta (3rd November) to eat or drink some items on the altar. Bread or tamales from the altar may be given to visitors. If extra tortillas are needed for

[21] This is discussed in more detail in Chapters 7 and 8.

a meal, they may be taken from the altar. Each day new tortillas are put on the altar. If fish is caught during the day, it will be hung on the altar for a short while before it is gutted, cleaned and cooked. Most of the cooked items of food on the altar are portions of a cooked meal that the living members of the household have also eaten during the fiesta. Thus it is as if the whole household, dead and living, are reunited in sharing meals. Dishes of food are boiled up in the evening (to prevent them going bad) and then replaced on the altar. On the 3rd November the food is eaten up by the living. The finished altar is a veritable cornucopia of the produce of the land and the people's labour. It also embodies social and ritual ties in the gifts that are there. All that is available at that season of the year can be represented on the altar to be shared with the dead. The altar is a celebration of Ojitec life.

It is of particular interest that rice and maize seedlings are placed on the altar for a good harvest. The dead at Todos Santos are good for crops, whereas the recently dead and their *aire* (bad air) are very dangerous to seeds and crops. As already noted seeds that are in a house when someone dies will be no good and will not germinate. Also a mourner who goes straight from a house of the recently dead into a field of crops without first bathing can carry the "bad air" of the dead into the crop and blight it. The recently dead are also dangerous to vulnerable human beings, such as the sick and women who have given birth in the last twenty days and their newborn babies. They are potentially dangerous to healthy human beings too. Members of the bereaved household must not bathe until after the fourth day, because the "bad" air they carry makes them vulnerable. Vulnerable people must not bathe or the river will further sap their strength. The nine day ritual following a death gradually detaches a dead person from the surroundings and people s/he lived with and transforms the dangerous dead into the beneficent dead, who return at Todos Santos to visit their families. If the ritual is not carried out properly, the dead will not be released to rest and the shadow (hin) will remain in the household threatening the well-being of those who live there and the community.

After the dead have visited the households of the living, the living, as it were, return the compliment by visiting the dead in their graves (although the dead are in heaven/with God, not in the graveyard). Most of the visits to graves take place on 2nd November. The people of Paso Limón visit either the small graveyard in the neighbouring ejido of El Nanche (just across the river) or the graveyard of Barrio Grande in Ojitlan, according

to where their dead lie. Some families cover both. The visitors leave their homes first thing in the morning of 2nd November. They take with them candles and veladoras, flowers, food (tamales and bread from the altar) and drink. The graveyard is full of visitors and comes to resemble a picnic place as the morning wears on.

People light candles on the graves of their relatives, often in the form of a cross, place flowers there and generally tidy up. They sit on the gravestones to eat their packed breakfast and chat with other visitors, catch up on news, note who attends the neighbouring graves and with whom. Whole households (man, woman and children) may go together. People also wander around the graveyard to see who else has come. There is a very easy, social and festive atmosphere, though tinged with moments of individual sadness about the loved ones who are dead.

Inside and outside the graveyard gates in Ojitlan, there are refreshment stalls selling food, soft drinks and beer and other stalls selling candles and flowers. A few men who meet up there may decide to buy a crate of beer between them and sit on the graves chatting and gradually getting drunk. A band of three musicians will play a tune over the grave of your dead relative for 10 pesos (1977 price)[22] and they are kept very busy all day. Before the dispute with the reforming priests, a priest would also attend and say prayers over any grave for a small fee. The visitors spend several hours at least in the graveyard. Most people arrive in the morning and return home early or mid-afternoon. On 3rd November, people start to take down their altars, eating the food that is still considered edible (most of it) and the fiesta is over.

Todos Santos is often a time of family reunions. Those who are living or working away from their native community make a special effort to return in Todos Santos. In 1976 and 1977, this caused great consternation and frustration to the development agency staff in Uxpanapa, because despite the fact that every day counted in the attempt to save the rice harvest, large numbers of ejidatarios insisted on returning home for three, four or five days during Todos Santos. The engineers in Uxpanapa condemned this as irrational and "fanatical" behaviour. Certainly returning to Ojitlan for Todos Santos was a form of resistance and a statement of preference for the moral community (of the

[22] 10 pesos was roughly 25p. For the period of my fieldwork, 1976-1978, the exchange rate was approximately 40 pesos to £1.

living and the dead) of home in contrast to the new, confusing, economic and political relationships of the collective ejido.

In Ojitlan, the ritual surrounding death is the life cycle ritual that most involves the whole community. It is also the only life cycle ritual that can take place without "outside" officials. As such, it offers the greatest scope for the expression of Ojitec autonomy and authentic agency. Ojitecs can have complete control over this area of ritual. The relationship of acompañar is particularly valued and is not a relationship mediated by money (in contrast to an increasing number of non-ritual relationships in Ojitlan). Acompañar emphasises "being with" people and implies a sharing time, which is not measured in a "modern" way.[23] Both the Papaloapan River Commission and the reforming priests saw it as "wasted time". The customs of appointing a person to sweep the household and appointing padrinos of the cross reinforce existing bonds between the bereaved and those who accompany, adding another aspect to existing multifaceted relationships. The ritual surrounding death was a site of resistance to the Papaloapan River Commission, when Ojitecs prioritised returning home for Todos Santos above saving the rice harvest in Uxpanapa. It was also a site of resistance to the reforming priests, as Ojitecs refused to give up indigenous traditions such as sweeping the house and offering hospitality to those who accompanied them.

Indigenous Catholic ritual related to death asserts a clear division of labour by sex and age in the tasks and space allocated to different groups. At the same time, there is an emphasis on equality and a welcome offered to all those who accompany the bereaved household. In some senses, this is a reversal of the hierarchies of economic and political relationships, where inequality is clear and there are fewer prescriptions on participation related to gender and age.

The ritual surrounding death is also of particular importance within Mexican ethnography. Todos Santos is a major annual event throughout Mexico, celebrated in a way that is unique within the Roman Catholic world.[24] Although, there are other areas

[23] Cf. the discussion of "modernity" in Keane (1996) referred to in Chapter 2 and elsewhere in this chapter.

[24] Cf. for example: Nutini (1998), Carmichael and Sayer (1992), Sayer (1994) and Jeffery (1999).

where the souls of the dead are believed to have permission to visit,[25] the elaborate altars and the widespread popular participation are very specifically Mexican.

The Fiesta of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Paso Limón, 11-12 December

The Virgin of Guadalupe is the patron of the ejido of Paso Limón and her fiesta is the more important of the two community fiestas. It is an example of the community fiestas that began after the formation of the ejidos in the 1930s, though in Paso Limón's case the fiesta was started in the mid-1920s by an indigenous landowner. From their inception most of these fiestas were linked with the ejido and organised through its structure. The Committee to run the fiesta is elected in the assembly of ejidatarios about three months beforehand. The most important members of the committee (all men) are the President, Secretary and Treasurer, who are assisted by six vocales or auxiliaries. The President and the Secretary between them are responsible for most of the planning of the fiesta. The activities of the fiesta can be broadly divided into two parts, the first concerned with the religious ritual and the hospitality associated with it and the second concerned with the other entertainments.

Community fiestas became important sites of struggle between the supporters and opponents of the reforming priests during 1976-8. The priests tried to "disentangle the illicit conflation of words, things and persons" (Keane, 1996:138). In Keane's view, this disentangling "is critical for the constitution of the modern subject and its insertion into an emergent political economy" (ibid.). In the fiestas of Ojitlan, the priests wanted to separate the prayers from the hospitality, dancing and drinking. Communities became divided on the issue and many resisted the priests' proposals. Community fiestas also became an important way to celebrate and value the community that was threatened by the resettlement. In this sense, fiestas also became a form of resistance to the Papaloapan River Commission and resettlement. They became a way of reasserting and valuing traditional multifaceted relationships in opposition to the "modern", single-faceted, relationships mediated by money that were increasingly a feature of life in Ojitlan and Uxpanapa.

[25] The Guardian newspaper carried a photo of oil lamps lit in Somma Vesuviana at the foot of Mount Vesuvius, noting that "the lamps are lit to guide the souls back to earth during a local festival dedicated to

Part 1: Religious Ritual and Hospitality

The making of candles and taking them to the chapel is a characteristic of all community fiestas, as is usually the practice of serving chi ro or popo to those who take part in the procession with the candles. Preparation for these events begins on 10th December in the President's house. Work may spill over into a neighbour's house if more space is needed

Candles are made especially for the fiesta. Each of the nine officials and the other ejidatarios should donate a half a kilo of wax for the purpose, though not all comply with this. The officials provide the string for the candle wicks. The oldest men of the community are invited beforehand to make the candles on 10th December. Although the men expect that their services will be needed, a formal request must be made. The candle-makers are responsible for the measuring and cutting of the string wicks, the melting of the wax and the making of the candles to the correct size. Several large hoops are made from thick creeper and suspended from the rafters. The wicks are tied on to these and the candles are made by pouring the molten wax on to the wicks. The candle-maker works by rotating the hoop of creeper as he goes so that each wick receives coat after coat of wax until the correct size is achieved. The rezandero and his assistant also participate and give advice. Once the candles are finished and almost hard, they are cut off the hoop and the bottom is cut flat so that they will stand up. The candles are then laid on the household altar. This work will take the best part of a day. The fiesta officials may look on but do not join in the candle-making. The candle-makers are fed during the day by the wives of the officials.

The festive drink of chi ro or popo is made and offered to those who take the candles to the chapel at the beginning of the fiesta. Popo or chi ro is made from cocoa, sugar, maize, water and *cocolmecatl* (a green creeper) and when served should consist mainly of froth with very little liquid. The production of popo for the fiesta is the responsibility of the older women, who have become expert at the art through many years of practice. They too must be formally invited to help by the officials. The officials and ejidatarios provide all the necessary ingredients, though the women bring some of their own specialist equipment such as colanders and swizzle sticks. Other pots and buckets are provided by the President. The *poperas* (the women who make the popo) are allotted a

---

the dead." The Guardian, 6.8.1998.

clearly defined separate working space within the President's house, where on the 10th they roast the cocoa beans, remove the shells and grind the cocoa ready for use on the next day. They are also fed for the duration of their work. Early on the morning of the 11th, the poperas resume work to complete the preparation of the popo.

The third major preparation activity involves the preparation of food. The ritual specialists and the officials themselves, as well as any other helpers, are fed for the duration of their work on 10th and 11th by the wives of the officials. All the ingredients of the meals are provided by the officials themselves, and their women collaborate under the direction of the President's wife. This is one important reason why the men elected to the fiesta committee should be married, since their wives must take on responsibilities too. In the rare event of an unmarried man being elected to a post, he would only be one of the auxiliaries and would have to ask his mother or some other female relative to act as cook.

At about midday on 11th December, people begin to assemble at the President's house ready for the procession with the candles. Some groups may come down from neighbouring communities (such as El Platanal) bringing their own candles. The women and children enter the President's house, while the men wait outside. Everyone is served with popo by the daughters of the officials and other female helpers. After this, the rezandero distributes the candles to the assembled company. The rezandero starts a prayer within the house and then the procession to the chapel begins while the prayer continues. One of the officials lets off fireworks as the procession heads towards the chapel. The women and girls form the main body of the procession and join in the prayers while the men straggle along behind or line the route. The only men actively participating are the rezanderos and the President of the chapel – the rest are mainly observers. The men are not expected to make the same acts of religious devotion as the women and instead they stand about talking, with the younger ones watching their girlfriends or possible partners for the dance in the evening. The men take part in the fiesta simply by being there. When the procession enters the chapel, the rezandero collects back the candles from everyone and lays them on the altar. Then prayers are said and the group disperses. The men stay outside the chapel and do not enter.

On 12th December a procession with the Virgin of Guadalupe takes place throughout the ejido. Again it is mainly women and children who are involved and again some come

from neighbouring communities to join in. Three small children are dressed as the principal characters in the story of the Virgin of Guadalupe – a girl as the Virgin herself and two boys as Juan Diego and the Archbishop. A number of small girls carry branches from the palm tree and the older girls take it in turns to help carry a large framed picture of the Virgin. An older boy carries a small banana tree decorated with coloured paper. The President of the chapel and the rezandero also attend. The procession leaves the chapel and goes straight to the stream, which marks one of the boundaries of Paso Limón. From there they move, singing, back to the chapel by a different route effectively doing a tour of the ejido. On their return to the chapel, the group sing *las mañanitas*[26] to the Virgin, followed by a prayer. After this the group disperses, though many stay around the chapel to talk and socialise.

The chapel is decorated on 10th December by the girls from the prayer group. The decorations and greenery are provided by the officials and the girls may be helped by a few boys related to the officials. It is an occasion for much joking, laughing and good humour. Afterwards a prayer is said in the chapel.

This part of the fiesta is the least taxing for the officials. They have to ensure that all the necessary materials are provided, including firewood and fresh water for which the auxiliaries are responsible. However, there are no real practical difficulties involved for the officials and they do not need to worry about the outcome, since they are only indirectly responsible. Each "cell" of specialists (the candle-makers, the cooks, the poperas and the prayer group) is responsible for their different activities. Any failures, such as a popo without any froth or a bad stew, would be blamed on the specialists themselves rather than on the committee.

Part 2: The Entertainments

In this second part of the fiesta, the entertainments, the officials are directly responsible and vulnerable to censure. The entertainments usually include one or two dances and the selling of beer and other refreshments and may also include fireworks, horse races and basketball or football matches. *Jaripeo* (bull mounting) is a feature of the patron's fiesta in the neighbouring ejido of Santa Rosa. The prestige of the officials, particularly

[26] A birthday song, also sung on human birthdays.

the President, rests on the successful management of the entertainments. It is in this sphere that community opinion is most demanding.

Within the committee of officials itself, there is a clear division of labour and responsibility. The junior officials or vocales are auxiliaries, who carry out tasks assigned to them by the higher officials. These jobs may include running errands to fetch provisions, fetching water, cutting firewood, handling beer crates, running refreshment stalls, setting up a tarpaulin in case it rains, preparing the ejidal assembly for the dance, preparing the ground for horse races, letting off fireworks and clearing up all the mess after the fiesta is over. They are not organisers, but the level of vocal is considered an essential training ground for the higher posts. No special abilities are required for the post of vocal.

The organisers are the higher officials, particularly the President and the Secretary, who acts as his second-in-command. On them falls the choice of music for the dances, the setting of prices for entry to the dance and for the tables, the choice of candidates for the horse races or the basketball and football teams, the decisions about fireworks and who should make them, the decision on how much beer to order, the advertising of the fiesta and the attraction of a large crowd by the exciting nature of the programme.

Security arrangements must be made for the dances and fights between the men stopped quickly by persuasion or force. While the fiesta budget is based on a fixed contribution from each ejidatario, it is nevertheless necessary to make a profit on the dances and the sale of beer in order to meet all expenses. Thus, it is essential that any violent outbursts are controlled, otherwise the older women may leave the dance taking their daughters with them and that profit would not be made. The leading officials of the committee need to have a position of some authority and respect in the community, which will help them to deal effectively with troublemakers when the need arises. It is accepted that although an official may drink alcohol, he may not get drunk at the fiesta when he is an official, be he vocal or President. Failure on this account is greatly criticised, doubly so if this drunkenness leads to failures in the fiesta organisation.

Common sources of trouble in the dance are when a drunken man or boy refuses to pay to enter the dance and must either be persuaded to pay or ejected from the hall. Brothers may dislike a sister's dancing partner and start a fight or a man may be

unpleasantly insistent on dancing with a girl who does not wish to dance with him (leading to trouble between him and the girl's male relatives). The beer stall is just outside the dance hall and many men simply hang around there drinking, especially the older married men. The younger men, who are more likely to be dancing, always head for the beer stall when there is a break in the music. There is great potential for drunken quarrels to develop. A further risk, which the committee must take into account, is that if potential dancers (mostly young unmarried men) consider that the quality of the music does not justify the entry price to the dance, they may stay outside drinking instead of dancing, thus increasing the likelihood of conflict, as well as reducing the takings in the dance.

Women are very important mediators in drunken conflicts between men. As wives, mothers, daughters and girlfriends they will be watchful of their men during the evening, aware of how much they are drinking and whom they are with. They will try to forestall potential trouble by talking to the men to calm them down, persuading them to move away from trouble or by persuading them to dance. In the last resort, a woman or women are allowed to push or pull a man away from trouble. He will allow himself to be "dragged away" by the women, when he could not himself choose to move away for fear of losing face with his fellow men. Frequently the women on both sides of a (potential or actual) fight are involved in separating the men.

In addition to a position of some standing in the community, the President also needs to have considerable outside contacts, not only to arrange all the entertainments, but also to encourage attendance at "his fiesta". The success of a fiesta is often judged in terms of the numbers of people present at the dances and other entertainments. The Treasurer must keep the accounts and make them balance when they are presented to the ejidal assembly at a later date. One of his jobs after the fiesta is to try to collect money from those who asked for beer on credit. Each of the three higher posts demands skill in managing people of the community for the fiesta to proceed smoothly.

Fireworks had been a regular part of the earlier fiesta, but there had been none in recent years when in 1977, the fiesta committee decided to return to this tradition.[27] Through contacts it was arranged that the firework makers of Juquila, Oaxaca should come to

[27] I think that this renewed interest in the best aspects of community tradition was part of the resistance to the reforming priests and the PRC discussed further in Chapter 7.

Paso Limón on 3rd December, nine days before the fiesta, to make the fireworks and the frames on which to set them. Previously, the firework-makers had come from Chiquihuitlan or Huautla, where they specialise in loud and jumping bangers. Those from Juquila specialise in colours and lights, which disappointed many people and led to complaints. As a result the officials did not pay the full sum agreed for their work.

The dances at the fiesta of Guadalupe are major events of the year in Paso Limón and are also attended by people from the neighbouring communities. People of all ages and both sexes attend the dance, as they do for the fireworks. Inside the dance hall, the older women sit with their daughters of "dancing age" (about 14-15 years onwards), watching their behaviour and who they dance with. Younger children also attend with their mothers or another female relative. Women may bring their small babies with them so as not to miss the fun, but they do not dance. The women keep an eye on their menfolk, who mostly stay outside drinking. In general, it is only the young unmarrieds and the recently marrieds who actually dance, while the rest look on and talk.

Horse races, football and basketball matches are also popular entertainments. The attendance for these events is mainly men and there is an atmosphere of camaraderie and bravado. Although many of the girls would like to watch, it is considered not quite proper for them to do so. The only way in which it is acceptable is if the girl can sit on her own porch or on a friend's or neighbour's porch. However, simply standing around (as it were, exposed) waiting and watching is considered inappropriate and "macho". At a horse race, the men all stand together in a large group at the finishing line, placing bets, drinking and joking. At football and basketball matches, they stand or sit around in smaller groups, but the atmosphere is similar and clearly "male space". Girls and women are expected to have "better" things to do in their own homes and indeed there is almost always some household chore waiting to be done, even at fiesta time.

The success or otherwise of the fiesta, and the standing of the higher officials involved, rests almost entirely on their planning and management of the entertainments of the fiesta. They need the skills and knowledge to organise the events, manage risk and use their position of influence to encourage attendance and keep order at their fiesta. The hazards of the entertainments, especially the dances, ensure that the officials will need

to make use of their power and influence to achieve a successful result.[28] Whilst the first part of the fiesta is essential, the work is done by "cells" of skilled workers and little risk is involved. The successful outcome is taken for granted. The attendance at the religious processions is in no way the responsibility of the officials[29], since although they may invite participation from their own and neighbouring communities, the invitation is formal and does not entail the activation of the officials' local networks of support. Those who come do so because of their devotion to the Virgin and if they do not come, it is because of their own lack of piety, not because of any failing of the officials.

Throughout the fiesta, the division of labour by sex and by age is frequently very evident. In part 1, clearly defined groups make their specialist contributions to the fiesta. There is a celebration of skills in service to the community. During the processes of making important items and the processions with candles and images, the community is defined by people participating, doing what is required. The processions often attempt to define the spatial boundary of the community or the centre of the community. The second part, the entertainments, also features a clear sexual division of labour. The priests' reforms threatened many aspects of the fiesta. Their desire to separate prayers from the hospitality and entertainments challenged the sexual division of labour in that they expected men and women to take an equal part in the religious activities. Traditionally the prayers were "women's work". While men might "accompany" processions, their main participation in the fiesta (unless they were officials) was often to get drunk and have a good time. Drinking was an important aspect of masculinity and "drinking together" was always a gesture of friendship and alliance.

The fiesta provides a context for the expression of the higher officials' power to influence other men. If they are successful, this further enhances their reputation and influence in the community. Throughout the fiesta there are tensions between notions of equality and hierarchy. There is an emphasis on equal contributions from ejidatarios, yet the higher officials are usually well placed within local economic and political

[28] Keane (1997:26-7) notes that hazard is an integral feature of ritual "scenes of encounter" and an integral part of the system of power relations.

[29] The religious divisions over the priests' reforms, however, modified this and officials made specific efforts to maximise attendance at these processions in order to compete with the opposite faction.

hierarchies. The fiesta provides an occasion and a forum for the articulation of community opinion. If the fiesta is considered a success in terms of the numbers participating, the general order and correctness of procedures and the money raised, then this will reflect credit on the main officials and increase their standing in their own community and perhaps beyond. Although there is no formal system of mayordomías to regulate progress through a hierarchy of political-ritual positions, it seems likely that serving the ejido in a series of increasingly important posts in community fiestas is part of the development of a local political career.

The Posadas

The Posadas take place on the nine days before Christmas (16-24 December inclusive) and are a re-enactment of Mary and Joseph's attempt to find shelter before the birth of Jesus. On the first evening, prayers are said in the community chapel and then the group (women and children) take the images of Mary and Joseph (referred to as the pilgrims) in procession to a prearranged house while one of the girls or women leads the singing. On arrival at the house, where the door is shut four girls enter the house closing the door again behind them.[30] Then a drama is enacted in song in which the pilgrims ask for shelter and explain who they are. Although the replies to their request for shelter are initially reluctant, the pilgrims are then welcomed into the house.

Further prayers are said in the household (including Latin prayers) led by the rezandero, after which the company is given a hot drink (usually coffee or atole) and something to eat (such as bread or tamales). With the exception of the rezandero, the men do not participate directly in the ritual although they may follow the procession and wait outside the house to receive their food and drink which is brought out to them. After this there may be dancing if there is any means of providing music (such as a record player or cassette recorder) and some of the young men may be persuaded to enter the house to dance with the girls inside. The pilgrims spend the night next to the altar of the household until the next evening when the prayer group will arrive to take them out in procession to another house and the ritual is repeated.

[30] The door is shut specifically for purposes of the ritual. Normally people leave their doors open until they go to bed.

The organisation of the posadas is done by the girls in the prayer group. Several weeks beforehand they invite householders to host a posada and nearer the date they make sure that the chapel is in order and that the pilgrims are ready. The Posadas are clearly seen as good fun and are enjoyed as such. All traditional religious gatherings present an opportunity for flirting and courtship, however indirectly. Even if there is no chance to dance at a posada, the girls and boys are very aware of each others' presence and plenty of looks and smiles are exchanged. The daughters of the host household are only too keen to take coffee and food out to the men waiting outside, if they do not enter. Outside of fiesta times, there is no evening social life for girls or women (the men and boys have the cantinas) so these occasions are particularly relished.

The ninth posada on Christmas Eve is the most important one, after which the birth of Jesus is celebrated. The household hosting the ninth posada (known as *el nacimiento* – the birth) is involved in the greatest expense of the nine days since the attendance is best of all on this night. The household and its helpers will spend the whole day in preparation. An image of the baby Jesus is brought from the chapel by the girls to the household in the late afternoon. The image is placed on the household altar with a white cloth hung in front of it, as he is not yet "born". Later in the evening the ritual of the pilgrims seeking shelter occurs as before. On some occasions in Paso Limón, a dance is also held on the same evening so that after the ritual of the pilgrims, many people go off to the dance.

They return to the host household, however, before midnight to begin the celebration of the birth of Jesus. The rezandero leads the prayers at midnight and afterwards the pilgrims and baby Jesus are taken in procession to the chapel. The children of the host household or their relatives carry the images. On arrival in the chapel, the girl holding the baby Jesus stands in front of the altar while everyone comes to pay their respects, by kissing the image and leaving an offering of money. Some women kneel their way to the altar to do this. Few men participate except as observers. Prayers are then held and the baby Jesus is placed on the altar. Then the group returns to the host household for tamales and coffee and celebrations continue there into the night.

In 1977, the religious divisions meant that in ejidos such as Paso Limón, the anti-priests faction and the pro-priest factions organised separate Posadas. The rival groups adopted different styles of singing and could be heard moving between different households

during the night. There were various incidents of insults or skirmishes involving the men attached to the two groups. The group opposed to the priests had the possession of the chapel and the community's images stored there.

Indigenous Catholicism and Relationships Within the Community

Indigenous Catholic ritual offers many occasions for Ojitecs to extend and reinforce their relationships with members of their own community. At life-cycle events (birth, marriage and death) social ties become infused with a ritual and moral quality through compadrazgo. Godparents are chosen when a child is baptised and married and also when someone dies. When there is a death, someone is chosen by the bereaved to sweep the house and care for the altar and candles. Godparents of the cross are also chosen. They raise the cross in the bereaved household on the ninth day and take it to the graveyard, thus removing the "shadow" of the dead person from the house.

There is also an ethos of equality and responsibility in the community in the face of death. During the nine days after a death, members of the community pay their respects, accompany the bereaved and bring food and other items to help the household during that period. The members of the bereaved household extend their hospitality to all who accompany them. In the ritual of the lifting of the cross on the ninth day, all those present participate. They are all given li yin during the prayers and then the flowers are handed back to travel with the cross to the graveyard. Everyone plays this important role, which is part of lifting the shadow of the dead from the house. Equally the burial and the taking of the cross to the graveyard are social/ritual occasions for all members of the community regardless of status. Although the responsibility rests primarily with the kin of the bereaved, members of the community should also help to ensure that the dead depart the community properly and that the living are protected.

Community fiestas present another picture of its members working together to create and celebrate something in common. A successful fiesta brings status to the community and its members. Although the fiesta committee is elected in the ejidatarios' assembly, the community is wider than the ejido and the fiesta allows all residents to belong. Each ejidatario (and other heads of household who are not) contributes the same amount of money to the cost of the fiesta – emphasising equal participation. Before the religious procession, popo is served to all who accompany, including people from neighbouring

communities. The route of the religious procession is important too in that it can mark out boundaries or central sites or constructions, not least of which is the community chapel. The chapel is the symbol of the community and embodies the history and work relationships that made its existence possible.[31] The nine days of the Posadas also stress community hospitality. Every household could afford to offer at least simple hospitality on these occasions.

Ritual also makes statements about the relationship between the powerful and the less powerful Ojitec in a society that is characterised by economic and political inequalities. Ritual offers ample opportunities for the display of economic and political networks, wealth, status and power as, for example, in the hospitality offered, the contents of the altar at Todos Santos, the donation of items to a bereaved household and the holding of some ritual offices and responsibilities. The senior officials of a community fiesta need to be well established economically and politically. They need to have a wide range of contacts and outside knowledge in order to arrange the entertainments part of the fiesta, as well as status and power to enforce security at the dances and prevent fights. If they use these qualities to good effect and the fiesta is a success, this further increases their standing locally. One of the wealthier households hosts the posada on Christmas Eve because of the expenditure involved. They too both state and gain status from this, because their young children or young relatives carry the image of baby Jesus to the chapel.

However, ritual is not simply a context for the display, amplification and reaffirmation of economic and political status, it is also a context where unequal relationships are expressed in a way that still allows subordinate groups and individuals some degree of control and initiative. This is in marked contrast to many non-ritual contexts where the relatively powerless/poor are not allowed a participation that can be conceived as equally valuable.[32] In community fiestas, the senior officials can only achieve success

[31] This view was frequently reinforced in peoples' comments about the priests' claims to jurisdiction over the chapel. Responses emphasised that the *people* had built and paid for the chapel, it was part of *their* history and *their* community. It was property of the ejido and the community, not the church.

[32] In Chapter 8, I explore the new sets of relationships offered by the Papaloapan River Commission, particularly in Uxpanapa. The Commission's rhetoric of equal treatment for all Ojitec in the process of resettlement and the collective ejido was accompanied by a complex hierarchy of engineers, technical experts and agents of banks providing credit. The Ojitec learned that, despite the emphasis on equality, they were subordinate in this structure and could not rely on support from the powerful when they needed it. Thus, Ojitecs in favour of resettlement/the collective ejido could simply not rely on engineers to support them when needed, for instance during a politically explosive ejido meeting. The powerful were

through the support and participation of the whole community, including the less powerful members. The officials must attend in person to make a formal request for help to even the humblest ritual specialist. The poor may attend a wake in a wealthier household, receive hospitality and cement goodwill by their presence. In the graveyard visits of Todos Santos, there is a sense in which all are equal and in a similar position vis-à-vis death.

Compadrazgo is also an area where relationships between Ojitecs of unequal resources can be strengthened by the introduction of sacred rules. If parents choose godparents more powerful than they, they hope the latter will be a source of support and help (whether financial or in terms of contacts). In return the poorer parents can support the godparents (politically or as labour power) and can play an active role in the relationship through the giving of presents, for instance, to the altar at Todos Santos. The priests' insistence on godparents attending classes, with the concomitant demand on time, threatened to restrict the field of possible godparents.

An ideology relating to men and women and the correct relationships between them is conveyed in all indigenous Catholic ritual. The sexual division of labour is very evident and through these practices statements are made about the natures of men and women and what they should be or do. Ritual also offers a context for the promotion and reinforcement of both male and female solidarity.

Women do the preparation of food, cook, make popo and tortillas and pray on behalf of the whole community. In particular, the directly religious activities of women and girls sustain the community morally. These activities keep women and girls extremely busy on many ritual occasions. The virginity and purity of unmarried girls is expressed in community fiestas when they take it in turns to carry the portrait of the Virgin of Guadalupe and when they participate in prayers on the many possible occasions. Religious ritual is the only sphere where unmarried girls play an active part and where they may be unchaperoned – they organise the Posadas, decorate the chapel, prepare and tend the images to be used and go wherever prayers need to be said. At the dances,

---

not accessible or reliable in the way that they could be within the relationships of the Ojitlan ejido, nor were there ritual opportunities that drew the Ojitec and the Commission together into a moral community. A mode of resistance to the Commission and resettlement was to invest in community fiestas in Ojitlan as discussed in Chapter 7. The Paso Limón "resistance" used the mode of hospitality (inviting Commission officials to a barbecue) in order to establish contact with the high level officials of the Commission as shown in Chapter 8.

in contrast, girls are accompanied and watched by their mothers and they must sit waiting to be invited to dance (once they have reached the age of 14-15).

On ritual occasions men's tasks include cutting wood, fetching water, moving and rearranging furniture, building shelters and coffins, carrying the coffin on their shoulders. When women are overworked at a ritual event, men will also kill, wash and joint chickens and they are always responsible for the killing and jointing of larger animals, such as pigs and bullocks.

All the important official posts are held by men, such as rezandero, caretaker of the chapel and officials of the fiesta. In the latter case, men can use the post to extend and reinforce economic and political networks. Generally men only join in religious activities if they are ritual specialists. This is particularly true for community fiestas and smaller events. In a larger arena, such as the village of Ojitlan or in non-Ojitec fiestas, men participate more by, for instance, attending mass. Some fiesta entertainments are really for men only – horse-racing, football and basketball, where aggression and power are expressed. Manliness is also expressed in getting drunk, fighting, standing around chatting with other men and watching the women and girls. In the dance men take all the initiatives, while girls wait to be chosen. Men may fight over women or girls or for other reasons. If they do, women (often older women/mothers) intervene as mediators and peacemakers.

In many ritual contexts, men and women are separated, engaged in different activities, though cooperating for a common aim. There are many opportunities for the expression and reinforcement of both male and female solidarity, though the men have more space for this in their work on these occasions. Ritual expresses the different skills of men and women. The altar at Todos Santos is an embodiment of skills, particularly those of the women. The general picture is one of a strict sexual division of labour, where men and women cooperate for the benefit of all. Women are busy at activities which are nourishing and supportive (both religious and culinary), while men's activities stress power, strength and leisure/relaxation. Within the context of ritual, all men can be manly and all women womanly, regardless of how they measure up to these ideals in non-ritual contexts.

Religion and ritual offer a very important sphere of agency for women and girls. Decorating the chapel and organising some of the prayers is the only sphere of autonomous agency for unmarried young women, the only occasions when they are unchaperoned. Women's agency is often based on specific knowledge or skills and clearly prescribed within religious ritual or a domestic context. Within religious ritual women act on behalf of the community. Along with the rezandero, they mediate between the people and the Virgin/God. Women also mediate between men in disputes, where they are drunk or at risk of being out of control. Women take the responsible actions to resolve the conflict or separate the two sides in the dispute. As human women mediate between their people and God, so the Virgin, especially the Virgin of Guadalupe, mediates between people and God. This model of agency and power is examined further in Chapter 6 on the millenarian movement, where the Virgin of Guadalupe was prominent.

Many ritual statements are made about the solidarity and mutual support that should characterise the relationships between kin. This is particularly clear in the ritual relating to Todos Santos. At a death, the immediate family and kin of the deceased hold the main responsibility for ensuring both that the dead person departs safely from this world and that the living are protected. They must honour all of their ritual obligations to achieve this. Kin must be prepared to finance the nine days ritual and expenses if a relative, especially a poor relative, has died. The women of the bereaved household receive help from their female relatives, friends and neighbours in the cooking and preparation of food for hospitality, while male kin help the men in other necessary tasks. Prayers held on the anniversary of a death also require the attendance, support and help of kin.

Todos Santos similarly provides a context for statements about kinship relationships. The contents of a household's altar reflect and embody kinship networks in the quantity and quality of items displayed and offered to the family dead. Todos Santos is probably the most important annual occasion for family reunions (certainly more important than Christmas), when kin living outside Ojitlan return to honour and remember the dead both in the family household and at the graveyard.

Ritual makes important statements about the relationship between the living and the dead Ojitec. In the ritual relating to death, Ojitecs enjoy both autonomy and a

considerable moral responsibility. When a person dies, Ojitecs, as individuals and as members of a kin group and community, must ensure that the dead leave the world safely to reach their resting place, whilst also protecting the living from danger at this time. Both of these aims are achieved through ritual, which can be carried out by Ojitecs without outsiders. The relationship between the living and the dead can only become good and beneficial if Ojitecs carry out this ritual correctly. The bereaved household choose people from their close friends and neighbours to help in special ways during this process. These are notably the godparents of the cross and the person who sweeps the house on certain days and cares for the altar and candles. Ojitecs from the kin group and community know their responsibility to accompany and help.

The sweeping ritual, the prayers and the raising of the two crosses are essential to lift the shadow of the dead from the household and the community. The two crosses, one of adobe, charcoal and lime and the other of wood, absorb what remains of the dead's shadow. The symbolism of the first cross suggests that the essence of life on earth accompanies the dead to the graveyard.[33] Lime is essential for the cooking of maize for tortillas, a central part of the Ojitec diet. It seems to me that lime could be considered to symbolise culture here. Charcoal comes from the hearth of fires used for cooking, again a symbol of life and culture. A few houses are built of adobe, sun dried brick. Adobe could therefore also be seen a symbol of culture. Once the nine day ritual has been completed, both the living and the dead are safe. The dead become beneficent and remain in a sense part of the community. They are remembered for a number of years through prayers on the anniversary of the death and, of course, they return to visit and are welcomed at the fiesta of Todos Santos.

Although the focus is on the relationship between the living and the known dead, there is also ritual recognition of the unknown dead. Candles are lit on paths, highways and wayside crosses for the dead who have no-one to light candles for them and who by implication have no altar to visit and may be simply wandering around alone. This may serve as a kind of protection to the living community and boundaries are especially marked in this way.

Indigenous Catholic ritual refers of course to the relationship between the Ojitecs and the Catholic spiritual world, most frequently to the Virgin Mary in her many

[33] This is my suggestion. Ojitecs themselves explained it as "es la costumbre" – it is tradition.

manifestations. Ritual and human action (as in the organisation of community fiestas) make God and the Virgin accessible to the Ojitecs and in this context, they can ask for strength, help, purification and protection. Purification or cleansing is essential for human well-being and is an important theme. Purification/cleansing forms an integral part of the ritual at places of pilgrimage (San Andres, Sanctuario) and also in indigenous healing practices. The structure of ritual suggests that women and male ritual specialists are closer to the spiritual world than ordinary men. Certainly women pray on behalf of the whole community and in this sense they are mediators between the God/the Virgin and ordinary men.

The priest, as God's representative, has the power to imbue material objects with spiritual and curative power as in the *milagros*, *relíquias* and holy water brought home from the fiesta of San Andres Teotilalpan (see below). Equally the flowers that are blessed at Sanctuario can protect a household from storms and the palm crosses given out from the church on Palm Sunday protect against lightning. Therefore, through the intervention of the divine, objects from the natural environment can become means of protection against that same environment. God and the Virgin make nature safe or at least more under control.

Although all indigenous Catholic rituals take place in inhabited human space, statements are also made about the Ojitecs' relationships to the natural environment, both to cultivated nature (agriculture) and to wild nature. Ojitec knowledge of the natural environment and skills in using it are expressed on many occasions. The presence of wild nature in ritual embodies this knowledge and skills, whilst at the same time presenting a picture of wild nature participating with humans in the achievement of moral and spiritual aims. Thus li yin and sintillo are essential for ritual relating to death, while the creeper cocolmecatl is essential for making popo in rituals relating to life. Wild leaf plants, after contact with the sacred (rubbing on a cross or blessing by the priest) become relíquia and have reviving and life-giving/preserving properties. The altar at Todos Santos is a celebration of the Ojitec relationship with both cultivated and wild nature. The relationship of Ojitecs to cultivated nature (agriculture) is more protective than in the case of wild nature. Seeds must be removed to protect them from the dangerous air of a recently dead person, while seedlings gain strength from being placed on the altar at Todos Santos.

Knowledge of "hot" and "cold" in the environment is very important to maintain healthy human beings. Cold food and drink, such as popo, should not be taken at cold times of the day, such as early morning. With this in mind, local agricultural products (maize, cocoa, beans, domesticated animals) are transformed into food, which is essential for the hospitality characterising all Catholic ritual. Without a fruitful relationship with nature, Ojitec Catholic ritual could not take place in its present form.

The Ojitec relationship with wild nature is often ambivalent and needs ritual to ensure a beneficial result. Some of the following indigenous ideas and practices were important in the millenarian movement discussed in Chapter 6. There are forces or "owners" or "people" of the hills, springs and caves and they can have a good or bad effect on humans. Humans should be very careful if they go near. Every person has a companion spirit[34] (in the form of an animal, such as a frog or climatic phenomenon, such as wind). This companion spirit has a material form, which may wander about near the person and any injury or death of the companion spirit will affect the human in the same way. It is possible for someone to accidentally (or deliberately in witchcraft) harm a person through harming the animal that is their companion spirit. Shamans have companion spirits (or *nahuales*), which are stronger than those of ordinary humans. The ancianos used to use witchcraft to harm anyone who did not wish to be a mayordomo in the days before the system was discontinued in 1968. People still fear that they have these powers.

Curanderos (curers) are considered to have strong blood and strong sight and the "owners" of the natural world work with them, helping them to cure people. A curing session will involve discussion with the patient on their recent activities and a *limpia* (cleansing) with herbs/leafy branches/relíquia [35] and eggs. The curing involves rubbing the leaves (sometimes doused in aguardiente) and eggs over the body of the person, then the eggs are broken into a glass of water and "read" to diagnose the illness. The cleansing with eggs and herbs can be a cure in itself, because the eggs are considered to take away some of the illness and should be thrown in the river if possible which will carry away the evil. The herbs used should be laid outside the house in the shape of a cross. It is said that, in the old days, some curanderos could diagnose just by taking

[34] Companion spirits have been widely reported in ethnographic studies in Mesomamerica, for instance Gossen, 1975 and Weitlaner, 1977.

someone's pulse. Anyone can try to cure someone, using the above techniques, but curanderos are considered to have stronger sight and greater ability to diagnose and cure.

Espanto (fright) is a common cause of illness. The sick person will have had some kind of fright caused by, for instance, a fall, something falling nearby, a loud noise, a horse, thunder or lightning, fire (flames leaping). The person may have left their spirit at the site of the fright and part of the curing process will involve the curandero returning there, with the clothes the person wore to "blow" them and recover the person's spirit. Earth or water may be brought from the site and rubbed on the nape of the patient's neck to complete the cure. Another commonly diagnosed cause of illness is *ojo (*the evil eye). People with *ojo fuerte* (a "strong eye") can make others ill, either deliberately or simply through envying them. A red ribbon or red handkerchief worn around the neck will act as a protection.

