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Broken Grounds: The Politics of the Environment in Oaxaca, Mexico

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate faculty in Anthropology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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ABSTRACT

BROKEN GROUNDS: THE POLITICS OF THE ENVIRONMENT IN OAXACA, MEXICO

by

Molly Doane

Advisor: Distinguished Professor June C. Nash

This dissertation is an ethnography of an environmental mobilization in Oaxaca, Mexico. The study centers on the a joint NGO/community effort to establish a campesino ecological reserve in the forest of Chimalapas. Chimalapas is an important zone ecologically. The communities of the region are embroiled in agrarian conflicts and a protracted battle with the state of Chiapas over the region's boundary. NGO and community activists in the area hope to resolve these problems and, through the legal designation of a Campesino Ecological Reserve, restrict development projects in the area. This Reserve would be mapped and managed by the communities and would be founded on community autonomy. The project is fraught with tensions, since government agencies in the area have major development plans for the area and regard the community activists and NGO working in the area as a threat to the local social order. This case shows the tensions between free market policies of globalization and local self-determination. It suggests that decentralization itself is an authoritarian force which civil society actors

attempt to challenge using a model of decentralized action. It also raises questions about the role of civil society in general and their ability to challenge hegemonic forms of development. Some of the paradoxes that emerge include: private organizations like NGOs are working against the privatization that they themselves embody; international funding for their project comes with institutional strings attached that undermine ideals for social change; and calls for localism and particularism are supported by international activists and international environmental ideologies.

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List of Acronyms

ANADEGES: Autonomía, Decentralismo y Gestión

ANP: Área Natural Protegida (Natural Protected Area)

CDNC(H): Comité para la Defensa de Chimalapas (Committee for the Defense of Chimalapas)

CNC: Comité Nacional Campesino (National Campesino Union)

COCEI: Comité Obrero Campesino Estudantíl del Istmo (Union of Workers, Campesinos and Students of the Isthmus)

COPLADE: Comisión de Planeación Para el Desarollo del Estado de Oaxaca (Planning Commission of Oaxaca)

CTA: Consejo Técnico Asesor (Technical Advisory Council)

DFID: Department for International Development (formerly ODA)

IEE: Instituto Estatal de Ecología (State Institute of Ecology)

INE: Instituto Nacional de Ecología (National Institute of Ecology)

LGEEPA: Ley General de Equilibrio Ecologico y Protección Ambiental (Environmental Protection Law)

MPS: Maderas del Pueblo (Wood For the People)

NGO: Non governmental Organization

ODA: Overseas Development Agency

PA: Procuradería Agraria (Agrarian Agency)

PRI: Partido Revolucionario Institucional

SEDESOL: Secretaria de Desarollo Social (Agency for Social Development)

SEDUE: Secretaria de Desarollo Urbano y Ecología (Agency for Urban Development and Ecology)

SEMERNAP: Secretaria de Medio Ambiente, Recursos Naturales, y Pesca (Agency of the Environment, Natural Resources, and Fish)

SERBO: La Sociedad para el Estudio de los Recursos Bióticos de Oaxaca (Society for the Study of the Biotic Resources of Oaxaca)

SRA: Secretaria de Reforma Agraria (Agency of Agraria Reform)

UCIZONI: Union Campesino Indígena Zona Istmo (Campesino -Indigenous Union of the Isthmus)

UNAM: Universidad Autónoma de México (Autonomous University of Mexico)

USAID: United States Agency for International Development

WWF: World Wildlife Fund

Introduction: Staking Claims in Chimalapas

> The Zoque of Oaxaca are also a mountain people, closely related to the Mixe. The Isthmus Zoque live on the wild Chimalapa mountains and are reduced now to only two primitive villages, San Miguel and Santa María Chimalapa, buried in steaming, rain-drenched jungle (Covarrubias 1946, 56-57).

The Problem

The title of my dissertation occurred to me as I stood with the municipal president looking out over Santa María Chimalapa from the relative height of the town hall. "It's an ugly town," said the president, pointing out toward the irregular-looking village, "the land here is *quebrada* (broken)-- *puras barrancas* (nothing but ravines)." Located amidst the lowlands of Oaxaca's Isthmus region, the hills of Chimalapas rise up abruptly from the surrounding plains. Residents of Santa María Chimalapas often describe the terrain as "*quebrada.*" Although used to describe the geography, this word eventually took on another meaning for me, as I witnessed a political chess game in Chimalapas which each day put the solutions to the region's social, economic and environmental problems farther out of reach.

Chimalapas covers 594,000 hectares that includes a full range of forest vegetation, from lowland tropical to highland cloud forest. It is home to a number of endemic species of flora, such as orchids, and endangered fauna, such as jaguars and spider monkeys; the rivers of Chimalapas also make it important hydrologically. According to activists, academics, and government officials working in the area, Chimalapas is one of Mexico's

last and most important wild areas. Moreover, its location on a coveted transportation route on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, between the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific Ocean, makes Chimalapas significant in global geo-political terms. In fact, Chimalapas stood to be affected by a number of development projects planned for the Isthmus region.

My study revolved around an environmental mobilization led by the Mexican non-governmental organization (NGO), Maderas del Pueblo, to establish a Campesino Ecological Reserve in Chimalapas. Backed by a network of national environmental groups and international funders, the NGO hoped to help solve agrarian problems in the area, detain development projects and provide a permanent framework of legal knowledge and appropriate technology with which *campesinos* (rural workers) would be able to manage their own resources long after the NGO had disappeared. This project intersects with a growing number of *campesino* and NGO movements that aim to establish indigenous autonomy. That is, the goal is to establish a system in which *campesinos* have maximum control over local development, production and marketing, with minimal interference from the state (Moguel et al. 1992). Significantly, one goal of the project was to prevent the establishment of a federally designated biosphere reserve or national park, since these designations would imply outside (international or federal) management of the zone.

In conjunction with NGO interest in the zone, government efforts to extend free-market development in Chimalapas have accelerated. This includes small-scale projects aimed at rural producers and major infra-structural development projects financed by

international capital. These efforts are accompanied by a campaign to suppress "undemocratic" elements in the countryside that would interfere with economic growth. The chaotic political space of Chimalapas was the focus of much governmental attention and effort during my stay there, and it played out as a low-scale war with communities least invested in PRI[1] politics and with the NGO, Maderas del Pueblo. This war was fought partly by periodic militarizations of the zone, and on a more daily level, by the constant presence of state officials closely connected to Oaxaca's conservative *PRIista* governor[2]. These officials ranged from the majority of well-meaning individuals carrying out real projects to hired thugs posing unconvincingly as agronomists whose presence in communities was feared. In one instance, after officials from a newly created State Delegation for Chimalapas had visited a community in which Maderas del Pueblo was working, the community began to have second thoughts about working with the NGO on a community mapping project.

Perhaps the most disturbing fact about the State Delegation for Chimalapas was the constant presence of the Police Chief and President of Communal Lands, the two most important local town authorities from Santa María Chimalapas. The election of these officials by Santa María's Town Council in 1996 coincided with the expulsion of Maderas del Pueblo from that *cabecera* in the same year. Just before their expulsion from

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[1]*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, Mexico's ruling party,1929- 2000.

[2]Diodoro Carrasco Altimirano

Santa María Chimalapas, Maderas had been working on declaring a Campesino Ecological Reserve within the town itself. At that time, they had the support of the town authorities. The Delegate from the State Delegation office explained that the election of these two new authorities represented a move toward democracy and participation in Chimalapas. He went on to explain that the new authorities had replaced a set of officials known to be *caciques*[3] and that since they were elected under indigenous *usos y costumbres*[4] the newly elected officials were not allied in any way to the PRI and represented the true will of the people. Yet, when I wanted to speak with the town authorities to ask them to submit my research proposal to the Town Council, I had to make my petition through the PRI-affiliated Delegate. During one of my several visits to the Delegation, one of the "agronomists" there whisked a bundle of papers out of his desk. It carried the letterhead of the environmental NGO, Maderas del Pueblo. It turned out to be a list of names of all those who had attended a recent conference sponsored by the NGO. My name appeared there. In this manner, the official signaled that my association with the NGO made me unwelcome from the perspective of the Delegation. I do not believe that it was a coincidence that the town authorities never responded to my research proposal, nor that its contents were never presented to the Town Council.

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[3]This term generally used to indicate an indigenous leader with close ties to the state and federal government who coopts local political representation in the community to his own benefit.

[4]In Oaxaca, indigenous communities are permitted to elect local leader outside of the national political party system.

State agencies carried out a public smear campaign against Maderas del Pueblo. In one instance, a newspaper article appeared accusing "Madera del Pueblo" of having guerrilla ties. When confronted, the newspaper editor denied libelous intent, pointing to the fact that the offending article referred to "Madera del Pueblo, not Maderas del Pueblo." Such articles were thought by many to originate with the special Delegation for Chimalapas, mentioned above to be staffed directly by the governor. The conflict between Maderas and government officials reflected a more general conflict in Mexico between the state and the new social actors which challenged its power and legitimacy.

My dissertation documents the paradoxical process through which a weakened federal system that is capitulating to a global neo-liberal political-economic model reasserts its control through the extension of decentralized state agencies. In neo-liberal discourse, decentralization is equated with the decline in authoritarian rule and the growth of democracy. But state-level agencies are highly personalistic and unaccountable to the "universal standards" that govern federal bureaucracies. That is, federal agencies have little knowledge of, and little control over, what local agents do (or can conveniently pretend not to). As a result, decentralized systems are capable of extending further into communities and of exerting greater levels of control.

At the same time, decentralized models of rule have opened spaces for the very autonomy movements that state agents oppose. The Zapatistas of Chiapas, as well as peasant movements which preceded them, have promoted a model of participatory democracy that includes women and sectors of the peasantry that have been traditionally

left out of community decision-making (Moguel 1992; Nash n.d.). Their transnational ties to civil society groups and indigenous movements hold out a promise for the insertion of an indigenous agenda into global politics as well as a multi-class, multi-ethnic international challenge to the tenets of neo-liberalism (Nash n.d.). The military reprisals of states against their people in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America are seen by some as the last resort of states losing hegemonic control over their citizenry (Arrighi 1999; Gill 2000).

This dissertation builds upon literature from anthropology and other disciplines that argues that state control over the rural sectors in Mexico has traditionally been based on a corporatist model, in which campesino demands were partially incorporated into state agendas (Gledhill 1995; Collier 1994; Hellman 1984). In Chimalapas, local officials rely on such clientalistic practices to win influence in communities. But it also engages a recent literature which sees a positive transformation in rural politics (Harvey 1998; Moguel 1992; Nash 2001; Nigh 1992). This transformation, in part due to a weakened state, has contributed to the emergence of new movements which demand control over the political process and over production. The goal of these movements is not to "topple the state, " but rather to develop a new political culture of democracy from below. That is, democracy has replaced revolution as the goal and catchword of social change (Edelman 1998). As a collectivity, these movements hope to ultimately transform the apparatus of the state itself. I review this literature in the chapter which follows. In this thesis, I argue that models of social change which privilege the idea of the local or the grassroots arise

out of the same paradigmatic soup which directs the ideology and practice of the global neoliberalism that such movements wish to challenge. My aim is not to discredit or naysay such movements, but rather to suggest that the challenge for new popular movements is to transcend provincializing paradigms in order to accede to the kind of democratic internationalism that might have the power to truly challenge global neo-liberal hegemony.

The Forest Frontier: A view of the stakeholders

The Role of the NGO

Maderas del Pueblo was founded by activists steeped in a left social movements tradition, who referred to themselves as a civil society mobilization. The fact that half of their sixty members were drawn from local communities legitimized this claim. While funding was directed at strictly defined technical projects, such as forestry, sustainable agriculture, satellite mapping and land use and planning, the founding members had a strong ideological commitment to rural equity, autonomous local development and political change at the local level. This created conflicts and contradictions within the organization: between scientists, or *técnicos,* and activists; between the organization and the government, and ultimately, between the NGO and its funders.

Urban Mexican NGO members themselves were a mix of technical workers and social activists. Some of the technical workers were narrowly focused on their individual jobs and were not particularly interested in the broader social goals of the group. In one extreme case, a conservation biologist expressed antipathy toward humans in general and

complained bitterly that his goals for wildlife conservation were subject to social negotiation. In another case, foresters who worked on a demonstration silviculture project expressed frustration at what they perceived to be lack of community interest in their efforts, particularly around a vanilla growing experiment. Their response was to work doggedly on the demonstration plot, seldom making outreach forays into the nucleus of the community.

Others considered themselves activists first and foremost; they made frequent reference to their leftist roots. One worker habitually wore a beret with a red star. He responded to one of my questions as to the individual occupations of group members with "we are all biologists here" an ironic reference to the famous Zapatista line "we are all Marcos here"[5]. Another member, who often wore a Che T-shirt, told me that he was an economist, thus explaining his nickname, *Comandante Ecomunista.*

Maderas was explicitly critical of the transnational capitalist alliances that characterize globalization. They associated this expansion with environmental destruction, whose direct causes were development projects and large scale agriculture and ranching. They also explicitly linked global capitalism to rural poverty. Yet, between 1991 and 1996 they were funded by US-AID, a State Department development agency which explicitly attributes the growth of democratic institutions in Latin America to this same economic growth.

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[5]This symbolically protects their masked leader's anonymity and asserts the Zapatista ideology of horizontal, non-hierarchic organization.

A growing body of work on NGOs suggests that their links to ideologues of privatization and conservative funders compromise their ability to direct social change in favor of local, autonomous or "grassroots" actors, and that in fact, NGOs are most significant as a conduit for young professionals into the middle class (Lofredo 1991; Fisher, 1997; Petras 1997). Local activists whom I met during fieldwork occasionally criticized Maderas del Pueblo, suggesting that funding success had made the organization too large and unwieldy to be effective; or that its political mission was being sacrificed as it added *técnicos* to its staff. But it was government opponents who really took up the NGO critique, suggesting that Maderas existed solely to extract middle-class salaries and that as an organization they could have no interest in resolving the problems which they quite literally fed upon.

Arturo Escobar (1995) has argued that development ideologies, including those which purport to promote local and environmental agendas, represent a neo-colonial extension of western domination over the non-West. This type of critique was launched against Maderas del Pueblo by Gustavo Esteva, a well-known Mexican intellectual, who had directed a development project in Chimalapas a few years prior. He suggested that the very notion of western environmentalism was an imposition that overlooked a deeply-rooted indigenous relationship to the land.

On the other hand, some post-marxist theorists posit an important role for NGOs in social change. Using Gramsci's notion that civil society is an arm of the state and the site of the production of hegemony, they see civil society actors, including NGOs, as a

locus for hegemonic shift; that is, they emphasize the role that civil society can play in shaping and influencing the state (MacDonald 1997). Maderas del Pueblo clearly saw themselves as carrying out this latter role.

The NGO Project

The mobilization in Chimalapas was using international monies to further fairly "subversive" goals, such as land tenure reform and autonomy from state directed development and monopoly political parties. Aiming to fill a void left by structural adjustment and privatization which resulted in the streamlining of state services, the NGO saw itself as providing crucial information and support. Clearly, its technical projects also constituted an intervention in the communities. But these interventions should not be understood as the kind of "neo-imperialist" intrusions attributed to NGOs by James Petras (1997). In fact, the Maderas project was very much an outcome of dialogue with the communities, witnessed by the fact that it had incorporated local desires to resolve land tenure disputes and the fact that it refused to support government initiatives to establish a Biosphere Reserve.

The very fact that the Maderas intervention revolved around a land conflict that state and federal authorities seemed reluctant to resolve made their presence problematic. Their activities were met by corresponding interventions on the part of local government agencies, who systematically undermined NGO support within the *cabeceras* (head towns). International funders of the project operated under an elaborate fiction that development is technical, not political. Thus, they demanded that Maderas emphasize

cooperation rather than conflict in their relationship with government agencies. Maderas refused to accept this dictum and most likely could not have. Ultimately, they lost their World Wildlife Fund support. This loss represented a serious inconvenience to the NGO. But ultimately it recouped most of the loss from the Overseas Development Agency (ODA), recently renamed the Department For International Development (DFID), whose representatives were more open to and supportive of Maderas' agenda for social development. However, their conflict with the World Wildlife Fund highlighted the limitations of "funding" social change.

Walking Like a Campesino: Competing Claims

Despite claims for its ecological and geographic importance, Chimalapas is not given particular mention in the standard geography textbook used in Oaxaca, which includes information on Oaxaca's many natural wonders (Arrellanes Meixueiro 1996). Aside from those officials, activists and academics working directly with the region, very few of my acquaintances, friends and contacts in Oaxaca had any knowledge of this relatively large region in the Southeastern part of their state.

Its omission from the mainstream lexicon, combined with local stories of unexplained happenings there, lent Chimalapas a certain air of mystery. Activists and community leaders claimed that some of its forest was uncharted; there were stories of disappearing expeditions, Bermuda Triangle style, in its forested midst. Such mythic accounts were underlined by the certain occurrence of clandestine activities evidenced by the presence of make-shift airstrips used by drug-traffickers in the forest.

On one occasion, an organic agriculture workshop I was observing was cut short when a package of cocaine mysteriously landed upon a cornfield. This coincided with the arrival of a military unit, who seized the drugs and occupied Santa María for several weeks. A four-star General with blue eyes took me aside and asked to see my passport. I hadn't brought it, since I had not planned on international travel that day: "How can I be sure you are not a Russian spy?" I assured him I was not, and he went on to tell me that he had recently traveled to Washington, D.C. with then President Zedillo..

Community members with whom I spoke were certain that the arrival of the military at precisely the moment when drugs fell from the sky was no coincidence. They felt that the military's arrival, ostensibly to fight the war on drugs, was in fact a signal that the military were implicated in the traffic itself. Given the recent arrest of a Mexican general and several other high-ranking military officials on drug-trafficking charges (New York Times, March 2001) this suspicion does not seem unreasonable. Besides their implication in drug profits, the militaries of the United States and Mexico are believed by many commentators and scholars to be using the drug war as a pretext to conduct clandestine local wars against guerrillas or suspected guerrillas[6]. In this sense, the drug war has become part of the State arsenal against social unrest, and the General's cold war

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[6]Moreover, the CIA has been implicated in both heroin traffic during the Vietnam War (McCoy 1991) and in cocaine traffic during the Contra War of the 1980s (Webb 1998; Scott 1998). In both cases, such trafficking was conducted not as an end in itself, but to further U.S. military goals, including the clandestine, illegal bombing of Cambodia and military aid for the Contras.

rhetoric reflects a real military preoccupation with potential rural anarchy. Forest regions like Chimalapas are the contemporary equivalent of the forest frontiers of enclosure era Europe, where geographically marginal areas became the last refuge of socially margin rebels (see Sahlins 1994). As in nearby Chiapas, the military checkpoints create "borders within borders" (Wild 1998) and underline the way in which these areas are perceived as being an internal threat to the state.

According to a number of community informants and local activists, illegal drug trafficking had been a problem within the communities of Chimalapas for decades. Communities members claimed that although they themselves had been involved in growing marijuana and poppies, this had caused social problems and many communities had prohibited the practice. Contemporary drug trafficking was thus attributed by informants to outsiders, who, whether Mexican or Colombian, continue to operate from the center of Chimalapas where there is total forest cover. These traffickers enter the area and build airplane runways. When the army enters to destroy them (or to participate, as some believe), the war on drugs becomes a real war in Chimalapas.

Clearly, the drug problem in Chimalapas emanates from both within and without. The effects of global economic policies on the florescence of the drug trade are well documented. Structural adjustment policies that have forced Mexico to abandon agricultural subsidies have made marijuana and opium poppies one of the more viable alternatives for peasant farmers. These drugs are produced in Chimalapas. Cocaine, grown by financially strapped peasants in the Andes, is processed in Colombia and sent to

the United States in stages, sometimes over land after being dropped in Chimalapas (Hamnett 1999; Scott 1998; Warnock 1995).

The current mystery of Chimalapas is largely a product of this contemporary clandestine drug problem. Yet, the region has been described as both a puzzle and a promise in the earliest accounts. In colonial accounts, Chimalapas is noted for its remoteness, its wild rivers and many natural resources (see Toledo 1996; Moro 1842). In Miguel Covarrubias' Mexico South, written in 1946, Chimalapas appears as a primitive remnant of Mexico's rural past. For developers, the region is a tempting economic frontier, whose natural wonders have not been adequately exploited (Toledo 1996).

Like New World frontiers, described by Ana Alonso (1995), Chimalapas is a region often described by activists and officials working in the area as though it is liminal space: "between savagery and civilization" as well as "at the margins of state power," between the order of the state and the chaos of nature (:15). As one travels through Chimalapas one does get the sense that it is a frontier, a wild-west. Most of its settlements are recent, established between the sixties to the nineties. These settlements include communities controlled by one of the two *municipios*[7], Santa María and San Miguel; ejidos[8] and other settlements sponsored by the government of Chiapas which have been placed within the communal boundaries of Chimalapas by virtue of a sleight of

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[7]*Municipios* are roughly equivalent to U.S. counties.

[8]Ejidos are communities set up after the Mexican revolution

hand and map that have extended the Chiapas boundary into Oaxaca; and ranching communities which were granted lands by Presidential Decree but formerly belonged to Chimalapas.

The conjunction of contested social relations and valuable resources present a challenge for activists, ecologists and would-be developers alike. Located literally and figuratively in the margins of the state, it is difficult to access and control from the federal, state and regional centers of government, located in Mexico D.F., Oaxaca de Juárez and Matías Romero. Like the now closed frontiers of the Mexican North and the U.S. West, it is a space of creativity and possibility (Alonso 1995) precisely because it is an arena of social struggle over competing agendas and ideologies.

To lead or even to work in this milieu is difficult. One must (attempt to) bridge the physical and psychic gap between urban centers or the accessible countryside and the remote outback. Whether one is a *campesino* (rural worker), an urban activist or government official, to be viewed as successful one must be physically capable, a savvy communicator, and possess some ineffable charisma or quality which allows one to pass from the city or town to the "*campo*"(countryside). It was expected that female members of the teams would have more difficulty arriving to the field. The men assisted them on steep climbs or across water crossings, by carrying their backpacks. Women who tried to compete with men by refusing such aid were derided as "boy scouts." Walking was a campesino art and its mastery linked urban workers to a rural habitus (Bourdieu 1977). Real never ran; they arrived early, but always appeared to walk at a slow relaxed pace.

One American woman who worked in Chimalapas and was something of an athlete always kept up with the men, but she would "fall behind and then have to run to catch up." These commentaries reflected the exclusion of urban women from campesino habitus.

Chimalapas contains fifteen distinct ethnic groups, landless peasants who have migrated there from other areas of Oaxaca and neighboring States. But Chimalapas is sometimes referred to as the "Zoque Forest." Now a minority in the zone, the Zoque trace their communities to the colonial period. Ruins in San Francisco La Páz, a congregation pertaining to Santa María, are said to be "late Olmec" : the Zoque, once a great trading nation, are said to have been descended from the Olmec. Notwithstanding this historical mystique, the surviving Zoque have not retained a distinct attire and few speak the Zoque language. Like the contemporary Maya, whose impoverished communities in the Yucatán provide an often unwelcome contrast with the splendid ruins of their ancestors (Hervik 1999) contemporary Zoque were sometimes regarded as a sad remnant of a glorious past.

The attribution to the Zoque in Chimalapas of inferior qualities by Covarrubias, who writes that the Zoque of Chiapas are "considerably superior to their Isthmus brothers" (1946: 57) was echoed by NGO officials, who contrasted the industrious trading civilization of the Isthmus Zapotec to that of the primitive Chimas. In fact, Covarrubias claims that the designation "Chima" was coined by Zapotec traders who traveled to the isolated Chimalapas mountains on mules. Their communities exemplify the persistent

social and economic problems of Mexico's "refuge" regions[9]. In their forested locale, the poverty of most communities in Chimalapas make it an imperfect Eden.

Until recently, Santa María was inaccessible except by foot. In the late sixties, the relatively high hills of Chimalapas could be reached from the lowland Isthmus only by steep and narrow paths, and the most frequent venturers were the Zapotec traders mentioned above. One woman, Gloria, told me that as a child the journey from Juchitán to Santa María Chimalapas had required a fourteen hour journey on foot, up unbearably steep paths. She remembered her childhood village with ambivalence. The now hot and deforested community had then been shaded. Three decades of change had brought greater wealth, through logging, ranching, and the cultivation of marijuana. A primitive road was carved out in 1967, and by the early 1980s it had been graded but never paved. Improved transportation brought with it a new style of concrete house which replaced airier pole and thatch homes. Gloria noted that the dire poverty of her childhood had been somewhat ameliorated, but at the expense of comforts like shade.

Getting to Santa María had changed for Arturo as well, a career official who had worked for a federal rural development agency (SARH) before being transferred to the new federal environmental agency (SEMERNAP). He had been sent to Chimalapas in the 1970s to investigate a possible hydroelectric dam project favored by the government.

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[9]"*Regiones de refugio*" were described by Beltran (1967) as areas where indigenous groups retreated, during the colonial and independence eras, in order to be able to maintain their traditions and norms outside of the state. This resulted their marginalization from the mainstream political process.

He remembered having to hike to Santa María up the new graded road which was not yet accessible by vehicle. Now most government officials arrive to Chimalapas in Dodge Rams. But the relatively accessible *cabeceras*[10] of Santa María and San Miguel Chimalapas, now serviced by a microbus which make one round-trip journey a day to Juchitán (three hours each way), are not representative of the majority of the communities of the region of Chimalapas, which can only be reached circuitously from the regional centers of Matías Romero and Juchitán.

Matías Romero is a commercial center and has a settled middle class which depends in part upon ranching and agricultural interests. Matías was founded in 1906, a planned community selected as the most "healthy" site for the railroad town, an ironic fact in light of the rather high contemporary incidence of Dengue Fever there. Matías was used as a hub town by NGO members and several government offices in charge of development in the region. From Matías Romero they visited communities in Chimalapas which were all accessible from Matías, but not to each other. The physical separation of communities from one another made Matías an important meeting and gathering point for *campesinos* from Chimalapas as well.

Many of the area ranchers live in Matías Romero. They have organized powerful ranchers association and are backed ideologically and economically (in the form of subsidies) by the Mexican government. Some of their properties were granted to them by

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[10]Head town, roughly equivalent to a county seat

Presidential Decree in 1958, and carved out of lands then belonging to Santa María Chimalapas. Since then, Santa María has lodged a flurry of complaints against ranchers, who invade lands belonging to Chalchijapa, a community of Santa María. Ranchers are proud of transforming the landscape from outback jungle into pastureland. One rancher bragged that "in twenty five years we have cleared more forest than the Chimas did in five hundred."

A number of the local authorities in Matías were ranchers, and the former town Mayor, Señor Smith, who was also my landlord, had ranching interests and connections. His grandfather, originally from New Orleans, had come to Matías Romero to work for the railway. He was proud of the few remaining English- looking wood houses which still stood and dismayed at the poverty which had overtaken the area since the decline of the railway. In contrast to the ecologist representation of the region's history, in which small property owners and ranchers had colonized and degraded the area, Señor Smith felt that it was really the Chimas[11] who were newcomers and usurpers.

Chimalapas, according to a number of locals with whom I spoke, had been unknown as a region of importance even to residents of Matías until its meteoric rise to national attention. It had been recognized only as a hunting ground, as a timber source and as the abode of a few primitive isolated communities. According to Señor Smith, the fact that many Chimas are in fact not Zoques, but rather recent immigrants of various

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[11]Chima is a designation used to refer to *campesinos* who live in Chimalapas

ethnic backgrounds, points to the outsider status of the Chimas themselves. As mayor of Matías he wrote the following letter to the Committee for Agrarian Conciliation in the 1970s (MPS archives), accusing people from Chimalapas of invading Colonia Cuauhtemoc and demanding that borders be redefined:

> "the invaders are not natives of Oaxaca; they are people that have come from other states and Chimalapas has given them permission to create communities, and I don't see why they are fighting (us) when Chimalapas has so much territory. I am asking you to intervene as soon as possible to avoid confrontations and deaths."

Notwithstanding these rancher voices, which seem almost caricatured, others in Matías expressed a fairly nuanced understanding of the issues at hand. For example, I had many opportunities to discuss these issues with María, an in-law of Señor Smith, my neighbor and a practicing lawyer. She acknowledged that Matías was drying up and becoming dustier than ever. She attributed this relative lack of rain to local deforestation, and the diminished rainy weather patterns created by tropical forests. However, she felt that through technology these ill-effects would be solved. She believed that persistent poverty could only be addressed through the infra-structural development of the kind going on in the region, even though it be at the expense of the forest and its ecological benefits.

The ranching towns as well as Chimalapas' outer settlements can be reached by following the dirt, pot-holed road, Boca del Monte out from Matías. The landscape seems to have been transformed into a kind of Midwest caught in eternal Spring, its monotonous

greenness punctuated by clusters of trees. Here one passes through Uxpanapa, a tropical humid zone contiguous to Chimalapas in Veracruz. Uxpanapa was a model development project between the fifties and the seventies, when "empty" tropical zones were bulldozed in order to establish settlements for a fairly successful middle class dependent on cattle ranching. It was also used to settle land poor peasants who were promised great agricultural riches but whose harvest of pineapples, mangos and oranges can hardly be given away. These were the pioneers of the Mexican state as it expanded within its borders, colonizing its own forested frontiers.

The road leads to two ranching and commercial centers, Colonia Cuauhtemoc and Lagunas. These towns look to be what they are: frontier communities. Their dusty town centers offer a few hotels, restaurants that serve local river lobsters and general stores that sell boots, bridles, and other ranching needs. Like all frontiers , this area is the site of conflict over rights and identity (Kearney 1998; Alonso1995; Sahlins 1994). National dreams of a bourgeois rural middle class are grafted onto this space against a geographical and social landscape that grants only a few claims.

Leaving Lagunas, one enters a corridor of dismal settlements which stretch along the two sides of the road. These are called Pobaldo Uno, Poblado Dos, and on until Poblado Catorce. The villages provide residence for tens of thousands of displaced from Veracruz and Oaxaca whose villages were inundated by the Cerro de Oro dam, a massive

hydroelectric engineering project. [12] From Poblado Catorce, San Francisco La Páz, Chimalapas is accessible only by path and requires crossing a river which, during the rainy season, could be crossed by boat, but often had to be fjorded. Once there, no hotels, motels, restaurants or corner groceries would be waiting. Food and shelter would be volunteered by the villagers themselves, who although always full of hospitality for the non-governmental organization (NGO), had been known to refuse the same for visiting politicians that they disliked. Getting there and being able to stay there in the first place required a certain kind of insider status, reflected in a series of contacts through NGOs and village people.

It was in fact physically difficult to get to all but the two *cabeceras* of Chimalapas. Mexican NGO workers had to bus ten hours from Mexico, D.F. to arrive in Matías, and from home bases there fan out into communities which took as many as twelve hours to reach. In this context, NGO workers described themselves as though they were explorers and pioneers. In their accounts, getting to Chimalapas required sacrifice, guts and endurance: macho qualities. When I first arrived in Matías Romero to Ramona's house, I asked her where she worked and how one arrived there from Matías Romero. Her demeanor was that of a privileged explorer as she described the long journey to San Antonio Nuevo Paraíso, a forest village so beautiful that its name was truly fitting. One arrived to the entrance only after a long series of truck, taxi and boat journeys. Once on

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[12]The devastating effects on this dam on local Mazatec and Chinanteco people have been documented by anthropologists Alicia Barabas and Miguel Bartolomé (1973).

the path, it was a three to six hour walk at a steep grade to arrive to the hidden village. Any visitor whose arrival was expected (with no telephones or radios, comings and goings were communicated through a fairly constant stream of NGO personnel) and welcomed would be met by a guide, who often brought along a mule or horse to carry backpacks and supplies.

Local government officials were often to be found in the *cabeceras*, but seldom journeyed to the less accessible communities, a fact which was resented within the communities, but also a source of pride and power. Whatever the reasons for infrequent visits, stories about ambushing unwelcome visitors were common currency within communities. Unwanted visitors had no guides and would naturally fear the winding and remote paths leading to the villages. Community and NGO members tended to view this fear and anxiety as the just desserts of corrupt and negligent politicians. Politicians on the other hand, viewed the perceived dangers as the outcome of rural anarchy, symbolized by inscrutable savages, drug traffickers and guerrilleros.

Fear of guerrilla insurgency was related to a purported connection between drug-traffickers and revolutionaries, the nearby Zapatista rebellion, and fears about the marxist *Ejercito Revolucionario Popular* (EPR) uprising that was active in the state of Guerrero and some areas of Oaxaca at the time of my fieldwork. One government official, a fellow bicycling afficionado who worked in the region, told me that the mountain biking was good in Chimalapas, but that he himself carried a gun while riding. He recommended that I do the same. However, it was not I, nor the government officials working in the area

who were subject to the real violence of the region. Rather, it was is the *campesinos* who were the most recent settlers in the area who bore the brunt of the conflict generated by land tenure and resource disputes between the municipalities, Santa María and San Miguel, and ranchers and loggers who claimed rights to the outlying areas of Chimalapas. Following Vilar (1986) or Anna Tsing (1995) respectively , it is worth noting that the most accurate view of the nation may well be from its border; the people who live on the margins can tell us a great deal. These colonizers of the forest frontier live in the margins of Chimalapas and at the front lines of the political and environmental conflicts that are so significant in contemporary rural Mexico.

Community Statistics

According to National Census data updated in 1995, Oaxaca has 570 municipalities. The two municipalities of Chimalapas have 13, 093 inhabitants: representing seven percent of the States' land mass and about four percent of its population. According to the 1990 census, the head towns (*cabeceras)* of the larger municipalities themselves, Santa María and San Miguel, have more than 1,000 inhabitants each. But fifty-four percent of Santa María's total inhabitants live in hamlets of less than one hundred inhabitants. Forty-five percent of San Miguel's residents live in hamlets of less than one hundred inhabitants. Santa María has twenty-four settlements and San Miguel has fifteen settlements.

Santa María Chimalapas is geographically the largest of Oaxaca's municipalities. Relatively sparsely populated, the rights of Santa María Chimalapa and San Miguel

Chimalapa to the immense region of Chimalapas are inscribed in local legend, which are an important element in its modern claims within the Mexican Republic. According to local legend, a *comunero* of Santa María bought and titled the lands of Chimalapas for 25,000 gold pesos in 1687. This legend is a reference point to Chimalapas' entitlement to its lands, ideologically and literally in terms of law. Legitimacy for the community is expressed in terms of this title, which was granted to the Zoque community. Zoque-ness is often equated with this right. However, since the majority of the inhabitants of Chimalapas are not in fact Zoque, but are recent migrants, the term "Chima" is commonly used to elide Zoque and community member.

Languages listed as spoken in Santa María include Zoque, which is the majority language with over three thousand speakers, Zapotec, Tzotzil, Nahuatl, Mixteco, Mixe, Mazateco, Chontal and Chinanteco. Languages spoken in San Miguel include Zoque, Zapotec, Tzotzil, Otomi, Mixtec and Mixe. It is worth noting that Zoque is considered to be a disappearing language. Miguel Bartolomé (1998) has estimated that there may be only a few hundred proficient speakers of Zoque. Such discrepancies between observations and census data may reflect that census questions elicit an ethnic identification that does not always coincide with linguistic realities.

The lowest official level of government in Mexico is the *municipio*, roughly equivalent to a county. The municipal center, called a *cabecera,* functions like a county seat. That is, the *cabecera* controls and distributes administrative functions for all of the settlements within the county. In Chimalapas, Santa María and San Miguel are

municipios and *cabeceras* both. As the lowest level of government recognized by the Constitution, each municipality theoretically has the power to settle its land as it sees fit. In Chimalapas, *campesinos* relocating from other towns in Oaxaca and the neighboring states of Veracruz and Chiapas have established many new communities. Their village charters are granted by the municipality in which they are settling. Settlements in the county are referred to as *agencias*, *comunidades*, and *ejidos*

In the case of the new communities, the most systematic histories, and social and economic data had been generated by the NGO, Maderas del Pueblo. The information they had gathered documented this migration of land-poor and displaced *campesinos* to Chimalapas, where they gained permission from municipal authorities to form new communities, or as in some cases in the eastern zone, entered as squatters. In the case of San Francisco La Páz in particular, this settlement had been slow, difficult and met by violence. This community, also known as La Gringa, is located far from the municipality of Santa María, to which it pertains. Its lands had been invaded and title to it claimed by loggers and ranchers originating from Chiapas. The dearth of settlements in the forested edges of Chimalapas made it vulnerable to such invasions. Thus, when Chinanteco settlers, some of whom had been displaced by the Cerro de Oro dam, began to settle there they were welcomed by Santa María's municipal authorities.

However, the settlers were thereby placed in the middle of a violent conflict with ranchers and loggers who had previously been operating undisturbed in the area. Their homes were burned to the ground, and a number of *campesinos* were murdered or

disappeared. Many settlers gave up and left the area. Over about a twenty year period a stable settlement emerged, and in 1994 the federal government confirmed Santa María's title to the lands and forced the ranchers to leave the area. Maderas del Pueblo was instrumental in negotiating this solution with the federal government.

San Antonio Nuevo Paraíso was settled in 1988 by Mixtecs from an arid region of Southwest Oaxaca. Its settlement was founded by Don Anselmo, who had literally walked Oaxaca looking for a new area in which to settle his family. After receiving permission to settle there, the new community was found to be just over the border of Veracruz and therefore outside of the jurisdiction of Chimalapas. The community had to be uprooted and relocated. Working with Maderas del Pueblo, both San Francisco La Páz and San Antonio Nuevo Paraíso have been actively involved with efforts to establish a Campesino Ecological Reserve.

The municipal centers are governed by four "authorities": a town president, who concerns himself with administrative questions in the head town itself; the President of Common Lands (*Bienes Comunales)*; the President of Surveillance--that is, the Police Chief *(Consejo de Vigilancia)*; and the Town Board (*Asamblea*). The Board is considered to be the ultimate authority, since it is made up of all town members eligible to vote, and must approve or be apprized of all decisions presided over by the three Presidents. In addition, each community has its own local Board, and a number of locally selected authorities. However, these local authorities are subordinate to the head town and community members do not have the same communal rights, for example, to logging

permits and land use and allocation, as *comuneros*, who are villagers either born into their member status or awarded member status in return for community service. Thus, in Chimalapas, recently settled communities like San Francisco Las Páz and San Antonio Nuevo Paraíso are subordinate to the *cabeceras*.

