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# IN THE NAME OF THE LAND

Organization, Transnationalism, and the Culture  
of the State in a Mexican Ejido

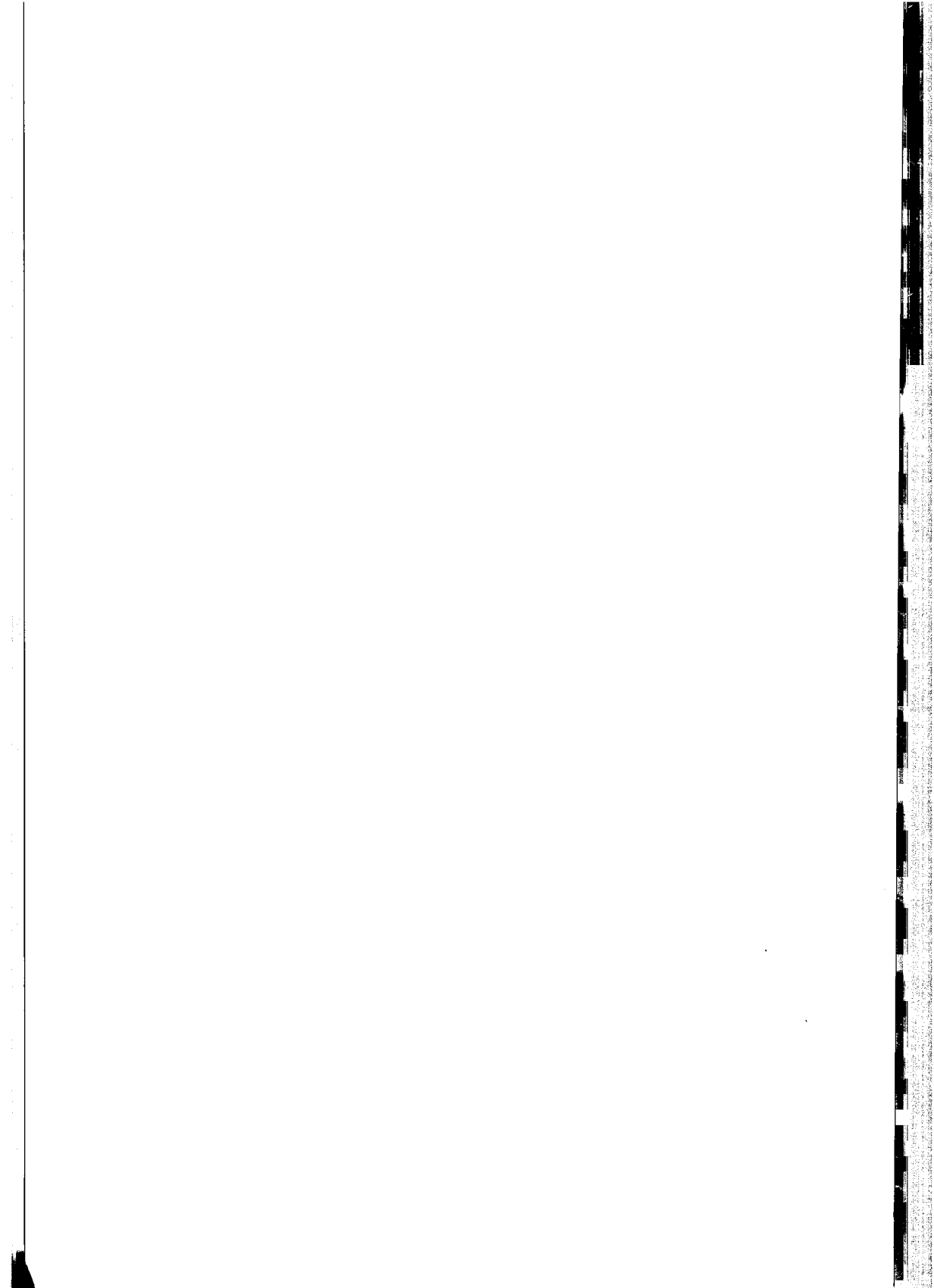
Monique Nuijten

## Stellingen

1. "Property is not a relationship between people and things but one between people about things" (Sabeau, D. (1990) *Property, production, and family in Neckerhausen, 1700-1870*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 18).
2. Imagination, reflective talk, and story-telling are essential elements of the organizing process (this thesis).
3. In Mexico there is much more freedom than in the USA since in Mexico rules can always be bent or "bought", whereas in the USA rules are applied much more strictly (ejidatarios of La Canoa, this thesis).
4. Brokers do not necessarily have a role in effectively connecting communities or peasants to the "state", of in effectively "filling the gap" between local and higher levels, but they do certainly play a central role in the "imagination of state power" (this thesis).
5. One can give practical suggestions for developing certain forms of organization but one should be aware that one may influence but can never "control" the organizing process (this thesis).
6. "If we want to understand the mechanics of power and organization it is important not to start out *assuming* whatever we wish to explain" (Law, J. (1992) Notes on the theory of the actor-network: ordering, strategy and heterogeneity. In: *Systems Practice*. 5(4) p. 380).
7. Much of the literature on the "empowerment of the poor" and "consciousness raising" has a "disempowering" effect since it denies the "poor" the capacity to judge their own situation and develop their own organizing strategies (this thesis chapter 10).
8. Governmental techniques and procedures do not necessarily lead to the creation of subjectivities and identities in line with existing dominant orders but may develop in routines and rituals with their own "re-enchanted" meanings (this thesis).
9. Modernity has its own enchantments, rituals, and mythologies (this thesis, cf. Comaroff, J. and Comaroff, J. (eds) (1993) *Modernity and its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa*. Chicago and London: the University of Chicago Press).
10. Most organizing develops as the side-effect of formal rules and institutional structures and takes unintended forms (this thesis).

In the Name of the Land: Organization, Transnationalism, and the Culture of the State in a Mexican Ejido

Proefschrift Monique Nuijten  
Wageningen, 21 december 1998



# **IN THE NAME OF THE LAND**

Organization, Transnationalism, and the Culture of the State  
in a Mexican Ejido

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**Organization, Transnationalism, and the Culture of the State  
in a Mexican Ejido**

Monique Nuijten

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To my parents



# CONTENTS

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

i

## CHAPTER 1

### ORGANIZING PRACTICES IN THE MEXICAN EJIDO:

#### A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction: the Coming into Being of a Research Object	1
The Ejido in Academic Debates	3
Coming to Grips with "the State"	8
Organizing Practices	11
Force Fields as Fields of Power	17
Methodological Considerations	23
Organization of the Book	29

## CHAPTER 2

### HISTORY, STORY-TELLING, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF COMMUNITY

Introduction: History, Master Narratives, and Story-Telling	33
Agrarian Struggle and Land Reform in the Valley of Autlán	36
A Disconcerting Experience with Local History	40
Life and Community after the Establishment of the Ejido	46
Story-Telling about Local Heroes and the Discourse of <i>Cacicazgo</i>	51
Factions, the Kinship Idiom, and the Construction of Community	56
The Village: its Festivities, Gossiping, and Scandals	63
Conclusion: Local Histories and the Construction of Community	67