The millenarian movement of 1972-3, examined in Chapter 6, drew on Ojitec ideas of shamans and forces in nature to develop opposition to the dam. A ritual similar to the curer's limpia was initiated as the final stage of the pilgrimage to the cave. Ideas of strong sight possessed by some were also prominent. The millenarian movement tried to create a new synthesis of traditional ideas and practices in defence of Ojitlan against the dam.

Regional Fiestas

There are several important fiestas which occur outside the territory of Ojitlan, but which are nevertheless well attended by Ojitecs. Of these the two most important are at San Andres Teotilalpan (in Cuicatec territory on the fifth Friday in Lent) and at Otatitlan (called Sanctuario near Tuxtepec, on 3rd May). In addition, Ojitecs who live near to Usila may attend the fiesta of San Felipe Usila. These regional fiestas are important for several reasons. The fiestas of San Andres and Sanctuario show a traditional kind of indigenous Catholicism, with much emphasis upon symbols and blessing by the priest, but with no attempt to enforce doctrinal classes on those attending. Since the trouble with the priests in Ojitlan, many Ojitecs leave these fiestas

[35] Reliquía are obtained from regional festivals, discussed in the next section, and kept in the home for use in curing if needed.

with a feeling of vindication that the Italians in Ojitlan really are doing something wrong. They really are "Protestants." Secondly, Ojitec have attended these fiestas for generations, demonstrating their longstanding contacts with ethnic and commercial centres outside Ojitlan. They are not an isolated ethnic group, as has been suggested by some writers.[36]

The fiesta of San Andres Teotilalpan

The journey itself is part of the event. There is no road to San Andres and Ojitec pilgrims must either walk from Ojitlan or take the bus as far as Jalapa de Díaz and then walk from there. From Paso Limón, pilgrims leave before dawn at 3 or 4 am and arrive either late the same night or, making an overnight stop, arrive the next morning at San Andres. The trip involves a fairly arduous and more or less steady climb. They take with them food and coffee for the journey, a jicara from which to drink water en route, money to buy food in San Andres and to offer to the saints and any items such as clothing that they wish to be blessed. Friends who cannot make the trip may send offerings along with one of the pilgrims.

At various points in the journey, where there are wayside crosses, the pilgrims pick bunches of leafy shrubs, rub them on the cross and then gently beat their feet and legs with the bunch to prevent tiredness and ensure a safe arrival. The first point is the borderline between Ojitlan and Flor Batavia, after which one enters Cuicatec territory. The second cross is again at a borderline, between Rancho Flor and San Andres. After this there are four crosses in the long ascent of Cerro Colorado. Pilgrims may cut walking sticks from the undergrowth around them, as the paths are difficult to negotiate especially if they are muddy. At night, after walking all day, it is good to rub aguardiente on one's feet (and also to drink it). Unless the pilgrims are unencumbered fast walkers, they will seek shelter for the night en route at the house of an acquaintance.

On arrival at San Andres, the pilgrims head straight for the church. Outside at the cross, they beat their feet and legs again with leaves and leave their walking sticks. They kneel at the door of the church and kneel their way forward to the altar, stay kneeling

[36] Young and Edholm (1974:96) criticise Barabas and Bartolomé (1974) for implying that the Chinantec of Ojitlan had been somehow isolated from history and other ethnic groups until the 1970s.

for a while and then sit in a pew. Women are more likely than men to do the full kneeling procedure. It is important to go immediately to the church on arrival to greet the Lord and say thank you for the safe journey and arrival. The pilgrims light candles in the church. A very important theme in the fiesta of San Andres is that of cleansing. Ojitecs who cannot themselves go to the fiesta may cleanse themselves with a candle (this is done by rubbing an unlit candle over the body) and ask a pilgrim to light the candle for them in the church of San Andres. Others may send money as an offering to the saints. Pilgrims go to cure themselves of illness, to ask for strength and help. After greeting the Lord in church, the pilgrims go to seek lodging for the visit, if possible at the house of a compadre of one of the party.

In San Andres there still exists the system of mayordomías which came to an end in Ojitlan in the late 1960s. A mayordomo in San Andres is elected to bear the cost of the fiesta, which in 1978 was about 18,000 pesos (approximately £450 – a day's agricultural wage being paid at around a £1 a day). The mayordomo has to kill a bullock to feed his guests[37] and pay for musicians to play at his house, aguardiente and fireworks. He also provides candles for the fiesta.

On the Wednesday before the fifth Friday in Lent, prayers are held in the mayordomo's house and then the candles are taken in procession to the church. The participants, led by the mayor domo and his wife, include people from San Andres and pilgrims from the wider region, including Ojitlan. At the church, the priest receives the candles and then carries on blessing people and their *relíquias*[38] as requested. After a blessing, the pilgrim leaves a cash offering on the altar. People take their relíquias to the various saints' images in the church. They rub the relíquias on the images and then on themselves in a process of cleansing. The relíquias absorb the good power of the saints with which a pilgrim cleanses herself. A few people position themselves in the church to cleanse people, as it were, professionally. One woman from Ojitlan would, for a fee, prick a pilgrim all over (reputedly with a viper's fang) to let out the evil and cleanse the person.

---

[37] The mayordomo's guests are the people of San Andres. Outsiders, such as the Ojitecs, are not invited to eat.

[38] Relíquias is the Spanish word for the bunches of leafy twigs, which people take back to their houses after blessing and which are considered to have beneficent and curative powers.

Thursday is the *vispera* (eve) of the fiesta and is in effect the most important day. Mass is held at 5 am. Throughout the day, people ask for blessings from the priest for themselves or for particular items they have brought with them (especially children's clothes). Outside the church, there are stalls that sell framed pictures of the saints, rosaries and *milagros*[39], which the pilgrims buy and take to be blessed along with their relíquias. In the evening, mass is held followed by the burning of fireworks. Dances are held, on Wednesday and Thursday nights, both in the house of the mayordomo and on the basketball court.

Large fiestas of this kind are very important marketplaces and there is a considerable variety of goods for sale in San Andres. Some stalls are set up with benches and tables for the sale of food and drink. These are run by locals of San Andres or from the nearby village of Teutila. In addition, sellers come from Puebla and Tehuacan (by light plane to Teutila) with clothes and blankets. Other goods available on the stalls include bread from Chiquihuitlan, baskets from Cuicatlan, earthenware jars and water jars from Oaxaca and industrially produced plastic containers and *petates* (sleeping mats). Some peasant pilgrims also bring small amounts of their produce to sell and simply sit down on the grass with the goods laid out around them on petates or plastic sheeting. The lowlanders (including the Ojitecs and Usileños) bring dried chiles, green chiles and tobacco while the highlanders (including San Andres and the surrounding area) offer local fruit and vegetables.

The pilgrims to San Andres come from at least three ethnic groups – the Chinantec (from Ojitlan and Usila), the Mazatecs (from Jalapa de Díaz and other communities) and the Cuicatec themselves. Spanish, however badly spoken, is the *lengua franca.* The Ojitecs of the tobacco growing lowlands have acquaintances and compadres in San Andres, dating from the time when the Cuicatecs used to come to work every season on the tobacco. These contacts are followed up when it comes to finding somewhere to sleep or eat in San Andres.

Friday, ostensibly the main day of the fiesta, is the day when most outsiders leave for home. After attending early morning mass, the pilgrims again seek the priest's blessing

[39] *Milagros (*literally "miracles*")* are pieces of a silvery metal shaped in the form of parts of the human body and animals. If you have a bad arm-ache, you buy a milagro of an arm and have it blessed by the priest to ease your pain. Likewise you may buy a milagro of a chicken, a pig or a cow and have it blessed to protect your own chickens, pigs and cows.

for themselves and for a safe journey home. Before leaving the pilgrims buy food for the journey, since it will be impossible to do so on the way home unless one has friends on the route. Finally outside the church, the pilgrims beat their feet and legs with leaves and rub some earth from the foot of the cross into the nape of the neck or anywhere else where one has a pain. On the return journey pauses are made at the same crosses as on the outward trip to beat the feet and legs and other parts of the body which may ache. There is more hearty beating in more parts of the body than on the outward trip, reflecting the increasing tiredness of the pilgrims. Pilgrims emphasised that this would help to counteract tiredness and did not acknowledge any expiatory significance of the action.

The Ojitecs who opposed the priests of Ojitlan commented that in San Andres they celebrated fiestas properly and that the priest there was a real Catholic. He did not attempt to interfere with the dances that were held during the fiesta or demand that they were held on different days from the religious ceremonies. He did not force the doctrine on to people by insisting that they attend classes. The mass in church was not dominated by ordinary people talking on about messages or stories in the Bible. Instead the mass was chanted properly and led by the priest. The priest accepted people's requests for blessing of themselves and material objects, such as a child's clothing (brought with them), relíquia, milagros and pictures of the saints. He allowed traditional cleansing with the saints' images and was often available to greet the pilgrims in the church on their arrival. The visit to San Andres helped to fuel the Ojitecs' resistance to the Ojitlan priests and they would return from the pilgrimage with renewed determination to resist the priests' reforms.

The Fiesta of Sanctuario

Otatitlan, on the banks of the river Papaloapan near Tuxtepec, can now be reached by road by two routes, one of which also involves crossing the river by ferryboat. It is undoubtedly the biggest fiesta that the Ojitecs attend and thousands of people visit it (coming from Oaxaca and Veracruz, as well as from other parts of the republic). Some pilgrims go to make a promise to the saint and ask to be cured of an illness or to make some other request. For this wish to be fulfilled, the pilgrim should attend the fiesta for seven successive years. (For San Andres, only two consecutive visits are necessary.)

Most Ojitecs travel to Otatitlan on 2nd May and stay overnight to return home the next day. Buses take them to the fiesta from Ojitlan via Tuxtepec and there is a tremendous crush to get aboard. Formerly, the Ojitecs used to walk or travel by mule or on horseback. Because of the good communications by road, the fiesta at Otatitlan is also the biggest marketplace of any of the fiestas mentioned here. People visit as pilgrims and consumers.

On arrival, the pilgrims make a visit to "greet the saint" (an image of Jesus Christ in the church). There is a special back entrance to the church, whereby after ascending some stairs the pilgrim can actually walk past the image fixed high above the altar. The pilgrim takes with her a bunch of flowers (which can be bought at the church gates) and on reaching the image, she strokes the image with the flowers and then strokes herself with them in the familiar process of cleansing. A fine sacking is placed over Christ's loin cloth on which pilgrims may pin little medallions and other items, praying for a blessing or a miracle. Some wipe their faces in the cloak of the angel at the side of Christ. Then the pilgrim descends the steps on the other side and out again into the open air. During the fiesta there is constantly a large mass of people waiting to enter to greet the saint.

People ask the priest to bless the flowers used in this purification. Some leave the flowers in the church "for the Lord" while others take them home to protect them from harm. If you take the flowers with you on a journey, you will arrive safely. Also, when there is a very bad storm and a lot of wind, you can burn a few of the flowers to protect the household. After the visit to the church, the people wander around the many stalls and entertainments, but do not buy any goods to take home until they are on their way the following day.

The pilgrims from Ojitlan stick together in groups (of maybe ten or so) as this protects them from robbers. No-one wanders off on their own, especially not the women. A dance is held in the square in the evening where once again the people from Ojitlan stick together, Ojitecs dancing with Ojitecs while their mothers look on. People sleep together in groups in the open air. The contingent from Paso Limón asks to sleep in the garden of a house, where they have slept for a number of years and where they feel safe surrounded by the metal railings.

The next morning the pilgrims enter the church to pray, kneeling with a lit candle, and ask the priest for a blessing. After this they are ready to head for the market stalls and then for home. Many of the sellers of goods come from Oaxaca with hammocks, embroidered hand-woven clothes, baskets, earthenware jars and other kinds of pottery, sombreros, horse saddles and other leather goods. From Tlaxcala come sellers of bread and also large trucks full of blankets, clothes, tablecloths, handkerchiefs and other textiles. Other stalls sell all kinds of metalware and kitchen goods, and cheap clothes. In general, the goods for sale at Otatitlan are cheaper than in Tuxtepec and this is certainly an extra reason for going to the fiesta of Sanctuario. Every pilgrim brings back home some purchases from the fiesta. Formerly, the fiesta fell at the end of the tobacco season in Ojitlan when the workers had been paid and had some money to spend. However, now the final payments from Tabamex take much longer to arrive than they did from the private credit agents so there may not be tobacco money around at all.

After the dispute with the Catholic priests of Ojitlan (which escalated with a violent protest on 24 October 1976 and the priests' exclusion from the church), the festivals of San Andres and Sanctuario assumed an additional importance as examples of "good Catholicism".[40] Some common themes found in the regional fiestas were: the journey involved arriving for the *vispera* (eve) of the fiesta; on arrival the pilgrim's very first act was to go straight to the church to "greet" the Lord or the saint; the ritual involved bunches of leafy twigs or flowers, which were stroked on the image of the saint and then used to stroke or "cleanse oneself"; the theme of *limpiar (*cleansing) was prominent. Ojitecs could receive a blessing from the priest without having to go to classes. They could obtain ritual items that had been blessed by the priest such as holy water and the relíquias, which were very important in indigenous Catholic ritual and curing practices. In the evening of the fiestas, dances were held. In the morning the Ojitecs always went to the church before leaving to ask for a blessing, which was given without them having to "earn" it in any way, such as by attending classes. One could also ask for other material items to be blessed such as children's clothes or something belonging to someone who could not attend the fiesta. The Ojitecs could also attend mass led by a priest, without the intervention or involvement of "catequistas" or "ordinary talking" (seen as signs of Protestantism). The traditional Catholicism of these

[40] Clarke (2000:204), citing Norget (1997), notes that "locally, it is not uncommon for adjacent communities to be led by priests with very different orientations".

regional fiestas convinced many Ojitecs that the Italian priests of Ojitlan were in the wrong. The resistance to the priests is discussed more fully in Chapter 7.

Chapter 5: Ethnicity

In this section I shall examine some discussions of Chinantec (Ojitec) identity. The first time that I heard about Ojitlan was in a discussion about ethnicity, introducing a context that implied that the Ojitec were defending their identity and their culture, which were under threat from (external) national forces. This was the article published as an IWGIA (International Working Group on Indigenous Affairs[1]) report in 1973, which tends to portray the Ojitec as victims, albeit victims making some attempt to fight back through millenarianism as their last strategy. Ethnicity and Ojitec culture seemed to be a site of struggle, between, on the one hand, the forces threatening ethnocide and, on the other, the millenarian movement asserting indigenous culture and resistance.

As background to my current study, I review some US anthropological work on the Ojitec or Chinantec and discuss the theoretical interests expressed there. I also examine some further aspects of the literature on ethnicity, on both Mexico and elsewhere. The Mexican intellectual and political climate in the 1970s fostered a debate on how to define, support and develop the Indian population. Arguments raged about the class position of the Indians and the value of investigations of Indian culture per se.[2] This formed the backdrop to my early theoretical interests in ethnicity. I was partly trying to explain my own contradictory experiences, which included my understanding of the distinctive culture of the Ojitec, but also my observations of how in practice Ojitecs would choose to deny it or claim it according to the context of interaction. For me, this seemed to raise regularly the question of what it meant to be Ojitec.

Ethnicity and Ethnocide

The question of Chinantec ethnicity was raised very forcefully in an international forum with the publication in 1973 of an IWGIA document, written by two Argentinian

[1] This group is linked to Survival International, both of which are concerned with the survival of indigenous peoples and their culture, originally in areas such as the Amazonian basin and now world-wide. The IWGIA report was reprinted as an article in Critique of Anthropology 1, 1974, which is the source I have used.

[2] I use the term Indian throughout this chapter, following the practice of many of the writers discussed. My discussions with Mexican anthropologists during 1976-8, however, emphasised that the term "indio" (Indian) was acknowledged to have negative connotations and that the term "indígena" (indigenous people) was being seen as more neutral and preferable. In most of this dissertation, I tend to use the latter term.

anthropologists who had been employed by the Papaloapan River Commission to carry out a study in Ojitlan. The aim of the report was:

> to call attention to a program of ethnocide which is being applied to ethnic minorities in Mexico as part of a policy of capitalist development being carried out by the Mexican government through regional development agencies (Barabas and Bartolomé, 1974:74).

The authors describe the activities of the Papaloapan River Commission and other government agencies with regard to the construction of the Miguel Alemán Dam on the River Tonto between 1949 and 1955. This construction meant that 20,000 Mazatec people had to be removed from the area of the future reservoir. The authors give details of the disastrous effects that the whole project, in particular the ill-planned resettlement, had on the Mazatec people. They summarise the process as one which accelerated the acculturation of the Mazatecs and which incorporated them into the national economy as a rural proletariat (1974:80).

In 1972, the Mexican President announced that a second dam was to be built in the area, again affecting an indigenous population who would need to be moved from the future reservoir of the dam. The Cerro de Oro dam was to be built in the Chinantec territory of Ojitlan. The government bodies in charge of the Cerro de Oro dam and the resettlement project were the Papaloapan River Commission (Comisión del Papaloapan, a regional development agency within the Secretaría de Recursos Hidráulicos) and the Instituto Nacional Indigenista. The authors argued that these agencies shared a common aim, which was to incorporate the Indians into the national capitalist system of production and consumption. Their strategies for achieving this were the elimination of the Indians' "economic semi-independence" and cultural identity. The Chinantec, according to Barabas and Bartolomé, were to undergo a process of "cultural extermination" (ethnocide) which served the needs of the Mexican state as they (the authors) formulated them above.

The main problem with this analysis is that it seems to rest on a dangerously simplistic notion of the opposition of two cultures (Chinantec versus Mexican National) and one could assume from reading it that if only the Chinantec were left alone in Ojitlan, there would be no problem. Thus the authors write that

> The Chinantec have been betrayed, essentially by the bilingual mediators; Indians whose reference group is mestizo society and who have used their ability to speak Spanish and their positions in the municipal authority, which they share with mestizo exploiters, to act as instruments of the Commission (Barabas and Bartolomé, 1974:85).

Although the role of bilingual mediators is recognised above by the authors, the general thrust of the argument implies that, except for these individuals, the Chinantec are a homogeneous group with "their own language, a coherent system of social and kinship organisation and an integrated relationship with a cosmos of their own conception" (ibid:84). The suggestion is that the troubles in Ojitlan began with the recent intervention of the Papaloapan River Commission over the Cerro de Oro dam project. The Chinantec are seen as victims of the Commission workers and of the bilingual mediators.

However, it is highly misleading to idealise the position of the Chinantec of Ojitlan before 1972. Indeed, the very success of the "bilingual mediators" was due to the fact that the Chinantec were not a homogeneous and unified group, but already internally stratified and linked economically, politically and socially to non-Indian groups both in Ojitlan and beyond.[3] Barabas and Bartolomé appear to espouse a rather romantic notion of ethnicity and tradition as a complete and integrated entity, which is, by implication, timeless and unchanging and should remain so. They imply that learning Spanish inevitably leads to loss of cultural identity. Young and Edholm, in the same volume, questioned these assumptions and argued for "the possibility of a dialectical relationship between ethnic identity/traditional culture and national culture and the process of its development" (1974:97). They add that there is a need to analyse how "traditional" cultures are[4] and to consider the role of colonial domination in the concept of ethnic identity.

As a signatory to the Declaration of Barbados, Bartolomé committed himself to the following statement:

> The anthropology now required in Latin America is not that which relates to the Indians as objects of study, but rather that which perceives the colonial situation and commits itself to the struggle for liberation.... Anthropologists must

[3] Cf. Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

[4] This point is developed later in the section headed Ethnic Divisions are Class Divisions.

> denounce systematically...cases of genocide and those practices conducive to ethnocide (IWGIA, Declaration of Barbados, 1972).

In publishing the IWGIA report on Cerro de Oro and the Chinantec, Barabas and Bartolomé were acting on the principles in the Declaration of Barbados and speaking out, as did other anthropologists at that time, on other issues.[5] Although some cultural change as a result of resettlement would be likely, the accusation of ethnocide seems perhaps a little too dramatic. The Ojitec had been affected by economic and political changes (at regional and national level) since at least the time of the Spanish Conquest. Their indigenous culture incorporated Spanish Catholicism. They were not an isolated, self-sufficient group, as was the case with some Amazonian Indian peoples defended under the principles of the Declaration of Barbados. Some Amazonian Indians did suffer ethnocide after the sudden contact with outsiders, who were intent on exploiting them and their resources. It seems as if Barabas and Bartolomé conceptualised the Ojitec as akin to Amazonian Indians, in their isolation and vulnerability.[6] This may have led them to draw on their South American experience and to offer the dramatic prediction of ethnocide.

Early Anthropology on the Chinantla : Cultural Traits and Distributions

The earliest anthropological work on the Chinantec addressed the question of "being Chinantec" as a matter of cultural traits. In the 1930s some North American anthropologists were engaged in the discovery, description and classification of cultures in the Chinantec area. Their work tends to be concerned with the identification of and distribution of particular cultural objects and practices (cultural traits). The period of reliable reporting on the Chinantla is said to begin with a series of reconnaissance expeditions made by the Weitlaners and Bevan in different parts of the territory.[7] Their explorations were relatively short (a few months at a time travelling) and aimed at

---

[5] Urban and Sherzer (1991:14) note that "indigenous advocacy by anthropologists and others through IWGIA" (and other organisations) was a feature of the 1970s and 1980s.

[6] Ramos (1994) presents a very interesting analysis of the creation of a similarly idealised image of the "good indian" by pro-indian NGOs in Brazil. The NGO indigenist organisations have become very efficient lobbying and campaigning groups. They have created the "hyperreal indian", who is good, heroic, suffering and principled – and whom international donors want to help. Ramos sees this as part of the process of professionalisation and bureaucratisation of the indigenist movement in Brazil. The model indian justifies the funding. In the case of the Ojitec, Barabas and Bartolomé are perhaps constructing them in the image of the noble, Amazonian indian.

[7] See Weitlaner, 1939, for details of the itineraries and time schedules of these expeditions.

recording indigenous material culture, beliefs and practices, such as the style of dress and housing, ritual dances, age-grading systems and *tianguis* (markets). The presence or absence of different forms of these were used as criteria for identifying sub-cultures within the region. The exercise was essentially one of classification, though the cultural objects and practices seem to have been chosen as criteria simply because they were "there".

This seemingly random selection of criteria in fact made the identification of sub-cultures problematic even in the authors' own terms. In one article, when it came to an actual ethnographic description of the different sub-cultures, the authors made the division in terms of geography and ecology into Highland and Lowland Chinantec. The discussion and comparison takes refuge at the end of the article in a psychologism of little explanatory value:

> The mountain Chinantec thus partake of the Chinantla and its ways, but tend to place their allegiance to the sierra above it (Weitlaner and Cline, 1964:551).

In the final analysis the classification is based on geographical features. The writers' approach is sometimes patronising or dismissive of Chinantec culture, which is implicitly compared with North American society/culture. Thus, for instance, "agricultural practices are still primitive and deficient" (ibid:539) and "humour is generally unsophisticated" (ibid:543).

Other articles written by this group of anthropologists announce discoveries of unusual or exotic items, such as a Chinantec calendar (Weitlaner, 1936) or a musical bow (Weitlaner, 1940). Irmgard Weitlaner describes a Chinantec calendar of 18 months of 20 days each, once used in the south-eastern Chinantla. The main part of the second article centres on a description of a musical bow found in Chiltepec and a discussion of the distribution of similar bows found on the American continent. The aim of the article is:

> a few observations which may serve as materials for the further study of American single trait distributions (Weitlaner, 1940:101).

There are many criticisms which can be levelled at this general approach. Though the writers have left us with some details of "exotic" aspects of Chinantec culture and their

distribution, and some attempts at classification of sub-cultures, the picture is incomplete and static. Their description and analysis tend to focus on discrete items and details without an attempt to examine the relationships or to analyse social structure. Where "social organisation" is discussed, it is solely in terms of the family and the political hierarchy of offices. Social change was not an issue for these authors, except in so far as cultural traits have disappeared or are disappearing, so there is no attempt to analyse or explain change. The underlying (diffusionist) assumption is perhaps that change is inevitable and comes from outside, but that the relative isolation of these communities has so far restricted it. Hence the need to record these cultures while they are still "there".[8]

The Ecological Approach

The ecological approach to ethnicity seeks to explain how ethnic identity is maintained in the context of contact with other ethnic groups. Two writers in this genre are Fredrik Barth and Henning Siverts. Their analysis centres on how and under what circumstances ethnic identity is maintained in situations of contact between different ethnic groups. They assume a "steady state" of affairs.

Barth developed this approach as a direct criticism of the previously described cultural trait tradition, where "differences between groups become differences in trait inventories" (Barth, 1969:12). According to him, the cultural traits thus considered have been defined by outsiders without noting the importance that members of an ethnic group may attach to them. In such an analysis of culture, no attention is paid to ethnic organisation, the relationship between different ethnic groups or indeed to the nature of the group which persists over time. He argues instead for "the critical focus of investigation...[to be].....the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses" Barth,1969:15).

In his analysis Barth seeks to explain how the Pathans have remained a "highly self-aware ethnic group", whilst inhabiting a large, ecologically diverse area, without

[8] In 1977, the Instituto Nacional Indigenista published a volume of myths and legends of the Chinantla, collected by Roberto Weitlaner. Comments on the front fly-leaf suggest a continuing concern to record something before it disappears. The comment is as follows: "The resettlement of the Chinantecs of the River Santo Domingo increases the importance of this book. The Chinantecs will be moved away from the Chinantla, they will lose their 'enchanted places', their ties and roots and these stories will be deprived of their magical background" (my translation from the Spanish, Weitlaner 1977).

centralised political institutions and whilst being in contact with many different cultural groups. In order to do this he isolates the key aspects of Pathan identity and then focuses on the boundaries between Pathans and non-Pathans to consider how that identity is maintained.[9]

Pathan identity depends not on the sum total of all aspects of Pathan culture,[10] but only on "certain cultural traits" which Pathans themselves have selected as criteria for membership of the ethnic group. These are first, patrilineal descent, second, Islam, and third, Pathan custom. This latter includes speaking the Pashto language and customs based on the values of male autonomy and equality, self-expression and aggressiveness. Together these provide a Pathan self-image. In Barth's view, three central institutions in Pathan life (hospitality, men's councils and the seclusion of women) provide opportunities ("organisational mechanisms") for the realisation of these core Pathan values. Barth also notes that these values are generally accepted by the surrounding peoples so that success as a Pathan implies behaviour that is admired by non-Pathans.

The boundaries that Barth focuses on are actual geographical boundaries in that they are areas on the edge of Pathan territory. He shows that where economic and political circumstances severely limit the ways in which Pathans can be autonomous, then individuals will not seek to maintain a Pathan identity since within its terms they are failures. They will choose an alternative ethnic identity, where one is available, in order to be able to perceive their position more favourably. Pathan identity can therefore remain unchanged and intact because failures and anomalies change identities and leave the group.

It is only when a majority of Pathans in a particular area are all faced with the necessity of compromising Pathan values that Pathan identity is modified slightly. Barth adds that urbanisation and new forms of administration are creating changed conditions, under which he expects there will have to be "radical" change in Pathan culture and its organisational relevance.

---

[9] Later writers, such as Jackson (1991) have continued to develop Barth's ideas on boundaries and boundary maintenance of interacting social groups. She is particularly interested in the process by which a relatively isolated culture becomes an ethnic group and self-awareness transforms in the direction of ethnic consciousness (Urban and Sherzer, 1991:5).

[10] There is considerable diversity of culture and lifestyle, which is still recognised as Pathan.

Writing in a similar vein on Mexico, Siverts' main assumption is that a "steady state" of inter-ethnic relations exists in Chiapas. This steady state

> can only be brought about when individual actors constantly face similar dilemmas of allocation of labour and capital to which the repertoire of responses is limited and stereotyped. It is further assumed that the cultural biases, which form part of the constellation of constraints, tend to be confirmed and hence perpetuated through the repeatedly rewarded choices (Siverts, H. 1969:102).

In Highland Chiapas, Siverts found that there were considerable cultural differences between the highland Indians and the Spanish-speaking *Ladinos*[11] and that such differences were being maintained over time.

He attempts to explain the maintenance of ethnic boundaries by describing the distribution of assets (such as land, technological skills, small industries, craft specialisation, education)[12] and by examining the forms of interaction between the two ethnic groups in the market (including business, trade) and in administration. He focuses on the constraints on Indians which prevent them from moving into Ladino spheres of activity. His conclusion is that

> One single factor, the principle of land allocation, produces a situation which, in combination with the ecological constraints, such as the presence of a Ladino ethnic category defending its position in the web of transactions, tends to limit the range of activities of individuals born as *Oxchuqueros* (Indians belonging to the community of Oxchuc) (Siverts, 1969:114).

He refers here to the fact that an Indian's only access to land is through remaining a part of his community and honouring traditional obligations, since he/she is not in a financial position to buy land as Ladinos can do, while other economic possibilities are limited.

Those few Indians who have succeeded in the Ladino occupations of business and the professions have become incorporated into the Indian community as "experts" to serve their fellow Indians. It is particularly interesting to note that the "young educated elite" are rather anxious to obtain recognition in their own society, rather than seeking to

---

[11] Ladino, like the term mestizo, designates people whose orientation is towards the national Spanish-speaking society.

[12] By implication, capital is clearly to be included in this list of assets, though Siverts' analysis does not spell this out.

become accepted as Ladinos. Siverts does not really explain this phenomenon, but he seems to see in it a defence of Indian culture and society against the Ladino. It appears to be the "unsuccessful", such as abandoned women from some Indian communities, who seek Ladinisation as a "desperate measure".

One of the main criticisms of both Barth and Siverts concerns their stress on the "steady state" of inter-ethnic relations. Barth deliberately focuses on traditional forms of organisation and their interaction to explain the status quo. Though he does acknowledge that the recent penetration of modern administration will have wide-ranging effects on Pathan identity, he excludes this from his analysis on the grounds that it is not a factor contributing to the historical state of inter-ethnic relations. Siverts assumes a "steady state" because the proportion of monolingual Oxchuqueros has not changed, indicating the continued importance of Indian languages. He also observes that Indians have not entered Ladino spheres of activity or embraced Ladino values, despite a long period of contact.

Barth does not examine the role of the state and wider economic and political structures. Urban and Sherzer (1991:7) comment that "in Barth's formulation of ethnicity, there is no special role given to the state". Barth mentions colonial regimes only in the context of the peace that they may enforce on previously warring ethnic groups, which may affect ethnic identities and boundaries (Barth, 1969:36). However, colonial domination has also had radical effects on many indigenous economies, including their control of land, as has been documented, for instance, by Meillassoux (1974) and Wisner, B. et al. (1977). Both Barth and Siverts stress how ethnic identity is maintained successfully because of particular economic and political circumstances, but the analysis remains static because the question of broader economic and political change is not addressed.

This means, for instance, in the case of Chiapas that many questions are left unanswered or not raised such as population pressure on Indian land, migration and the implications of Indian waged labour on local Ladino land or on the coffee plantations on the Pacific coast. Young (1978) suggests that capitalist development can affect population growth, which would certainly have repercussions for the continued "stability" of indigenous communities with a restricted land base. A consideration of some of these aspects, set in the context of the development of capitalism in the area, might have made it harder to propose the existence of a "steady state" of inter-ethnic relations. In fact, reading

between the lines in both analyses, it is possible to detect "conflicting tendencies" that do not fit the author's model and so have been left to one side.

Siverts' "ecological approach" presents a rather sanitised, even cosy, picture of inter-ethnic relations in Chiapas. Although he describes conflict at some points (as in Ladino violence to control Indians), it is not important in his analysis and disappears in the language he chooses to summarise the situation. Thus he writes of "ecological constraints" and "a polyethnic society based on economic specialisation and symbiotic interdependence between the constituent units" (Siverts, 1969:101). An alternative approach using the same evidence might see it as based on economic and political inequalities, with the dominant group, Ladinos, also using force to maintain their position. This second approach could analyse conflicts of interest, resistance and possibilities for change.

Barth and Siverts both assume that ethnic identity is only challenged in interaction with other ethnic groups. Neither Barth nor Siverts look at the internal dynamics and possibilities of conflict within the ethnic group. They therefore imply a homogeneity within the ethnic group, which is highly questionable.

A further problem with Siverts' work is the lack of a clear definition of culture or ethnic identity. He fails to identify the key features of Oxchuc identity, though he refers to a "set of idioms" and implies that these include dress, language, traditional products for trade and participation in the Oxchuc "hierarchy of tribal offices".[13] Oxchuc values are not really discussed except indirectly, for instance, where they appear as "constraints" to change. Thus deviation from Oxchuc patterns of production and consumption leads to witchcraft accusations and even homicide. He makes no attempt to explain what "being Oxchuc" actually means to the Oxchuqueros, so we are left with a picture of ethnic identity as a kind of collection of customs. This hinders an analysis of change in ethnic identity, while Barth's formulation enables us to see a process of accommodation to different circumstances.

[13] The corporate structure of the Indian community appears to be relatively intact.

Ethnic Divisions are Class Divisions

The first mention of class in relation to Ojitlan itself comes from Arthur Rubel, a North American anthropologist who carried out research there in the early 1950s. He makes a distinction between "ethnic class" and "economic class", although it is not quite clear how he envisages the relationship between the two.[14] They appear to be almost alternative ways of classifying the population rather than analytical concepts. According to Rubel, "the criteria for 'class' on an ethnic basis are the following: language, social functions, recreation groups, intermarriage, location of living places, types of building, occupation, dress." Every household could be assigned an ethnic class on this basis.

On the question of economic class (defined in terms of occupation and wealth), Rubel writes that "there is no class structure in the Indian community of Ojitlan. There is a class structure within the 'political entity' called Ojitlan." In making this statement, Rubel is echoing Julio de la Fuente's argument of the time that Indian groups were internally undifferentiated and that "in any attempt to divide a given political entity into classes, that entity must include an element of gente de razón."

This theory can be criticised on a number of counts. Firstly, the available evidence does not support it. Material to be presented throughout this thesis clearly demonstrates that the indigenous Ojitec were an internally differentiated group before the 1950s. Even Rubel's own notes contradict his hypothesis. He writes, for instance, that while the great majority of Indians are engaged in agricultural occupations, "some of the most important *comerciantes* (traders) are Chinantecs". He also remarks that most non-Indians are engaged in non-agricultural pursuits, but the few who do work on the land "are on no higher economic level than are some Indians."

Rubel's argument also shows a curious and confusing use of the term "class". His "economic class" is not defined in terms of a group's relationship to the means of production and his use of the term clearly equates it with "ethnic class". The existence of a class structure, in his analysis, depends on the presence or absence of certain

[14] Rubel (1950), Notes from a conversation with Sr. de la Fuente, in unpublished fieldnotes. Since these are unpublished notes, it would be unfair to criticise them too heavily. However, they are indicative of a general theoretical trend.

individuals (gente de razón) and not at all on economic relationships. Therefore, the gente de razon *per se* bring social change and class differentiation to another supposedly homogeneous ethnic group. Rubel's term "ethnic class" is also potentially confusing because of the word's connotations of economic criteria while he uses it to refer to a group defined in terms of culture and status.

Friedlander, writing twenty years later, also equates ethnic divisions with class divisions. She is strongly critical of the theoretical approach that defines Indians solely in terms of their culture. In her study of Hueyapan, Mexico, she stresses that the Hueyapeños' "so-called Indian identity relates more precisely to their low socio-economic position in the national stratification system" (Friedlander, 1975:xv). According to her, they are "poor peasants" rather than Indians with a separate culture.

She considers that ethnicity in Hueyapan is defined in relation to the dominant group (non-Indians) and is often phrased by the people themselves in terms of things that they do not have rather than in positive terms. They "lack", for instance, education, civilisation, knowledge of Spanish. Many of the ingredients of "traditional" Indian food and medicine were not available in Mexico until after the Spanish Conquest, when they were imported or introduced.[15] When Indians begin to adopt items or behaviour from the dominant group, the latter downgrades them and adopts others so that the Indians are still perceived as "lacking". Being Indian, according to this author, is a matter of being subordinate to non-Indians and not primarily a question of cultural differences nor indeed cultural isolation. Unfortunately, this leads her to assume that all Indians are poor and she therefore ignores economic differentiation within the Indian community itself.

Yet within Friedlander's own writing, there are many hints that there is considerable economic differentiation in the Hueyapeño community. Thus, the family with whom she lived "lives reasonably well, but (is)....not among the wealthier residents in Hueyapan" (Friedlander, 1975:1). There is also an unequal distribution of ejido land, though the consequences of this for differentiation within the community are not

[15] Siverts also notes that the Chamulas of Chiapas use in their fiestas imitations of French grenadier uniforms used by Maximilian's troops in 1862 (Siverts, 1969:105). Taussig (1987:377) refers to indigenous culture as a product of the colonial encounter and therefore "invented tradition". Abercrombie (1991) notes for the Bolivian fiesta-cargo system that it is "a Spanish colonial residue now interpreted as 'Indian'."

examined. She mentions that the Hueyapeños have developed cash-crop production of fruit, which is sold in Mexico City, and that there are seven locally owned trucks for transporting the produce. It must be clear that a truck owner is by no means "poor" in the same way as a landless peasant. She also intends to:

> analyse the roles that various non-Indian groups have played in transforming Hueyapan indigenous culture, while preserving the villagers' Indian identity and low socio-economic status in Mexican society (ibid:xv).

Among these non-Indian groups she cites schoolteachers, while at the same time living in an Indian household where one of the members was a schoolteacher. In treating all schoolteachers as "outsiders", she fails to acknowledge the way in which Indians themselves are involved in their own transformation.

Friedlander's work is useful in that she stresses that Indian identity is defined in relation to other groups in Mexican society, in particular the dominant group of non-Indians. Her discussion of the changing content of Hueyapan culture is interesting and important, since it makes clear that culture is affected and transformed by economic and political relationships. Finally, her empirical observation that ethnic identity is very restricted to place (Hueyapan) is valuable. There is no sense of "Indianhood" beyond this, certainly not on a national level.[16]

The main problem with Friedlander's work is that, along with the other writers in this section, she equates class and ethnic divisions and thereby implies the homogeneity of the ethnic group. Although her analysis seems more sophisticated than Rubel's, she nevertheless joins him in attributing social change and economic differentiation to the presence of another ethnic group as, for instance, in her stress on the role of outsiders as agents of transformation.

Two Mexican writers, Pozas and Pozas (1977:16), argue that the essential characteristic of the Indians is that they are the people easiest to exploit in the Mexican system and that the key to understanding the Indian situation is the analysis of these relations of exploitation. All other Indian characteristics (such as language, dress, culture) are considered as secondary. It is the Indian's participation in economic production which

[16] Siverts (1969:116) made a similar point and stressed that "Indianhood" in this sense only exists among romantic intellectuals and certain idealistic absentee politicians.

determines all the changes in his (sic) personal life and in that of his community and culture.

The authors stress that Indians do not form one class and that there is economic differentiation within the group. However, in the analysis most Indians are seen to fall into one of several sub-categories of the proletarian class such as semi-proletarian or sub-proletarian. The definition of these could be disputed. Few become petty or middle bourgeoisie and those that do "are in the process of losing their Indian characteristics" (1977:137).

This approach, though more refined than Friedlander's in its recognition of some differentiation within the Indian group, still tends to equate class with ethnic divisions in the suggestion that ascending the class ladder means becoming "non-Indian." Clearly if the defining characteristic of the Indian is seen to be that he/she is exploited, then an Indian who reaches the position of "exploiter" (even on a small scale) must therefore become non-Indian in terms of this analysis. However, this formulation is limited because it underestimates the persistence of distinctive indigenous world views and community culture. In Chapter 1, I noted how indigenous tobacco entrepreneurs emphasised common ethnic bonds with those who received credit from them. In this example, maintaining an indigenous identity appeared to contribute to economic success.

It is important, nonetheless, to see the strong economic determinism of the Pozas' argument in its Mexican intellectual and political context. Their work (and that of others) was a very necessary counterbalance to the influential culturalist approaches which informed official thinking on the "Indian question" in Mexico and which have manifestly failed to take into account the real economic causes of the poverty of the Indian groups.[17] At this macro level of argument, it is perhaps understandable that empirical "complications" (such as the existence of indigenous capitalist entrepreneurs)

[17] This was a regular theme I observed in discussions with young Mexican anthropologists and within the regional centres of the INI. I attended the III Conference on INI Social Investigations (III Reunión de Investigaciones Sociales del INI) held in Huamelula, Oaxaca, 13-14.9.1978., where the debate continued on what kind of anthropology was now needed in Mexico. There was a general consensus of criticism for narrow ethnographic studies, which failed to locate the municipio within a regional context and ignored relationships between different ethnic groups. Further discussion of what kind of anthropology is needed can be found in articles in a volume by Warman et al. (1970), reviewed by Jaquith (1972) and Cuellar (1973).

should be neatly defined out of existence in order to lend the theory more coherence and impact.