Chimalapas comprises 594,000 hectares of area, a figure based on President Díaz Ordaz' 1967 Presidential Edict, which recognized Chimalapas' communal rights based on a colonial-era title. Thus, the two municipalities of Santa María Chimalapas and San Miguel Chimalapas should control the lands in the area as communal lands. On paper, Santa María controls 460,000 hectares and San Miguel the remaining 134,000 hectares. But because of the seizure of lands by the State of Chiapas to create *ejidos*, and expropriations by the federal government in Uxpanapa on the Northern border, Chimalapas has lost territory and been embroiled in land tenure conflicts. Their strategy to recoup territory has been to invite *ejiditarios* and settlers into Chimalapas as long as they accept the jurisdiction of the municipality in whose jurisdiction they lie. Thus, Chimalapas is made up of communal lands as well as *ejidos*. This strategy, promoted by the NGO, Maderas del Pueblo, has broad potential significance, because, as shown in great detail by George Collier (1994), unresolved land tenure disputes have functioned historically to keep campesino communities hostile to one another. In its role as the only potential mediator of such conflicts, the state thus becomes a patron and ally, and *campesios* are left unable to unite as a common force against the state. The inclusive strategy of Chimalapas lends itself to two possible interpretations. On the one hand, the

municipalities set themselves up as a local "state," yielding power over and extending patronage to a captive set of client communities which also figure into a strategy of protecting communal lands from ranchers and loggers. On the other hand, this strategy is an innovative response to the divisive agrarian tactics of the state, and serves as one possible model for positive inter-community organizing and conflict resolution.

In Chimalapas, the local governmental structure is similar to others in Oaxaca characterized by what Fox and Aranda (1996) call "non-Western" traditions. That is, local governance is not associated directly with national electoral politics and may include traditions like councils of elders and cargo systems. These traditional governance systems are known as "*usos y costumbres*" and are associated with ethnically indigenous communities. Since 1995, Oaxaca has made a step beyond tolerance of these kinds of systems and has allowed communities to officially encode their traditions. Maderas Del Pueblo has been attempting to institute the Reserve at the community level by lobbying the Community Assembly to recognize it within the local statute that once adopted by the community, will be "made official" at the Federal level.

However, it is important to note that local offices and the rules governing town councils are encoded in federal law only when they fall within the parameters of Federal law. For example, a community cannot encode the traditional practice of excluding women from political decision-making, or punish crimes in a manner deemed illegal by the state. Moreover, political offices included within the community codes, such as those pertaining to common lands are very recent innovations (DeWalt and Rees 1994). The

quick adoption of *usos y costumbres* by Oaxacan municipalities is seen as a sign of the strength of indigenous communities there as well as the victory of Indian politics in the state arena. In Santa María Chimalapas, the contents of a community statute were being negotiated during the period of my fieldwork. Unfortunately, this process seemed more likely to limit the scope of tradition and demonstrated the ways in which community autonomy and decentralized rule were tightly meted out by the state.

Agrarian Claims and Identity

Agrarian organization in Mexico can be divided into five major phases: Pre-colonial, Colonial, Reform period, Mexican Revolution period and the present Reform period (Ibarra Mendivil 1996). During the Colonial Period, successive Spanish administrations enacted legislation intended to concomitantly check the power of colonial authorities and to guarantee the social reproduction of Indians. Over time however, the distribution of land became more and more skewed, reaching a crisis during the liberal Porfirio Díaz administration.

An important demand of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917) was land redistribution. In 1915, Carranza issued the Agrarian Law. This law was institutionalized in the Mexican Constitution of 1917, specifically in Article 27. Article 27 stipulated that all lands in Mexico were foremost the property of the State; established eminent domain over private property in cases where public interest was at stake; and it gave the Mexican state authority to return lands which had been seized or sold from Indian communities, and to expropriate and redistribute large holdings (Ibarra Mendivil, 1996). Under this

legislation, the *ejido* and the agrarian community were created. *Ejido* is a Spanish term derived from Latin which was used by the Romans to refer to exit lands that were used communally. It was introduced into the colonies by the Spanish, and then became the core of land reform after the revolution of 1910-1917.

Most *ejidos* are organized around individual plots although some are communal. Generally, these consist of redistributed land. Existing or intact indigenous communities most often opted to form agrarian communities, which are based on land tenure forms from the colonial period. They are communally organized. Land can be transferred within the community according to local custom. In practice, land is seldom redistributed and plots are held as though private parcels. Although land is not supposed to be sold or rented, such practices have been reported. For example, community authorities may parcel out grazing land or decide to rent logging rights to a timber corporation. Communities are plagued by land tenure disputes, arising from ambiguous boundaries and the existence of multiple deeds granted under successive administrations (DeWalt et al. 1994).

The Agrarian Law of 1992 made a number of important changes in agrarian laws. They are summarized by Dewalt et al. as follows: 1). The government will no longer redistribute land. 2). Land rights disputes are to be settled by decentralized, autonomous Agrarian Tribunals 3). *Ejidos* can be sold, rented or mortgaged 4). It is no longer necessary to work one's own ejido land in order to maintain rights over it 5). Ejido members can enter into joint ventures and contracts with private investors, including

foreigners, whose investments are limited to 49% investment equity. These are the reforms which have caused the most controversy, since they allow for the privatization of the rural sector and the expansion of private and transnational business interests. With the exception of the Agrarian Tribunals, they do not directly affect agrarian communities like Chimalapas.

Although lands were seized, privatized or incorporated into haciendas in the intervening centuries, Santa María's colonial title gives it status as Indian communal lands. This is an extremely important fact: effecting both its juridical and ideological position. Lands with colonial titles were treated as protected Indian land after the Mexican Revolution. Chimalapas is communally held by its community members and is protected under law from the redistribution of agrarian reform. Thus, Chimalapas was not reorganized as *ejidos* after the Mexican Revolution. As one NGO worker pointed out, Chimalapas is in a sense, a large piece of private property belonging to the members of the community. The new reforms of 1992 thus do not effect the organization of the community in the radical sense that they effect *ejiditarios,* who may now choose to privatize and even sell their lands, thus transforming entire communities.

Although many of the specifics of the Agrarian Law do not effect land-holdings *per se* in Chimalapas, it would be inaccurate to say that Chimalapas has not been affected by the new reforms. In a general sense, the protests surrounding the reforms and the adoption of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) have a great deal of symbolic resonance. Most agrarian redistributions were made during the Cárdenas period

(1934-40). Between 1940 and 1970, a period of rapid industrial and infra-structural development, new *ejidos* and small properties were made available as forest frontiers were colonized. During this period, the forest of Uxpanapa in Veracruz and the Lacandon in Chiapas were settled (Collier 1994; Toledo 1995). In the final analysis, reforms benefitted private small-holders, encouraged agribusiness and created a paternalistic and clientalist relationship between the state and the rural poor (Thiesenhusen 1994; Grindle 1986). But nevertheless, Agrarian reform was the symbol of the revolutionary Mexican state and its commitment to its campesino citizenry. Thus, new agrarian legislation and NAFTA did not represent a radical break with the realities of the past so much as the abandonment of a promise. The new laws will also affect Chimalapas by allowing industrialization and development in nearby communities formerly off-limits to this type of investment. This potential will be discussed in Chapter five.

However, the new Agrarian Law in Mexico did effect many important changes in local governance. In the most general sense, these changes, which have to do with the powers of community assemblies and internal authorities, are intended to promote decentralization and community participation in rural areas. According to local agrarian officials with whom I spoke, these changes are intended to promote decentralization, the lessening of undemocratic forms of local and federal authority, and increased decision-making autonomy within communities. In practice, they seem to be directed by the Agency of Agrarian Affairs (*Procuraderia Agraria*) and to require considerable governmental intervention in their disposition. This was evident in Santa Maria as they

crafted their community laws (*Estatuto Comunal*), a process I will discuss in Chapter 4.

Since 1995 indigenous communities in Oaxaca have been permitted to opt for a local governing process based on traditional law (*usos y costumbres)*. The majority of its 570 counties have opted to institute this traditional law. Communities which choose the traditional system are required to set up and follow a community statute which is registered with the Federal government. Many *campesinos* and activists regard the community statute as an opportunity to inscribe local development preferences and a measure of local autonomy into law. Government officials involved in the new agency of agrarian affairs insist that these local statutes are subordinate to federal law, and may not institutionalize practices deemed illegal by the State. In fact, the Agency of Agrarian Affairs which regulates this process sees the local statutes as a means to *regularize* the governance practice of indigenous communities.

Methods in a Non-traditional Field

The fact that multiple actors played a role in Chimalapas and that the site itself was a collection of many communities influenced the design of my study. This section explores the difficulties of a multi-locale, multi-class and transnational ethnography both from the fieldworkers perspective and in terms of contemporary dissonance in the academy concerning such approaches. My fieldwork subjects were urban Mexican anthropologists, government officials and "local" peasant or campesino leaders. None of these actors lived at home, having relocated to the regional town, Matías Romero in Oaxaca near to their focus and mine, Chimalapas. Our class, gender, institutional and

political positions were negotiated between us, destabilized as they were by this separation from the customary home spaces in which such identities are forged. Through this process of negotiation, this new uprooted community in the field which was the subject of my research became a looking glass through which my own home community became visible. This continues to influence my critical stance toward solutions to global problems which fail to problematize the local or the traditional, precisely because global class, gender and race inequalities, however produced, are reproduced in all the corners we inhabit. From the perspective of the academy, my research challenges oft-critiqued but still deeply held ideas about the field, which was meant to be a discreet place which harbored something identifiable as cultural difference. I think in anthropology our fields function like Raymond Williams'(1975) pastoral scene, which critiques the industrial present through its association with an imagined perfect past. In Williams, a moving escalator keeps that ideal time just behind us. Our fields are a contemporary pastoral, this time displaced not in time but in space. The field is a parallel universe to bland middle classness, asphalt and apathy; it is the location of resistance, community and rooted tradition.

My study, conducted during fourteen months between 1996 and 1997, involved Mexican urban activists from the upper and middle classes, and from both the political left and the political right; U.S. bureaucrats, and *campesino* leaders involved in the project. It took me to Mexico City, Oaxaca, Matías Romero and communities in the region of Chimalapas. Because I was conducting an ethnography of a "project" I followed

the town and village meetings, the NGO workshops, funder initiatives, etc which went into the larger initiative. I also followed the government "reaction" to the project, documenting their implementation of parallel but opposing development projects. Thus, my year was filled with "locations" but my study did not entail protracted contact with community members who were not involved in politics or in efforts to establish a reserve. In this sense, it was not a traditional community study.

The organization of this project reflected my desire not only to understand the continuities and innovations within the agrarian mobilization of Chimalapas, but also to elucidate the relationship of this struggle to political, economic and social arrangements at the national and international levels. This echoes George Marcus and Michael Fischer (1999) who prescribe "multilocale ethnography," because it incorporates "visions from headquarters" as well as local visions. Ideally, this not only avoids essentializing constructions of community or of the traditional, but also centers the analysis within "the relationship among levels." Or, to go beyond this, as Gustavo Ribeiro (1994) shows in his work in Argentina, multi-level analysis has the potential to supersede the examination of how local, national and international phenomena are "articulated." Rather than, for example, regarding the "effects" of the national and international on the local, it should be possible to investigate how these levels are in fact really integrated.

This attention to global/local relationships set out in my proposal certainly intersected with the general interests of my Graduate Program at CUNY. Political economists stress the importance of linking local communities to global contexts and

centered transnational political-economic phenomena, and thus would regard the investigation of levels as a common-place and the questioning of tradition as part and parcel of good historical work. But when I presented my work outside of CUNY a common reaction to my presentations was "where are the people?" Questions along these lines concern whether my fieldwork really represented a community view: sure, you interviewed political leaders, but what did the community really think of the environmental projects being promoted in the area? This is a question I could not ultimately answer, because my fieldwork experience made me question notions of the local in a radical sense. By this I do not mean that the local has become a globalized terrain, cosmopolitanized. In fact, I believe that in Mexico, rural areas like Chimalapas are in many ways increasingly cut off from links to a bigger world as decentralization provincializes their politics.

However, what I did begin to question was a fairly unexamined anthropological notion that the levels of power that exert their influences on a community can be peeled off to reveal a secret, mysterious or hidden truth. I believe this idea is central to the anthropological enterprise, or to the way it sees itself: that the "people" are distinct from the "power" and that the job of anthropology is to find those people. I think this is the basic idea behind difference (see excellent discussion in Gupta and Ferguson 1997); resistance; and in Mexico, autonomy based on indigenous tradition. As Judith Hellman (1992) has pointed out, scholars who study social movements often regard the incorporation of local movements into larger movements or to the state (who may be

fulfilling the movement's demands) as a "failure" of the movement. That is, anthropologists get uncomfortable because the real people seem to disappear. Thus the anthropological project, to peel back the skin and reveal the sweet fruit, becomes more akin to peeling an onion.

This sense that I was presenting my audience with an onion had its corollary among my urban middle class informants, who although integrally involved in a significant movement in Chimalapas, believed (inspite of protests to the contrary) that my contact with them was just a precursor to getting to the heart of things. They saw their role as preparing me to go to the "field" when I in fact understood myself as squarely in the field. As Gupta and Ferguson (1997) have suggested, the notion of the field itself uses a natural, agrarian metaphor that ties anthropology to its traditional roots. This agrarian location was deeply held by my urban informants, who, although they had read my proposal, never really believed that they themselves were part of the field and therefore part of my study. They refused to let me interview them in the traditional sense, and instead used our sessions to dictate their opinions of agrarian problems in Chimalapas and their own views on anthropology. Yet, I was very interested in their life histories and their own roles in a new environmental movement in Chimalapas. I could only obtain this information circuitously–it was regarded as irrelevant.

As they dictated their stories of Chimalapas, they also broke down the distinction, discussed by Sanjek (1990), between fieldnotes and anthropological text. My informants constructed my text, in the sense that I was never really able to outside of the framework

that they had built up around the site. My jotted notes contained all kinds of academic analyses. Some of my informants were in fact trained as sociologists and anthropologists. Besides collapsing the distinction between fieldwork and the kind of reflection that is supposed to occur at home once the field has been left behind, it also broke down the proper roles of fieldworker and informant. My informants were also fieldworkers. But as actors in a social movement, they were also involved in the construction of a local history that will most likely endure longer than this movement. In fact, my informants were very vocal about their own instrumentality in constructing Chimalapas as a focus, as a problem, and as a site. I will discuss this theme at greater length in chapter two.

But among urban informants, especially those trained in the social sciences, there was a constant battle against political inauthenticity that gave rise to the need to associate themselves with the community, to trade in their urban capital for *campesino* habitus, to "walk and talk"like *campesinos*; to transform their own intellectual projects into community productions. This problem applied to *campesino* actors as well. For one thing, actors themselves were divided along class lines and this translated into political differences. Thus, there was no one community view–there were many. Community leaders often reflected on this and questioned their own relationships to the community, just as their relationships to the community were constantly being attacked by their opponents. They were accused of self-interest and *caciquismo*--cooptation by the ruling elite–delivering the community to the nation. In community meetings, *campesinos* associated with NGO or state politics constantly reassured their audience of their

credentials as community representatives, usually by distancing themselves rhetorically from the NGO or the state. Thus, my informants moved from their objective roles as experts and anthropologists to their role as social movers and subjects. Their objective status legitimized their roles as analysts and representers of the problem; their subject status legitimized their roles as representatives of the community or the people.

In this context, one of the difficulties of doing fieldwork in this situation was the strategic deployment of my own difference by my informants. My urban middle class informants often used me as a foil to deflect their own class distance from the *campesinos*. On the other hand, desk-bureaucrats from funding agencies who were also my informants regarded me as a valuable link to the field– thinking I would divulge some secrets to them. Meanwhile, the NGO with whom I was affiliated was in a battle to the death with local government agencies and had deep misgivings about my commitment to the "field" because I was also observing government projects. This was in spite of the fact that they themselves had encouraged me to get permission to live in a community that had recently expelled the NGO, and was closely affiliated with the state government. Because its local leaders had quite literally been bought by the conservative state government, the only way to get permission to stay in the community was to apply directly to the state delegate in the region. I ultimately had no success with this, but was suspected by all sides for trying.

Obviously, local politics were not in fact, separate from state and national politics. Communities in Chimalapas had adopted traditional law, something that is

meant to provide a measure of autonomy from political parties and their patronage. Yet, these communities were inextricably tied to the state and to newer international actors, since state agencies actively encouraged the election of leaders sympathetic to state agendas. But the existence of traditional law reinforced a pervasive tendency to analyze community politics as a level entirely separate and based on radically different principles than the state. Joan Vincent (1990) relates this tendency to colonial field situations, in which communities were analyzed as taxonomical units and therefore deliberately analyzed outside a broader political context. Although most would not argue with contemporary epistemological critiques of past practices, it is nevertheless true that anthropological studies less tied to community are viewed as methodologically unsound and somehow suspect

That is, although my anthropological onion "proved' what most anthropologists these days believe-- that power and hegemony are mutually constituted from above and below-- that levels are integrated, as are subjects and objects, the audience still waits for resistance and a redemption story. In fact, anthropological fieldwork stories are still redemptive narratives: wherein the naive fieldworker gets mistreated until he finally gets to the middle of things, understands the culture and gets adopted as someone's godchild. These redemptive stories about "fitting in" are a bit odd coming from a field that still sees objectivity, outsider status and otherness as a central principle for data gathering. Perhaps more importantly, as a field populated mostly by people who did not get invited to the high school prom (literally and figuratively speaking) and therefore know just how high

school works, anthropologists ought to know that the best view of the big picture is not always from the center. These two issues, concerning "fitting in" and "location" are the intertwined factors which made me question both constructions of the local and notions of fieldwork and where its value lies. These are not revolutionary observations or critiques, as I have shown above. Yet all the same, as Emily Martin (1997) points out in her discussion of the difficulty in studying western science from within a western science, embedded anthropological assumptions about the field and fieldwork are "like the air we breathe."

What is the moral of the anthropological onion? Certainly not that there is no community or that there are no "people" out there. But it did leave me critical of notions of resistance and tradition which I feel not only romanticize the field but also decenter the important questions about our own communities. Where are our people, in the U.S., when it comes to community planning and decision making? How many of us know the intricacies of the policies coming out of our own city councils? Does our democratic voice get heard by the politicians who represent us?

As for my own location, fieldwork forced me not only to reconsider my own identity in the field, but also at home. Going to the field, I was told by fellow anthropologists that as a Ph.D. candidate I would be accorded a level of respect far beyond that expected by your average graduate student. Certainly, academics are held in very high esteem in Mexico. But this fact was undercut by four things. On the first I will be brief. It involves a spreading anti-intellectualism that seems linked to the global

dissemination of what might be called the coca-cola personality pattern: which valorizes everything that is light and cheerful; the second had to do with the fact that I am a woman; the third involved my class position and the fourth my political commitments. I will discuss gender, class and politics below.

Women were not treated well in my field site, with the exception of some federal agencies where certain universal standards of office comportment apply. In state agencies, women were almost without exception employed in secretarial pools and equally without exception valued for a highly feminized style of behavior and dress. Within the NGO I worked with, only about ten of its sixty members were females. None of the thirty employees were women. Of the ten urban women, only four remained by the end of my fourteen month stay. Women at the NGO were constantly harassed and denigrated on the basis of their femininity and sexuality. As females, they were accused of being unfit for the job, disorganized and naive. Their sexuality became ammunition as they were accused of being flirtatious and loose--possessed of too much sexuality; or alternately as being ugly or unkempt, possessed of too little. Interestingly, the women who did remain in the NGO were all wives or mistresses of male members. When I asked a local leader whose family I knew why he did not invite his wife and grown daughter to environmental forums, he replied " for the same reason I don't bring my cows and chickens." This situation certainly depressed me in the field, but just as significantly depressed me at home; my exaggerated experience with gender inequality in Mexico reawakened me to its more subtle but equally real consequences at home.

My class identity also took a beating in the field. Many of my informants, particularly those Mexicans working for international NGOS or funding agencies, had more cultural capital than I, a fact which made me feel unworthy and uncomfortable, but also presented all sorts of problems with what Laura Nader has called "studying up." On the other hand, *campesino* life made me acutely aware of my grotesque, bloated privilege in a global context where the official poverty level for our third world informants has been officially set at about $350 a year.

My urban, middle-class Mexican informants from the NGO, many of whom worked in a left tradition, deflected their own class status by inflating mine, imagining a suburban home for me, filled with useless appliances and flanked by a driveway overflowing with luxury autos. This was hideously painful to my own "credentials"–like many anthropologists I had chosen my profession not to make money but to try to engage, in my limited intellectual way, in a good fight. And this brings me back to the point: that my critique of the field, or of the idea of the field, or of the reification of the field or of its romanticization, is really a critique of the idea of leaving home–of making home a neutral grid; or even yet the depository of broken dreams of democracy equality and struggle–and exchanging it for an imaginary, other, impossible, dream space.

Summary

Some observers of Chimalapas have commented that a low-scale war is going on there. Human rights abuses by ranchers, drug-traffic and a related military presence, and a hostile intervention on the part of the state government created an extremely tense

atmosphere. On a number of occasions, people embroiled within this tension commented that surely a "real" war would soon break out. The Maderas del Pueblo *Campesino* Ecological Reserve project began to come into serious conflict with government agencies in 1995. It is probably not coincidental in light of the Zapatista movement in nearby Chiapas that the NGO/community discourse of autonomy began to be viewed as less a "grassroots development" discourse and more of a political polemic.

This introduction has set out the major actors and the general setting of my field site. It describes the political and environmental conflict in Chimalapas, which although marginal geographically and politically, is a prism through which to view the more general conflicts that have arisen as Mexico has embraced a global, neo-liberal model of development. The Campesino Ecological reserve was proposed by a Mexican NGO, Maderas del Pueblo, which includes local members. It's major funders are US-AID and the Overseas Development Agency (now the Department for International Development or DFID) via an International NGO, the World Wildlife Fund. Through the Ecological Reserve, the NGO hopes to help to establish autonomy for the region, a goal that corresponds to the dominant trends of the Left in Latin America today, where local democracy has replaced revolution as an organizing principle. In this sense, the Mexican NGO sees itself as part of a social or popular movement and claims civil society, not the development world, as its ideological space. Its role in the region has brought it into conflict with the state agencies in the area, which are the agents of decentralized rule in the zone.

I. Contested Spaces: National Restructuring and Community Governance in Oaxaca

Introduction

The role and significance of NGOs and "civil society" in global and national restructuring is a matter of debate in contemporary social science. Globalization theory posits the decline of the nation-state, and its possible replacement by business and non-governmental organizations. This dovetails with the pervasive anti-statism of mainstream politics and the global spread of neo-liberalism (Steinmetz 1999), to which democratic openings are often attributed. A separate but significant literature distinguishes a modern industrial and state-led development period from a post-modern period characterized by flexible industries, open borders and transnational labor flows which challenge the nation-state as a locus for cultural production and as the premier organizer of economies.

Critics of NGOs highlight the contradictions of a social politics based on privatization and of a left politics that seems to have capitulated to global capitalism. These critiques are useful for relating the totality of NGO projects to the global hegemony of free markets and decentralized action. However, as a number of influential scholars of Latin America have established, working within a hegemonic system does not imply one's wholesale capitulation to it. Social action against the arrangements of states must necessarily play out using the rules of the strongest player. At the same time though, adherence to those rules, even in protest, acts to strengthen and validate them, creating hegemony from below. If civil society discourse and social strategies are not the

"answer" for social change in a global world, they do insert themselves into the "compression of time and space" (Harvey 1989) that characterize globalization. Processes of financial expansion and the creation of new markets via global trade agreements create unitary terrains of both power and social struggle. Social actors, such as environmentalists, operate within the context of transnational ties, involving international agreements as well as international activists, as they attempt to protect or transform local spaces.

The most influential (non-liberal) contemporary theories for describing and analyzing the Latin American states are influenced by neo-marxist approaches (most notably Gramsci) and to a lesser extent by a blending of post-structuralism (notably Foucault). In this chapter, I argue that while the free market ideology of globalization results in decentralization of power, that in fact, centralized power is reconstituted through that very process. I argue, along with Timothy Mitchell (1999) that power is "capillary and dispersed" in the Foucauldian sense, but that the institutional practices which exercise this power also cohere into an independent and abstract structure with practical effects. The authoritarian implications of the contemporary state are challenged by civil society actors, who see opportunities for local autonomy within decentralized spaces. Thus, civil society, something at once created by and responding to the weakened central state, participates in the creation of a new hegemony of decentralization. Both state and non-state actors understand and construct their projects through a nationalist script, thus reinforcing the power and importance of the state and the local.

Globalization Theory

The "globalization thesis" posits that the nation-state has become "precarious" as an organizing force in the modern world; and that markets and non-governmental bodies are replacing the nation-state as the most significant organizing forces in the contemporary world (Arrighi and Silver 1999). This thesis is supported by the apparent victory of capitalist economic organization, especially in its neo-liberal incarnation, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, an event that affected the ability of Latin American states in particular to opt for "strong" states . As a recent review of new books on democracy in Latin America finds, these processes are often seen as hopeful trends for the development of "real" democracy in Latin America (Kelley 1998). On the other hand, critiques of the neo-liberal paradigm 1). See the weakening of the state as an abrogation of the social contract and a race to the bottom and 2) regard the rise of new social movements and the proliferation of NGOs as a sign of a reinvigoration of the grassroots which will have the power to democratize the weakening state. In fact, it appears that the "state" as an organizing linguistic reference on the part of the powerful and as a focal point of resistance or attack on the part of the left has been replaced by "democracy" on all sides. That is, both the top-down models of neo-liberal ideologues, wherein the state itself becomes less authoritarian, and the bottom-up models of its critics see a diminished role for the state and a greater role for democracy. Thus, globalization seems to indicate a paradigm shift away from bounded states and toward the autonomous functioning of on the one hand, markets, and on the other, new social movements.

In a recent volume assessing globalization theory, Arrighi and Silver (1999) review some of the major challenges to the basic tenets of globalization theory. One such challenge questions the newness of the important role of transnational business in relation to states. Emmanuel Wallerstein (1994) argues that these relationships took on their current form beginning in the nineteenth century. This specific claim, that globalization is not new, intersects with Eric Wolf's (1983) work, which identifies seemingly radical shifts in global organization not as "new" periods, but rather as successive intensifications of a continual process of capitalist organization.

Another major challenge to the globalization thesis explored by Arrighi and Silver involves the ability of markets to be global in scope without nation-state regulation. If, as the globalization thesis suggests, nation-states are obsolete, what will replace them as the organizing forces behind markets? Can regulatory bodies such as the World Trade Organization entirely replace states as the mediator between markets, and capital on the one hand, and laborers and consumers on the other? Charles Kindleberger argues for the continuing importance of states in directing and regulating financial markets. Leslie Gill (2000) also argues, in the context of the contemporary Bolivian state, that global markets do not imply the demise of the state. She discusses the way in which poor Alteños in Bolivia understand neo-liberalism as merely the latest manifestation of class and national oppression. But because they emphasize the "made in the USA" aspect of neo-liberal intervention, the complicity of national elites in promoting and directing its policies are obscured. I discuss the importance of nationalist discourse and state deployment of

international development plans in Chapter five.

In a related vein, Bob Jessop (1999) argues that global markets are not, in fact, replacing the state; rather, states are being reorganized around the "deployment of the economy as a social relation." That is, although the Keynesian welfare state in the United States and Europe is being eroded, the state takes on a new role as the coordinator of new supra and sub-national political economic loci. The state mediates between international regulatory organs and agreements, such as NAFTA, FTAA and Biosphere Reserves, and *newly strengthened* sub-national spaces responsible for regulated economic and social life at the regional and local levels, such as state government agencies, NGOs, and communities. This reorganization of the state lends itself to decentralization and to the current academic and policy interest in local governance, as opposed to state government writ large. Jessop sees the "hollowing out"of the state as a development that involves a stronger role for regional or local states below the national level, reflecting the growing internationalization of economic flows and spaces with the economic retreat of the state. This leads to the promotion of subnational, regional, and local economics rather than a national economy as such. Since the "supply side" is increasingly accepted as the key to national competitiveness, there is also mounting pressure for needed improvements in infrastructure, human resources, etc. to be identified at the appropriate level and implemented regionally or locally, rather than through a uniform national policy. This corresponds to the "shift from the centrality of government to more decentralized forms of governance" and to the "necessity of varied forms and levels of partnership between

official, parastatal, and non-governmental organizations in managing economic and social relations." This is reflected in the promotion of self-organization at the grassroots and between organizations, and the critical importance of private monies along with public funds for projects. Finally, Jessop argues that the state is crucially important in mediating between global processes and the social base, and that it maintains social cohesion through nationalism. In Bourdieu's (1999) terms, the state is the "superordinate classifier": it legitimizes or underwrites the values of all other fields and transforms their specific forms of capital into legitimate "symbolic capital." At a cultural level, this shift is associated with a public campaign by state and non-state actors to adopt new "bodily, political, and social life" (Jessop1999). This last process is carried out in part by NGOs, which, as Leslie Gill (2000) argues are an important avenue for middle class mobility which directly or indirectly tend to reinforce the message of neo-liberalism. In the Oaxacan context, the Mexican corporatist state is eroded, but clearly directs the internationalization of the economy through decentralized agencies and within communities recently granted rights to political self-determination at the community level, aand through the promotion of regional infra-structural development.

Border Theory: Deterritorialization, Cultural Hybridity and Cultural flows

Another body of anthropological literature which intersects with debates over the nature of globalization comes from Border Studies. Robert Alvarez (1995) provides a useful review of the development of Border Studies in anthropology, highlighting the two major trends in the literature. "Literalist" border studies focus on the events and cultures

in around national boundaries. These include studies of maquilas and border communities. Other studies take a more metaphorical direction, to focus on cultural hybridity and border identities, and include the influential feminist works of Gloria Anzuldua (2000) and Ana Castillo (1994). Another important influence on border studies include recent critiques of anthropological conceptions of culture areas, which challenge the territoriality of cultural formation (Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Appadurai 1990; Maalki 1992). These works call into question the continuing relevance of the territorally-defined nation-state in the study of culture; culture and nations transcend territorial boundaries and cultural production no longer takes place solely within the nation-state rubric. For example, Michael Kearney looks at migration and transnational identity formation (Kearney 1998) and the disciplinary function of borders, which serve to police and "discipline" migrant laborers coming from Mexico to the U.S. (Wilson and Donnan 1998).

Two recent volumes which critically engage border studies (Donnan and Wilson 1999; Wilson and Donnan 1998) point out the contributions of the emerging field, but insist that the nation-state is not in decline, and emphasize the continuing importance of nation-states for cultural production; both as physical "sites" and as metaphors for the contemporary construction of nation-states and nationalism. Peter Sahlins (1998) argues the processes that are concealed at the center of the state (where power relations are "perfected") become most visible at the margins of the state, where its power is not consolidated or its hegemony is weak. This echoes Ana Alonso's (1995) study of the

nineteenth century Mexican frontier, where processes of nationalist identity formation, already fairly consolidated in Mexico City, are in a nascent stage. Here, low status Creoles and Mestizos "earn" citizenship through their subjugation of "non-Mexican" Apaches.

Within the international context, physical boundaries (with their checkpoints, customs, border patrols, fences and surveillance systems) serve to regulate labor flows and to reinforce the subordinate relationship of Mexican laborers in the U.S. This policing, ostensibly to keep Mexican labor out of the U.S., in fact allows a fairly free flow of labor. But it does so in such a way as to condition Mexican labor, alerting them to the impending abrogation of their rights as citizens and laborers. At the same time, it reinforces U.S. nationalist myths by constructing immigrant labor as a problem. In this way, blame for declining wages is placed on the foreign invaders, rather than on American business practices (Kearney 1998). In sum, these works see the porousness of international boundaries and global migration flows as part and parcel of the continuing legitimacy of nation-states.

Post-structuralist and neo-marxist Challenges to the State Concept

If globalization theory has posed a challenge to the legitimacy of the state concept, so has post-structuralist theory. The crisis of rationalist and humanist assumptions shared by capitalism and communism also challenge the continued legitimacy of the state concept (Steinmetz 1999). This crisis is perhaps for scholars of the state most influentially reflected in Foucault's radical suspension of normative standards. Nancy

Fraser (1989) summarizes the political implications of Foucault's genealogy of power. First, Foucault suggests that "power touches individuals through the various forms of constraint constitutive of their social practices rather than primarily through their beliefs (:25)." That is, practices are more decisive than ideology when it comes to power; or put another way, it is not false or distorted ideology which stands between people and their recognition of an oppressive state. Second, Foucault's genealogical method suggests that power is capillary, neither centered in the realm of politics nor economy. If power is everywhere and in everyone, then seizing the reins of political and economic power would not concomitantly topple the power regime, which we carry in us. In fact, in Foucault's model the very liberal framework which understands power as emanating from the state to impose itself upon the subjects is a discourse which itself is part of the capillary deployment of modern power, and so may act to conceal domination. Finally, Foucault implies that it is through the "politics of everyday life" that social transformation can occur, since power is constituted through mundane practices (Fraser 1989).

Fraser is among the politically engaged scholars who finds Foucault's apparent suspension of humanist norms to be troubling: in his model, the liberating discourse of the left are generated within the same general paradigm or power system which generates oppression. Yet, his work is influential in contemporary studies of the state. His genealogical method and his focus on institutions as loci of power and culture and his elaboration of discursive regimes are particularly relevant to this discussion. Fraser

proposes a "rescue" for Foucault. First, she suggests that the very language used by Foucault reveals his own underlying norms and implies his condemnation of oppressive institutions). Second, she proposes that his work is most useful methodologically, rather than as meta-theory, and that its strength lies partly in precepts well-established in feminist theory: that it is through the "politics of everyday life" that social transformation can occur, since power is constituted through mundane practices (Fraser 1989).

Along with Timothy Mitchell (1999), I find Foucault's imagery of power as capillary and dispersed both useful and interesting; but I also believe that these capillaries are attached to an independent and abstract state structure which has real effects and real tanks and soldiers. Second, I find it useful to view globalization and its "keyword" democracy as a new discursive regime: it appears that the "state" as an organizing linguistic reference on the part of the powerful and as a focal point of resistance or attack on the part of the left has been replaced by "democracy" on all sides. That is, both the top-down models of neo-liberal ideologues, wherein the state itself becomes less authoritarian, and the bottom-up models of its critics see a diminished role for the state and a greater role for democracy. Thus, globalization, which in no way implies the withering of the state, seems nevertheless to indicate an intellectual paradigm shift away from an emphasis on bounded states and toward the autonomous functioning of on the one hand, markets, and on the other, new social movements. The discursive regime of globalization is a thick circulating soup of non-normative concepts, such that civil society, democracy, sustainability, grassroots, etc. have no fixed values, as words like

bourgeoisie, proletariat, class, and exploitation do.

Although political economists or neo-marxist scholars of the state reject Foucault, they share a focus on institutional power and cultural production within them. For example, Leslie Gill (2000) is explicitly critical of Foucault's decentering of power, but believes that state practices are increasingly decentered. She notes that the state is changing its role and that institutions and their practices are increasingly the focus of study by scholars of state power. In another context, Marc Edelman (1997) has suggested that "to analyze neo-liberalism only in terms of the market's corrosive effect on the public sector, or to talk incessantly about a generic 'neo-liberalism' or 'globalization'; obscures the way that state institutions continue to figure in real political-economic processes"(:14). Thus, although there is disagreement about whether the state itself is an entity or abstraction that deserves attention, Foucauldians and neo-marxists seem to agree that power/state power is "decentered, capillary and dispersed" (Mitchell 1999).

Neo-marxist theories of the state, culture and social change are heavily influenced by the work of Antonio Gramsci and other elaborations of his concept of hegemony, which has been particularly important in the study of contemporary social movements in Latin America. Evelina Dagnino (1998) discusses the transformation of the Latin American left beginning in the 1970s, from traditional marxist approaches to establish a new vision of culture and politics. She argues that Marxist approaches, particularly as influenced by Althusser, posed problems for scholars interested in both culture and social movements. The Althusserian model saw the state as the locus of domination in society,

but tended to conflate culture and ideology, equating popular culture and false consciousness. In this model, the state (not people) is the primary agent of social transformation. However, it is worth noting that Althusserian structuralism is not the only Marxist tendency in Anthropology. The important role of political economic approaches from Anthropology for developing theories of historical and political agency without abandoning structure has been discussed by William Roseberry (1989) and June Nash (1981).

Gramsci viewed the state as the totality of political society plus civil society, a formula which "highlights the complex and variable articulation of government and governance in underwriting state power" (Jessop 1999), which, in Gramsci's model, is "armored by ceorcion." In their work on "everyday forms of state formation" in Mexico, Gilbert Joseph et al. (1994) employ a Gramscian concept of hegemony to discuss the ways in which Mexican citizens of every social category--*campesinos*, professionals, elites, politicians--participate in the formation of the often reified state. A number of studies in this vein detail how *campesinos* from colonial times have exercised their (however limited) rights as subjects and later citizens through litigation over land rights or in criminal courts (Stern 1995; Larson 1988; Mallon 1994). The state, it has been observed in this literature, has been resisted but also reconstituted and reinforced by such daily acts. That is, by accepting the terms of the state and by using state tools to express opposition, *campesinos* "become" the state.

Like Joseph, Leslie Gill (2000) credits Corrigan and Sayer (1984) for a

sophisticated and nuanced reading of Gramsci, who focus on the role of civil society in providing "moral regulation" within the state, but who do not romanticize the autonomy of civil society. In fact, the most significant critiques of neo-Gramscian approaches is that in their selective reading of Gramsci, they reify an evil state as against a liberating civil society, thus reproducing Hegelian dualities (Castañeda 1994). According to Evelina Dagnino (1998), Latin American interpretations of Gramsci do privilege the democratic, rather than the authoritarian, reading of Gramsci. Contemporary Latin American theories of the state and social change locate the revolution not in insurrection or the toppling of the state, but rather in the process of intellectual and moral reform. In this sense, the role of ideas and culture assume a positive character, and are no longer relegated to the realm of false ideology. Social change is conceived as a "war of position." It does not require a vanguard, nor a frontal attack on the state. Within this paradigm, democracy has become the unifying concept, replacing revolution, and the strengthening of civil society is paramount to building democracy. Arturo Warman (1988) has documented this same sea-change from "revolution" to "democracy" in Latin American peasant studies.

Using a blending of Foucault and others, neo-Gramscian approaches emphasize everyday forms of resistance, pluralism, diversity and flexibility. Dagnino (1998) points out that the strength of this approach is that it allows for "multiple subjectivities" because it avoids the determination of social actors based solely on class; and it allows a broader scope for the role of culture and cultural struggles over meaning within political struggles. Its weakness is its tendency to lose sight of the continuity between civil society

and the state, as well as to elevate the moral authority of civil society as against an evil state. Dagnino's summary of current tendencies within the Latin American left, and their relationship to the state, civil society and democracy reflect my own findings concerning the civil society mobilization in Chimalapas, a theme I take up at greater length in chapter three.