## CHAPTER 3

### THE EJIDO AND VILLAGE LA CANOA

Introduction: the Ejido and a Transnational Village	73
The village and the Regional Setting	74
Household Economies and the Distribution of Ejido Land	78
Differentiation among Ejidatarios	83
The Importance of Migration	86
On the Ideology of Land	90
The Role of the Ejido in the Organization of Local Projects	93
Conclusion: Land, Politics, and Organizing Practices	98

## CHAPTER 4

### LAND, GENERATION, AND GENDER IN A TRANSNATIONAL EJIDO FAMILY

Introduction: Households and the Ideology of the Family	103
The History of a Household	106
Organization of a Household and the Patriarchal Ideology	109
Households Within Transnational Networks	116
Searching for a Solution for a Son who Failed in the United States	120
Another Son Returning from <i>el Norte</i>	124
Changing Gender Relations	128
María Becoming an Ejidataria and the Struggle around Family Resources	132
Conclusion: Transnationalism and the Peasant Life Style	135

## CHAPTER 5

### ORGANIZING PRACTICES AROUND INDIVIDUAL EJIDO PLOTS

Introduction: the History of Land Transfers and Land Transactions	139
A Basic Contradiction in the Agrarian Law	141
Land Distribution at the Start of the Ejido	145
Migration and the Renting out of Ejido Land: a Risky Endeavour	151
A Myriad of Transactions and the Fragmentation of the Land	157
The Many Elements Influencing the Inheritance of Ejido Land	160
A Serious Inheritance Conflict: the Lagos Brothers	171
Organizing Practices Around the Sale of Ejido Plots in La Canoa	175
The Story of a Famous Illegal Sale of an Ejido Plot in La Canoa	177
Conclusion: Organizing Practices within Multiple Force Fields and the Role of the Law	183

## CHAPTER 6

### ORGANIZING PRACTICES AROUND THE EJIDO ADMINISTRATION

Introduction: in Search of Leaders and the Flow of Action	189
The Central Role of the Ejido Commissioner	192
Different Factors Influencing Ejido Management	196
Who is Managing the Commons?	201
Ejido Meetings	208
The Unpopular Position of the Ejido Commissioner	214
Reflective Talk and Two Contrasting Discourses of Organization	217
The Ejido Elections of 1991: the Preference for a Colorless Commissioner	220
Conclusion: Decentered Management, Access to Resources, and Forms of Control	224

## CHAPTER 7

### THE "LOST LAND" I: THE PRIEST AND THE LAWYER

Introduction: Land Conflicts and a Different Approach to State-Peasant Relations	227
Predicament of the Conflict	230
Fifty Years of Fighting the "Enemy"	235
Resuming the Fight against the <i>Pequeños</i> in 1991	239
The struggle begins: <i>Licenciado</i> Salazar	243
The letter to the Mexican President	245
More Dealings with Salazar and Growing Doubts	251
Shifting Constellations and Individual Frustrations	255
Alternative Projects	260
Conclusion: the Decentered Labyrinthine Bureaucratic Machine	263

## CHAPTER 8

### THE "LOST LAND" II: THE ENGINEERS

Introduction: Officials, Ejidatarios, and the Culture of the State	267
The MAR Engineer Serrano Arriving in the Village	269
A New Broker: the Gatekeeper in Mexico City	275
The Priest Visiting the Head of the MAR in Guadalajara	279
The Second Engineer: Castañeda	283
Distrust, Conspiracy, and Dealing with Contradictory Information	288
The Third Engineer to Arrive At the Ejido: Morales	293
Conclusion: Modern Myths and the Culture of the State	299

## CHAPTER 9

### INSIDE THE "HOPE-GENERATING MACHINE"

Introduction: Officials and Institutional Projects	303
The Interrelation between Politics and the Bureaucracy	304
Officials about La Canoa and "Normal" and "Abnormal" Irregularities	310
Officials Theorizing about Corruption and the Ways to Fight it	315
The Reform of article 27 of the Mexican Constitution	320
Young Officials Dealings with Ambiguous Institutional Environments	323
The Project of the Internal Ejido Rules in a New Institutional Environment	330
Conclusion: Officials in a World of Contradiction	338

## CHAPTER 10

### ORGANIZING PRACTICES IN THE MEXICAN EJIDO: A CONCLUSION

Introduction: Organizing, Power, and Development	343
Organizing Practices in Multiple Force Fields	344
Returning to Resistance, the Culture of the State, and State Intervention	345
The Role of Organization and Education in Development Debates	349
“Modern” Organization versus Existing Organizing Practices in the Ejido	352
Practical Implications	358

### APPENDICES

1 Land Reform and Ejido Legislation in Mexico	363
2 Central Actors and Political Divisions in La Canoa	369
3 The Romero and García Families	371
4 Ejido Commissioners of La Canoa and the <i>Planillas</i> of the 1991 elections	374
5 Main Actors in the Struggle for the “Lost Land” in 1991-1995	376
6 Schematic Overview of Organizing Practices in Different Force Fields	378
Glossary	380
Acronyms	381
References	383
Summary	395
Resumen	399
Samenvatting	403
Curriculum vitae	409

## Tables

3.1	Distribution of ejido plots between different types of households in La Canoa	80
3.2	Area of rainfed and irrigated land in the ejido La Canoa in 1993	83
3.3	Distribution of irrigated land and rainfed land between ejidatarios in 1993	84
3.4	The seven ejidatarios who possess the largest area of irrigated land in the ejido La Canoa in 1993	85
3.5	The seven ejidatarios who possess the smallest area of rainfed land in La Canoa and who do not possess irrigated land	85
3.6	Residence of ejidatarios of La Canoa in 1993	87
3.7	Occupancy of houses in the village La Canoa in 1993	87
3.8	Number of inhabitants of the village La Canoa in this century	88
3.9	Households "from the village", possession of ejido plots and remittances from the United States in 1993	89
5.1	Land distribution in La Canoa in 1942	146
5.2	Acquisition of land by people who were recognized as ejidatarios but who were landless in 1942	149
5.3	Types of acquisition of land by landless ejidatarios since 1942	149
5.4	Types of transactions with ejido plots between 1942 and 1993	157
5.5	Types of land acquisition by Miguel Romero, Andrés Romero, Juan García and their children between 1942 and 1993.	159
5.6	Distribution of land in the ejido La Canoa in 1942 and 1993	160
5.7	Types of inheritance of ejido plots from 1942 to 1993	167
5.8	The ways in which the ejidatarios in La Canoa today acquired land since 1942	168

## Figures

2.1	Map: land situation of the ejido La Canoa	48
3.1	Age composition of the ejidatarios of La Canoa in 1993	80
3.2	Distribution of ejido arable plots and common lands between households in the village of La Canoa in 1993	82
3.3	Number of hectares ejidatarios of La Canoa possess in 1993	83
3.4	Number of hectares ejidatarios possess when 1 hectare of irrigated land is counted as 2 hectares of rainfed land	84
5.1	Land possession in 1942 by the two agrarian leaders and by two families who today belong to the "opposition", and the ages of the different family members	147
5.2	Possession of plots by three families in 1942 and 1993	158
5.3	Number of male and female ejidatarios in 1942 and 1993	167

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Wageningen, November 1998





CHAPTER 1  
**ORGANIZING PRACTICES IN THE MEXICAN EJIDO:  
A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

**Introduction: the Coming into Being of a Research Object**

*Make sure that they never create ejidos in your country! The ejido is a complete failure. It is not enough to give the people a small plot of land. What is necessary is education. The ejido only produced laziness!*