Macro-analyses of the Emergence or Resurgence of Ethnic Distinctions

Cross focuses on the emergence of ethnic distinctions in several case-studies. He argues the importance of considering wider structural variables as causes of ethnic resurgence or ethnic conflict and suggests that "structured inequalities with areal manifestations and high correlations with ethnic groups will be conducive to ethnic resurgence" (Cross, 1978:38).

He also makes a useful distinction between ethnic salience and ethnic allegiance, as follows:

> Ethnic salience involves mobilising and selecting putative cultural traits and using them to typify or characterise a social group. Ethnic allegiance is a process entailing the identification of group members with these characteristics (ibid.)

Cross's analysis is particularly valuable in that it takes as problematic the social emphasis on ethnic divisions, their emergence or resurgence. He attempts to explain the economic and political conditions under which an ideology of ethnicity can become dominant in a given society.

He presents a comparative case-study of Trinidad and Guyana in terms of inter-ethnic relationships and conflict between the African and Indian sections of the population. Although in both countries the two ethnic groups were characterised by cultural differences and separate historical experiences, ethnicity was less salient and ethnic allegiance less emphasised in Trinidad. He attempts to explain this by looking at the extent of ethnic competition for resources in the two countries

In both countries, Indians were introduced as indentured labourers in order to provide a cheaper replacement for African labour on the plantations. However, in Trinidad Africans displaced from the cane plantations were able to work on the cocoa estates and also a generous land allocation policy started in the 1860s meant that by 1908 there were 11,541 small independent cane farmers (drawn from ex-estate labourers), almost

equally divided between Africans and Indians. In Guyana, where pressure on land was more intense, the displaced Africans had no possibilities of viable independent cultivation and there was thus more competition between the groups.

Cross shows that, in Trinidad, this situation led to an emergence of working class consciousness in the 1930s (before adult suffrage) which bridged ethnic divisions, and this was particularly manifested in trade union activities. In Guyana, on the other hand, where inter-ethnic competition was more intense and ethnic divisions more salient, Africans actually opposed universal adult suffrage since it would mean allowing the Indians a political power commensurate with their numbers, which the Africans perceived as a threat. Cross mentions other factors that may affect the salience of ethnic divisions and ethnic allegiance, such as spatial mobility and occupational mobility between generations for the different ethnic groups in the two countries. He suggests that ethnic salience will rise with the degree of inter-regional penetration of one group by another and also the degree with which one ethnic group starts to enter occupations previously dominated by another.

This analysis of inter-ethnic competition for resources is located within a theory of internal colonialism. Cross concludes that:

> conditions which produce.....[ethnic allegiance].... are endemic to the colonial situation. On this basis a theory was proposed that would predict a heightened sense of 'nationalism' , accompanied by the lowering of ethnic allegiance, at the colonial periphery in the period immediately prior to the cessation of political domination from the external 'core'. Where nothing had been done to alter the fundamental inequalities of the colonial experience, the theory would then predict a new consolidation of the core internally. The internal periphery would now be expected to re-emerge with a heightened sense of ethnic allegiance...The theory... would predict lessened attachment to ethnic identities in conditions of internal decolonisation and at least tolerable levels of ethnic salience with sustained economic growth (ibid: 56).

Although there is no discussion of the cultural content of ethnic identity and the structures through which it is conveyed, Cross's analysis is very important in that he attempts to examine the relationship between class divisions and ethnic divisions and does not equate them. Instead he shows how economic structures and relations can influence the relative priority given to ethnic and class allegiances in a particular society. His analysis would be further improved if the role of the state in transmitting ideology had also been examined. However, an adequate theory of ethnicity must be

able to account for its greater or lesser salience in different historical periods in a given society, and Cross is clearly working towards this.

There are some similarities between Cross and Mexican anthropologists, such as Marroquin, who was linked with the Instituto Nacional Indigenista and wrote in 1972 about the indigenous Indian community, using a political economy approach (Marroquin, 1972). However, Marroquin also examines in more detail (than Cross) the cultural content of ethnic identity and the structures which support it. The indigenous community is a *complejo unitario socio-cultural* (a socio-cultural unit) where status and group membership is ascribed through kinship, control maintained by the traditional (conservative) authorities and, where the economic system is pre-feudal and pre-capitalist, keeping the society at a mere subsistence level. The organisation of work and other institutions (such as the mayordomías) develops the *conciencia colectiva* (collective consciousness) and a special sentiment of group solidarity. Certain magico-religious values afford strong cohesion to the group. This seems to be Durkheim's model of mechanical solidarity as used by Redfield for the Yucatan, portraying the community as well-integrated and economically self-sufficient in opposition to the outside. Marroquin notes the dichotomy "nosotros – los otros" (subsumed to indígena-non-indígena) in indigenous classification.

Marroquin continues that the indigenous communities are in a subordinate relationship to the regional "centro rector" (governing centre – metropolis), which is the axis (*eje*) of a complicated economic and political feudal process through which the indigenous communities are incorporated into the regional economic system for the benefit of the centre. The indigenous communities are described as marginal and have a "superficial participation in the benefits of national economic development and no participation in regional or national politics". In this formulation, the nature of indigenous communities is constructed through their relationship to the governing centre-metropolis and takes a form which benefits the latter.

Ethnicity and Resistance

Both Cross and Marroquin offer examples of the political economy approach to ethnicity. The strength of this approach lies in its attempt to set a community or area in the context of large-scale political/economic systems and in its reintroduction of history

into anthropological study. Where the macro approach is combined with traditional fieldwork, the research has involved studying the effects of capitalist penetration on those communities. There is an emphasis on the impact of external forces (the state and the capitalist world system) and on the ways in which societies change or evolve largely in adaptation to such impact. This approach also shows an interest in symbols involved in the formulation of class or group identity, in the context of various political/economic struggles. It is here that "the political economy school thus overlaps with the burgeoning 'ethnicity' industry", according to Ortner (1984:142). Ortner's main criticism is that there is too much emphasis on the economic and not enough about the relations of power, domination and control which those economic relations play into. She also warns that a capitalism-centred worldview may miss the history of a given society, in that it may focus only on the impact of external forces on that society.

The preceding works on ethnicity have several theoretical interests in common. The first is an attempt to address the general question of social and cultural change (or lack of it, as in Barth and Siverts), and secondly to consider how ethnic identity is maintained in a situation of contact with other groups. Some, such as Pozas and Pozas, emphasise the transforming effect of the national development of capitalist economic relations, while others (Siverts) emphasise the patterns of individuals' constrained choices, repeatedly rewarded within local economic circumstances. Barth is explicit about cultural content, focused on central values, while Siverts and the Pozas are not.

Several comment on the phenomenon of individuals changing ethnic identity. For Barth and Siverts, it is the "failures" who lose their Pathan/Oxchuc identity, while for the Pozas, it is the economically successful, the bourgeoisie, who are losing their Indian characteristics. Very few of these writers have much to say about the role of the state in processes affecting ethnic identity. Many of the theories suggest that ethnic identity is a matter of rational choice amongst alternatives, an approach challenged by the Comaroffs below.

The recognition that culture changes and that individuals have a role to play offers an important challenge to the assumption that culture determines the way in which we view the world.[18] Asad, among others, criticised the "determinist" notion of culture as "an a

[18] Some further relevant material has already been discussed in Chapter 2 above.

priori totality of authentic meanings to which action and discourse must be related if they are to be properly understood and their integrity explained" (Asad, 1979:608).

He argued that such a concept of culture (as found in the works of Bloch, 1977 and Douglas, 1966) can not be part of an adequate theory of social change, because it states that nothing can be said or done with meaning if it does not fit into that culture. This view implies a one-to-one fit between culture, thought and practice which is passed on through the generations. However, the reaction against a "cultural determinist" view does not necessarily lead to a picture of the rational actor choosing consciously from a selection of separate cultural identities.

Asad argues that writers such as Bloch and Douglas take culture (or ideology or systems of meaning/discourse, depending on the term used) as the basic concept for defining and explaining a given historical society. In the ethnography and analysis of these authors, there appear details of the social, economic and political tendencies which support existing conditions. However, states Asad, in any given society, there also exist tendencies which might contribute to the undermining of existing conditions. It is the relationship between these undermining tendencies and the supporting ones which makes political argument possible in a society, yet the former tended to be suppressed in anthropological texts (or relegated to a chapter on social change). The central question, according to Asad, should be "how different forms of discourse come to be materially produced and maintained as authoritative systems" (Asad, 1979:619).

It is here in uniting concepts of "contested culture or symbols" and "agency" that "ethnicity" and "resistance" meet. What Ortner refers to as "the burgeoning 'ethnicity' industry" (1984:142) examines the phenomenon of cultural difference maintained in a situation of contact between cultures. Increasingly the analyses of culture contact have been phrased as analyses of the "colonial encounter" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991; Kaplan, 1990) and this, combined with the developing theoretical interests in agency and practice, has brought to the fore the concept of struggles over power and meaning on the frontiers of empire. After Bourdieu, this process has been seen as a dialectic of challenge and riposte, domination and defiance (Bourdieu, 1977:12). The Comaroffs are particularly interested in "the colonisation of consciousness and the consciousness of colonisation" (1991:xi) and the process by which some meanings and actions become conventional, while others become objects of contest and resistance. This approach

emphasises the agency of groups and individuals and acts as a powerful critique of theories of internal colonialism (for instance, Marroquin, 1972, above) in which the dominated groups often seem rather passively dominated.

My original difficulties with what it means to be Ojitec arose partly because of the contradictory messages that I was receiving about "being Ojitec". This contradiction is partly resolved if I suggest that the conceptions of what it means to be Ojitec are indeed contested. Statements of Ojitec identity also vary with context and audience. In the increasingly cash-based economy of PRC-Ojitlan,[19] everything has a price – even one's own traditions and stories. What it means to be Ojitec *is* significant in resistance in Ojitlan. In the words of writers discussed further in the next section, "When the state's goal is homogenisation, difference appears as resistance. 'The ethnic discourse' is inherently a discourse of resistance" (Urban and Sherzer, 1991:14). Perhaps being Ojitec in itself should be seen as a form of resistance.

It is possible, therefore, to trace links between the analytical focus on ethnicity and the more recent emphasis on resistance through considering the theoretical treatment of culture, consciousness and identity. There are struggles over culture and symbols on the frontier. The Comaroffs' work on the subject of religious conversion offers valuable insight for any unequal situation where a group's existing belief system is being challenged. They argue that for the Tswana of South Africa, religious identity is not a matter of a clear cut choice between alternatives – Tswana traditional or Nonconformist Christian. That model of rational choice between two clear religious systems is itself a Nonconformist ideological model of conversion. The Comaroffs argue that religious identity for the Tswana is more accurately formulated as a matter of consciousness and everyday practices, such that religion is part of everyday practices. Religious identity was not just a matter of belief, but also a matter of how to live expressed, for instance, in the style/divisions of the house; the organisation of the settlement; practices reflecting notions of time, work and self-discipline (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1988:15). The Tswana did not become "totally" converted to Christianity, but in fact were like *bricoleurs*, picking and choosing practices and lapsing from time to time (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991:248-50).

---

[19] I will use "PRC-Ojitlan" as an occasional shorthand for the Ojitlan transformed by the Papaloapan River Commission's activities. It was a marketplace, where relationships were increasingly mediated by cash with effects on the value of tradition and hospitality.

Thus being Ojitec can be seen as a matter of everyday practices, which can be incorporated as they are (or transformed through interaction with the alternative "modern" systems) into resistance activities. One of the forms of resistance to the reforming priests, discussed further in Chapter 7, were the everyday practices of indigenous Catholicism. Offering hospitality to visiting mourners and dancing in festivals were two examples of Ojitec everyday practices, which became highly charged with political significance as resistance. Thus conceptions of what it means to be Ojitec are contested and are transformed through specific forms of resistance. Asserting or reasserting tradition as a symbol of resistance has been noted in Panama by Howe (1991). In his analysis, the *mola*[20] of the San Blas Kuna indians is seen as not simply a legacy of the past, but a symbol of the Kuna victory in a struggle with the state (1915 – 1925) over Kuna culture. The mola:

> is not covert resistance to domination through the modification of colonially imposed forms, but an overt flaunting of the failure of the state to effect its domination through forced assimilation, simultaneously as it is a continuation of tradition (Urban and Sherzer, 1991:3).

Ojitec resistance through indigenous Catholicism similarly made public statements about the failure of the state and regional authorities (the Papaloapan River Commission and the Archbishop of Oaxaca) to control their hearts and minds. Being Ojitec was a site of struggle. Similarly, the Ojitec resisted many aspects of the new identity prepared for them in Uxpanapa by the Papaloapan River Commission. According to the Commission's vision, the "new life" of opportunity for the Ojitecs in Uxpanapa was to be free from exploitation and fanatismo. It would also incorporate "modern" notions of production, time, settlement patterns and names.

Ethnicity, National Identity and the State

Questions of ethnicity and Indian identity are not only matters for theoretical debate, but are also enshrined within state policy in Mexico and other Latin American countries. Recent writings on nationalism and the construction of a postcolonial national identity have further advanced the discussion of ethnicity in that the role of the state is more

[20] The mola is an elaborate sewn blouse, worn by Kuna women, referred to by Howe as "*the* prime symbol of Kunaité" (Howe, 1991:43).

fully considered. Various studies discussed below have traced changing images of the Indian in the history of Latin American countries, often relating these to national political and economic changes. Concepts of hegemony and discourse are used to explain how the state tries to maintain its legitimacy and authority over time. Themes of "contest" continue. Multiple images and multiple identities are examined.

Whilst the colonial state in Latin America used force to subjugate the Indians, the post-colonial state has tried to transform "the Indian" into a citizen and gain sovereignty over land. Urban and Sherzer (1991) suggest that while post-colonial Latin American states have opposed the autonomy of Indians, they have not necessarily opposed Indian traditional dress and other aspects of culture. On the contrary, symbols of Indianness have often become important in establishing a national identity in opposition to the previous European colonial power. Thus, for example, Miss Guatemala wears traditional Indian dress in international beauty competitions (1991:10). Hill considers the process of "folklorisation" in Mexico. She argues that indigenous traditions of music and dancing are removed from their local context to become national traditions. Primary school festivals do "lo folklorico" producing shows with music and dance from all over Mexico. Everyone can take part in this national tradition. Although Indian traditions are celebrated, they are totally divorced from their particular places and meanings (Hill 1991:77). They offer a "safe" expression of Indian identity as part of the national identity.[21]

Writers such as Crain (1990) and Alonso (1988) use the concept of "imagined (political) community" of the nation to refer to similar processes of construction of national identity. Alonso considers that modern Mexican nationalism is "above all a revolutionary nationalism" (1988:42). She discusses an example of a museum of the revolution in which the divisions and enmities of the time are erased into "a vision of the struggle in which *all* fought on the side of the 'nation' and the 'people'" (ibid:43). All can therefore be united within the imagined political community of the nation. Alonso refers to processes of "departicularisation" (whereby difference and local

[21] The annual "Guelaguetza" in Oaxaca city, a celebration of indigenous music and dance, is a fascinating example. The Chinantec contribution from the Tuxtepec area is danced to the song "*Flor de Piña*" (Flower of the Pineapple). The pineapple is a recent commercial crop, never grown by the indigenous Chinantec. The dance is performed by light-skinned gente de razón girls and has most probably been created especially for the Guelaguetza, since to my knowledge there are no traditional Chinantec dances. The *huipiles* (dresses woven on a backstrap loom) worn by the girls are the only "authentically Chinantec" feature of the presentation. The Guelaguetza is a very popular event for national and international tourism.

meanings are suppressed) and "universalisation" (whereby the tradition or history belongs to everyone and no-one) (1988:44).

Crain provides a review of historical change in the image of the Indian within Ecuadorean national identity. After a colonial and postcolonial period when the national identity was seen as white/mestizo in opposition to an inferior indigenous other, she shows how since the 1960s (linked to political/economic changes such as oil money, land reform and middle class political parties) there has been a more positive discourse about the Indians. Indigenous culture has been revalorised and nationalised, with state funding of folklore festivals. As in the Mexican example, discussed by Hill above, Crain shows that the nationalising of indigenous culture severs it from local meanings and places. Overall the Ecuadorean government has contradictory policies in relation to the Indians. At the same time as the state tries to promote and value ethnic culture, it also supports capitalist development in the countryside, which undermines ethnic identities and transforms indigenous peasants into migrants and wage labourers (Crain, 1990:56).

A study of historical changes in the symbolism of the *charro* as "lo mexicano" also reveals (hegemonic) strategies at work to blur differences (whether of class, region, wealth, ethnicity) and to create a national unity. Najera-Ramirez considers the various agents or interest groups, who have assumed the authority to define lo mexicano through the charro (Nájera-Ramírez, 1994). The charro is the horseman/cowboy, sometimes associated with bandits, sometimes with the rural police force, sometimes with traditional Mexican culture. Over time, different interest groups have tried to promote their own definitions of the charro as a symbol of lo mexicano. Amongst these, Nájera-Ramírez notes the following: colonial *haciendas*[22] ran charro competitions which emphasised the equality of hacienda workers and promoted social unity; the dictator Porfirio Diaz cultivated a charro image of heroism for his *rurales* (rural police force, considered brutish by opponents of Diaz). After the revolution, there was a strong resurgence of nationalism and interest in lo mexicano. Folkloric, music presentations of Mexican traditional life were invented, including the charro. The aim was to attract tourism and also to blur regional differences to create a more integrated society and, as in Alonso's similar examples above, to construct a postrevolutionary national unity (Alonso, 1988:43; Nájera-Ramírez, 1994:5).

[22] Hacienda refers to a large privately owned farm, estate or plantation.

Further interest groups competing to define the charro were: the urban charro associations defining a (somewhat upper class) code of honour and responsibility; the 1940s film industry (funded by the post-Cárdenas conservative government) portraying the charro as a macho, violent and sentimental hero – promoting the politically useful idea of necessary tyrants to keep the ignorant masses in check. Mexicans living in the USA today still value the charro as a symbol of manhood and nation. As a result of this historical process, there are multiple images of the charro. It is not possible to rule some out because of their artificial roots "because once such representations enter social discourse, they become part of the symbol complex and thus one of various possible meanings" (1994:11).

Multiple images and multiple identities are recurring themes in this literature on ethnicity and national identity. Hill examines the flexible identity and everyday practices, especially talk, of the people of the Malinche volcano in the state of Puebla, Mexico. In talk, the people express their "penetration" of their situation and attempt to mount some small resistance to the broader Mexican system.[23] The terms of this talk are often borrowed from the rhetoric of the Mexican state and Hill sees talk as providing a foundation for cultural resistance, as the Malinche people try to maintain some degree of autonomy vis-a-vis the state (Hill, 1991:73). The Malinche people see themselves as campesinos, and are organised through the CNC, though many in fact work in factories or other jobs. The slogan of "self-defence" is a centerpiece of the Malinche "idiom of resistance". "*Uno se defiende*" (one defends oneself) or "*hay que defenderse*" (you have to defend yourself) were also common phrases heard in Ojitlan. This could be considered evidence for a longstanding indigenous (emic) concept of resistance, emphasising that resistance is not an analytical invention of outsiders.

According to Hill, the Mexican state sees indigenous people as from a past time, as survivors. Public representations on murals are often from pre-conquest times and "lo folklorico" is about tradition from the past. However, Malinche people resist this potential designation as "people of the past" by using the idiom of kinship when discussing ethnic differences. So those who prefer modern dress and using Spanish

[23] Hill comments that "penetration" is Willis's term for an interested understanding of its structural position by a group (Willis, 1977). Such an understanding is part of cultural knowledge. Willis differentiates penetration from consciousness which is at an individual level.

have the "practices of our children" and those who prefer to use the mexicano language and traditional dress have "the practices of our respected grandfathers". Differentiation within the community is expressed within an idiom which emphasises continuity, mutual respect and co-membership in a family. Hill writes that that this idiom

> exploits a nationally acceptable rhetoric of 'Christian' and 'family' values while constituting a resistance to the state's attempt to divide people by consigning some of them to the past and some of them to the future. This rhetorical practice facilitates the complex balancing act that preserves the indigenous family and community as intact units that will sustain their 'children' when they are in need, but permit them to practise strategies that will enable them to capture resources from the urban, capitalist sector when they are available (Hill, 1991:82-3).

The Malinche people therefore maintain what could be seen as a flexible identity (within limits), which both allows their indigenous autonomy and allows them to benefit from the broader society wherever possible. The apparent randomness and unpredictability[24] of state actions (for example, when and where they might appropriate land, build roads) makes this flexible identity the best for taking advantage of their overall situation.

The Malinche case, argue Urban and Sherzer (1991:7), reminds us that the phenomenon of cultural difference does not presuppose the existence of objectively distinct groups. The analysis of the Malinche people's flexible identity (or manipulation of multiple identities) stresses that we can distinguish between the consciousness of difference and the embodiment of difference. With similar interests, Baumann examines the dominant discourse of ethnicity in multi-ethnic Britain, which tends to reify and equate 'culture' and 'community', suggesting a range of separate 'ethnic-cum-cultural communities' (Baumann, 1997:209-213). He argues that there also exists an "equally effective alternative discourse, here called the demotic" which emphasises the social processes of active negotiation and debate in 'culture' and 'community'. He gives the example of how young Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims have created a shared "Asian culture" in Bhangra music, while in most other contexts their identity is more specifically Sikh or Hindu. The term "Asian culture" has little meaning for the older generation. Both Hill, in her discussion of flexible identity, and Baumann, in his concept of the demotic

[24] The unreliability of agents of the state was a feature of the Ojitec experience of resettlement. Ingenieros could not be relied upon to arrive at meetings on time or at all. Ejidatarios learned to their cost that they were unreliable allies in a dispute. See, for instance, Chapter 8.

discourse, highlighting active 'culture-making processes', point to ethnicity as a matter of everyday practices by active agents with capacities for negotiation and creative action, within local, regional and national contexts. In Ojitlan, everyday practices of Ojitec hospitality and indigenous Catholic ritual were used creatively in forms of resistance to agencies of the state and the Catholic Church. Hill's concept of flexible identity is also applicable to the Ojitecs in their negotiation of relationships within their own communities and with PRC and other government representatives.

Ethnicity, Indigenism and the State

According to Young and Edholm, there have been two basic positions on the Indian question since the conquest of Mexico. One view argues that Indians should be assimilated into the nation, often assuming specifically at the lowest level. At the end of the nineteenth century, Limantour and the *cientificos* (the scientists) still "openly regarded Indians as worthy only to be beasts of burden for the more civilised white races" (Young and Edholm, 1974:94). The second view is that the Indians should be treated as a separate category and set apart from the rest of the nation, because "in some way (they) form separate nations within the nation and must be given autonomy and incorporated almost as equals into a 'plural' society" (ibid:95).[25] Although the authors emphasise that both of these views are represented at most levels within the INI,[26] the first view has tended to prevail.

The emphasis within Mexican indigenism has therefore been to educate and assimilate the Indians into Mexican national society. Thus Mexican "indigenism has as its objective the integration of indigenous communities into the economic, social and political life of the nation" (Caso, 1958:27).[27] Aguirre Beltrán formulated the INI's policy in the following terms in 1972:

> The purpose is still integration and in no way to develop in them (the Indian population) an ethnic consciousness that separates them from the rest of the nation. It is necessary to change their caste-like position to a class position,

[25] This view is implicit in Barabas and Bartolomé, 1974.

[26] The Instituto Nacional Indigenista, National Indigenous Institute, the government agency founded in 1948.

[27] Urban and Sherzer (1991:5-6) note that early twentieth century Brazilian indigenism operated with a similar assumption – that culture contact would eventually lead to assimilation and homogenisation of culture within the nation state.

> where the possibility exists that the Indian may enter a group, in this case the proletariat...(Aguirre Beltrán (1972:3, cited in Barabas and Bartolomé, 1974:87).

According to Clarke, the mainstream *indigenista* (indigenist) viewpoint, associated with Mexico's ruling party, the PRI, "adhered to the principle of enlightened, planned, non-coercive integration" (Clarke, 2000:43). The INI was set up in 1948 and centres were set up among the major ethnic groups of Oaxaca, coordinated from Mexico City and later from Oaxaca City. In the rural areas, the INI's presence was most often seen in their schools, staffed by bilingual teachers, where all the lessons were taught in Spanish. The aim was to educate the indigenous people in Spanish as part of the policy of integration. The INI could also provide facilities (medical or technical services) for community development. In the light of this national policy of integration, the maintenance of any kind of ethnic identity could be seen as resistance.[28] "When the state's goal is homogenisation, difference appears as resistance. "The ethnic discourse' is inherently a discourse of resistance" according to Urban and Sherzer (1991:14). During the mid-1970s, there were also young anthropologists working on social investigations within the INI, who were arguing strongly for policies based on accepting ethnic pluralism.[29]

During the 1980s and 1990s there was a significant increase in ethnic political organisation in Oaxaca. The most important of these ethnic organisations were formed by the Zapotecs in Juchitán (the COCEI discussed below), the Triqui of the Mixteca Alta, the Zapotecs of the Sierra Juarez and the Mixes of the Sierra Mixe. Each group focused on the issues that were most relevant to itself and had alliances with either intellectuals or peasants and proletarians (as did COCEI). They saw their struggle as part of the larger indigenous issue in Oaxaca and Mexico and often had very similar demands. These demands included accurate demarcation of territorial boundaries, regulation of the extraction of natural resources (especially forestry), provision of public services and agricultural credit, respect for municipal autonomy and the freeing of indigenous political prisoners (Clarke, 2000:181-2). Whilst some of these issues relate to ethnicity, others are campaigns for the improvement of the quality of life, and it is

---

[28] Hill (1991:72) comments on the "astonishing cultural persistence of the Mexican indigenous sector" after 500 years of domination. She assumes this persistence to be evidence of resistance to assimilation

[29] For instance, Alberto Aguirre, speaking on Indigenism at the III Conference on INI Social Investigations, Huamelula, Oaxaca, 13.-14.9.1978.

interesting that local/regional pressure groups have taken an ethnic form. One of the organisations mentioned by Clarke is of Chinantecs and Zapotecs of the Sierra Norte. This does not include the area of Ojitlan, where the neighbouring ethnic groups were Mazatec and Cuicatec. There is no ethnic organisation listed for the north-east area of the state of Oaxaca where Ojitlan is situated.

In 1992, Article 4 of the Mexican constitution was reformulated to acknowledge the ethnic plurality of the nation:

> The Mexican nation has a multi-cultural composition sustained originally in its Indian communities. The law will protect and promote the development of their languages, cultures, usages, customs, resources and specific forms of social organisation, and will guarantee to their members effective access to the jurisdiction of the state. In the judgements and agrarian procedures in which they take part, their legal practices and customs will be taken into account in terms established by law (Clavero 1994:189, cited in Clarke, 2000:163).

Following this, Article 16 of the Oaxaca constitution has recently been reformed to be consistent with it. It says that "the state of Oaxaca is sustained in the presence of its 16 indigenous groups. The law will establish the means to preserve indigenous cultures" (Gijsbers, 1996:84-5). The implementation of this meant that in mid-1995, the Oaxaca government revised its electoral legislation to allow municipios to opt to carry out their elections to political posts through traditional assemblies instead of through the secret ballot. The system using traditional (all-male) assemblies is referred to as "*usos y costumbres*" and has been adopted in many municipios[30] in Oaxaca (Clarke, 2000:168). Several writers suggest that bilingual teachers are playing a very active role in the leadership of the new ethnic organisations.[31] This is in marked contrast to the early days of the INI, where bilingual teachers were given an important role in the education and assimilation of the Indians into the Mexican nation.

The COCEI[32], based in Juchitán in the isthmus of Tehuantepec, has proved very successful as an ethnic political organisation. As an organisation, it "combines intense

[30] 408 municipios (or just over 70%) out of 570 opted to carry out their elections to political office through community assemblies (Clarke, 2000:168).

[31] Gijsbers, 1996:18; Clarke, 2001: personal communication.

[32] Coalición Obrera Campesina Estudiantil del Istmo or Coalition of Workers, Peasants and Students of the Isthmus.

indigenous identity with equally strong class consciousness" and won the municipal elections in the town of Juchitán in 1981. In 1983, it was removed violently from office by the Mexican government, but it won the municipal elections again in 1989 and 1992 (Campbell, 1993:214). Ethnic organisations, such as COCEI, are now also contributing to the anthropological debate on ethnicity and class. Daniel Lopez Nelio, a leading figure in COCEI, has written

> The Zapotec race is oppressed by an entire economic system, the same as the working class. Now the struggle is not only over an ethnicity because the Zapotecs are also workers. The struggle is also for peasants and the indigenous cultural question. It all comes together.....These are the struggles led by COCEI (Campbell, 1993:213).

Lopez Nelio points to the need to see the inter-relationships between ethnicity and class, rather than opposing them as alternative categories or conflating them.[33] Campbell argues that by abandoning the "artificial division between ethnicity and class, we can understand how ethnicity is simultaneously a weapon wielded against outsiders and a contested terrain of class interests within indigenous communities" (Campbell, 1993:213). Ethnic identity is defended and also recreated in the process of this struggle and Campbell points to the "ideological uses of ethnicity by indigenous groups to resist external and internal enemies" (ibid:214).[34] Thus ethnic identity and indigenous culture are contested and transformed within a political arena.

The rise of ethnic political organisations is a very interesting development in Mexico, which points to the continuing significance of ethnicity contrary to the earlier predictions of assimilation and homogenisation. There are no ethnic organisations reported for the area of Ojitlan, nor have people in that area made use of the "usos y costumbres" provisions for local elections. However, I have found a range of material on Uxpanapa from internet searches, which suggests that indigenous identity has become more salient there, instead of disappearing as predicted by, for instance, Barabas and Bartolomé (1974).

---

[33] As, for instance, in the work by Friedlander (1975) and others discussed earlier in this chapter. Lopez Nelio would say that the literature on ethnicity and class largely misses the point in that analysis should not be a matter of which is the better category to characterise rural communities, but rather how do the two categories interplay?

[34] Kearney (1989), cited in Campbell (1993), has noted the reconstituted ethnicity of Mixtec migrants (from Oaxaca) to the USA and N. Mexico. He sees this renewed ethnicity as a form of active resistance to the migrants' low status and socio-economic position in the area

In February 1997 a report by Roger Maldonado, Director General of *Nuevo Amanecer* (New Dawn) Press, noted the difficult situation for the Chinantecs of Uxpanapa. He quotes at length the leader of the *Consejo Indígena del Uxpanapa* (Indigenous Council of Uxpanapa), the Chinantec Juan Zamora Gonzalez:

> We are demanding from the federal government and from the state governments of Veracruz and Oaxaca that they complete the infrastructure and services that were promised to us, but everyone is trying to avoid responsibility. The federal government says that it has no commitments to us, because they were transferred to the state governments of Veracruz and Oaxaca; the state government of Veracruz says that it has no commitment to us, because it never took over jurisdiction of us. They say that the state of Oaxaca has the commitment, Veracruz just allowed us on to their land. The state government of Oaxaca says that it has no commitment to us, because we are citizens of Veracruz. The only commitment that Oaxaca would admit to us is a moral commitment, because we are Oaxacans.[35]

The latest available evidence on the results of the Ojitec resettlement in Uxpanapa is discussed towards the end of Chapter 8. Here it is relevant to note that the Ojitec in Uxpanapa have founded an ethnic political organisation. In July 1997, a press bulletin from the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) in Mexico condemned the arrests of Juan and Marcos Zamora Gonzalez, who had been "jailed for political reasons in the port of Veracruz".[36] The term Chinantec is used to describe the ethnic group, a term which was never used by the Ojitec themselves, but by other organisations such the Papaloapan River Commission. On May 8th 1997, the newspaper El Nacional carried a story that the administrative centre for the Valley of Uxpanapa was to be called Chinantla.[37] The agreement had been reached between Zoques and Chinantecs after a period of dispute. This is a further example of the regeneration and redefining of ethnicity. Chinantla was the term used by Weitlaner and Cline (1964) for the area inhabited by the Chinantecs. Neither of these terms, Chinantec or Chinantla, were in use by the Ojitec in the mid-1970s, although they were aware of the term Chinantec being used by outside agencies.

---

[35] Cf. Maldonado (1997), http://www.eurosur.org.rebelion/hemeroteca/ecologia/eco028.htm (The extract above is my translation from the Spanish.)

[36] CNI/National Indigenous Congress (1997), Press Bulletin July 3 1997, http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/mexico/other/cni_anti_indig_vio_jul97.html

[37] El Nacional en Internet, May 3 1997, http://www.unam.mx/nacional/1997/may97/08may97/08pa191.html

My review so far suggests that Ojitec (Chinantec) ethnicity has been affected by historical changes within Mexico from the Spanish conquest, through the Mexican revolution and the formation of the ejidos, the national/regional development of capitalism, the construction of the Cerro de Oro dam and the resettlement in Uxpanapa. Ojitec (Chinantec) ethnicity has been transformed during this time, for instance by establishing new traditions of community fiestas in the ejidos and then defending them as part of the resistance to resettlement. However, evidence suggests that in the new settlements of Uxpanapa, there are still meaningful forms of organisation that are Ojitec (now apparently more frequently known as Chinantec[38]) and that contrary to theoretical and national policy predictions of homogenisation, there are still expressions of Chinantec (Ojitec) ethnicity and difference. It seems that "defending oneself"[39] has frequently taken the form of asserting an ethnic difference and identity.

[38] The people resettled in Uxpanapa are now adopting the more generic term of Chinantec, suggesting a sense of belonging to a wider group than the term Ojitec. The choice of Chinantec also fits with the national trend of developing ethnic organisations linked to linguistic/cultural units. Where organisations are also linked to places, the place is typically a region, not a town like Ojitlan. So, for instance, ASAZ CHIS (Asamblea de las Autoridades Chinantecas y Zapotecas de la Sierra) covers the northern hills of Oaxaca, not a particular town (Clarke, 2000:181). This organisation does not include the area of Ojitlan, where the neighbouring ethnic groups were Mazatecs and Cuicatecs.

[39] An indigenous concept of resistance - "Hay que defenderse" or "uno se defiende" – a common phrase among the Ojitec and also noted for the Malinche people of Puebla by Hill (1991:79).

Chapter 6: Cerro de Oro : Political and Millenarian Responses in 1972-5

The possibility of a dam at Cerro de Oro, Ojitlan, was first mooted in 1948 in a detailed study of options to control flooding in the Papaloapan River Basin (Noriega, 1948). In 1944, the worst flood ever hit the lower Papaloapan basin, leaving two metres of water in the streets of Tuxtepec and Tlacotalpan (Tamayo, 1976:71), flooding 470,000 hectares of land and causing 100 deaths (Hernandez Castro, 1976:13). Damage totalled 100 million pesos (Escanero, 1977:15). Economic activities virtually came to a halt in the area and this extreme situation attracted national attention. The result was that in 1947 the government, through the Secretariat of Hydraulic Resources, formed the Papaloapan River Commission (Comisión del Papaloapan), Mexico's first regional development agency. The Commission was to plan and build works necessary for the integrated development of the region. This task involved first and foremost the control of the river to prevent flooding.

Floods were not a new phenomenon in the Papaloapan river basin and major floods had been recorded for 15 of the years between 1840 and 1945 (Noriega, 1948:38). However, they had recently become more frequent and more damaging. A previous government report of 1943, cited by Noriega, had noted that before 1921 the floods were infrequent and that the water stayed on the land only 3-4 days, actually benefiting the cultivable land with deposits of alluvium. Since 1921, floods had increased both in frequency and duration and there was an increasing danger that the fertile soils of the lower Papaloapan basin would become leached and sterile. In 1931, 1935 and 1941, for example, the land was under flood water for 2-3 months, causing considerable losses to agriculture (ibid:39).

Higher rainfall was ruled out as a cause of increased flooding by Noriega. The main cause was erosion in the higher reaches of the Papaloapan basin, which was in turn due to deforestation carried out since 1920 in the sierra of Oaxaca "*por diversos motivos*".[1] This erosion meant that some of the rivers, especially the Santo Domingo, that fed into the Papaloapan carried large quantities of silt, which, once the current slowed in the flat

[1] "For various reasons". The reasons are not discussed by Noriega. A later study stated that "since 1920 the Upper Basin has been deforested irrationally" (Escanero Gonzalez, 1977:9). I shall return to this point later in this chapter.

lower basin, were deposited as sediment. As a result, the riverbed had risen and the carrying capacity of the river was reduced. Noriega considered that control of River Santo Domingo was the most urgent matter in hand (ibid:12 & 104). He recommended the construction of a series of dams, which between them would control the River Papaloapan and prevent flooding altogether. A relief riverbed was also suggested for the lower Papaloapan. After control of the Santo Domingo, the second priority was control of the River Tonto with a dam suggested at Temascal. It is interesting that in the conclusions and recommendations, **no** mention is made of measures to prevent erosion in the upper Papaloapan.

In fact, it was the dam at Temascal (called the Miguel Alemán Dam, after the President of Mexico at the time) which was built first. Whilst it did not tackle what was seen to be the major problem (the River Santo Domingo), it was the cheapest option because the valley of the River Tonto was more accessible, communications were better and it was nearer to already developed and populated areas than were the possible sites on the Santo Domingo. Ewell and Poleman also suggest that the Santo Domingo dam was not built first because national investment priorities favoured other regions (notably the North-west) and that there was strong resistance to the proposal from the state of Oaxaca (Ewell and Poleman, 1979:73).

The Miguel Alemán dam did not prevent flooding in the lower Papaloapan basin. In 1958, 195,000 hectares were flooded. In August-September 1969, 340,000 hectares were flooded and the lower Papaloapan remained a lake for a month. The rain fell for 42 days in the lower Papaloapan at this time (Hernandez Castro, 1976:16). The financial losses were considerable because of the investments which had been made in the lower Papaloapan since the construction of the first dam. The SRH gave the damage in 1969 as 443 million pesos, while the local Chamber of Commerce figure was 930 million pesos (Escanero, 1977:15). These floods made it clear that further action was necessary and in 1972 the decision was made to build the dam at Cerro de Oro.

The Presidential Decree of 1972

The Presidential decree of 30th August 1972 announced that the dam was to be built at Cerro de Oro and set out the provisions to be made for the resettlement and

compensation of the population to be displaced.[2] The preamble included statements of general policy, of which the following is particularly interesting:

> The future socioeconomic development of the country ought to take place on a fairer and more equal basis aiming to improve systematically the distribution of income in favour of the majority of the country's population, especially in those regions where the population has received the fewest benefits as in the case of the upper reaches of the river Papaloapan, where it is essential to carry out various infrastructural works, which as well as increasing the production and the incomes of the population will allow them to become integrated into the national economy (ibid).

There is a government emphasis on equality and on the notion that development should mean that benefits are distributed evenly. Equally important is the statement that the population should become integrated into the national economy, since this is seen to be the way to achieve the former aim and to be the way forward for the country's Indian population. The decree states first that the Cerro de Oro dam will provide irrigation for 70,000 hectares in the state of Oaxaca. As the first point made this clearly seems designed to forestall opposition from the state of Oaxaca. The decree continues that the dam will also control floods from the Santo Domingo river and provide electricity.

Separate provisions are made for compensation of ejidatarios and owners of private property. The ejidatarios would be able to choose their place of resettlement from the zones offered by the Secretariat of Hydraulic Resources. The area of cultivable land to be offered had yet to be decided, but each ejidal or communal group was to receive in addition an area of heathland for collective use equal to that which they possessed at the time. Ejido land in the resettlement zones was to be offered not only to those ejidatarios with land, but also to those with rights and no land and to the landless employees of private landowners. Compensation for buildings and other immovable goods was to be paid in cash thirty days after the acceptance of the evaluations by the Commission for the Evaluation of National Property. The elected representatives of the ejidatarios were to be allowed to take an effective part in this work and their opinions were to be heard.