National Restructuring in Mexico

In the Mexican literature, debates about national restructuring are revolve around the decline of the corporatist state, the global integration of the Mexican economy, especially in its recent incarnation through the ratification of NAFTA (and discussions over the FTAA), and the rise of new social movements. The two most significant recent events related to national restructuring are the 1994 Zapatista uprising in Chiapas and the declining power of the PRI, which has resulted in, on the one hand, the significant electoral victory of PRD candidate Cuahtemoc Cardenas as Mayor of Mexico City and on the other, of the election of the PAN candidate Vicente Fox in the presidential elections of 2000. Mainstream theorists and newspaper editorialists point to the opening of the electoral system as proof that the economic restructuring of Mexico leads to political democratization, and view the political unrest epitomized by the Zapatista uprising an inevitable consequence of the reorganization of states at the "end of empire." Critics of neo-liberalism question the simple equation of free markets with democratic change. Jonathan Fox (1990) cautions that abstract development policies that employ a discourse of equity must not be conflated with democratic practice at the local level. John Gledhill

(1995) argues that national economic indicators that tout "growth" fail to reveal the parallel immiseration of the poorest sectors in Mexico, or through what "mechanisms" free markets translate into democratization and improved social welfare for the majority (: 13). In fact, as George Collier (1994; 1997) has argued, it is this growth at the level of the national economy, and the concomitant decline of the corporatist state model, that has presented the Mexican state with the strongest challenge to its legitimacy with its own people. In Mexico, the hegemony of the revolutionary state was solidified by the creation of official avenues for campesino organizing. The National Confederation of Campesinos (CNC) was organized by Cárdenas in 1938 in such a way as to weaken Marxist influences within the post-revolutionary Mexican state. All campesinos were automatically granted membership in this union. In this way, the state acknowledged campesino demands at the same time that it circumscribed their expression. As Brian Hamnett points out:

> This measure was a corollary of the *ejido* policy, which at one and the same time both rectified the earlier revolutionary neglect of the peasantry and absorbed it into the all-embracing sphere of state patronage (1999, p. 245).

Collier traces the roots of the 1994 Zapatista rebellion to the deep cuts in rural social programs that were instrumental in forging patronage ties between campesinos organized within the "official" peasant union (CNC) and the state between the 1950s and 1970s, and the concomitant rise of independent unions tied to religious and Marxist organizers. He also cites the changes to the 1992 Agrarian Law as an important factor. Although most land redistribution occurred during the Cardenas administration (1934-

1940), making rural development programs the most significant state "carrot," campesinos continued to litigate for lands, and land redistribution remained central to the symbolism of the revolutionary Mexican state. Beginning in the 1980s, there has been a significant growth of independent peasant and indigenous unions. They are significant for employing a discourse of political autonomy from the state, control over the local productive process, and for the reassertion of ethnic or indigenous identity particularly as they relate to territorial claims (See Harvey 1998; Moguel et al. 1992). The Zapatistas are the most visible social movement to arise out of this new era of campesino organizing.

As Shannon Mattiace (1997) discusses, the growth, expansion and linkages of regional indigenous and campesino organizations in Mexico correspond to successive periods of institutional decentralization in Mexico, particularly during the Echeverría and De La Madrid administrations. Calls for local and regional autonomy have been linked to indigenous rights movements at the international level, and articulated within a discourse of human rights particularly as expressed for indigenous peoples in Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization.

Collier and Stephen (1997) review the impact of the Zapatista rebellion on political organizing in Mexico. They review the long-term shifts in Mexico's insertion into the global economy that contributed to both the uprising and the conditions of underdevelopment in Chiapas as well as the general economic crisis in Mexico that has affected the middle classes, contributing to wide-spread domestic sympathy for the Zapatistas. At the same time, these global and economic conditions present real obstacles

for the type of democratic opening that the Zapatistas hope to catalyze. The autonomy agenda of the Zapatistas is liberatory in the sense that it calls for participatory democracy as against the authoritarian democracy of the state. It opposes neo-liberalism, both for its local effects and because it erodes state autonomy. In this sense, the Zapatistas paradoxically battle the state in relation to local conditions, but "revindicate" nationalism in relationship to the global. But as the authors point out, "the very concept of autonomy includes economic liberalism's myth of the autonomous individual exercising liberty through consumption." Thus, the rebellion of the Zapatistas is very much expressed through extant discursive regimes of globalization and nationalism. As Collier points out for Chiapas, and I show for Chimalapas, new forms of collective action, although potentially liberatory, also present "cautionary tales." They expose local arenas to new forms of power and funding that can exacerbate pre-existing conflicts and power inequalities; bring unwelcome outsiders into local affairs; and are subject to government cooptation.

Shannon Mattiace (1997) argues that projects of democratization and autonomy, whether at the community or regional levels, will be best served by increasing federalization or decentralization of the Mexican state. My own study would suggest a caution. If the decentralization of the state leads to the growth of autonomous campesino and indigenous movements, the question is whether this represents a weakening of state hegemony (as many theorists of globalization suggest) or whether state hegemony is now legitimized through a discourse of decentralization that has its corollary in peasant

organizations. Further, if my study suggests that the state, and its collectivity of agencies, is relegitimized and reconstituted through decentralization, it also suggests that community-level projects and politics equally need to be problematized. The local is not a panacea to the global monolith, nor its mirror opposite.

Constructing Community

"Community" is one of Raymond Williams' densest "keywords." As Michael Watts (2000) argues, community spatializes tradition, evoking local knowledge and the embodiment of institutions (such as property rights or the agrarian struggle) as well as of history. It suggests "positive" readings of representation, authority and power and negative readings of the state. It is usually regarded as a locus of resistance and an object in relation to the state. Its ability to "speak" with one voice to NGOs or to the state is seldom explicitly problematized. In this sense, there is a parallel to nationalism: community is to state what the nation is in the international arena. Watts is particularly interested in how the idea of the community leads to the creation of local traditions and the strategic deployment of essentialized identity by locals; and how community is invoked by the state, particularly through the extension of customary law, which in turn must conform with national law. He finds a parallel between this process, and the "market triumphalism" of multilateral institutions which champion the community because it is the foot soldier in the decentralization of the state and the spread of "market-driven individualism."

In this same spirit I wish to disaggregate the categories of "community" and

"state" in the analysis of my field notes. On the one hand, I outline the political and ideological motivations of the many institutional actors in Chimalapas. How do the ideological goals of NGO actors differ or converge with those of government actors? What are the goals of their various development projects and what are some of the intended and unintended outcomes of their actions? On the other hand, I focus on the complexity of shifting alliances and shared membership between community members, NGO workers and government officials, I hope to deconstruct the community/state, insider/outsider dyads constantly invoked by the informants in this story. Particularly interesting here is the way in which intellectuals/activists invoke an essentialized community or social movement in such a way that their own important roles in shaping the political terrain are separated from their individual formations as leftists and intellectuals. As Warman (1988), Collier (1994; 1997), Dagnino (1998), and Hewitt de Alcantara (1984) have explicitly argued, since 1968 Mexican anthropologists have increasingly become participants in the campesino struggles that were previously their objects of study.

As mentioned above, one way to address this question is to look at insider/outsider status. It might be said that an NGO like Maderas, no matter how hard it tries, cannot be considered a grass-roots or local movement as long as it funded from outside, staffed by professionals, etc. But then, why is it not part of the community? It has had a significant influence on community representation and has integrated members of the community within itself. It has articulated a community agenda and helped to invest

that agenda with historical legitimacy.

The community in Chimalapas is itself constantly undergoing transitions. At about the time of the Mexican Revolution, Zapotec traders came to Chimalapas and installed themselves as the new elite, learning the Zoque language (Maderas del Pueblo, n.d.). Are the Zoque-speaking children of this elite, many of whom hold political office and represent the community, not part of the community? Its lands are granted secure tenure based on a colonial title that is said by some informants to be a patched together fake. .The majority of its ancient inhabitants and rightful stewards are recent immigrants who never in their wildest dreams thought they would be living in a tropical rain forest. Designated as "Chimas," campesinos from a number of indigenous backgrounds are ethnicized according to a land title. Campesinos work with urban activists, learn to use computers and geographic satellite positioners, and come into contact with a constant flow of international visitors. Their local struggles are publicized on the internet and by means of a well-orchestrated media campaign directed by local NGOs. But such complexity and "fluidity" is not new: self-representation has always been a creative engagement with dominant regimes (Joseph et al. 1998). These are questions of history and history-making, about the extent to which a community is allowed a history of change and the importance of non-change and authenticity to our concept of community. If there is change, can there be a community in the sense that we like to understand it? Can the interest groups in Chimalapas, meaning NGOs, government agencies, community groups and funders, all with their diverse internal and external agendas, be classified as

community or state, internal or external, insiders or outsiders?

In Chimalapas, the construction of discourse, of knowledge to-be received by the world outside of the region, was as important as the implementation of mega-development and ecological planning alike. The legitimacy of this knowledge was based on its acceptance or provenance from the communities of Chimalapas. Yet, the communities of Chimalapas were not unified in their desires. Thus, many groups could claim legitimacy or appear to have legitimacy in front of specific audiences, based on their limited success within a number of communities. Insider status is asserted on the personal level through discourses of gender and identity as well.

In my research, the distinction between the community, state, national and global were constantly being made by my informants. Broadly speaking, within the NGO community and among intellectuals, the community was a virtuous place, in contrast to the state government, which was right-wing, manipulative, corrupt and also anti-community. The Federal government was generally viewed as having more "democratic openings" in it, but was also tainted. Globalism was regarded along with neoliberalism, as a threat to local sovereignty, local cultures and local economies or ways of development. Thus, people within the communities, NGOs and government agencies were constantly evaluating themselves and others in conversations according to their degree of integration into the community, whether they had been or had not been integrated into the community and whether they spoke from within, on behalf of (or both) or against the community.

In fact, the very legitimacy of the NGO depended or seemed to depend upon its

integration into the community on a very real level. Discursively, the community and the NGO were conflated. The NGO was made up of community and non-community members, but was founded by and received funding from individuals coming from various levels of outsiderness (i.e. state, national, global). Its opponents portrayed the NGO as absolute outsiders. Left NGO and non-NGO opponents tended to portray Maderas as leftists looking for a cause, or former leftists on the gravy train, or misguided but well-intentioned activists. But all opponents described the group as outsiders who were not welcomed by the majority of the community. Government opponents of Maderas portrayed them as dangerous rebels, drug traffickers or manipulators of the community people. Supporters of Maderas, including funders, other NGOs and some government officials, regarded their strength to be primarily in their good community relations and insider status.

Similarly, the efficacy of government projects, or more to the point, the ability to initiate government projects depended to some degree on the attainment by government representatives of insider status. Because Mexican law requires that development projects in agrarian communities be ratified at the municipal level, funds allocated for projects cannot be distributed until the projects themselves are accepted by the municipal assembly. Such acceptance often requires the presence of a project director who is personally charismatic and establishes trust with people, or by convincing town authorities, who tend to control town assemblies, to accept projects.

Global/Local Politics

The "chima" is the post-colonial subject *par excellence*: renamed, re-territorialized, and refashioning identity within a global social, economic and political milieu. However we want to theorize this complexity, post-modernity does not guarantee that Chimas experience the world as a global flow. The cosmopolitan connectedness of globalizations elite is experienced by the less powerful as a stultifying centralization. According to G. Spivak (1997), civil society mobilizations that are global in scope have replaced social movements, which set out to challenge the state. As such, civil society is the force which will more effectively challenge the oppressive effects of globalization by linking its far-flung challengers against their far-flung foes. Such interpretations raise interesting possibilities about the future of organizing, but do fail to center unequal access to the networks which link globalized actors, nor the authoritarian implications of tightly globalized economies and international agreements and networks among powerful states, agencies and powerful actors.

The change in focus from social movements to new social movements to civil society reflects a parallel move from an emphasis on world systems and various forms of neo-marxism (dependency and underdevelopment theory) to post-structuralist and post-modern approaches to politics. This corresponds to the failure of modern "production" focused movements to challenge capitalism and the decline in hegemonic socialism. In this section, I will briefly review these major theoretical paradigms and the way they account for social change.

According to June Nash (1994), as capital expands into the "marginal economies" of the developing world, peoples living in these marginal spaces have been at the forefront of social movements which respond to the disruptions experienced as a result of this expansion. Activists in Chimalapas have described the struggles over development in Chimalapas in these terms. According to the Director of Maderas del Pueblo, the peoples of the Chimalapas region are engaged in a struggle over the right to designate the future position of their lands within the new global order.

Anthropologists have focused on the specific, local outcomes of global trends (Nash, 1981), and on the ways in which campesinos engage, contest and influence State policies (Joseph and Nugent 1994; Mallon 1994). Similarly, recent literature on social movements has reframed the terms of the agrarian question. A long-standing debate in this literature has been whether States or people have been more instrumental in effecting social change, and whether peasants have been passive onlookers or active agents in state formation. Influential literature coming out of Latin American studies integrates these two models, viewing the powerful State as a hegemonic force which at once limits the choices of citizens, at the same time that its own agenda is contested and shaped by various interest groups within the State (Joseph and Nugent, 1994)

For example, State promulgated agrarian laws have failed to lift Mexico's large agrarian population out of poverty, acting rather to contain discontent while encouraging the growth of capital intensive firms which can compete in a global market (Thiessenhusen 1995). However, these laws have been a means by which campesinos

have shaped and asserted their identities, and negotiated their own fortunes within the State (Mallon 1994; Nugent 1993).

Another debate in the literature concerns the historical nature of social movements themselves. New Social Movement theorists have suggested that older working class movements, associated with a "modern" period of industrial capital have given way to a "postmodern" era of social movements. These movements are associated with "finance capital," and reflecting an era of greater democratization and social wealth, do not seek broad, structural change. Rather, they reflect the fragmented interests of citizens now free to choose among a variety of lifestyle choices, who agitate for greater sexual freedom, gender equality, or improved environmental quality (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Touraine 1981).

This view has been challenged by those who do not regard modernity and postmodernity as radically different historical epochs (Harvey 1989; Williams 1989) and who see continuities between old and new movements (Calhoun 1993). Consistent with literature coming out of Latin America, Calhoun argues that social movements have seldom set out to revolutionize social structures, but rather to modify policy agendas. Furthermore, "new" movements such as feminism and environmentalism can be traced to the nineteenth century, just as "old" working class movements continue to be generated today. In the case of Chimalapas, there is clearly continuity between an old agrarian movement and a new environmental one.

In Chimalapas, civil society discourse is used predominantly to describe

contemporary mobilizations in the area. In this discourse, change springs from the grassroots, and is an expression of true democracy. It has become an important discourse in the context of decentralizing states. The funders who support Maderas del Pueblo also employ a discourse of civil society and democratization which valorizes the community and the "grassroots." In this discourse, democratization is the outcome of decreasing isolation and entry into the state as full citizens. But this ideology of democratization is rooted in a modernizing ideology that equates democratization with capitalist development. As such, this discourse is also accessible to state and federal agencies.

NGO actors define civil society as a non-state insurgency, an expression of populist democracy. This democracy is not linked to global development models, in the sense that autonomy indicates an indigenous form of governance and local development. Ideally, autonomy would result in a break with the type of development sponsored by states and development agencies. But the equivocation of these terms–where one term, such as democracy–has two distinct meanings, blurs projects and agendas. This equivocation makes it possible for an NGO like Maderas which is committed to fundamental social change to access support from development agencies whose goals are more modest. However, it also sets up a single discourse which is accessible to competing interest groups and is thus easily appropriated.

The Environment and Social Action

While the forests of central Mexico disappeared soon after the Conquest (Taylor 1974) the forests of Southern Mexico only began to be seriously affected by this process

of global development in the 20th century. According to a study by the U.S. man and the Biosphere program, "the conversion of forest to grasslands in the humid tropics is one of the most profound land transformations of the 20th century" (Downing et al. 1992). Development policies in Mexico have had devastating environmental effects (Goodman and Redclift 1991). A review of governmental policies relating to the use of natural resources sheds light on some of the environmental problems experienced in Chimalapas.

Bray and Wexler (1996) review forest policy in Mexico. During the liberal years of the *Porfiriato* just before the revolution, Mexico granted timber concessions to foreign companies, opening the forests to foreign companies who were given the right to extract wood from the nation's forests. While revolutionary reforms instituted by Cárdenas in the 1930s redistributed a great deal of forest land, by WWII the need for accelerated pulp production led the government to create Forest Exploitation Industrial Units (UIEFs). This granted private timber enterprises sole permission to cut forests, while paying the community a very low stumpage fee. UIEF concessions were granted for up to 40 continuous years. The government was able to do this under their Article 27 rights, which reserved the right of the Mexican government to appropriate lands.

By the 1950s, the government itself entered the timber products industry, forming partnerships with private companies who contributed not only to deforestation, but also to the quelling of rural guerilla movements. During the 1970s and 1980s, the Mexican government deforested huge tracts of tropical rainforest, in order to facilitate the colonization of these areas under the National Deforestation Program. This program was

responsible for deforestation in Uxpanapa, an area adjacent to Chimalapas. The colonization programs which led to massive deforestation in the Lacandon jungle were promoted as a solution to campesino landlessness, such programs obviated the necessity for the government to redistribute high-quality lands (Collier 1994). Aside from avoiding conflict with powerful members of society, such solutions also allowed the Mexican government to proceed with programs of agricultural modernization, which tied up large parcels of land in efficient cash-crop producing farms and ranches (Hewitt 1976; Barkin 1990).

The 1960s and 1970s were also a time of oil and hydroelectric development in Southern Mexico. Oil revenue from the gulf coast were used to build dams, to supply electricity to the nation. This predominantly agrarian area was suddenly supplying Mexico with most of its export oil, and half of its electricity (Nigh 1994). These projects, as noted above, effected Chimalapas by increasing immigration to the area, and arousing State interest in its potential as a major artery of transportation. Yet, these projects, proposing to usher in modernity and enrich the nation, seem to have brought few benefits to the Southern rural population, who still rank as poorest, and who often lack electricity, pure water, and basic literacy skills (Collier 1995).

Food policies also reflected development goals, as commercial crops for export began to be aggressively promoted in the 1970s (Sanderson 1986). Commercial cropping, along with the import of cheap foreign foods, makes traditional subsistence farming expensive, increasing the necessity for wage work among campesinos (Nash 1994),

encouraging large capital intensive farming and requiring the use of pesticides, harmful both to apply and to ingest, and contributing to rapid soil exhaustion. Agricultural loans and the pressure to produce high yields led to the increased use of pesticides among small farmers in Mexico (Wright 1990).

In Mexico, campesinos have incorporated an environmentalist critique into social movements that also aim to change the basic conditions of poverty and inequality in rural areas. Environmentalism can encompass a critique of mainstream development and rural underdevelopment. It is a powerful cultural discourse in the West that cuts across divides of class and sidesteps explicit expressions of ideology. It can also access the considerable resources of development agencies. Fischer and Hajer (1999) remark that environmental sustainability has become a central tenet of development policy precisely because capitalists have begun to recognize their own dependence on a modicum of environmental quality, if only so the workforce may reproduce itself.

Clearly, environmentalism is also a keyword itself, suggesting at once a romantic, bourgeois movement "consumer" based movement; a development agenda which has incorporated environmental protection within a neo-liberal frame; and a potentially radical critique of neo-liberal development, particularly as it calls for the control over the productive process in rural Mexico. In Uneven Development, Neil Smith (1984) critiques the bourgeois conception of nature which he argues underpins the "save nature" and "manage nature" rhetoric of mainstream environmentalists. In this conceptualization, nature is an external resource, which exists outside of human social relations; and is

universalized in such a way that human nature and social relations are seen as natural and immutable. Smith argues that under capitalism, "first nature" is replaced by an entirely different produced landscape. That is, "the competitive and accumulative imperatives of capitalism bring all manner of natural environments and concrete labor processes upon them together in an abstract framework of market exchange, which, literally, produces nature(s) anew" (Braun and Castree 1998: 9).

Smith's original statement of the "production of nature" has been criticized for diminishing the actual environmental crisis. James O'Connor (1992) has suggested that environmental problems constitute the "second crisis of capitalism;" wherein capitalism fails to reproduce it own means of production, including the physical environment and the labor force. In this vein, Jane Collins (1992) has argued that seasonal off-farm wage work performed by farmers leads to ecological degradation of family lands, leading to a situation in which they cannot reproduce the conditions of their own production.

In these approaches, capitalism is the central force in human/nature relationships. A useful volume edited by Charles Zerner (2000) also points to the market as a prime organizer of nature and to dominant approaches to the environment. He points out that "nature is like a stock market: we act to conserve nature because wild nature contains potentially useful option values." However, in this volume, particular attention is also paid to "scale." That is, the authors contend that there is no single market operating on a fixed scale and with particular social and environmental consequences. All markets exist within particular historical and cultural contexts. Further, small communities may be

involved in the commodification of nature, with varying effects on the environment. In other words, neither capitalism nor environmental destruction are necessarily "large" in scale nor always promoted externally.

This represents a welcome departure from another influential body of literature concerning development and the environment, that of the Postcolonial Greens. For example, Sachs (1992) argues that the environmental movement arose in opposition to the precepts of economic rationality which subordinated environmental values to the goals of global capitalist expansion without achieving its stated goals of raising living standards in the Third World. He provides a useful critique of another murky keyword: sustainability, through which environmental concerns were incorporated into developmental agenda. He notes the narrowing of options presented by sustainable development, which purports to strike a balance between conservation and economic gain, by "managing" resources in such a way that they will be available for future generations, without seriously challenging the ways in which capitalist accumulation are inherently unsustainable. He also points out that environmental degradation is framed as a problem of overpopulation, wherein the "poor" overtax resources. In this formulation, development, which will reduce global poverty, becomes the solution, rather than a cause, of environmental degradation (Sachs 1992). Like Sachs, Gustavo Esteva and Arturo Escobar are explicitly critical of development insofar as it is a Western paradigm. As Watts notes (2000), they imply that Latin American social movements are either premised on radically different assumptions, or can fashion an alternative; that their location

outside of the state (in civil society) and outside the panoptic gaze gives them access to new forms of subjectivity that can radically challenge modernity. They argue that the "defense of the local" is the prerequisite to taking on the global, and is therefore a crucial element in the collective construction of alternatives. That is, in their analyses, the possibility of reactionary social movements and the reproduction of exclusion and hierarchy at the local level become irrelevant.

The inhabitants of Chimalapas enter the 1990s with environmental groups both national and international in scope. Their community conservation plan includes the non-Zoque majority of Chimalapas's recently formed *ejidos* and *colonias*, along with the Zoque majority of the town of Santa Maria. Yet, primordial Zoque claims and Zoque ethnic identity are central to community self-representation. Zoque authenticity is linked to the unspoiled forests of Chimalapas as community members and environmentalists alike market their campesino ecological reserve plan to the Mexican government. This "strategic essentialism" has helped to link campesinos and indigenous movements around the world to environmentalists and their resources. If anthropologists have a guilty romance with the "ecological savage, " mainstream environmental politics are deeply invested in the symbolic power attached to indigenous leaders of movements that can be cast as environmental. As Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing suggests, just as the primeval forest is the "dream space" of urbanites, its inhabitants are the last representatives of some yearned for alternative to the modern world (Tsing 1993). To be rooted or connected to the forest, they have to be dehistoricized; this involves the "biologization" of ethnicity, so

that a forest-dependent indigene is represented in much the same way as an endangered species would be; so that indigene nature equals external nature and by extension, indigenes make no impact on nature. Such essentialisms have been critiqued in many places (e.g. Merchant 1996; White 1996; Slater 1996). But increasingly, anthropologists are discussing the strategic deployment of these essentialisms by indigenous groups themselves (Conklin and Graham 1995; Brosius 1999; Hernandez and Nigh 1998; Watts 2000). In Chimalapas, the work of representation is as important as the work of community mapping.

The movement in Chimalapas dovetails with the most significant and promising scholarly and activist work on environmental movements in Mexico, which link autonomy and production with environmentalist concerns. For example, in Quintana Roo, a Maya community organized to protest the renewal of a timber concession which had controlled timber rights in the area, and demanded control over both resource management and marketing (Bray et. al. 1993). In Sierra Juarez, Oaxaca, community forestry has become a national model. According to David Bray (1991), such developments are environmental in the sense that they prevent the quick and efficient deforesting the of the area typical of large timber concessions, as well as the soil erosion that accompanies clear-cuts. At the same time, they meet local social requirements by leaving management and marketing up to locals, and potentially combining communal ownership and democratic values with profitability (Bray 1991).

According to Bray, Mexican campesinos have "passed from seeing natural

resource issues as another manifestation of class struggle, to taking responsibility for 'the permanent reconstruction of nature.'" Their participation is crucial to the preservation of natural resources (Bray 1995). This view suggests that environmentalism cannot be unilaterally imposed from above, at the same time that grassroots ecological movements must be encouraged, through for example, the extension of credit, technical assistance and training. As Ronald Nigh(1994) points out, campesinos have been very quick to respond to macroeconomic changes in the economy, moving, for example from agricultural labor, to wage labor and back again within a relatively short period of time, in response to the oil boom and bust. Similarly, the extension of massive credit for chemical fertilizers and pesticides changed the nature of campesino farming starting in the 60s. With the debt crisis of 1982, and the abrogation of credit, campesinos have been adopting organic agriculture, or returning to traditional methods (Nigh 1992).

The upsurge of organic farming, notably of coffee for export, is an interesting and seemingly contradictory phenomenon. Organic agriculture is a sustainable method, compatible with the reinvigoration of community tradition and autonomy from government interference in the form of loans and credits. Movements toward sustainability can challenge the "traditional" socio-political structure of the community, whose leaders have ties to the PRI (ruling party), which as the State party, promotes modernized agriculture and the productive efficiency required by NAFTA. At the same time, organics tap into a global niche market, whose growth may well be encouraged by market integration.

Summary

The central question of this chapter is how one can make sense of the relationship between the "community" and the "state" within a paradoxical situation of two parallel tendencies: accelerated globalization and the increasing valorization of the local. Globalization takes the form of market integration and the extension of development into frontiers. On the other hand, global networks increasingly link indigenous groups with each other and to activists, who are fighting these power consolidations. Funders, such as the World Wildlife Fund, global in span, support only those projects which they deem to "grassroots." Changes made to the Mexican constitution in 1992 weakened communal rights and agrarian reform to expand private enterprise in Mexico. At the same time, Article 27 allows municipios to control development initiatives within their jurisdictions, and local governance based on "usos y costumbres" was been an official option for Oaxacan municipios since 1995. The weakening of central authority in Mexico effectively ended agrarian reform, causing a great outcry among the left. At the same time, numerous grassroots organizations and NGOs sprang up to fill the resulting void in social services. This "void" is considered by some to be a great democratic opening and by others to represent the Mexican State's broken social contract with its people.

Jonathan Fox has discussed the decentralization of the Mexican State. Decentralization is regarded as essential for pro-market reform (moving away from authoritarian regulation of markets) and democracy--making space for local activism (civil society) and encouraging active local governance. Possible pitfalls in this process

include the growth of local governance within communities with a history of authoritarian leaders (caciques) and lack of accountability. Moreover, as federal agencies allow state offices to take over administrative tasks, "government" may take on the face of whatever governor is in power that Sexenio. Fox (1995) points out that strong grassroots organizations are needed to make local democratization spring from decentralization. In Chimalapas, the tension within decentralization is apparent.

Agrarian policies and development schemes and environmental understandings can be seen as they develop within broad political-economic (and intellectual) processes, to become integrated into local culture. The inability of the most sophisticated advances of financial markets to unilaterally dictate the terms of this subsistence is apparent in the active campesino movements of Mexico today, exemplifying what June Nash has called the "power of the powerless" (Nash 1995).

At the same time, NGOS have important cultural and political effects. NGOS are a conduit for middle class mobility and tend to privilege certain kinds of cultural capital. The public/private alliances which characterize NGOs (often elided with civil society and democracy itself) can have powerful implications for the understanding of class and politics, potentially producing the kind of depoliticization of social issues more characteristic of the United States. The appropriation of discourses of autonomy and civil society by the state may have contradictory effects. Local statutes or governance by local custom may be viewed as a victory for the community. But it is also an avenue for minute state regulation (agrarian agencies, SRA and PA, oversee this process). Moreover, once

elections are conducted by traditional means, PRI interference isn't as easy to point to as it used to be. The agencies working in the community have been officially divorced from the political process–their projects are cleansed or depoliticized. In the chapters which follow I will describe the communities and projects laying competing claims to Chimalapas, their stated mandates, and some of the "unofficial " discourses which reveal the unequal weights of these claims within the power system of the Mexican State.

II. Will the Real Cacique Please Stand Up? : Legitimacy and Representation in Chimalapas

"Why wouldn't we fight against the reserve? How would we live afterwards? Are they going to give us a salary to do nothing?" (*Comunero* from Chimalapas, quoted in *Lucha* 1993:16).

Introduction

Maderas del Pueblo's is not the first concerted effort at a sustainable environmental development project in Chimalapas. The epigraph above refers to a Biosphere Reserve that was proposed for Chimalapas in 1988 by SEDUE, the federal agency in charge of environmental regulation at the time. This reserve was opposed by community leaders on the grounds that it would restrict local control over production and resources. The current environmental movement is not, therefore, the "natural" result of inherent indigenous desire for a reserve, but the outcome of a negotiated solution between environmentalists and community members.

This chapter summarizes the most significant past and present community-based projects related to campesino rights and the environment in Chimalapas in the past few decades. Using interviews and narratives from published materials, the chapter juxtaposes the competing interpretations and goals of the project leaders. Each project embodies a particular vision of social change. Each leader featured here thus tells his story in relation

to the project he was attempting to carry out and each story unfolds in relation to the interpretation of its teller. Each story establishes the credibility of the teller and links him to the community. These leaders are urban intellectuals, but in the telling attempt to place themselves inside the community ethos since they are acutely aware that it is only people from the community who can legitimately represent and speak for/as the community. It is not primarily my intention to evaluate the truth value or the ultimate accuracy of the narratives, but rather to show how each interpretation is embedded in particular theoretical, historical and institutional contexts. Because each story also contains important silences, the stories are selected in such a way that the silences of one story are "filled in" by stories which follow. Because the stories are convoluted, the main characters in this chapter are introduced below along with their respective projects. The names of community members have been changed, but not those of published authors and public figures.

Chimalapas as Social Laboratory: Testing the Agrarian Question

The first significant ecological reserve project that attempted to garner community support in Chimalapas was the Vocalía, a government/NGO alliance promoted by the governor of Oaxaca which attempted to implement a sustainable development plan and ecological reserve between 1989 and 1990. The Vocalía was led by Gustavo Esteva, a well-known Mexican activist and intellectual. This project failed, but some of its personnel and projects lived on in the project which followed it. The next project was Maderas del Pueblo, an NGO which established presence in the region in 1987, but began

its current ecological reserve project in 1991, after the demise of the Vocalía. Maderas is led by Miguel Ángel García Aguirre, an anthropologist. Finally, UCIZONI is a notable human rights organization which has worked in the Isthmus zone since the 'seventies [1]. UCIZONI is led by Carlos Beas Torres. Below is a synopsis of each leader and project.

Gustavo Esteva, Vocalía:[Public/Private alliance: 1989-1990]

Gustavo Esteva is an industrial sociologist by training. His work on the Mexican peasantry is well-known, both inside and outside of Mexico. His works include The Struggle for Rural Mexico (1983, with David Barkin) and Grassroots Post-Modernism: Remaking the Soil of Cultures (1998, with Madhu Suri Prakash). Along with intellectuals such as Wolfgang Sachs and Arturo Escobar, Esteva is associated with the post-marxist critique of development practice. His chapter "Development" in The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power (Wolfgang Sachs, Ed. 1992) argues that both capitalist and Marxist solutions to rural poverty impose western intellectual models on the peasant communities which are their objects. Esteva emphasized that peasant communities are founded on principles rooted in pre-Colombian traditions and indigenous customs. Michael Watts designates both Gustavo Esteva and Arturo Escobar "post-colonial Greens." They ground their critique of development in a fundamental opposition of Western and non-Western traditions which reveals a post-structuralist

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[1]SERBO runs an important project of environmental diagnosis in the region. Because it is not a "social development" project, I am not including it here.

antipathy to both neo-liberalism and Marxism alike. Instead, they posit a radical alternative based in local, indigenous communities, self-determination and autonomy.

Esteva is cited in Cynthia Hewitt (Anthropological Perspectives on Rural Mexico, 1981) as a campesinista– part of a school of Mexican neo-marxists who saw a positive role for peasant production within the Mexican State. Against marxists theorists who saw the demise of the peasantry as an inevitable and perhaps desirable consequence of modernity, Esteva thought that the peasant mode of production could and should survive. He proposed that the Mexican state devise projects to raise the living standards of peasant families. He viewed peasant production as a non-capitalist mode subsumed within capitalist production and was part of a group of scholars looking for a type of development which was less centralized than in either industrial capitalism or industrial socialism. Because Mexican landowners contracted out to the peasantry and were no longer directly linked to the land, Esteva thought peasants could organize, much like industrial workers, to bargain collectively. He believed that peasants could raise productivity without destroying their communal base, and without necessitating the overthrow of the capitalist order. He was interested in promoting alliances between the state and the peasantry, arguing that state interests were not homogeneous nor entirely bourgeois.

In his view, peasant incomes can be raised through negotiation with the State, since as an inherently coopting organ it encompasses within it many institutions and individuals who share the interests of the peasantry. Through strong grassroots peasant

organizations, peasant interests could be strengthened within government circles (Hewitt: 157-58). Thus, Esteva promoted a pluralist corporatist vision of the Mexican state.

As the intellectual force behind the Vocalía, Esteva took as his point of departure this negotiated pluralism. Citing the fact that community problems in Chimalapas had not been resolved by the direct actions resorted to in the past, Esteva initiated a joint project with the governor of the state of Oaxaca to establish an ecological reserve in Chimalapas. This project began in 1989 and ended in scandal in 1990. Gustavo Esteva left the region with a price on his head. However, many of the individuals who continue to work in Chimalapas today began their association with the region during the Vocalía project.

Interestingly, Esteva is currently an advisor for the Zapatistas in Chiapas. He is committed to the autonomy movement and asked me to read a small tract he had written on the subject before our second interview[2]. He defined autonomy within the state as the institution from below of a form of administration based on indigenous principles of rule and community organization. Esteva believes that these principles are unique to indigenous communities in the sense that they are based on non-Western codes of ethics and values. They are models appropriate to and particular to Indian communities.

Miguel Ángel García Aguirre: Maderas del Pueblo del Sureste *[NGO/ community alliance, 1991-present]*

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[2]De la Resistencia a la Liberación. Por qué Autonomía?: Táctica, Estrategia, Sentido en la Lucha por la Autonomía de los Pueblos Indígenas.

Miguel Ángel García Aguirre, the Director of Maderas del Pueblo is an anthropologist whose ideas reflect neo-marxist positions influential in Mexican anthropology. In departure from Esteva's politics of negotiation, and influenced by theories of dependency and underdevelopment, he believes that foreign imperialism and global capitalism are integral causes of environmental and social problems. Because neo-liberal political-economic policies are directed and promoted by the state, there is no possible negotiation between the peasantry and the state. Ironically, this position was most cogently stated by Arturo Warman, the author of We Come to Object (1980) an influential study of an agrarian struggles in Morelos. Warman is an actor in this story in his role as Director of the Secretaría de Reforma Agraria (SRA), an agency that has systematically avoided resolving ecologically and socially devastating agrarian disputes in Chimalapas. In his capacity at the SRA, Warman has moved from an intellectual anti-state position into a very high government position where he enforces the policies he was once so critical of. In this sense, he figures as the "Darth Vader" of this story and has become a real enemy to the Maderas cause.

In a recent article entitled "La historia Chimalapa: una paciente y tenaz lucha indígena por un rico territorio en disputa" (The History of Chimalapas: a patient and tenacious indigenous struggle over a rich territory in dispute), Miguel Ángel García argues that Chimalapas has retained a high degree of ecological conservation precisely because of its cultural integrity. He makes an equation between ecological diversity and cultural diversity, and ecological integrity and cultural integrity. Indigenous cultures help

biodiversity to flourish (and, by logical extension, non-indigenous cultures would promote monocropping and species extinction). Thus, as campesinos fight for their lands and autonomy over productive regimes, they are inherently fighting for the ecological preservation of those lands. This article appears in a volume edited by Armando Bartra, who argues that the populist struggles of Mexico today that call for local control over production based on indigenous models represent the true spirit of Marx as well as a move away from the "economic determinism" of Marxist scholars.

The Maderas project was described to me by a representative of the British Council (a socially progressive agency which also funds Maderas) in Mexico. Jorge used the work of George Foster, "Peasant Society and the Image of Limited Good" (1965), as his point of departure. Foster hypothesized that peasants, who for unavoidable reasons were faced with relatively low agricultural yields and few other economic options, had inscribed scarcity and failure into their very cultural fabric. In this culture, fear of envy discourages achievement and success, and therefore works internally to perpetuate peasant poverty. Jorge described Foster's notion of "limited good" as morally repugnant because, in this view, traditional peasant communities are brutish places: full of mistrust and competition over scarce resources. In other words, peasants in this milieu keep each other down because they themselves have no hope of succeeding at anything (Hewitt 1984).

Jorge's rather presentist interpretation of George Foster reflects the fundamental shift in peasant studies that has occurred in the decades since Foster published "Limited

Good." Modernization theories and assimilationist approaches to indigenous communities, reviewed thoroughly by Hewitt, have little currency. The most dominant approaches emphasize some variant of moral economy and/or dependency theory. Jorge explains the current problematic in the following way:

> In reality, Indian communities are capable of prospering. They are currently kept down not by their own inability to cooperate internally, but by the PRI, which octopus-like, grips each community directly.

Because social problems are attributed to the domination of the community by the state, indian communal organization becomes the answer to party politics and the model for social change. Jorge explained that by providing technical support to create a self-managed reserve, Maderas is supporting Indian autonomy–something which the PRI greatly fears and is trying to stop. He went on to describe how the PRI works to divide communities in Chimalapas and turn them against the Campesino Reserve.

Carlos Beas, UCIZONI

Carlos Beas is the Director of Union of Campesinos and Indigenous People of the Isthmus (UCIZONI), an organization which is internationally known for its work in human rights. Beas and UCIZONI won the Roger Baldwin Medal of Liberty, a prestigious international human rights prize, in 1996. Beas travels widely to speak on human rights–he had been invited to my hometown of Madison a few years previous to our interview and other members of UCIZONI have traveled there since. UCIZONI identifies

itself as an NGO dedicated foremost to human rights in the Isthmus zone, but also sponsors a number of programs for small producers to grow corn and coffee, build mills and small chicken farming projects, among others. These projects have involved UCIZONI in an extensive network of NGOs, including groups which focus on rural development, indigenous issues, women's health, and agrarian problems.

UCIZONI, along with Maderas del Pueblo, has been very active in opposing the Megaproject in the Isthmus region (see chapter 5). An article entitled "Tehuantepec en la Mira: Para Megajoder al Istmo" appeared in La Jornada, one of Mexico's leading national newspapers in 1999. As the title implies (Tehuantepec in the sights: Megafucking the Isthmus) the Megaproject will destroy the Isthmus. Here Beas suggests that the secretive implementation of the project, as well as its predicted tendency to benefit caciques and the wealthy at the expense of the general populace signals the authoritarian nature of the Zedillo regime. Beas, like Maderas, is critical of neo-liberalism. But he describes the central problematic in Chimalapas as one of indigenous cultural survival, and relates the conflicts in the area to the weakening of indigenous institutions. In his account, the adoption of new or foreign economic regimes and technologies, from drug trafficking to roads, upsets traditional institutions and creates gender/class power imbalances. His solution is to promote traditional and technologically appropriate productive projects, in effect challenging global development models through the maintenance of indigenous cultural practices. Beas has been influential in the most recent articulations of indigenous autonomy, particularly insofar as he has liked goals of indigenous self-determination in

Oaxaca and Mexico with the rights accorded to indigenous peoples in Convention 169 of the International Labor Agreement, ratified by Mexico in 1991 (Mattiace 1997).