(fragment of an interview with Federico, coordinator of government projects in the villages of the municipality of Autlán)

*The problem with ejidos is that the ejidatarios do not read newspapers, they do not come to the meetings, they are ill informed. This phenomenon of the ill informed ejidatarios is a general phenomenon, it is not specific to one ejido.*

(fragment of an interview with José, head of the SARH in the region of Autlán)

These two fragments show the frustration of officials who have been working extensively with ejidos and who consider it to be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to raise the enthusiasm of ejidatarios for new government programs and local projects. Although these quotes refer to ejidatario smallholders in the valley of Autlán in western Mexico, they are similar to the way officials elsewhere tend to express themselves about smallholders who do not seem to make any effort “to develop themselves”. They characterize these smallholders as lazy, uneducated and disinterested people. In this book, however, it is shown that the organizational characteristics of the Mexican ejido and the stereotypical way in which the relation between ejidatarios and officials developed, has little relation to laziness, a lack of organizational skills or a deficiency in education but has everything to do with the strained relation between ejidatarios and the Mexican state. It is also argued that, while government officials see land only as a means of production, for ejidatarios who live in an increasingly transnationalized setting ejido land has acquired different meanings.

I carried out research in an ejido in Mexico and in several government agencies during several periods of fieldwork from mid 1991 to mid 1995. Let me explain the rationale of this study by providing more information on the history of the ejido. The ejido form of land tenure was established at the beginning of this century as a result of the Mexican revolution (1910-1920) in which masses of landless peasants demanded “land and liberty” from the state. Large landholdings were expropriated and ejidos were created to receive and administer these confiscated lands. The way in which the land had to be distributed among the landless peasants as well as the organizational structure of the ejido at the local level were all dictated

by the agrarian law.<sup>1</sup> The Ministry of Agrarian Reform (MAR)<sup>2</sup> played a central role in the procedures for the establishment of ejidos but also remained heavily involved in the local administration of ejido matters and in land conflicts. This continuing interference by the state made analysts claim that the agrarian insurgents who had fought for *tierra y libertad* (land and liberty), in the end had got *tierra y el estado* (land and the state) (Tutino 1986: 8).

Yet, despite the strict agrarian law and interference by the Ministry of Agrarian Reform, practices developed which were different from what the law prescribed. For example, the agrarian law permitted the division of the arable land into individual plots but prohibited the selling of these plots, renting them out or leaving them unused. In practice, however, these became common practices in ejidos throughout Mexico. With respect to the local administration of the ejido, things also worked out differently. The agrarian law stipulated that ejido meetings should be held every month and that decisions had to be taken by a majority of votes of the ejido assembly, in which all ejidatarios are represented. Yet, it became a common phenomenon that no decisions were arrived at at these meetings and that the head of the ejido, the commissioner, took decisions on his own. Furthermore, in many ejidos the monthly meetings were not held and if they were held, few ejidatarios attended. Likewise, the rules were also seldom applied in the resolution of land conflicts by the MAR. It has often been commented that the Mexican agrarian law essentially furthers the interests of the rich and powerful, meaning that the person who can pay the highest bribes or has the best political contacts wins a land conflict. At the same time, land conflicts between ejidatarios and private land owners abound and many have never been resolved. As the official rules concerning the use of the land and the administration of the ejido are seldom followed, and the ejidatarios themselves show little interest in formal procedures, the ejido system has often been labeled as highly "disorganized" and "corrupt". The Ministry of Agrarian Reform is seen as a central element in the fostering of such corruption.

In my research I wanted to find out how these practices in the ejidos have developed. I argue that the labeling of these practices in a functionalist way as "disorganized" or "corrupt" does not bring us any nearer to an understanding of these dynamics, nor to an insight into the precise role played by the official rules and procedures. I contend, that these practices are the result of active organizing by ejidatarios, as well as officials and other social actors (Long 1990). A central argument of this book is that in the myriad of activities which are labeled as "illegal", "disorganized" and "corrupt" we can also distinguish certain organizing patterns. For example, it is obvious that so-called "disorganization" in the ejido goes hand in hand with forms of organizing outside the formal structure. The fact that no decisions are taken at the general ejido meeting is related to the way in which important matters are decided by small groups around the ejido commissioner and at the offices of the MAR. The fact that people know where they have to go to have their affairs settled, what language and arguments they have to use in negotiations with the officials of the agrarian bureaucracy, and how much they will have to pay for certain services, is also an indication

of a certain patterning in organizing practices. In order to understand ejido dynamics, the question then becomes that of distinguishing the central resources and sets of social relationships that influence the development of these arrangements.

In my research I set out to study these forms of organizing related to the ejido and to find out what the central factors in their development had been. In order to enter into these intricacies I conducted in-depth research in one ejido, La Canoa in Jalisco. In 1938 the village of La Canoa received lands to establish its own ejido. This land was immediately divided into individual plots and distributed among the households of the village. Yet, over the years the number of households has increased substantially and today most households in the village have no access to ejido land. Today there are 196 households in the village La Canoa, while the ejido La Canoa has only 97 members (ejidatarios). Many villagers combine their life in the village with migration to the United States.

I approach the study of ejido organizing practices by looking at the significance of the ejido in the livelihoods of different social actors and by studying their relation with the wider socio-political context. It should be remarked that I avoid a conceptualization of the ejido merely in institutional-legal terms. As Barth puts it, "I am in no way arguing that formal organization is irrelevant to what is happening - only that formal organization is not *what* is happening" (Barth 1993: 157). By studying the intimate social worlds of the ejidatarios as well as the wider force fields in which forms of organizing develop, one automatically enters into the complicated debate on the relation between ejidatarios and the Mexican state. Although this is a difficult subject, the peculiarities of local forms of organizing cannot be understood without taking this relation into account.

In this introductory chapter I lay out the theoretical framework of the study. After a critique of conventional views of the ejido, I set out my views on the Mexican state. I then present an approach to the study of the ejido which focuses on organizing practices within determinate force fields. Finally, some methodological implications of this approach are discussed.

### **The Ejido in Academic Debates**

A rich literature on the ejido and peasant forms of organization in Mexico exists (for an overview see Hewitt de Alcántara 1984). In many studies the ejido is analyzed from an economic perspective. These works concentrate on the productive aspects of ejido agriculture and the problems encountered (Durán 1967, Appendini and Salles 1975, 1983, Barkin 1988, Crummett 1985, Hewitt de Alcántara 1994, de Janvry *et al.* 1995, Dewalt 1979, Reyes *et al.* 1974). Here we also find debates about the differentiation of the peasantry, typologies of agricultural producers, and how the development of capitalism in rural areas may finally lead to the proletarianization and disappearance of the Mexican peasant (Bartra 1979, Paré 1984).

Sociologists and anthropologists have above all focused on local and regional power relations and the effects these had on the operation of the ejido. For example, much has been written on the problem of the frequent emergence of non-democratic and non-accountable leadership within ejidos (Bartra *et al.* 1975, Warman 1976) and corruption and mal-administration with respect to ejido plots and communal resources (Eckstein and Restrepo 1975). Others have discussed the difficult path towards the establishment of ejidos, the continuing struggles for legal land titles to land, and the dynamics of ongoing negotiations between government agencies and ejidatarios (Gordillo 1988, Winder 1979, Rincón 1980, Esteva 1980, Binford 1985, Schryer 1986, 1988). Reyes *et al.* (1974) and Zaragoza and Macías (1980) present valuable studies about the legal and political intricacies which surround the ejido.