Compensation was to be paid to private landowners in a broadly similar fashion (although they received cash compensation for their land too, which the ejidatarios did not receive directly) with participation also allowed by their elected representatives. However, they could also choose between receiving the compensation for their land in

[2] Diario Oficial de la Federación, 30 August 1972, pp. 1-3, Mexico.

full or receiving a fixed amount of land in the resettlement zone and compensation of the difference in value (partial compensation). Public sector credit institutions were to help finance the agricultural activities of peasants in the resettlement zones.[3]

The Question of Erosion

It was clear from Noriega's report that the main purpose of the construction of the series of dams was to prevent the silting up of the Papaloapan river and thereby prevent the damaging flooding of the lower basin. Yet, as previously observed, despite the recognition that erosion was the ultimate cause of the problem, the report's recommendations and conclusions did not mention action to prevent further erosion. Although the formulation of the Papaloapan River Commission was based on the view that the entire river basin should be developed as a unit, the vast majority of both private and public investments were made in the lower basin in the first thirty years of the Commission's existence. Thus, between 1952-1976, only 50 million pesos[4] were spent on soil conservation projects, about half in the upper basin (SRH, 1976, cited in Ewell and Poleman, 1979:73). However, unless erosion in the upper reaches of the Santo Domingo river is reduced, the Cerro de Oro dam will only have an effective life of 60 years.[5]

The causes of erosion in the upper Papaloapan most probably lie in the crisis of peasant agriculture there. Although I do not have information on the area of the watershed of the Santo Domingo, Young (1978) provides a few useful pointers in her study of an area in the watershed of the River Tesechoacan (part of the Papaloapan river system). She notes that in the early 1870s coffee cultivation was introduced into the hot zone and was grafted on to existing household subsistence and petty commodity production. Each household used some of its land for coffee. "The staple, maize, was either relegated to slightly less favourable plots or the period of fallow was shortened" (Young, 1978:136). The shortening of the fallow period is particularly likely to result in erosion. The population expanded in the late nineteenth century up to the revolution, as a result of the new crop's need for labour power. This created more mouths to feed from a smaller

[3] This appears to be the sole aspect of the plan approved of by the Great God Engineer of the millenarian movement. Cf. later in this chapter.

[4] This would be about £1,250,000 at the 1976 exchange rate of 40 pesos to £1.

[5] Ewell and Poleman, 1979:73. This is because the reservoir itself will become silted up.

amount of land devoted to food crops. Young also notes that villages without land suitable for coffee (hillside villages) began to service the coffee-producing villages with foodstuffs, which probably meant increasing maize production in the former and entailing the possible over-use of land.

A number of writers have shown how traditional agricultural techniques of slash-and-burn can become detrimental to the environment when outside pressures (such as development of cash crops, appropriation of land, government intervention) upset the balance, for instance, by reducing a population's land base leading to reduction in the fallow period of fields.[6] In the case of Ojitlan, the "dangers of nomadic agriculture practised by indigenous groups"[7] were frequently cited as another good reason for resettling the Chinantecs into a zone with a system of settled agriculture, which it was said would not destroy the environment as slash-and-burn methods had done.

Lucero and Avila were strongly critical of the view that slash-and-burn methods *per se* were environmentally detrimental. They stress that evidence suggests that the Ojitlan area had been permanently settled for 2,000 years and that Chinantec methods of cultivation have conserved the fertility of the soil over that time (Lucero and Avila, 1974:51). They consider that Chinantec culture and agriculture are highly adapted to the tropical climate and soils and represent a mode of cultivation that respects and preserves that environment. It is only relatively recently, they argue, that slash-and-burn agriculture has reached a crisis point in Ojitlan owing to a series of factors. Among these are population growth (itself a result of agricultural efficiency), a decline in mortality, the deficient agrarian reform and credit systems and the fact that the local agro-industry has not absorbed indigenous labour. In addition the demand for agricultural products in regional and national markets has encouraged the indigenous people to produce more (and sell some) but there has been no corresponding input of capital or technological development to prevent possible reduction in soil fertility (ibid:55).

---

[6] Cf. for instance: Goethals, 1967; Hewitt, 1976; Jeffery, 1981; Meillassoux, 1974; Ormeling, 1956; Wisner, O'Keefe and Westgate, 1977.

[7] Mexico, 1962, cited by Lucero and Avila, 1974:55. Escanero (1977:9) also refers to the "irrational" deforestation in the upper Papaloapan basin.

Lucero and Avila were particularly concerned that the Chinantec techniques and practices of a multiple use of the environment would be lost forever in Uxpanapa. They consider that the Papaloapan River Commission should have made some attempt, in the twenty five years of its existence, to improve and perfect the slash-and-burn agricultural system[8] instead of damning it prematurely.

It is ironic that a programme designed to solve problems caused by erosion should at the same time be accused of causing environmental destruction in the resettlement area, previously a zone of virgin tropical forest. Yet such are the conclusions of a team of ecologists from the National Autonomous University of Mexico, who carried out studies in Uxpanapa in the early stages. Thus:

> The two alternatives were: to use this region of the Mexican tropics (Uxpanapa) as usual, that is, solely as areas for agriculture and cattle raising, destroying all the enormous variety of plant and animal species present in the 85,000 hectares (just one hectare of humid tropical forest in Uxpanapa contains about 200 species of plants)
> Or, rather to combine the areas destined for agriculture and cattle-raising with other similar areas of humid tropical forest left intact, from which would be generated new forms of production of necessities and agroindustries.
>
> Against the opinion of the country's foremost specialists in tropical ecology, the first alternative was chosen. A massive deforestation operation using heavy imported machinery destroyed 85,000 hectares of forest in just under two years, leaving 514,250,000 pesos worth of wood for railway sleepers, 720,800,000 pesos worth of commercial wood (with the concessions given to private companies), an enormous plain of thousands of hectares of land not suitable for agriculture for the resettled peasants and indigenous people (Toledo, 1976:35-6, cited by Lucero and Avila, 1977:4).

Lucero and Avila argue that the Uxpanapa resettlement project will only benefit capital and will "liberate" a large quantity of labour power previously "captive" in the indigenous communities. They foresee the rapid deterioration of the soil's fertility in Uxpanapa and that the Ojitec settlers, unable to earn a living, will thereby be forced to migrate in search of work and become transformed into a dependent, marginalised and proletarianised cheap labour force. This process will also entail the complete disintegration of the ethnic group.

The authors' alternative proposals for Uxpanapa stress the importance of taking into account all the specialist views that have been put forward. Their recommendations

[8] As had been done, for instance, in the Belgian Congo, Lucero and Avila, 1974:54-5

also include gradual deforestation, the investigation of forestry potential and unconventional uses of the forest, leaving zones completely untouched, protection of the soil from erosion, the setting up of a training and information centre to facilitate communication with the peasants and a research programme into agricultural uses of the soil (Lucero and Avila, 1977:17-20). Above all, they felt it was crucial that the Ojitec knowledge and multiple use of the humid tropical environment should not be lost.

These alternative proposals have been ignored. Early criticisms of the project, particularly the accusations of Barabas and Bartolomé in an international forum, led to the development of a "fortress mentality" in the Papaloapan River Commission. The Commission became very defensive and allowed virtually no further input by social scientists. The project has been run to overcome purely physical and technical problems by Commission staff trained in these areas. It is not perhaps surprising that:

> The lack of emphasis on the more subtle social processes and the lack of consultation with the Chinantecs themselves have resulted in increasingly serious problems (Ewell and Poleman, 1979:87).

I shall discuss in Chapter 8 the particular problems faced by one group of resettled peasants, those from Paso Limón.

The Political Opposition

In this section I shall outline the complex manoeuvring around the Cerro de Oro project by overtly political groupings. The final decision to build the dam was preceded and followed by attempts to wear down and reduce the effectiveness of the regional and local opposition to the project. The last State Governor of Oaxaca to oppose the dam was Brena Torres (1962-8). His successors, however - first Bravo Ahuja[9] and then Gomez Sandoval - had supported the construction of the dam at Cerro de Oro.[10] Their agreement was probably an important precondition for moving forward. In Tuxtepec,

[9] Bravo Ahuja was from a powerful Tuxtepec family (Clarke, 2000:219). He was Governor of Oaxaca from 1968-1970 and then resigned to become Minister of Education. He was succeeded as Governor by Gomez Sandoval, from 1970-4. Clarke notes that both men reflected national policy on issues such as student radicalism, tolerating opposition to a degree unacceptable to the Oaxaca economic elite (ibid:221). Perhaps on the issue of the Cerro de Oro dam, they were also reflecting national policy and priorities against Oaxacan opposition. Bravo Ahuja, as a Tuxtepec man, would probably have been lobbied by groups that would benefit from the dam's prevention of flooding in the lower Papaloapan.

[10] Excelsior newspaper, 3 July 1976, Mexico City

the district capital, the dam was opposed by those groups (often linked with gente de razón in Ojitlan) whose fortunes had been made through the extraction of surpluses from the indigenous hinterland, such as Ojitlan. Other groups who stood to gain from the prevention of floods and influx of investment into the area supported the project.

In Ojitlan rumours were circulating in March 1972 that the dam was to be built at Cerro de Oro. That month a Committee Against the Dam was formed by the CNC[11] in Ojitlan and supported by such diverse organisations as the Cattlemen's Association, the Association of Private Landowners, the Chamber of Commerce, the Cane Growers Association of the local sugar mill and the Lions Club (Lucero and Avila, 1974). The Committee brought together a wide range of local interests (across class and ethnic divisions), worked to organise resistance to the dam and, amongst other activities, sent an open letter of protest to the President of the Republic in July.

In May, President Echeverría had set up a Special Study Commission to look at the question of the dam. Its members were all *oaxaqueños*, born and bred in the state of Oaxaca,[12] and they recommended that greater priority should be given to federal investment in the Oaxacan portion of the Papaloapan basin, in an attempt to remove objections to the project from Oaxaca. This was particularly important since the Miguel Alemán dam had meant the loss of fertile land to Oaxaca, while all the major benefits of the project had accrued to farmers and investors in the state of Veracruz.[13]

On 12th August 1972 a special meeting was held in Tuxtepec between the members of the Special Study Commission and representatives of the cattlemen, private landowners and ejidatarios of the area. The commission stressed that it was necessary for a few (the Ojitecs) to make sacrifices for the benefit of the many. An appeal was made to wider loyalties, with the statement by the Governor of Oaxaca that, as oaxaqueños, we might

[11] Confederación Nacional Campesina, a constituent part of the ruling Mexican political party, the PRI, Partido Revolucionario Institucional.

[12] This choice was deliberate, since it was stressed that as they were all oaxaqueños they would certainly not wish to cheat the people of Oaxaca. The members of the commission were Jorge L. Tamayo (Head of the Papaloapan River Commission and of the Tuxtepec Paper Factory), Victor Bravo Ahuja (former Governor of Oaxaca and the Minister of Education) and Antonio Jimenez Puyo (former Municipal President of Tuxtepec).

[13] In 1976, newspaper editorials in Oaxaca were still stressing this point. In one, under the headline, "10,000 hectares is a great loss to Oaxaca", the editor writes, "if this project were to benefit Oaxaca, we would not say anything against it, but we know very well – and we have been saying it for years – this dam will only benefit Veracruz." Carteles del Sur, Oaxaca, 30.1.1976.

object, but as men we should accept the project. From this meeting representatives were designated from each ejido or community affected to attend a meeting with President Echeverría. At this meeting on 28 August 1972, only three leaders (regional representatives, including the CNC) of the delegation actually spoke with the President and handed in the petitions,[14] though much political capital was made out of the occasion where the President was said to have reassured the delegates about compensation and resettlement (Ewell and Poleman, 1979:85).

As a result of the recommendations of the Special Study Commission, the Presidential decree of 30 August 1972 incorporated a number of commitments to the Oaxacan portion of the Papaloapan river basin. Thus, one million hectares in the Mixtec area of Oaxaca were to receive special attention with regard to soil conservation programmes, forestry, mineral deposits, roads and small-scale irrigation works. Three hundred and sixty three million pesos[15] were allotted for road construction in the Oaxacan part of the basin. There were also plans to build schools, post and telegraph offices, hospitals, rural health centres and to provide drinking water, sewerage systems and electricity to specified communities. In addition, agricultural experiment stations, animal health centres and demonstration plots were to be provided (Ewell and Poleman, 1979:198).

It was clear that a large influx of money was on the way to Oaxaca and this probably did lessen opposition to the dam at many levels within the state. It is very likely to have affected the stance of the CNC at the state level, since it also represented many Oaxacan communities that would benefit from the proposed programme of works. Certainly it appears that the regional CNC (based in Oaxaca) gradually dropped their opposition to the Cerro de Oro project. Though the CNC in Ojitlan remained vehemently opposed, their opposition eventually came to focus on the choice of resettlement site for the Ojitecs. The CCI[16] supported the choice of Uxpanapa in the state of Veracruz, while the CNC favoured resettlement within the state of Oaxaca, in particular an area known as Los Naranjos which was to receive irrigation from the Cerro de Oro dam. Los Naranjos is much nearer to Ojitlan than Uxpanapa (which is 150 miles distant) and was felt by

---

[14] Lucero and Avila, 1974.

[15] This would be about £9,075,000 at the 1976 exchange rate of 40 pesos to £1.

[16] Central de Campesinos Independientes, a small peasant organisation founded in the 1960s. It appears to have supported the Cerro de Oro project from the start.

many to involve less of a rift with the homeland. Many communities were divided in their choice of resettlement site along these lines and at least one (La Esperanza) refused the Commission's offer to install electricity and tap water, because they felt it would compromise their resistance.

After the Presidential decree, opposition to the project continued in Ojitlan, feelings ran high and there was a strong undercurrent of violence which erupted from time to time in fights between opposing factions. In the municipal elections of December 1972 the PRI candidates were opposed by PARM[17] candidates who were in favour of the Cerro de Oro project. The PRI won the elections as usual, but the PARM accused them of fixing the ballot boxes. On 1st January 1973, when the new President was to take office, the PARM candidates occupied the municipal offices, claiming that the victory was theirs. With remarkable speed the State recognised the PARM's claim. The PARM Municipal President appears to have held office for much less than a year of the usual three year term. Numerous accusations were levelled at him by his opponents, including that he had treated the Chinantecs badly and favoured gente de razón (as he himself was), demanded that Spanish be spoken, ogled women and raped a minor, did nothing for Ojitlan, obtained jobs for his supporters and accepted bribes from the Commission. Eventually an attempt was made to lynch him. It failed, but he was forced out of office and replaced first by an interim President and then by one of the PRI candidates he had ousted the year before.

It is worth noting that none of the major figures in the political manoeuvring against the dam appears to have participated in or supported the millenarian movement. This perhaps highlights the divisions in the Ojitlan indigenous community, since many of the actors in the "political" drama were indigenous Ojitecs, yet they dismissed the messages as fabrications. The fact that these bilingual men had reached elected positions of influence in the municipio of Ojitlan, meant that they were likely to be (at the minimum) reasonably wealthy peasants with their own network of contacts, a traditional[18] attitude to the church, a working knowledge of the local capitalist economy and some understanding of the regional/national power structure. They would probably have considered the leading figures in the millenarian movement their social and

[17] Partido Auténtico de la Revolución Mexicana, the main national opposition party.

[18] By this, I mean the traditional attitude to indigenous Catholicism, as discussed in Chapter 4.

political inferiors. The opposition to the dam project did not therefore present a united front.

The Great God Engineer and the Virgin of Guadalupe

The millenarian movement in Ojitlan developed in response to messages received by an indigenous peasant, Andres Felipe Rosa, from a series of apparitions in 1972-3.[19] Before the first message, there were widespread rumours in Ojitlan that some engineers had disappeared into Cerro de Oro and that the hill would open up and swallow those working on the dam. It was also said that the ancianos had instructed the shamans guarding the border of Ojitlan to send their nahuales to kill the President of Mexico. The attack was said to have failed because the President was very well protected by his own guardian spirits (Barabas, 1989:235).

The messages began on September 10th 1972[20] when the Great God Engineer appeared to Andres Felipe,[21] while he was working in the hills of his ejido of Potrero Viejo. There followed six further appearances of the Great God Engineer until March 1973, and the gist of his messages[22] to Andres was as follows. The dam should not be built because the river is too strong and the President has made a mistake in deciding to go ahead with it. Jesus Christ had wanted to open up Cerro de Oro to flood Tuxtepec and Veracruz (in vengeance for this plan), but did not do so because the Virgin of Carmel[23]

---

[19] My sources for this section are articles by Barabas (1974, 1977 & 1989); discussions with Barabas & Bartolomé; Lucero & David; my own copy (in Spanish) of the original messages, typed by a local schoolteacher; my own discussions during fieldwork with a variety of Ojitecs. In this section I use the term Chinantec, as Barabas does, in order to be consistent and avoid confusion. My preferred term is Ojitec as explained in Chapter 3.

[20] This was ten days after the official declaration that the dam would go ahead and five days before Mexico's Independence Day celebrations on 16th September.

[21] Andres was an ordinary indigenous peasant – typical of the humble recipients of messages from the Virgin in Roman Catholic tradition. It was a poor indigenous peasant, speaking the Indian language nahuatl, who first saw the Virgin of Guadalupe according to the story (Turner and Turner, 1978: Ch.2).

[22] The full text of the messages is in Appendix 1, both in Spanish and English. Barabas states that the text she uses was handed to her by Andres Felipe in the middle of April 1973. The messages were received by him in Chinantec, translated by his daughter into Spanish and then typed by a local schoolteacher.

[23] La Virgin del Carmen or Our Lady of Mount Carmel. The name seems to have come from an order of hermits, devoted to Jesus and the Virgin, living on Mount Carmel in (now) Israel in 13th century (http://www.ocd.pcn.net/mad_en.htm). She is one of many virgins, whose images are found in churches and homes throughout Mexico.

interceded on behalf of her children. Jesus Christ placed the Virgin of Carmel and the Virgin of Guadalupe above the hill, Cerro de Oro, for extra protection.

At the time of the third message (17th September 1972), the Great God Engineer asked Andres if he wanted to see where the Virgin of Guadalupe would be if they built the dam through the whim of the government. He asked Andres about setting up the village on the hill if the dam was built. Andres replied that there was no water on the hill. The Great God Engineer insisted that there was water and that the people should not go away, because anywhere else would be dangerous because of the dam. He showed Andres a cave in the hill of Santa Rita (in Potrero Viejo territory) within which were figures of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the Virgin of Miracles and Santa Rosa.[24] After this message, daily pilgrimages to the cave began and a ritual developed (Barabas, 1989: 249-50). Andres would stay near the cave with his son and daughter and repeat the messages to the faithful who arrived to purify themselves, to pray and to be cured of illness. The pilgrims to the cave included not only indigenous Chinantecs but also peasants from further afield from the state of Veracruz (ibid).

The next two messages from the Great God Engineer addressed the national and local authorities, as if aimed towards negotiations. The President was said to have made a mistake because he paid too much attention to the state of Veracruz, but he could correct his mistake. Mrs. Echeverría was referred to as having given much thought to the Mexican family. There was a reminder than an old man once defended Mexico with a standard of the Virgin of Guadalupe.[25]

The Virgin of Guadalupe appeared just once directly to Andres, saying that she had come as the proof wanted by the municipal authorities. The Virgin said that the dam should not be built as it cannot hold the water back and will burst. If the dam must be built, then the President of Tuxtepec must be persuaded to build a barrier in Tuxtepec to protect the city and Veracruz when the dam bursts. In their messages, both the Virgin of Guadalupe and the Great God Engineer referred to important and well-known historical figures such as Benito Juarez, Hidalgo and Lázaro Cárdenas and the stances that they had taken in the past on behalf of Mexicans and their rights, implicitly linking

[24] Although the official patron saint of the municipio is San Lucas, the festival held in honour of Santa Rosa is much bigger and in practice she is regarded as the main saint. In the panoply of deities in the messages, Santa Rosa is the local representative.

the present situation with past struggles. The Virgin offered to save the Mexican President if he would have consideration for her (and stop the dam). She agreed with everything else going on up there (in government), but not the dam. Both the Great God Engineer and the Virgin stressed that their message should be passed on to the appropriate authorities and to a newspaper in Tuxtepec.

The final message is less conciliatory and appears to withdraw the offer of proof. In it, the Great God Engineer appears to Andres in his house, saying:

> Give no proof, for the parish priest has said 'he wants to be bigger than I'. Be not troubled, if the priest does not want to come, the Virgin of Guadalupe will seek a way to make him come. It is for the priest's own good that he should come to the cave. Force is not needed.

From the 15 September 1972, the cave on the hill of Santa Rita, near the ejido Potrero Viejo, became a site of pilgrimage, with more than 100 people arriving everyday (Barabas, 1989: 239). Andres stayed in the cave (which became called the *iglesia* or church) during the day with his son or daughter to receive the pilgrims. In the first pilgrimages, people identified sacred signs and symbols left by the deities in the cave. These were the figures of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the Virgin of Miracles and Santa Rosa, which were to be found on the rocky walls and floor of the cave, marked by little piles of stones. Personal identification of these symbols - or identifying new ones – was the principal form of incorporating new people into the group of the "faithful" and into the movement. If you could "see", you became sacralised and become part of the group awaiting salvation.

The second stage to become one of the "faithful" or "chosen" was to purify oneself. At first this purification involved washing oneself with or drinking the water from a spring in the cave, but the "holy water" dried up because many people took bottles to fill with the water to take home. After this the purification involved rubbing mud (from the place where the spring had been – mud kept humid by the temperature of the cave) on to the body. From the beginning, Andres' mother-in-law, who was a shaman, ran curing sessions in the cave. Traditional curing sessions were run on very similar lines to the theme of purification mentioned above. The Spanish term used is "limpia" (or clean/purify). The shaman's curing used leafy branches (from nearby trees or picked up

[25] Miguel Hidalgo, a figurehead in the struggle for Independence from Spain.

by pilgrims on the ascent of Cerro Santa Rita), which were beaten on the body, with holy water or holy mud; then sickness was diagnosed using an egg. She would also trace the sign of the cross in holy mud on the sick part of the body.

Barabas describes the sacred spaces created by the movement. The first sacred stage was the path, about 2 ½ kilometres long, from the crossing of the river at Potrero Viejo to the Cerro Santa Rita (the location of the cave). People walked along the path sharing stories about miracles reported at the cave, talking about the destruction of the dam and the punishment of those responsible, speculating on the life of the chosen on the hill. Barabas comments that these almost took the form of a litany, with the same words being repeated by the same people, some of whom were making two or three visits a week (Barabas, 1989:250). The second stage was a wayside cross, surrounded by flowers and candles, where people would cross themselves. The third stage was ascent of the hill, which took place in silence. Candles and flowers were left at any hollow or cave in the rock on the ascent, where people might pause to pray. The final stage of the journey was the cave (or church). Inside the faithful burned incense, while candles and flowers were received everyday and placed on the altar (a rocky structure by the spring). The shaman and other older women helped with the ritual. The faithful prayed for hours in silence. One participant is quoted by Barabas: "Here it is not like the priest's church, where it's all noise and gossip; here it is serious" (ibid:251). Andres was often to be found in a space outside the cave, repeating the messages received to the pilgrims. A further sacred space was a tree, where the Virgin had appeared and left her mark in the wood.

Barabas (1977) sees the messages and the millenarian movement as an attempt by the Indians to create their own form of mediation (a sacred one) between themselves and the authorities responsible for the dam project. The secular mediators (the municipal authorities, local interest groups, the technocrats and representatives of the numerous commissions) had failed to convey the Indians' views to the appropriate authorities and Barabas considers the communication via such mediators to have been virtually one-way (downwards). It was clear to the Indians at that time that no-one was listening to them. The messages offered sacred mediators (the Great God Engineer and the Virgin of Guadalupe), who guaranteed to protect the Indians and intercede with the authorities, including the President of Mexico. Andres was the mediator of the sacred in that his role was to ensure that the messages were written down and passed on to the correct

authorities. The sacred messages and suggested solutions put the Chinantecs on an equal footing with other groups in the negotiations.

The messages incorporate and transform both indigenous beliefs about companion spirits and powers in nature and indigenous Catholicism into a new synthesis of action on behalf of the Chinantecs. The chief technocrat (the engineer) representing the national power structure is also incorporated, while messages are addressed to the people, the political decision- makers and the Catholic priest. Within indigenous belief about nature, the Great God Engineer approximates to the *dueño* (owner) or *señor* (lord) of the hill. All caves, springs and hills have such "owners", ambivalent forces that can be made beneficent through ritual. The Great God Engineer is also God and is referred to as Lord. In real life, the engineers of the Papaloapan River Commission also have ambivalent characteristics. They can provide help through building roads, providing drinking water, but they also build dams. Barabas comments that the Chinantecs' Ingeniero Grande Dios is a supernatural being, with greater power than real life engineers, who could speak out on their behalf as no-one had in the secular mediation (Barabas, 1989:243). As owner of the hill, the Ingeniero offers it as a place for the people to live. He will provide water (as both owners of the hill and real life ingenieros would). The Ingeniero Grande Dios is therefore the Messiah, who will bring justice and save the people from destruction (ibid:245). Unlike his traditional indigenous and technocrat models (the owner of the hill and the engineer), the Great God Engineer is not ambivalent towards the Chinantecs – as their Messiah, he is unequivocally on their side. Andres receives the messages, but is not a Messiah or holy person himself.

Jesus Christ behaves like the shaman as guardian of the borderline, whose role is to prevent evil entering the territory and return it to the sender. Jesus was planning to open up Cerro de Oro to flood the land below in an act of vengeance. Barabas notes that this is the only message, which implies that only the indigenous Chinantec (who live above Cerro de Oro) will be saved.

The Virgin of Guadalupe does not appear directly to Andres until the sixth message (in December 1972 or January 1973[26]), although she is mentioned earlier and pilgrims were identifying her image in the cave in late September. She presents herself as proof for

[26] The original Spanish text implies December 1972, while Barabas (1974 and 1989) has January 1973. Her eventual appearance was perhaps a response to the expectations of local people.

the municipal authorities of Ojitlan and Tuxtepec. Barabas suggests it was in response to demands for proof from these and the Catholic priest (ibid:247). The Virgins consistently argue for actions that will protect the non-indigenous peasants below the proposed dam. Thus the Virgin of Carmel stops Jesus Christ's vengeful plan to open Cerro de Oro causing floods and the Virgin of Guadalupe wants a wall built in Tuxtepec to protect the (non-indigenous) people below if the dam is built (because the dam will inevitably break).

The Virgin of Guadalupe also refers to Benito Juarez and Miguel Hidalgo (who feature in primary school history lessons) and Lazaro Cárdenas (the President who implemented the ejido land reform, which benefited most communities in Ojitlan). Barabas comments:

> These characters, all removed from their historical context, become sacred, extra-historical characters, who provide the basis for social criticism. They make it possible for the needs and objectives of the current situation to be identified with those of other situations. They reveal a revolutionary aspect to the Chinantecs' action and serve as a model for them to form one united group with other peasants and indigenous people, also on an extra-historical plane. We believe that this message is a contemporary revival of the events of the Mexican Revolution, the signal of which (blood on the foot of the Virgin) indicates the atemporal nature of events in the domain of the sacred and the possibility of recreating (metahistorically) the struggle. Without encouraging, either openly or indirectly, the indigenous people to act against the established powers, it acts as a reminder that this past could return to punish the guilty, although it could still be avoided if the government listens to the message (ibid: 247-8).

In her analysis of the movement, Barabas points out that both in the messages and in the ritual practices at the church/cave, the movement "includes all those recognised as wronged irrespective of their ethnic identity" (Barabas, 1977:250). Thus among the "just" feature not only the Indians to be displaced by the dam, but also other peasants who may be victims of the authorities. The "unjust" include the President of Mexico and his authorities and the Indian bureaucracy of Ojitlan who were not responding to the messages. Barabas writes that:

> The movement, though concerned with ethnic reintegration, has extended its frontiers and given rise to an incipient class-consciousness which will increase in this particular case if the allied peasants manage to exert enough pressure on the power groups (ibid:250).

The millenarian movement's appeal to non-indigenous peasants in fact holds an implicit criticism of Barabas and Bartolomé's concept of the homogeneous and unified ethnic group discussed in Chapter 5. The historical reality was that the people of Ojitlan had many and varied contacts with non-Chinantecs. The pilgrimage response and ritual resembles very closely the multi-ethnic participation and ritual linked to purifying and curing at the regional fiestas of Sanctuario and San Andres Teotilalpan, discussed in Chapter 4. In this sense, it is more accurately characterised as a further example of a regular practice rather than as a sign of a new alliance and new class consciousness.

Barabas considers the millenarian movement to be the first organised response of the Chinantecs to the problem of the dam. According to her, the movement began to fall apart in April 1973 owing to the deliberate interference of the same mediators who had sown confusion throughout the whole process. The indigenous and mestizo mediators refused to accept the authenticity of the revelations. They dismissed the messages and the movement as political manipulation and called Guadalupe the "Virgin of Politics". Neither they, nor the Catholic priest visited the cave/church "either through fear, through disbelief or in order not to validate the movement and the messages by their presence there" (Barabas, 1989:252). The local technocrats and the regional and national government ignored (or pretended to ignore) the movement, the threats and petitions. This attitude (of ignoring), she argues, has frequently exacerbated religious protest movements into violence, but this has not happened in this case. In 1974 Barabas and Bartolomé had also commented on the possibility of violence, by saying that it would not be surprising if the Chinantecs were to adopt violent means to defend their homeland and way of life (1974:86).

In general, Barabas continues, "ethnic socio-religious movements" are part of the history of resistance to colonialism and internal colonialism and a response to multiple deprivations suffered under this system. These movements are usually "nativist" (seeking answers from their own culture or cultural past), but also draw on the dominant culture. This acculturation in the "socio-religious movement" does not mean the loss of their own culture, because the new syncretism develops in order to reinforce the anti-colonial ideology and practice. Barabas emphasises that their approach is new in that it conceptualises "ethnic socio-religious movements" as utopias; "as projects based in the hope of a future in which will be realised dreams of happiness, justice and well-being"(1989:272). She emphasises the creative nature of these movements in that the

utopia offered is not just a repetition of old myths, but cultural roots are rescued and revalued and a new synthesis of own and alien ways is formed. Indian utopias are more concrete and less detailed than the abstract European utopias, precisely because they are open to change through the wishes and practices of the group. A utopia reconquers the past towards the future.

In sum, Barabas's analysis emphasises that the Chinantec millenarian movement is a form of resistance to internal colonialism and multiple deprivation. Thus her approach belongs within the very broad range of anthropological literature on millenarian movements (including cargo cults), in which the political, economic and religious context of the movement is analysed in order to explain its causes (as, for instance, Worsley,1968; Lantenari, 1974; Christian, 1987). Her emphasis on the construction of a utopia is particularly reminiscent of Burridge (1969). Barabas, also, emphasises the rational nature of the movement, thereby distancing herself from the comparative rationality approach of writers such as Wilson (1973), in which millenarian movements are seen as the reaction of peoples with (different) closed mentalities to change from outside.

There are some differences in the way that Barabas herself tells the story of the millenarian movement. The brief account of the millenarianism in the 1974 article begins with the appearance of the Virgin of Guadalupe on 12th December 1972 (when she did not appear, according to Barabas 1989 and my sources), followed by a mention of the Devil appearing at Cerro de Oro (not clear to whom and never mentioned again in other sources). God's own engineer is not mentioned until early 1973 (though he was, from the first message in September 1972, the main sacred mediator). The translation could account for the transcribing of El Ingeniero Grande Dios as God's own engineer, but not for the priority given to the Virgin of Guadalupe in the story. Perhaps Barabas herself was reframing the story to appeal more to a national and international audience. The Virgin of Guadalupe is a powerful, respected national symbol in Mexico, while the Great God Engineer or God's own engineer sounds eccentric and would have had only a local significance. The outcome of the Chinantec struggle was not clear at that point and Barabas and Bartolomé hoped to enlist support for the Chinantec opposition at the same time as denouncing ethnocide. It is possible to glimpse the "romance of resistance" (Abu-Lughod, 1990) in this reframing of the story, the references to the

revolution and the possibility of violent resistance, and the potential for uniting the indigenous and non-indigenous oppressed.

Barabas's analysis of the messages, the "deities" and the millenarian movement itself provide valuable ethnographic detail. Yet her analysis remains also incomplete and we are left without an explanation (apart from the role of the bilingual mediators) for the failure of the movement. A focus on the frayed edges and different strands in the movement might help to conceptualise its place in the series of responses to the Cerro de Oro project. Perhaps, in the words of Kaplan (1990), Barabas has privileged one of the novel articulations between the Chinantec and national systems of meaning at the expense of others. Has she reified the millenarian movement as the authentic voice of the Chinantec people, rather than seeing it as one of plural articulations or one of a series of forms of resistance? Barabas suggests that the movement is the "first organised response of the Chinantecs to the problem" (Barabas, 1989:235) of the dam. However, this ignores (or defines as not authentically Chinantec) the political organising mentioned above, which did include representatives from all the ejidos of Ojitlan. Most Chinantec communities were organised as ejidos. Although the ejido representatives were often from the more influential families in an ejido, they were also mainly Chinantec and did try to represent their communities' opposition to the dam. The Committee Against the Dam also included Chinantecs. These forms of opposition may have proved ineffective, but I think that they should be considered organised Chinantec attempts to face the problem.

My own fieldwork material suggests that there were probably competing discourses in the pilgrimage and sacred centres, especially the cave. Eade and Sallnow (1991) emphasise the value of examining the specifics of pilgrimage, rather than engaging in what they see as ever wider (and potentially ever more vacuous) generalisations about the phenomenon. One area of interest lies in how different sectors of the population "do" pilgrimage and how they construct the shrine's powers. Many Chinantecs visited out of curiosity, others were also interested in the possibility of curing. Some also believed in the possibility of the promised salvation from the dam. It seems to me likely that there were (at least) two competing and overlapping discourses at the cave. One was the discourse of healing, which would have drawn people from the region as did the fiestas of Sanctuario and San Andres Teotilalpan. The other discourse was of becoming saved from the dam, which could be divided into two parts. One series of messages was

calling for negotiation with political authorities and for a change of plan by the President himself. The second set of ideas was for setting up the village on the hill if the dam was to be built.

As a place of healing, the cave could have become established as the other regional centres mentioned, although the two hour climb of Cerro Santa Rita required effort and would need to be considered worth it. The setting up of the village on the hill was not a workable plan. A total of 20,000 Chinantecs were to be resettled and they could not all be located on the hill. In addition, the Chinantecs of Ojitlan do not live on the higher hills, like Cerro Santa Rita. Residents of low-lying communities would have found the idea very unattractive. Some of the messages were very direct attempts to influence negotiations (unlike the more indirect messages in Christian's case study), but they did not achieve any influence. Although at least one mestizo politician visited the cave and increased his local influence as a result,[27] the political figures did not respond positively to the messages and the movement. They either condemned them as political manipulation or ignored them. The discourse of healing could not have sustained the cave as a sacred place in the face of the failure of the project to stop the dam.

The decision to build the Cerro de Oro dam had highlighted the relative powerlessness of the people of Ojitlan in the national decision-making process. The early political opposition had included people from all ethnic and class sections of the municipio, but had failed to stop the dam project. If the millenarian movement is seen as providing a "scan of society" (Christian, 1987), then it was a forceful attempt by the ordinary indigenous Chinantecs to make their voices heard. This form of resistance called on several traditional Chinantec sources of power against the power of regional and national government. Firstly, the messages tried to harness the ambivalent forces in nature, the owners of the hills, caves and springs. The Great God Engineer, as an owner of the hill, became a Messiah for the Chinantec. This implicitly linked with the shamans (who have their powers through working with the owners of the hills) and through them with the traditional power structure of Ojitlan headed by a Council of Elders. Although Barabas emphasises that the Elders were still feared and respected in Ojitlan, the ending in 1968 of the system of *cargos* or mayordomías (which regulated access to the highest posts) was a telling sign of changes in power structures. Participation in the system of mayordomías involved a significant amount of money to

[27] Personal communication from Alvaro Lucero M., 1976.

sponsor festivals and hospitality in return for a position of respect and power in the community. By the 1970s there were already other sources of influence and power (from the regional capitalist economy, regional development agencies and national political structures). The ending of the cargo system was diagnostic of the undermining of the traditional power structure and associated powers. The demise of the millenarian movement, and especially its condemnation by local political figures, was a further indication of changes in power relations and structures.

Secondly, the messages tried to harness the powers of the Virgin of Guadalupe and the Mexican Catholic tradition of her helping the poor, oppressed, indigenous people. She is considered the most influential of the Virgins in Mexico and is frequently appealed to for healing and in emergencies, such as floods. The Roman Catholic Church in Mexico officially acknowledged two miracles of her intervention on behalf of the people of Mexico City to save them, firstly from floods in 1621 and secondly, from plague in 1737 (Turner and Turner, 1978:89). Indigenous Catholicism is an important sphere of Chinantec agency, as discussed in Chapter 4. The influence of these messages would have been enhanced by a visit from the local priest and the very last message expresses this disappointment.

The Catholic priest never visited the cave, although he was invited by Andres Felipe. The messages do not refer directly to the priest until the last one, when the Great God Engineer says that the Virgin will find a way to make the priest visit the cave for his own good. Although, the Virgin is referred to from the beginning in the messages, the main protagonist, the Great God Engineer, was not likely to elicit a positive response from the Catholic Church. Shaw and Stewart emphasise that the Roman Catholic Church has always had a clear, negative attitude to syncretism – of which the Great God Engineer is clearly an example (1994:11).[28] However, even a solo appearance by the Virgin of Guadalupe would have presented difficulties for the church. In recent history, the church in Mexico has tried to avoid political associations of the popular Virgin of Guadalupe, particularly when she may become a symbol of division and be associated with "enthusiasts whose teachings have conflicted with orthodoxy and whose eager

[28] The Roman Catholic Church does, however, allow for "inculturation", whereby the Word of God can be adapted into local idioms and symbolic repertoires. Shaw and Stewart note that Catholic priests may find the distinction between inculturation and syncretism difficult to make in practice (Stewart and Shaw, 1994:11).

followers have disrupted orderly civil and ecclesiastical life" (Turner and Turner, 1978:77).

It is not clear how much the historical references would have meant to the Chinantecs. There have been plenty of examples in Mexican history of Virgins associated with politics. The Independence struggle was fought by pro-Independence fighters under the banner of Guadalupe and pro-Spanish fighters under the banner of the Virgen de los Remedios; whilst Guadalupe was also associated with Zapata and the revolution. My discussions in Ojitlan suggested that while people did feel strongly about the land reform, they had mixed feelings about the violence of the revolution, which some had avoided, whilst others had fought in it.
The Chinantec millenarian movement tried to appropriate the national symbol of Guadalupe in its struggle against the national government. The Roman Catholic Church in Mexico could not have supported that. The local priest neither supported nor condemned the movement.[29] In the original story of the Virgin of Guadalupe, an initially sceptical Roman Catholic bishop was eventually persuaded by signs to accept the vision as genuine. The Chinantecs had hoped for a similar ending.

The third attempt to draw on sources of power was in the direct appeal to the President of Mexico. There was the suggestion that he had been mistaken and could change his mind when he realised this. This is a direct appeal from the citizens. Implicit in this is the view that the intermediaries/mediators are responsible for the mistake. This theme of blaming "mediators" runs through the whole debate. Analysts such as Barabas and Bartolomé blame the bilingual mediators for "betraying" the Chinantec; the millenarian messages implicitly blame the mediators for failing to pass on their views and the Commission engineers later blamed other intermediaries for stirring up the people against resettlement and Uxpanapa.

The question of whether the pilgrims could "see" the signs of the Virgin in the cave recurred in my discussions with Ojitecs during my fieldwork.[30] People commented that

[29] Personal communication from Alvaro Lucero, who told me that the priest was Italian. My sources are not entirely clear whether this was the same priest as when I arrived in 1976. Some Ojitecs told me that the Italian priests arrived in 1974.

[30] I realise the limitations of views expressed three or four years after the event. However, I did hear a great variety of views, which suggested to me that people's experience of the pilgrimage and the cave was varied, allowing some scope for the concept of competing discourses.

there was nothing to see or nothing there. It was said that the Virgin of Guadalupe had left Mexico City to come here to stop the dam being built. One man asked a friend of his to go and check. The friend reported that the Virgin was still in her basilica in the Mexico City, so that was a lie. Some people who "didn't see anything" still visited several times in the hope of something. Others said they had seen the Virgin of Guadalupe, the Virgin of Carmel, the Virgin of the Soledad, the Virgin of Miracles,[31] Miguel Hidalgo, Benito Juarez. Two sisters said they had seen two little pigs in a yellow colour (as if of gold) high up on the ceiling of the cave, where no human could have reached to paint them. They emphasised the marvellous things in the cave but that no-one would touch them, because they were sacred. There were stories of people being cured of illnesses and a story of a man who stole something and went lame until he made reparation and was cured. The Virgin wanted to speak to the President of Ojitlan, but he didn't go, so she disappeared. A curandero told me that he visited twice and saw the Virgin (of Guadalupe) both times, as she is in her picture. He has *la vista* (sight), but a lot of people went and saw nothing, because they didn't have "sight". The people (or owners) of the hill are said to work with curanderos and help to give them power.