All of these activists were concerned with the problem of affirming an authentic democratic agenda in Chimalapas. Thus, they were acutely aware of the theoretical and practical importance of the representativeness of their respective projects, and constantly reflected upon their own roles in the community. They also reflected upon the role of native leaders in the communities who project the only audible community voice but are not necessarily themselves a product of a democratic selection process. Activists thus often related the success or failure of their respective projects to the representativeness or, conversely, the corruption of particular community authorities.

Sources

In the next section, I will present a brief overview of events which seem to be general to both Maderas and Vocalía histories. My sources for this overview include an analysis and presentation of a proposed ecological reserve entitled *Tequio por Chimalapas*. Published in 1990 by the Vocalía and the State Planning Committee for the Development of Oaxaca (COPLADE), this is Esteva's contemporaneous representation of the project. Tequio is a Nahuatl term which refers to unpaid cooperative labor. Tequio's are currently used in Chimalapas to carry out some local infrastructure projects. The use of this term in the title of the publication describing the Vocalía project has a great deal of rhetorical power: it implies that the project itself is communally formulated and will be accomplished cooperatively. I also refer to the *Lucha por Chimalapas*, written by a

group of NGOs that all are heavily indebted to Esteva (the Lucha is clearly Esteva's voice). This was published in 1993, after the demise of the Vocalía amidst charges of corruption. Thus, the Lucha is a retrospective narrative. Finally, I use data from two 1997 interviews with Esteva himself, also retrospective.

Information pertaining to Maderas comes from a number of reports and analyses produced by the NGO and two published articles by Miguel Ángel García as well as personal communications[3]. Although not all of these materials were written solely by Miguel Ángel García, the mission of Maderas is strictly defined by his vision. Finally, the UCIZONI perspective is taken from interview material and published sources by the Director, Carlos Beas, and provides a "third" possible interpretation of recent events in Chimalapas. Up to a certain point, the interlocutors agree upon a single narrative. The telling of the past as it pertains to the "community itself" does not diverge significantly in the accounts. But once the interlocutors themselves are inserted into that community (in the eighties), the histories begin to diverge. Each history is told to legitimate the role of the teller, and to delegitimize the role of other leaders and their projects. Thus, while the distant past can be enshrined in a standard historical narrative, recent community history is necessarily contested. In particular, the legitimacy of community leaders, who are variously upheld as true representatives or as usurping *caciques*, corresponds to the position of particular projects in relation to those leaders. Simply put, leaders who reject

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[3]I never formally interviewed Miguel Ángel. He canceled or failed to appear for a number of interviews we had arranged.

particular projects are cast by the project proponents as caciques, and by the project opponents as true representatives.

Agrarian History: The Historical Defense of Chimalapas

All of the NGO leaders in Chimalapas take as their point of departure the agrarian struggle in Chimalapas, which they trace to colonial times, and the accelerated development process which began to seriously threaten forest resources and community autonomy beginning in the 1970s. This history is presented generically below: it is similar in all of the accounts. Agrarian history is presented as constant battle with a series of colonial and state bureaucracies which from the beginning paid no heed to the ancestral rights of the Zoque to their territory.

According to this history, Zoque inhabitants of Chimalapas were forced to buy the title to their own lands in 1687 for 25.000 pots of gold, and local legend had it that Chimalapas means "*jicaras de oro*." This version of history suggests both victimization and revindication for the Zoques. It also "roots" the name of Chimalapas itself with a colonial land title. Interestingly, the large number of Indian communities in Oaxaca has been attributed partly to the fact that during the 17th century the Crown issued new land titles for a fee. This was apparently to rectify a system of titling that had become confused and unverifiable. Large landholders had encroached on Indian communities, and these communities seldom possessed physical proof of entitlement. During this period, many Indian communities lost their land, lacking either money or knowledge for the retitling process. In Oaxaca, *caciques* managed to buy their communities, both keeping the lands

together and of consolidating their own power (Stephen 1997). This set Oaxaca apart from other areas, where large landholders opportunistically acquired Indian lands during this period (Taylor 1974; de Los Angeles 1988; Romero Frizzi 1988). Carlos Muñoz Muñoz (1977) derives the name "Chimalapas" from Nahuatl, with an uncertain meaning. "Chimal" is a nahuatl designation for a certain type of plant. Another derivation suggests that the nahuatl "chimalli" corresponds to the Spanish "rodela" (shield); and that "apan" is "rio" (river). Thus Chimalapas would mean "rio de escudos," or river of shields.

The remainder of Chimalapas history is told in a similar vein. Independence from Spain did not improve the Chima lot. In 1847, President Santa Anna granted a concession to Jose de Garay to explore the area in hopes of cutting a Transisthmenic canal connecting the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific Ocean. The Zoques demanded recognition, succeeding in 1850 when President Jose Joaquin Herrera recognized their ancestral rights and granted them a new title. But their troubles were not over. Jose de Garay sold his concession to an American company, which proposed to build a railway across the Isthmus, cutting across Chimalapas. This rail was never built, but American investors in the project claimed lands in the area until the twentieth century. During the liberal administration of Porfirio Díaz, incursions into the area increased as plantation operators were given rights to lands which had been proclaimed "baldios,"[empty] and a great deal of timber was cut from Chimalapas.

Interestingly, the Mexican Revolution is not represented as a particularly liberating period for Chimalapas, because it fails to mitigate these abuses and incursions.

Redistributions of lands in Chimalapas during the revolutionary period are presented as distinctly anti-revolutionary, since Mexican landowners took over lands in the Isthmus, and were granted title to their lands amidst the "antiagrarian" stirrings of the post-war. In fact, land reform appears as a negative on the Chimalapas tally. As agrarian communities, the cabeceras of Chimalapas were officially unaffected by agrarian reform. But some of their territories, unrecognized by the federal government were made available to small property holders during the 1940s, in the final years of Cardenas' agrarian reform. Chimalapas officially lost 40,000 hectares of territory when it was granted to Colonia Cuauhtemoc by presidential decree in 1958. The alliance between lumberjacks and cattle ranchers began in this period: loggers cleared the lands and ranchers occupied them and further organized, in association with parastatal timber companies, a continuing traffic in illegal timber.

Finally, Chimalapas is negatively affected by development and by the Chiapas state agenda. The timber company Sánchez Monroy sent their agents into Chimalapas to cut timber illegally, and ranchers coming from Chiapas began to establish themselves in Chimalapas. In 1963, the Agency of Agrarian Reform (SRA) granted 2,000 thousand hectares to establish the ejido Rodulfo Figueroa within Chimalapas. This led to another attempt by the Chimas to secure their territorial boundaries, and eventually to a 1967 Presidential Resolution which reaffirmed their ancestral boundaries. However, this decree was not followed by a boundary survey, and has contributed to an ongoing agrarian battle

over the legalities of these boundaries.[4]

Agrarian reform is represented as principally a divisive tactic of the government against the community. In Maderas accounts, during the 70s and 80s, the Chiapas delegation of the SRA further institutionalized the agrarian struggle in Chimalapas by granting agrarian titles to a number of small property owners, ejidos and nationals, giving them rights over lands within Chimalapas. This situation was further complicated when Chiapas began to insist that its borders actually extended into those areas of Chimalapas now settled by ejidos from the Chiapas side. Police, caciques and officials from Chiapas control this area and threaten and intimidate the Chimas.

Finally, state development policies are held accountable both for environmental degradation. Maderas particularly focuses on the effects of cattle on Chimalapas, pointing out that since the beginning of the '60s, private and governmental interests have encouraged the "cattle-ization" of the countryside, encouraging systematic deforestation and the replacement of corn production with meat and milk. In Chiapas, pastures replaced forest at such a rate that between 1950 and 1970 pasture land increased from 1.6 million hectares to 3.6 million hectares (Tequio:4). In Oaxaca, between 1960 and 1965 the number of cattle doubled. In Chimalapas, this process was most visible in Colonia Cauahtemoc, a ranching community cut out of lands formerly belonging to Chimalapas.

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[4]In an interview, Esteva speculates that this Presidential Decree had as much to do with the President's fear that foreign landholders in the area would compromise national sovereignty. Thus, his affirmation of Chima land rights was nationally strategic.

Deforestation is systematic, in the sense that ownership of lands rests on their "improvement": settlers were alerted by agrarian officials that if they did not clear their lands they would lose them.

Mega-development of the region has transformed Chimalapas in the past and threatens to further alter social relations in the future. Beginning in 1973, the Cerro de Oro Dam on the Veracruz-Oaxaca border transformed Uxpanapa, the neighboring tropical forest area of which Chimalapas is a discreet political/social entity. The flood plain created by this dam caused the displacement of thousands of Chinantecos, who were resettled on 85,000 hectares of forested land in Uxpanapa. This area has been transformed into a dismal series of communities, as characterless and desolate as their names (Poblado Uno, Dos, Tres, etc.). The Agency of Agriculture and Hydraulic Resources (SARH) began to intensify its operations in the zone in 1980, when they began to study the possibility of establishing a dam on the Rio Corte (Santa María), to supply water on the plains of the Isthmus. The Chicapa-Chimalapas project would have inundated a part of Chimalapas, and was opposed by the Chimas. Other development projects were proposed for the region in the 80s. These included a SARH logging initiative (1985) which would have intensified logging for export in the area and a project promoted by the Agency of Communication and Transportation (SCT) to build a highway from Cintalapa to Palomares which would cross through the central, densely forested region of Chimalapas.

Finally, in 1988, the Agency of Urban Development and Ecology (SEDUE) began to discuss plans for making the area a biosphere reserve. This reserve was opposed by the

community ostensibly because of fears that it would cut off access to the resources upon which the Chimas depended.

Thus, according to Vocalía and Maderas, this history pointed to on the one hand, a systematic lack of attention to agrarian complaints, and on the other, a systematic encroachment on local resources. At the same time, Chimas suffered an institutional abandonment at the level of infra-structural development. They lacked roads, many communities were not electrified, only the cabeceras themselves had plumbing of any kind, schools were lacking or deficient in many communities and few credits or other supports for agricultural production were available. The SEDUE biosphere reserve proposal of 1988 represented just another such imposition. But here the agreement between the Vocalia and Maderas del Pueblo comes to an end.

Contested Legacy: Direct Action

It is not disputed that the Chimas have responded to agrarian injustices and development through several dramatic direct actions in Chimalapas. But the meaning and efficacy of these actions constitutes a major point of departure in the analyses of the Vocalía and Maderas. In 1975, an action developed around the paper company Fábricas del Papel Tuxtepec, which wanted to log in Chimalapas . Community authorities signed an agreement (in Maderas history, under force or threat) to allow them to operate under the aegis of a community forestry business, in spite of a veto by the community Assembly. The company continued to operate until 1977, when the Chimas revolted, seized and burned their equipment. The military was sent in to reestablish order in the

area, and in 1978 the company pulled out.

On December 2, 1989, comuneros from Santa María Chimalapas, tired of loggers stealing their timber from the Chiapas side, kidnaped Absalón Castellanos, a timber baron and the brother of the governor of Chiapas at the time. The timing was strategic, since the kidnaping occurred the day after Heladio Ramírez had taken office as governor of Oaxaca. This incident resulted in a meeting between the two governors, who promised to look into the demarcation of the boundaries of Chimalapas. Castellanos, who was released unharmed, stopped his illegal timber operations in the area. But twenty-one Chima hostages seized in retaliation by Chiapenecan police remained in custody for several months.

According to Esteva, these actions, the only form of struggle available to the Chimas at the time, were of very limited utility and as such, underlined their marginality in relation to the state. The Vocalía, designed to open channels of communication between the state and community, was the first step in an integral solution to the problems which motivated these short-sighted uprisings. In fact, Esteva attributed the 1988 SEDUE declaration of a biosphere reserve to the stridency and intransigence of the Pact of Ecological Groups (Miguel Ángel's group), which had forced the government into a position of non-negotiation. Thus, in Esteva's view, direct action brought reprisals or unwelcome solutions such as the Biosphere Reserve proposal.

In contrast, Maderas viewed these actions as the ultimate sign of community vitality, of the existence of a continuing "struggle of the people." Although Maderas

certainly did not condone kidnapings or other illegal direct actions among its campesino members, direct actions of the past are valorized and juxtaposed with the contemporary role of Maderas del Pueblo, which is a strong community advocate in relation to state agrarian agencies. In this way, past community struggles over the land are conflated with current ones, and Maderas' role as a successful agrarian watchdog (see the case of San Francisco La Páz/La Gringa, below) fits into a continuum of righteous agrarian struggle. Although Miguel Ángel negated any positive contribution on the part of the Vocalía, he observed that the Governor of Oaxaca had formed the Vocalía as a direct response to the 1989 kidnaping–that is, by their actions the Chimas had forced the government to address their problems.

Contested Legacy: Community Role in the New Settlements

New settlements in Chimalapas are generated in two major ways. The first is the result of illegal squatter settlements. Many of these have been given recognition as *ejidos* by the Chiapas government, which claims the area of Chimalapas adjacent to Chiapas as its own. The second is the recognition of new communities by the authorities of Santa María and San Miguel themselves. Thus, Chimalapas contains a number of new settlements which are not squatter settlements, since they were granted the right to establish *congregaciones* by the *cabeceras* themselves. According to Esteva, this situation is part of the agrarian problem. Whereas *ejidos* in Chimalapas are the outcome of corrupt business and government interests in Chiapas, the new legal settlements in Oaxaca are linked to a corrupt community leadership in the *cabeceras* of Chimalapas.

Esteva's retrospective Lucha Por Chimalapas explains the process in the following way. In Oaxaca the Agency of Agrarian Reform (SRA), in concert with municipal authorities of Santa María and San Miguel, gave land to settlers who wanted to live in Chimalapas. The communal authorities and the SRA charged settlers by household or by hectare for rights to live there. In this way, a number of "congregaciones" were formed, each one deforesting the area around it. The communal authorities encouraged the perception among settlers that they had no legal right to the land and that only conformity to their authority would safeguard them. They thus lived isolated and afraid, subject to extortion on the one hand from the municipal authorities and on the other from the SRA.

In Esteva's account, particularly in the Lucha and the 1997 interviews, the forces of community corruption and *caciquismo* are perhaps the premier anti-democratic force in Chimalapas. He claims that corrupt leaders control and oppress their communities, sell its timber and open it up to drug traffickers. They enforce inequality and isolation within the community by brokering all outside relationships. However, Esteva believes that these leaders never represent the community itself:

> In Indian administrations there would be no *caciques*. *Caciques* are imposed from outside, they don't come from within (aren't created by) the community. In the past, local governments were required to register with political party. The PRI interfered in local politics to install sympathetic leaders. These were the *caciques* (Interview, January 1997).

According to Esteva, the role of the Vocalía was to allow the community at large, including the new settlements, to interact with the government and participate in decision-making, thus breaking the hold of *caciques* in the area. Esteva concludes that it ultimately failed when the displaced *caciques* allied themselves with Miguel Angel García, an "ecological cacique," to regain their position.

Maderas del Pueblo represents this settlement process quite differently. They do not reflect on the motivations of community authorities in authorizing new legal settlements. They emphasize the perspectives of the new settlements themselves, which tell of displaced peasants finding refuge in the lands of Chimalapas. Whereas Esteva sees these settlers as cannon fodder in a war between resource greedy *caciques* from Santa María and San Miguel on the one hand and ranchers and loggers on the other, Maderas represents them as victims of a larger external system that promotes the interests of ranchers and other powerful individuals. As for the illegal settlements, a major strategy of Maderas to reduce conflict in the area has been to convince the same community authorities regarded as caciques by Esteva, to accept illegal settlers in the area and thereby transform them from Chiapenecan invaders subject to manipulation by Chiapas state authorities into Chimas struggling toward an autonomous ecological reserve. This is not to say that Maderas deliberately defends or promotes the interests of powerful campesino leaders. In fact, the efforts of Maderas to help establish productive autonomy through a campesino reserve are focused almost exclusively on these new, relatively powerless new communities.

Maderas emphasizes its own role in reducing conflict among campesino constituencies and bringing new legal settlers and illegal settlers alike under one rubric. Miguel Ángel also departs from Esteva's claim that the Vocalía was instrumental in creating community alliances. He maintains that the project was in fact an instrument of the governing forces who, in light of the direct actions of 1989, feared losing control of the area and used the Vocalía to create an opening in the community by which to insert themselves more securely.

The Vocalía Tells Its History

According to Esteva, the Vocalía was not a government "project" in the usual sense. It was a "space for "*concertación*" (agreement/negotiation) It had entered the community at a time when the community was being preyed upon by ecologists who cared more for the environment than for the needs of the local inhabitants. Like the later Maderas project, it proposed an ecological reserve which would "contribute to the health and longevity of nature and society in Chimalapas, through the negotiation of a collaborative force" (Tequio: 51). But its premier concern was for the people, not the environment alone. In fact, Esteva insisted that he had <u>never</u> been an ecologist, explaining that for Indians and campesinos ecology is not a separate aspect: it is a world view, a relationship with nature which includes what Westerners call ecology.

Esteva describes himself as a "de-profesionalista." He began working to sustain his family at the age of 15, after his father died. Eventually, he made a career in industrial

relations, and was employed by IBM and Proctor and Gamble among others. But after twenty years he began to feel that these companies didn't set out to help workers or the community, but rather themselves. In his own words, this realization caused him to flee to the other extreme and he entered a clandestine organization of guerillas. However, the internal violence of the group disturbed him and he decided that the answer for social change must lie in government.

Thus, in the seventies Esteva worked in well-funded government programs under a populist president. By 1976 he was by his own account "in very serious danger" of becoming Secretary of State. But he came to realize that government goals and programs were contrary to the interests of Indian communities, and that it was the most well-meaning programs which caused the most harm. The name of his NGO, ANADEGES, symbolized this realization: it changed from "Analysis, development and Negotiation" to "Autonomy, Decentralization and Negotiation." At the time of the interview, Esteva was working with his NGOs (Opción, Espacios) in Oaxaca and also had been working as an advisor to the Zapatistas in Chiapas.

Esteva has worked for the past thirty years with campesinos in NGOs. In 1988, he was working in Oaxaca with campesino groups when he was invited to help establish the Vocalía. This invitation was the outcome of a combination of connections and experience. The Governor at the time, Heladio Ramirez, was an old friend, he had prior government experience, experience working with campesinos, and finally, he had been directly involved in Chimalapas over a local political issue. Specifically, while working

as a member of ANADEGES in Chimalapas. he had been to help in the removal of the President of the Comisariado de Bienes Comunales[5] (President of Communal Lands) of Santa María from office. This man was known to be implicated in drug-trafficking and illegal logging in the area. By Esteva's account, local *campesinos*, frightened to stand up to the Comisariado, had asked Esteva to petition the governor for intervention. In sum, his experience made him a likely candidate and he was invited to direct the Vocalía. The intent was to establish a partnership between the government and the community, and serve as a link between the governor of Oaxaca, the State Development Agency (COPLADE) and the community. This type of cooperation was consistent with Esteva's published views on the peasantry and social change.

Esteva juxtaposed the history and development of the Vocalía with a prior failed attempt by ecologists to gain ascendency in the region. According to Tequio por Chimalapas, starting in the seventies:

> The number of ecologists and academics interested in the region began to increase. Some continued the splendid tradition. . . in which academics not only carry out technically accurate and rigorous work, but also associate their own interests with the local communities and in one way or another are transformed into activists, occupied in the defense of their interests..Together with these, opportunists and dilettantes also arrived. To concern themselves with Chimalapas brought recognition and wealth to many urban ecologists, who did not appear disposed to commit themselves seriously to the protection of the forest but used

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[5]This was Roberto Comacho, an influential community member who presently works with Maderas del Pueblo

> this flag to bring water to their mills. These interferences without a doubt affected the prestige, effectiveness and work of those who were genuinely interested in the region and who were really trying to transform their interest into an opportunity for alliance and commitment to the Chimas. Although they were unfamiliar with the forest and had had no contact with the communities, many of them were conscious of the importance of Chimalapas and were trying to translate this consciousness into effective activism..." (Tequio:8).

According to the Tequio, the meeting convened by the Pact of Ecological Groups (PGE or *Pacto*) in Mexico and the Agency for Urban Development and Ecology (SEDUE)[6] in Oaxaca in 1987 to discuss the "destiny' of Chimalapas angered community leaders, who had not been invited. Miguel Ángel García, now Director of Maderas, had been the major force within the Pacto at this time. Esteva's unflattering reference to "urban ecologists" above undoubtedly refers to Miguel Ángel. According to the Tequio, community leaders had not then known of the existence of the Pacto, which had previously met in Mexico City. But they nevertheless managed to organize a small group to travel to Mexico City to present the local view, and to gain the sympathy for their agrarian struggles. Although they were encouraged that the ecologists shared their concern about development projects in the area, they were concerned that the majority of the ecologists were "openly" opposed to all forms of forest exploitation and wanted to

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[6]SEDUE later becomes SEDESOL, and Natural Protected Areas are briefly under its jurisdiction. Currently, Natural Protected Areas are handled by a new environmental agency called SEMERNAP.

create an "untouchable" forest reserve in the region (Ibid:8). In a newspaper article covering the 1987 events, an influential campesino of Santa María, then a representative of the PRI affiliated National Campesino Council (CNC), comments:

> "It was very bothersome, irritating, that the ecologists were planning how to organize Chimalapas. There was a guy there who wanted to bring in canoes so as not to have to build roads through which Sabritas potato chips could enter (Quoted in Lucha: 22)."

After the October Oaxaca meetings, The PGE were invited to Santa María to meet with community members. During this meeting, the PGE denied that they were opposed to all forms of forest exploitation and affirmed their commitment to exploring sustainable alternatives to a total ban on resource use, and offered to formulate a proposal for alternative development which would incorporate the community point of view. One month later, the Chimas discovered that UCIZONI had already designed its own proposal for Chimalapas, within their "Forest Diagnostic for the North Zone of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec." This proposal suggested modifying the commercialization of timber to benefit the communities, training community members in the possible uses of the forest resources and improving community organization, defining a forest reserve zone, reforestation zones and preventing clandestine logging, and studying similar projects in other forest areas in Mexico. According to the Tequio, this proposal was not widely circulated among the community. Similarly, in 1988 the PGE completed its proposal for the area, which, like the UCIZONI proposal, was not "submitted for consideration"

among the Chimas. It provided an presentation of what was known about the ecology of the area, and of the threats to the forest. These threats included: the agrarian conflict, exploitation of the forest, extensive cattle ranching, mega- development projects, and illegal activities such as trafficking in flora and fauna and drugs. They suggested that if these problems were not resolved through "agreement, resulting in the convergence of the communities short and long term interests, the interests of the state of Oaxaca and the nation," these threats would result in "irreversible deterioration; the extinction of vegetable and animal species; hydrological and climate change; soil erosion and attendant lack of soil productivity; the imposition of monoculture and attendant community dependency; cultural and ethnic weakening; and finally a sharpening of inequality and climate of social tension"(Lucha:22). Resolving these problems would require "channeling funds and efforts toward a common project, in which besides the community, the state and federal governments, civil organizations, academic entities and international organs" would participate (:24).

But according to the Lucha, the PGE was publicizing its cause in too confrontational a manner. By 1988 their denunciations of public agencies resulted in the 1988 unilateral declaration of biosphere reserve by SEDUE. They realized that their hands were tied without the cooperation of the government, NGOs and the communities themselves. Thus, they began to organize a series of meetings, out of which grew the idea to create a "dialogue space" made up of community, NGO, government and academic participants. To further this goal, the PGE asked Gustavo Esteva to use his relationship

with the governor to help get this dialogue underway (:28).

In light of the fact that the Chimas had recently taken Absalon Castellanos prisoner, state officials were aware that some sort of action needed to be taken in Chimalapas. The Secretary of Planning and the Governor thus produced the "Development Plan for the Micro-region of Chimalapas," a document produced without consulting community authorities or ecologists and pleasing to no one (Tequio:11).

Meanwhile, Esteva invited the New York-based Synergos Institute to participate in the process(:12). Esteva and members of PGE made a new proposal to the Governor, resulting in the creation in November 1988 of a special Subcommittee of COPLADE, which was constituted during a meeting of the PGE, Synergos, community leaders, government representatives, academics and UCIZONI and ANADEGES. The goals of this new organ were: to solve agrarian problems and border dispute; design and implement a plan for the region, with ample participation of the communities and other interested groups; postpone development projects--including the dam, the highway, the SARH-BID forestry project, and the implementation of a biosphere reserve–until the public had reached agreement; attend to the problem of lack of basic services in the region (Lucha: 30-32). Although these projects were supposed to be carried out with community permission, cooperation, input through a democratic process, by the following year COPLADE was running amok in the communities, implementing projects which had not been approved by the communities themselves. As a result, the interested groups reconvened, and finally in June of 1989 established the Vocalía Ejecutiva,which was

charged with overseeing and implementing the COPLADE program (:34).

According to the Lucha, written in 1993, Estvea was appointed as the advisor to the governor, and Miguel Ángel García was selected from the PGE to organize operations. The meeting in which the Vocalía was established included Esteva as well as representatives from government agencies (SRA, SARH, SEDUE), NGOs (UCIZONI, ANADEGES, Maderas),Synergos, community authorities from Chimalapas, and timber interests among others. Miguel Ángel García was the "principal power" of the meeting, and gave a detailed presentation of the work he was trying to organize. In a footnote, it is noted that Miguel Angel resigned from the Vocalía in 1989, but continued to work in the region with his NGO, Maderas del Pueblo. His reason, stated in an interview a few years later, reflected his disapproval of COPLADE's involvement in the process and his fear that the project would coopt "the struggle of the people (:34)."

In the Tequio the role of Miguel Ángel is treated at greater length and more hostilely. In this version, Miguel Ángel's presentation at the meeting of a program for work for the Vocalía was met with disfavor by the communal authorities in attendance. They claimed that they had not been consulted properly. Moreover, Miguel Ángel's proposal was of limited utility to the Vocalía, since it contained a narrow ecological focus, failing to take into account "other opinions and positions" (14-15). The PGE proposal is included in an annex of the Tequio. Its main points are to implement a participatory methodology to involve the community in discussions of the problem and to design a program of integral development and preservation; to implement experimental

and demonstrative models of alternative development; to make an ecological diagnostic of the region; to increase publicity at local, state, national and international levels about the problem; to secure international aid; and to facilitate inter-institutional collaboration (:21-23). This proposal was rejected, purportedly for failing to present a "common profile": incorporating the opinions and views of all of the community, governmental and non-governmental actors in the region. For COPLADE and the Vocalía to effect this common profile, they would need full participation from the Chimas. The difficulty in achieving this lay in the fact that the Chimas live in scattered communities with many different interests.

In a section headed "Do the Chimalapas Exist?" the Tequio sets out the problematic as follows. Chima is an identity derived from a place (rather than an ethnicity). But this place has no definite boundaries; they are imperceptible and permeable. The territory is not formally marked out, nor is it delimited by natural boundaries such as rivers. Neither is it defined by its type of vegetation, which extends into areas that are not part of Chimalapas. In this sense, Chimalapas is a social construct, not a natural entity(:16). New settlements have been created in the area. Each year there are more Chimas, some legitimated by the communal authorities and others not. Thus, "Chimalapas today is a dream, a project, an enterprise to undertake, more than a consummated reality." The Vocalía's Tequio por Chimalapas, a proposal for a three year project in the region, is the project which will "organize the collective force" in Chimalapas.

The Lucha por Chimalapas goes on to enumerate the achievements of the Vocalía projects. These include organizing the release of Chima prisoners from jails in Chiapas and negotiating a cessation of hostilities between Chiapenecan police (who work for ranching interests) and communeros living on lands desirable to the ranchers from Chiapas; the "reconstitution of political power" in Chimalapas; Organizing the grassroots; and resolving local worries about making Chimalapas a reserve.

In the Lucha, caciquismo and a vertical power structure are cited as corrupting influences in the zone. The Vocalía is credited with democratizing the political culture in Chimalapas. Their frequent meetings held in the communities allowed Chimas who were not in leadership positions to participate in the decision-making process. The meetings included the participation of government officials, but were not expressions of the "bureaucratic power" which had formally characterized official visits to the community. As participants in the Vocalía, these officials became part of a rising "popular power" in Chimalapas. The minutes of these meetings, as well as stories, poems and opinions written or relayed by Chimas, were published in a newsletter called Voces en la Selva.

The establishment or revitalization of a real community voice culminated in the creation of the trust supported by the MacArthur Foundation (administered through Synergos), named "Tequio without Borders," headed by a Technical Committee constituted by representatives elected from within the communities. This trust was created to fund programs identified as priorities by the campesinos themselves. The original concept was to strengthen existing campesino organizations, so that the Chimas

themselves could begin to accumulate experience in administration, funding, political organization, and some of the technical aspects of conservation. Although there were some problems associated with the manipulation of the trust by traditional authorities, the "errors committed were no more serious or numerous than those that would be committed by any public entity or NGO in a similar situation (:48)."

This process of steady democratization and "concertación" led to the greatest achievement of the Vocalía: the conciliation between Chimas and the squatters on their land. Although the Chimas could only demand that the government resolve agrarian conflicts, it was in their hands to make peace with illegal settlers. In this period, the Chimas decided that they would not work to expel squatters from Chima territory. This "historic decision" laid the basis for face-to-face communication among the various settlements of Chimalapas, and for eventual conciliation.

The Lucha also emphasizes COPLADE's positive role in the process. It defends COPLADE's commitment to negotiation also extended to their promise to oppose SEDUEs "unilateral" declaration of a biosphere reserve in the area. The Chimas opposed it on a number of grounds. They viewed it as an outside intervention which would rob them of their livelihoods. They were aware that Mexico's Natural protected areas (ANPs) often imposed restrictions on natural resource use for the inhabitants of these zones without effectively stopping environmental damage. Thus, in the Tequio, a plan for a reserve was outlined which would take into account these concerns (:54).

Ultimately, in 1990 the governor intervened and the Vocalía project was canceled.

This was due in part to the incomplete process of democratization in the zone, the excesses of local leaders and the necessity to cancel funds for projects that were not being carried out properly. Technical support for proposed projects was inadequate, and a growing distrust among the Chimas of government involvement in the project (in light of the fact that agrarian problems were not being resolved). Esteva resigned, and soon after the PGE began to circulate rumors that the Vocalía had secretly signed an agreement with the government to establish a biosphere reserve in Chimalapas.

In response, a group of community leaders occupied the municipal building in Matías Romero, demanding the disbandment of the Vocalía itself (:62).According to Esteva, the disbandment of the Vocalía closed the space for negotiation and signaled the reversion of the Chimas to primitive methods of protest. The MacArthur Foundation canceled its support of the project (there were accusations of missing monies).
In an interview, Esteva summarized the demise of the Vocalía:

> I had promised one year to the Vocalia. I stayed eighteen months, but couldn't continue to dedicate myself to Chimalapas. I had many commitments with other peoples. At the same time, the Vocalía had begun to effect two types of interests: one caciques of the PRI, and of drug-traffickers. They were in danger of losing their power thanks to the work of the Vocalía. And particularly one person from the PGE, from the university who had worked various years in Chimalapas, had lost his voice as ecologist of Chimalapas–which he considered his patrimony--because the Chimas were speaking of a campesino ecological reserve themselves, speaking of ecology themselves--he lost political power. When I left, a new Vocalía Executive entered. This was a moment of weakness for the Vocalía.

In this moment of weakness, the ecologists form a pact with the caciques in exchange for cooperation over their projects:

> Although in the beginning the CNDC and Miguel Angel were against the caciques (this was their normal inclination)-- in this moment they made an alliance with the caciques to eliminate the Vocalía. They came to an agreement with the governor, to recall the Vocalía,--the ecologists maintained their political position (Esteva 1997).

In this reflection on the demise of the Vocalía, its failure is attributed to the ambitions of Miguel Ángel García, an ecological cacique who makes common cause with the PRI-allied campesino caciques. The Vocalía is credited with beginning a process of establishing a campesino reserve, and Miguel Ángel (who soon begins a Campesino Ecological Reserve project in the zone) is represented as opposed to this democratic process. The Lucha, written after Maderas had successfully gained hegemony in the area, seeks to defend the legacy of the Vocalía. In this account, the Vocalía's initial efforts are continued by Maderas del Pueblo, which began to receive WWF funding in 1991 to establish a reserve in the area. The PGE finished the process of conciliation with settlers from Chiapas, begun under the Vocalía. In 1991, the CNDC was created to fight development projects still planned for the area (Lucha:67-70).

Maderas Tells Its History

Esteva's account of the Vocalía's role and impact is vociferously denied by Maderas documents emitted from Maderas itself in archived documents written by current members of Maderas. Whereas the Tequio por Chimalapas was a contemporaneous document, outlining the problem and future plans for Chimalapas, the Lucha por Chimalapas is clearly a defensive piece, written to defuse charges of corruption and to establish a positive legacy for the Vocalía initiative. The types of charges levied against Esteva during the last days of the Vocalía can be seen in an undated letter sent to Governor Heladio Ramirez Lopez (probably 1991) by a campesino from Nicolas Bravo (a community of chimalapas), and a member of Maderas.

In this letter, Esteva was accused of misrepresenting himself and his project and of misappropriating funds. Whereas the campesinos had routed the timber company and recuperated their lands from loggers and ranchers in 1986, since then, Esteva had done nothing to stop the advance of illegal logging and drug trafficking activities. Although the MacArthur Foundation, through Synergos, had granted 280,000 dollars for productive projects, only 13 chicken farms had been developed, ten of which had no chickens. None of the five sewing workshops was functioning, nor were the thirteen carpentry shops. The letter claimed that this failure was due to a lack of training and technical support, although by Esteva's own account, 25 million pesos were paid out to NGOS for these services. Similarly, thirty million pesos were paid to NGOs to carry out the study for the *Tequio por Chimalapas*. According to the letter:

> "This plan was written without our consultation, and included proposals which we oppose completely, such as the one to relocate some of our communities. Furthermore, the NGOS which have been paid to carry out these activities share offices with Esteva in Oaxaca–and are thus paying his telephone bill and office expenses."

Materials published by Miguel Ángel García also question the legacy claimed by Esteva. In an article written in 1994 (published in 1996), perhaps partly in response to the Lucha, the role of the Vocalía is treated at some length. In this account, Garcia disputes the characterization of the 1987 meeting of ecologists, convened by the PGE in Oaxaca, presented in both the Tequio and the Lucha. Esteva describes that meeting as a convocation of naive ecologists interested in working in Chimalapas while taking no account of the community voice. In Garcia's account, the fundamental purpose of the meeting is for ecologists to negotiate with SARH, and to convince them to desist in their development plans–not a convocation of would-be ecological colonists. The legacy of this meeting, according to Esteva, was a distrust within the community of ecologists in general. According to García, its legacy is the beginning of a process to publicize the plight of Chimalapas and the first step in a community/ecological alliance.

Although none of the people who would later constitute the Vocalía Ejecutiva (i.e. Esteva) were present at the 1987 meeting, Maderas participated in the 1987 meeting, and in the visit to the community in the following days. Maderas began its diagnostic work in the area, and submitted its first funding proposal to WWF in 1989 to study the causes of

deforestation in the zone, and upon approval began formal work in the zone. At the same time, COPLADE formed the Vocalía Ejecutiva. COPLADE's motivation to form the Vocalía had to do with the growing seriousness of the conflict between Chiapenacan loggers and comuneros from Chimalapas. The Chimas had recently taken Absolon Castellanos hostage, and twenty-one Chimas taken by Chiapenecan police had been imprisoned for several months.

In the Maderas accounts, the Vocalía is regarded as a top-down intervention on the part of the governor of Oaxaca and COPLADE. Esteva is the main force behind the project, since he is the liason to the governor and the NGOs involved in the project are affiliated with Esteva, who is described as "intellectually indebted" to Ivan Illich.[7] Funds came from the State government, MacArthur, and WWF. Its projects, begun with government funds, were largely a failure. As one Maderas worker put it: "they built carpentry shops in places which had no electricity." Their monthly meetings allowed for "character acts" by the state government but ironically, in opening up dialogue in the community which counteracted the asymmetrical relationships in the zone, set the scene for the later repudiation of the Vocalía.

The Maderas account also raises doubts about the Vocalía's ability to represent the community. Initially, the authorities of Santa María were closely allied to the Vocalía.

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[7]Ivan Illich, founder of the Center for Intercultural Documentation in Cuernavaca, is an influential analyst of industrialized society. His work criticizes "growth economy, political centralization and unlimited technology" (The Ivan Illich Archive, http://www.cogsci.ed.ac.uk/-ira/illich/).

But in San Miguel, a group of indigenous professionals, mostly bilingual teachers, had established the Centro Autonomo de Desarrollo Indigena de Chimalapas (CADICH)– and later the Centro Cultural Zoque-was opposed to the Vocalía. The fear that a biosphere would be imposed by the federal government was one of the motives that caused the Chimas to disown the Vocalía, amidst accusations of misappropriation of funds. Although the Vocalía would attribute this unfortunate turn of events to having upset the interests of caciques in the area, in reality their failure can be attributed to the fact that they had proposed a total ban in the area. This was attested in a document which showed that the Vocalía had participated in a meeting with government officials in which the formation of a reserve was discussed. Since the Vocalía had denied the existence of such a project, the Chimas thought the Vocalía was operating behind its back in favor of a reserve. They asked the Governor to audit the Vocalía.

According to Maderas, after the disbandment of the Vocalía, Maderas del Pueblo became the major force in the area. The authorities of both *cabeceras* began to see the "ecologists" in the zone in a more favorable light. Maderas began their work in the area with a focus on some of the newer, more marginalized communities in the Northern area of Chimalapas. These communities have limited rights, and depend more on agriculture than timber for subsistence. In order to help campesinos improve agricultural productivity and sustainability, Maderas promoted traditional or low-tech cultivation to prevent soil erosion. They also promoted the use of *frijol abono*, a type of legume which increases soil fertility that is inter-cropped with corn. They began a tree nursery to produce valuable

species, such as cedar and mahogany. and fruit trees. Finally, they discouraged the use of commercial pesticides in favor of organic compounds (such as chile and garlic) made with local products. This project, entitled "Alternative Development and Community Participation in the Chimalapas Forest" was funded by the WWF through the BioDiversity Support Program (BSP), a consortium of the WWF, The Nature conservancy and the World Resources Institute, through US-AID. The project was designed to reduce dependency on agricultural credits and expensive inputs, increase productivity and decrease environmental damage. It thus promoted autonomy and ecology. This was the first major grant that Maderas received (1991-1996).