In most of these works on the ejido we find a tendency to adopt (often implicitly) neo-marxist models, emphasizing the exploitation of the peasantry by the state. This political economy type of analysis is especially evident in the work of Stavenhagen *et al.* (1968), Stavenhagen (1969, 1970), Huizer (1970) and Bartra (1974, 1975), who espouse a strong "revolutionary commitment" and interest in peasant mobilization and organization. Debates on the ejido and local forms of organization have mainly, within this political economy framework, been centered on the extent to which local patterns are linked to, and have been shaped by, the wider framework of the political economy. For example, it is often argued that the peasantry today is dominated by a new agrarian bourgeoisie which controls their labor and impedes the development of the ejidos (Rello 1986: 21). It has also been stressed that through the ejido system of land tenure, the supply of credit via the state rural banking system BANRURAL and the marketing of various agricultural products, the state controls the peasantry and "forces rural people into the role of petitioners of the state" (Hewitt de Alcántara 1987: xv).

The ejido has also been analyzed in relation to Mexico's political system, which in the view of many authors is characterized by the dominance of the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) and corporatist mechanisms. The ruling PRI includes three main sectors: labor, peasant, and popular, and many organizations are linked to one of these three sectors. For the peasantry the most important official organization linked to the ruling PRI has been the National Peasant Confederation CNC which was created under the presidency of Cárdenas (1934-1940). The CNC was set up to represent ejido petitioners and ejidatarios in their relations with the state bureaucracies and is said to have provided the bulk of rural support for the PRI. This has "led many analysts to conclude that the agrarian reform - and the ejido in particular - was a cornerstone in the building of Mexico's corporatist and authoritarian one-party regime because it secured the ejidatarios' political submission to the state" (Zendejas 1995: 25).

Another analytical framework for the study of state-peasant relations and for understanding ejido administrative and political practices centers on patron-client relations and practices of brokerage (de la Peña 1986, 1992, Salmerón 1988, Tapia 1992). Special

attention has been given to the figure of the local bosses, the *caciques* (Bartra 1975, Levya 1992, Paré 1975, Schryer 1986, Warman 1972). The general view is that the *caciques* “mediate between the needs of the national state (or private corporations) and the actual on-the-ground situations of peasants and workers, that they derive power from this relation of mediation, and that this power takes on very complex cultural qualities because of the diverse natures of the *caciques*’ mediating roles” (Lomnitz 1992: 297). The ejido has been depicted as the ideal institution for these intermediation processes. As Grindle puts it, “gradually, as the machine-like clientele networks of the PRI expanded, ejido commissioners were transformed into brokers between government and peasants, trading their ability to deliver the votes of ejidatarios for the patronage and protection of the regime” (1995: 42). This leads to a gloomy picture in which groups of peasants could try to organize themselves independently but “were generally coopted or repressed by the formidable power and resources available to the various power brokers throughout the system” (*ibid.*). It is claimed that many rural *caciques* actually “find their origin in the process of agrarian reform, which they were the initiators of and which they obtained their power from through a complex network of *compradazgo* (ritual kinship), friendships, debts, favors and threats which made it possible for them to control the agrarian communities” (Bartra 1980: 29 own translation). It is often stressed that the state itself has fostered the emergence of systems of intermediation by *caciques*. It was a common strategy to enrol these men especially in regions where the state was weak. Although it is often said that this all-pervasiveness of *caciques* enables the Mexican state to exert control over different populations, even in the smallest villages, at the same time this dependence by the state on the *cacique* is seen as a sign of the weakness and ineffectiveness of the Mexican state as it makes it impossible to implement government programs without giving a central role to regional powerholders.

#### *Limitations of the Existing Debates*

Underlying much of the literature on the ejido we find a strong commitment to the dire straits of the Mexican peasantry. However, for a study of the development of organizing practices in the ejido the existing literature presents serious theoretical limitations. First of all, with respect to the organizing strategies of peasants, these works tend to concentrate upon the “great” peasant movements, “progressive” forms of collective action, and on “revolutionary change”, not on the everyday organizing practices of peasants. The ejidatarios’ perspectives and the ejidatarios’ own organizational capacities are not fully elucidated. More generally, they do not show how ejidatarios process social experience and devise their own ways of coping with life (Long 1990: 8). In the same way they do not show how the relations between ejidatarios and officials have influenced the organizing practices in the ejido. For example, what has been the precise role of officials in the illegal renting out and selling of plots and in the illegal division of the common lands in the ejidos?

Secondly, in these works the state is analyzed as an instrument of class interests. While

acknowledging the fact that in rural Mexico it is common to find prominent families which combine economic and political power, in my opinion, we simplify the dynamics of the ejido by analyzing them in terms of a model of social class differentiation. In addition, in many of these works "the state", "the peasant" and "the ejido" are presented as relatively homogenous and uniform entities involved in a continuous unequal power struggle in which the peasants or the ejido always - I would say by definition - emerge worse off. As Zendejas points out "in the majority of research on peasants, the figure of the State has obscured the other social actors, institutions and classes as peasants' interlocutors" (Zendejas 1988: 101, own translation). This has led to a situation where conclusions were often reached without the actual mechanisms of processes of domination having been fully unraveled.

Indeed, even if it were possible to demonstrate that the provision of credit and other government programs is geared to effectively controlling the peasantry, it is at the same time possible to argue that these practices are not necessarily successful since they confront modes of resistance that encompass a multiplicity of forms of strategic peasant activity (Scott 1985). In addition, ejidatarios may be very capable of developing their own ways of manipulating state programs and appropriating resources (de Vries 1997). In effect, as Long and van der Ploeg (1989) argue, it is at this level that - through negotiations between different producers and officials - significant policy transformations take place.

Finally, the corporatist and intermediation analyses of the Mexican regime need thorough revision. As Rubin puts it, "since the 1970s, accounts of politics in postrevolutionary Mexico have assumed that ongoing domination has resulted from centralized, relatively homogenous power transmitted outward through corporatist mechanisms" (Rubin 1996: 85). I agree with Rubin that too much emphasis has been placed on the power of the all-mighty state and on mechanisms of corporatism and patron-client relations in studies on rural Mexico. As becomes clear in this study, in certain ejidos the CNC did not play any role in the organization of ejido matters at the local level. Although it is certainly true that mechanisms of intermediation have played an important role in linking rural areas with the "state system", I seriously doubt the usefulness of a unilateral focus on *caciques* or patron-client relations for understanding local level practices in ejidos. Let me explain this on the basis of my own research experience.

Soon after settling in La Canoa I started doubting the usefulness of traditional models of brokerage and *caciques*. Although some ejidatarios deployed this discourse of *cacicazgo* and liked to talk in terms of exploitation by local bosses, I could not discern any influential boss or broker in the village. Certainly, there were influential people in the region and there had even been a very famous regional *cacique* who became the Minister of Defence, General Marcelino García Barragán. But the General, as well as the lesser *caciques* in the region, had had no all-embracing control of local affairs or ejido politics. They did not even aspire to gaining such a control. They were more interested in the central political and economic resources in the region, such as municipal politics, sugarcane production, or the irrigation

system. In fact, most organizing activities in the villages and the ejidos took place beyond the influence of these men. Hence, local organizing practices and the relation of the ejidatarios to the state cannot be conclusively explained by a vertical intermediation model with the *cacique* occupying a nodal point within the system. On the basis of the research, I arrived at the conclusion that patron-client relations have been exaggerated as a central organizing principle in rural areas. Although personal relations and the exchange of favors are central in socio-political life, we should not automatically assume that these are expressions of vertical patron-client relations.