The importance placed on "seeing" the signs of the Virgin was potentially divisive, rather than uniting. Traditional Chinantec views are that there *are* differences in what people can see. The curanderos have "sight" and some people have "strong sight" (which can damage others and needs curing). Some people can see the spirits (such as, "owners" of the hills) and others cannot. In addition, there is the possibility of "mistaken sight" (seeing the Devil, but thinking it is a good force). "Seeing" correctly may still lead to a bad outcome if the ambivalent spirit is not made beneficent. Thus, what each person "saw" was a very individual thing, perhaps countering the potentially unifying force of the movement itself. The question of who the messages were from and who was in the cave was debated and disputed from the beginning of the movement. The indigenous "owners" of the hill were ambivalent forces, who could help or harm those who went near. The positive view of the messages gave the Great God Engineer the status of Messiah and removed the ambivalence of his role models (the owner of the hill and the engineer). However, a reinterpretation of the messages of a failing

[31] These are some of the popular representations of the Virgin in Mexico. People often have small pictures of one or more of these in their houses, as part of their household altar.

The most important collective social practice of the movement seems to have been the curing ritual, which was already established within Chinantec culture and a feature of the visits to the church in regional fiestas. The pilgrimage to the cave offered everyone the chance to act. In this sense, like many features of indigenous Catholicism discussed in Chapter 4, it created an opportunity for a form of autonomous direct action, a sphere of legitimate agency for all. There was no need to wait for a mediator to return from a meeting to speak to another meeting. Everyone and anyone could go and do and see. The innovations in practice – listening to Andres Felipe retell the story of the messages and silent prayer in the cave – did not evolve into forms of political protest. The main thrust of the movement was offering (sacred) mediation and negotiation. The discourse of healing at the cave was not sufficient to sustain the movement in the face of the failure of its overt aim of negotiation to stop the dam.

In the situation of confusion, frustration and uncertainty which existed, many Chinantecs, as well as non-indigenous peasants from a wider area, seem to have responded to the messages by visiting the cave. The movement grew rapidly, since it offered the Chinantecs some hope in an apparently hopeless situation. However, it must be remembered that the visitors had different experiences. Whilst some were convinced by what they saw, others saw nothing but kept returning in hope and yet others were disillusioned and disappointed.

By 1976, at the time of my arrival, the movement had clearly failed and there was no trace left of the activities or the excitement reported at its height. I found that many people were reluctant to talk about the movement and felt some embarrassment that they had let themselves be deceived. When people did talk, many stressed both the terrible uncertainty of the times and the sense of hope and faith engendered in them by the messages and the pilgrimages they had made to the cave. The movement appears to have petered out in 1973. In October 1976, Andres Felipe's wife told me that no-one had visited the cave for well over a year and that the path was completely overgrown and impassable. People now accused her and her husband of cheating and lying and said that it had been the Devil in the cave and not the Virgin at all. Andres Felipe was at that time working in the resettlement zone, Uxpanapa. He was said to dress quite well and some suggested he had profited from the offerings of money left in the cave.

The visions and pilgrimage reported in Ojitlan in 1972-3 can be set in a pattern of similar events recorded since the 16th century in Mexico. Various sites (now important pilgrimage centres) are associated with an appearance of the Virgin or a miraculous event involving an image of the Virgin or Christ. These include Tepeyac (in Mexico City – the Virgin of Guadalupe), Chalma (the Black Christ) and Ocotlan, Tlaxacala (the Virgin). The places, stories, forms of worship and symbolism incorporate aspects of pre-Columbian religion. Turner and Turner (1978:Ch.2) and Nutini (1970:3, cited in Turner and Turner 1978) give some examples of the syncretism involved and the (syncretic) symbols of unity produced. Nutini even suggests that the early Franciscan methods of converting the Tlaxacalan Indians could be characterised as "guided syncretism" in the use made of similarities between the pre-Columbian and Catholic religions (ibid.). Turner and Turner note that traditions of humble shepherds or farmers seeing the Virgin or finding images of her in the earth/under stones or in caves can be traced back even further to mediaeval Europe. There were also regional pilgrimage traditions in Mexico before the Spanish conquest. Barabas (1989) locates the Ojitlan movement in the context of ethnic socio-religious movements since the 16th century, which have developed as responses to colonialism/oppression, as protest movements offering utopian solutions. Her examples are drawn from all over Mexico (from the northern states to Yucatan and Oaxaca) though the Chinantec are her only 20th century example.

The Fragmentation of Resistance

As the millenarian movement tried to forge a synthesis of traditional and modern (technical and citizen) sources of power to prevent the Cerro de Oro project, the Papaloapan River Commission continued its work in Ojitlan. The new economic opportunities were probably the most decisive factor in the fragmentation of resistance to the Cerro de Oro project. Political divisions over the project were very obvious in the Ojitlan municipal elections of December 1972, with the PRI against the dam and the PARM in favour. The local political supporters of the dam condemned the millenarian movement as political manipulation, while the local political opponents of the dam did not support the movement or visit the cave. There also seem to have been continual initiatives from the Commission, which helped to establish their firmness of purpose. During 1972-3, there were various official studies and surveys in Ojitlan, including the anthropological work previously mentioned, studies of land use, compilation of lists of

those eligible for resettlement and surveys of ejidatarios' belongings for compensation. High levels of indemnification were assessed – much higher than in the resettlement of the Miguel Alemán dam (Allen, 1978:219). Communications were improved through the construction of a major bridge over the River Santo Domingo and smaller ones over streams such as at Paso Limón. Dirt roads were cut to the communities. Electricity and drinking water were offered. The Office for the Resettlement was set up in Ojitlan in 1973 to organise and oversee the process locally. Visits were organised for ejidal representatives to the various resettlement sites and ejidos then voted for their choice. The majority chose Uxpanapa, with Los Naranjos as the second most popular choice. Work in Uxpanapa began in August 1973 with the construction of a road from the Trans-Isthmus (of Tehuantepec) highway 140 kms into the zone to the River Uxpanapa. Once the proposals for Uxpanapa were decided in 1974, work began on the clearing of forest in some areas and related construction work. This began to open up opportunities for well-paid waged labour for Ojitecs in Uxpanapa. The first crop was sown in winter 1974-5 in which members of 5 ejidos took part. By winter 1975-6, 11 ejidos were involved and in summer 1976, 23 ejidos (Ewell and Poleman, 1979:131).

The Commission's work brought money and jobs to Ojitlan. Some Ojitecs obtained jobs working directly for the Commission as messengers, caretakers, general labourers, clerical and maintenance staff. Others benefited from providing services such as restaurants and bars. Resettlement in Uxpanapa offered every ejidatario 20 hectares of land. There were also various opportunities for well-paid waged labour in clearing land, construction and working on government crops. In addition, groups of ejidatarios began to sign up for moving to Uxpanapa to work on their new ejido land. The first 12 ejidos received compensation for their goods and belongings in 1975. This sequence of events clearly emphasised that the government meant business, that the project was going ahead, and many people were drawn into participation in the new economic opportunities. The cash available, both paid and promised, emphasised the seriousness of the government's intent. At the same time, many, especially those with land and assets in Ojitlan, still hoped that in some way the project would fail and the dam would not be built.

In Paso Limón, 35 men signed up in 1976 to go to work on their new ejido in Uxpanapa. Their situation highlights some of the reasons for the fragmentation of resistance to resettlement. Some were existing ejidatarios with very little land, others

were young men with ejido rights but no land and others had no ejido rights at all. Some of them had been pilgrims and visited the cave at the height of the movement in 1972-3. By 1976, Uxpanapa seemed to represent a better opportunity for them than their home community. They signed papers accepting the Cerro de Oro project and resettlement, despite the opposition of other members of the community. Some men were single; many initially left their women and children in Paso Limón. They set up a provisional community called La Horqueta and after living first in a kind of communal barn, gradually built their own temporary houses. The site of the final settlement was nearby, but not yet constructed. The 35 ejidatarios then began to sow crops (rice and maize) working on the model of the collective ejido, with credit from the bank and use of machinery and chemical inputs. This model of development and the Ojitec responses are discussed more fully in Chapter 8.

In this chapter, I have examined local political and millenarian responses to the Cerro de Oro project, which had been devised to meet regional and national development needs. The local opposition took different forms, which threw into relief differences between communities and different political alliances within Ojitlan. I have argued that the political opposition of 1972 should be seen as the first organised Chinantec response, it being no less Chinantec for its broad alliance with non-Chinantec groups in Ojitlan. The millenarian movement is the second strand of Chinantec opposition, with different leaders, those more closely linked (like Andres Felipe) with traditional sources of power and less fluent in Spanish. As a form of resistance in the realm of religion, the millenarian movement could be considered an indirect form of resistance, although its messages were very explicitly aimed at influencing negotiations and decisions about Cerro de Oro. The movement drew on traditional forms of power (the powers in nature and shamans; the Virgin and other Catholic "deities") and established religious practices (of pilgrimage and curing), whilst it also appealed to new sources of power (the citizens' appeal to the decision-making President; the Ingeniero/God advising against the dam). The messages expressed both the syncretic nature of indigenous Catholicism and its continuing creative potential as it incorporated the new power of the Ingeniero as Messiah. As discussed earlier, indigenous Catholicism offers a sphere of agency within which all can feel able to act with autonomy and integrity.[32] Taking part in ritual activity is legitimate agency on behalf of the greater community.

[32] This may sound romanticised. However, Ojitecs were certainly able to act with *more* autonomy and integrity in *this* sphere than in many other spheres of economic and political relationships.

The movement's failure to influence the major decision-makers must be considered a factor in its loss of popular support. Yet, the demise of the movement did not necessarily discredit the belief system itself. The figures in the cave could be reinterpreted as perhaps the devil or the malevolent "owners" of the hill and springs; it was said that the Virgin of Guadalupe had wanted to see the negotiators, but when they didn't appear, she went away (but she is still around). However, the powers of the shamans (and of the Elders) were probably questioned, given that the ending of mayordomías had already begun to undermine the traditional power structure. The early local responses, discussed here, to the Cerro de Oro project based their protests on defending both a place and a way of life. As the Papaloapan River Commission pursued its initiatives, particularly those offering economic rewards (waged labour; the promise of payment for immovable goods, such as fruit trees), questions were raised about the (class) variation in the quality of the way of life that was being defended. The younger and more disadvantaged groups began to consider that they could improve and defend their way of life in another place through accepting the offer of resettlement in Uxpanapa.

Chapter 7: Resistance to Catholic Reforms

This chapter considers further forms of resistance in Ojitlan, which occurred in response to the local implementation of reforms within the Roman Catholic Church. Two resident Italian priests, of the Salesian Order, began to put into practice the *Nueva Evangelización* (New Evangelisation) policy of the new Archbishop of Oaxaca, Bartolomé Carrasco. Communities became divided in their response to the reforms, with some people supporting the priests and some resisting, at times with violence, the changes in ritual and changes in what was required to be a "good Catholic". The resistance to the Catholic reforms often took the form of revitalising traditional forms of religious ritual. Here I examine in detail the Ojitec views for and against the reforms and the processes of division, accommodation and resistance that occurred within several communities and in the villa of Ojitlan itself. Some of the fault lines in communities were parallel to the divisions that had begun to appear over resettlement in Uxpanapa. The resistance to the local version of "New Evangelisation" is discussed and compared with previous forms of resistance in Ojitlan.

The Reforms

In 1974, two Italian priests of the Salesian order arrived in Ojitlan and began to introduce what they saw as reforms into the practice of Catholicism in Ojitlan. Their overall aims were to educate the people in Catholic doctrine, remove the non-religious aspects of religious occasions and submit the Ojitecs more overtly to the authority of the church.

The priests wanted to reduce the emphasis on images in fiestas and prohibit the drinking of alcohol and dancing during those fiestas. They disapproved of the traditional band of wind instruments in fiestas and would not allow them to play in church. In some community services held by the priests' supporters, the band was replaced by guitar music. The priests also insisted that people should attend classes in Catholic doctrine before receiving certain sacraments. Thus, before baptism, the child's parents had to attend mass for four Sundays and attend the classes afterwards. Potential godparents also had to do this, as did a couple who wished to be married. The doctrinal classes were often held in the priests' house or in other houses. The priests also wished to extend their control over chapels in the rural communities by claiming the right to

approve who should be the chapel caretaker and the right to decide on what activities should take place there.

The priests began to train indigenous men to be *catequistas*, who were to help educate people in the Catholic doctrine and assist the priests in church services. Some of these men had little land to work on and could be considered marginal people, with limited resources and time to spare. Catequistas were expected to run doctrinal classes and lead prayers in their own communities. They changed the format of prayers, incorporating lengthy readings of the Bible and interpretations of the passages read (both in Ojitec and Spanish). The style of prayers also changed from the chanting in nasal intonation similar to the Ojitec language to a more melodic singing.

The catequistas, as representatives of the priests, also made direct attacks on indigenous Catholic ritual. In the ritual relating to death, they tried to stop the sweeping of the house and the eating of meals as an integral part of the ritual. They argued that the people spent more time preparing and eating food than they did in prayer. The catequistas also wanted the men to take an active part in prayers instead of staying outside drinking, lamenting and talking. Finally, they also demanded to choose the godparents of the cross in order to ensure that those chosen were "true" Catholics, that is supporters of the priests who have attended classes.

The responses of the priests' critics ranged from discontent to outrage. Complaints were made to the Archbishop of Oaxaca, both in writing and by delegations of protesters. The Archbishop supported his priests and had ruled that there were no grounds for removing them. It was, in fact, the Archbishop himself who was responsible for the implementation of the New Evangelisation reforms in the state of Oaxaca. The general approach, known as "The Option for the Poor" and based in Liberation Theology, aimed to emphasise that the church's true obligation is to the poor and oppressed.[1] The aims of New Evangelisation were to enrich knowledge and understanding of church doctrine and to "purify" components of popular religion that misinterpreted or misused Catholic symbols (such as drunkenness during fiestas and ritual overspending on life cycle rituals or mayordomías). The methods to achieve this encouraged the laity to lead lectures during mass and participate in Bible discussion

[1] "The Option for the Poor" was formally accepted into the official ecclesiastical plan at the meeting of the Latin American Bishops in Puebla, Mexico in 1978 (Norget, 1997:81; Berryman, 1987).

groups, with a view to making individual church members more "conscious" and aware. People also had to attend *pláticas* (catechising talks) before the rites, such as baptism. Norget suggests that "the discourse of this church reformist movement attempts to shape a mindset of individual freedom and progress through rationality, knowledge and self-determination" (Norget, 1997:80).

Resistance in Ojitlan

On Sunday 24 October 1976, the protests took a violent turn when the Archbishop visited Ojitlan. During midday mass in the church of Ojitlan, a battle broke out between the supporters of the priests and their opponents who had entered the church to protest to the Archbishop about the priests' behaviour. The indigenous Ojitec protesters entered the church, shouting that the priest was a Protestant and that he did not say mass as it used to be.[2] They threw stones, drew blood from the priest's hand and face and damaged windows and doors. The Archbishop ended up with some blood on his vestments. One of the priests (the most disliked) fled for his life, jumped in his car and drove off, chased by men throwing stones. A number of people were hurt as well as the priest, but there were no serious injuries. The windows and doors of the vestry and the priests' house were also damaged and the church loudspeaker was left hanging loose.[3]

Throughout the afternoon, there were crowds of people (mainly men) in the area around the church. They were discussing the events in groups and there was an atmosphere of excitement. The door of the church had been locked by the protesters. The military police arrived from Tuxtepec at about 4.15 pm and stood guard at the police office. Statements were taken from the protesters and from the priests and the Archbishop, but no one was detained. The crowds dispersed. It should be noted that the protesters felt they were very clearly in the right and did not run off afterwards, but stayed to justify and explain their behaviour.

---

[2] This account comes from an eye witness in the congregation and my own observations from about 3.30 pm. For the previous few days I had been in one of the rural ejidos and so I missed the actual fighting.

[3] Middle level officials of the Papaloapan Commission working in Ojitlan condemned the attack on the priests as *fanatismo* (religious fanaticism) and saw it as further proof of the ignorance and irrationality of the indigenous population. This will be discussed further in Chapter 8 Development Ideology and Practice.

The statements made to the authorities were reported in El Tuxtepecano, a weekly paper. Pedro Ronquillo, an indigenous Ojitec, leader of the protesters and President of the Comité de la Acción Católica (Committee for Catholic Action) made a statement as follows:

> The priests have obstructed the right of the faithful to get married and to baptise their children. In addition the Committee has constantly received complaints from many families that when their daughters have gone to confess or take communion, the priest has put the girl in a room alone and made indecent approaches to her. The committee has made many complaints about these matters, which have been ignored by the church hierarchy in Oaxaca.
>
> On the day in question, Ronquillo and others entered the church to talk with the Archbishop who was officiating at mass, when they were attacked by about 50 people inside the church. Then one of the priests fired two shots from a revolver and the priests' supporters attacked them with sticks and stones, causing injury to 16 persons (who are named).

At the end of his statement, Ronquillo again asked for the immediate removal of the Italian priests to avoid a recurrence of these events which might result in deaths (El Tuxtepecano, 31 October 1976, Tuxtepec, Mexico).

The Archbishop's statement went as follows:

> The Archbishop arrived in Ojitlan with the two Italian priests at about 11 am to celebrate mass at 11.30. When he arrived there was a large group of people gathered in front of the church. Although they were talking in Ojitec, he realised that they wanted to expel the Italian priests from the church. It was also known that the day before announcements had been made on the radio encouraging all the communities of Ojitlan to take part.
>
> During the mass, someone approached the Archbishop with a letter signed by the Catholic Action Committee asking him now that he was in Ojitlan to give a personal reply to the requests that he had already received to remove the Italian priests. The Archbishop asked to speak to Ronquillo, who entered with about fifty supporters. He told Ronquillo that there were no grounds for granting their request and that they could discuss the matter further when the mass was over. Ronquillo and his group withdrew.
>
> A short while later, a group of about 50 entered the church, forcing their way to the altar and began to attack the catequistas and those around them with sticks, stones, vases and candleholders from the altar. They smashed the stone font and used pieces from it to attack those present. The congregation managed to remove the protesters from the church but they then went to wreck the priests' houses, breaking plates, windows and washbasins. They were prevented from entering the church again by barricades of pews (ibid).

Evidence from witnesses suggests that it was indeed the protesters who initiated the fight, despite their official statement to the contrary. However, the scene appears to have ended, not as in the Archbishop's statement, but with the protesters in charge of the church and the priests locked out. Certainly the priests did not officiate again in the church for over a year and instead held mass in the storeroom of an indigenous shopkeeper in Ojitlan and elsewhere where they had supporters, as for example in the ejido of Monte Bello on the road between Ojitlan and Tuxtepec.

These events were the culmination of a growing dissatisfaction with the Italian priests which was felt by many sections of the community and the failure of various previous protests to the Archbishop. They saw violent direct action as their last resort. The municipal authorities (the PRI) of Ojitlan appear to have turned a blind eye to the possibility of trouble in the church and made no attempt to prevent it, although it must have been clear that something was brewing. At least some of the elected municipal officials were themselves opposed to the priests and privately supported the attack.

Resistance in Paso Limón

Several of the rural communities of Ojitlan had thrown the priest out of their chapels earlier, though without the same violence. Paso Limón was one of these. The priests' supporters in Paso Limón recounted the story to me as follows:

> From about April 1974, courses in Catholic doctrine were held in the chapel of Paso Limón. The classes were given by the priest or by visiting students from a seminary in Mexico or by catequistas. The classes were quite well attended and there were four sessions, one for girls, one for married women, one for children and one for the men. The priest used to come to Paso Limón quite often.
>
> In August 1975, Enrique Morales[4] (a resident of Paso Limón) started to attend classes in Tuxtepec to train as a catequista. He would return every now and then to give classes in the chapel. The priest wanted Enrique to be in charge of the chapel. The President of the chapel said that only the priest should give classes in the chapel. Pedro Moreno was also a catequista by then – he was a resident of

[4] By then Enrique Morales was already the Resettlement Representative for the group of 35 from Paso Limón who were keen to start work in Uxpanapa.

Paso Limón who had been an inveterate drunkard and people objected to receiving religion from him.

At the fiesta of the Virgin of Guadalupe, 1975, the priest did not want mass and the dance to take place on the same day. Most people did want mass and the dance on the same day as it was the tradition. There was also trouble at Christmas over the Posadas. The first posada used to be held in the school and was followed by music, dancing and drunkenness. The priest did not want this and a small group of about 12 adults stood up in favour of the priest and formed their own faction. They were nicknamed the "Twelve Apostles".[5]

In February/March 1976, the priest sent a message to Miguel Niño (one of the "Twelve Apostles") for the President of the chapel saying that he was coming to say mass and that the chapel should be opened. The chapel was not opened. Nothing happened.

On 4th April 1976, there was to be a wedding in Paso Limón. The priest sent a message via a young woman, Antonia Lopez, saying that he was coming. Antonia, who had not yet taken sides, gave the message to her brother, the local police agent (and an opponent of the priest), so that they were ready to pounce on the priest when he arrived at the chapel. The priests' opponents tied up the catequistas and also the priest for a very short while, but then they untied him. The wedding had to be postponed until the following day when the mass was said in Ojitlan.

The priests' opponents told me a different story:

The people began to attend the classes which the priest held in the community chapel. There was, however, a growing dislike of the new upstart catequistas.

The trouble really began in October 1975 when the priest went to say mass in the chapel. He asked to see a list of the members of the committee which would be organising the forthcoming fiesta of the Virgin of Guadalupe (12 December).

When he was shown the list, he objected because he did not want the customary dance to be held. The people suggested that he could come and say mass either the day before or the day after the dance on the 12th if he wished to avoid it. The priest did not agree.

Later the priest sent a message to Miguel Niño saying that he was coming to say mass on a certain day and that the chapel should be open. The chapel was opened, but when the priest arrived he wanted to choose a new President of the chapel. The people refused. The priests' view was that those who were educating themselves in Catholic doctrine should be in charge of the chapel. The community's view was that they would elect whom they wished to the post of President and that the community would also decide what would happen in the chapel.

On another occasion the priest sent a message saying that he was coming to say mass, but when he arrived the chapel was locked and the President of the chapel refused to hand the key over to the priest because he said that the people did not want it. The priest and his supporters broke the padlock, entered the chapel, said mass and then the priest left.

On the final occasion the priest arrived with his supporters, broke into the locked chapel and said mass. The people opposed to the priest were waiting, and they entered the chapel, took hold of the priest and tied up some of his supporters, taking them to the jail in Ojitlan where they spent the night. The priest was not attacked, but was warned to leave immediately before there was further trouble.

Since then, April 1976, the Italian priests have not entered the chapel in Paso Limón, although they have said mass in the houses of their supporters in the community. (In June 1976, the ejidatarios voted out Alfredo Merino as comisariado ejidal[6] because he had not supported the people against the priest.) Both versions of the dispute make it clear that the crucial issues were the priest's claim to nominate the President of the chapel; his demand that the catequistas run classes in the chapel and his interference in

[5] A year later, at Christmas 1976, the group had grown and appeared to include most, if not all, of the 35 in Uxpanapa.

the organisation of community fiestas. In these examples, the priest was overstepping his traditional role in indigenous Catholicism and attempting to establish his authority in new areas in the community. In November 1977 the priests sent a letter to the ejidal authorities of Paso Limón in which they set out terms for the "re-opening" of the chapel. These were as follows:

1. The resignation of the present caretaker and those in charge of the chapel.
2. Free acceptance of the reconciliation between the community and the Church.
3. The recognition that those responsible for the chapel of Paso Limón are the priests of Ojitlan.
4. The acceptance of the catequistas that the priests may send.
5. The acceptance that the chapel of Paso Limón should be open to everyone in Paso Limón and to the Catholics of other communities.
6. The acceptance that religious fiestas will be celebrated without alcoholic beverages.
7. The caretaker of the chapel will be nominated after a time by those who attend the chapel.

The majority of the ejidatarios were vehemently opposed to accepting these terms and were particularly opposed to points 1,3,4 and 6, which they considered to be gross incursions on the community's capacity for self-determination.

Objections to the Reforms

Although the objections reported in newspapers emphasised accusations of abuse by the priests, the more widespread popular concern was with the changes in the practice of Catholicism. One of the most frequently heard denunciations of the priests was that they were *evangelistas* (the word used for Protestants). Although there was very little Protestantism in Ojitlan, it had taken root in the neighbouring village of Usila and many Ojitecs knew of the ideas and practices which characterised it there. They were also aware of the divisions that Protestantism had caused within Usila. The priests' actions were seen as evidence of Protestant infiltration into the Catholic Church because many

[6] The ejidatarios then voted in Francisco Montor, one of the two men who went to Oaxaca in 1935 to start the petition for the ejido. This emphasised further the link between the group against the priest and the "old families", who did well at the start of the ejido.

of their reforms imitated Protestant ritual. The dislike of images, the stress on classes and talking, the priests' frequent use of the word "Alleluia" in services, the reading from the Bible and lengthy discussion of passages from it, the banning of wind instruments in church, changing the style and music of singing, the prohibition on dances and drinking – these were all well-known features of Protestantism. There was also heavy criticism of holding classes or services in people's houses or other non-sacred buildings – Protestants did this. The reading of the Bible and discussion of it was a use of non-sacred language (ordinary talking) in religious ritual which was vehemently condemned.[7] It also prolonged the service and Protestants were known for the interminable hours they spent in prayer sessions.

In attempting to introduce these reforms, the priests radically overstepped their traditional sphere of authority. In Ojitec eyes, the priest's authority stemmed from the fact that he was educated, he mediated between the people and God and administered the sacraments for them. He celebrated mass and led them in prayers in consecrated religious buildings. His authority lay in his unique ability to perform these sacred ceremonies on consecrated ground. With the push for reform, the priest became someone interfering in people's daily lives, demanding their attendance at non-sacred sessions to learn the doctrine on non-sacred ground (the priests' house or other houses), demanding authority over community property (chapels) and over community events (fiestas and other rituals). The trouble was compounded by the fact that the priests were Italian and could be added to the long line of foreigners in school and folk history who have tried to control Mexicans.

The priests were also training catequistas to replace the traditional rezanderos. The rezandero was a human vehicle through which the appropriate prayers were said in the community when necessary. He practised his received knowledge of formulaic prayers and ritual and acts on behalf of the community. The rezandero's authority stemmed from his knowledge and practice. Anyone wishing to become a rezandero had to accompany and learn from an existing rezandero and prove himself (or, theoretically, herself) within the community before he was able to lead prayers alone. The rezandero's authority therefore also stemmed from the community, as people acknowledged him by asking him to say prayers at the anniversary of someone's death

[7] One old woman, a good Ojitec Catholic, condemned this sacrilege with righteous anger – "There they are with their f...g Bible talking nothing but f...g gossip."

and on the other individual and communal ritual occasions. He served an apprenticeship, proving himself, earning respect and acceptance over time from the community before being accorded ritual authority.

Unlike the rezandero, the catequista derived his or her authority from the priest who trained him away from the community. Instead of serving a community apprenticeship, they acquired ritual authority relatively suddenly. The catequista's duties and source of authority were radically different from those of the rezandero. They did not act as vehicles of received knowledge, but rather spent a large part of a prayer session interpreting the Bible in everyday language. They were seen to be acting and improvising as individuals and claiming divine support for their *own* words. Traditionally only the priest had given sermons on rare occasions. He had the authority to do this because of his education and his direct link with God. The catequistas were criticised not only for their usurpation of authority, but also for their ignorance and bad Spanish. Although the traditional rezanderos spoke bad Spanish (many worse than the catequistas), this was not perceived as a problem because in indigenous Catholic ritual the recitation of prayers followed a formula of words, sound and rhythm, which demanded neither a perfect understanding nor perfect pronunciation of Spanish. However, the catequistas engaged in "ordinary talk" or "gossip" in religious services without possessing the priest's education and sacred standing.

Furthermore, the catequistas were seen as upstarts, the little boys and drunks of yesterday (many of them were), who had no right or authority to stand up and impart religion to the community. For some of them, becoming a catequista was their only way of gaining an authoritative voice within the community, because as poor ejidatarios or landless men, they would have been unlikely to achieve an elected position of power within the ejido.

The demand that people attend doctrinal classes before receiving certain sacraments was very unpopular and considered a waste of time. The parents of a child to be baptised not only had to be married, but had to attend mass for four Sundays as well as the classes afterwards. The godparents-to-be were also expected to attend. This conflicted with traditional practices in that godparents chosen for their wealth or contacts could not really be expected to go through this procedure. The obligation to go to mass and attend classes seemed an excessive drain on the people's free time. Mass was not held

regularly in the outlying communities of Ojitlan, nor were the classes at first. This meant that people had to spend a large part of Sundays on a special trip to the centre of Ojitlan. Sunday is deemed to be a day of rest and is a popular drinking time for the men, while the women also enjoy a rest from extra-domestic chores. The need to attend classes made it more difficult to combine a baptism with a fiesta, a common indigenous practice, since more advance planning now became necessary. A young couple attending mass and classes prior to their marriage would have to be accompanied by the girl's mother or other female relative, since the two young people would not be allowed to go out alone, lest the boy "take advantage" of the girl or they elope. This situation once again makes demands on the relatively small amount of free time enjoyed by women.

Many Ojitecs attempted to circumvent this demand by going to Tuxtepec churches instead. However, once this became a widespread practice, priests in Tuxtepec began to refuse to baptise children from Ojitlan, saying that it should be done in Ojitlan. The way around this, for some at least, was to give their place of residence as Uxpanapa, where in 1976 there was no resident priest.

The priests and their representatives made direct attacks on some central aspects of indigenous Catholic ritual. They were opposed to the hospitality offered to mourners during the nine day ritual after a death on the grounds that people spent more time in preparing food and eating than they did in actual prayers. Certainly the bereaved women and their close female relatives spend little time in prayers because they are busy in the kitchen. The catequistas and their supporters began to refuse to eat in the bereaved household, saying "We did not come to eat, we came to pray." This upset many Ojitecs, including some who supported the catequistas for political reasons, but who still respected indigenous Catholic ritual. The reformers also tried to make men participate actively in the prayers, instead of their traditional drinking and talking. A direct attack was made on the sweeping of the house after a death and the catequistas would take the broom away from the person appointed to carry out this task, declaring that it was not Catholic to do so. The catequistas also claimed the authority to choose the godparents of the cross, in order to ensure that they were "good" Catholics (that is supporters of the priests).

The indigenous Catholic tone of prayers and singing was very nasal and obviously related to the intonations and sounds of the indigenous Ojitec language. The prayers and people's responses to prayers followed a formula akin to chanting, which was only found on religious occasions. The priests and their supporters disliked these sounds and advocated a style of singing and prayers that was more related to the intonation of the Spanish language. Their songs and prayers were livelier, with their rhythms more akin to the national anthem and other songs sung by children in schools. To many Ojitecs, this new style no longer sounded sacred and also seemed similar to the songs sung by Protestants.

The prohibition on dances and drinking at religious fiestas was a direct attack on existing gender identities, as drinking is considered very manly. It also attacked the part of the fiesta which offered the male officials the opportunity to enhance their status and show and develop their network of contacts within the community and beyond it. Dancing on religious occasions was an important arena for courtship and, like many other aspects of ritual, a context where important statements were made about gender identity and relationships.

Some Ojitecs also interpreted the priests' reforms as an attack on the Mexican constitution. An article appearing in El Tuxtepecano on 7 November 1976, a fortnight after the trouble in Ojitlan, pointed out what some had already known about the law. Under a front page headline, "Flagrant Violation of Our Constitution", the writer cited three articles of the Mexican Constitution relevant to the dispute over the priests.

> Article 130: In order to practise as a minister of any religion in Mexico, a person must be a Mexican national by birth.[8]
>
> Article 24: All religious acts of public worship should take place specifically within the temples (churches), which are to be under the watchful eye of the (civil authorities). (ibid:20)
>
> Article 27: The temples that are erected for public worship are the property of the nation. (ibid:25)

The article condemned the Archbishop of Oaxaca for collusion in the violation of the Constitution and then went on to condemn religious abuses (including by Protestant groups) and the exploitation of the people.

---

[8] Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, 1978:106

After the trouble in the church and the publication of this article, there was widespread discussion of the issues throughout the communities of Ojitlan. The priests' opponents interpreted their stand in terms of defence of the constitution in three ways. Firstly, the priests were foreigners illegally practising religion in Mexico. Foreigners had no right to order Mexicans about. Just as a man is master in his own house, so the Mexicans are masters in their own country. The atmosphere of hostility to foreigners was very general in Ojitlan and in the early weeks of my fieldwork more than a few thinly veiled threats came my way, making it clear that if *I* overstepped the line, I would meet the same fate as the priests. I was also frequently questioned as to whether England was close to Italy or were they in fact the same country? The second argument made was that religious buildings are the property of the nation, not the church, so the people should decide what happens in the churches. If they did not like the behaviour of the priests, they had a perfect right to protest and their protest should be heard. Finally public worship should take place inside proper religious buildings and not, for instance, in people's houses where the Italian priests were prepared to say mass.

Processes of Religious Resistance

The fiesta of Santa Rosa de Lima was celebrated in the ejido of that name on 24-25 August, before the actual Saint's day, in order to avoid clashing with the main fiesta in Ojitlan which was of much longer standing. In 1977 and 1978, religious divisions were apparent in the celebration within the ejido. The candles, made by men of the community, were taken from the house of the President (of the fiesta committee) to the chapel in the afternoon of the 24th. In 1977, there was a delay in the start of this because the supporters of the priest would not participate until the priest himself arrived. The priest did not come. The priests' opponents could not find one of their number who was willing or able to lead the prayers and the procession, though there were plenty of girls and women ready to participate. Eventually a visiting trader[9] from Cordoba was persuaded to step into the breach and she led the prayers as the candles were taken to the chapel at dusk.

[9] Referred to often as *Maestra* (teacher), a term of respect, she was a former teacher-turned-trader from the city of Cordoba in the state of Veracruz. She made regular visits to Ojitlan, carried mainly clothing goods by mule to sell in the ejidos.

In 1977, there had been some semblance of unity in that the two factions had at least planned to take the candles to the chapel together, although this did not occur because the priest did not arrive. By the 1978 fiesta, religious divisions were more entrenched within the community. When the committee for the 1978 fiesta was elected in the ejidal assembly, a number of ejidatarios (supporters of the priest) said that they did not want to pay their quota of 100 pesos towards the fiesta just so that the officials could go and get drunk on it. The assembly voted to have no entertainments and not to pay the quota. Some members of the fiesta committee and other ejidatarios, who were opponents of the priest, did not admit to defeat and determined to go ahead to organise some entertainments. Between them they raised money for the deposit for a band and decided to run the dance as a commercial venture in the hope that they would at least break even. They also decided to make candles and popo for those who took the candles to the chapel on the 24th. The ritual of the fiesta therefore became a politically charged act, as the wider religious and political context changed. In effect, these men formed their own fiesta committee from the group opposed to the priest. The leading members of the group were all supporters of the PRI and included a former Municipal Treasurer of Ojitlan. The ejidatarios of Santa Rosa had by now received their compensation cash from the Commission and so they had some ready capital to invest/risk.

The fiesta officials activated their personal and political networks in a determined effort to achieve a good attendance at the fiesta. An especial invitation was issued to the President of the chapel in Paso Limón (another opponent of the priest) for the people to attend the religious procession with their banner. In the event a large contingent of girls and women (larger than the year before) took part in the procession with the candles on the 24th, when a larger circuit than usual was made of the ejido community. A rezandero from Santa Rosa (an opponent of the priest) led them in prayers. They all received popo beforehand at the house of an official of the fiesta committee.

The priests' supporters did not take part in the fiesta at all. On the 24th they held their own classes in Catholic doctrine, pausing only to laugh and joke as the other faction's procession passed by. They intended to wait to celebrate until the priest could come on the 25th to say mass. This meant that the vispera or eve of the fiesta was effectively ignored, when traditionally it had been the high point of anticipation of events. In everyday life, there were often cross-cutting ties of marriage or compadrazgo between these two factions. Members of opposing sides were on speaking terms without being

particularly friendly. Some awkward interactions were avoided by sending children on errands.

On the 24th there was a basketball tournament, but no horse races or jaripeo because the ejidatarios did not want to contribute their labour to the clearing of the ground or to building the corral. Only one dance was held, on the evening of the 24th, which was very successful and the profits on the dance and the beer sold were sufficient to pay the band so that the officials were not left out of pocket on the venture. The following day there were no further entertainments except drinking for the men. Prayers were to be said in the chapel in the afternoon, but the rezandero had got drunk and was incapable. The crisis was resolved by calling in the teacher-turned-trader who happened to be passing by and was pressed into service.

The fiesta of Santa Rosa in the main village of Ojitlan was celebrated on the 29th and 30th August although the street market might start nearly a week before. In 1978, in the period of opposition to the priests, a determined effort was made to celebrate the fiesta "more as_it used to be". The fiesta committee issued typed invitations to the ejidal authorities of each community, outlining the programme of events and asking for the people's attendance with their banners at the procession to take the candles to the church. This was the first time that such formal invitations had been issued and it was an indication of the efforts made by the opponents of the priest to prove that they were in a majority by obtaining a good attendance. The tradition of fireworks on the night of the 29th before the dance was also revived.

The procession on the 29th to take the candles to the church went the full length of the main street before returning and entering the church. The prayers were in the traditional chanting style. At the door of the church, the procession was met by an old man, who was taking care of the church. The priests were not allowed to take part. A rosary was said inside the church. The procession was accompanied by the old style band of wind instruments who played both in the procession and in the church at breaks in the prayers. The band playing was one of many clear symbolic rejections of the "new Catholic orthodoxy" and represented a reaffirmation of tradition. Tradition had ceased to be taken for granted and had gained a political siginificance. Like the mola (Howe, 1991), discussed in Chapter 5, the ritual of the Ojitec fiesta was a symbol of a political victory claimed against "outside forces". In the church itself, the images of the saints

were very much in evidence in contrast with the recent past when the Italian priests had removed them from the church. Traditionally, mass is said on the evening of 29th and first thing on 30th August. In 1978, the Italian priests (excluded from the church) said mass in the storeroom of an indigenous shopkeeper, but this was poorly attended compared with the numbers in the church for the praying of the rosary.

A further example was in El Nanche, a fairly small ejido on the other side of the river from Paso Limón. It was part of the municipio of Ojitlan, although the residents spoke the language of Usila (from whence they came in the period of the formation of the ejidos). In 1978 the fiesta, held on 1st May, was only about five years old. The fiesta committee was elected from the ejidatarios, as in Paso Limón, and the fiesta itself followed a similar format. On 30th April, the candles and popo were prepared in the President's house and the workers were fed for the duration of their work. The fiesta committee invited the poperas from Paso Limón to prepare the popo, as no-one in El Nanche knew how to do it. On 1st May popo was served to those attending (mainly from El Nanche, Paso Limón and Santa Rosa) to take the candles in procession to the chapel. Prayers were said first in the President's house. The procession with the candles was led by the President of the fiesta and his wife, who each carried a bouquet of flowers and a candle. Further prayers were then said in the chapel. In 1977 the supporters of the priest controlled the chapel and appeared to be in the majority. The prayers were conducted in the priests' style with interpretations of the Bible and singing to guitar accompaniment.

After the religious events of the fiesta were over in the early afternoon, there was little for the girls to do until the dance in the evening. Some stayed around for a while talking and then returned to their homes to prepare for the dance. Horse-races and a basketball tournament were arranged and the men spent most of the day watching these and drinking. The dance in the evening was held on the basketball court in the open air. The fiesta committee was particularly keen to encourage the attendance of the girls from Paso Limón and Santa Rosa, because they dance. It was said that if a girl of Usila dances, she will not get married – so they did not dance. Therefore, the vast majority of the girls who danced in El Nanche were from outside the community and so were many of the men and boys. The fiesta was particularly popular with the boys of Paso Limón, since the dance was relatively cheap[10] to enter and they could learn to dance there,

[10] 20-30 pesos in 1978 or 50-75p.

making their mistakes before a relatively small and less critical audience. Thus, to them, the smaller dances in El Nanche and also in the nearby communities of Cachuatal and Yucatan were the training ground for the bigger dances in Paso Limón, Santa Rosa and Ojitlan.