Maderas' major gains and successes during this period were not limited to technical programs. Perhaps their most proud accomplishment was the creation of an agrarian conciliation team, made up of community representatives from the two *cabeceras* and a number of congregations. The commission traveled to most of the ejidos set up from the Chiapas side of the border. They offered to accept them as comuneros of Chimalapas and respect their community limits if those communities would stop litigating against Chimalapas, a situation which was holding up the execution of the presidential decrees. Maderas' innovation was to convince the communal authorities to conceptually separate the agrarian problem from the border dispute with Chiapas. They argued that many communities in Mexico straddle state borders. In other words, a community could accept the geo-political boundaries of Chimalapas (and whatever reserve was eventually instituted there) and still accept the state jurisdiction of Chiapas.

Maderas achieved this conciliation within a majority of the ejidos and pressured the SRA to carry out official surveys of their communities. However, some ejiditarios were threatened and pressured by Chiapenecan interests. One representative of a Tzotzil ejido which had participated in the process lost his wife and baby to an assassin.

Although the Vocalía claims credit for beginning the agrarian conciliation, in the Maderas accounts there is no mention of a Vocalía role. In 1991, Maderas also created the National Committee for the Defense of Chimalapas (CNDC), a network of local representatives, ecological NGOs, academics and celebrities. Headed by Luis Bustamente who had close ties to Donaldo Colosio[8], then Director of SEDUE (later renamed SEDESOL), the CNDC had the "ear" of highly placed and sympathetic governmental officials. The CNDC advocated an immediate agrarian solution as well as a new model for a Natural Protected Area (ANP). This ANP would be locally planned and conceptualized and it would be managed locally. This plan, presented by way of Maderas allies with ties to the president, was greeted with favor by Salinas de Gortari in 1992. Salinas' pronouncement in favor of such a Reserve reinforced the relationship between the communities and the CNDC. In the same year, the CNDC sponsored the "First Campesino-Technician Meeting of Chimalapas," where fifty campesino representatives met Maderas members to discuss the relationship between politics, productive regimes and natural resources in Chimalapas. During the meeting, they established regional

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[8]Colosio was assassinated in 1994, during his presidential bid as a liberal, reform-minded PRI candidate.

councils and a General Council of Representatives (CGR), intended to counteract communication problems between communities and the problems of centralization and corruption in the cabeceras.In 1992, the CGR declared Chimalapas to be a Campesino Ecological Reserve (REC).

Another important accomplishment of the CNDC in this era was the rerouting of the Ocozocuautla-Sayula highway, which would have cut through Chimalapas. This project had been promoted by the governor of Chiapas, Patrocinio Gonzalez Garrido. Salinas referred the rerouting as an example of his administration's commitment to conservation. At the same time, the CNDC pressures the SRA to finish marking out the borders of Chimalapas and raised public awareness of the zone in the national press.

In response to the CGR's declaration of a Campesino Ecological Reserve, in 1993 SEDESOl organized a meeting between the CGR, the CNDC and the state governor, Diódoro Carrasco. It was agreed that the state and federal governments would respect the Reserve and allow it time to constitute itself. The campesinos agreed that in order to make it legal, they would accept a designation of Campesino Biosphere Reserve. As a biosphere reserve they would conform to existing regulations concerning protected areas and also qualify for international funds from the Man and the Biosphere Program of UNESCO. An agreement was signed which would establish the Reserve upon SRA's delivery of the "Definitive Agrarian Plan and Act of Possession," which would indicate that the Presidential Resolution of 1967 had finally been executed.

Although this Plan was expected just a few months later, it was never delivered.

Officially, the SRA claimed that it could not be accomplished due to legal actions (*ámparos*) from ejidos in Chiapas. However, it later became clear that the governor of Chiapas was exerting pressure to prevent the agrarian solution. Patrocinio Gonzalez, formerly governor of Chiapas and now Secretary of State "informed" SEDESOL and SRA that the Plan would not be delivered as scheduled. In response, the CNDC published a protest, directed at Salinas, and demanded an audience with him. The president of the WWF, which had endorsed NAFTA, sent a letter to Salinas in support of Chimalapas. In response, Colosio requested that the CNDC moderate its protest, given that NAFTA was being negotiated and presidential elections were coming up, and promised to help intervene on their behalf. But Salinas did not respond to a request that he meet with the CNDC. So the communities and the CNDC organized a demonstration and a press conference at the offices of the United Nations program for the Environment in Mexico City, and later marched to the presidential palace to demand an audience. In response, a meeting was arranged between the SRA, SEDESOL and other government representatives on December 16th. Chima representatives waited outside while the meeting went on, failing to come to any accord due to the intransigence of Patrocinio Gonzalez. At the end of the meeting, only Arturo Warman (now of the Procuradería Agraria) agreed to meet with the Chimas,and set a new meeting date for the 20th of November. The Chimas felt betrayed yet again.

At this meeting, the Chimas presented a set of demands, including an agrarian solution, attention to human rights abuses and to problems of narcotrafficking and

violence in Chimalapas. The officials there, including Arturo Warman, the two governors, and representatives of SRA and SARH accepted the demands. They formed the "Interinstitutional Commission for Attention to Chimalapas." Out of this meeting brigades were formed to survey the limits of Chimalapas. But the brigades were met by violence and resistance by ranchers and Chiapenecan property owners. Once again, the communities sent a protest to Salinas and the rounds of pressures, negotiations and promises was begun again. This time, the SRA intervened, offering to remove the property owners settled in La Gringa/San Francisco La Paz, lands belonging to Chimalapas but uninhabitable because of the violence promoted by settlers and ranchers who had invaded. In 1994, the government gave restitution to title holders there and gave the lands back to Chimalapas. According to Maderas, amidst the victory over La Gringa, a there was a "minor scandal" when the WWF granted Salinas recognition for his accomplishments in environmental protection. Among these accomplishments was the "protection of the Chimalapas Forest."

Discussion

In the accounts presented above, both Esteva and Miguel Ángel present themselves as defenders of the community. Each emphasizes his role as the real spokesperson for the region. Both men have presented ecological reserve projects for Chimalapas. Yet, each insists that his approach is essentially social, not "ecological." Both cast the community as helpless and vulnerable to powerful outsiders. Each man

casts the other as that powerful outsider.

In Esteva's view, Miguel Ángel is an "ecological cacique." The relationship between the Chimas and the ecologists was tenuous and fragile from the beginning, ostensibly because their first meetings concerning the region (1987) took place in Oaxaca without the knowledge or participation of community representatives from Chimalapas. Thus, to gain power, Miguel Ángel had to ally himself with corrupt local leaders.

In Miguel Ángel's account, the 1987 PGE meeting is an emergency measure to halt development projects in the area. He discusses this meeting at length, but gives short shrift to the Vocalía. In contrast, Esteva distances the Vocalía from the 1987 meeting, and links the current Maderas del Pueblo project to the Vocalía. Esteva discusses Miguel Ángel's brief stint with the Vocalía in detail. Miguel Ángel does not mention it at all.

In Miguel Ángel's view, Esteva is a puppet of the governor and of the state development agency, COPLADE. The COPLADE project was yet another government intervention into a remote zone outside of their control. Thus, each represents his own project as an outcome of a democratic community process. Related to this, Miguel Ángel argues that the Vocalía, as an intervention, was not designed to establish community self-sufficiency. It gave out money without building a lasting structure. For Miguel Ángel, a sustainable development project should "teach the people how to fish, not give out fishes."

Whereas Esteva argued that it was the Chimas, and later the PGEs oppositional stance which contributed to the problematic relationship with the state, Miguel Ángel

insisted that corrupt government interests would always make community compromise a moot point. This theme surfaces in his narrative about the CNDC/government attempts to negotiate an agrarian solution. In spite of the conciliatory attitude of the community and the CNDC, agrarian agencies fail to produce the promised solution–mainly because ranching and government interest are linked.

Finally, Esteva links his project to the building of democracy in the zone. He sees the agrarian conciliation, the creation of a Council of Representatives, and the cessation of development projects, all of which happened under Maderas del Pueblo, as Vocalía initiated achievements. He links these achievements to the democratic opening created in the community through the Vocalía. Miguel Angel turns this claim on its head, saying that the democratic opening created by the Vocalía empowered the community to throw the Vocalía out.

Esteva argues that ultimately the objectives of Maderas and Vocalía were not distinct, just their methods. The Vocalía never was an "apparatus," never had personnel. There were two people from Chimalapas who helped with organizing and the Vocalía was a " space of negotiation." It had a small grant from Macarthur to pay transportation, offices in Oaxaca and some studies. All of the Chimas and villages and authorities and Maderas del Pueblo worked with the Vocalía. One of the weapons of Maderas was to say that Esteva had robbed money--but he had never managed money. As for the Vocalía being a top down group, one can see in the Vocalía newsletter, Voces de la Selva that this isn't true, where minutes from each meeting of the Vocalía are published.

But the difference in "method" referred to by Esteva is the basis for a serious charge against Maderas del Pueblo. Esteva accuses them of making common cause with caciques known to trade in illegal timber, support cattle interests and perhaps have links to drug traffickers. It is these activities–ranching, logging and drug-trafficking–which have been identified by Maderas del Pueblo as the major threats to the ecology in the area.

UCIZONI Tells Its Story

The question of caciquismo is also raised by UCIZONI, which has worked in Chimalapas in the past. The following is excerpted from an April 1997 interview. Beas refers to the Vocalía as a non-governmental project and emphasizes the role of community corruption in the Maderas project. However, it is important to note that UCIZONI and Maderas del Pueblo do cooperate on projects, notably in activism against the Megaproject.

Through Chimalapas, Ucizoni also has relationships with environmental NGOS, which pre-date the appearance of Maderas Del Pueblo in the zone. The first group, with which Beas had contact, worked in Chimalapas in the late seventies. This was the Grupo de Estudios Ambientales (GEA). Emphasizing the defense of the forest and of precious tropical tree species in danger of extinction, they were expelled from Chimalapas in around 1983. In 1987, a small group of ecologists arrived to Matías Romero and asked UCIZONI to introduce them to Santa María Chimalapas. This group was Maderas del

Pueblo.

UCIZONI itself has had a number of projects in Chimalapas over the years, including a project currently underway in Santa María, to assist women in starting *avícolas* (chicken coops). UCIZONI also works in a number of small communities pertaining to Chimalapas, in small production projects. In the past, UCIZONI has worked to secure the release of prisoners seized in Chimalapas. But Ucizoni's work with Zoque communities is not limited to Chimalapas–it also extends to Zoque communities located in other parts of the Isthmus.

However, UCIZONI's most significant work in Chimalapas took place in 1988 and had to do with promoting the execution of the Presidential Resolutions that titled and confirmed the communal lands of Santa María and San Miguel. This work was suspended after a conflict occurred with Santa María:

> In 1987 a serious conflict arose between the authorities of Santa María and its communities. The authorities were relieved of their offices and by agreement of the community no other social organizations would be able to work there–so as not to divide the community. This is why UCIZONI longer works in the community *as* Ucizoni: We still have projects there, but reduced in scale, and promoted by individuals, so as not to divide the community
>
> UCIZONI had a very strong relationship with the PGE during their first two years, but they have grown apart since then–although some people who come from Ucizoni work for Maderas and vice versa. UCIZONI has fundamental differences with the PGE and with Maderas. Ucizoni struggled against *caciquismo* in Santa María Chimalapas, which was ruled by certain persons that over time

were incorporated into Maderas. For this reason, the community of Santa María Chimalapas doesn't accept the presence of people from Maderas, and this has to do with the fact that part of the Maderas team is made up of the old *caciques* linked to the illegal extraction of timber and corruption in Santa María.

According to Beas, the complex agrarian problems, development agendas and government incursions into the zone were further complicated when ecological/NGO actors began to arrive on the scene:

> The first experience of Chimalapas with an NGO was a total failure. This occurred in the mid-seventies, with financing from an international funder originating in Holland. This group used the money themselves, defrauded the community over the construction of a road and used the money to pay themselves. This is part of a general situation that up 'til now has been generating a great deal of distrust. That is, the activities of NGOs in the area have been obscure, not well-understood by the people. This explains the reserve people have there towards people from the outside.
>
> In Chimalapas, there is an extreme problem with cultural loss. Zoque is practically a lost language, and the traditional costume has disappeared completely. This process is complex: it has to do with the dominance of Zapotecs in the *cabeceras*, decreasing isolation through the construction of roads, the type of education mandated by the government, and immigration flows.
>
> But one of the fundamental problems is the weakening of the internal community structure. This happens when community power is seized by small groups who defend only their own interests. In Chimalapas, this group has been the one which is linked to the illegal extraction of timber. In the Isthmus region, timber traffickers are often times linked to drug traffic. In Chimalapas there is also a huge problem with drug traffic (Beas, interview 1997).

In this interview, Beas criticizes NGOs in general, and suggests that Maderas del Pueblo has made some shady alliances. He also implies that Maderas has been working in the communities against the community will–since in the late '80s NGOs were banned from the area. UCIZONI works "as individuals" in Chimalapas in order to respect the community will.

Community Expulsions: Vicissitudes of Professional Fortune

After working for several years in the communities and building what appeared to be some very strong relationships, Maderas del Pueblo was expelled from Santa María Chimalapas in the wake of a change of local power. This change of authorities occurred in 1996 and soon after the community assembly banned Maderas from the *cabecera.* This restricted (but did not end) Maderas activities, which in Santa María had been centered around a WorldWildlife Fund supported effort to write a campesino reserve into the *estatuto comunal,* the customary law sanctioned by state and federal authorities since 1995. Maderas believes that both the change of authorities and their expulsion from the community were the result of PRI fears that the autonomous campesino reserve model would be institutionalized in local law.

This was not the explanation offered by Esteva and Beas. In interviews conducted in 1997, both Esteva and Beas claimed that the expulsion from Santa María represented the community will. Esteva explained:

When the Vocalía ended the *caciques* returned to power. But afterwards the

> people had structure, and little by little began to reorganize themselves. In the last year new people entered the *Cabecera* in Santa María and San Miguel, young people who do not represent the interests of the caciques. These new directors are those which are confronting Maderas del Pueblo. Maderas says these new authorities represent the government. The argument of Miguel Ángel is that this is the government, these are caciques. But [in reality] these are the new authorities. They say to Maderas that if you want to work here work with us, through the communities and the assemblies. They have had a lot of money at Maderas--they arrive to communities and make arrangements to work with people without talking to the community, to the government (Esteva, interview, 1997).

Esteva went on to explain :

> In Chimalapas the struggle was always for autonomy. Los Chimas, the people from the region who are a mix of Zoque and Zapotecs, but who are forming an identity "chima" above all (more than Zapotec or Zoque) have been struggling for their autonomy, which is the right to manage the immense forest which is theirs. They are disposed to receive technical support from ecologists, but want to manage it for themselves. Their problem with Maderas is that Maderas does not respect their communal authorities, that assemblies aren't held–they are not against the process itself, but the method.

Beas agreed with this interpretation:

> Right now in Chimalapas, the municipal authorities of Santa María are native authorities. As far as I know, their election signified an expression of community rebuilding given that they do not represent the interests of the logging groups. Thus, they have the support of a large part of the mother community, Santa María.

> However, they have little influence in the newer communities of Chimalapas. The main accusation launched against the new authorities, particularly in the case of the *Consejo de Vigilancia* (police chief) is of being too tolerant, too close to, the government position. However, it is worth pointing out that Santa María elects its authorities through the traditional system of *usos y costumbres*. This is an important sign of community reinvigoration. It is a sign of a vitality that persists in spite of all the pressures and the loss of cultural values. The community authority was formerly too close to the contraband loggers, but was also very close to the government. Now, what we have is an authority which is not tied to the loggers, but is not in conflict with the government either (Beas, interview).

At this point one can begin to see a pattern in the expulsions and denunciations. Esteva claims that his project was undermined by caciques. Miguel Ángel suggests that the Vocalía was expelled as a result of community consensus. Esteva and Beas both regarded Maderas' falling fortunes as a result of declining *caciquismo* and the reassertion of community strength. Maderas viewed their expulsion from Santa Maria as a PRI-*cacique* intervention.

Some gaps in the story were filled by a Maderas member who was also a community leader, Roberto Comacho. Comacho has filled a number of community roles and participated in a number of projects. He has been Comisariado of Bienes Comunales, a representative for the CNC (PRI-affiliated campesino organization), a participant in the Vocalía process and is currently a paid staff member of Maderas del Pueblo.

One day at his house in Santa María, he showed me a photograph of himself next

to Gustavo Esteva. Comacho could not refrain from bragging that he himself (though certainly he "liked" Esteva) had been instrumental in the expulsion of the Vocalía from Chimalapas. What he did not tell me was that in 1987, as a member of ANADAGES, Esteva had been appointed by the governor to help the community remove a corrupt set of local authorities from office. Comacho was Comisariado de Bienes Comunales at the time. When Beas referred to the caciques who had been accepted into Maderas, he was referring to Comacho and another local leader, Tenorio Díaz. Esteva also says he doesn't go to Chimalapas these days because the caciques have a price on his head of three million pesos. For their part, members of Maderas del Pueblo (those who do not belong to the community) have been threatened with "hanging from a tree" if they step foot in the *cabecera* of Santa María.

Discussion

This chapter has set out the history of the agrarian struggle in Chimalapas but also shows how that struggle is very much influenced and shaped by its tellers. As both Cynthia Hewitt de Alcantara (1984) and Evelina Dagnino (1998) have established, the agrarian struggle in Mexico, long studied by Mexican anthropologists, has come to be intimately connected to the projects of intellectuals, particularly since 1968. Campesino struggles have been connected to marxist and neo-marxist liberational ideals and politics. George Collier (1994) has shown how the Zapatista movement arose out of the conjunction of independent campesino organizations, religious organizing on the part of both Protestants and Liberation Theologists, and Maoist organizers coming out of UNAM

student uprisings. In fact, Arturo Warman (1988) sees the main distinguishing feature of post-1968 campesino movements to be the inseparability of the "local actors" from their elite, academic allies. In the past thirty years, anthropologists working in the campo have merged with the objects of their investigations, and at the same time, have become subjects within the movements they study. As mentioned above, Warman himself is anthropologist turned bureaucrat, and in his capacity of the Director of the Agrarian Agency (SRA) was Miguel Angel Garcia's opponent and mirror opposite.

III. A Distant Jaguar: Civil Society in Chimalapas

> "We have a great forest **here** and a good forest **there** that is already a Reserve and that is still connected to the forest here. A jaguar can still look for his girlfriend in another jaguar **here** or a jaguar over **there**. He doesn't have to be resigned with only those jaguars that are **here** (Leo, October 13, 1996)."

Introduction

Maderas del Pueblo and groups like it (see Chalmers 1995) are the poster-children of what is referred to as civil society-- that pocket of democratic possibilities which has opened with the waning of the centralized State. In this chapter, I will look at the way in which Maderas del Pueblo deploys civil society discourse to discuss the social changes taking place in the Mexico of the Millennium.

As a discourse, civil society presents a paradox, describing an enlightenment vision of universalism from whence our modern conception of citizenship is derived while championing the local, itself a peculiarly Romantic project. Sometimes used synonymously with the "NGO Sector," civil society is often understood as "grassroots,"growing from particular places, while its local projects are defended by outsiders (professionals and career activists), using international funds. Within the concept as discourse there is an antinomy between what we define as universal rights and the kind of citizenship that implies a respect for local, indigenous identities and determinations, which themselves are contested: "traditional, "ancient" or historical constructs (Dirks et al. 1994).

In Western political theory, civil society is a term which has been used at once to define the state and the working of its power, and to describe a force which is always working against or outside the state (Cohen and Arato 1994). In "mainstream" discourse, it is used to denote a process wherein neoliberalism opens spaces for democracy, leading to the rise of civil society. Among activists, particularly those on the left, the term has a critical edge. Opposed to the decentralization and downsizing processes which characterize Mexico of the nineties, these activists regard civil society as a champion for the people against the state. Civil society is the reification of the people against the reification of power. But insofar as civil society is equated with the NGO sector, the concept elides notions of public and private, transforming "democracy" into a private good. The fact that NGOs are not elected and have little or no public accountability undermines their claims to community representation. It puts the local government, which by whatever means, is elected, in a strong position to appropriate and redeploy civil society discourse to build power and constituency in the communities.

In Chimalapas, civil society discourse links goals of community autonomy to globalizing discourses of politics and the environment. It creates a space in the community for urban activists and their representations. The fact that Maderas draws half of its staff from the communities allows it to move between local, partial, political goals and impartial, general, ecological goals. It juxtaposes a gritty, masculine, crusading stance with a clean, professionalized, environmentalist image. It creates a "political-ecological" community.

Civil Society in Mexico

The growth of civil society, in this context understood as a sector made up of organizations and mobilizations which function outside of government control, is considered by policy analysts to be a *sine qua non* for democratic transition as well as the expansion of free markets (Fox 1994; 1995). In the nineties, development money has been directed less at large scale infrastructural projects (such as dams) and more toward funding "grassroots development," often through NGOs.

In Mexico, the emergence of civil society is often traced to 1968, when students organized against the central control of the PRI (ruling party). After 1968, elements of campesino, worker and student organizations, formerly incorporated in official PRI organs, began to constitute themselves as politically autonomous units (Harvey 1998). After the debt crisis of 1982, the contraction of the 1970s oil-boom economy, and the resulting International Monetary Fund restructuring, Mexico could no longer maintain a corporate state with the social programs that had formerly worked to absorb and demobilize social protest. At the same time, new social movements and the NGO sector expanded in response to this void (Harvey 1998; Nash 1998). But as Hellman (1994) has also argued, popular groups themselves are sometimes clientalistic, working to extract favors from the ruling party for particular constituencies rather than to promote democratization per se. Their existence does not therefore constitute a threat to the State.

Yet, the history of clientalism and cooptation in Mexico makes new social movements distrustful of the state and political parties, including those of the left.

Autonomy from party politics is regarded by social movements as a necessary precursor for democratic social change. These groups argue that because traditional left parties want to tap into the strength of social movements in order to bolster their own entrenched positions, they actually threaten the power of the masses on the left (Hellman 1992).

The revolutionary model that legitimizes Mexican nationalism in the eyes of the left harks back to radical revolutionaries like Zapata who called for land redistribution and social programs for the rural population. The revolution linked with Zapata sought to redress the development course taken during the Liberal period (1854-1911). The liberal reform laws of President Benito Juarez (1854-1871) disempowered the Church but also had the effect of breaking up corporate peasant holdings and privatizing communal lands.

The worst abuses occurred during the subsequent years when President Porfirio Díaz installed himself as a dictator (1871-1910). He formed close alliances with the United States and permitted development of Mexican railroads and oil resources by foreign business interests (Hamnett 1999). The more moderate elements of the Revolution whose policies eventually won out were concerned with containing the discontents that had arisen during the Díaz regime. The Constitution of 1917 nationalized resources and limited foreign investment in the country, but land redistribution remained more a nationalist discourse than a reality. Between 1934 and 1940, President Cárdenas set the course of a cooptive and centrist state. His reform program redistributed land to the peasantry. By making ejiditarios automatic members of the State sponsored peasant union (CNC), he coopted their claims within the state. At the

same time, he routed influences within the power structure that were interested in moving toward a Soviet model of state socialism (Hamnett 1999). During the period of rapid development, urbanization, and industrial expansion that followed (1940-1970), the redistributive rhetoric of the revolution declined.

The 1992 reforms to Article 27 of the Constitution effectively ended agrarian reform in Mexico. These reforms made way for the kinds of free market policies necessary for the implementation of NAFTA in 1994. In official discourse, NAFTA legitimizes the course of economic development that has in fact been pursued by the State. For the left, NAFTA harks back to the worst abuses of the Liberal era and symbolizes the official end of the revolution.

Needless to say, poverty and landlessness are still compelling problems to social activists in Mexico. As a result, some left activists have taken refuge in NGOs-- where they work to reserve spaces within, but safe from, political parties and the state by using international funds. In this inverted space, professional NGO workers attempt to create small utopias. Among professional and non-professional activists alike the establishment of local autonomy has replaced revolution as a long-term organizing goal. The vicissitudes of activist strategies in long-term movements has been discussed by George Collier (1994) for the Lacandon Forest.

While the mobilization in Chimalapas differs significantly from that of the Zapatistas (it is not armed and is influenced and shaped by NGO monies), both are framed within civil society discourse. The Zapatista uprising, which began on January 1,

1994 (marking the passage of NAFTA) in nearby Chiapas is notable for being the first post-cold war, post-communist guerrilla movement in Latin America. It is also remarkable for its commitment to democracy. Among the media, the Zapatistas became famous for putting a global, post-modern face on revolution, uniting an international network of activists through the internet and journalist-friendly outdoor conferences in the jungle. In Chimalapas, the movement consciously refers to the nearby Zapatistas and its main concerns are identical: land, autonomy, and human rights (see Collier and Stephens, 1997 on the Zapatistas).

Civil Society and Community at the *Foro*

In October of 1996, the National Committee for the Defense of Chimalapas (CNDC) held its first "Forum of Community and Civil Society on the Chimalapas Forest"(the "*Foro*"). This national committee was founded by the NGO Maderas Del Pueblo del Sureste, which has been working in the Chimalapas area since 1987. Maderas disseminates all information received by the CNDC, and organizes its periodic meetings. In fact, it was Maderas del Pueblo that organized the Foro itself. However, Maderas describes itself, and is often described in media and academic sources as the foot soldier and spokes organ for the more nationally integrated CNDC. The CNDC includes among its members Guillermo Briseño, teen heartthrob from Mexico's popular rock group Mana and the even more famous singer, Emmanuel, as well as many environmental groups and scholars of note.

The two day event brought local activists, environmentalists and representatives

of funding agencies from all over Mexico and even abroad, where they met in the Chimalapas Forest of Southern Oaxaca: one of the remotest corners of Mexico. The Invitation reads in part:

> The agrarian authorities of the community of San Miguel Chimalapa, in coordination with Civil Society (capitalized), invite independent, social and political organizations and indigenous communities to their first **NATIONAL FORUM,** to present a great ecological and social problem and its possible solutions.

The invitation echoes in its sweeping inclusiveness as well as in its remote forest locale the massive outdoor conferences organized by the Zapatistas in the nearby Lacandon Jungle, in which activists, scholars and journalists were invited to come together to both witness and solve the problems of Chiapas. Absent from the list of invitees are national political leaders, representatives of their political parties, or government officials. Invited are independent political and social organizations and indigenous communities. Thus, including both presences and absences, one would reasonably be able to suppose that the actors might roughly be divided into government, civil society and community. Who "is" government, civil society, community? What is the "great ecological and social problem" mentioned in the invitation and what are their respective roles in it? Members of Maderas del Pueblo often referred to something they called *sociedad civil*, civil society, which was conceived as the opposite of *gobierno*, or government. They rejected all political parties and political affiliations, and do not aspire to become a political force.

According to Miguel Angel Garcia, the Director of Maderas del Pueblo:

> "there is a line: on one side is the government and on the other side civil society. There is going to be negotiation, (but) no playing the little game where we mingle, which is where co-optation starts" (La Lucha por Chimalapas, 1993: 104; cited in Umlas 1998: 170).

Yet, between Mexico's federal environmental agency, SEMERNAP, universities like Chapingo and UNAM which had ecological curricula, and the NGO sector there was a lot of cooperation and exchange. Some individuals working in SEMERNAP had previously been members of the Pact of Ecological Groups, a coalition of environmental groups which support the CNDC. Future activists and officials, many of whom were biology students at the universities, met and mingled and made friends. These friendships and sympathies were important for negotiating policy. As the gulf between the governmental and non-governmental sector in Chimalapas grew, so did enmity among formerly friendly individuals. Activists derisively referred to individuals who worked for government agencies as functionaries, people lacking in autonomy and self-serving turn-coats.

Likewise, some campesino members of Maderas had previously been allied with PRI-sponsored campesino organizations. For example, (as previously mentioned) Pacheco had been a community authority when he was removed from office for corruption in 1987, a representative of the Pri-affiliated CNC (National Campesino Congress) during the late eighties and early nineties, and was currently a paid staff member on Maderas' Social Development team. Municipal authorities of San Miguel had

broken with Maderas only to later return. In 1996 the sympathetic local government of Santa María Chimalapas was replaced by a set of authorities who were hostile to the Maderas project. Maderas was subsequently expelled from the community, its members threatened with hanging if they returned. A few months after the *Foro* described below, the then sympathetic government of San Miguel was replaced by a hostile one (according to election observers, *campesinos* were paid 200 pesos and a machete to vote for the candidates with PRI sympathies). During the period of my fieldwork, the relationship between Maderas and government agencies at both the state and federal levels had become so strained that "mingling" was out of the question. Even negotiation seemed far out of reach. One government official I talked to referred sarcastically to Maderas as "saints," another derided them in mock imitation, saying "Oh, the poor people, the poor forest, the poor animals. Poor Chimalapas." In more formal interview settings, government officials almost always told me the watermelon joke: why is an ecologist like a watermelon? Because it is green on the outside and red on the inside.

One INE (National Institute of Ecology) official implied that Maderas was refusing to negotiate with the government in order to forestall a solution to the problem, implying that the implementation of a *campesino* reserve would also signify the end of Maderas' usefulness and of their internationally funded salaries. Another government official accused the group of interfering with the democratic opening in Mexico, because its members were too "red," thus suggesting guerilla ties or tactics. In this way, the group was discredited as "fringe," while the democratic opening was attributed to the state. Yet,

of the informants above, at least three had been closely allied with Maderas or its network of left-leaning environmental groups in the past. While these officials accused Maderas of profiting from the problems of Chimalapas, Maderas workers suggested that these former allies in government posts had abandoned their ideals for a salary. Partly in response to the significant presence of NGOs and their money in the region, State and federal government agencies are extending themselves to offer and confer infrastructural as well as ecological development projects in the zone. However, these projects are largely confined to the two *cabaceras*, Santa María Chimalapa and San Miguel Chimalapa, whose political decisions determine the ability of NGOs in the region to carry out their work.

Within Chimalapas, the poorest, most peripheral communities have allied themselves with the NGO, Maderas. In contrast, the leadership of the two controlling municipalities, Santa María and San Miguel Chimalapas, reject the Campesino Reserve and its supporters. Instead, they receive government support and services. Thus, a picture emerges of an extremely marginalized Maderas constituency. They control no forestry permits (which belong to the two main municipalities, Santa María and San Miguel), and live in a forest not able to sustain the usual agricultural practices. And so they turn to civil society alternatives and their visions of autonomy and ecology. Meanwhile, those communities which have most to gain by supporting the PRI, in terms of jobs on infrastructural projects, tend to do so.

NGO and government projects alike were dependent on community legitimization

and were active in imagining, creating and representing this community. To return to the invitation (which was written by Maderas):

> "The Chimalapas forest is currently the most biodiverse region in Mexico and perhaps in Central America, keeping a high degree of conservation thanks to the ongoing struggle of its indigenous communities, inhabitants and ancestral caretakers of the aforementioned territory. In the last few years, the aforementioned communities of Chimalapas have stepped up their struggle in the defense of their territories and wilderness (montañas), in the face of a concerted attack on the part of cattle ranchers, loggers and drug traffickers. As a result, they have realized the necessity of protecting their forest, taking the initiative to construct, by their own decision, an Ecological Reserve, the administration and management of which would remain in their hands. To this new model they have given the name **Campesino Ecological Reserve**. Now, the Chimalapan communities, in order to hear opinions, doubts, understandings and proposals of civil society (campesino organizations, ecologists, conservationists, academics, investigators, lawyers) about the Chimalapas Forest and its Reserve; are meeting and inviting participation en el **"FORO COMUNAL Y DE LA SOCIEDAD CIVIL SOBRE LA SELVA DE LOS CHIMALAPAS"** (My translation).

In the invitation Chimalapas is identified as the most "ecologically diverse" region in Mexico. The problem in Chimalapas is represented as a twofold ecological problem: on the one hand, positive ecological depredations endanger the forest. These are side effects of extractive capitalist activities such as ranching, logging and drug trafficking. On the other hand, something or someone is preventing the communities of Chimalapas from protecting their own environment. The solution to the problem is to constitute

Chimalapas as an autonomous unit, which would administer itself as an ecological reserve.

The land/environment is the common denominator which unites the inhabitants of Chimalapas (who live in about forty communities, few of which are linked by any direct road or path) as one community. Identity rests not in any named ethnicity (there are about fifteen different indigenous groups and languages represented among Chimalapas' 15,000 inhabitants), but in belonging to one of the communities of Chimalapas. These community members are either indigenous, non-indigenous inhabitants, and those who are ancestral caretakers. All have conserved the land through an unspecified struggle and are aware that it will be threatened if they do not take action as a community.

This community speaks with an independent voice, gaining its authority from its assertion that as it has always cared for its lands, it should continue to do so as an autonomous ecological reserve. Importantly, what is invoked here is not *the* community authority (which is a political post) but *community* authority. As such, it speaks to an organized community of people, the larger civil society community, but not its authorities. Thus, the two communities-- those who are indigenous, inhabitants and caretakers and those who are members of a civil society community--are linked in a common moral community.

In the semiology of Chimalapas (told by Maderas), politics are tainted and community is pure. Political leaders from the municipalities, whether allied with the NGO or not, were described by urban NGO staff as shifty, untrustworthy, uncivilized,

rude and sexist. All political parties were corrupt or co-optable. Electoral politics were a sham. While the municipalities were tainted by politics and power, the smaller settlements in the forest had an Edenic aura. The "people" referred to the inhabitants of the forest settlements outside of the immediate control of the powerful (and tainted) municipality. The forest setting, its beauty remoteness, isolation, powerlessness, cleansed the recent settlers of their past politicized/powerful campesino status. Representations of these communities usually included women, children, old people and animals: an association made between vulnerable places and innocent creatures. Civil Society occupies a brokers position in this scheme: self-consciously post-political, it links itself to local political actors as well as a professionalized class of NGO workers, and dreams of a future autonomy founded on unspecified "traditional" community modes of organization.

The invitation, as noted above, immediately conjures up images of the Zapatistas, who have held several "national forums" in the Lacandon Jungle. Their forums have attracted thousands of activists and NGO representatives, who are housed in makeshift barracks. The Forum in Chimalapas was similarly held in a remote and forested area, rather than in the municipio of San Miguel, which has a graded dirt road, and is close to the Juchitán (the largest town in the area) from where it is possible to get a microbus or truck transports to San Miguel Chimalapa. Instead, attendees met in Zanatepec, a small cattle ranching community, and were transported to Benito Juárez in trucks and buses. The Forum in Chimalapas was similarly held in a remote and forested area, rather than in the municipio of San Miguel, which has a graded dirt road, and is close to the

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Thus, rather than travel through the populated, coastal town of Juchitan, travelers entered Chimalapas through the much more rural landscape of the central Isthmus. This region has the hottest and most humid climate in Mexico, as well as the windiest. The drive from Juchitan to Zanapetec, which lies in between the gulf of Mexico and the Pacific Ocean, takes the traveler through one of the windiest places in the world. Small trees lie completely flat on a sea of seemingly electrified grass. The windmills which punctuate the landscape spin like tops. It is not unusual for cars to tip and people to be swept off their feet. Out of this flat landscape rise the rounded hills of Chimalapas, whose relative height(800 meters) within this tropical climate generate a cloud-forest microclimate (that is, it is colder, and always moist and foggy). From Zanatepec (a village of a few hundred people), Benito Juarez is accessible by an ungraded dirt road. There are no bridges at river crossings--during the rainy season mud and high water make the community accessible only by foot or horse.

Although the October Forum was arranged for a month after the end of the rainy season, recent storms had filled the rivers. Truck caravans bringing people and supplies to the village got stuck and overturned several times.

The road to Benito Juárez winds up to the top of a precipitous hill, after several hours finally opening out into a clearing in the forest, where Benito Juárez is nestled.

Activists involved in advocacy for Chimalapas, many of whom are urban Mexicans and have never traveled to Chimalapas itself, thus experienced Chimalapas in its most pristine "remoteness." Significantly, Maderas was absent as an overt force or "voice" at the Forum which they had organized. Only campesino members of Maderas spoke, and then wearing their "community member" hats.

The program began with breakfast on Saturday morning. This immediately lent an air of domesticity and comfort to the conference. Women from the community worked in makeshift kitchens, serving beans, tortillas, coffee and animal crackers on plastic plates and utensils, all provided by Maderas. Women from San Antonio Nuevo Paraíso set out their Chimalapas t-shirts for display and sale.

The conference opened with welcomes for the several hundred attendees and was followed by a series of speeches by political leaders from Chimalapas, who recounted important episodes in Chimalapas' agrarian struggle. In this history of Chimalapas, speakers related its past and present struggles in such a way as to unite agrarian struggles of the past with the current NGO project. The telling of community history emphasized ancestral rights (crucial to the legitimization of land tenure claims in relation to agrarian agencies) yet accommodated the fluid ethnic composition of Chimalapas. Many of its communities are newly settled by various indigenous groups. Thus, the Zoque who were once the majority in the area, and who peopled Santa María Chimalapas during colonial times, are now outnumbered by immigrants. These multi-ethnic immigrants, along with the Zoque, are reclassified as "Chimas," their identity and culture both (re)historicized

and territorially (re)defined.

Campesino leaders also recounted important episodes in the community struggle against agrarian abuses and development projects, such as the seizing and burning of Sanchez Monroy's logging equipment; and the 1989 kidnaping of Absolon Castellanos, brother of the governor of Chiapas at the time.

In contrast to this affirmation of community strength, linked both to ancient municipal rights and the rejuvenating influence of immigration, in the testimonials which followed speakers recounted their experiences of the often illegal and development process which has repeatedly threatened their own livelihoods and individual safety. For example, Doña Angela, the only female speaker and the most moving, described the murder of her husband and her eldest son, who had settled on previously "vacant" communal lands belonging to Santa María Chimalapas. These forested lands, located far from the municipality itself, had been used for years as pasture by cattle ranchers from neighboring Chiapas. When Doña Angela's family moved in with the permission of the authorities of Santa María Chimalapas to establish a new community, they were murdered by the cattle ranchers. In her testimony, Chimalapas is feminized: its victimized status underlined at the same time that the feminine role is played out. It is important to note that women, generally excluded from local decision making, were brought to protests and meetings, not only to cook and care for children, but also to symbolically underline the powerless position of the Chimas in relation to the State.

During the remainder of the conference, discussions and presentations linked

community identity to the environmentalist project. This was to prepare for a protest and march the following week in the city of Oaxaca, where there was a public representation of the environmental community. First, *comuneros* from San Francisco La Paz presented campesino maps detailing a land use plan for their area, which they completed under the Maderas Campesino Ecological Reserve project. This map showed how the community would farm and graze in an ecologically sustainable manner. Then SERBO, A.C. , an NGO which has in the past few years carried out a detailed study of present ecological conditions in Chimalapas, presented a slide show of the (at the time, unpublished) results of their recently completed evaluation:

> [These slides of Chimalapas were made] with photographs that were taken by some objects which circle the Earth and that are called satellites, that are like cameras which take images of the Earth below. These images are a little different than the photographs we take here of the countryside, the colors above all. I want to give a big thank you to the communities that above all here in Oaxaca gave us permission to visit their forest lands, accompanied us, helped us, put us up and showed us great hospitality. I believe that almost all of the communities of Chimalapas are represented here and I want to thank them for making it possible for us to carry out our study. Also, I would like to thank the organizations and foundations that supported us and collaborated in this study.