Authors who concentrate on Mexican politics have recognized the limitations of an analysis based on *caciquismo* as there exist many different types of *caciques* and their basis of control and their style of intermediation has changed through time. Lomnitz, for example, argues that "the phenomenon of 'caciquismo' is so diverse-in terms of the kinds of power relations involved, in terms of the economic and ethnic characteristics of *caciques*, in terms of their position in society - that the utility of the term itself can be doubted" (Lomnitz 1992: 296, see also Tapia 1992). Gledhill (1994) offers an analysis of the phenomenon of *caciquismo* in terms of complex sets of changing socio-political alignments which structure the relations between people and the state. Following Gilensan (1977), Gledhill argues that we should explain what particular kinds of social agents fill the gap between local and higher levels and how they do so (Gledhill 1994: 125). Yet, as we will see in this study, it is also necessary to ask ourselves the question why in certain situations the gap cannot be filled. What was striking during the research in La Canoa was precisely the lack of effective intermediaries. In the land conflict between the ejido La Canoa and several private landowners, in particular, the ejidatarios had great difficulty finding reliable brokers and found themselves in the position of desperately seeking "the right connection". Yet, although they invested much energy in this case, they never found the intermediaries who could effectively operate on their behalf. I argue that we perhaps need a conception of the state which centers on this *idea of the gap between people and the state that can be filled*. This entails developing a perspective that takes into account how people's representations of state power is shaped by this continual search for intermediaries.

In sum, although I realize that the state apparatus has considerable influence on local organizing practices, I refuse to be pulled into the dominant and, in my view, mystifying debates on state-peasant relations in Mexico. In my view, this belief in the "mighty actor" called the state, has prevented social scientists from studying the complexities of socio-political life. In Abrams' words, "we have come to take the state for granted as an object of political practice and political analysis while remaining quite spectacularly unclear as to what the state is" (Abrams 1988: 59). The central limitation of these approaches for my work is that by assuming beforehand the existence of certain classes, political figures and socio-political mechanisms, they impede the in-depth study of organizing practices which may show a different dynamic. Furthermore, these theories obviously do not offer tools for the analysis



of situations and processes which show divergent dynamics. Authors who in the past wrote within a strong neo-marxist framework have also started to look for new forms of analysis. Esteva, a former neo-marxist who wrote about the peasantry, for example, argues that conventional wisdom in the social sciences about peasant problems and the categories used in these studies "inevitably reduced the peasant world to a mechanical structure, and, in the process, lost the keys to understand that world" (Esteva 1987: 131).

### Coming to Grips with "the State"

#### *Experiences During Fieldwork*

Although I tried to keep my distance from dominant debates on state-peasant relations, at a later stage I concluded that what I saw as an "obsession" with the state in Mexico certainly has its reasons and therefore needs to be taken seriously. It is related to the feelings of awe and powerlessness of a great part of the population (including academics) towards a bureaucratic machine characterized by opaque politics. Hence, following Abrams, I argue that "we should abandon the state as a material object of study whether concrete or abstract while continuing to take the *idea* of the state extremely seriously" (Abrams 1988: 75).

My experiences during the research made me realize that more than the state's actual presence (in whatever form) the "idea of the state" was extremely important. While living with the ejidatarios for a long time and following them in their struggles with the MAR and in their fight against private landowners who had invaded parts of their land, many things struck me. First of all, there were many aspects of the ejidatarios actions which I perceived as contradictory. Although a certain degree of "contradiction" and "inconsistency" was an important element in my views on social life and organizing, it assumed quite dramatic forms in the field. For example, while ejidatarios could one day theorize about how land conflicts in Mexico were always resolved by elites to their own advantage through political networks, the next day they could spend an enormous amount of energy and money to set into motion the legal-administrative process carried out by the bureaucracy. But why did they spend all this energy on a bureaucratic process when they themselves said that these matters were decided by political influence? I was also amazed to see that in their legal-administrative struggle to recover the land that had been invaded by private landholders, over and over again the ejidatarios paid large amounts of money to intermediaries who in the end always vanished. If one day they had been deceived by one intermediary, the next day they would start working with another one who offered his services. I was also amazed by the fantastic stories that were told to them by officials and intermediaries and which they seemed to accept. Was this perhaps a form of false consciousness? Definitely not, for when I talked these things over with them, they appeared to be well aware of the situation. They knew that it was highly improbable that land would be taken from mighty private landholders, they

realized that they were paying money to an intermediary who would probably disappear, and they were well aware of the fact that the fantastic promises made by officials probably were lies. However, although they realized that they were being deceived, they still went on working with the same bureaucracy. This phenomenon caused me terrible confusion during the research. At the same time I realized that it was precisely this phenomenon that was essential for understanding the nature of the relationships between the ejidatarios and the Mexican state.

This peculiar relation of the ejidatarios to the state bureaucracy is linked to forms of theorizing by the ejidatarios about power and politics in society. Failure or conspiracy theories thrived as many things did go wrong in their relation with bureaucracies. These theories provide explanatory schemes for their lack of success with officials and for the fact that their plans always seem to be sabotaged. In particular, in serious conflicts, which occur in an atmosphere of insecurity and opacity, one would hear the most fantastic conspiracy theories. This constant theorizing and reflecting is used to rationalize and explain their own actions or those of other people. Through these experiences I realized that this phenomenon of theorizing about power and politics in society had also to be taken into account as an important part of state-peasant relations and that it was central to the organizing practices in the ejido. This would take the study "of the state beyond the apparatus of government to show how the magic and power of the state are formed in everyday discursive practice" (Tsing 1993: 25). It must be added that this theorizing and construction of conspiracies is not typical of the Mexican peasantry, but can be found in all social circles and especially within the bureaucracy itself.

### *An Alternative Approach to the State*

I will shortly explain my main theoretical notions on the state. The state remains a difficult concept to work with in anthropology. As Smith puts it "while communities and domestic groups lie at the heart of anthropological investigation, for unions and the state, one is inclined to turn elsewhere" (Smith 1996: 4). It will be obvious that I argue against a view of the Mexican state as an almighty apparatus with almost absolute top-down control through corporatism and intermediary structures. I do not adhere to the notion of the state as a coherent and homogenous entity with deliberate projects and strategies to exploit and deceive certain groups of the population. Instead, I think that we should conceive of the state as a collection of decentered practices without a central agency, or core project. I prefer to use decentered notions of the state in the tradition of Foucault. Ferguson, following Foucault, argues that "the state" "is not the name of an actor, it is the name of a way of tying together, multiplying, and coordinating power relations, a kind of knotting or congealing of power" (Ferguson 1990: 273). Rubin, in the same line of thought, applies Foucauldian notions of power to the Mexican case and argues that "what appears to be ongoing and unchanging domination ... is the overall result not of an all-controlling center of particular

structures of political bargaining and rule but of numerous changing forms and locations of domination and resistance" (Rubin 1996: 88). This is a notion of the state that is, in my view, extremely useful. Yet, this decentered idea of the state needs to be combined with ideas about the cultural dimensions of power and domination (see Dirks, Eley and Ortner 1994). Fortunately, more works have recently appeared which stress the necessity "to decenter the regime and place culture and everyday experience squarely within discussions of power" (Rubin 1996: 90, see also Aitken 1997, Gledhill 1994, 1995, Lomnitz 1992, and Joseph and Nugent 1994, Pantser 1997). We should not then view the state as a set of institutions and procedures whose political significance is obvious without reference to cultural categories but, instead, study the magical and meaningful aspects of concrete political practices (Tsing 1993: 72-73). For that reason I introduce three notions, which deal with these aspects and which are central to this work, namely *the idea of the state*, *the culture of the state* and *the hope-generating bureaucratic machine*.