In 1978, the religious divisions in El Nanche were much clearer. The President of the fiesta was a supporter of the priest and he refused to organise a dance. On the day of the fiesta, 1st May, there was no popo or procession with candles because the priest could not come until the 3rd May so there was to be no celebration at all until he came. Nine ejidatarios decided to organise the dance themselves as the fiesta committee had refused to.[11] Amongst themselves they put up the money for the deposit for the band, hoping that they would recoup it and cover their costs from the dance and the sale of beer. Once again the girls from Paso Limón and Santa Rosa were invited. A larger contingent attended from Paso Limón than in 1977, probably reflecting the fact that the dance had become a political issue and that the girls' parents recognised this and encouraged their attendance. The organisers of the dance came to Paso Limón by raft to collect the dancers and ferried them back home across the river when it was over.

One of the most striking features of the religious divisions was the way in which in several communities (including Paso Limón and Santa Rosa) each side held its own series of nine Posadas. On several occasions the rival processions passed close to each other, each group singing with all its might. There were several incidents involving the throwing of fireworks (bangers) at the other group and the odd scuffle between the men of the different groups. The ritual became very overtly political, with men actively encouraging their women to attend the posadas in order to keep the numbers up, where beforehand they had been indifferent and even hostile to their participation. One of the elected municipal officials living in Santa Rosa (and opposed to the priest) had, prior to the religious divisions, forbidden his wife to take part in posadas. After the dispute began, he was very enthusiastic about her attending and even sometimes stayed in to babysit. Women became important political actors during this dispute in the sense that they had skills (prayer) which were essential to the cause of opposition to the priest. Their contribution was recognised as important. Men opposed to the priest still did not

---

[11] The original number of ejidatarios in El Nanche was 24 (Lucero and David, 1973), whilst those eligible for ejido land in Uxpanapa were 83 (Escanero, 1977). Many of the new ejidatarios were young men - children and grandchildren of the original farmers.

swell the numbers in prayers by attending themselves, but by encouraging their women. Hosting a posada also became a political act and a statement of affiliation to one faction or another.

Forms of Resistance, Agency and Power

Visitors and pilgrims to the cave of the millenarian movement were to be found on both sides of the argument about Catholic reforms in Ojitlan. As noted in Chapter 6, many Ojitecs, indigenous and non-indigenous, visited the cave and had different experiences of it. As resistance to resettlement became more fragmented, some groups (the young and those with less land and less advantage from the existing power structure) began to take part in waged labour and/or work in the collective ejidos of Uxpanapa. These groups tended to become supporters of the priests' reforms, although there were definitely individuals caught up in that political alliance who objected strongly to the priests' changes in ritual. The polarisation of views and formation of factions did not take place immediately, but once it began, those who were already choosing to experiment in Uxpanapa could not ally themselves with the old power structure of the community, as they had already implicitly rejected it. The groups in favour of the priests seemed often to include non-indigenous peasants, whose parents and grandparents had migrated from other parts of the sierra of Oaxaca when the ejidos were being formed in the 1930s. These non-indigenous peasants had often received less land or poorer quality land. They did not speak the Ojitec language, though they usually understood it. These less advantaged groups saw more to be gained from the Commission's and the priest's appeals to the new, equal, individual citizen ready to take up new opportunities in the modern world.

The opponents of the priests included some of the wealthier peasants and those in labour alliances with them, for instance the tobacco alliances mentioned in Chapter 1. Some important local political figures, associated with the PRI, who had ignored or condemned the millenarian movement, were opponents of the priests' reforms. Many of the priests' opponents were indigenous Ojitec, who were well positioned in the old (pre-PRC) economic and political structures of Ojitlan. Their response to resettlement had become one of passive resistance, waiting until all promised facilities were built before they would begin to move.

In both the millenarian movement and the opposition to the priests' reforms, resistance took an overtly religious form. In the former, resistance involved the religious practices of pilgrimage and curing and in the latter, resistance revitalised community fiestas and reaffirmed traditional ritual concerning death. There was also some violence in the second case. It is interesting to compare what was being resisted in these two cases. The millenarian movement resisted the PRC's proposals, which appeared as an attack on both the place and the people of Ojitlan. As such, it provoked a religious response, not least because indigenous religion governs all aspects of people and place and is not confined to a narrow sphere of religion (separate from culture), as in a more Western model (Stewart and Shaw, 1994:10). The resistance to Catholic reforms was also a form of resistance to the PRC proposals. This can be seen firstly in terms of the people involved, but also an analysis of the processes of resistance has revealed that the defence of traditional Catholicism was at the same time a defence of community life threatened by resettlement. The millenarian movement opposed all PRC proposals, but by the time of the Catholic reforms, resistance to the PRC took the form of passive resistance to resettlement. Those passively resisting resettlement were most associated with the resistance to Catholic reforms. As Kertzer (1988) has suggested, ritual can be important as a means of resistance where there are no traditional mechanisms for large-scale political organising. In Ojitlan, there were no such mechanisms. The CNC and CCI were essentially channels for top-down communications to the peasants, rather than authentic unions representing members' interests.

In both examples of opposition to outside agencies, the active popular resistance takes a religious form, reflecting perhaps the importance of indigenous Catholicism for providing a sphere of autonomous agency and legitimate, collective direct action. Established religious practices were used and reinforced. In both examples, the effect was that men became more involved in religious activities than was previously common practice. Pilgrimage and curing practices, featured in the millenarian movement, were always religious activities involving men and women equally. Although prayer in community and life cycle events continued to be seen as women's work, the priests' challenges meant that men paid more attention to the organisation of these events than had been normal practice. However, the overall effect may be that the active forms of resistance through religion involve more women, while passive forms of resistance feature men more prominently. There may be an indigenous cultural parallel here in the way that women mediate in disputes and fights between men, as discussed in Chapter 4.

To some extent, the women may be seen here as mediating between the Ojitec men and the PRC men; and between the Ojitec men and the priests. The women are active mediators to mitigate the agency of the men, which could otherwise, in the indigenous Ojitec view, become too dangerous and out of control.

Many of the practices in the resistance movements are established practices, rather than innovations. Since they are practices under threat, performing traditional ritual and asserting continuity becomes a highly charged political act. The traditions of indigenous Ojitec Catholicism, such as hospitality, dancing and sweeping the house on the fourth day after a death, became symbols of resistance, similar to the example of the mola (the elaborate embroidered blouse of the Kuna women) as a symbol of Kuna resistance to the state (Howe, 1991). The innovation has been seen in these two resistance movements, less in religious practice than in the formation and strengthening of alliances to promote that practice, which has drawn men more fully than before into the organisation of religious events.

The processes of resistance involved competition for association with particular symbols. This was particularly marked in the pro- and anti- priest alliances in that both sides competed to represent the true spirit of the fiestas, carrying their own images of the saint or virgin in processions. The Comaroffs (1991) and Kertzer (1988) have noted examples of the struggle for possession of key symbols. At the same time, the priests' supporters could always choose to deny the importance of symbols and claim them to be a distraction to understanding church doctrine.

Abu-Lughod (1990) considers that forms of resistance are to be considered part of the local system of power relations that has produced them. She cites the example of "little songs"(discussed in Chapter 2) and to this I would add the Ojitec examples of hospitality and dancing. Traditions of hospitality in life cycle rituals and fiestas are part of the community structure of the ejido. They express the reciprocity and co-dependence of people who live in a small community, where access to ejido land is governed by membership of the community. Those who have more than others should give more to the community when they can. Dancing is considered diagnostic of a civilised society. The Ojitecs disagree with the usileños, who say that "a girl who dances will not marry" and they disagree with the priests' opposition to dancing. Ojitecs see their positive view of dancing as a sign of a more enlightened culture. It is,

however, also diagnostic of a system of power relations within which girls/women have much less freedom of movement and choice than men. Girls dance, but they must wait to be invited by the boys/men. Girls must be chaperoned, men not. Girls and women may also be called upon to mediate between drunken men at a dance.

The Archbishop of Oaxaca and the Ojitlan priests saw the Catholic reforms as part of a modern, rational approach to the world, based on individual "consciousness", knowledge and understanding of biblical teachings and church doctrine. In their attempts to separate the Ojitec from their "distracting" traditions, the reformers were engaging in the struggle to constitute the modern subject in Ojitlan. As Keane has explained, being modern involves "disentangling illicit conflations of words, things and persons" (1996:138). The attempt to create "modern" Catholics seems to have been pursued quite aggressively in Ojitlan, with people refusing to accept hospitality (thereby causing offence) and priests claiming jurisdiction over community chapels. This generated equally aggressive responses, such as locking chapels and physical attacks in the church. Norget (1997), for instance, describes a much gentler approach by the local priests in an area of Oaxaca City, which had generated some quieter, passive resistance. In the following chapter, I will discuss in more detail the modernising project of the PRC in Uxpanapa and compare the two discourses of modernity, that of the PRC and that of the Catholic reforms.

Much of the discussion in these last two chapters has focussed on forms of resistance to the PRC and the Catholic reforms. However, I think that this case also illustrates the potential pitfalls of an excessive focus on resistance. I have already suggested that we can glimpse the "romance of resistance" at work in Barabas's analysis of the millenarian movement. My own discussion of the resistance to Catholic reforms perhaps risks idealising the "community" that is being defended. An excessive focus on resistance would miss the significance of the Ojitec and non-Ojitec alliance in favour of the priests' reforms. As Kaplan's analysis (1990), discussed in Chapter 2, has suggested, there may be multiple cultural articulations in the space between contact and hegemony, where creative historical agents make new articulations between different systems of meaning. Some novel articulations may be characterised as forms of resistance, while other novel articulations (which privilege the new dominant group) may receive less attention or analysis. Forms of accommodation to the new situation may be missed in the focus on forms of resistance. Those groups who were prepared to

try early resettlement in Uxpanapa were often denounced as traitors by their opponents. They may have found in the "new Catholicism", with its emphasis on the rational individual, a moral framework within which they could justify their choices and find support for themselves during the difficult realities of resettlement, discussed further in the following chapter.

Chapter 8: Development Ideology and Practice

In this chapter, I aim to examine the agents of development and those who were being developed, as well as the relationships between them and with other groups who were excluded or peripheral to the development process. The analysis of resistance will further explore concepts in the work of the Comaroffs (1991), in particular the value of examining the "agents of domination" and the "long conversation" between these latter and dominated groups.

At this point in my analysis of resistance to regional development, I shall refer to the agents of domination as the employees of the Papaloapan Commission (and other government agencies where involved), with some distinctions made between levels of employee within the organisation.[1] As noted in Chapter 2, much past writing has tended to overlook the agents of domination or relegate them to a category of faceless reflexes of political and economic processes. The Comaroffs stress their interest in analysing the experience, consciousness and motivation of these agents of domination in order to understand the processes of colonisation and resistance. They argue that the consciousness of the missionaries, their perception of themselves and their mission was informed by a literary and public discourse in nineteenth century Britain about natives and the role of the evangelists (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991:53).

Public Discourse about Development in the Papaloapan River Basin

The first question, then, concerns how the Commission and its workers saw themselves. For the Papaloapan Commission workers, the influential public discourse can be found in government statements about development and in the Commission's own statements about its mission. These statements are broadly in line with the national political discourse of the time.

The Presidential decree of 30 August 1972 emphasised the following points:

- The future socioeconomic development of the country ought to take place on a fairer and more equal basis

[1] However, as was clear in Chapter 2, the Commission workers are not the only agents of domination involved in Ojitlan, points to be returned to later.

- Development should improve systematically the distribution of income in favour of the majority of the country's population, especially in those regions which have received the fewest benefits, such as the upper Papaloapan
- Infrastructural works would be carried out, which would increase the production and the incomes of the population in these areas and allow them to become integrated into the national economy.

Equality is to be achieved through increasing production and incomes, thereby bringing about integration into the national economy. The crucial factors are infrastructure and economic development. The concept of the past here implies that development has been unequal and unfair; and that poorer populations are not integrated into the national economy.[2]

The Papaloapan Commission, modelled on the Tennessee Valley Authority in the USA, was established in 1947 as a semi-autonomous Federal authority under the Ministry of Hydraulic Resources. Official publications from the Commission explain its original objectives as follows

- To study and construct works[3] to control (the rivers) as a first step for the later development of the entire river basin. The wording emphasises that the works will be essentially hydroelectric dams to control floods and waterways, to be linked with works such as irrigation and subject to careful planning.
- The danger to health from floods and stagnant water was to be dealt with by appropriate engineering and drainage.
- The Commission was to plan, design and construct the works necessary for the integrated development of the Papaloapan river basin.
- The Commission is the coordinator of development and where specific items are mentioned, they are always matters of infrastructure, transport, construction,

---

[2] For discussion on this second point of "integration into the national economy", see Chapters 1, 3 and 6. In general terms, I suggest that the Ojitec are not isolated from the national economy and have been affected by many national/regional developments such as the development of the haciendas, the formation of the ejidos, the growth of commercial agriculture and wage labour. They have often maintained a degree of self-sufficiency through some subsistence agriculture. The Ojitecs' position within the national economy is often not an advantageous one for them. However, some degree of self-sufficiency means that they are not totally dependent on national markets for their needs. They are not fully modern consumers.

[3] "obras (de defensa) que consistirán esencialmente en presas de almacenamiento para control de avenidas y encauzamiento de corrientes, que tendrán que realizarse en forma armónica con las de aprovechamiento y obedeciendo a una cuidadosa planeación" Comision del Papaloapan, 1976:1) This source is a collection of short papers which were presented to Jose Lopez Portillo, when he visited the area as prospective Presidential candidate on 16 March 1976. As he was in the PRI, his election to the office of President was assured. The Commission published these papers.

> irrigation – in short technical, material, engineering matters (Comisión del Papaloapan, 1976:1-3).

In the same volume, a paper by Jorge L. Tamayo, the Chief Executive of the Commission, develops the agenda. He emphasises that the Mexican revolution was concerned not only with fair ownership of land, but also with making sure that there was justice in the benefits that people could obtain from the land. To ensure this an adequate "política hidráulica" was required. The first dam at Temascal had helped to free Tuxtepec from floods and the second dam at Cerro de Oro, when completed, will ensure the "definitive liberation" of Tuxtepec from floods. In the social and cultural realm (*orden*), the Commission cooperates with education and health programmes. The operational characteristics of the Commission have allowed it to maintain a technical and administrative staff, who are capable, care about their work and have strong links with the Papaloapan Basin. Tamayo refers to a previous meeting about the humid tropics where Lopez Portillo agreed with the conclusion that it was necessary to develop these areas in a way "which avoided disorderly (unplanned) development without technology" (Tamayo, 1976:7-11). At several points in this presentation, Tamayo refers to the past fluctuating budget of the Commission, which has limited its effectiveness. The opportunity before them is to study the past impact of man on the environment, be self-critical and from these experiences initiate a strategy for the conquest of the humid tropics. He added approvingly the quotation:

> "*Comeremos del trópico o nos comeremos al trópico*" (ibid). (We shall eat from the tropics or we shall use up all the resources of the tropics.)[4]

A preliminary analysis of the ideology contained above would summarise it as follows. The language used emphasises equality, justice, liberation in the continuing spirit of the Mexican revolution. Action to bring about justice is seen as a matter of engineering, technology, infrastructure and the physical environment. Integrated planning and technology are good. The human element is not seen as problematic, but is seen as benefiting from the integrated programmes to be run by caring, committed, local staff. Within this framework, commission workers (including many that I spoke to) can see themselves as caring, well-qualified people who are working to bring about justice, higher incomes and a better life for people. This language of justice and liberation

[4] I think the meaning here is that if we do not use the tropics for food, then the resources will all be used up through simply extracting them, for instance, removing timber.

supports the view that "modern Mexican nationalism is above all a revolutionary nationalism" (Alonso, 1988:43). The public discourse about development in the Papaloapan River Basin constructs it in the image of justice, in the spirit of the Mexican revolution and, moreover, offers a vision of the struggle in which all development workers are on the side of "the nation" and "the people" (ibid.).

This contrasts with the Commission as presented by Barabas and Bartolomé (1974). They state that the Commission (as part of the SRH, Secretariat of Hydraulic Resources) has the aim of "incorporation of the Indians into the national capitalist system of production and consumption by means of the elimination of their economic semi-independence and cultural identity. In other words, the objective is to incorporate the Indian into a rural proletariat" (Barabas and Bartolomé, 1974:74). In a section of the article, headed "A Regional Development Agency and Its Style", the authors argue that big business in agroindustry (such as sugar and lumber) and construction have been the main beneficiaries of the Commission's work to date. The Commission is seen as a "technocratic dominion" supported by powerful regional and national economic and political interests. "Agency engineers and technocrats have come to act as mediators between the economic pressure groups and the Mestizo and Indian peasants in the process of regional exploitation" (ibid:76). In this representation, Commission workers are seen as coordinating the exploitation of the peasants.

The scientists from UNAM[5] and anthropologists such as Lucero and David were very critical of the ecology of the Commission's plans for Uxpanapa and proposed alternatives referred to in Chapter 6. According to Ewell and Poleman, the directors of the Papaloapan Commission believed that the ecologists' proposals were totally impractical and felt personally threatened by the public opposition to their policy. The Commission saw the ecologists' proposals as "an irresponsible attempt to consciously set up a system of subsistence agriculture, which might or might not slowly develop into more productive systems if totally new and untried avenues of research were successful"(Ewell and Poleman, 1979:120). The Commission supported a modernist ideal and seemed clearly hostile to small-scale, subsistence agriculture with a low level of technology.

[5] Universidad Nacional Autonoma de México – National Autonomous University of Mexico.

The combined effect of the criticisms led to a fortress mentality in the Commission, as noted in Chapter 6. The work was increasingly centralised into the hands of the Commission's own staff and no social scientists were involved after the Barabas and Bartolomé (1974) article.

The specific plans for Cerro de Oro, Ojitlan and Uxpanapa develop the general ideas in the Papaloapan Commission statements still further. Themes of justice and equality are emphasised again. In Uxpanapa a direct marketing system for sale of products, run by the ejidatarios themselves, was to be set up to avoid the establishment of intermediaries. (Ewell and Poleman, 1979:114). The plan for Uxpanapa therefore tried to discourage Ojitlan's mestizo merchants from moving into the area and re-establishing their control over the Ojitecs. The compensation scheme for those affected was considered to be generous and fair by commentators such as Ewell. Whilst the area affected by the dam remained unflooded, the Ojitecs could continue to farm their lands in Ojitlan, even though they had received other lands in compensation. Uxpanapa was to have a much higher level of services than Ojitecs had enjoyed in their homeland. Each family was to have a grant of 20,000 pesos[6] to build their own home and a 1600 square metre plot of land behind their house, where they could keep animals and have a kitchen garden. All of the above were attempts to improve on the resettlement of the Mazatec people, displaced by the Commission's first dam, the Miguel Alemán.

The development of Uxpanapa, though initially part of the resettlement response to Cerro de Oro, quickly came to be an important project in its own right. Thomas Poleman from Cornell University, USA, refers to a conversation on a visit in 1976 with the Commission's Secretary, who said it was a chance to apply the lessons of the Los Naranjos[7] development project. "Soon 15 thousand Chinantecs will be resettled and will immediately begin farming on a commercial scale. Send one of your students to record what happens" (Ewell and Poleman, 1979:ii). That student was Peter Ewell, an agricultural economist, whose report has provided me with some very useful factual

[6] This would be about £500 at the 1976 exchange rate of 40 pesos to £1.

[7] This was one of the areas where Mazatecs displaced by the Miguel Alemán Dam were resettled. The agriculture project there was controlled by the Commission and proved an expensive failure. The mechanism of collective ejidos in Uxpanapa with the democratic participation of ejidatarios was intended to avoid the problems of paternalistic dependency in Los Naranjos (Ewell and Poleman, 1979:170).

background on Uxpanapa.[8] The invitation itself reflects the Commission's sense of the importance of the project. It is suggested that the cost of developing an area of virgin rainforest could not be justified if it was only for the resettlement of a small number of Ojitecs. "In the early 1970s, the national agricultural crisis meant that all expensive projects in rural Mexico were justified by significant projected increases in agricultural production" (Ewell and Poleman, 1979:74). The Commission therefore developed a plan to open up Uxpanapa for intensive agricultural production to meet the increasing needs of the nation for food and to serve as a model for developing over six million hectares of tropical rainforest in the Southeast.

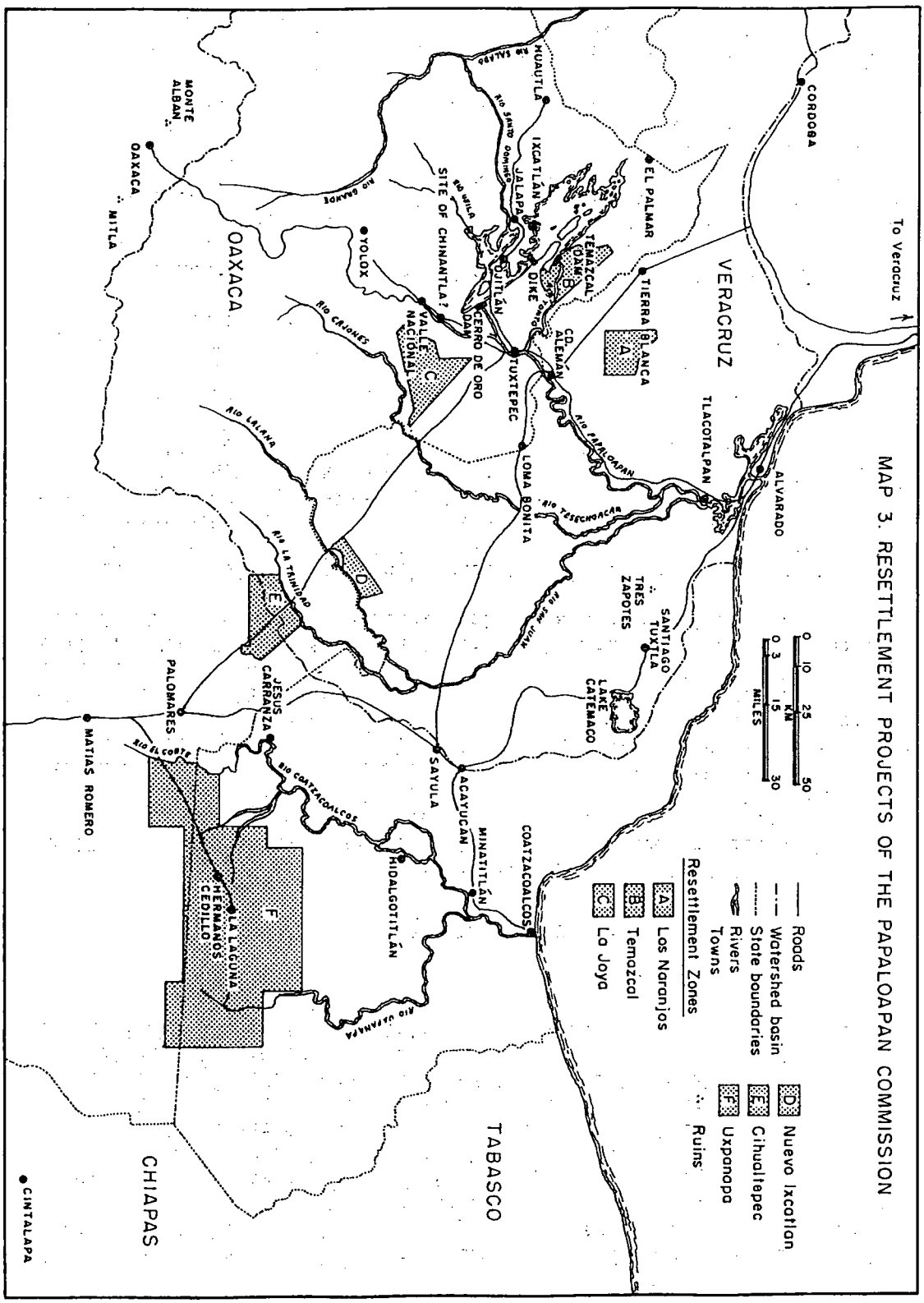
The development project which focused on Cerro de Oro, Ojitlan and finally Uxpanapa came to have a number of different objectives, which sometimes conflicted with each other. The project was both a regional project (control of floods, infrastructure, resettlement) and part of overall national plans (to raise agricultural production for the nation). It also fitted with the state indigenist project of integrating indigenous people into the nation (as discussed in Chapter 5). The collective ejido was chosen as the organisational mechanism at the heart of the Uxpanapa project.

Public discourse, nationally and regionally, therefore was broadly very positive about Uxpanapa. The varied criticisms of the project were attacked as the work of irresponsible and unrealistic radicals. The Commission defended itself on the ecological questions. Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, a distinguished Mexican anthropologist and commentator on indigenous affairs, criticised what he saw as the "rising tide of irresponsible radicalism" (Aguirre Beltrán, 1976, cited in Ewell and Poleman, 1979:87). As the critics were marginalised and ignored, the projects were concentrated into the hands of the Commission's own technical staff, who had a very positive view of their mission in Ojitlan and Uxpanapa: to bring about a combination of social justice and economic development in a tropical frontier zone through intensive use of technology. This mission was also expressed in the upbeat sign at the entrance to Uxpanapa; the first sight seen on entering said "*Seamos realistas hagamos lo imposible*" ("Let us be realists

[8] As an agricultural economist, Ewell's theoretical interests were obviously different from mine. However, his report, whilst dealing with technical aspects of the Uxpanapa project, also "tells the story of the Commission workers" and helps me to consider them as agents in the spirit of the Comaroffs (1991) approach, rather than dismiss them as faceless reflexes of political and economic processes, as perhaps can be seen in Barabas and Bartolomé (1974) quoted above.

Map 3: Resettlement Projects of the Papaloapan Commission

(Source: Ewell and Poleman, 1979:35)



and do the impossible") and on the reverse of this, to be read when leaving, "*El que no cree en milagros no es realista*" ("He who does not believe in miracles is not a realist"). The Commission team were the realists doing miracles, promoting progress and modernity, even appropriating the religious language of utopia (in the reference to miracles). The opposition were irresponsible radicals trying to take people backwards towards subsistence agriculture.

The Commission Employees

The lower levels of Commission employees in Ojitlan were clerical workers, messengers, caretakers or those involved in transporting goods and people between Ojitlan and Uxpanapa. They earned a good salary, but had no decision-making powers over the Ojitec. Some of these workers were indigenous Ojitecs, while others were from monolingual Spanish speaking families from Ojitlan or outside. Some were married to indigenous Ojitec women. They tended to have a critical, though not always negative view of the Indian. "*Hay que mexicanizar al indio, ni indigenizar a Mexico*" ("We have to mexicanise the Indian, not indianise Mexico") said one in an almost exact paraphrase of a statement by Aguirre Beltrán.[9]

The middle level of officials encountered by the Ojitecs were mostly engineers, addressed by the title of Ingeniero,[10] a term which I will use to refer to them. They made the daily decisions that affected the Ojitecs and implemented the various Commission projects. It was this group that most frequently used the word *fanatismo* about the resistance activities of the Ojitecs. (Examples of fanatismo were: returning to Ojitlan for Todos Santos, thereby abandoning the Uxpanapa rice harvest; opposing the priests and ejecting them from the church.) In Uxpanapa, the ejidatarios also dealt regularly with representatives from the bank providing credit. In general, Commission experts and representatives of the Commission were referred to by the generic title of Ingeniero. Some ejidatarios in Ojitlan would shout "Ingeniero!" as a jokey term of

[9] The title of an article by Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán was "El Fin del Indigenismo no es el Indígena: es Mexico" (The Aim of Indigenism is not the Indian: it is Mexico), published in El Día, 8.12.1977, Mexico. I think this kind of expression would have been commonly used within the Commission.

[10] The title of Ingeniero El Grande Dios (the Great God Engineer) was given to the sacred mediator in the millenarian movement of 1972-3, discussed in Chapter 6.

greeting to each other, accompanied by smiles and gestures of mock admiration[11]. Many of the technical experts working in Uxpanapa came from the north of Mexico and so had no experience of the humid tropics and no experience of working with an indigenous population.

The executive and top levels of the Commission saw Uxpanapa as a unique and exciting experiment in intensive agriculture in the tropics. The Chief Executive, Jorge Tamayo, was himself a geographer and his statements suggest that he saw himself and the Commission in the vanguard of progress. The major investment required in infrastructure to open up an area of virgin tropical forest had to be justified, in the context of a national production crisis, by promising agricultural returns at least as high as those elsewhere in the country. The Commission had good funding for the first time in twenty years and wanted to keep it that way. They needed to show good returns in the short term to maximise their chances of maintaining and increasing government investment against competition from other areas of the country. The critics accusing the Commission of "ethnocide and ecocide" were arguing for a much slower pace of development.

The Ejido Colectivo

Each ejidatario (which included all eligible men over 16 years old at the time the census was carried out) was to receive 20 hectares of land to be organised into collective ejidos. The collective ejido is vastly more complex than the traditional ejido in Ojitlan. The system combines democratic participation by the campesinos with the centralised technical direction required in the development of efficient, large-scale agriculture. The land is held in common and the ejido's operations are supervised by the Ministry of Agrarian Reform, which is responsible for its legal structure, and by the official Bank, which provides the working capital. The ultimate authority is the General Assembly of legal ejidatarios, which is responsible for approving all technical plans and credit contracts and electing official representatives. At the end of each cropping cycle, a special planning and evaluation meeting is held. The profits from the harvest are distributed, usually, according to the following formula: 30% in equal parts to all of the

[11] R.J.Weitlaner, author of various studies on the Chinantla already mentioned, did not like to be referred to as Ingeniero (although he was one), because the title implied that he might be concerned with measuring or assessing land and he felt that would have created reserve (Irmgard Weitlaner, his daughter, personal communication to me, Mexico City, 1977).

ejidatarios and 70% per cent in proportion to the number of days which each member has worked, at a uniform daily rate independent of productivity. At the same time, the technical plan for the next season is approved according to the government's plans for the region, the availability of credit and the wishes of its members. The decision-making process is therefore rather complex and time-consuming.

The executive body is composed of a President, a Secretary and a Treasurer, elected every three years. The President has very wide powers, including presiding at the assembly, drawing up the agenda, representing the ejido to outside authorities (particularly the official bank) and directing the day-to-day operations of the ejido. He organises the daily work schedule, distributes advance payments to the members and makes frequent trips to local offices, the state capital and even to Mexico City. Although it is a full time job, he does not usually receive payment for his work. He delegates a member of his family or hires someone to do his share of the agricultural labour. Presidents are sometimes accused of appropriating funds for their own use. A second elected executive body, the Consejo de Vigilancia, (a police authority) is responsible for keeping an eye on the President, keeping track of the accounts, and counter-signing the credit receipts (Ewell and Poleman, 1979:133-4).

The Paso Limón Pioneers

Thirty five men from Paso Limón[12] signed up to go to work on their new ejido in Uxpanapa in 1976. They signed papers accepting the Cerro de Oro project and resettlement despite the opposition of their fellows, who said that no-one should go to Uxpanapa until everything was ready there. The fact that they did not ask the ejidal assembly's permission to go was intermittently used against them in arguments. The reason they gave for their choice was that they did not have enough land to work on in Paso Limón. They saw themselves as grasping an opportunity to improve their lives, an opportunity which did not exist in Paso Limón. They are a clear example of the broader truth already mentioned, that population growth and the unequal distribution of quality

[12] I refer to them as the Paso Limón pioneers to distinguish them from the remaining ejidatarios in their home ejido in Ojitlan. As noted in previous chapters, they tended to be men with relatively little land to work in their home ejido and also younger men interested in the new opportunities.

ejido land meant that there was an increasing number of people who could not earn a reasonable living from their land in Ojitlan. A comparison of figures makes this clear.[13]

In the early stages, the men were mainly on their own in Uxpanapa. Some were single and some left their families in Paso Limón, while the temporary community known as La Horqueta was set up. At first the men lived in a large barn or barracks, then gradually built their own temporary housing in the traditional style, except that they had to use aluminium for the roof. Palm was not available in Uxpanapa. There was no religious shrine or focus in this temporary community.[14] Women with school-age children tended to stay in Paso Limón. In the early years, there was regular movement by the men between Ojitlan and Uxpanapa. Slowly young families moved to La Horqueta and men wanted their wives there to cook and wash for them. Otherwise, they had to pay for these services – two women who cooked were paid 50 pesos[15] a day by the ejidatarios.

Those left in Paso Limón regularly expressed, to me and to each other, their suspicion of and hostility to the pioneers. The pioneers, it was felt, had betrayed the rest of them by going it alone. It was suspected that the pioneers were trying to cheat the remaining ejidatarios out of their fair share of things, that the pioneers had tried to claim compensation for the chapel (community property), that they were telling lies to the Commission about the people of Paso Limón. The pioneers were said to have warned the Commission that the Chief Executive, Jorge Tamayo, would be kidnapped if he attended a barbecue in his honour in Paso Limon.[16] The pioneers were criticised for not taking part in the communal work parties for the school, although they had children there. The ejidatarios remaining in Paso Limón redistributed the ejido land of those who had left definitively for Uxpanapa. There were also discussions about redistributing the houses of those who had left. This was agreed on condition that those receiving houses to use also took part in the fatigas. The pioneers had not asked the

[13] Cf. Figure 1 in this chapter.

[14] The resettlement zone as a whole did not have a church or resident priest.

[15] This was the average for a day's agricultural wage labour in Ojitlan.

[16] The Paso Limón ejidatarios invited Tamayo to a barbecue in the ejido on 26 September 1976. They killed a bullock as a sign of their good faith/will and all ejidatarios in Paso Limón contributed to the cost of 4,000 pesos. The photo taken of Tamayo and the ejidal officials was shown to me as a sign that Tamayo and the ejido understood each other. Hospitality was the chosen mode of gesture to present good will and it also became important as a gesture of resistance, see Chapters 4 and 7.

ejidal assembly permission to go to Uxpanapa and therefore were considered to have lost their ejidal rights in Paso Limón. Those remaining in Paso Limón repeatedly emphasised that no-one should go to Uxpanapa until everything promised was ready. Otherwise there was no guarantee that the government would keep their word and there would be no way to pressure them.[17] This was part of the ejidatarios' broader view of government, which may fail to deliver if one cannot apply pressure or influence. The Paso Limón ejidatarios' preference for delay was in clear contrast to the Commission's plan, whereby the ejidatarios themselves would help to build their new communities and farm the newly cleared land as soon as possible.

One pioneer wanted a particular relative to be allowed to live in his house in Paso Limón so that he himself could visit from time to time and collect fruit from his trees. He asked for an ejido meeting to settle the matter and had arranged for some official representatives to be there (from the Commission and from the Department of Agrarian Reform). His view was that the officials' presence would provide some security for him so that people would not gang up on him or attack him. Officials of the various government agencies did not always turn up to meetings when they were expected and so could not be fully relied on for political support. At a later assembly the relative sent a letter, drafted for him by a local schoolteacher, in which he requested the house and promised to take part in all work parties and financial contributions. The assembly agreed to let him use the house. This case is an example of the fear of some pioneers, the unreliability of the Ingenieros as allies, yet finally a reasonable outcome for all which rested at least partly on the many links (especially kinship and compadrazgo) between members of the two groups.

When the pioneers visited their families and friends in Paso Limón, especially for Todos Santos,[18] they were initially optimistic about Uxpanapa. In 1976-7, people talked of how there was much to eat in Uxpanapa, many wild animals to hunt, many fish and shrimps in the rivers. They sowed maize there, but then sometimes had to buy maize in

---

[17] The last section of this chapter comments on this.

[18] Their return for this festival is significant. Aside from the importance of the festival in the indigenous Catholic year, no Ojitec would deny a person's right to visit the graveyard and prepare an altar for the dead. Therefore, even at a time of great tension in Paso Limón, the pioneers return for Todos Santos was not disputed. The pioneers' attendance at community festivals, such as that of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Paso Limón, could have been challenged by those opposing resettlement and could have led to trouble. This was because it could be argued that they had abandoned their community, no longer contributed to it and therefore were no longer welcome at the fiesta which celebrated that community.

Figure 1: Table to Show Examples of Change in Numbers of Registered Ejidatarios from 1930s (Ojitlan) to 1976 (Uxpanapa)

Ejido in Ojitlan	**Ejidatarios (1930s allocation)** (Lucero and Avila, 1973)	**In Uxpanapa ejido** (SRH, 1976a)
Paso Limón	94	195
El Nanche	24	83
Potrero Viejo	33	63
La Esperanza	60	158
Las Pochotas	48	175

Ojitlan for their families. The shortages would emerge later in discussion – no palm for roofs, no fruit, no coffee, no fresh milk. Several houses in La Horqueta were well stocked with fizzy drinks for sale. The first rice harvest (in 1976) had not been too good, but the Commission/Bank would make sure that the ejidatarios did not lose out.

In the early days of the colectivo, the pioneers were allocated a truck and driver by the Commission. The driver lived in the nearby town of Matías Romero and went home at weekends. On some Mondays, he was late, the ejidatarios were kept waiting and could not get to work. Most of the work was distant enough to require truck transport – the deforesting of land for the new village was, for instance, ten kilometres away from La Horqueta. On another day, the brakes needed fixing, but it was supposed to be fixed quickly so that the truck "should be available for work". The truck did not arrive, so no work for the colectivo could be done. Some of the men went to work on their subsistence maize field, while others went to get some firewood using the chainsaw which had been acquired for deforesting. On one four day visit that I made in May 1977, the truck was only available for one full working day out of three. An attempt to solve this problem around July 1977 by buying the ejido's own truck led later to other difficulties. At the same time, the pioneers established their own cooperative shop with credit for both ventures provided by the bank. The elected representatives of the colectivo, such as the President, Enrique Morales, had to become full-time administrators. They were involved in the wide range of administrative tasks referred to earlier in this chapter. On the day of this meeting, for instance, Enrique had gone to fetch two chainsaws to be used in the clearing of land for the new village.

A meeting with the representative from the Bank went as follows in May 1977, after a year of working the colectivo. The representative of the Bank sat at the head of the table and Enrique Morales (President of the ejido committee) sat on his right. The discussion was about how much rice and maize would be sown next time. Some ejidatarios asked questions about what the daily wage would be. In response to this, Enrique launched into a speech about how "We are the *patrones* (bosses) and so we cannot expect a wage. The boss pays wages and we are the boss now". It is interesting that after a year of working colectivo, this question could still be asked. It probably refers to the relatively low daily returns received by the ejidatarios for their work and may still reflect some lack of awareness of the meaning of colectivo. Then the Bank representative emphasised that the decision about how much rice and maize to sow was

up to them. In the end they agreed to sow 150 hectares of maize and 150 of rice. A list had been made of all the members of the colectivo and the days they had worked and this list was available to the people of the bank and of the ejido. Ejidatarios received shares in the profits (or money allocated) according to the days worked.

The pioneers maintained some traditional work habits, some of which were more controversial than others. In 1977, they had already sown subsistence maize, which was an act of resistance against Commission policy of the time. People continued with fishing, especially in the May dry season, which in Ojitlan can quite legitimately be a whole day's work activity. The Commission workers' would have viewed it as a day off work. Some younger pioneers certainly preferred it to a day clearing land to sow maize.

Many of the pioneers with family still in Ojitlan returned for the festival of Todos Santos with their news. In 1977, the second rice harvest also failed. The pioneers said that the machinery did not arrive on time and so the rice fell over and could not be harvested. They sowed some communal maize, which was doubled over and could be harvested when they had time. People were also sowing their own subsistence plots of maize (of 1,2 or 3 hectares). The colectivo story, however, was the same for the second year running. They had sown rice and maize, using credit, and for reasons beyond their control, the crops had failed to raise a profit. The ejidatarios were in debt, earning ridiculously low daily rates (1/5 of the Ojitlan daily rate when these were calculated) and felt out of control. While they were in Paso Limón at this time, some of the pioneers took part in an ejido work party to clear the path to the neighbouring ejido of El Cacahuatal. This participation was an important indication of their commitment to and continuing membership of the ejido of Paso Limón. There were in fact many cross-cutting links of kinship and compadrazgo between the pioneers and those who had stayed in Paso Limón.