In this segment of the presentation, the speaker emphasizes the dependence of NGOs upon community hospitality--the sign of their legitimation of NGO projects in the region. He also acknowledges a debt to international funders and foundations, thus

linking the SERBO study to a global environmental project. He then goes on to outline the SERBO assessment of the ecological condition of the Chimalapas forest:

> Here in this other map we have thirty different little colors, no? And this gives one a bit of a headache but it can be simplified and we can make a pretty simple classification that would give one color, green, to all of the wilderness which is conserved. The zones or areas which show fragmentation, where the natural vegetation and the animals and plants are on the defensive, are yellow. Totally deforested areas are red. We see that the area in the municipal limits of Santa Maria and San Miguel Chimalapas contain conserved forest that are green. Zones where the forest is already losing the battle are at the entrance to Santa Maria Chimalapas, Cuauhtemoc where the forest has already lost the battle, and where right now the battle is happening--the forest is being fragmented in the northeast zone .

His use and simplifying explanations of satellite images highlights the divide between *campesino* and urban technologies. Likewise, the SERBO discussion of ecology, which uses technical terms to describe vegetation, and emphasizes endangered flora and fauna, differs from *campesino* presentations, which as we will see below, place more emphasis on poverty and lack of control over natural resources. Also important here is the fact that the areas within the limits of Chimalapas are green, and therefore ecologically healthy. Deforestation problems are encroaching upon its entrance and in surrounding areas. This fact is significant, as the speaker goes on to explain:

> This is a phenomenon that worries us ecologists quite a bit. We have a great forest here, a good forest there that is a reserve already and that is connected still.

> One could say that a jaguar can still look for his girlfriend in another jaguar here or a jaguar over there and he doesn't have to be resigned with only those that are in his own area. These are bridges of natural vegetation which the animals need. For example, the tapir and the jaguar and many birds and other animals and also plants need to intermix and communicate with others to keep themselves healthy. But these bridges are being destroyed .

Particularly interesting is the use of the jaguar's plight to describe the dangers of ecological fragmentation. If the jaguar can't move from one area of the jungle to another, he will be limited in his choice of mates. In evolutionary terms, genetic diversity will be restricted, and the species will die out. Translated into human terms (the jaguar will not be able to pick and choose among girlfriends), the image is at once sexual, humorous and accessible. It also serves as a poignant metaphor for the civil society project itself, which seeks to unite the fragmented communities of Chimalapas against powerful global processes of political and economic development. These global forces are referred to in the next segment of the slide show:

> Right now we will turn more to numbers to see what this means in hectares. We are able to say that these two areas that comprise the communal lands of Santa Maria and San Miguel Chimalapas still have around eighty percent of well conserved wilderness, sixteen percent is fragmented and five percent is already deforested but this is a very small part and if we compare it to the North toward Veracruz here we would have almost one hundred percent of red deforested a little tiny bit of fragmented and almost nothing conserved. The comuneros have shown us that here the forest is still conserved. To conserve it in the future will require a lot of effort and of everyone.

Here the speaker emphasizes that Chimalapas is still a viable forest, and he attributes this to the inhabitants of Chimalapas. The deforested areas he refers to in Veracruz are part of the same forest system that were deforested during modernization programs of the 1970s which promoted colonization, industrial timber production and infrastructural development projects such as dams (Toledo 1996). The speaker goes on to enumerate more specifically the contemporary causes of deforestation:

> If we see the ecosystems or lets say not so much ecosystems, but the soil uses of these zones that are deforested, that represent for Chimalapas five percent or thirty thousand hectares, we will see what causes deforestation. And we see, obviously, that it is the pasturing, ranching and secondary vegetation that is also linked to the pastures that causes the great majority of the deforestation. Seasonal agriculture, here, represented as AT, Agricultura temporal, is less than 0.9 percent, what it means if the AT hasn't been the cause of deforestation, that is the campesinos who grow corn and beans and all this, are not deforesting important areas of Chimalapas. Rather it is the pasturing, the cattle ranchers, the ranching which is causing the great part of the deforestation (Marco, SERBO, A.C. October 12, 1996, my translation).

Like community speakers, Marco attributes the environmental problem to predatory outsiders--cattle ranchers and loggers (often illegal agents of timber companies). His analysis extends beyond the campesino critique to conclude that *agricultura temporal* (that is, seasonal agriculture or "slash and burn"), is not the major cause of deforestation in the zone. This taps into a large academic debate carried out between political ecologists (see Painter and Durham 1998; Place 1993) -- who blame

environmental degradation on capitalist expansion into wilderness zones-- and mainstream theorists, who attribute environmental problems to population growth and primitive agricultural practices (such as slash and burn). The satellite images, which show Chimalapas to be more preserved than the areas outside its borders, and the evidence about the causes of ecological degradation, contribute to the legitimization of the Chimalapan demand for a locally controlled ecological reserve.

The next day, the program commenced with Mesas de trabajo (Work groups)-- where participants split into discussion groups. The topics were : The agrarian problem, the Campesino Ecological Reserve, autonomy, use and management of resources, and infrastructure and social problems. Each table was led by a campesino leader, who presented the results of the discussion when the group reconvened as a whole.

I sat in on the Ecological reserve discussion, which mostly involved a lot of discussion about agrarian problems that *campesinos* were experiencing. The results were presented by the group leader as follows:

> What are we going to do so that the Campesino Ecological Reserve functions? The land must be conserved. We ask that the government give the reserve legal recognition. We need to combat poverty. Poverty is serious for those who are disabled or blind. In Chimalapas we are rich but we don't know how to make use of the land. The opinion of the *campesinos* that met at table 2 is that we must organize the people and well, there were different opinions, but all had the same goals.

Eduardo's summary accurately reflects the type of discussion that occurred at Mesa 2.

Charged with discussing implementation of a Campesino Reserve, participants quickly moved on to other issues. One recurring theme was the problem of poverty and the powerlessness of community members living in a "rich" zone to combat it. This powerlessness over local resources is attributed to the imperialistic intervention of government and outside projects:

> Let's go to the next question, Who is going to do it? The government wants to impose a biosphere reserve but doesn't consult with the *campesinos*. Thus, it is the opinion of the *campesinos* that we want the community to do it, we ourselves the *campesinos*. We can care for the forests because it is ours. That is, since we live here we know how to tend it and the truth is that all is missing is recognition to be able to go ahead. No government is going to protect it because only to us is it important.We mustn't allow others from the government or from other countries come to look after us . . . we must be organized. These are the opinions of the *campesinos* that were here.

Here the speaker suggests that a biosphere reserve designation for Chimalapas would constitute an intervention and would disempower campesinos.

> We still need to address the following question: How are we going to do it? It is: The rational use of the timber, making a rule about natural resources in each community to make an internal regulation, organizing all of the *comuneros* from different communities of Chimalapas to prevent logging, and to impede the extension of [logging] permits to people from the outside. The government is corrupt and because of this we must say our piece (Eduardo, Oct. 13, 1996, my translation).

In this presentation of the results of the campesino reserve discussion, the ecological campesino reserve is mentioned only once. NGOs and international funders are not mentioned at all. Instead, the presentation begins with a discussion of poverty, and of poverty in the face of a wealth of natural resources. While the ecological problem is not described, the community role in caring for the forest is emphasized repeatedly. The problem is presented as a specifically local one, where outsiders enter the communities with logging permits, granted by SEMERNAP, the federal agency that regulates forestry. Thus, rather than seeing the ecological problem as part of a global fight against deforestation and biodiversity loss, the communities see it as a local problem stemming from the refusal of the Federal and State government to grant local control of resources to forest communities.

Both Eduardo and Marco legitimize the autonomy project through their respective representations of the environmental problem. While it is not clear how the more "global" NGO conservation vision is linked to the local autonomy project (community members don't speak specifically about how they envision conservation or understand the SERBO project), both treatments trace the roots of the problem to the same cause (capitalist development of resources). NGOs, legitimated by the community through the concurrence of two projects (saving the ecology for the NGOs and safeguarding the community territory), would also legitimate themselves within a post-socialist political climate through their alliance with international environmental groups and an international concern about ecology.

The March and the Concert

The conference also featured a dance and a concert by Domingo, who sang a sweet and melodic song about Chimalapas and her forest as well as some corridos which recounted the agrarian struggle. This was followed the next day by a *Lucha Libre* (restling match), where the *Ecologista*, dressed in a green spiderman outfit defeated the black-hooded *Deprador* (Destroyer).

After the conference, Maderas and participating community members took their message on the road, arriving in truckloads to the state capitol, Oaxaca de Juarez. On the first day there, they marched about five kilometers, from the outskirts of Oaxaca to Tule, a nearby town famous for a tree estimated to be one thousand years old.

Along the way they stopped at a school so that the children of Chimalapas could relate their agrarian struggles and their ecological problem to the schoolchildren in Oaxaca. This march of "Niños Y Viejos was intended to publicize the cause and culminated in a stop at the State Senate, where campesinos met with agrarian representatives to demand agrarian solutions and implementation of the Campesino Reserve.

The campesino contingent slept over in the Zócolo that night. They camped near their banner from the Foro: painted in bright colors, it depicted trees, deer, tapirs and jaguars amidst which were huddled a few campesino faces. Later that evening, everyone pushed aside their bed-rolls to get ready for a concert, hosted by Maderas. It featured

Guillermo Briseño of the chart-topping pop group, Mana. A more "earthy" ensemble of hippyish musicians known as Cielo y Tierra (Sky and Earth) also performed. The concert was thronged with screaming teenage girls and curious by-standers.

Government Response

On October 10, 1996, two days before the commencement of the *Foro*, a *desplegado* (accusation) appeared in *La Jornada*, a nationally distributed newspaper. It was addressed to President Zedillo, Emiliano Chuayffet, the Secretary of State, Jose Angel Gurria, the Secretary of Exterior Relations, Julia Carabias, the director of the federal environmental agency (SEMERNAP) and Diodoro Carrasco, the governor of Oaxaca. It reads:

> "The undersigned, municipal authorities of Santa María and San Miguel Chimalapas, and the agrarian representatives of Santa María Chimalapa publicly denounce the "National Committee for the Defense of Chimalapas," "The Pact of ecological Groups," and Maderas del Pueblo del Sureste,"A.C., for usurping the representation of the Chima people, with the end of obtaining economic resources from international organizations.
>
> "These Pseudo ecologists (who capitalize on the struggle of our people only by signing protests, and thus their halo comes at our expense), directed by Luis Bustamente and Miguel Angel García,[1] have been receiving 7 million pesos

[1] Both are Directors of the National Committee for the Defense of Chimalapas, an alliance of NGOs and individuals who support Maderas in their efforts.This alliance was formed in 1991, in order to stop the construction of a proposed highway through Chimalapas. Miguel Angel García is also the Director of Maderas del Pueblo.

[about a million dollars in 1996] annually from the British Embassy,[2] The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the Rockefeller Foundation, that supposedly are applied in works of ecological protection and development of our communities. However, we haven't seen any concrete result, nor received any explanation about the management of those resources.

"For this reason in the General Assembly which took place on the 14th of January, 1996 in the municipality of San Miguel Chimalapa, it was unanimously decided to expel these organizations from Chima territory, a decision reiterated in the General Assembly of September 22 of the same year. In the same way, on the 14th of May of 1996 the General Assembly of s *Comuneros* of Santa María Chimalapa roundly rejected the divisionist politics that the ecologists carry out in the congregations, censured the management of the resources obtained in the name of the Chimas and forced them to declare their leaving in light of the fact that they had not justified with work and deeds the application of the huge sums of money that they obtained using our name and the pretext of safeguarding our natural resources.

"It is for this that we ask the intervention of the Federal Government so that international support to these groups is canceled and redirected along reliable lines in a show of respect to the local authorities. These people will stop at nothing to continue receiving the money of international organizations, therefore we hold them responsible for our personal security, for the security of our families and of our lands (bienes).We want to live in peace! We want to speak for ourselves, therefore we will not accept that Luis Bustamente, nor Miguel Angel García, nor anybody speak for the Chima people. For all of the above, we deauthorize the

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[2]This refers to the British Overseas Development Agency (ODA), remamed DFID

> supposed "Communal Forum of Civil Society on the Chimalapas Forest" that they are trying to carry out the next 12th of October in our territory with the idea to disseminate the image that they represent the Chima people, and we ask ecological organizations which act in good faith to not be fooled by these supposed social redeemers (*La Jornada*, October 10, 1996, my translation).

In this accusation NGOs are accused of misrepresenting themselves as members of the community and of appropriating the representation of the Chimas. They are the predators, the Chima their prey. These "pseudo ecologists" destroy community by promoting political divisions: they fragment the community.

The document represents the NGO as a voracious outsider, juxtaposed to a helpless "Chima" who now must ask for federal intercession on his behalf. This emotional rhetorical appeal is offset by the linkage of community will to local authority. In this text, community will rests within the pronouncements of its legitimate ruling bodies. Thus, the protest argues that international foundations should give their monies directly to the authorities of the two municipalities of Chimalapas. Likewise, the protest is directed toward the highest authorities in the country and the state. While in the invitation above authority rests in civil society, in the protest, authority rests in elected leaders. Interestingly, the accusation does not apply to all ecologists (just pseudos), implying that not all civil society groups are included in this rejection. Care is taken not to reject the democratic opening itself and thereby position the government outside of it. As must now be evident, this civil society project is eminently political, tapping into the

worst fears within the government about loss of control and ethnic fragmentation. Thus, government opposition to the project is strong.

The denunciation which appeared in the nationally distributed newspaper, *La Jornada*, during the week of the *Foro* demonstrates the precariousness of NGO legitimacy. In it, The CNDC and Maderas were accused of being psuedoecologists who had appropriated the representation of Chimalapas in order to get funding from the WWF. The denunciation accused Maderas of promoting political divisions among the communities of Chimalapas. Finally, it announced the fact that Maderas had been officially expelled from Santa Maria Chimalapas, the largest and most powerful municipality, in May, a few months before the *Foro* took place. Although publicly the *Foro* was proclaimed a success, in private it was acknowledged that attendance was much lower than expected. Members of Maderas opined that this denunciation had scared villagers off. Another factor which probably contributed to attrition at the *Foro* was the sudden military presence in the area at the time of the conference. There is periodic militarization in Chimalapas, purportedly as a check against narcotraffic. However, this check clearly coincided with the *Foro* and was a deterrent to prospective attendees. This was unfortunate for the Maderas, since in part the *Foro* was intended as a public demonstration of the strength of the Campesino Reserve, and of its popularity within the communities of Chimalapas.

During this period, and in spite of the representation of community solidarity at the *Foro*, the World Wildlife Fund decided not to renew their grant to Maderas del

Pueblo. The mission of the WWF in developing countries is to fund conservation projects which can be supported at the grassroots level, and instituted by developing countries at the federal level. The WWF stopped funding Maderas because of its inability to negotiate its campesino reserve plan with the government. According to the Oaxaca director of the WWF:

> "The strategy of Maderas and the CNDC, it seems to me, is the principal point of difference between the WWF and Maderas del Pueblo. We see the problem in the same way, but have different strategies to confront it.. ..we don't want to carry out an agenda that is 100 percent political since there is little political will or space for negotiation with some interest in solving the problem and not to make political capital out of the problem" (José, personal communication, May 15,1997).

In other words, Maderas del Pueblo was so busy making its larger political points--against NAFTA, large landholders, the cattle ranching way of life, poverty and inequality--that it did nothing but draw fire from the government. What had happened in the past few years that Maderas could no longer negotiate its Plan with the federal government? How had Maderas, which has great credibility as an effective local actor, come to be expelled from one of Chimalapas' largest municipalities and cut off by a major funder?

One of the reasons for the declining legitimacy of the NGO in the main municipalities was the successful appropriation of civil society discourse and networking practices by the local government. Among the major complaints of the NGO is that the state government had established an office near Chimalapas in order to interfere politically in the community. This Delegation, located in Matías Romero, is staffed by

and reports directly to Diadoro Carrasco, the Governor of Oaxaca. It was assumed, by both Maderas workers and some federal government officials with whom I spoke, that the accusation in *La Jornada* had been planted by the Delegation.

This office also coordinates a committee pertaining to Chimalapas, made up of the heads of communities as well as government development, environmental and agrarian agencies. Maderas does not have a representative on this body, but Maderas workers claim it was their idea to create such an entity in order to cut through the complex web of interlocking agencies whose contradictory policies make problem-solving in Chimalapas so difficult. This coordinating entity was coopted by the government in order to reduce the power of Maderas. Maderas responded by backing out of negotiations concerning the establishment of a Campesino Reserve. Government officials insist that *campesinos* from the communities feel victimized by Maderas, and accuse Maderas of interfering in local politics. According to the Delegation, *campesinos* have invited the state government to take a more active role in solving problems in the area (Sergio Guerrero, personal communication, March 23, 1997).[1] Indeed, the Delegation was actively promoting its own silvicultural and agricultural projects in Chimalapas. The municipal authorities of Santa María Chimalapas were more often to be found in the Delegation office than in their own village.

While Federal officials and WWF officials with whom I spoke referred to the Delegation and its activities with repugnance, by the end of my stay both the WWF and SEMERNAP were actively cooperating with this agency and with State Institute of

Ecology (IEE), an agency more noted for its closeness to the Governor than for its ecological expertise. Both these agencies were represented at the conference cosponsored by WWF, SEMARNAP and SERBO, A.C. in June of 1997. Campesino members of Maderas attended, though wearing their community hats. They insisted that neither they nor Maderas had been officially invited. The director of the Oaxaca office of WWF denied that this was true. Whatever the case may be, this conference certainly indicated the distance which had grown between Maderas and its former allies, as well as the success of the state government in gaining a foothold in Chimalapas.

Community Statute

The WWF distanced itself from Maderas because a major priority of the WWF was to codify environmentally sustainable practices into local customary law. In 1995, they provided financial support to Maderas to work toward this goal. Maderas helped to draft a community statute which referred to a campesino ecological reserve. According to Maderas informants, this statute was drafted after a series of workshops and discussions with campesinos, who laid out the fundamentals of their usos y costumbres. On the eve of its passage by the community assembly in Santa Maria, a new set of pro-PRI authorities took office. They struck down the statute and expelled Maderas del Pueblo. By 1997, the WWF was funneling its funds into state level environmental agencies working in the area, who were now the only ones in a position to build community support for a codified ecological reserve.

During 1997 the Procuradería Agraria, an agrarian agency created in 1992 along

with the new Agrarian Law, was involved in writing and implementing a community statute in Santa María. PA officials described their role as auxiliary–they said that they had facilitated writing the statute by writing down its various clauses according to the wishes of the community. They explained to me that "usos y costumbres" refers to a customary law. They objected to the 1995 provision for a campesino reserve, saying that this was not traditional and therefore a violation of the intention of this kind of statute. But they also told me that traditional law was always subordinate to federal law. That is, communities could not encode illegal practices into law. They gave as an example that although it was customary for women not to vote, under federal law women were entitled to this right. Thus, their role was to oversee the statute, make sure it conformed to Federal guidelines and submit it to the Agrarian Tribunal for review and implementation.

Other provisions in the 1995 statute which were considered illegal by the PA concerned the assignation of authority with the community. Disputed points included the role of the municipal president, the role of the community assembly, and the role of the PA. Local governance in Santa María is the responsibility of a president of communal lands (comisariado de bienes comunales), who has jurisdiction over all municipal lands, including the congregaciones; a police chief (consejo de vigilancia) who has jurisdiction over the municipio; and a municipal president(presidente municipal), whose duties are confined to administrative issues within the cabecera itself. It is normally the responsibility of the Comisariado to convene community assemblies. If he is absent, this responsibility falls to the Consejo de Vigilancia. In the 1995 statute, if both these

authorities are absent, the municipal president becomes responsible for convening assemblies. The PA objected to this provision, saying that it violated the Agrarian Law. According to the Agrarian Law, when the communal representatives aren't available, assemblies must be convened by "twenty comuneros and the PA." This language was inserted into the 1997 statute, though when it came up for a vote comuneros opted for the 1995 language.

The PA also objected to language in the 1995 statute which referred to communal posts and the Assembly as "authorities." One official told me "there are no authorities, either inside or outside the community. The only authority is the Agrarian Tribunal." He also told me that communities which adopt usos y costumbres have the mistaken idea that this type of internal arrangement signifies autonomy. He said "they want to use the statutes to exclude the government or diminish its authority. But the idea of law based on usos y costumbres is actually a convention which comes down through Roman law."

The Mexican Antipolitics Machine: State Development Projects

James Ferguson analyzes development discourse and development projects. Development discourse sets up an alternate reality, posing a problem to solve based on incorrect analysis. The projects they set up are based on faulty premises and always fail. Why? He asks. He concludes that development projects, while ostensibly technical in character, actually play an important role in expanding state power, which is housed in these bureaucratic agencies. Poverty elimination and agricultural development thus serve as a "point of entry" to remote parts of the country for state agencies.

Clearly, Lesotho is very different from Mexico, which has a highly developed and bureaucratized state. But in Mexico, state power is both exercised and disguised (or at the very least diffused) by a proliferation of agencies which make its power hard to locate. At the same time, development discourse depoliticizes social problems, turning poverty and subsistence issues into technical problems. Just as the anti-gravity machine of science fiction suspends the effects of gravity, the anti-politics machine erases the effects of politics and the exercise of power (Ferguson 1997).

Following Foucault, Ferguson examines the "unplanned" outcomes of development planning; the "authorless" outcomes of development strategies (ibid: 20). This Foucauldian approach to power has been criticized for decentering power, or rather, failing to locate it correctly. Be that as it may, Ferguson provides a useful conception of the state based on this "authorless" condition which leads to unintended outcomes. According to Ferguson:

> The "developmental" state . . . is a knotting or a coagulation of power. If we can speak of the "development" apparatus as part of a process of "etatization," that can only be a way of saying that it is involved in the distribution, multiplication, and intensification of these tangles and clots of power (Ferguson 1997: 274).

This conceptual frame is useful in the current analysis of development in Oaxaca, where the decentralization of power proliferates agencies and increases the sheer number and reach of its tentacles. State projects fit the Ferguson model because Mexico's bureaucracy consists of an enormous number of development agencies and rural or urban development

is the dominant discursive relationship between Mexican political parties and agencies and its people.

In this era of decentralization local development agencies (multiplying daily) play a central role in local politics and the continuing efforts at state consolidation. Political goals can be camouflaged as development goals. Decentralization in this way in fact has a powerful "centralizing" effect. Political insertion into the community , as for example, when the WWF or Maderas assists the community in writing a local statute, is redefined as the valorization of the local. Paradoxically, the complete regulation of the community is valorized as a local act and attributed to the decentralization of the state.

The inseparability of development and politics is encoded in the Mexican constitution (communities have to approve any new projects in town meetings). It is also encoded through the electoral process. Although Mexican electoral politics continued to be dominated by the PRI during my research, its six-year political calendar was used to explain the failure and cancellation of projects. Candidates distance themselves from unpopular incumbents not by denouncing the party itself but by denouncing his technical programs. This effectively "depoliticizes" politics through development. Finally, the PRI can incorporate a variety of competing public agendas by establishing disarticulated agencies with different primary goals. This "knot of power" is called the government.

Chimalapas is the subject of technical projects concerning land use or the environment, administered by the following State and federal development agencies:

-SEDESOL: Secretariat of Social Development {Federal]

-COPLADE: State Planning Commission of Oaxaca

-Subdelegacion del Gobierno: Liason to State governor, located in Matias Romero

-SRA: Secretariat of Agrarian Reform

-Procuraderia Agraria: Agrarian Agency established in 1992

-SEMERNAP: Federal Environmental Agency

(Proders):Regional Programs including Chimalapas

-INE: Federal environmental agency in charge of National Parks and Biosphere Reserves

-IEE: State Institute of Ecology

These were the agencies most significant in terms of ecological planning in Chimalapas. These agencies were all coordinated through a special Subcommission of COPLADE.

The "subcommission for the Development of Chimalapas" umbrellas an exhaustive list of Mexican development agencies including those which pertain to health, education and welfare. This commission is comprised of all the agencies whose services are indicated in COPLADE'S "Microregional Development Plan for Chimalapas (1995)" as well as the municipal leaders of Chimalapas. According to the COPLADE Plan, the "general objective" of development in Chimalapas is to:

> Improve the level of life of the inhabitants of the Chimalapas zone, by a push *(impulso)* for economic development in the microregion, with full respect to its traditions (sus usos, costumbres) and forms of organization; establishing a harmonic relation with its ecological setting" (COPLADE 1995).

The COPLADE Subcommission for Chimalapas was established during the time

of the Vocalía. But in 1994, SEDESOL created a Subdelegation for Chimalapas which was made up of community representatives and government officials. Maderas objected to the Federal intervention and to the fact that the subdelegation was not headed by campesino representatives. Ultimately, the SEDESOL delegation was disbanded. In its place, a special Delegation for Chimalapas be created. This Delegation pertains to the governor of the State and COPLADE. Its Coordinator, by all accounts, was selected after much negotiation between government officials, community representatives and the CNDC. Sergio Guerrero, its director, was compadre to a Maderas family. Maderas thought they would have an ally in Guerrerro when he first took up his post in 1995. He had been involved in the Agrarian Conciliation in La Gringa in 1994. But the subsequent Subcommittee on Chimalapas–intended to link campesinos and government officials in dialogue and negotiation–excluded the participation of Maderas del Pueblo.

Subdelegation for Chimalapas

I lived across the street from the subdelegation, and went there on a number of occasions to set up an interview with Guerrero. The President of the Comisariado de Bienes Comunales and the Consejo de Vigilancia were often there. It was taken for granted among various informants that talking with Guerrero was as good as or better than talking to the presidents themselves. On one occasion, Guerrero gave a rather distressed looking President a wad of pesos–for gas money I was told. The office was staffed by a few female secretaries and Guerrero's immediate assistant. His office was guarded by two muscular bad-tempered "agronomists" rumored to be poros–hired thugs

of the government who stir up trouble and rioting. In contrast to their brutish demeanors and unwillingness to cooperate (an appointment book? G. is a very busy man), Guerrero seemed friendly, helpful and reasonable.

However, this Delegation was much-criticized (by NGO personnel, federal officials, academics). Its projects and activities had been largely confined to the cabeceras and its relationship to the town authorities was a matter of ridicule. It was accused of fomenting against Maderas in the communities. The La Jornada denunciation above was attributed to this office. Maderas accused the Delegation of coopting the Consejo General de Representantes, organized in 1992 by Maderas.

In 1997, Maderas was beginning an ecological land use plan (ordenamiento ecologico) in Sol y Luna, in the Eastern zone of Chimalapas, Guerrero had begun his own projects there. Suddenly, the community of Sol y Luna was having doubts about doing the ordenamiento. Guerrero told me that he himself had nothing against Maderas del Pueblo. However, always conscious and respectful of the wishes of the people, his agency was helping to enforce certain "internal decisions" taken by the communities. Thus, it was useless to dwell on the truth of an accusation against Maderas or an accusation against himself. The only truth, claimed Guerrero, was the community will.

IV. Sleeping with the Enemy: International Funders

"It's sort of like "sleeping with the enemy." We're asking them [the *campesinos*] to turn around and say 'we realize the government hasn't supported our rights in the past, but now we think they're going to support our rights'"(Jim, U.S. AID, personal communication. January 17, 1997).

I. Introduction

In 1991, Maderas del Pueblo del Sureste, A.C. won a five year grant to help plan and implement a locally managed "Campesino Ecological Reserve" in the Chimalapas Forest of Oaxaca, Mexico. This program was funded by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) through the Biodiversity Support Program (BSP) of US-AID, a development agency housed in the United States Department of State. Maderas fit the WWF criteria for sponsorship to a tee: operating with a joint *campesino* (rural worker) and professional staff, they were well positioned to carry out technical projects with full community support and acceptance. Linked to broad networks of environmentalists[1], Maderas had powerful connections to environment-minded government officials in Mexico (Umlas, 1998). This was a crucial fact, since the BSP:

> "work[s] with developing country *governments* and non-governmental organizations to design and implement innovative conservation and development projects to strengthen local capacity for conservation efforts (Davenport 1995: 9, italics mine)."

By the time I began my fieldwork in October of 1996, Maderas had been expelled from one of the two major *municipios* (townships), which together control the 600,000 hectares of territory that is Chimalapas. Relations with the World Wildlife Fund were

strained; negotiations with governmental environmental agencies had deteriorated; and communication with the two agencies in charge of agrarian complaints had broken down completely.

It was in this context that funders expressed frustration at what they regarded to be political intransigence and a certain ideological purity on the part of Maderas del Pueblo. While acknowledging that many of the problems in Chimalapas, including land tenure disputes, border ambiguities, deforestation, over-grazing and the like could be attributed to government policies, spokespeople from the WWF and US-AID emphasized the necessity of cooperation and negotiation, implying that to retain their funding, Maderas and their *campesino* constituency would have to "sleep with the enemy." Clearly AID officials themselves did not regard the Mexican government as an "enemy, " but they did regard the presence of NGOs in developing countries as an opportunity to expand rural democratization, and explained that the precursors for conservation are "democracy, participation and economic development" (Frank Zadroga, U.S.-AID, January 17, 1997).

Green Development

U.S.-AID is involved in dozens of park projects throughout Latin America, some in tandem with The Nature Conservancy (see Brandon et al.1988) and others with the WWF-BSP. In Mexico, U.S.-AID funds projects through the WWF in Calakmul, El Triunfo, El Ocote and Chimalapas. Chimalapas is the only proposed park that would be self-managed: the others are managed through Mexico's Areas Naturales Protegidas Program.

Parks are designed after the Biosphere Reserve model. This model became popular in the 1980s in light of the failure of many Latin American Nations to effectively manage protected areas, often modeled after U.S. National Parks. National Parks are designed around touristic consumption of nature, but prohibit human habitation and daily use of resources. This failure was attributed to the impossibility of exporting the National park model to countries with high population densities in rural areas, and high dependence on natural areas for subsistence resources and farm land on which to practice shifting agriculture (West 1991; Brandon et al. 1998).

In the Biosphere Reserve model, rural communities are permitted to use park resources. The areas are zoned in such a way that a "core" area will be off-limits for agriculture and cutting, but outer areas will contain communities and sustainable practices will be permitted. Biospheres are charged with sustaining their local populations, whose subsistence practices will in turn sustain their environments. Unfortunately, the model does not account for 1). The presence of populations who were recently settled in numbers too high to be sustained in tropical environs, or who do not have the know how to survive "sustainably" 2. The persistence of development projects in or near the area which forces area residents to concentrate on smaller and smaller available lands 3. National economic/development policy which demands economic returns (in form of trees, tourism). In sum, local residents may face an undue burden or responsibility for conservation, and their efforts may reward outsiders, including those who profit from tourism, for example (Brandon et al. 1988).

However, this model satisfies many of conservation's critics, since it does not automatically disadvantage populations found to be living in an area deemed in need of protection. Like the National Park model, the biosphere model is charged with self-sustainability. Sustainability is an equivocal term, used interchangeably to refer both to the longevity of environmental resources and the ability of a region to pull itself up by its own economic bootstraps. Sustainability is a linguistic equation which turns the debatable compatibility of environmental and economic priorities into a truism. In this equation, rich biotic resources are eternally transferable as economic resources. Besides sustainability, forests also bear the burden of the green house effect. Although forests such as the Amazon produce about half the world's oxygen, in USAID discourse, forests are greenhouse gas producers. Although the United States produces more greenhouse gas per capita than any other country, it is the developing world and their forest regions which are charged with reducing emissions.

The Maderas project is part of the Mexico Ecodevlopment program, funded by the Biodiversity Support Program (BSP) through USAID's Latin American Bureau "Environment and Global Climate Change"(E/GCC)Program. The program is a response to a congressional mandate, asking USAID to redress greenhouse gas production in developing countries. Greenhouse gases, which get trapped in the atmosphere, are thought to contribute to global warming. Brazil and Mexico were identified as "key": producing greenhouse gases through the burning of forests and fossil fuels. E/GCC promotes the development of policies and technologies in host countries which will eventually be

disseminated widely but "focus primarily on the sustainable use of forest resources because the burning of tropical forests for conversion to agricultural lands is considered to be the primary source of gases in the region and because forest resource management is the sector in which AID believes it can have the greatest impact" (Davenport and Kraus 1995).

"Sustainability" is the "philosophy" which informs AID's environmental programs. The NGO sector is regarded as the key to sustainable development: where AID money trains local groups such that conservation can continue when the money runs out. In U.S.-AID terms, NGOs are part of AID's "Green Portfolio." This is the latest addition to AID development policy, which seeks to solve problems of "health and well-being" in the developing world. Constraints to health and well-being have been identified as: the (degraded) environment, over-population, AIDS, Child survival and health, and (lack of) democracy. Recently, child health has been phased out, and population programs are being phased out slowly. Programs in the environment have increased dramatically in the past few years: from $900,000 dollars annually in the Mexico program to six million dollars in 1996. In addition, the Latin America Bureau contributes another ten million dollars and the Global bureau contributes additional funds.

USAID'S philosophy is to work with local people to get them involved in the conservation process through buffer zone management. According to Jim, with its NGO partner Maderas, the WWF will accomplish this through a campesino reserve. "We understand through the WWF that Campesino Ecological Reserve would be the most

hopeful outcome" in Chimalapas. The REC would be recognized by the Federal government and specified through some type of management plan. But the idea is nebulous because there is no existing model. As Jim said: "We are following the WWF lead on this."

But in USAID view, the Reserve should have a functioning Board of Directors, drawn from all of the "stakeholders" in the area: including campesinos, State and Federal government officials, and municipal government. Jim explained that what doesn't work is the pervasive mistrust of the government which is probably well-founded on the part of campesinos, but which has to be overcome since the Reserve will ultimately be overseen by the government. According to Aid officials, the proper role of NGOs in conservation projects is to develop management plans in their sites and to analyze environmental risks. These risks commonly include roads, deforestation from locals and commercial logging. In Chimalapas, individuals haven't the wherewithal to defend their own interests. They are subject to invasions by timber interests and cattle ranchers, and to human rights abuses by these groups. The overriding human rights problem in Chimalapas complicates matters there and accounts for Maderas' emphasis on long-term social planning.

According to AID officials, the reason these abuses occurs is due to chimalapas' remoteness, and related to this a lack of democratic institutions which would provide some oversight in this war of all against all. These institutions include education, press coverage, and accountable governmental institutions. All in all, AID officials expressed strong misgivings about the project:

> "We can't justify spending tax-payer money to promote community organization in a place like Chimalapas. We would have to spend a fortune to get real democracy going there–to teach the people how to participate in the Reserve and understand the issues involved."

According to Frank Zadroga of US-AID, the social problems in Chimalapas were so severe because historically the "Indians didn't work for their rights. They weren't informed. This allowed more powerful interests from Chiapas to come and take their land away." Frank added that this continuing state of affairs was apparent at the Foro, where there was not much community particpation in analysis of the issues. Finally, US-AID officials acknowledged that they had encouraged the WWF to cut off Maderas, and said they would like eventually to leave off work in the Chimalapas entirely.

Although the government "builds mistrust" with its policies, campesinos and the NGO still need to build "bridges and trust." According to Jim, US-Aid does not directly intervene in the WWF project. That is, the WWF is in charge of managing the project and allocating funds (so Maderas applied to WWF for their grant). Instead, AID asks for clarifications, advises them to get out of one activity or stress another:

> We sort of look over the shoulder of the orgamization and we express concerns about where those programs are going. Right now, the WWF is about to submit to us a proposal for a second phase of their activity. The first phase was five years; the second will last four years and we're in sort of a bridge right now during which we're going to conduct an evaluation of their program, an external

evaluation, that will tell us something about their successes and their failures and the places where things should be improved. We have been interacting with the WWF and the BSP since the beginning of the program, telling them, discussing with them the places that we think the program should go. One of the things they're going to be talking about during these meetings I suspect is um where the program should go in terms of US-AIDS vision of where the program should go. One of the things we've been looking for is a stronger more explicit connection between the activities we fund and actual conservation goals. And um ah we've been discussing this with the WWF for a number of years now and they in turn have been discussing this with their grantees, including Maderas. And so I think that one of two things that must be going on is that they are encouraging Maderas to develop a stronger connection between conservation goals and their activities. I think Maderas has done a lot of community organizing and introduced some innovative agricultural techniques. . . [But]across all of the WWF programs we are encouraging the groups to [develop programs] more in the context of what is going to be the finished product. . .I think that either a better connection is going to be developed between the program activities and conservation outputs–in this case program activities and the eventual declaration of a campesino reserve, because that is what the WWF is aimimg for, a campesino reserve, or there's going to be an interruption of the activities at some level–either between US-AID and WWF or between WWF and Maderas. I expect that its going to be worked out

> with Maderas. . It would be great if it could be worked out with Maderas, because they are very well-connected in the area and that would be a good organization to working through, if they are willing to adopt this approach of developing a connection between their activities and long-term conservation goals."

Jim went on to explain that the problems of drugs and ranchers in Chimalapas were beyond the scope of Maderas or the communities to resolve. Government and international efforts would be needed. Saying that the WWF would be broadening its scope to work with more groups, including other NGOs, and state and federal government agencies, Frank stressed that conflict resolution was going to be an important component of future AID projects in Chimalapas:

> "What tends to happen when groups like Maderas work strongly with localized communities is that they tend to take their side and try to find solutions just working within that sphere and sometimes all that causes is conflict between local communities and outside forces of destruction..or even the government. Sometimes communities become even more negative toward the government."

Large scale development projects, promoted and funded by agencies like the World Bank and U.S.-AID, along with national expansion policies that go hand in hand, have been cited in numerous sources for the rapid destruction of the Latin American tropics (Painter et al. 1998: Place 1993; Brandon et al. 1998). In these analyses, it is the

expansion of capital which lies at the roots of ecological destruction. U.S.-Aid officials certainly acknowledged the role of large scale logging enterprises, ranching and the like in environmental destruction. However, these observations were offered in a manner which disarticulated them from their root causes. They located the causes of environmental destruction within the incomplete process of rural democratization which characterized Chimalapas. This lack of democracy bred a disempowered populace who could not defend themselves from invaders and a local cultural profile which prevented the type of communication necessary to build bridges among competing interest groups. In their analysis, the causes of major environmental destruction were severed from the powerful groups promoting and profiting from such destruction and responsibility for change was placed on the shoulders of the local population.

The WWF: Projects

It was during the period of my fieldwork that the WWF began to abandon its strategy of funding grassroots ecological development through Maderas' long-term community planning process. The WWF began funding Maderas in 1990 in an exploratory way and in 1991 began funding its project entitled "Hacia una Reserva Ecologica Campesina." The stated objective of this project was to "generate a participatory community process that would promote the design and establishment of a natural protected area through the conscious decision of the campesinos, the planning, management and administration of which remains in their hands." This was meant to further a "global" objective:

> "to achieve self-sufficiency by increasing production and productivity in a sustainable manner using agroecological and agroforestry techniques, in order to progress from there to attend to matters such as the betterment of the quality of life of the population." (Saldebas, July 1995, p.36).