Following Abrams, the belief in the existence of a strong, coherent state system is what I call the *idea of the state*. According to Abrams, the state-idea is "an ideological artefact attributing unity, morality and independence to the disunited, amoral and dependent workings of the practice of government" (Abrams 1988: 81). This belief in the state "conceals the workings of relations of rule and forms of discipline in day to day life" (Alonso 1994: 381). However, such an "idea of the state" is not peculiar to the peasantry. In a similar way, the wide-spread belief among certain groups of academics that there is a center of state control in which power is concentrated is illustrative of how this "idea of the state" is reproduced. Both are misrepresentations which lead to forms of State fetishism (Taussig 1992). Hence, contrary to traditional approaches to intermediation, I argue that brokers do not necessarily have a role in effectively connecting communities or peasants to the state, or in effectively "filling the gap", but play a role in the imagination of state power. By searching for the "right intermediary" and by presenting themselves as the "right connection", ejidatarios as well as brokers are implicated in the construction of this "idea of the strong state".

With the *culture of the state* I refer to the practices of representation and interpretation which characterize the relation between people and the state bureaucracy and through which the idea of the state is constructed. It is present in the "reading" and interpretation of speeches, official acts, programs, and documents by the ejidatarios. It is manifested in the lost map which becomes a fetish in a land conflict and in official stamps and documents which acquire symbolic meanings beyond their administrative functions. The culture of the state is expressed in the numerous letters written every day to the Mexican President. An important aspect of the culture of the state is the atmosphere of opacity, distrust and conspiracy which always surrounds conflicts, negotiations and dealings with the bureaucracy, especially in conflictive cases. The practices of "impression management" (Morgan 1986: 177) in which officials and brokers exaggerate their importance in order to convince the ejidatarios that they have the necessary "access" and connections to make the bureaucracy

work are also elements of the culture of the state. In sum, the culture of the state is the construction of the idea of the Mexican state through techniques of mapping, fetishization, interpretation and speculation or, in other words, it is “the cultural inscription of the idea of the state” (Alonso 1994: 381).

It must be stressed that my notion of “the culture of the state” differs strongly from the way in which “political culture” is used by political scientists (Almond and Verba 1980, Camp 1986, 1993, Cornelius and Craig 1988, 1991). In the studies of political scientists the notion of political culture refers to the cultural elements which are characteristic of a certain political system. The analysis of a political culture is related to political processes such as elections, faith in the government, and the legitimation of the state. In contrast, recent works on political culture focus less on the legitimacy of the political system and distance themselves from a one-sided focus on political culture as a study of attitudes. Instead they focus more on political practices (see the volume edited by Pantser 1997). Although this latter approach is more interesting, my focus is a different one. My central interest is not the legitimacy of a political system, nor the working of a political system. In my use of the culture of the state, I am concerned with the role of symbolism in the everyday interactions between ejidatarios and state bureaucracies.

The *bureaucratic hope-generating machine* is similar to what Abrams calls the state-system, “a palpable nexus of practice and institutional structure centered in government and more or less extensive, unified and dominant in any given society” (Abrams 1988: 82). Because of the specific characteristics of the Mexican bureaucracy I decided to call it the hope-generating machine. Ferguson (1990) talks about the “anti-politics machine” referring to the depoliticizing effects of “development” institutions in Lesotho. Yet, as we will see, in Mexico one of the most remarkable aspects of the bureaucracy, rather than its tendency to depoliticize the relationship between people and the bureaucracy, is its hope-generating capacity. In part, this generation of hope is related to a presidential system in which a new president takes office every six years, heavily criticizes former programs and introduces new projects often together with new institutions (see chapter nine). But this hope-generating characteristic of the bureaucracy is also based on the fact that the bureaucracy offers endless openings, and that officials are always willing to initiate procedures. The bureaucracy never says no and creates great expectations. On the other hand, many promises are never fulfilled.

## **Organizing Practices**

### *How to Approach the Organizing Process*

Considering my research interest, in finding out how certain organizing practices had developed around the use and transfer of land plots and administration in the ejido, in the first instance I was interested in organizing as a verb, as a process. We saw that the

academic debates on the ejido and the peasantry in Mexico do not offer an analytical approach for dealing with the complexity of these organizing practices in the ejido. Although there has always been considerable discussion and interest in peasant forms of organization, there is a striking lack of empirical understanding of how villagers and smallholders organize their lives, their problems, and their relations with government institutions.

We would expect that approaches focusing on the relation between organization and development are better able to analyze local organizing arrangements. There is, for example, a strong empowerment perspective which attributes a central role to local or peasant forms of organization in development (Esman and Uphoff 1984, Uphoff 1986, Harris 1988, Bebbington *et al.* 1993, Berkes 1995). However, in this perspective the discussion focuses on the possible role of different types of organization in development and not on analyzing existing forms of organizing. I argue that this lack of analytical understanding of existing forms of organizing is, in large part, due to the persistence of notions of formal bureaucratic rationality which hold bureaucratic organization to be one of the underlying principles of the success of "western modernization" (see Clegg 1990 for a critical discussion of Weberian models of organization). This view precludes further inquiry into forms of organizing which do not fit with these ideal-typical models but which are central to the lives of peasant smallholders.

Mainstream theories in the sociology of organization offer us some ideas for the analysis of organizing practices, but their limitation is that they focus on the management of people and social processes. Although many organization theories stress the fluid boundaries of organizations and the importance of informal networks for organizational dynamics, their focus remains the entity of the organization and how to improve its efficiency. In a recent work Burrell, a well-known author on organization theories, recognizes that conventional organization theory has neglected and suppressed whole categories of human beings such as women and the peasantry (Burrell 1997: 12). Burrell asks himself if it might be that "in the absence of any disciplinary concentration upon this numerically massive group [the peasants] we miss 'a history of the hidden'; a history of those who live like troglodytes below our eye level?" (*ibid.*: 14). He also argues that by ignoring the role of all kinds of emotions in the organizing process many organization theories are artificial. "There is little mention of sex, yet organizations are redolent with it; little mention of violence, yet organizations are stinking with it; little mention of pain, yet organizations rely upon it; little mention of the will to power, yet organizations would not exist without it" (*ibid.*: 52). Yet, it is a pity that Burrell himself does not offer any conceptual ideas for the study of these "invisible people" and emotions in the organizing process.