The disillusionment with the colectivo came to focus on getting rid of Enrique Morales, the President of the ejidal committee in La Horqueta. The Consejo de Vigilancia (police committee representative) from La Horqueta came to Paso Limón to ask that the ejidatarios pass a motion to remove Enrique Morales because he was in favour of the colectivo. They also wanted to remove his deputy, Beto Gallegos. The kinship and compadrazgo links between the pioneers and those remaining in Paso Limón meant that

there were informal channels for dialogue between the two groups as well as the formal mechanism of attending an ejido assembly. The men chatted during the ejido work parties. As a slender majority of the pioneers turned strongly against the colectivo, there was scope for renegotiating alliances and the development of new resistance strategies. The Paso Limón ejidatarios responded positively to the pioneers' request, because it would enable them to regain control of the reunited ejido, remove suspicions of betrayal by the pioneers and develop a new line of resistance to the Commission and colectivo. The casualties of this new alliance would be some of the elected officials, such as Enrique and Beto, who persisted in supporting the colectivo probably because they had invested so much in it and felt they had little to gain by turning back.

In January 1978, I travelled with a group of ejidatarios from Paso Limón and their women (87 in all) to Uxpanapa. Ostensibly, they were going to look at their house plots in the new community in Uxpanapa. The second purpose was to remove Enrique from power. The people making the journey included some from both the pioneers and the Paso Limón group. Much of the banter on the bus journey used metaphors from sports, creating an atmosphere of "our team". None of the really influential men from Paso Limón travelled with the group, but they supported its aims. These few days highlighted power structures, alliances and concepts of authority and it is worth telling the story in detail, as it presents the various problems in microcosm. The events of these few days culminated in the assembly of ejidatarios of Paso Limón, where the challenge and riposte between them and the Ingenieros revealed different sources and concepts of authority.

The truck and the cooperative shop had become bones of contention after six months of operation. The official in charge of the truck, Beto Gallegos, was accused of taking it wherever he wanted, without consulting the committee or the assembly. For instance, without any consultation he went to sell 12 tons of maize in Ojitlan and bought a machine to remove grain from maize cobs. The ejidatarios were annoyed because they had wanted cash not a machine. In a very heated assembly on Monday 9th January, matters came to a head and the people voted to dissolve the cooperative shop and sell the truck. In this same assembly, the Ingeniero asked for the paperwork for both the truck and the shop. Beto handed over the papers and the Ingeniero said that he would return the next day to dissolve the shop. He did not return the next day, but did turn up two days later (Thursday) in the second assembly that week when the ejidatarios from

Paso Limón were present. The committee in charge of the truck was very annoyed that Beto had handed over the papers. Further criticisms centred on the fact that, after the meeting on Monday, Beto took the truck off to Matías Romero to get some more goods for the shop. The committee and some others (about 12 in all) lay in wait for the truck out on the road, stopped it, made Beto get out and walk, and took the keys off him. They took the truck back to La Horqueta, where they kept it safe. On Wednesday, when the Ingeniero had still not arrived, they waited until the afternoon, then took all the goods out of the truck, making a careful note of its contents and leaving them in someone's house. They then set off in the truck to look for the Ingeniero.

The Assembly of Ejidatarios on 12 January 1978

In this section, I explain the story of the meeting in some detail as an example of an encounter in the "long conversation" between the Ojitec ejidatarios and the Commission engineers. Each phase of the encounter is indicated by a letter, which I then refer to later in my analysis of the interaction.[19] After the description of events, I will analyse the different models of agency, power and authority seen in competition.

A. The assembly of ejidatarios on Thursday afternoon, 12th January, was opened by Juan Montero, President of the ejidal assembly in Paso Limón, Ojitlan. After the list of those present was read out, Beto Gallegos was called to account for his actions. He and his father were very concerned that there was "no authority" present, by which they clearly meant government officials. Several replies emphasised that the greatest authority was the ejidal assembly; also that the commission had not nominated Aurelio Lopez and so had nothing to do with this matter. Enrique's brother, Isauro, told the assembly that Enrique was ill with dysentery and had left for treatment. Juan then told Isauro to go to Enrique's house and fetch the seal of office. Isauro replied that "Each man is in charge of (gives orders in) his own house. I am in charge of mine, not my brother's. You, the authorities can go, but I'm not going." Isauro refused to accept the argument that he had a right to enter his brother's house. When he remained adamant, the assembly agreed to give Enrique three days' notice to hand the seal over to the new President (of the pioneers), Jorge Santiago, who had been elected in Paso Limón. If

[19] I have divided the encounter into sections (indicated by letters) to facilitate references to it in the subsequent detailed analysis of the interaction between the ejidatarios and the Ingenieros. Implicit models of agency, power and authority are revealed in the assumptions made and the language used.

Enrique did not hand the seal over, then the assembly would have to take measures to remove him from the ejido.

B. The meeting returned to criticisms of the official in charge of the truck, Beto Gallegos, and his father who stood next to him and supported him. The President from Paso Limón first addressed Beto's father rather formally as "don Pablo", then in the second exchange between them, he addressed him as "compadre, porque somos compadres" ("because we are compadres"). The President's tone remained serious and formal, but the recognition of compadrazgo implied fairness and honesty in the proceedings and mitigated some of the fear and antagonism. Speakers from Paso Limón criticised Beto for having handed over the papers to the Ingeniero and criticised him for using the truck as he wanted without enough consultation. Beto's reply to each of these accusations included the phrase "You should have said..." at the time or said more. Other comments insisted that the pioneers' debt would be carried by them and not by all the ejidatarios of Paso Limón. They also demanded that the land be parcelled up individually.

C. Then followed various complaints by the pioneers that the Morales brothers had been threatening them when they were doing their individual work such as clearing land for pasture or sowing maize that would not be colectivo. It is worthy of further comment that the officials and individuals singled out for criticism in this meeting were all monolingual Spanish speakers, whose families came in the past from the Oaxacan hills and did not speak Ojitec. Their fluency in Spanish would have been one reason they were elected to the posts, but their not being Ojitecs may have made it easier to scapegoat them for the failures of the colectivo. The final item on the agenda was that those who wished to start building their homes in the new village should write their names down so that the list could be handed to the Commission and material allotted to them.

D. When the assembly was nearly over, the Ingenieros arrived and Enrique's brothers and another pioneer official hurried over to explain Enrique's illness and absence. The Paso Limón President went to greet the Ingenieros and they were brought into the discussion. The centre of the meeting shifted to where the Paso Limón President and the Ingenieros were standing. The Ingenieros did not comment on the criticisms of Enrique, which were repeated to them. They announced that the cooperative shop

would be dissolved after the maize had been harvested. In reply one pioneer referred to the other Ingeniero's promise to dissolve the shop the next day. The Ingeniero said that it would take 10-12 days to dissolve the shop because of the bureaucracy, and in that time they should get on with the harvest. The excuse of bureaucracy softened the blackmail, but the message was clearly that the papers would not be handed over until the harvest was finished. The maize needed to be harvested without the promised machinery and the income from it was expected to be very low. One pioneer commented that they could not expect their *compañeros* of Paso Limón to come and suffer as they were doing, being paid such low prices, earning 15/20/30 pesos a day, when in Ojitlan the daily rate was 50 pesos.

E. The ejidatarios insisted that they wanted to dissolve the shop immediately and they wanted to sell the truck as soon as possible. The Ingeniero replied that "the paperwork will not be handed over to any one of you". In the tension and anger of that meeting, the phrasing was very provocative and the Ingeniero must have realised that. The ejidatarios reacted very angrily to this statement and various of them declared that then they would set fire to the truck in front of the Ingeniero's eyes. When the situation had been calmed, the Ingeniero replied that the paperwork would not be handed over to any one person, but to a committee of five which would be elected by the ejidatarios. "Let's do it straightaway!" was the reply and five members were nominated and elected. The ejidatarios also argued that the Ingeniero should immediately do the paperwork so that the documents could be handed over and the truck could be sold. The Ingeniero agreed and asked if they had a typewriter. "No", came the reply, "but you can do a draft of it by hand." This was done there and then.

F. Some of the ejidatarios from Paso Limón made a point of saying in the presence of the Ingenieros that they wanted to be given individual lots of land, not colectivo. The Ingeniero replied brusquely in a manner that was almost surly that the Presidential decree said that it had to be colectivo. "*Ustedes saben lo que es un Decreto Presidencial*" ("You know how important a Presidential decree is"), in a tone of voice which suggested that only complete brutes would fail to understand and dare to question this.

After the assembly, the ejidatarios from Paso Limón began their return journey. Some of the younger men (about 26) stayed on in Uxpanapa in the hope of some well-paid work sowing rubber or learning to drive tractors.

Models of Agency, Power and Authority

In the ejidal assembly meeting described above it is possible to detect competing actors' models of agency, power and authority in action. The different models involved could be seen as:

The Model of the Traditional Ejido of Paso Limón, Ojitlan

The majority view held that the assembly of ejidatarios was the sovereign body and authority in the community. All eligible ejidatarios, regardless of how much land they used, could attend the meeting and speak. Decisions were reached by a vote, with the whole community following majority decisions. The ejidatarios knew that they were governed by wider laws, but the assembly dealt with most local matters. The ejidal officials were elected by the assembly and this included the local police agent, who was the first reference point for law and order matters. As mentioned in the discussion of community fiestas, elected officials relied on their position and influence in the community to achieve conformity with their requests. Sanctions included general censure/disapproval, (unspoken) threats of violence or economic sanctions (no offers of work), exclusion from community events and in extreme cases the potential to exclude someone from the ejido altogether. Serious breaches of law and order would lead to the individuals being taken to the prison cells in Ojitlan. The assembly made decisions on issues to do with the school, when and why to hold communal work parties. All ejidatarios should participate in the work parties. Some ejidatarios were clearly more confident and more influential in the assembly (which seemed to stem from factors like economic wealth, political contacts, age and confidence). The ethos was that all ejidatarios had equal rights to speak and influence decisions. All decisions about the ejido had to be made in the assembly hall in the presence of all the ejidatarios.

Challenges to this established model of agency, power and authority came from two directions. The Cerro de Oro project meant that the assembly became involved with a wider range of matters, including the choice of resettlement site. The Paso Limón

assembly did not make decisions about what crops to sow on individual parcels of land, as each ejidatario was in charge of what he did with his own land. The pioneer view of this situation was that as most of them had very little land in Paso Limón, so they had very little influence in the ejido assembly and would be unlikely to achieve elected positions of responsibility. The younger ones had never attended the Paso Limón assembly as any land in the family would have been in their father's name, so he would have attended. Many of the pioneers claimed to have felt rather excluded from the traditional ejido decision-making and opted to try the alternative opportunity of Uxpanapa.

The Model of the Ejido Colectivo, Uxpanapa

This model of agency, power and authority extended the decision-making powers of the ejidal assembly, whilst at the same time bringing in new sources of power to influence those decisions and increasing the complexity of the decision-making process.

The Ingenieros' view of this model, essentially the view of the Papaloapan Commission, was that the assembly of ejidatarios would discuss and make decisions on crops to sow in line with national production needs as well in line with the ejidatarios' own wishes. The new experts were the Ingeniero as agricultural/technical adviser and the representative from the bank in charge of the credit arrangements. Their authority was based on their knowledge and control of technology and essential resources for the ejidatarios' livelihood. Their aim was to facilitate the ejidatarios' work. Elected ejidal officials would organise the work and credit and some became full-time administrators/organisers. Meetings could be time-consuming, but the ejido colectivo was seen as the way to increase national production of food, while maintaining democratic principles of participation by the small farmers.

Other specific efforts were made, on behalf of the ejidatarios, to guarantee an improved quality of life for them. This included a complete ban on alcohol in Uxpanapa and the attempt to prevent Ojitlan entrepreneurs from renewing their role as middlemen in the resettlement zone. These were perhaps rather paternalistic measures "for their own good."

The pioneers' view and experience of the colectivo gradually came to be quite frustrated and negative. The ejidal assembly, whilst nominally remaining the maximal authority of the community, was clearly losing control to other sources of authority. The Ingeniero passed on the priorities of the Commission (linked to national priorities), generally had a say in what could and could not be done and together with the Bank representative controlled all the paperwork. As things went progressively wrong with the failed rice harvests of 1976 and 1977, the ejidatarios felt less and less in control. Although the ethos was that the ejidatarios made the decisions, in fact, decisions seemed more and more constrained by the Bank or the Commission. The experts often seemed to be telling them what to do. There were more meetings than in the Paso Limón ejido and this included waiting around for the Ingeniero or Bank representative to arrive. The ejidal officials, especially the full-time administrators, became more and more involved with administration, paperwork and supplies and less and less involved in farming, perhaps inevitably becoming a little separated from the rest of the ejidatarios. The administrator's role in organising labour and payment was closer to that of the manager/patrón of a private estate than to the role of the ordinary ejidatario. Most ejidatarios did not understand the details of the paperwork and credit arrangements and so trust was important. The ejidal officials also became closely identified with the colectivo and tried to enforce the principles of the colectivo, for instance by discouraging non-collective maize farming.

Life in the colectivo at its worst (Autumn 1977) involved waiting for technical experts to arrive at meetings or in the field, waiting for the truck to take people to work, waiting for technology (agricultural machinery) to arrive, waiting for the groups' cooks to serve dinner as wives were still in Paso Limón. When there was activity in the collective fields, it was often on a damaged crop where the daily rate for work became very low indeed. The ejidatarios began to feel insulted that they had to work for such low rates of return. They were also mostly proud farmers or sons of farmers who felt ashamed to be associated with such poor harvests. Their work, credit and inadequate money were organised by full-time officials, whose day seemed more comfortable than theirs. Increasingly, the officials, especially Enrique, were blamed for the failures of the colectivo and for failing to stand up to the Commission to change the situation. Enrique was also accused of corruption. Although clearly things were not going well, there was a suspicion that some people were getting rich from the situation, for instance, the Commission, corrupt officials and loggers extracting timber. The quality of life and diet

in Uxpanapa was also quite limited, without the variations of wild produce and fruit available in Ojitlan.

Analysis of The Assembly of Ejidatarios on 12 January 1978

The power play in this important assembly demonstrates how the ejidatarios (both Paso Limón and the pioneers) and the Ingenieros negotiate with different models of agency and power, using strategies from different models to try to gain advantage. I will try to summarise for each stage of the encounter.[20]

A. Beto Gallegos's claim that "no authority" was yet there (effectively true for the colectivo, as, without the experts, decisions could not be made and acted on) simply damns him further in the Paso Limón eyes, as for them the assembly is the maximal authority. The authority of the head of household is questioned, but defended and recognised when Enrique's brother refuses to breach it by taking the seal of authority from his house. The dethroning of Enrique will involve removing the seal of office from him. So far, the ejidal assembly rules, but has also acknowledged the separate authority of the head of household. The new President of the pioneers was elected in Paso Limón, so he now enjoys the support of the whole community.

B. Beto is condemned for acting without enough consultation with the committee of ejidatarios. He is also condemned for being too willing to accept the Ingeniero's authority by handing over the papers. The ejidatarios assert their authority over the Ingeniero. Beto's defence emphasises that people should have spoken up more, thereby accepting the authority of the ejidatarios. If he had known their views, he would have followed them.

C. Complaints against the Morales brothers follow the Paso Limón model of agency and power. Enrique Morales was simply following the colectivo model and trying to carry out his role as administrator with his brother's support.

D. The Ingenieros use their control of colectivo paperwork to delay the dissolution of the cooperative shop until after the maize harvest. They are clearly trying to

[20] The letters refer to the phases of the encounter described earlier.

tell the ejidatarios that they must do the harvest first. Here the Ingenieros are breaking the strict ideal of colectivo, which emphasises that ejidatarios make the decisions, but they are conforming to the reality experienced by the pioneers, that Ingenieros often tell them what to do and leave them limited freedom of choice. The late or non-arrival of Ingenieros is another use of Ingeniero power.

E. The Ingeniero is deliberately provocative in claiming that he will not hand the paperwork over to any individual. He is using his knowledge of Spanish and colectivo procedures to wrong-foot the ejidatarios. In their anger, they offer a very traditional "burn it" response, which seems to ignore the fact their own colectivo owns the truck, but perhaps reflects the reality that they feel – that it belongs to the Commission. The ejidatarios respond by immediately forming the necessary committee. The Ingeniero delays asking for a typewriter, which he knows they do not possess, again using his knowledge of procedures and technology to regain control. The combined assembly of ejidatarios, however, insists that it can be done by hand. The fact that the ejidatarios "win" this exchange reflects their increasing grasp of the way the Ingeniero experts operate, their own increasing understanding of colectivo procedures and the confidence built up by the large number of Paso Limón ejidatarios united in support.

F. When faced with the will of the ejidatarios for individual plots not colectivo, the Ingeniero falls back on the final authority of the country's President, delivered in a threatening "expert" tone of voice.

The Commission's View of the Uxpanapa Project, the Ejido Colectivo and the Paso Limón Pioneers[21]

The Uxpanapa project therefore had conflicting objectives from the start. The pressure to justify investment through achieving high agricultural yields in the short-term meant that land use and crops chosen tended to reflect national government priorities rather the wishes of the ejidatarios. National demands dictated annual crops, which conflicted with the development of longer term perennial crops such as rubber and cattle

[21] Much of the material in this section comes from Peter Ewell's report on Uxpanapa, 1979, especially Chapter X, as well as from some brief discussions we had in the field. His interest was in assessing the success of Uxpanapa as an agricultural regional development project.

operations. The zone as a whole was treated as the unit of production. The pressure on time meant that only limited crop trials were possible.

The Commission worked to start agricultural development and build infrastructure in Uxpanapa as soon as possible so that it would be ready for the Chinantecs[22] when they arrived. However, as one of the general Chinantec resistance strategies, they were slow to arrive. In the early years, more land was cleared than there were Chinantecs to farm it and so the Commission had to plant this land with hired labour in order to try to meet Uxpanapa's production goals.

The managers of the projects in Uxpanapa were the technical agricultural staff of the Commission and the officials from the Bank. Between them, they organised the ejidos to receive credit from the bank, a process involving many meetings and large amounts of paperwork. The Commission's technical staff in Uxpanapa were given the ("impossible" – Ewell and Poleman, 1979:171) task of managing the entire programme and they did not have the time to work through the detailed questions and problems of each group of ejidatarios. Many of these technical staff came from north Mexico and so had no experience of working with indigenous populations or working in a tropical climate. They were demoralised by the low yields and heavy losses of the first few years and fell back on "blaming the problems on the laziness and selfish individualism of the Indians" (ibid). Chinantec alienation from the projects meant that there were thefts from experimental test plots for crops, which invalidated the results of trials.

The slow rate at which the Ojitecs moved into the new towns and the fact that their numbers fluctuated even then, through working and social visits to Ojitlan, made things more complicated for the Commission workers. The lack of an established population complicated the organisation of both the labour in the agricultural programmes and the collective ejidos. Commission workers found this irritating and felt that "they are working very hard for an ungrateful people who refuse to share the hardships of a newly opened frontier area, and expect to be handed everything on a platter" (ibid:173). This theme of conquest of a frontier recurs. Technical staff were reluctant to write off crops to insurance if another (expensive) application of pesticide could help, as they were under pressure to make Uxpanapa produce rice. "They (the technical staff) saw

[22] This was the term used by Commission workers and by the various academics, but it was not used by the people of Ojitlan themselves.

themselves fighting a skirmish in the conquest of the jungle, which they were determined to win" (ibid:144). In the process, they would bring to the indigenous people progress, modernity and the benefits of being an integrated part of the nation.

Commission workers were also disappointed at the apparent lack of interest in planting trees and crops in new backyard gardens in the new towns. Young social workers from the cities were hired to run a conventional home economics extension programme with the women. "They have quickly become frustrated by the lack of interest and 'dirty' habits of the Indians"(ibid). From the Commission experts' point of view, then, they were working very hard in an exciting conquest, trying to juggle conflicting objectives and aiming to improve the lives of the Chinantec, who appeared to be lazy, selfish, ungrateful and unwilling to share the hardships of the frontier zone. This view tended to fit with common Mexican stereotypes of Indians.

The case-study of the Paso Limón pioneers is particularly interesting, as it illustrates the original attitudes and the subsequent changes. Ewell begins his chapter on collective organisation and modern agriculture in Uxpanapa with a description of his first meeting with the pioneers, "who, in 1976, were held up as a model of collective consciousness and hard work, and who symbolised the potential of Uxpanapa" to the planners (Ewell and Poleman, 1979:165). He flew into their area in a helicopter with an agronomist. When they landed, the pioneers were resting at the side of the road.

> We shook hands with everybody, and were introduced to the leader of the group, a young man of about thirty. The agronomist asked him some questions for our benefit: "How many of you are working here in Uxpanapa?" The leader smiled and answered, "thirty-five." "How many hectares are you growing this season?" "Seven hundred: six hundred and ten of rice and ninety of maize." "How many hectares did you cultivate in Ojitlan?" "It's difficult to say, two or three hectares, maybe eighty between us." The agronomist laughed and slapped him on the back. We joked and chatted for a few moments, walked back to the helicopter, and continued on our tour (ibid).

This encounter expresses the optimism and excitement felt by the technical experts in the early days of the project. Shaking hands with everyone (thirty five people) is rare between visiting experts and ordinary peasants, but here it emphasises an equality as partners in the ground-breaking project. The agronomist's behaviour expresses delight with the peasants' opportunity to improve their lives and his pleasure at working with them. The pioneers, too, were enthusiastic and wanted to make a great success of the

venture. "They all looked forward to the day when they would confront their adversaries with big profits as proof that the Uxpanapa project would benefit all of them if they would work together with the government" (ibid:166).

In that first season of 1976, the pioneers signed credit contracts for over 3 ½ million pesos,[23] but their yields of rice and maize were very low. In mid 1977 their "mood was subdued" and they "were losing faith in the project". Ewell reports "a long conversation (with the leader of the group, Enrique Morales) about the collective system, in which he expressed very serious doubts about the possibility of getting the people to work together under these conditions. His own personal position in the community was being undermined, and he felt that he was losing control of the group" (ibid:166). By the end of 1977, "the spirit of the group was entirely broken. The rice crop was very small once again. Opposition leaders came from Ojitlan and convinced the people not to harvest the maize, simply to turn it over to the bank" (ibid).

The refusal to harvest this maize crop followed the critical assembly meeting described earlier and marked a further stage of resistance to the colectivo. The maize needed to be harvested to meet their obligations to the Bank, but the actual money to be paid to the ejidatarios for their work was very little. After the support of their fellow Paso Limón ejidatarios in the assembly and the reminders of a decent rate of pay, the pioneers refused to harvest the crop. The Ingenieros at that meeting hoped that the visitors would stay to help harvest the maize. The insurance company refused to honour the loss of the crop and the Bank was unable to offer more credit until that debt was repaid. By then, work had begun on the new town where the Paso Limón people were to live and so people were able to live on the subsidies which they received for building their houses. "There was nothing to do except wait until the project was completed and see what the future would bring" (ibid).

The Struggle to Constitute the Modern Subject

The refusal to work the ejido colectivo marked an important stage in the processes of resistance and accommodation to the whole PRC project. The people who had seen most hope for themselves in Uxpanapa (and were therefore a key group needed by the

[23] This would be about £87,500 at the 1976 exchange rate of 40 pesos to £1.

PRC to encourage the others to resettle) had finally rejected the colectivo. Although, they had resisted in minor ways beforehand (through, for instance, sowing their own subsistence maize), this was different. The people who had shown most interest in progress and modernity had had enough.

The PRC's model of the collective ejido included a vision of the new way of life in a new community as part of the "miracle" of Uxpanapa.[24] The Ojitecs would be protected from their old mestizo exploiters and protected from alcohol in the "dry" regime of Uxpanapa. They were to live in modern settlements with well-built houses of concrete, running water and other facilities. The Commission had developed its own scheme for the organisation of space in Uxpanapa (both for agricultural activities and for settlement) and tried to draw the Ojitecs into it. The Comaroffs have analysed how Nonconformist missionaries in South Africa tried to draw the Tswana into their scheme of settlement and tried to influence the design and location of buildings. For both the Tswana and the Ojitec becoming a new citizen touched on the physical patterns of settlement and everyday practices (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991:Ch.6).

The Commission's plan regrouped the ejidos of Ojitlan into new settlements in Uxpanapa. People from the same home ejido were often dispersed among several new ejidos. The new communities were initially given numbers and then the names of distinguished men, from the regional and national context. This process of naming and reorganising communities "makes the presence of the state palpable in everyday life" (Alonso, 1988:41). The communities of Ojitlan were often named after features of the landscape or the produce of nature, linking place and people. In contrast, the state naming structured the world through important men. This extended even to the names of the dams, which were named after Presidents of Mexico. The dam at Temascal was named the Miguel Alemán. The dam at Cerro de Oro was made safe with the name of Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado. It was no longer at a dangerous hill ("owned" by ambivalent forces) that would not withstand the force of the water.[25] On the contrary, the Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado dam was a successful part of the nation's regional development programme.

[24] Cf. Allen, 1978:217.
[25] These were some of the messages of the 1972-3 millenarian movement examined in Chapter 6.

However, just as the Tswana challenged the missionaries, so too the Ojitecs resisted the Commission's concepts of space in Uxpanapa. The temporary settlement for the Paso Limón pioneers was given a real name, La Horqueta (the fork), not a number. The pioneers cleared their own land for individual (not collective) subsistence plots of maize. In Ojitlan, those passively resisting resettlement also threw their energy and resources into revitalising the fiestas of their old communities and patron saints.[26] In Paso Limón in May 1978, the ejidatarios revived the tradition of community fishing with chinchorro (large net), which involves two teams of men setting up two large nets across the river. One net is held stationary and the other is walked towards it, trapping the fish in between. The catch is shared by all the participants, who included some of the Uxpanapa pioneers, as well as those passively resisting resettlement in Paso Limón.

There were struggles too over conflicting attitudes to time. In the traditional ejido of Ojitlan, ejidatarios had control over their working days. Time not working would include time accompanying one's neighbours in the ritual of the life-cycle and the community fiesta. For the men, it included drinking time with one's fellows. The Commission experts in Uxpanapa regarded ritual time (especially if it involved leaving a harvest to return to Ojitlan) and drinking time as "wasted time". The collective ejido incorporated different attitudes to time. It was necessary to spend time in meetings (far more than in the Ojitlan ejido), time waiting for the experts to arrive, time waiting for transport to the fields. Perhaps most critically there was a different concept of a day's work and its value. Towards the end of the colectivo described earlier in this chapter, the financial reward for a day's work was so low that the Ojitecs refused to accept it. They rejected what they saw as the "wasted time" in the colectivo.

In this chapter, I have tried to examine part of the "long conversation" between the Commission and two groups of Ojitecs, the Paso Limón pioneers and the Paso Limón resisters. In Kaplan's (1990) terms this was the gap between contact and hegemony, when creative agents tried to develop novel articulations between two systems of meaning. The Paso Limón pioneers were an example of accommodation to change. They tried to work the colectivo, despite the frustrations of the work regime and resettlement. The Commission experts, as agents of domination, operated within a modern discourse of technological progress which limited their understanding of the pioneers' difficulties and developing resistance to the colectivo.

---

[26] Cf. Chapter 7.

Postscript: Uxpanapa in the 1990s

I have gleaned some more recent information on Uxpanapa from a range of websites, some of which feature campaigns either to save the tropical rainforest environment or to improve the situation of the Chinantecs. Several sources, emphasise that the facilities (hospitals, good roads and schools) promised at the start of the resettlement project were not provided in full (Maldonado, 1997). Once the valuable tropical wood was extracted the Commission withdrew from the area leaving the Chinantecs to their own devices (ibid). There had been concerns about land invasions by spontaneous colonists right from the beginning of the Uxpanapa project, when road access to the area was improved. This has continued to be an issue in the area. The government also resettled some Zoque Indians in Uxpanapa after the eruption of the volcano El Chichonal (Rangel, 1997).

None of the sources comment on the collective ejido, which has perhaps been abandoned. One report suggests that the death of Jorge Tamayo in a helicopter crash at the end of 1978 weakened the commitment to the whole Uxpanapa project, including the facilities for the Chinantecs (Ginsberg, 2000). Many of the Chinantec migrated to better paid work in factories in Mexico and the USA. Ginsberg reports on a Mexican environmental organisation encouraging Chinantecs to plant ixtle (which can be made into rope) as part of a programme of sustainable agriculture. There are hints that the infrastructure of the area is poor, the tropical rainforest environment is deteriorating and that there is a high level of crime, including drug-trafficking (http://www.coacade.uv.mx/paginas/modelo/contex-est.htm).

The Chinantecs have begun to organise as Chinantecs and are part of the Consejo Indígena de Uxpanapa (CIUX – Indigenous Council of Uxpanapa). An example of a protest by Juan Zamora Gonzalez, the Chinantec leader of the CIUX, was discussed in Chapter 5. In 1997 Juan and his brother, Marcos, were arrested and jailed in the port of Veracruz for "political reasons", according to the National Indigenous Congress (CNI, 1997a and b). Further evidence of a resurgence of ethnicity in the area (and an implicit rejection of state naming practices mentioned earlier) is the fact that the major Chinantec community was called Chinantla in 1997 and was the municipal capital of the

Valley of Uxpanapa (Rangel, 1997). The Chinantla was a term used by Weitlaner (1964) to refer to the whole Chinantec-speaking area in Oaxaca.

It seems that the Chinantecs are now organising politically as Chinantecs, as are many ethnic groups in southern Mexico (Clarke, 2000). The Chinantec identity has not disappeared, as suggested by the predictions of ethnocide. Many Ojitecs said in the 1970s – "We are not moving until all the facilities are in place. If we go before then, there is no guarantee that they will provide what they have promised." Unfortunately, this prediction seems to have been proved correct.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

The Ojitecs' struggle with modernity has been traced through analysis of their interaction with different government agencies and the church. The notion of resistance has been very useful in this analysis, though it is important to remember that it is a multifaceted concept. Resistance is not a single thing, but is rather a useful way of organising thinking about relations among groups of people, the state and the ecclesiastical authority.

I have examined a variety of forms of resistance set in their cultural and political/economic contexts. The major organised forms of resistance seem to be those that were overtly religious and this trend reflects the importance of religion as a sphere of legitimate agency for the Ojitecs. It also highlights the lack of other mechanisms for large-scale political organising, because national peasant organisations in Mexico, such as the CNC, have a top-down approach to communication.

The processes of religious resistance in Ojitlan have shown how protesters reappropriate and use terms and categories present within the dominant discourse in order to resist them. In the millenarian movement, the Great God Engineer challenged the viability of the dam. The priests' opponents rephrased the priests' language of reform as evidence of Protestantism through the negative connotations attached to the use of Alleluia and discussion of the Bible. Talking about biblical teachings in everyday language during a prayer session was criticised as "gossip" in contrast to the traditional formulaic prayers and responses. The Paso Limón pioneers on the collective ejido in Uxpanapa learned to use the criteria and procedures of collective agreement to refuse to harvest a "modern" crop that wouldn't pay them adequately in terms of traditional Ojitec standards. Everyday forms of resistance also use this strategy of reappropriating the categories of the dominant discourse – note for instance the jokey mutual greetings between Ojitecs calling each other Ingeniero with mock gestures of respect.

The difficult and rapidly changing situation in Ojitlan meant that many of the forms of resistance were overt and often very physical, as in the attack on the priests in the church and the locking of community chapels. This form of resistance mainly involved men. Many ejidatarios were very outspoken in their criticism of the Papaloapan River Commission officials, including in meetings when the officials were present. However,

there were still many examples of the everyday forms of resistance. In Uxpanapa, some of these were initially masked with symbolic conformity – expressed in such forms as "yes, we are in favour of the collective, but we just want our own little bit of maize field too". Later the right to sow subsistence maize was demanded overtly.

The practice of established indigenous Catholic ritual was a regular strategy of resistance, whether through pilgrimage and curing rituals in the millenarian movement or in asserting the traditions of community fiestas. These practices were not entirely conscious forms of resistance in that they were first and foremost practices that defined and defended the Ojitec identity. Reasserting tradition was firstly a defence of identity and secondly a form of resistance. The millenarian movement did assert something novel in its formulation of sacred mediators and its transformation of the dangerous cave into a "church". The movement's ritual practices, however, like the ritual of community fiestas followed established patterns. I would disagree with Scott's emphasis on the individual's consciousness of his unequal position and the implication that he manipulates symbols and other resources to resist it. In his example the rich and poor share the same "community of discourse", albeit "at a distance". Both sides try to extend the concept and practice of tolong towards their own advantage, but it is a shared concept and part of a shared culture.

In Ojitlan and in situations of colonial encounter such as South Africa (Comaroffs, 1991) and Fiji (Kaplan, 1990), there is an interaction between different systems of meaning which will affect the degree to which each side can calculate the effect of their actions upon the other and the degree to which they can understand the actions of the other. The interaction between the Paso Limón pioneers and the Commission experts in Uxpanapa is a good example of this

Nevertheless asserting tradition can be considered to feature in many examples of resistance in Ojitlan. In this sense, traditional religious ritual in Ojitlan belongs with the mola of the Kuna Indians of Panama (Howe, 1991) as a form of resistance to outside agencies of the state or church. Thus tradition is transformed as it is reasserted.

This case offers the chance to analyse changing forms of resistance over a period of time and to consider how they reflect changes in underlying power relations. Thus the very strong early resistance by many people in different ways was focused on defending

a place – the physical place of Ojitlan threatened by the dam. As time went on and the PRC offered a range of opportunities to the Ojitecs, those who continued to resist could be seen as defending their advantageous position in sets of relationships in contrast to the less well placed who were prepared to try change.

My study has also shown the importance of considering resistance through an examination of different actors' models of agency and power. In Ojitlan there were at least the following different (though overlapping) models of agency and power. The indigenous Ojitec model, which stretched along a continuum from those with very limited experience of the regional capitalist economy to those, with greater wealth and resources, who have benefited from it to a greater extent and understand it more. Symbols of power included consumer goods, style of clothes and an ability to deal with "outsiders". Along this continuum, the emphasis and authority given to sources of power varies. Other models of agency and power are held by the local gente de razón; the PRC officials and organisation in Ojitlan and Uxpanapa; the priests and their catequistas.

The process of resistance occurs through the interactions between different actors' models of agency and power. There are two broad scenarios. One is where these different actors' models belong within the same "community of discourse" (as in Scott's village of Sedaka) and the second is where they belong within different systems of meaning. The process of resistance will be different in these two scenarios. In Sedaka, the rich and poor understand each other because they share the same model, but they disagree about the interpretation of events. In Ojitlan, Fiji and South Africa different groups possess different models of agency and power and they disagree because they do not fully understand each other – the models conflict and are not compatible. This is partly why the interaction between people with these different models leads to such conflict and feelings of distrust and betrayal.

The interaction between groups in unequal power relations suggests that the dominant groups have more resources with which to enforce their model on the subordinate groups. The Papaloapan River Commission tried to shape Ojitec experience and redefine agency and power in a "modern" field of social and political relations. PRC officials saw Ojitec religion as fanatismo and held that Ojitecs were vulnerable to manipulation by mestizo and other exploiters, an implicit picture of ignorant gullibility.

Subsistence agriculture, having your own maize for your family, was part of the Ojitec view of being a good man. To the Commission it was part of a backward model that was against the interests of the nation. The self-sufficient Ojitec was not a good citizen.

The power of the Commission stemmed from their position within the law and the state, the technical and financial resources they commanded and their ability to bring about practical changes for the benefit of Ojitlan – running water, roads, bridges. They were the agent of the new economic and social relations of capitalism, which were already impinging on Ojitlan. Patterns and processes of resistance to the Commission were diagnostic of existing power relations in that those least well placed gave up resistance first.

The models of agency and power promoted by the Commission and by the priests were in many respects mutually compatible. It is not surprising that the Paso Limón pioneers also accepted the priests' reforms. Both were modern models in that they separated out "illicit conflations of people, words and things" (Keane, 1997:138), separating the individual from sources of authority embedded in complex relationships within the community. The modern, "conscious" Catholic had a knowledge of church doctrine and an individual relationship with God. He did not have to "accompany" his neighbours or fulfil community obligations of hospitality and service in fiestas. The modern ejidatario would prioritise the crop and his family and could look rationally to the future, unaffected by fanatismo and mestizo exploiters.

My ethnography also points, like that of Kaplan (1990), to "multiple cultural articulations" in the interaction between two systems of meanings in a colonial encounter. I would also emphasise the creative agency in this period of interaction, where people try to make sense and respond to the new situation. This response can be often fumbling and exploratory, because initial responses are based on taken-for-granted understandings and strategies (which fail) and because new systems of domination (new models of agency and power) are not fully understood. The concept of "multiple cultural articulations" allows scope for analysis of forms of response which constitute accommodation rather than resistance. It reminds us to beware of an excessive focus of resistance. The supporters of resettlement found in the priests' reforms a model of agency and power, within which they could see themselves as moral agents doing the right thing, in contrast to the accusations of betrayal and sell-out echoing in their ears.

They wanted land to work in their own right as individuals to raise their families. In the old ejido, their access to land depended on their family's position and the historical pattern of land distribution (discussed in Chapter 1). In Uxpanapa, each ejidatario had a notional 20 hectares (to be farmed as colectivo). In modern Catholicism, each individual was responsible for his awareness and his relationship with God – the community was in the background.

At the same time, the period of my fieldwork was long enough and the pace of change sufficient for me to observe the inadequacies of the new models of agency and power. These models freed the individual, released him/her from outdated, constraining relationships and ignorance. In place of this were new relationships with people defined in terms of their jobs, not their relationships or their community. The weaknesses of the new models of agency and power were that the powerful sometimes left the Ojitecs in practice alone, vulnerable and unprotected. The engineer did not turn up to defend the ejidatario at a meeting, or to solve an urgent problem; the priest did not arrive to say prayers on the right day for the fiesta so there was no fiesta. The failures of models based in or compatible with capitalist economic and social relations had begun to show.

The meeting described in detail in Chapter 8 marked a further turning point in the interaction between different actors' models of agency and power. The new alliance made between the pioneers and the Paso Limon group showed creative agency in action. The ejidatarios of the two factions drew on both models of agency and power in order to achieve a result in their favour. The pioneers remained in Uxpanapa, but refused collective work and were to live temporarily on the allowances to be received for building their houses. The Paso Limón people returned to continue their passive resistance to resettlement. This meeting is a good example of a people in transition trying, creatively, to use all strategies from any sources of power to win in a dialogue with the Commission experts, essentially agents of domination.

Resistance can therefore be seen operating at many levels, from the micro-levels or relationships between individuals (in a meeting of ejidatarios or in male-female relations) up to higher levels of relationships between dominant and subordinate groups (the Commission officials and the indigenous Ojitec of the millenarian movement). These levels are linked through economic and political relations and through the creative agency of individuals.

My study also points to the resilience of culture. Despite the concerns about ethnocide, indigenous Ojitec culture did not disappear, although a process of transformation was under way during my fieldwork (and had been under way since at least the Spanish conquest). The processes of resistance revealed many layers of a syncretic religion and culture, as the millenarian movement (using overtly pre-Catholic beliefs in shamans and "owners" of caves) ceded place to resistance through the defence of indigenous Catholic ritual (focused on celebrating the Virgin of Guadalupe and other figures revered in mainstream Mexican Catholicism). Evidence of an "ethnic revival" in the 1990s in the politics of the state of Oaxaca suggests that ethnicity and culture, however transformed, continue to be of relevance for understanding how people construct their lives. The references to the Chinantec of Uxpanapa, gleaned from websites, suggest that being Chinantec matters and that people are now organising *politically* as Chinantec, something which did not occur in the 1970s. This change seems to reflect a renewed interest in plural politics in the nation, shown in some constitutional changes mentioned in Chapter 5. Some have said that in Oaxaca, ethnic politics and the introduction of "usos y costumbres" (traditional assemblies for voting) may be seen as a reaction against the political domination of the PRI.[1] Perhaps ethnic politics is seen to represent the people better than the often top-down approach of the PRI and its associated organisations, such as the CNC. At the time of my study, the Ojitec did not use the term Chinantec, referring to their identity in terms of language or place (community or Ojitlan) or both. Now the wider term, Chinantec, is in use. My study covers a critical period in the transformation of that culture.

The concept of resistance has been useful throughout this dissertation in examining the series of responses in Ojitlan to the Cerro de Oro project. I have tried to analyse the "long conversation" (Comaroffs, 1991) between the outside agencies and the Ojitecs and considered the "multiple cultural articulations" (Kaplan, 1990) between different systems of meaning. Both of these approaches have been helpful in my study, because they allow for creative, yet structured, agency within the context of major change. Like Kaplan, I agree that we should not overemphasise resistance to the extent that we miss processes of accommodation to change, which are also diagnostic of power relations. I have found valuable Abu-Lughod's discussion of the everyday practices of power, which helped me to see Ojitec dancing as a strategy and symbol of resistance. At the

[1] Colin Clarke, 2001, personal communication.

same time, she has helped to alert me to the many facets of the "romance of resistance" in my own and others' work. Keane's (1996) formulation of the "struggle to constitute the modern subject" has highlighted how Ojitec identity is contested and helped me to analyse patterns of relationship between the Ojitecs, the state and the church. Finally, I think that my work presents a substantial case study of multiple responses to major regional development where changing forms of resistance were diagnostic of changes in underlying power relations. Religion was an important sphere of agency and a site of struggle for Ojitec identity.