The WWF was also funding SERBO and COSECHA, a Honduran NGO contracted to assist Maderas in their agroecological projects. The SERBO and Maderas projects complimented each other. Both shared the same political-ecological understanding of the causes of environmental destruction. But whereas Maderas was responsible for the social diagnostics and social work or reserve planning in Chimalapas, SERBO was focused on diagnosing the condition of the flora and faunal resources in the zone. Although SERBO's director and a number of working members with whom I spoke agreed with the Maderas approach, as an organization they explicitly avoided political statements or entanglements which might compromise either their funding or their ability to work as impartial investigators in the communities (Salas interview, 1997).

The proposed strategy for the 1997-1998 WWF project in Chimalapas deemphasized long-term community planning in favor of a more strict emphasis on the conservation of faunal and floral resources. Although the WWF claimed that they would like to work with Maderas in the future, the 1997-98 schedule of funding did not include Maderas. Instead, WWF funding was funneled to SEMERNAP, SERBO and CONABIO, an academic group focused on the study of biological resources. An important aspect of both the Maderas project and future projects was the implementation of language in the

estatuto comunal or community statute which would institutionalize some kind of a protected area within the two municipalities of Santa María and San Miguel.

In 1995 a local statute had been drafted by Maderas, ratified by the community in Santa María but overturned or annulled by a government elected in 1996. The new strategy of WWF was to fund SEMERNAP and the community authorities to aid implementation of a community statute which would facilitate the implementation of a reserve at the local level. The logic of redirecting funds from Maderas to SEMERNAP and state and federal government agencies had to do with the fact that the new authorities of Santa María were now sympathetic to the government, and upcoming local elections in San Miguel were predicted to produce a similar turn (and they did). Moreover, since the SRA and the PA were actively working to shape the communal statutes in the communities, it was thought that SEMERNAP, a more moderate agency still invested with federal authority could help to ensure that the statutes were still crafted in a way that would promote sustainability rather than just crude development. Another goal of the WWF was to strengthen the Consejo Técnico Asesor (a government initiated coordinating committee on Chimalapas–treated below) by getting NGOs more involved, including Maderas, SERBO, WWF and SEMERNAP, to generate consensus about conservation strategies.

Local Planning: José

José, Director of the WWF in Oaxaca, which has direct contact with Maderas and Chimalapas, agreed that the relationship between the WWF and Maderas would have to change. He described Maderas as a group so involved in its own political agenda that it could not carry out the conservation project. Specifically, he cited Maderas' involvement in the many legal battles over land tenure in the area as a patent waste of time. In José's view, agrarian problems were serious, but could ultimately only be solved by the government. The government would never resolve these problems in order to aid a project it did not view with favor. But for the WWF, Maderas' misfortune, being expelled from Santa Maria, could be turned to good advantage, since a local government sympathetic to the state government would be able to negotiate agrarian problems and come to some agreement about a reserve. José predicted (correctly) that the next election in San Miguel would produce a new government hostile to Maderas and closer to the State government. Thus, the two municipalities would both be in the government camp and would be able to negotiate a reserve of some kind with WWF and the communities.

José did not pretend that this was either the most democratic or the most ideal solution. He expressed misgivings about the tactics of the state government, who were not responsive to the communities as a whole, and tended to support ranching interests, land invaders and the new speculators who had gained leverage with the changes to article 27, caciques and narcotraffickers rather than the "people who are entitled to the land." But he did think it would be the most expedient way to negotiate a protected

designation of some kind for the area. In his view, it would be virtually impossible to negotiate a solution with the consensus of the entire community, since its resources were heavily controlled by powerful local men involved in timber extraction, ranching and narcotics growing or trafficking. Moreover, many agrarian conflicts were the result of government policies which had promoted colonization into the zone. Although a Presidential Decree of 1967 had set out the limits of Chimalapas based on its claims to a colonial title, legal titles before this date had been granted to colonists. Thus, one piece of land might have several legal titles, granted to different parties. These problems would only be resolved if the government had the will to intervene. According to José, Maderas was in no position to solve these problems due to their "problems with Santa Maria. . .their unstable relations with San Miguel, [and] their worse relations with the state and federal governments in the last six years."

José summed up his perception of Maderas as follows:

> I believe that Maderas has a problem of basic survival. If they don't modify their agenda, or become more creative in negotiation, the truth is there are going to be other groups. . . and Maderas will be marginalized. . .

He went on to characterize the ethos of the group as follows:

> Maderas is the only one that is right, pure. And good is always going to triumph over evil, so one day the government is going to get tired and is going to resolve the problem. Someday the authority in San Miguel is going to change and there is going to be another, intelligent, authority, that sympathizes with Maderas and then

the masses are going to come to power and install democracy in Chimalapas.

According to José, this was an unrealistic and even dishonest position. But no one was presently in a strong position to negotiate a solution in Chimalapas. The Consejo Tècnico Asesor for Chimalapas (1995) was staffed by COPLADE people (planning, development agency with Chimalapas regional subdivision since 1989). Of COPLADE, José said:

> The only thing they know how to do is get funds in order to say 'now I'm going to make a well for water in the community, now I'm going to put in a carpentry workshop, now I'm going to build a bridge. . .

COPLADE officials were "semi-democrats," too far from the campesinos to relate well with them. They were office bureacrats with "allergies" to campesinos.He depicted government agencies as possessed of a "frightening arrogance" toward the communities, especially campesino and indigenous communities.

As for the State Institute of Ecology (IEE), the other agency working in the area (and with WWF), José was very critical of the Director, and claimed that the IEE has neither money, nor knowledge of the area, nor environmental expertise. He explained:

> They trade in "political capital" and conflict, telling the community to hate Maderas, to run Maderas out of the community, that they lose their financing, or that the IEE get their financing.

The last major agency which had presence in the area was SEMERNAP, which had problems with the IEE and few resources, but an open attitude and possibilities to be effective in the area. According to José, it was ultimately the land and its resources which paid for these political problems, in the form of more clandestine timber extraction, more ranching, more pastures and more agricultural clearings. Consequently, the WWF did not want to abandon its position in the area, which he identified as the most biologically diverse and conserved of the Northern tropical forests.

At this time, WWF was initiating a new phase of work, in concert with SERBO, an NGO which had recently completed an evaluation of the biological resources in Chimalapas, the State Institute of Ecology (IEE) and SEMERNAP (Department of Natural Resources–Federal).

Evaluation of Project

The 1995 evaluation of WWF projects which US-AID and the BSP had asked to be conducted included an evaluation of Maderas. It was carried out by an independent contractor who conducted surveys of Maderas staff, looked at their findings, and organized a workshop during which the problems found in the report were discussed and internal difficulties aired. Here, I do not concern myself with the internal problems and conflicts within Maderas revealed by this report. More illuminating than the evaluation of the group itself is the presentation of the WWF project and its analysis of the evaluation. This analysis shows how the WWF has met critics of its projects, which has been

included in a general critique of environmentalists for favoring biotic conservation over cultural survival, by appropriating a discourse about the "grassroots" which makes the WWF seem more "campesinista" than the NGO. That is, the critiques generally applied to funders are absorbed, the funder is re-represented as everything it was formerly not, and the old critique is now redirected by the funder at the NGO.

In this synopsis analysis:

> 1. U.S. National Parks and Forests serve as a point of departure. Set aside for posterity, these lands are managed by the government with some conflicts arising between people and parks. This model is *less effective* in developing countries where "immediate needs for economic growth and land distribution" must be balanced against long-term benefits of natural resource protection.

Here, the persistent problems between residents and Parks in the U.S. are given short shrift. Park management in the U.S. has favored timber, mineral interests and tourism at the expense of "long-term" environmental planning. The displacement of rural populations and the negation of indigenous rights to lands have been issues in the creation of virtually every protected area. Yet, only in developing countries are "immediate needs for economic growth" and "land distribution" cited as serious problems.

> 2. In the past, local rural populations were targeted for environmental programs in Developing countries. Yet, they were omitted from discussions concerning conservation and development policies and were victims of decisions made beyond their reach. Countries such as Mexico contain "diverse cultural groups

with historic rights" to land which pre-date environmental legislation. Their social organization and land use practices were not taken into account by planners, causing both their cultural and ethical relationship to the land to be overlooked. This caused resentment among locals, who failed to respect the boundaries of park areas. This led to illegal colonization, poaching and burning

Here, there is a false dichotomy between the cultural homogeneity of the US and the diversity of the developing world. At the same time that past disrespect of locals is acknowledged, blame for environmental problems is still placed on them, instead of the timber, cattle or national interests which promote these activities on a much larger scale.

3. "Over the last few decades there has been a growing awareness on the part of many international environmental organizations of the negative social consequences of environmental protection and the need to ameliorate these impacts as much as possible.. .In what has become a major shift in strategic focus and conservation policy, the international conservation community has begun to integrate the needs and goals of rural development with the imperatives of biodiversity conservation so that environmentally sound practices bring about local economic benefits as well. The underlying justification for this form of conservation is "sustainability", by which land use is gauged by its capacity to 'meet the needs for the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.'"(Davenport 1995:6)

In this passage, a new era of environmentalism sets out to redress the critiques laid out

above.

4. The competing philosophies which make up environmental development are addressed. Developers prioritize economics, environmentalists prioritize flora and fauna, and "other" sectors prioritize community development.

These conflicting agendas are resolved in the end:

5. "While each viewpoint has validity, each also neglects to address the interdependence of natural resource availability, environmental conditions, local standards of living and macro-economics. The task for ecodevelopment is to cultivate strategies which simultaneously account for people, economy and the environment and their interdependent relationships."

The evaluation of Maderas del Pueblo was based on interviews with government officials and activists familiar with the region, a tally of the goals of Maderas as laid out in original proposals for the project versus its actual accomplishments, and a comparison of these goals/accomplishments with WWF priorites. The evaluation also included data gathered from internal documents and interviews and a workshop conducted with Maderas staff members. The WWF found a discrepancy between Maderas' goals for environmental education and its actual practices, and between its goals of unifying the community around a campesino reserve and actual knowledge among community members about important aspects of the reserve.

According to the evaluation, Maderas was most interested in the promotion of agroecology (organics) and education about the pitfalls of pesticide use. For Maderas, this

includes negative environmental effects as well as the dependency on expensive outside resources which results from their use. This finding was juxtaposed with Maderas' poor record in environmental education and the incorporation of women into projects, which related to their apparent belief that environmental education was "woman's work." It was observed that agroecology was a popular and sought after program among campesinos, but also that Maderas personnel tended to view their own technologies as superior to campesino technologies, and to want to train rather than listen and learn. It was not clear what environmental education should entail nor why agroecology did not meet that criteria.

Another criticism of the project was that it was too narrowly focused on "social development" issues, such as land tenure and human rights. Because Maderas had argued for that the resolution of social problems is critical for any ecological solution, the WWF had initially agreed that this was an acceptable focus. But the NGO was ultimately found to be too wedded to these problems and too slow to resolve them. Related to this, the evaluation queried whether Maderas had not become too "political" to be effective in the region.

However, as a whole the project was judged to be insufficiently sensitive to local needs. For example, Maderas consistently ignored campesino interest in subsistence options such as cattle ranching. Maderas supplied the technical knowledge to make organic fertilizer, but did not supply the seeds demanded by local villagers. Ultimately, in the WWF analysis, Maderas fails because it is not grassroots enough.

New Projects: WWF Conference

During the summer of 1997, WWF held a series of conferences called "Zoning Priority Areas for the Conservation of Natural Resources and Biodiversity of Chimalapas, Oaxaca." The conferences, scheduled for weekends in May, June and July in Oaxaca City, were meant to set out the strategy for the next few years of WWF activity in Chimalapas. The sponsors of the event were WWF, SEMERNAP and SERBO. Invitees included members of the State Institute of Ecology (IEE), the Delegation for Chimalapas (whose representative did not speak or participate beyond his role as videocam operator fro the day)and a number of academics –all members of the Consejo Asesor Tecnico y Cientifico para el Manejo y Protección de los Chimalapas (a committee of COPLADE's subdelegation for Chimalapas). I attended the June segment of the conference, which was intended as both "academic" and "conservation oriented." Invited speakers included government officials, in charge of introductions and overviews, and academics and NGO workers, who spoke about the flora and fauna of Chimalapas. The conference was held in a luxurious hotel in Oaxaca, and opened with an ample breakfast buffet, loaded with fresh fruit, yogurt, eggs, meats, and bread. Attendees included officials from Mexico city in their dark formal tailored suits, academics from the United States, local bureaucrats, NGO members (all in casual city attire) and campesinos in worn button shirts, sandals and caps or hats.

In this conference, the importance of academic participation in planning for

Chimalapas was emphasized. The Director of SEMERNAP-Oaxaca (Salvador Anta) emphasized the need for sustainability and development to be compatible. Guillermo Castilleja, the Director of WWF— Mexico, reflected on the fact that schemes for grassroots consensus building were not easy to build and that before one could talk about conservation plans one really had to gather more information–which was what this workshop was designed for. Lopez Ramos of IEE reiterated the importance of the Consejo Tecnico Asesor for planning in Chimalapas.

Environmental speakers included Leo of SERBO who presented the results of the SERBo diagnostic of the actual condition of flora and fauna in chimalapas. Tom Wendt from the University of Texas reviewed the studies done of Chimalapas and Uxpanapa, concluding that not much data was available, and that more research on the flora and fauna of the area was needed. Doctors Salazar and Meave from UNAM spoke on the importance of orchids and floral diversity in Chimalapas, respectively. Professor Peterson from the University of Kansas presented his findings on faunal diversity in general, with Professor de la Maza from UNAM focusing on the importance of butterflies in Chimalapas. Several community leaders were present, most associated with Maderas. They claimed they had not been invited, though José denied this. They took on role of intervenors and the community conscience, and cast the conference as the imperialistic venture of outsiders and intellectuals. The dynamic went like this:

During the SERBO talk, Leo showed a map showing the level of conservation within communal boundaries vs. outside of communal boundaries. Comacho intervened, asking

to see the map another time. He corrected the communal limits shown on the map and then, having the floor, began what is rather a stock narrative:

> "It worries us, the comuneros, that people from afar are making decisions about Santa María . . . We don't want a biosphere reserve imposed upon us, because that won't solve the problems of the unresolved borders between Oaxaca and Chiapas. These problems have to be resolved first."

Comacho also alluded to the PGE meeting called by ecologists in 1987 to discuss Chimalapas (see chapter two). This meeting was criticized more for its "outsider" position than its agenda: it took place without the prior permission or knowledge of community members. This reference was understood by most participants and served as a warning and a judgment from Comacho. The moderator responded with exasperation to this interruption, asking audience to stick to technical questions and save land tenure issues for the next segment of the conference, tentatively scheduled for sometime the next month.

Leo responded to Comacho by explaining that since SERBO had turned over the results of their study to the assemblies of Santa María and San Miguel, it could not fairly be said that the scientists were up to anything on the sly. However, this concern was voiced again: Lionel asked whether Wendt had had permission to work in the community (granted by assembly in 1984) and whether he had given that study to the community (yes again). Lionel also expressed his interest in the studies (especially about the 900 species of butterflies in the region), and wished there was community access to them--this time in

reference to the fact that communal authorities rend to keep things like this locked up in the municipal office and often take them home with them when they leave office.

Salazar's talk and slide show, which showed a variety of orchids found in Chimalapas and also suggested that orchids might provide an avenue toward sustainable development, inspired a lot of whispered commentary from the campesinos in attendance as well as a few formal questions from the audience. Roman Alvaro (Comisariado de Vigilencia, San Miguel) said ("We don't care about any of this. We have to solve our problems first.") Lisbette, from SERBO, asked about the profitability of orchid raising compared to say, cattle. Salazar thought that due to competition from Thailand, orchids could only be a side venture, and only if focused on a few select, very pretty, varieties. Teresa, an ecologist working for SEMERNAP, expressed exasperation: ("they are always looking for the economic possibilities" in everything). A government official (INE) commented that the orchid could indeed serve as a "detonator of economic activity," which could be combined with vanilla and ecotourism in the region. Comacho volunteered: "this is just a registry of the plants the researchers are taking. We are concerned with the Campesino Ecological Reserve." Lionel didn't think much of the orchid idea either: many other activities are more profitable, such as maguey pith, palma comedor and timber.

The conference wrap-up pointed out the strengths and weaknesses of the environmental project in Chimalapas so far. Strengths included: local interest in the project, experts familiar with the problem, governmental interest in the area, and a high

level of conservation in the region. Weaknesses included: social problems, lack of information about deforestation and floral and faunal resources in the central, forested zone, insufficient personnel to carry out work in the area, and low level of information exchange among the various experts, community members and NGOs. It was also pointed out that there was a persistent problem to balance ethical and utilitarian values within the zone: that is balancing the survival of people, their resources and economics.

Discussion

A divide persists between the stated commitment of the WWF to community participation and, on the one hand, its obligations to its funders, and on the other, to its commitment to immediate conservation goals. The strategies of Maderas were too radical and political to accommodate the former. Based on gradual community organizing and re-education, they were too slow to accommodate the latter.

The relationships between and among the various personnel and agencies are complex and shifting. AID funders were fairly "flat" characters. They were distant from the problem and steeped in neoliberal ideologies and solutions. They acknowledged that government policies and landed interests were prime causes of the problem in Chimalapas, but still found solutions within the education of the ignorant Indian, who needs to be taught to protect his lands from opportunists. In this Hobbesian landscape, all humans are by nature predatory and opportunistic. Free markets are the economic corollary to our natures. Our job is to learn, as individuals, how to manage those markets to our own advantages. This kind of analysis coincides tightly with mainstream

development policies. For example, the World Bank focus on poverty has shifted from seeing infra-structural development as a prime goal and recognizes the role of governments in the misallocation of funds. But it does not acknowledge the structural role of its own policies in creating poverty, nor the role of such policies in promoting profit in the First world. In the same way, AID did not acknowledge the systematic links between illegal logging and ranching and the establishment of free markets in Mexico.

The World Wildlife Fund cannot be grouped with an agency like AID. Its focus is primarily on conservation. The failure of reserves in both the U.S. and in developing countries to accommodate locals created hostility and destruction of many reserves. Their use of the sustainability rubric is largely pragmatic. However, its projects cannot challenge the local inequalities which lead to environmental destruction and therefore must remain elitist. However, there was a marked difference between the personnel that worked directly in the campo in Oaxaca and its staff from Mexico, who were largely administrators.

The chain of command that led from AID offices to the campo was apparent at the conference. Guillermo looked like a stock-broker, sat apart and was not known to the campesinos. José wore casual attire and mixed with SEMERNAP folk and somewhat with campesinos. He had an intimate and complicated understanding of problems in Chimalapas and a deep sympathy for them.

Similarly, government officials from Mexico City, such as those from INE, dressed formally and behaved in a distant manner. Salvador Anta, ecologist and Director

of SEMERNAP–Oaxaca, had been a real ally to Maderas but was lately shifting away from them. His distance from the campo was marked in his business-like attire. On the other hand, Manuel Vargas and Artemio, both SEMERNAP officials charged with establishing trust for the agency in Chimalapas, looked rumpled and very campo. This chain of clothing, from suits to sandals, mirrored the social alliances and enmities present at the conference.

Clothing was a sign: of ideological position, of class, of professional status and of distance from the campo. The clothing of credibility in the professional world or Mexico City was not the clothing of credibility in the campo. José was a mediating figure. He related to the middle class professionals who staffed Maderas and the low-ranking officials who worked at SEMERNAP. They in turn, bridged the gap between middle class and campesino. Thus, Maderas workers and SEMERNAP workers in the campo adopted campesino-like attire and were only effective as fieldworkers if they could establish trust among campesinos. This credibility was important to maintain such a project. There was always a threat of losing it: community members always dangled that sword and did so at the conference by referring to the 1987 conference. This outsider project had always to be made insider.

For the WWF, this entailed a balancing act between maintaining community ties and maintaining funder support and credibility with the government. In this context, my own connection to community activists became important to the WWF. After the conference, participants met at a downtown restaurant for drinks and cena. I was seated

between Manuel, a SEMERNAP official who was staffing a new office recently opened in Ixtepec (Isthmus), and Comacho. This configuration was planned by José, who had remarked at the fact that I sat with the comuneros at the conference, and who wanted me to collaborate with Manuel in Chimalapas. It was in this context that I was able to observe SEMERNAP projects in Chimalapas first-hand, something I will discuss in the chapter which follows.

V. Environmental Planning in the Communities

Introduction

This chapter looks at government environmental agencies and projects and the ordenamiento ecológico (ecological land use planning) promoted by Maderas del Pueblo in Chimalapas. It shows how particular environmental projects embody and promote democratic and modernizing agendas, respectively. At this juncture, in Mexico as in other countries, environmental planning is the most expedient way to package development agendas. Since the development era began at the close of World War II, succeeding decades have brought shifts in the focus of development projects: from industrialization and infrastructure, to population control and child health (Escobar 1995). In the nineties, institutional attention began to focus on environmental degradation, particularly in the "third world"; as well as grassroots solutions to development problems in general (Place 1993; Escobar 1995; Brosius 1999). Some analysts attribute this interest in the grassroots to a fruitful critique of Western development practice that has led to the a more user-friendly kind of development (Annis 1988). In this view, local organizations and NGOs mediate between local communities and global processes to help them adapt to modernity and change (Fischer 1997). Others see the valorization of the grassroots and the local as a new way to package an anti-statist neoliberal agenda. According to Petras, the association of NGOs with the "local" and the common tendency to view them as separate from and opposed to the state obscures their dependence upon both private and

state patronage (Petras 1997). Clearly, development literature itself sidesteps the overarching critique of development and its association with economic imperialism and invokes the "grassroots" to suggest that aid agencies are willing to let the locals call the shots when it comes to their own social and economic arrangements. Nevertheless, international donors and aid agencies, national development agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are particularly interested in local solutions to environmental problems that are rooted in *campesino* (rural worker) technologies. In this chapter I will use data from fieldwork I conducted during 1996 and 1997 concerning the proposed *Campesino* Ecological Reserve in Chimalapas, Mexico to suggest that the ideological and political perspectives of developers influence the representation of what those *campesino* technologies are, and concomitantly, what kind of development it is that *campesinos* want

The institutional shift toward an environmental focus is exemplified in Mexico by the breakup of the Agency for Urban Development and Planning (SEDUE), which until 1992 was in charge on environmental planning. This agency was replaced by a social development agency called SEDESOL, which was in charge of the environment between 1993 and 1995. In 1995, environmental issues became the responsibility of The Agency of Environment, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Fish (SEMERNAP) at the Federal level. SEMERNAP is roughly equivalent to the United States Department of Agriculture.

SEMERNAP has subsumed the Agency for Ariculture and Hydraulic Resources (SARH), formerly charged with overseeing forestry projects and permits. SEMERNAP

also houses several additional agencies which are charged with environmental protection and enforcement (PROFEPA) and with the administration of natural protected areas. This latter agency is called the National Institute of Ecology (INI).

At the state level, Oaxaca's environmental planning is overseen by the Sate Institute of Ecology (IEE), created in 1995. This proliferation of environmental agencies indicates a shift in development discourse from urban planning (sprawl, population) and "modernizing" development to the environment. It also effects a cleansing, or a distancing of the state from much criticized top-down development agendas.

Environmental Planning in Mexico

At the federal level, both INE and SEMERNAP are staffed by professional ecologists, many of whom are deeply committed to conservation goals. They claim that environmental legislation in Mexico has evolved to reflect a committment to "bottom-up" rather than "top-down" planning. However, they are deeply enmeshed in a set of institutional ties which makes their ecological land use plans difficult to implement and enforce. According to Magdalena Rendon, Director of Ecological Planning at INE, before instituting a land use plan, one has to consult with each one of the agencies in charge of development in that area–including the Agency of Communications and Transportation (SCT), and agencies in charge of water, oil, minerals and tourism. This has led to a three-year pile up of unreviewed land use plans. Once, these hurdles are met, the agency must also contend with local level desires, since land use plans must be approved at the municipal level. According to Rendon, competing interests at this level were more of an

obstacle than the federal level ones (Interview, Mexico City, June 16, 1997).

In Chimalapas, this dynamic is evident. INE would like to declare Chimalapas a protected area. But the agency only has authority over federal lands. In order to have jurisdiction over Chimalapas, the zone would have to be designated a Biosphere Reserve or a Natural Protected Area (ANP), such as a National Park. But INE cannot make this designation, since under Article 27 of the Constitution only the municipalities have the power to make such a designation. But at the community level, this designation has not been accepted. Victor De La Maza, an official at INE who had worked directly in the community of Santa María Chimalapa, blamed this state of affairs on Maderas del Pueblo. He felt that their insistence on a "*campesino* reserve"–a designation which does not exist under Mexican law, was a deliberate strategy to forestall the creation of a reserve (when their internationally funded salaries would dry up).

But Rendon also pointed to institutional difficulties which made environmental protection difficult in Chimalapas. For example, SEMERNAP has recently rescinded forest permits for Colonia Cuáhtemoc, a community adjacent to Santa María that is accused of logging excessively and encroaching on Chimalapas' borders. But when the enforcement agency PROFEPA entered the zone they were unable to verify (or detain) the problem. These institutional and legal tangles complicate environmental planning. They also make environmental planning a necessarily bottom up proposition. This is why environmental planning becomes a political challenge. While Federal agencies appear to be highly professionalized or bureaucratized, state agencies become political instruments.

The creation of new environmental agencies has also resulted in a shift of personnel from these defunct development agencies. Personnel from SARH, SEDUE and SEDESOl now work for SEMERNAP. In some cases, this shift does not result in a new type of work or responsibility. Foresters from SARH are still foresters in SEMERNAP. But in other cases, personnel with no environmental training have landed top positions in environmental agencies, as will be discussed in relation to the IEE, below.

SEMERNAP

SEMERNAP was conducting several projects in the Chimalapas area, including the implementation of a local land use plan carried out by Maderas and participants from San Francisco La Paz; a tree nursery in Santa María, and projects related to the training of comuneros in productive alternatives to logging. SEMERNAP included a number of officials who had formerly worked with the PGE and/or the Vocalía. It had had very cordial relationships with Maderas del Pueblo until about 1995. In any case, SEMERNAP officials worked closely with Maderas since the local land use plans being carried out by Maderas had to be approved and registered by SEMERNAP. This agency also had an excellent relationship with the WWF.

SEMERNAP had a Federal headquarters in Mexico City, a regional office in Oaxaca City and a new sub-regional office in Ixtepec (in the Isthmus, near Juchitan). Office culture tended to reflect distance from the center. The highly professionalized, suited staff in the Mexico offices contrasted with the more casual, barn-like atmosphere of the Oaxaca offices. Regional staff were more steeped in the problem of Chimalapas,

and familiar with the communities themselves. The job of Salvador Anta, the State Director, was to coordinate relationships between agencies and funders. Funding for Maderas del Pueblo is funneld through SEMERNAP.

Salvador Anta is a biologist by training and had been involved in the early PGE initiatives in Chimalapas, and dated his involvement to 1989. He had not been a part of the CNDC, but had worked in Chimalapas in 1990 through a UNAM associated ecology group called PAIR. He eventually became Director of the Oaxaca-SEMERNAP in 1996. Anta views the problem in Chimalapas as primarily agrarian, and discussed the serious problems of poverty in the area. In his view, the current conflicts in Chimalapas had to do with the institutional interventions of the local government and a lack of clarity on the part of Maderas del Pueblo (he didn't elaborate on this).

According to Anta, there had previously been more cooperation between the NGO and the government. He referred specifically to the events of 1994, when SRA had intervened to return La Gringa/San Francisco La Paz to Santa María. It had previously been controlled by Chiapenecan ranchers and small property owners whose titles to the lands overlapped those of Santa María. In 1994, all parties seemed to be unified in the vistory over La Gringa. He related the current animosity to a battle of representivity between Maderas del Pueblo and COPLADE. This battle focused on the Consejo General de Representantes (CGR). According to Maderas, this body was created with the assistance of MPS in 1992, and was meant to be a body of representatives drawn from the many communities of Chimalapas, NGO representatives and key government officials.

This body would have assured democratic participation and accountability in the process of establishing and managing a *Campesino* Ecological Reserve. But (according to Teodosio, MPS worker) in 1995, COPLADE and the Subdelegation had constittued their own version of the CGR, omitting MPS from representation on the body.

When asked about the role of the State Institute of Ecology in Chimalapas, Anta explained:

> My impression is that more than conservation it is seeking control for the state government. The process of conservation has escaped the control of the state government because of its meager institutional presence and the State Institute of Ecology may be looking to establish a biosphere reserve jointly with the National Institute of Ecology. But more than anything it is an attempt to reclaim lost institutional ties (Interview, Oaxaca, February 6, 1997).

This heightened awareness of political contexts was reflected in even the most technical projects sponsored by SEMERNAP. Local-level staff were valued as much for their personality traits as their technical skills. Manuel Vargas, Director of the Isthmus region office in Ixtepec, sang the praises of Artemio. A forester who worked in Santa María out of the Ixtepec office, he had a "mellow" quality. He was easily accepted in the communities and could converse with *campesinos*, something Manuel did not feel he could easily do. Artemio will play an important role in the *campesino* map making workshop, part of the MPS project, below.

SEMERNAP was generally regarded (even by MPS) as an institution with a real

ecological committment. Its employees at the State and regional levels had a complicated and firmly grounded understanding of the conflicts in Chimalapas, the perfidy of the government, the tenuous role of Maderas del Pueblo. Most functionaries with whom I spoke agreed with the Maderas del pueblo construction of the problem. However, some subtly shifts had taken place. Whereas alliances between SEMERNAP officials and MPS had been very strong, these ties were beginning to weaken.

In chapter three, I discussed how as Maderas del Pueblo became increasingly marginalized from the cabeceras of Chimalapas, the WWF had begun to shift its funding from MPS to SEMERNAP and to strengthen its ties to the state government. At the SEMERNAP/WWF conference in July of 1997, Javier, the Director of the WWF, had introduced me to Manuel Vargas, the director of the regional SEMERNAP office in Ixtepec. He suggested that I also distance myself from MPS, and arranged that I accompany Manuel on a SEMERNAP sponsored field trip (discussed below).

Manuel claimed to have roots in the political left, though he would not discuss this. But at the same time, he blamed the left-sympathies of MPS for detaining the reserve process in Chimalapas. According to Manuel, SEMERNAP was having difficulties carrying out their work in Chimalapas. Aside from funding problems, their work in San Francisco La Paz (pertains to Santa María) was being held up by MPS. MPS had completed local ecological plan (ordenamiento ecologico) there in 1995. SEMERNAP was in charge of "follow-up, " which has to do with ratifying and registering the plan at the Federal level. But the authorities in SFLP were holding up the process, due to the

negative influence of MPS. When I asked whether the community might not be reacting this way out of distrust of the increasingly hostile state government, Manuel became defensive:

> "I don't relish eating off the same plate as Guerrerro (State Delegate, see chapter 5). But MPS doesn't want to put its ecological plans into effect until the revolution comes. It is not going to come."

This sentiment was echoed by Ignacio Piña, Director of Environment at the Oaxaca SEMERNAP. Piña was involved in the Vocalía, and worked in the campo in Chimalapas during this period. He described the Vocalía process as participative, saying that the communities had had a very clear vision of what they wanted (a solution) and what they didn't want (government intervention). Although Miguel Angel Garcia "paints a different picture" he had been deeply involved in the process at the beginning, but had left when an ideological split occurred between himself and Esteva. This split had caused Esteva to turn to the government extreme and Miguel Angel to the anti-government, NGO extreme. According to Piña:

> MPS is a group dominated by one ideology and one and a half ideologues (this is a reference to the fact that one of the original founders of MPS was Sylvia, Miguel Angel's girlfriend, now the administrative director)–a cult of personality. Reading history, you know how dangerous that is. No matter what your ideology, how correct it is, it can't be mandated by one "big man." Social change cannot be imposed, as we saw with the cultural revolution in China.

Piña went on to explain that MPS has been radicalizing and isolating itself. The state government, suspicious of NGOS, has been putting the squeeze on MPS, creating more distrust on the part of MPS, which is now rejecting even its friends. Moreover, the state government has been gaining power in the area because groups like MPS and UCIZONI cannot solve the problems of poverty in the area or provide the services people need. Referring to the democratic opening in Mexico, he concluded that the democratic process requires cooperation, not radicalization (Interview, July 1997).

In contrast to the "pragmatic" views above, Teresa, an employee of SEMERNAP, expressed disgust at the recent turn of events which had "politicized" SEMERNAP and forced them closer to the state government. She related the history of the creation of the State Institute of Ecology as follows:

> I was invited to work with SEDUE in the early nineties in ecology, though SEDUE really wasn't equipped to do anything besides urban development. In 1992, when Julia Carabias became the National Director of SEMERNAP, she traveled to the Oaxacan coast and was scandalized to find out that a stae so rich in natural resources had no ecological agency of its own. We began to push for the creation of such an agency. When the IEE was finally created, I went to work there. But the director Lopez Ramos was entirely a political animal–with neither interest in nor understanding of ecology.

Teresa later quit and went to work for SEMERNAP. In her story, the IEE, created to oversee environmental issues, was coopted by state political interests.

State Institute of Ecology

In stark contrast to the technical expertise of SEMERNAP, was the State Institute of Ecology (IEE). This agency is headed by a civil engineer and staffed by urban planners formerly employed by SEDUE. These men are charged with creating an ecological land use plan for the State of Oaxaca, although they have neither the expertise not the tools by which to do it. Their role in Oaxaca was regarded by informants from Maderas, from SEMERNAP and from the WWF as purely political.

The office of the IEE was located in an upscale residential neighborhood close to the center of Oaxaca. Fronted by a high wall, its gates opened into a peaceful and verdant garden. Its new and modern offices contrasted to the utilitarian and distinctly unluxurious offices of SEMERNAP, where the bustle of employees and groups of milling *campesinos* gave off the distinct impression that work was being accomplished. At the IEE, time seemed to stop in the relative quiet of the inner sanctuary. The director inhabited an enormous carpeted office, and he sat behind a desk in a dark formal suit. Adjacent was a secretarial pool, where an inordinate number of young mini-skirted women giggled and gave themselves manicures. It was clearly the final resting place of deserving functionaries. This agency was closely allied with the Subdelegation discussed in the previous chapter. In response to my question "what is the work of the Institute of Ecology?" Arturo Ochoa Canales, assistant to the director, replied:

> The State Institute of Ecology, together with the Agency of Agriculture and Forestry, is in charge of reviewing the programs of the communal authorities. This

> year, the IEE is beginning a program to attend to the petitions of the municipal presidents and has their support because they want help in making sure that NGO and international aid gives them the economic and technical support that the inhabitants of Chimalapas need to develop their own distinct programs of conservation and ecology. They have had some assemblies in which they have asked for the departure of some NGOs that are working there but still have achieved no concrete results. In this sense, the government is respectful of the decisions of the municipal authorities.

He went on to explain that the communities wanted Maderas' international support from the ODA to be canceled, and redirected to the local authorities. Although Ochoa was unconcerned about the implications of a megaproject in the region, and vague about ecological plans for the region, by implying that it can redirect international funds from the NGO to the community, this agency has allied itself to that part of the communities which wish to expel MPS.

Maderas del Pueblo and Local Environmental Planning

As previously noted, the *Campesino* Reserve would be a protected area, but does not correspond to any designation now set up under Mexican environmental law. Moreover, local communities and the NGO have rejected any attempts by the government to establish a more traditional sort of reserve, such as a Biosphere Reserve. They claim that in order to forestall environmental deterioration, the social problems in the area, including land tenure disputes and land invasions, need first to be addressed. They also

cite Mexico's poor record of controlling ecological deterioration within protected areas and the fact that Mexico's federal protected areas are subject to federal exploitation of resources. Meanwhile, both government agents and NGO activists are doing political work in the communities to promote their respective ecological visions.

Through their *campesino* Reserve, MPS hopes to establish a de jure autonomy, by carving out spaces in existing Mexican laws. One strategy is writing a reserve into the *estatuto comunal*, or community statute. The other cornerstone of this strategy is the *ordenamiento ecologico*, or ecological land use and planning program of the Federal Environmental Agency, INE. Under Mexican environmental law, INE hopes to carry out a grand scheme of geographical mapping and land use planning. Ecoregions are envisioned as a series of nested levels. The largest is North America, and includes, perhaps not surprisingly, Canada, the United States and Mexico, NAFTAS original signatories. Mexico and then its various regions make up the next levels. Finally, land use and planning can be done at the municipal and sub-municipal level. The new law is careful to state that this land use planning can be carried out by qualified non-governmental and community technicians.

This sub-municipal level of planning is what interests MPS. They envision their *Campesino* ecological reserve not as a one federally demarcated zone subject to federal oversight, but as the natural outcome of many many small land use plans, carried out by the forty-odd communities in Chimalapas. These land use plans would be binding once registered through SEMERNAP. In Mexico, under Article 27 of the Constitution,

municipios have the ultimate jurisdiction over development in their own territories. Thus, communities could conceivably develop their own land use plans, using the technical criteria required by the federal and state governments. These plans might include prohibitions on certain types of development which are being actively promoted in the region, such as agribusiness projects and plantation forestry.

The implementation of this project requires that the NGO participants raise consciousness of the need for and implications of the Reserve. MPS workers believed that the low impact, organic farming methods and sustainable forest management plan envisioned for the Reserve were not only appropriate technologies, but also reflected actual *campesino* technologies. In some cases, new methods were being taught to *campesinos* who were migrants to the area and had never farmed forest soils. In other cases, *campesinos* had lost knowledge of simpler and less expensive technologies used by an older generation. MPS workshops in organic agriculture were popular and well-attended. Farmers working in forest soils were interested in methods that were both sustainable and cheap. Most workshops were informal and took place on the plots of the farmers themselves.

The WWF, as a funder of the project since its inception, was aware of the popularity of the informal workshops. But it was primarily concerned with the rapid and verifiable implementation of the *Campesino* Reserve Project itself. This meant having a management plan in hand and tangible proofs of environmental expertise among the *campesinos*. Thus, in more formal forays into the communities, MPS conducted mapping

and planning sessions for the Reserve using Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), a methodology favored and strongly recommended by the WWF. PRA uses a series of diagnostic tools such as surveys, questionnaires and conceptual exercises such as maps and ven diagrams. The goal of the methodology is to elicit local understandings of particular problems and to encourage grassroots participation in whatever project is being deployed. For local NGO workers, an aspect of legitimizing and institutionalizing any project was its ratification by community members within community law, a process that tok place in assemblies closed to outsiders.

In May of 1997, I attended a land use and planning workshop in San Antonio Nuevo Paraíso, a new settlement that belongs to the jurisdiction of Santa Maria Chimalapas. SANP is one of the smaller, newer and poorer communities that makes up MPS' constituency. Settled in 1988 by Mixtecs from an arid region in Southwest Oaxaca, these *campesinos* are learning to live in this humid but fragile and infertile zone. They do not have unlimited access to the timber surrounding their village, either to clear or to harvest.