Post-structuralist organization theories offer interesting insights. In these works attention is paid to the ideas that guide people's organizing behavior and "the conceptual means by which social actors come to an understanding of their own interests and the strategies they pursue to realize the former" (Reed 1992: 114). The forms of discourse available to and used

by social actors in assessing their organizational situation and deciding on their courses of action are a central object of study in this approach (see Law 1994a and 1994b for an example of this perspective). However, post-structural organization theories also have limitations. It seems that in their adherence to multiplicity and fluidity they have relinquished the study of power relations within determinate socio-political force fields. Why ejidatarios choose to organize in different ways can only be explained by inquiring into their experiences with various types of authorities in the past. The discursive practices through which social actors decide upon certain courses of action, the social conditions in which they are formulated and implemented, and the outcomes that they produce are embedded within fields of power.

The best starting-point for the development of an analytical framework for organizing practices is the much quoted article by Wolf *Facing power; old insights, new questions* in which he makes a connection between organizing and power. In this article he stresses that "it is a pity that anthropology seems to have relinquished the study of organization" (Wolf 1990: 590-1). He argues that we should get away from viewing organization as a product or outcome, and move to an understanding of organization as a process. Wolf suggests that we could make a start by following "Conrad Arensberg's advice (1972:10-11) to look at the 'flow of action', to ask what is going on, why it is going on, who engages in it, with whom, when, and how often" (Wolf 1990: 591). Yet, he adds that when we study "the flow of action" we should also ask the questions: "for what and for whom is all this going on, and - indeed - *against* whom?" (*ibid.* emphasis added). These questions require a conceptual approach capable of analyzing "the forces and effects of the structural power that drives organizing processes" (*ibid.*). Wolf makes the point that most anthropological studies that deal with issues of power and politics neglect the question of organization. This point is also made by Long (1984, 1988, 1990) who stresses the importance of understanding organizing as a process shaped by the interactions between different social actors. At the same time, Long points out the importance of combining an actor-oriented perspective with historical-structural approaches "since many of the choices perceived and strategies pursued by individuals or groups will have been shaped by processes outside the immediate arenas of interaction" (Long 1990: 17).

In addition to approaching organization as a process I argue that we should not define organizing in terms of collective action, but rather in terms of different action patterns (see also Verschoor 1997). People often follow fragmented organizing strategies, without collective projects ever becoming crystallized. They work with one set of actors and then another, develop strategies and change them in the course of action. Another important point is that collective action has the notion of common goals and well-defined objectives. However, in many cases common goals do not exist and the objectives develop in the course of the organizing process. People may be constantly reflecting, theorizing, and debating about the proper course of action. As we will see in the subsequent chapters, good reasons

may exist for people not to work in collectivities with a more or less established structure. Good reasons may exist to work in changing constellations of people and develop new strategies and projects. However, although these fragmented forms of action are much harder to grasp and difficult to put in place, they form an important part of the organizing process. Hence, when I talk about organizing practices, I refer to the manifold forms of organizing, whether they be individual or more collective. Yet, my ultimate interest lies not in the isolated organizing actions, strategies, and performances in themselves, but in understanding their logics in specific socio-political contexts. I ask myself, for example, why ejidatarios when dealing with determined problems operate in changing constellations of people instead of in stable enduring groups.

But I am also interested in organizing practices in another way. Besides the action patterns and strategies which we can distinguish when individual people or groups try to achieve certain things, there is another way in which organizing practices are analyzed in the present study. I try to distinguish forms of structuring or patterning in organizing practices. In other words, I study the organizing "processes that arise from particular combinations of ideas, material circumstances, and interactional potentials and have patterning as their consequences" (Barth 1993: 4). For example, in chapter five I show that in the many "illegal" or "informal" arrangements with respect to ejido plots we can distinguish certain regularities. We find a certain pattern in the way in which the sale of ejido plots is settled and that in these arrangement other ejidatarios, officials of the MAR, the ejido commissioner and the ejido assembly play specific roles. In chapter six a different form of patterning of organizing practices is discussed. There I show, among other things, that the executive committee does never render accounts of their activities at public ejido meetings, but that there exist other effective mechanisms by which the ejidatarios exert control over the members of the committee. In my view, this patterning of organizing practices in unexpected and often "invisible" ways always occurs around the management of resources, and in relation to institutional settings. For that reason, I stressed that organizing practices can also be distinguished in the apparently "disordered", the "corrupt", the "chaotic", the "unexpected".

For this second focus in which attention is paid to the structuring or patterning which can be distinguished in organizing practices, Bourdieu's work (1977, 1984, 1991, 1992) is interesting since he develops a practice oriented approach with attention to creative human agency. In his *Outline of a theory of practice* Bourdieu (1977) argues that a great part of our actions are routine and that practical knowledge organizes a great part of our daily actions. This practical knowledge "functions like a self-regulating device programmed to redefine courses of action in accordance with information received on the reception of information transmitted and on the effects produced by that information" (Bourdieu 1977: 11). Habitus is for Bourdieu the taken-for-granted part of culture. Although Bourdieu leaves room in his analytical framework for improvisation and flexibility, he is above all interested in the regularities of structure and processes of domination and in his work he concentrates on the

political culture of the dominant classes.

Although his stress on regularities and practices is interesting for my study, there are several limitations in Bourdieu's notion of habitus. The most important limitation is his tendency to conceive of human agents as socialized in unconscious ways. Criticizing Bourdieu's approach Gledhill points out that "it is surely of some importance that there is communication within social groups about the extended experiences of 'being-in-the-world'. Human beings are not, in fact, windowless nomads, even if the habitus does play a crucial role in structuring the meanings social collectivities ascribe to changing experience" (Gledhill 1994: 138). I concur with this critique which immediately indicates the limitation of Bourdieu's theoretical framework for the study of "small politics" and the creativity in "everyday organizing practices". For these themes we need an approach which leaves room for indeterminateness, fragmentation, and the complexity of human consciousness. As will be explained next, in my approach to organizing practices, continuous critical reflections by human agents, their theorizing on politics and power in society, and their story-telling are central elements. Organizing practices, how structured they may be, are the subject of constant critical reflection.

### *Reflective Talk and Discourse*

In my approach, social theorizing, reflexive talk and story-telling by social actors are a central part of the organizing process. Therefore, I would add to Wolf's point about the importance of following the "flow of action", the necessity of following the "flow of ideas". In post-structuralist organization theories it is argued that the creation and re-creation of stories are a way of ordering the world around us and are central to the organizing process (Reed 1992: 114, Law 1994a: 52). The continuous dialogues and discussions I had with people on their courses of action, decisions or events were not meant to provide material for a sort of decision-making model. Instead, these reflections were used to show "how people's consciousness engages with the world precisely within the incomplete processes of everyday social practices" (Smith 1996: 7). This is a point that Rosaldo also elaborates forcefully when arguing that "not only men and women of affairs but also ordinary people tell themselves stories about who they are, what they care about, and how they hope to realize their aspirations" (Rosaldo 1989: 129-130). Rosaldo furthermore argues that such stories significantly shape human conduct and therefore cannot be ignored by social analysis (*ibid.*: 130). The study of consciousness is central to any analysis of human actions "because people always act (however imperfectly) relative to their desires, plans, whims, strategies, moods, goals, fantasies, intentions, impulses, purposes, visions, or gut feelings" (*ibid.*: 103). The fact that people everywhere are in a critical, reflective dialogue with the world in which they live, with themselves and with the researcher is also very well shown in the works of Pigg (1992, 1996, 1997).