Appendix I

The Messages of the Millenarian Movement in Ojitlan 1972-3

Version A: The Original Spanish Text[1]

El día 10 de septiembre del presente año en curso, el señor Andres Felipe Rosa trabaja en el cerro del ejido de Potrero Viejo del Municipio de San Lucas Ojitlan, el ya está trabajando cuando llegó que dice es ingeniero el grande Dios, siendo como a las 5 de la tarde dicho día.

El señor le dijo a Andres, mira que ya se ve muchas brechas en el cerro de Oro, y volvio decir que dice Ud. que se va a hacer la Presa, y el señor Andrés contestó yo creo que no se va a hacer porque este río corre mucho, volvio Andrés preguntar a él, Ud. que dice se va a poder hacer la Presa? y contestando a Andres yo también digo que no se va poder hacer porque no va aguantar el cerro.
El señor Andrés pregunto al señor que llegará el agua hasta aquí? y el señor contestó que como a 30 metros va a subir al cerro.

El dia 15 del mismo mes de septiembre.

Siendo como a las 9 de la mañana volvio presentarse el señor y diciendo a Andres, que el Jesucristo ya merito quería a abrir parte de la mera raya del Cerro de Oro para que se saliera todo el agua del río que estáadentro del Cerro no se pudo, porque la Virgen Santa del Carmen defendió mucho pro la niñez, por que se iva perder todo Tuxtepec hasta Veracruz: volvio decir que el Señor Jesucristo va a respetar y va a dejar otra Virgen de GUADALUPE más arriba donde se encuetra la otra y así hay más fuerza.

EL DIA 17 DEL MISMO MES DE SEPTIEMBRE.

Como a las 12 del día se presentó el Ingeniero el Grande de Dios diciendo a Andrés, Que si quiere ir a haber a donde vas estar la virgen de Guadalupe? y Andres aceprtó de ir a ver el lugar donde se va a quedar la VIRGEN DE GUADALUPE, sise hace la Presa

[1] I have kept my copy as close to the original as possible, including some mistakes which may be typing errors or the typical mistakes made by Ojitecs who are not very fluent in Spanish.

por caprichodel gobierno. Después de eso le preguntó a Andrés Que si quieres que forme tu pueblo aquí en el CERRO? y Andrés contesto que no hay agua aquí en el CERRO, entonces dijo el Ingeniero que si hay agua aquí en el CERRO y que no se vayan ustedes por otro lado porque corre peligro por la presa.

EL DIA 10 DEL MES DE NOVIEMBRE

Este día le dijo a Andrés que el Señor Presidente Echeverría tiene un lazo de compromiso que nunca saldrá que si no acepta que no se haga la presa el CERRO de ORO, y volvio a decir a Andrés que ese lazo si va a salir si se toma encuenta a mí porque el presidente un poquito se equivocó por la culpa delEstado de Veracruz y su Señora de Echerría (sic) sí pensó muy bién por la familia mexicana que se trata de matrimonio y la esposa del gobernador del Estado también.
Volvio el Ingeniero a decir a Andrés que la Esposa del Presidente de la República pensó muy en por que Dios le ayudó, y el Ingeniero quiere que la misma Esposa de Echeverría estudie el problemas de la Presa en modo de que no se haga la Construción (sic) de la Presa en el CERRO de ORO el Ingeniero el Gran Dios si está de acuerdo por el credito que ya se abrió para los campesinos.

EL DIA 20 DEL MES DE NOVIEMBRE DE 1972.

ANO DE JUAREZ.

Andrés Felipe Rosa fue a ver su semillero de tabaco en Cerro, el Señor Ingeniero elgrande Dios ya estaba cuando llegó Andrés en dicho lugar, y diciendole que desde ayer te ando buscando y preguntando a Andrés, cómo está el asunto que ya se a notó todo lo que yo te he dicho? Entonces, contestó Andres que sí ya está anotádo.
El Ingeniero que dice que es el gran de Dios volvió a insistir a Andrés que vaya a decir a las Autoridades del Municipio de Ojitlán sobre de este asunto, para que así turna a las Autoridades de Tuxtepec sobre de este mismo caso para el bien del pueblo en que vivimos.
Entonces le dijo a Andrés que sino se acuerda el Gobierno que hubo un anciano que defendió a México con un estandarte de la virgen de Guadalupe.

El Señor Andrés Felipe Rosa dice que cuando el Ingeniero del gran de Dios trae una virgen deGuadalupe en su espalda cuando se va y desparece a una distancia de 15 metros de su vista. Cada vez que habla con él en el CERRO.

DATOS RELACIONADOS CON EL ASUNTO DE LA APARICION DE LA "VIRGEN GUADALUPANA".

+++++ + +++ +++ ++ ++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++

Que el día 5 de este mes se le hizo la aparición, pero que ya no fué el Ingeniero de Dios, sino la propia Virgen de Guadalupe y que le dijo a él Andrés Felipe "Que hablaracon Diego y le dijera que como prueba que quería que se presenta ella, y tambien que le diga que procura hablar con el presidente Municipal de Tuxtepec, para ver que la Presa no se haga, por que no va a aguantar, y al poco tiempo se va arreventar y que va ser muchos los hijos de ella que van a morir, que eso le va a dar mucho pena, y que es lo que no quiere, por eso Nombra a Diego para evitar esta catastrofe. Que tambien dijo, que DON BENITO JUAREZ hizo la leyes para que no se molestaran los mexicanos y se fueran a otra parte; igualmente que DON LAZARO CARDENAS" Poreso repartio las tierras para que nose la sacaran de su lugar a los campesinos ni se les hechara agua. Ademas que se le vea al Presidente de la Republica paraque no se haga la Presa, Ysi no se puede evitar, que se le hable al Presidente de Tuxtepec, para que se echa una barda, desde la casa de Emilio Patatuchi hasta el barrio de abajo para que así no se pierda Tuxtepec y toda la parte del Estado de Veracruz que por eso Cura Hidalgo gano la lucha por que fué la primera que sacó para la defensa de los mexicanos, que anduvo con los Generales y soldados, y que cuando cayó en Mexico, su pié sangró (Enseñandole la sangre a Andrés Felipe). Que a ella le da mucha pena por que un hijo no nace en un mes, sino que la Madre le cuesta tiempo y trabajo y que por eso lo hace (Y que comenso a llorar)

Además dijo la Virgen, que si el Presidente de la República le hace caso a ella misma salvará al Presidente Municipal de Tuxtepec, le presta atención que se puede publicar en acción el Periódico de Tuxtepec.

1972.

(ANO DE JUAREZ)

EN EL DIA 8 DE MARZO DE 1973.

Dice el Ingeniero El Presidente de la República tiene que respetar la frace que dijo Don "BENITO JUAREZ." "ENTRE LOS INDIVIDUOS COMO ENTRE LAS NACIONES EL RESPETO AL DERECHO AJENO ES LA PAZ" por que dijo que cuando llegó haciendo gira, cuando no estaba en la Presidencia, que dice que Presa no, y lo demás tengo que ayudarles a todos ustedes, que es carretera, luz electrica, agua potable, etc. No tenga usted cuidado, le di a Andres, ustedno le va a pasar nada.

Sí te mete a la cárcel lasAutoridades competente, yoprometo ayudarle a usted por orden de la Virgen de Guadalupe.

La Virgen de Guadalupe me dijo que élla está conforme con todas las cosas que dice arriba. Pero eso nomás de la Presa, no esta de acuerdo. No te olvides lo que te dije ese día, y hasta que fuí yo a enseñarte la parte que se hace un puente para sacar los productos de pobres campesinos de este lado del SANTO DOMINGO; Entre los cerros altosde las POCHOTAS y POTRERO VIEJO.

DICTADO EN EL CERRO DE SANTA RITA A LA ENTRADA DELA GRUTA 9-III/73.

Version B: My Translation from the Original Spanish Text

1. On the 10th of September this year,[2] Andres Felipe Rosa was working in the hills of the ejido of Potrero Viejo in the municipio of San Lucas Ojitlan. He was working when at about 5 pm a figure arrived who said he was the Great God Engineer.

   The man[3] said to Andres, "Look, you can see a lot of tracks at Cerro de Oro" and then he said, "What do you think? Will the dam be built?" Andres replied, "I think that it won't be built because this river has a very strong current."
   Andres asked him, "What do you say? Will the dam be built?"

[2] 1972

[3] The Spanish term *el señor* is used, which can mean both "the man" and "the Lord". In spoken Spanish, it could be completely ambiguous as to whether a man or God is referred to. In written Spanish the capital letter (not used in this case) would indicate God.

He answered Andres, "I, too, say that it won't be possible to build it because the hill will not withstand it."

Andres asked the man, "Will the water come up to here?"

The man replied, "It will come about 30 metres up the hill."

2. On the 15th of the same month of September

At about 9 am the man again appeared before Andres and said to him, "The worthy Jesus Christ wanted to open up part of the actual borderline of Cerro de Oro so that all the river water inside the hill would pour out. But it could not be done because the Holy Virgin of Carmel stoutly defended her children – otherwise all of Tuxtepec and Veracruz would have been lost."

He also said, "The Lord Jesus Christ will respect this and will leave another Virgin, the Virgin of Guadalupe, higher above the place of the Virgin of Carmel, so that there will be more strength there."

3. On the 17th of the same month of September

At about twelve midday, the Great God Engineer appeared and said to Andres, "Do you want to go and see where the Virgin of Guadalupe will be?"

Andres agreed to go and see the place where the Virgin of Guadalupe will be, if the dam is built because of government whims.

After this the man asked Andres, "Do you want your village to be formed up here in the hills?"

Andres replied, "There is no water here in the hills."

Then the Engineer said, "Yes, there is water here in the hills and don't any of you go anywhere else because of the danger from the dam."

4. On the 10th of November

On this day the man said to Andres that President Echeverría has made a solemn pledge[4] that will never be realised if he doesn't accept that the Cerro de Oro dam should not be built. He said to Andres, "This pledge will be realised if I am taken into account because the President made a little mistake because he was pressured

[4] Perhaps this refers to a Presidential oath to serve the Mexican people.

by the state of Veracruz. Echeverría's wife did think very carefully about the Mexican family and so did the wife of the State Governor. The Engineer said again to Andres that the wife of the President of the Republic thought about why God had helped him.[5] The Engineer wanted Echeverría's wife herself to study the problems of the dam in such a way that the dam will not be built at Cerro de Oro. The Great God Engineer is in favour of the credit that is now being allowed to the peasants.

5. On the 20th November 1972.[6] Year of Juarez.

Andres Felipe Rosa went to see his tobacco seed-bed in the hills. When Andres arrived, the Great God Engineer was already there and he said to Andres, "I have been looking for you since yesterday."
He asked Andres, "How is the affair going? Has everything that I have told you now been noted down?"
Andres answered, "Yes it has been noted down."
The Engineer who says that he is the Great God again insisted that Andres should go and talk about this to the municipal authorities of Ojitlan, so that they in turn might go to the authorities of Tuxtepec to discuss this matter for the benefit of the village in which we live. Then he said to Andres, "Doesn't the government remember that there was once an old man who defended Mexico with the standard of the virgin of Guadalupe?"

Andres Felipe Rosa says that the Great God Engineer has a Virgin of Guadalupe on his back when he goes and that he disappears at a distance of about 15 metres every time that Andres talks with him in the hills.

6. Information related to the matter of the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe
+++

On the 5th of this month[7] the apparition took place, but it was not the Engineer of God, but the Virgin of Guadalupe herself.

---

[5] To become President?

[6] The date on which the Mexican revolution is celebrated.

She said to Andres Felipe, "Go and speak with Diego and tell him that as he wanted a proof, I have come and also tell him that he should speak with the Municipal President of Tuxtepec so that the dam will not be built, because it will not be strong enough and after a short while it will burst and many of my children will die. This would cause me much pain and I do not want that. Because of this I choose Diego to avoid the catastrophe."

She also said, "Benito Juarez made the laws so that the Mexicans would not be molested nor forced to leave for other places. Equally, this was why Lazaro Cardenas distributed the land so that the peasants would not be thrown out of their homes nor have water poured on them. In addition, the President of the Republic must be seen so that the dam will not be built. And if it cannot be avoided, then the President of Tuxtepec must be persuaded to build a wall from the house of Emilio Patatuchi as far as the lower barrio so that in this way Tuxtepec will not be lost, nor will the whole state of Veracruz. It was for this that the priest Hidalgo won the struggle because he was the first who stood up in defence of the Mexicans. He travelled with the Generals and the soldiers and when he fell in Mexico, my foot bled." (She showed the blood to Andres Felipe.)

She said "It causes me a great deal of pain because not a child is born in a month that does not cost the mother a lot of time and effort. That is why I am doing this." (And she began to cry.)

"In addition," said the Virgin, "if the President of the Republic does what I say, I will save him and the Municipal President of Tuxtepec if he pays attention to me. This can be published in Acción, the newspaper of Tuxtepec."

1972

(Year of Juarez)

7. On the 8th March 1973

---

[7] Barabas dates this as January 1973, but the date at the bottom of my original Spanish text is 1972, though the month is not specified. I would suggest that it could be December 5th 1972, because the fiesta of the Virgin of Guadalupe occurs later that month.

The Engineer said, "The President of the Republic must respect the dictum of Benito Juarez, 'Between individuals as between nations, the respect for the right of others is peace', because he said that there would be no dam when he made a trip here before he was President. He said also, 'I must help you all with roads, electric light, drinking water etc..' Don't worry," said the Engineer, "nothing will happen to you."

"If the authorities put you in prison, I promise to help you on the orders of the Virgin of Guadalupe."

"The Virgin of Guadalupe told me that she is in favour of everything they say up there.[8] The only thing she disagrees with is the question of the dam. Don't forget what I told you that day when I even went to show you the place where they are building a bridge between the high hills of Potrero Viejo and Las Pochotas to take out the products of the poor peasants on this side of the Santo Domingo."

Dictated on the hill of Santa Rita, at the entrance to the cave. 9-III/73.

Version 3: The English Translation in Barabas (1977)[9]

March 30 1973

On March 30, the Lord again appeared to Andres in his house about eight o'clock at night, and said, "Give no proof, for the parish priest has said, 'he wants to be bigger than I'." And he said, "Be not troubled, if the priest does not want to come, she herself (the Virgin of Guadalupe) will seek a way to make him come. It is for the priest's own good that he should come to the cave. Force is not needed."

[8] In the government.

[9] The translation in Barabas's article varies in some details from mine above, but is essentially similar. She includes this additional message.

Bibliography

Abercrombie, T.

1991 "To Be Indian, to Be Bolivian: 'Ethnic' and 'National' Discourses of Identity" in Nation States and Indians in Latin America eds. G. Urban and J. Sherzer, pp. 95-130. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Abu-Lughod, L.

1990 "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power Through Bedouin Women" in American Ethnologist 17(1): 41-55

Aguirre Beltrán, G.

1972 "El Fin del Indigenismo no es el Indígena: es México" Mexico: El Día, 8.12.1972.

1976 "Etnocidio en México: Una Denuncia Irresponsable" in G. Aguirre Beltrán, Obra Polémica. Mexico: SEP-INAH.

Allen, E.

1978 "Miracle in Tehuantepec" in The Geographical Magazine 51(3): 217-222.

Alonso, A.M.

1988 "The Effects of Truth: Representations of the Past and the Imagining of Community" in Journal of Historical Sociology 1(1): 33-57.

Asad, T.

1979 "Anthropology and the Analysis of Ideology" in Man 14: 607-627.

Baumann, G.

1997 "Dominant and Demotic Discourses of Culture: Their Relevance to Multi-Ethnic Alliances" in Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multicultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism eds. P. Werbner and T. Modood, pp.209-225. London: Zed Press.

Barabas, A. and M. Bartolomé

1974 "Hydraulic Development and Ethnocide: The Mazatec and Chinantec People of Oaxaca, Mexico" in Critique of Anthropology 1: 74-91.

Barabas, A.

1977 "Chinantec Messianism: The Mediator of the Divine" in (ed.) Western Expansionism and Indigenous Peoples ed. E. Sevilla-Casas, pp. 221-254. The Hague: Mouton.

Barabas, A.

1989 Utopías Indias: Movimientos Socioreligiosos en Mexico. Mexico: Grijalbo.

Barth, F. (ed.)

1969 Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: the Social Organisation of Cultural Differences. London: Allen and Unwin.

Beals, R.L.

1975 The Peasant Marketing System of Oaxaca, Mexico. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Berryman, P.

1987 Liberation Theology: Essential Facts About the Revolutionary Movement in Latin America and Beyond. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Bevan, B.

1938 The Chinantec and Their Habitat. Report on the Central and Southeastern Chinantec Region. Publicación 24. Mexico: Instituto PanAmericano de Geografia e Historia.

Bloch, M.

1977 "The Past and the Present in the Present" in Man n.s. 12: 278-92.

Boissevain, J. (ed)

1992 Revitalising European Rituals. London: Routledge.

Bourdieu, P.

1977 Outline of a Theory of Practice. Translated by R. Nice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brown, M.

1996 "On Resisting Resistance" in American Anthropologist 98(4): 729-735.

Burridge, K.

1969 New Heaven, New Earth: A Study of Millenarian Activities. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Campbell, H. et al. (eds)

1993 Zapotec Struggles. USA, Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Campbell, H.

1993 "Class Struggle, Ethnopolitics and Cultural Revivalism in Juchitán" in Zapotec Struggles eds. H. Campbell et al.. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Carmichael, E. and C. Sayer

1992 The Skeleton at the Feast: The Day of the Dead in Mexico. London: British Museum Press.

Carteles del Sur

1976 30.1.1976. Mexico: Oaxaca.

Caso, A.

1958 "Ideals of an Action Program. National Indigenous Institute of Mexico: a Report" in Human Organisation 17(1): 27-29.

Castillo Tejero, N. & Arechavaleta, E.

1973 Informe sobre los tiestos procedentes de Las Pochotas, Ojitlan, Oaxaca. Mexico City: Museo Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Depto. de Maquinas Electronicas, Informe manuscrito (unpublished).

Christian Jr., W.A.

1987 "Tapping and Defining New Power: The First Month of Visions at Ezquioga, July 1931" in American Ethnologist 14 (1): 140-166.

Clarke, C.

2000 Class, Ethnicity and Community in S. Mexico: Oaxaca's Peasantries. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Colburn, F. (ed.)

1989 Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance. Armonk, New England: M.E. Sharpe, Inc.

Comaroff, J.L. and J. Comaroff

1988 "Through the Looking Glass: Colonial Encounters of the First Kind" in Journal of Historical Sociology 1(1): 6-32.

1991 Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa vol.1. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

1997 Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier vol.2. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Comisión del Papaloapan

1976 Junta de Trabajo sobre el Plan Básico Veracruz Bajo Papaloapan (held March 16, Cosamaloapan, Veracruz). Mexico: Comisión del Papaloapan.

Crain, M.

1990 "The Social Construction of National Identity" in Anthropological Quarterly 63 (1): 43-59.

1992 "Pilgrims, 'Yuppies' and Media Men: The Transformation of an Andalusian Pilgrimage" in Revitalising European Rituals ed. J. Boissevain, pp.95-112. London: Routledge.

Cross, M.

1978 "Colonialism and Ethnicity: a Theory and Comparative Case Study" in Ethnic and Racial Studies 1(1): 37-59.

Cuellar, J.B.

1973 "Different Strokes for Different Folks: Another's Perspective of On That They Call Anthropology: The Mexican Case" in American Anthropologist 75:601-602.

de Certeau, M.

1984 The Practice of Everyday Life. Translated by S.F. Rendall. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Delgado, A.

1956 "La Arqueología de la Chinantla" in Tlatoani, 10, 2a epoca.
(Also published in:
1966 "Arqueología de la Chinantla, NE Oaxaca, Mexico. Su secuencia actual." in Homenaje a R.J. Weitlaner, pp. 81-90. Mexico: INAH.)

Diario Oficial de la Federación

1972 30 August, pp. 1-3. Mexico.

Douglas, M.

1966 Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Eade, J. and M. Sallnow (eds)

1991 Contesting the Sacred. London: Routledge.

Escanero Gonzalez, F.J.

1977 Reacomodo de los Campesinos Afectados por la Construcción de la Presa Cerro de Oro, en Uxpanapa, Veracruz.. Mexico, Autonomous University, Faculty of Engineering. Professional Thesis.

Espinosa, M.

1910 Apuntes Históricos de las Tribus Chinantecas, Mazatecas y Popolucas. Republished 1961, as Papeles de la Chinantla III, ed. H.F. Cline. Mexico: Museo Nacional.

Ewell, P. and T. Poleman

1979 Uxpanapa: Resettlement and Agricultural Development in the Mexican Tropics. New York: Cornell University, Agricultural Economics Staff Paper 79-10.

Excelsior

1976 3 July 1976. Mexico City.

Fernandez, J.

1965 "Symbolic Consensus in a Fang Reformative Cult" in American Anthropologist 67: 902-29.

Foucault, M.

1978 The History of Sexuality. Vol.1: An Introduction. New York: Random House.

1982 "Afterword: The Subject and Power" in Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics. Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, pp. 208-226.Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Friedlander, J.

1975 Being Indian in Hueyapan: A Study of Forced Identity in Contemporary Mexico. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Galjart, B.F.

1990 "Review of Scott, Weapons of the Weak" in Bijdragen tot de taal-, land- en volkekunde. 146(2-3): 343-344.

Geertz, C.

1966 "Religion as a Cultural System" in Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion ed. M. Banton, pp. 1-46. London: Tavistock.

Gijsbers, W.

1996 Usos y Costumbres: Caciquismo e Intolerancia Religiosa, Oaxaca. Mexico, Oaxaca: Centro de Apoyo al Movimiento Popular Oaxaqueño, AC.

Goethals, P.

1967 "Rarak: A Swidden Village of W. Sumbawa" in Villages in Indonesia ed. Koentjaraningrat. New York: Cornell University Press.

Gossen, G.

1975 "Animal Souls and Human Destiny in Chamula" in Man 10(3): 448-461.

The Guardian

1998 Photo taken in Somma Vesuviana, Italy and caption published on 6th August.

Hale, L.

1997 "Preto Velho: Resistance, Redemption and Engendered Representations of Slavery in a Brazilian Possession-trance Religion" in American Ethnologist 24(2): 392-414.

Hall, S.

1988 "The Toad in the Garden: Thatcher Among the Theorists" in Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture ed. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Hernandez Castro, G.

1976 "Inundaciones. Control de Avenidas. Riego" in Comisión del Papaloapan, Junta de Trabajo sobre el Plan Básico Veracruz, pp. 13-22. Mexico.

Hewitt, K.

1976 "Earthquake Hazards in the Mountains" in Natural History May:30-37.

Hill, J.H.

1991 "In Neca Gobierno de Puebla: Mexicano Penetrations of the Mexican State" in Nation States and Indians in Latin America eds. G. Urban and J. Sherzer, 1991, pp. 72-94. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Howe, J.

1991 "An Ideological Triangle: The Struggle over San Blas Kuna Culture, 1915-1925" in Nation States and Indians in Latin America eds. G. Urban and J. Sherzer, 1991, pp. 19-52. Austin: University of Texas Press.

IWGIA (International Working Group on Indigenous Affairs)

1971 Declaration of Barbados. Copenhagen: IWGIA Document No 1.

Jackson, J.

1991 "Being and Becoming an Indian in the Vaupés" in Nation States and Indians in Latin America eds. G.Urban and J.Sherzer, pp. 131-155. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Jaquith, J.R.

1972 "Review of De Eso Que Llaman Anthropología Mexicana" in American Anthropologist 74: 993-994.

1973 "Reply to Cuellar" in American Anthropologist 75:602-3.

Jeffery, S.

1980 "Invisible Women: How Women Disappear in a Mexican Chinantec Community" in Bulletin of the Society for Latin American Studies 32:90-122.

1981 "Our Usual Landslide": Ubiquitous Hazard and Socio-economic Causes of Natural Disaster, Natural Hazards Research Working Paper no 40, June. Boulder: University of Colorado.

:

1999 The Mexican Day of the Dead: An Exploration of the Meaning and Relevance of the Festival as Part of a Unit of Work on Dealing with Death. Oxford: Farmington Institute for Christian Studies. Available on website www.farmington.ac.uk

Kaplan, M.

1990 "Meaning, agency and colonial history: Navosavakadua and the Tuka movement in Fiji" in American Ethnologist 17(1): 3-22.

Keane, W.

1996 "Materialism, Missionaries and Modern Subjects in Colonial Indonesia" in Conversion to Modernities: The Globalisation of Christianity ed. P van der Veer, pp.137-170. New York and London: Routledge.

1997 Signs of Recognition: Powers and Hazards of Representation in an Indonesian Society. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kertzer, D.

1988 Ritual, Politics and Power. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Lantenari, V.

1974 "Nativistic and Socio-Religious Movements: A Reconsideration." in Comparative Studies in Society and History 16(4):483-503.

Lucero, A. and S. Avila

1973 Proyecto Cerro de Oro. Mexico: manuscript.

1974 "Las Relaciones Ecológicas en el Norte de la Chinantla" in Cultura y Sociedad, Mexico, pp. 48-58.

1977 Alternativas Para el Reacomodo de la Población Afectada por la Construcción de la Presa Cerro de Oro. Mexico:mimeo.

Marroquin, A.

1972 Balance del Indigenismo. Mexico: I.I.I. Ediciones Especiales 62.

Meillassoux, C.

1974 "Development or Exploitation: Is the Sahel Famine Good Business?" in Review of African Political Economy No. 1.

México, Dirección General de Estadística

1973 Censo Nacional de Población – 1970.

México, Dirección General de Estadística

1973 Censos Agrícola-Ganadera y Ejidal de México – 1970.

México, Ingeniería Hidráulica en México

1962 Planificación Integral de la Cuenca del Papaloapan. Mexico: Ingeniería Hidráulica en México.

México

1978 Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos.

McKevitt, C.

1991 "San Giovanni Rotondo and the Shrine of Padre Pio" in Contesting the Sacred eds. J. Eade and M. Sallnow, pp.77-97. London: Routledge.

Nájera-Ramírez, O.

1994 "Engendering Nationalism: Identity, Discourse and the Mexican Charro" in Anthropological Quarterly 67(1): 1-14.

Noriega, J.

1948 Control del Rio Papaloapan. Mexico: Comisión del Papaloapan. Reprinted 1973.

Norget, K.

1997 "Progressive Theology and Popular Religiosity in Oaxaca, Mexico" in Ethnology 36(1): 67-83.

Nutini, H.

1988 Todos Santos in Rural Tlaxcala. USA, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Ormeling, F.

1956 The Timor Problem. Groningen and Jakarta: J.B. Wolters.

Ortner, S.

1984 "Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties" in Comparative Studies in Society and History 26 (1): 126-166.

Osella, C. and F. Osella

1999 "Power/Flirting" (Comment. Exchange with K. Yelvington) in Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute 5(3): 457-460.

Pozas, R. and I.H. de Pozas

1977 Los Indios en Las Clases Sociales de México. Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, sa.

Ramos, A.R.

1994 "The Hyperreal Indian" in Critique of Anthropology, 14(2): 153-171.

Rendón, S.

1973 Informe sobre la Investigación 'Estructura de Poder en la zona de afectación de la Presa Cerro de Oro'. Mexico: Secretaría de Recursos Hidráulicos, Comisión de Relaciones Humanas.

Rubel, A.

1950 Unpublished Fieldnotes. Archive of the Convento del Carmen, Mexico City.

Rubel, A.

1950 "Notes From a Conversation with Sr. de la Fuente" in Unpublished Fieldnotes, early 1950s. Archive of the Convento del Carmen, Mexico City.

Sahlins, M.

1993 Waiting for Foucault. Cambridge: Prickly Pear No. 2.

Sayer, C.

1994 The Mexican Day of the Dead: An Anthology. Boston and London: Shambhala Redstone Editions.

Scott, J.C.

1985 Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance. New Haven: Yale University Press.

SRH, (Secretaría de Recursos Hidráulicos), Comisión del Papaloapan

1976 Mesa Redonda sobre Manejo de Cuencas, mimeo.

SRH, Comisión del Papaloapan

1976a Tercer Informe - Presa Cerro de Oro. Comité de Reacomodo, mimeo.

Siverts, H.

1969 "Ethnic Stability and Boundary Dynamics in S. Mexico" in Ethnic Groups and Boundaries ed. F. Barth. London: Allen and Unwin.

Stewart, C. and R. Shaw (eds)

1994 Syncretism/Anti-syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis. London: Routledge.

Tamayo, J.

1976 "Comentarios" in Comisión del Papaloapan, Junta de Trabajo sobre el Plan Básico Veracruz Bajo Papaloapan pp. 69-72.

Taussig, M.

1987 Shamans, Colonialism and the Wild Man: a Study in Terror and Healing. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Turner, V. and E. Turner

1978 Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture. New York: Columbia University Press.

Turton, A.

1986 "Patrolling the Middle Ground" in Journal of Peasant Studies 13(2): 36-48.

El Tuxtepecano

1976 31 October. Mexico:Tuxtepec.

1976 7 November. Mexico:Tuxtepec.

Urban, G and J. Sherzer (eds.)

1991 Nation States and Indians in Latin America. Austin: University of Texas Press.

van der Veer, P.

1996 Conversion to Modernities: The Globalisation of Christianity. London: Routledge.

Vickers, A.

1992 "Review of Everyday Forms of Resistance" (ed. F.D. Colburn) in Australian Journal of Politics and History 38(2): 305-6.

Warman, A. et al.

1970 De Eso Que Llaman Antropología Mexicana. Mexico: Editorial Nuestro Tiempo.

Wauchope, R. (ed)

1964 Handbook of Middle American Indians Vol. 7, Austin: Texas University Press.

Weitlaner, I.

1936 "A Chinantec Calendar" in American Anthropologist (N.S.) 38:197-201.

Weitlaner, R.J.

1939 "Los Chinantecos" in Revista Mexicana de Estudios Históricos y Antropológicos III:195-216. Mexico.

1940 "Notes on Chinantec Ethnography" in El México Antiguo 5:161-175. Mexico.

1977 Relatos, Mitos y Leyendas de la Chinantla. Colección INI No. 53. Mexico: Editorial Libros de Mexico.

Weitlaner, R.J. and C.A. Castro

1954 Mayultianguis y Tlacoatzintepec. Papeles de la Chinantla I. Mexico: Museo Nacional de Antropología, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia.

1973 Usila, Morada de los Colibries. Papeles de la Chinantla. Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Anthropología e História.

Weitlaner, R.J. and H. Cline

1964 "The Chinantec" in Handbook of Middle American Indians ed. R. Wauchope, 7:523-552. Austin: Texas University Press.

Werbner, P. and T. Modood (eds)

1997 Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multicultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism. London: Zed Press.

Willis, P.

1977 Learning to Labour. New York: Columbia University Press.

Wilson, B.

1973 Magic and the Millenium. New York: Harper and Row.

Wisner, B., P. O'Keefe and K. Westgate

1977 "Global Systems and Local Disasters: The Untapped Power of People's Science" in Disasters 1(1): 47-57.

Worsley, P.

1968 The Trumpet Shall Sound: A Study of the "Cargo" Cults in Melanesia. New York: Shocken Books.

Yelvington, K.

1999 "Power/Flirting" (Comment. Exchange with C. and F. Osella) in Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute 5(3): 457-460.

Young, K and F. Edholm

1974 "Todos somos Mexicanos, but some are more Mexican than others" in Critique of Anthropology 1: 93-100.

Young, K.

1978 "Modes of appropriation and the sexual division of labour: a case study from Oaxaca, Mexico" in Feminism and Materialism: Women and Modes of Production. eds. A. Kuhn and A. Wolpe, pp.124-154. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Internet Websites

Consejo Nacional Indígena (CNI)

1997a "CNI Protests Official Violence and Militarization Against Indigenous", Press Bulletin, July 1997.
http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/mexico/other/cni_anti_indig_vio_jul97.html

CNI

1997b "Campanya Por La Libertad de Juan Zamora"
http://www.sccs.swarthmore.edu/users/staff/justin/ezln/alerts/cni970625.html

Maldonado, R.

1997 "Compañias Madereras y Gobierno Mexicano Ponen en Peligro de Extinción a la Etnia Chinanteca" , 14.2.1997.
http://www.eurosur.org.rebelion/hemeroteca/ecologia/eco028.htm

Ginsberg, S.

2000 "Report from Uxpanapa: Can Bromeliads Save Veracruz' Last Rainforest?"
http://www2.planeta.com/mader/planeta/00/0004veracruz.html

Rangel, P.

1997 "Aceptan Zoques y Chinantecos", El Nacional en Internet, 8.5.1997.
http://www.unam.mx/nacional/1997/may97/08may97/08pa191.html

Our Lady of Mount Carmel

http://www.ocd.pcn.net/mad_en.htm

Regiones Hidrológicas Prioritarias Amenazadas

http://www.conabio.gob.mx/marinas/hidrol.html

http://www.coacade.uv.mx/paginas/modelo/contex-est.htm

Glossary of Spanish and Ojitec Terms

Spanish

acompañar	to accompany; an important mode of ritual relationship, implying time being with/ time sharing with those who have been bereaved or fellow members of the community
adobe	brick; brick dust
agente policia	police agent, usually an elected unpaid post in rural communities
aguardiente	rum made from sugar cane
aire/mal aire	the bad air left by the recently dead, which is dangerous to crops and people
anciano	elder
arroba	weighs 11 ½ kilos
atarraya	a bell-shaped fishing net, with weights at its lower perimeter – it is thrown over fish in shallow water
atole	drink made from ground maize
avecindadaos	those who qualify for ejido land in a community, but do not have any
barbasco	dioscorea composita; a type of wild yam found in the forest; steroids can be extracted from it to make medicine
campesino-compra -maiz	peasant-who-buys-maize; used pejoratively
cantina	bar
capitanas	the captains – women who recruited tobacco workers for the plantations
cargo	duty, responsibility
catequistas	people trained in Catholic doctrine, who run classes to help educate others and assist the priest in church services
catre	fold-up bed made from a wooden frame, covered with sacking
científico	scientist
charro	horseman, cowboy; symbol of Mexico discussed in Chapter 5
chile gordo	green (fat) chile, a commercial crop

chinchorro	large fishing net, which stretches across the river; in the dry season two large nets are placed across the river, while one net is walked towards the other trapping fish in between them
choto	homosexual (Ojitec: tsa huan)
cocolmecatl	a green creeper used in the preparation of popo
colectivo	term used for the collective ejido, whereby each ejidatario had individual rights to land, but the land was farmed not individually but as a large unit with community access to credit, machinery and chemical inputs
comerciante	trader, businessman/woman
comisariado ejidal	the term used for the main elected representative of the ejido
compadre/comadre	the term used between parents and godparents of a child; indicates a special relationship of mutual respect and support
compadrazgo	the term for the institution of godparenthood and relations between compadres
compañeros	companions; people from the same community; comrades
congregación	small settlement, typically of private property and estate workers
copal	incense
curandero	person with the ability and knowledge to cure illness; curer
defenderse	to defend oneself; as in "hay que defenderse" – "you have to stand up for yourself"
dueño	owner
ejido	the name for the community formed through the allocation of land under the post-revolution land reform laws
ejidatario	member of an ejido, with rights to farm land but not to sell or rent it
encomienda	a grant of land by the Spanish government to a private person, who then had to pay taxes to the King of Spain in the post-Conquest period. The land grant "included" the indigenous population, who worked on the land for the encomienda owner
espanto	a fright; sickness caused by a fright or shock
evangelistas	evangelists; term used to refer to Protestants

fanatismo	(religious) fanaticism, used pejoratively about indigenous Catholicism
fatiga	communal work party, involving ejidatarios mending a road or facility for the community
flor de muerto	flower of the dead – yellow marigold (Oj: li yin)
gente de razón	literally "people of reason", a term used for Mexicans of foreign descent who speak Spanish and no indigenous language
habilitador	person who provided credit for the tobacco crop and bought the harvest
hacienda	a large plantation, estate or cattle ranch
hierba mora	a wild leaf vegetable
huipil	the traditional dress of Ojitec women; panels of white cotton are woven on a backstrap loom, sewn together and embroidered
iglesia	church
indigenista	indigenist; adjective linked with concerns of indian peoples
indio perro/a	indian dog – term of abuse used by gente de razón to each other
ingeniero	engineer, often used generically to denote any kind of technical expert
jaripeo	the contest of trying to ride an unruly young bull in a ring
jicara	an empty half gourd, used as containers especially for drinking
ladino	a term, similar to mestizo, used to refer to an orientation to the national society and culture (as opposed to indigenous/indian)
limpiar	to clean or cleanse; the term used in curing ceremonies (noun – limpia)
libres	the "free"; owners of private property
lo folklórico	used in a phrase to refer to doing or showing traditional folklore
lo mexicano	mexicanness, doing or showing the Mexican way
madrina	godmother
mañanitas	a birthday song, sung on the saint's day in fiestas and on human birthdays

memela	a tortilla folded in half with a filling added, then sealed up and fried
mestizo	a term implying an orientation towards the national economy, society and culture
mayordomías	a hierarchy of posts involving fiesta sponsorship (by mayordomos). In Ojitlan this was linked in a system with secular posts through which one moved to become an anciano or elder. The Ojitlan system ended in 1968.
milagro	literally miracle; a piece of silvery metal shaped in the form of parts of the body or animals. If you have a bad arm-ache, you buy a milagro of an arm and have it blessed by the priest to ease your pain.
mole	a rich, spicy sauce served with meat on special occasions
municipio	administrative district, for instance Ojitlan
nacimiento	birth
nahual	a person's companion spirit
nanche	a yellow fruit, slightly smaller than a cherry
oaxaqueño	person of/from Oaxaca
ojo/ojo fuerte	the evil eye – sickness caused by another person's envy or "strong sight"
orden	order
padrino	godfather
paisano	peasant, term usually used to imply backwardness and ignorance; can be used positively to indicate a common place of origin
palo sembrador	planting stick, for making holes in the ground to plant seeds
pan de muertos	"bread of the dead"; bread made especially for Todos Santos
patrón	boss
petate	sleeping mat
pinole	drink made from toasted ground maize
pláticas	catechising talks; discussion of biblical texts
política hidráulica	politics of water/irrigation

poperas	women who know how to prepare popo
popo	a frothy drink made of cocoa and maize for special occasions
Posadas	a sequence of nine evenings of prayers and socialising in different households on the nine evenings before Christmas
puerto de la sierra	the port of the interior, a phrase used of Tuxtepec
relíquia	a bunch of leaves or leafy twigs, which are blessed by the priest and then considered to have beneficent powers for use in curing
rezandero	prayer leader in indigenous Catholicism
rurales	the rural police force of the dictator Porfirio Diaz
señor	gentleman; used with a capital letter to indicate the Lord, God
sierra	the hills
sintillo	a coloured foliage plant, used for decorating altars at Todos Santos
tamal	a snack made from boiled, ground maize (flavoured with meat/beans or sweet) then wrapped in a banana leaf and steamed
tepejilote	a very popular wild vegetable
tianguis	weekly (or regular) market
tierra caliente	hot country, tropical lowlands including Ojitlan
Todos Santos	The festival of All Saints or the Mexican Day of the Dead
tolong (Malay)	mutual help between conceptual equals (term used by Scott, 1985)
totopos	dry, toasted tortillas
usileño	person of Usila
usos y costumbres	literally "uses and customs"; term used for the system of voting in traditional assemblies, adopted in Oaxaca as an alternative to the previous secret ballot (considered to acknowledge the plurality of groups in the state)
veladora	candle made in a glass
villa	the administrative/main centre of a village
vispera	the day before a fiesta or event

vista	sight

Ojitec

chi ro	or popo, frothy drink made from cocoa and maize
hin	the shadow of someone who has died; it needs to be removed through ritual
jme chi	spirit of a person; leaves the body when they die
li yin	flower of the dead, a yellow marigold
tsa con jueh	people of San Pedro Sochiapan
tsa huan	homosexual
tsa jinh	people of Usila
tsa kin	poor, shabby person from the hills, for instance Cuicatecs
tsa ma jah	people of Tlacoatzintepec