Although learning "traditional;" technologies to survive here, these technologies are not traditional to this particular group of people (but rather, to the soil type itself). As one of the town's leaders pointed out: "When we arrived here we thought it was paradise–so much water, everything green. But after a season or two the corn yields really fell off. We are interested in these workshops because we want to know how to keep our corn yields high without clearing more land." The problem he refers to here is that

tropical soils are acidic; tropical forest fertility is dependent upon the tree root system that binds nutrients into the soil. During this workshop, *campesinos* were asked to outline the steps necessary for building a house. This process, well-understood by the participants, was related to the less well-understood process of community mapping. Familiar materials such as wood and palm were related to the technical materials of map making, ranging from colored markers to geographic satellite positioners.

Later, villagers finished drawing and coloring maps which indicated the location of each community members land, showed what was grown or raised there, and where activities such as hunting, clearing, grazing or gathering could appropriately take place. For example, the maps indicated that steep forested areas should be zoned for "Protection"--that is, left alone, that forested flatter areas could be used selectively or inter-cropped. These minimal use areas were designated for "Conservation". Finally, flat areas with relatively rich soil, such as near rivers, could be farmed, and were designated for "Use." This workshop was meant as a final planning session, at the end of which *campesinos* would adopt the land use plan into their communal statute. This was emphasized by an NGO worker:

> "Just like you have to plan how you are going to build the house, it is necessary to plan how we are going to do the ecological land use plan. Organization is what is super-important. To be well-organized, that is that we all be in agreement in what we are doing, that we are all content with the planning and the design of the model. That is why in this workshop we are going to think about an assembly

> where you are going to discuss your rules and also your maps, the technical map to be able to make a technical-*campesino* model.. Making an ecological land use plan is not easy. . .already we have been a year doing this, but the thing is not to leave things half-done. . .(p. 7, SANP transcript, May 7, 1997)."

But for MPS, organization was not only for the realm of map-making. Its relevance to community stability and well-being was not only related to environmental preservation and agricultural sustainability. It was also related to community autonomy and permanence. This workshop was meant as a final planning session, at the end of which the *campesinos* would adopt the land use plan into their communal statute. This was emphasized by an NGO worker who led the discussion:

> Right now there are things the government is doing. It is changing the forestry law. . . it is giving priority to those communities which grow a plant called Eucalyptus, a plant that if you grow, they pay you but then the land is not going to be yours, it is going to be the company's.. . if you grow Eucalyptus it leaves the land poor, dry, if you have a river and you grow it there, it leaves everything dry and sterile. . . if they come to you with this proposition, don't fall into the trap. (Terso, P. 8)

Next, an NGO member advised the *campesinos* that the Mexican government was planning a mega-development project in the region, which would include a tranisthmenic high speed rail and a number of industrial and agricultural projects that threaten to turn the isthmus into a border zone. After enumerating these possible developments, the group

leader said:

> If in some way you managed to give a legal meaning to your ecological land use plan it would be like a tool to protect yourselves from these types of things. You have an internal communal statute and your ecological land use plan. It shows you have a type of organization and consciousness that is very advanced–consciousness of conservation and management of resources. This is very meaningful since now it would be more difficult for changes to be made in the use of the soil in this territory by outsiders. That is, they would have to go over your heads to get around these internal rules (SANP transcript, may 7, 1997).

On the last day of the three day workshop, community members were asked to meet together to approve the land use plan. They returned undecided. There was some confusion about the terms preservation and conservation and what that meant in terms of land use. However, the main problem lay with the fact that some of the men were uncomfortable with the fact that this plan would have to be submitted to SEMERNAP (the environmental Agency) to become official. "I want to have kids with my sweetheart" joked one man. Getting serious, he asked, "if all these lands are in preservation" he said pointing to the map "where will my children find a parcela?" or as another man put it:

> we're going to be working the land and in a while SEMERNAP is going to tell us no, you are violating the law because you are sowing here in a conservation zone (P. 67 back side)."

Although clearly MPS itself was concerned with buffering the community from state intervention, and offered community mapping and ecological land use plans as a viable *campesino* tool against that intervention, community confidence in this strategy was not as high as they had hoped. It is also possible that despite WWF confidence in the effectiveness of PRA, the formal classroom-like setting of the workshops and the paternalistic tone of the activities undermined NGO efforts to make common cause with the community in this particular moment.

SEMERNAP Field Trip

In July of 1997, I accompanied representatives of SEMERNAP and a busload of school children from Santa María Chimalapas on a field trip to Los Angeles, Oaxaca. This community lies near the border of Veracruz, in lands which once belonged to Chimalapas. They were settled by landless colonists in the '40s and '50s within communities granted to them by Presidential Decree. During this era, government programs encouraged the clearing and colonization of tropical forests. These 'empty" lands promised to endow landless peasants and even create a rural middle class based on a kind of tropical midwest. This area was once heavily forested, but now completely deforested and largely devoted to agriculture and cattle.

Antonio, a forester from SEMERNAP, explained that the trip was intended to raise awareness about alternatives to logging as a livelihood. He explained that these children would not be able to cut trees when they grew up, since aside from any possible future protected status, the forest just wasn't as abundant as it used to be.

Our host, Reyes Sanchez, was seventy years old, born in Puebla, but had arrived in Los Angeles in 1957 after working as an agricultural laborer in Veracruz. Now a successful fruit grower (and good friend of my rancher landlord, Guzman), he lectured the assembled children on the productive potentials of fruit. Reyes told his history as one of personal and environmental redemption. Arriving by river, the only transport available then, Reyes saw the *ejido* transformed from wilderness to pasture:

> I am seventy-something years old and I know what work means. Arriving to these parts forty years ago, in this *ejido* Los Angeles where you are right now, I saw with sadness how there were so many lands that were not being worked. Then there were many wild animals and I was afraid because I had to go to the *monte* and there was danger of [encountering] tigers and lions and other wild animals. In these times, one didn't eat beans in this place, but rather practically all game. Deer, pheasants, many wild animals that were here then have been wiped out. And we are wiping ourselves out. We don't try to reproduce all what God gave to us all, but rather destroy it throughout Mexico.

But Reyes Sanchez found a way to live with what nature had provided and to make it reproduce and flourish. Noticing the presence of *naranja cucho* or *naranja lana*, a wild orange tree, he had the idea to grow these seeds in viveros (greenhouses, but means more like a tree plantation here). In Veracruz, it was a common practice to graft orange trees, and he wanted to do this. His friends criticized him and chided him, saying that he did not have the skills to carry out such a project.

He explained how he collected 400 oranges to remove and plant their seeds, and then once the trees had grown, grafted them to make them produce oranges. He asked the children what fruit trees already grew in Santa María and told them which ones could be reproduced through grafting. He also discussed how the oranges could be marketed in the region. Finally, he encouraged them to each start a vivero on one hectare of land, using this method. At the end of the trip, he loaded the bus with sacks of oranges which could be used for seed.

This presentation showed how available plants could be cultivated, at no cost, for production and profit. After the lecture, we toured the tree viveros, the storehouses and the boats used to transport the oranges down the river. Reyes Sanchez emphasized that *campesino* knowledge, such as his, needed to be shared and disseminated. A highly practical project, given the realities of the limitations of current forest-based subsistence in Santa María, the experience was also riddled with ironies. Los Angeles was a strange model of the future to use on the school children. Belonging to once forested lands, and lands long ago pertaining to Santa María, it was completely deforested. The project offered by Reyes Sanchez was in this sense rather post-apocalyptic. Another irony had to do with Reyes Sanchez himself. He lived in a relatively large concrete house, which however basic, does signal wealth in ejidos like Los Angeles. His side yard was completely taken up with an enormous satellite dish..

During this field trip, children from Santa María Chimalapa were told that they would not be able to live off the forest, as loggers or carpenters, as their parents had. Los

Angeles was a village of the future–treeless but productive. The solution being offered was market-driven "modern" agriculture as opposed to the "traditional" model of sustainable subsistence agriculture proposed by the NGO. above. At the same time, by virtue of the fact that it was promoted by a local, it was presented as a traditional *campesino* solution. In this model, the *campesino* appeared not as a member of a community, but as an entrepreneur. The association of SEMERNAP with this presentation showed the narrow frame of the SEMERNAP vision of environmental preservation. The creation of an ecological reserve in Chimalapas did not imply a departure from global models of both behavior and economies for the future.

In contrast, the MPS project to establish a *Campesino* Reserve represented an alternative model, in the sense that it envisioned a future which was linked to an imagined traditional past based on a reclaimed *campesino* knowledge. Social organization in this reserve was inseparable from a liberating political project and a reliance on strong community organization.

Having noted the differences in these two community workshops around ecology, it is important to note that these projects were not entirely separate. The NGO was using a model of ecological land use planning outlined by the federal environmental agency; SEMERNAP was in favor of the *campesino* reserve project and had worked with MPS on land use plans in several communities, including the one mentioned above; and both SEMERNAP and MPS had a working relationship with the World Wildlife Fund.

As previously mentioned, during the time of my fieldwork, MPS had become

estranged from SEMERNAP and the WWF. The latter agencies perceived the MPS project as inappropriately political and technically deficient. Finally, the marketing of subsistence agriculture in San Antonio Nuevo Paraíso reflected the lack of alternatives available to the smaller communities of Chimalapas. They were granted permission to settle by the two *cabeceras* (Santa María and San Miguel) but did not have unlimited access to the surrounding lands. Children from Santa Maria, on the other hand, were community members with full rights, whose range of choices for the future were somewhat broader.

The ironies and the conflicts of these workshops was underlined by two double-edged uses of *campesino* technology. In the first, villagers in San Antonio Nuevo Paraíso used geographic satellite positioners, the ultimate high-tech tools, to record the boundaries of their *parcelas*: boundary problems and ambiguities being the oldest of *campesino* complaints. In the other, Reyes Sanchez used his satellite dish, an ostentatious reminder of globalization, to sort orange seeds, thus representing it as a useful *campesino* tool.

VI. Detonating Development: The Megaproyecto in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec

"The object of Fisker, Montague, and Montague was not to make a railway to VeraCruz, but to float a company. Paul thought that Mr. Fisker seemed to be indifferent whether the railway should ever be constructed or not. It was clearly his idea that fortunes were to be made out of the concern before a spadeful of earth had been moved. If brilliantly printed programmes might avail anything, with gorgeous maps, and beautiful little pictures of trains running into tunnels beneath snowy mountains and coming out of them on the margin of sunlit lakes, Mr. Fisker had certainly done much."

--Anthony Trollope, The Way We Live Now, 1875, p.63

Introduction

Together with national and foreign investors, the governments of Oaxaca and Veracruz are currently beginning the implementation of a large development project that could potentially transform economic and social life in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. The Program for the Integral Development of the Isthmus de Tehuantepec promises to modernize and democratize an area of Southern Mexico so indigenous, rural and poor that urban Mexicans jokingly insist it belongs to Guatemala. The project is intended to expand industry, modernize oil production and processing plants, develop agribusiness and industrial forestry and improve transportation to facilitate the rapid movement of goods for the world market. According to government spokespersons, the project will create jobs, increase the wealth of the region and bring it in line with the rest of the

nation.

This project has engendered a great deal of opposition from social groups and indigenous communities. They regard it as a force of underdevelopment, and view foreign investment in the area as a threat to local sovereignty. Invoking the Liberal period (1854-1911) of Mexican history when financial speculators from the U.S. and other foreign nations set their sights on Southeastern Mexico as a global transportation link, the opposition suggest that the project will benefit investors at the expense of local self-determination and community development. Thus, they have renamed it the Megaproject, as though to attach an ungraceful gringo prefix to an uninvited neo-liberal intervention.

In fact, sovereignty is a sensitive point in Mexico, due to past U.S. interventions and the economic alliances with foreign powers made by the pre-revolutionary Liberal regimes. In this chapter I will argue that globalization and neo-liberal development in Mexico are interpreted within a pervasive discourse of national sovereignty: both its proponents and opponents express their views through a nationalizing script.

In 1821, at the time of Mexican independence, the American dollar was calibrated against the peso. In China, which was silver-poor, the peso was an important currency of exchange. Mexico was poised to be a world power. But a combination of elements, including an external debt inherited from Spain and the incomplete consolidation of the Northern frontier, led to the loss of two-thirds of its territory to the United States after the Mexican-American War (1846-48). The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo (1848) ceded California and the Southwestern states to the U.S. In order to avoid further territorial to

the U.S. and damage to the nationalist reputation of the Liberal regime, President Juárez granted the U.S. transit rights in its Pacific ports and across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. This agreement was formalized in the McLane-Ocampo treaty of 1859. However, the treaty was never ratified by the U.S. Congress because of the outbreak of Civil War.

Soon after, the French invaded Mexico, installing Maximilian, Archduke of Austria, as Emperor and briefly ousting Benito Juarez (1862 and 1867). Although the legacy of Benito Juárez is highly contested, the struggles of the emergent Mexican nation against foreign imperialism during his administration are powerful nationalist stories for all Mexicans.

After the defeat of Maximilian, Juárez and later Porfirio Díaz embarked upon a modernizing project, through which Mexico inserted itself into the world market. Liberal theorists thought that building infrastructure such as transportation and industrial expansion in the agriculture sector would stimulate stagnant economies. Under Díaz the southeastern states of Oaxaca and Chiapas were especially targeted for development. Dependency school critics of modernization have argued that by trading natural resources and agricultural products for foreign capital, Mexico became dependent upon the influx of foreign capital for its internal development, but that profitability depended upon a poor labor force and cheap exports (Cardoso and Faletto 1973; Frank 1969). Thus, it is essentially "development" that keeps Mexico poor.

Although Juárez was interested in attracting foreign capital, it was Porfirio Díaz who was responsible for dramatically increasing foreign investment, from 200 million

pesos in 1857 to over one billion in 1911 (Chassen 1990, 5). During the Porfirian era, railway construction was a national priority. Liberal policy makers explicitly connected railway construction in Southeastern Mexico to their project to stimulate the economies of Oaxaca and Chiapas. The railway system increased from 1, 074 kilometers of track in 1880 to 19, 280 kilometers in 1910 (Ibid).

In his study of the impact of railway construction upon Mexico, John Coatsworth has argued that railway construction failed to stimulate economic growth. Instead, it served as a conduit for the export of raw materials to the United States, stimulating U.S. mineral companies and other industries dependent upon cheap natural resources. Moreover, rail lines constructed in remote areas of the Southeast, rather than having a modernizing effect on production and social relations, actually served to revivify a disintegrating hacienda system, which remade itself into modern agribusinesses. Combined with a dependency on the flow of foreign capital, the Porfirian development agenda contributed to a regressive redistribution of wealth and investment in Mexico (Coatsworth, 1984).

The contradictions within the Liberal period provide a see-saw of interpretations for proponents and opponents of neo-liberal development. On the one hand, for most Mexicans Benito Juárez is a nationalist hero. He set out to modernize the nation by disempowering the Catholic Church and breaking up latifundias. He sought to balance the threat of foreign intervention with the need for foreign capital, and he wrested control of the country away from Maximilian. Thus, modernization serves as a legitimate discourse

tied to nationalist dreams for proponents of the project. On the other, Porfirio Díaz' administration tipped the balance of national policy toward foreign investment. His thirty-year dictatorship undermined the Republican values promoted by Juárez, and reinforced the power of large landholders.. For opponents, development projects hark back to the abuses of the Porfirian period, which was the catalyst for the Mexican Revolution and its call for land redistribution and a protectionist State.

Opponents have waged a tremendous media campaign in which the transportation aspect of the Megaproject has become a central symbol. Since the Megaproject proposes a railway or highway to modernize transportation across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, its opponents represent this neo-liberal project as a resurrection of liberalism. In a conference hosted by activists and intellectuals called the Transithmenic Megaproject: the Other Side of the Mirror, the absurd and surreal world of Alice in Wonderland was invoked to connect the two historical periods.

Development and GeoPolitics

In Chimalapas, activists have framed local history is framed around centuries of resistance to land usurpers, timber barons, and other developers: with those who promote the Megaproject merely the latest manifestation of the geographical objectification of the zone. The Isthmus region, described by colonial observers beginning with Cortes himself (Moro 1844), has been noted for its abundance of floral and faunal resources, its beautiful forests and its attractive natives (Williams, 1852). However, its premier value was consistently assessed to be in its development potential: including its strategic location as

a transportation corridor between the Pacific and Atlantic oceans and to the southern states of the United States It was explored at the behest of the Mexican federal government and the governor of Veracruz in 1824, as a locus of colonization and a commercial route (Toledo 1995). In 1842 Santa Anna granted the Spaniard Jose de Garay a concession to build a canal across the zone. This did not come to pass, but resulted in a geographic study by Caeytano Moro and Manuel Robles. According to them:

> The capitalists, as soon as they colonized these lands, would flow into these parts and would make the value of the land and its products rise quickly, since a great part of the riches of the civilized world would pass through here; with boats it would be possible to establish rapid exchange with all parts of the world so that it would bring the excellent products of this territory to the best markets (Moro 1842, in Toledo 1995, p. 59).

In 1852 John Jay Williams and his expedition surveyed the region, arguing for its geographical and climactic suitability as a Canal site and region for (Non-Indian) settlement. His published survey, made for the Tehuantepec Railroad of New Orleans, a Louisiana based company that was considering constructing an interoceanic route, notes:

> The geographic position of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec would secure [for the Rail Company] once and for all the vast trade and immigration from the Atlantic portion of the U.S. territory and the new state of California in the Pacific (Williams 1852, quoted in Toledo 1995, p. 60).

Strategic and military North American interest in the area was also strong. According to

American Admiral Schufeldt who reconnoitered the Isthmus in 1870:

> "a canal across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec is a prolongation of the Mississippi river toward the Pacific Ocean. It converts the Gulf of Mexico into an American lake. In times of war the Gulf can be closed to all enemies" (Chassen 1990:25).

However, even Porfirio Díaz was inclined to be cautious about U.S. plans for the Isthmus. Ultimately, the concession to build the transisthmenic railway was granted to British Company, Pearson and Son in 1902. Pearson happened to be a close friend of Díaz. Called the National Railway of Tehuantepec, Pearson's company finishes constructing the railroad in 1907. It was badly constructed by the standards of its day. However, until the Panama Canal opened in 1914, the railway bustled and the ports of Salina Cruz and Coatzalcoalcos grew tremendously. The coastal areas began to produce oil and company towns sprang up along the railroad route and near the ports.

Soon after its construction, the Mexican government nationalized the railway, acquiring the huge debt incurred for its construction. Thus, it has been suggested that the whole project was then, and is now, an exercise in financial speculation (Megaproyecto Juchitan). Nevertheless, dreams of a transisthmenic canal appear in the earliest colonial accounts describing the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, and continue to this day--although generally a high speed rail has been favored over an actual canal in recent times.

The interoceanic canal as a development dream was a recurring motif in Central America as a whole long before the selection of Panama for the canal site in the Liberal Era. While interest and financial speculation in a Mexican canal waxed and then waned, it

was the Panama canal which was ultimately carved out of what was once Colombian territory. The canal, which was in operation by 1914 (Ruíz Cervantes, 1994: 28), was financed by the United States in return for a one hundred year concession. Since then, the United States has regarded the Panama Canal as an important site for both military and economic reasons. But its one hundred year concession ended in 1999.

At that time, the Canal reverted to Panamanian control, diminishing United States privileges in the zone: including the right to transport goods and personnel free of tariffs, and the right to control and monitor international trade and travel. This transfer, combined with the fact that the Panama Canal can no longer keep pace with the volume of shipping traffic in the region, has revivified the intracontinental competition to host the next and best Isthmenic Canal.

Whether and where to build a new, more modern, canal has become a subject of contemporary study and consideration in Mexico, Nicaragua, and Columbia. Shades of the liberal era returned as Central American governments again touted new canal projects which they presented as the most favorable to US strategic interests, in anticipation of the impending reversion of the Panama Canal to Panama (Mendoza Morales, 1996; Ochoa and Assoc. 1996).

In the Isthmus of Tehauantepec, an actual water canal is not currently being proposed publicly. However, the specter of Panama has raised concern among activists in Mexico that the transportation aspect of the Megaproject is intended to replace the Panama Canal. In their view, the canal has not really been ruled out, but rather replaced in

favor of a high-speed rail, which will be part of a larger overall project to develop the transportation and productive resources of the region. While many state and financial interests favor such development, among leftists the interoceanic railway raises fear about international meddling in local affairs. This fear resonates deeply with Mexico's most cherished collective obsession--that of national sovereignty.

The Megaproject: Instrument of NAFTA

> "Carlos Slim [The richest man in Latin America] is Mexican, but he is more transnational than many foreign capitalists, that's why today, with these projects, its no longer a struggle against one foreign power, we are not in the age of imperialism, when Maximilian governed, its is a struggle against transnational capital" (Miguel Angel García, Director of Maderas del Pueblo, quoted in *El Imparcial*, August 26, 1997).

The railway project under consideration is a small part of the "Megaproject" being proposed by the Mexican government. As indicated in the quote above, the government of Mexico is courting investment to finance this major development project in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec (Oaxaca and Veracruz). This "Megaproject" will create new infrastructure for transportation, electricity, industry, forestry, agriculture and fishing, each sector constituting a discrete "detonator" for development in the region. According to government and industry spokesmen, the project will reduce poverty in the Isthmus and make this region competitive with other world areas rich in natural and human resources.

The stakes are high: speculation in the project runs to the billions of dollars; while hundreds of thousands of acres of tropical forest, countless indigenous communities and local commercial enterprises stand to be affected. The high speed train would traverse the Isthmus, connecting the gulf of Mexico with the Pacific Ocean. The ports of Coatzalcoalcos (Gulf) and Salina Cruz (Pacific) would be extensively modernized (Ochoa and Associates). Opposition to the plan is strong and organized in the Isthmus, although the Megaproject has commanded a relatively modest amount of national or international attention.

As peripheral geographically, historically or politically as the Isthmus of Tehuantepec may seem even to most Mexicans and Mexicanists, the current regional struggle over the Megaproject comes out of and reflects the broad social, political and economic changes which are transforming daily life across the globe. To its proponents it is a project which will, for better or for worse, bring Mexico's Southern periphery into line with a more modern, more prosperous albeit less Indian Mexico. In sum, it is a symbol of both national and gobal integration.

Its opponents believe that the megaproject is a means to extract the natural resources of this region, to complete a process of conquest and colonization (as though to drain the last drops from its open veins). In particular, plans to build a new railroad across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec echo the Panama Canal and suggest the ceding of territorial sovreignty in the area. Thus, the megaproject, made possible by constitutional changes instituted to make NAFTA possible, is a potent symbol of neoliberalism in Mexico.

The Megaproject, according to Maderas del Pueblo, will divide the country in two, transforming the Isthmus into a militarized canal zone, fragmenting the communities along with the forest, creating a region where neither indigenous cultures nor endemic species will have a place. Conversely, funding local projects and indigenous initiatives in Mexico would strengthen the diversity which marks both its people and its places (Communications Director, Conference, Al Otro Lado del Espejo).

Along the same lines, global capital is faceless and nameless, hard to locate and difficult to fight. Global capitalists may have been born Mexican, but they have lost their culture and their identity. In turn, they will think nothing of selling their own lands, nation and peoples. The Megaproject will dismantle rich local cultures and disrupt traditional subsistence; it will disrupt a thriving local mercantile patterns and destroy the environment.

But the trope of foreign capitalist invasion is managed and manipulated in such a way that both foreign and national capital are shown to undermine both Mexican and regional culture. Remarks such as [If we don't stop the Megaproject] "we will all be speaking English-- let's hope so, anyway, its easier than Japanese" still play very well and get their point across. But it is also emphasized that times have changed: the relative simplicity of U.S. or French imperialism is a thing of the past. The Mexican government and Mexican investors, along with foreigners, participate in a new global system (General Assembly, Maderas del Pueblo, May 17, 1997).

This discourse counters the argument from the government side for carrying out

the Megaproject. According to the government, the Isthmus is a poor region which, being five percent below the national average in various economic indicators, needs development. But just as the opposition relates its concerns to larger ideological issues, so too did government spokespeople. They were seriously concerned about social unrest which would threaten the modernization and democratization of the country. Where the NGO's of the Isthmus saw themselves contributing to a kind of political coming of age for Mexico, and envisioned a kind of grassroots democracy, the government saw guerilleros.

Selling the Project

Editorial comments that appeared in Oaxaca's newspapers welcomed the Megaproject on economic grounds. For example, an article entitled "Maquiladoras in the future of Oaxaca" celebrated the fact that fifty national and international companies were interested in investing in the Isthmus region. Using Korea as a model nation, the author suggests that the presence of maquiladoras would "reactivate the economy at all levels, implying the entrance of foreign capital and translating into a source for jobs and a higher level of life for the family." Maquilas would prevent Oaxaca's youth from having to migrate to the United States (Villamayor 1997).

In January of 1997 representatives of the state government of Oaxaca went on tour to promote the Megaproject, making stops at some of the major municipalities on the Isthmus. They arrived in the dusty, hot windblown towns toting a bewildering array of computers and armed with *PowerPoint* they generated a slick slide show worthy of

Madison Avenue.

In Matías Romero, their audience was a mixed crowd of local professionals, workers, campesinos, activists and municipal authorities. The speakers emphasized that the proposed transportation project was **not** intended to compete with the Panama Canal--but rather to make the Isthmus itself a competitive region within the world.

The transportation project would in fact merely compliment an ambitious industrialization plan, including the installation of maquiladoras, forestry plantations and petrochemical plants. The new goods thus generated would be brought to market via the new high-speed rail. According to the government, the rail line, far from transforming the Isthmus into another Panama, would boost local prosperity by linking the Isthmus to world markets. Rather than compromise national sovereignty, the rail would help bring the region up to par with the rest of Mexico--thus in a sense making it more a part of the nation.

For an investment of 14 billion pesos, the 11 proposed project packages (encompassing 64 discreet projects) were projected to create 11,000 jobs. The 11 projects had 11 "critical aspects for implementation":

1. Political, social, business and institutional consensus
2. Regional promotion
3. Regional approval
4. Regional land use plan
5. Plan for infrastructure and industrial parks

6. Information/promotion

7. Regional council on development

8. Plan for business promotion

9. Support group for social participation

10. Communication strategies

11. Ecological land use plan

These critical aspects seemed designed to meet the dissent that was already known to be brewing. Critics of the project worried that it was a top-down intervention, that it would bring profits to distant capitalists without local benefits, that the process was not participatory and that it would cause ecological damage, particularly to the coasts and to Chimalapas.

Notwithstanding the tables and charts and computer graphics, citizens and community groups did express strong reservations and doubts during the question and answer period. They were especially doubtful about the claims for job creation, and a number of audience members questioned whether economic benefits from the projects would accrue locally. They pointed out that Matías had already lost 600 jobs with the decline in the railway. They asked why, if this project was to be directed by business, business representatives were not at the meeting. One woman pointed out that the oil refinery in Salina Cruz had caused terrible coastal pollution and a demographic explosion. Others They wondered if small producers would benefit and whether the project had any funds built in for education and health.

The municipal president of San Miguel Chimalapas used the question and answer period to raise the question of the fate of Chimalapas. His concern did not hinge directly on ecology, but on natural resources. Although hostile to NGOs working in the area, Leandro Morales echoed similar concerns: that the Megaproject could be a scheme to clean out natural resources, to tap into the considerable water sources of the forest of Chimalapas, and later to take advantage of a cheap labor supply for maquiladoras.

Perhaps not surprisingly, a great deal of opposition has arisen to the very idea of "Megaprojects." Between 1940 and 1970, Mexioc underwent dramatic industrial development, transforming itself from a rural to an urban nation. During this period, the tropics of Southeastern Mexico were systematically deforested in colonization projects that opened new lands for campesino settlement and monocrop production. In addition, the timber, mineral and water resources were tapped to provide for the growing needs of the nation. In the Chimalapas area, huge, inefficient and technically flawed dam projects (see Bartolome and Barabas; Evans, 1994) resulted in much loss of property and the relocation of thirty-five thousand people, many to forest lands in nearby Uxpanapa, now deforested, dry and infertile. Many of the recent colonists in Chimalapas are refugees from the Cerro de Oro dam project. Between 1940 and 1960 a timber company operating in Chimalapas removed vast quantities of timber. Mexican ecologist Alejandro Toledo has called the development of the Isthmus and surrounding areas "one of the greatest social and ecological tragedies in the history of the modernization of Mexican society" (Toledo 1995, p. 139).

Even among locals who are hostile to the ecologists, the memory of the construction of the original transisthmenic railway still irks. As mentioned previously, the railway which currently winds through the Isthmus was built behind the standards even of its day, contributing to the curtailment of Matías Romero's glory days as a thriving railway hub in the first half of the twentieth century. Regarding the proposed plan to build a high speed train in place of the present obsolete system, a former PRI Mayor and grandson of a railway engineer from Louisiana who had settled in Matias Romero, made the following comment:

> They are always saying that the railroad is going to be fixed. . . [When the Engineer Olguin visited recently proposing to renovate the railway] I asked him through which route the railroad would pass. He said in the same place it is now. We are going to use the [existing] infrastructure. Which is to say that this Engineer hasn't ridden a train. . If the engineer who came as the governor's representative would ride the train, he wouldn't need to ask the railway workers about anything, he would notice. But if he were to have asked the railway workers about the tracks, the workers would have told him that the tracks have many curves and a few very steep hills and thus this impedes the rapid transit of the train (Guzman-Clark, 1997).

The presentation closed with a government call for social solidarity behind the project and a warning that some unnamed groups were receiving funding to disrupt the development process. But expectations of local scepticism were what undoubtedly

influenced the government decision to keep the Megaproject a secret during planning stages. Thus, while a proposal for the Isthmus project was elaborated by the firm Ochoa and Associates in May of 1996, and leaked to the press a few months later, government officials, including those in charge of the proposed transportation project, continued to deny any knowledge of the proposed plan. By the time the state government of Oaxaca had gone public with the proposal, and taken it on the road in January of 1997, opposition to the Megaproject was already strong and well organized.

Among the vocal opposition are environmental organizations, left-leaning parties, and supporters of indigenous autonomy who reject the principles of party politics. However, as shown above, perhaps testament to the historically umbrella nature of the PRI, many pro-government informants also expressed doubt and opposition to the project

Opposition to the Project

In August of 1997 Maderas del Pueblo and UCIZONI, an Isthmus based human rights group, jointly hosted a conference about the Megaproject, which was attended by almost one thousand people from NGOs, local communities and universities. This conference called "The Isthmus is Ours" was very effective in putting the Megaproject on the public agenda. Thus, whereas there had been little news coverage of the proposed project in the preceding months, the megaproject was almost daily in the news for the weeks just before and after the conference (August 1997). Here it was stressed that government estimates of the benefits of the project are overblown and environmental damages underestimated. Instead of pork-barrel development fiascos, capital should be

put toward local projects to reinforce and strengthen local cultures and land use patterns. Thus like the Zapatistas in Chiapas, the social movement against the Megaproject in the Isthmus has linked ethnic identity and local development with sovereignty and political autonomy.

EL Istmo es Nuestro was preceded by months of planning. Several smaller conferences held throughout the Spring were sponsored by various NGOs and community groups around the Isthmus and the state. By March, planning and promotion for the August conference were underway. *El Istmo es Nuestro* took place in Matias Romero, Oaxaca. The conference featured a number of important guest speakers and lasted three days. In attendance were a number of influential Mexican scholars, journalists from major daily newspapers, and international observers.

Soon after the conference, a rash of newspaper articles appeared accusing Maderas del Pueblo of using its international funds (WWF) to plant marijuana and promote guerilla activity. It is generally acknowledged by activists as well as politically moderate government officials that these accusations are planted by less moderate elements of the government, namely officials in the employ of Oaxaca's state governor or of his closely controlled state development agencies.

In government discourse, the organized opposition to the megaproject is not only a great annoyance to those who would propel the Isthmus into the 21st century. It is also a threat to Mexico itself. It is a given in the late nineties that free markets and democracy are equated in the discourse of global politics. Mexico, famous for its so-called

democratic opening and its turn away from state protectionism is often touted as the "proof" of this equation. In governmental discourse the democratic opening is a vague and wonderful thing, which belongs exclusively to parties and groups who espouse free market ideologies. It is threatened by those same non-governmental organizations, social movements and burgeoning political parties which criticize Neoliberal politics. These last social actors, who to many academics are the "marker" of democratic opening, are subject to the usual accusations of representing dangerous, or perhaps more importantly, unfashionable socialist, communist or guerilla ideologies. In a 1997 article in La Jornada, the President of the Association of Mexican Bankers nicely summed up this position:

> "The poverty that 40 million Mexicans suffer is the result of the many years delay caused by galloping populism in the country during the seventies and the great increases in population. Some people with bad intentions or without knowledge of the theme attribute the origin of the political economic crisis to the free market that Mexico has been employing in the last few years, and they call this neo-liberalism. But neo-liberalism in Mexico is a myth. When traditional communist and socialist doctrines came crashing down, the followers of these doctrines were left without banners; they didn't know what to say or who to attack (Del Valle, quoted in La Jornada, October 17, 1997)."

In government discourse it is this element which, critical of the neoliberal political-economy, is a threat to Mexico's burgeoning democracy as well as its unity as a State. In particular, the spreading movements for local political control and indigenous

autonomy are seen as a threat to national sovereignty. They will fragment its wholeness and create many foreign states from within.

This battle over the Megaproject is not only fought out in public forums and newspapers. It is also waged in the juridical realm. According to Mexican environmental law, all development projects have to be preceded by an ecological land use and planning study. According to the Mexican constitution, these plans have to be approved by the municipality to be affected. Thus, in order to initiate a forestry plantation on the lands of Santa Maria Chimalapas, for example, its appropriateness would have to be established through a land use plan, and this plan would have to be approved by Santa Maria's town assembly.

The government agency in Oaxaca which is charge of carrying out the territorial land use plan for Chimalapas is the newly created State Institute of Ecology. The agency is directed by an urban planner, and staffed by architects, symptomatic of the recent change in vogue from urban development to ecology. Upon inquiring about the ecological advisability of the Megaproject, I was told by a representative of this agency that "the project comes from the federal government. They wouldn't suggest doing it in the first place if it were going to be harmful to the environment." Although the agency has almost no technical staff--which would include geographers, cartographers, biologists, anthropologists, etc., it has completed a land use plan for the entire Isthmus region. It must now be approved by the affected municipalities, including Santa Maria and San Miguel.

Meanwhile, Maderas del Pueblo has completed two land use and planning studies for communities in Chimalapas. They argue that land use plans (such as completed by the State Ecological Institute) done on a broad regional scale will not work. The plans ought to reflect actual land use patterns and realistic future uses--and so must be done with the knowledge and participation of particular communities. Thus, one cannot do a plan on the municipal level, let alone a regional one. Maderas hopes to complete enough plans to cover the entire territory of Chimalapas. These would have to be approved by the two municipalities of Chimalapas.

Thus, both activists and state government representatives need access to local leaders to promote their respective agendas. In 1997 town elections in San Miguel Chimalapa a pro -PRD government was replaced by a pro-PRI one. According to the ex-president and members of Maderas del Pueblo, community members were given 200 pesos each (twenty-five dollars) and a machete per household to vote for the PRI-supported candidates. Santa Maria Chimalapas has had pro-PRI or pro-government presidents for the past two years. Members of Cadich, an NGO created by community members of San Miguel Chimalapa, are convinced that the State and Federal governments rigged the recent elections in order to install puppets, and that these puppets will be manipulated into ratifying a land use plan which will give the green light to the Megaproject.

According to a 1999 article by Carlos Beas of UCIZONI, a number of projects are already up and running, to the benefit giant transnational corporations. These include a

giant iron mine in Sola de Vega, and a foundry in Salina Cruz initiated by the Grupo Acerero del Norte. Petroleum exploration has intensified, and Shell is interested in capitalizing on any possible privatization of PEMEX.

The U.S. forestry company Planfosur is expanding its plantation forestry activities into Matías Romero. SEMERNAP is allowing them to establish plantations on lands formerly used for agriculture and cattle. Finally, personnel from the Agency of Communications and Transportation (SCT) have been looking into the possibility of a developing a new highway across the Isthmus (Beas 1999).

The Megaproject is a real plan which is all ready underway. But it is also a powerful illustration of the current crisis in Mexican politics. On the governement side, the megaproject is a symbol of modernity, technology, progress and growth. On the opposition side, it is a symbol of oppression: signifying ethnocide, ecocide, and the death-by-sale of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. According to a diverse group of NGOs and social organizations who came together as "The Regional Commission Promoting the Sovereign Development of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec," the government has coopted the terminology of the opposition, claiming that the Megaproject will protect national sovereignty, local commerce and the environment. In this way, they hope to equate their own goals with those of the opposition--representing themselves as activists for the people. At the same time they hope to defuse the social groups--by painting them, if not as armed rebels or guerrillas, at least as retrograde pessimists, dinosaurs in this age of optimism.

Conclusion

The irony in the relationship between civil society, its funders and the government must now be very clear. US-Aid insisted that democracy in Chimalapas could only be advanced through "organization and communication" between the "stakeholders" of Chimalapas: such as *campesinos*, cattle ranchers, loggers, and government agencies. Ideally, an NGO like MPS would act as some kind of neutral arbiter among these interests. Yet ultimately, this civil society solution did not prove satisfactory to its funder. On the one hand, the visions and goals of MPS did not center exclusively on immediate technical solutions to the environmental crisis in Chimalapas.

On the other hand, the only arbiter in the region which had the power to generate organization and communication among the scattered communities of Chimalapas proved to be the state government. Thus, under the aegis of democratization a project intended to amplify the community voice through "civil society" was transformed into an opportunity for the state to insert itself further into the community. By the end of 1997, when I left my fieldsite, Chimalapas had no protected designation, no ecological reserve. Negotiations over the community statute were at a standstill. Tired of the truckloads of delegates and officials, NGO members and anthropologists at their town assemblies, they had stopped showing up for the meetings altogether.

My study represents a relatively small window to view a much larger and longer term project. It happened to span a period of real crisis and contradiction, and thus I fear, in writing tends to obfuscate the gains and contributions made by Maderas. Certainly, I

believe that my study provides an important caution in regard to reliance on international or development funding when it comes to projects dedicated to fundamental social change. But Maderas represents an important ongoing project in the area. I think this contribution lies partly in their role to detaining development projects, to advocating for land tenure disputes in Chimalapas and to providing needed information and expertise in legal and human rights matters. But perhaps more importantly, it has contributed to an ongoing project for the cultural construction of an ecological community; it has helped to create the possibility for the imagining of an alternative to the dominant development model. It is part of a larger global project, demonstrated by far away WTO protestors in Seattle and Zapatista neighbors, to create meaningful community based on democratic principles and social justice. I believe this can be accomplished, but that it will not happen in a day, nor without critique and re-examination. In particular, I think it is important to reconsider amorphous categories like democracy, community, autonomy, and civil society, and to recenter concepts like class, and exploitation as well as the state and its politics, all of which after all, remain operational at the local level as much as the global level.

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