An important implication of this perspective is that one should not be "afraid" of



inconsistencies and contradictions in the stories and versions people present. On the contrary, “shifting, multistranded conversations in which there never is full agreement” may show important areas of contestation and struggle (see Tsing 1993: 8). Tsing argues that we should situate local commentaries within wider spheres of negotiation of meaning and power while at the same time recognize the local stakes and specificities (*ibid.*: 9). Hence, story-telling, reflective talk, and imagination are essential for the analysis of the force fields in which organizing occurs.

As I have emphasized the importance of reflective talk and dialogue, it is necessary to be more precise about my position towards the concept of discourse. It is obvious that people tend to express themselves through discourses which are socially and historically constructed. In the case of the ejido, for example, people tend to use a “revolutionary discourse” in order to explain the ejido system. However, we will see that the “discourse of corruption” and the “discourse of accountability” are also pervasive. Some people use discourse in the broad meaning of “a cluster of ideas and images which provide ways of talking about a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society” (see Hall 1997: 6). Many authors, however, follow Foucault by not defining discourse in terms of language but as forms of knowledge produced in the context of power relations and institutional practices (see Foucault 1980, 1991). Foucault argued that through discursive practices and institutional rituals human subjectivities are created. In his view discourses in different organizational settings play an important role in processes of discipline and control (see also the section on governmentality). Many authors have followed Foucault’s ideas and have studied the role of discourse in politics and bureaucratic practices and have shown how particular discourses play a role in the construction and legitimizing of particular sets of rules, roles and policies (Apthorpe 1986, Ferguson 1990).

Although these are valuable insights, I distance myself from approaches that place too much stress on the power of dominant discourses. It is obvious that languages are never innocent nor ahistorical and influence the formation of identities. However, in my opinion, we should not consider subjects to be “captured” within discursive formations. Discourses do not necessarily shape human minds and cognitive processes in a fixed way (see Said 1978, Young 1995, Bhabha 1991 and Spivak 1987 for an interesting discussion on the effects of colonialism on the subjectivity of colonial subjects). For example, Bhabha has illustrated well the hybridization of authority and decentering of discourses from their position of power and authority (Bakhtin 1981) in the case of European colonial discourse. Hence, we may find that powerful and influential discourses exist in relation to organizing processes. Yet, we should not assume that the use of these discourses means that people’s consciousness is automatically shaped by them. Instead, we should study the way in which these discourses may be used and challenged by situated social actors.

## Force Fields as Fields of Power

As I have explained above, in my view, we should not assume beforehand the existence of certain power relations and forces in society that can automatically explain the organizing process. Instead of assuming that certain powerful positions determine the characteristics of the organizing process, it may sometimes be more fruitful to study how "patterning generates institutional and organizational effects, including hierarchy and power" (Law 1992: 380). Yet, the difficult point remains as to how to relate organizing practices with power relations. As Sabean points out, "words such as 'power' are too amorphous to be of much analytical value" (Sabean 1984: 24). For that reason, I introduce the notion of the *force field* as a field of power.

In anthropology the concept of the social field has a long history. The concept was especially developed by the Manchester school in anthropology (Turner 1974, Kapferer 1972, Long 1968: 8-10, Mitchell 1969). Turner, for example, defines the political field as "the totality of relationships between actors oriented to the same prizes or values" (1974: 127). The process-oriented field approach of the Manchester school broke away from functionalist approaches in which social behavior is viewed as governed by fixed norms or rules. Instead, these authors concentrated on the dynamics of social action and interpretation in which norms are subject to manipulation and negotiation. Yet, in my opinion, there are problems with the assumption that a social field can be characterized in terms of norms and values which - though subject to negotiation - are shared by the various actors. Long's approach is more interesting as he defines the social field not in terms of norms but in terms of "an area of social life defined in relation to certain types of action" (Long 1968: 9). Hence, Long defines the social field more in terms of action and argues that the main point of the social field analysis is that "individuals and groups do not operate in clearly defined institutional frameworks but rather construct fields of action which often cross-cut formal organizational boundaries and normative systems" (Long 1989: 252). My use of the notion of force field resembles Long's notion in the sense that the force field is not based on normative values but on organizing practices. Yet, unlike Long's approach, I use a concept of field which emphasizes struggle and power differences between different sets of social actors.

In legal anthropology the notion of field has also been widely used, especially after the publication of Moore's famous article on the semi-autonomous field (1973). This article offers interesting insights for the analysis of patterns which develop in organizing practices. Moore analyzes, among other things, how in the garment industry in New York, within a specific institutional setting (with designers, retailers, workshops with laborers, the union, etc.), strict government regulation, and official agreements with the union, a semi-autonomous field develops with its own "extralegal givings" and "moral obligations" based on "a series of binding customary rules" (Moore 1973: 62-79). She also shows that although the official rules and labor laws are not followed in these arrangements, they do determine

the bargaining position of the key figures in the social field. Despite her original analysis, her notion of semi-autonomous field has several limitations for my work. First of all, although Moore takes the influence of the larger society into account, she treats the semi-autonomous field as a clearly distinguishable entity with boundaries. She argues that the semi-autonomous field can “generate rules and customs and symbols internally” and “has the means to induce or coerce compliance” (*ibid.*: 56). However, in her own case studies it is very clear that the rules in the semi-autonomous field develop in direct relation to the official rules and thus are not simply “internally generated”. Furthermore, in many situations we will find that fields are loosely structured and may not be identified so neatly as in Moore’s examples. Another limitation is that she emphasizes the mutual agreements in the semi-autonomous field and does not pay sufficient attention to conflicts and tensions within the field. Yet, the strong point in her analysis is that she identifies the most important actors and central resources which led to the development of a certain patterning in the organizing process and that she shows the role that official rules played in this development.

The specific term *force field*, which I use in this work, has above all been employed in historical works and different authors give the concept different meanings (see Jay 1993 on the work of Benjamin and Adorno, Thompson 1978, Roseberry 1994). Roseberry, for example, uses the concept “field of force” to analyze “the complex and dynamic relations between the dominant and popular, or between state formation and everyday forms of action” (Roseberry 1994: 358). Although all definitions refer to processes of power and domination, the basis of these processes differ according to the author and not all are explicit about it.

The notion of force field which I use in this work, most resembles Bourdieu’s notion of a field (1992: 94-115). According to Bourdieu the field is the locus of relations of force and not only of meaning. The coherence that may be observed in a given state of the field is born of conflict and competition and not of some kind of immanent self-development of the structure. Every field has its own logic, rules and regularities which are not explicit and which make it resemble the playing of games. However, it always remains a field of struggles aimed at preserving or transforming the configuration of forces. These struggles and activities in the field always produce differences. Bourdieu argues that the active forces which produce the most relevant differences in a field define the specific capital (cultural, economic, social, etc.) of the field. In this way a field cannot exist without a certain capital and a capital does not exist or function except in relation to a field. In Bourdieu’s field, agents and institutions constantly struggle, according to the regularities and the rules constitutive of this space to appropriate the specific products at stake in the game. Those who dominate in a given field are in a position to make it function to their advantage but they must always contend with the resistance, the claims, the contention, of the dominated. The coherence, ruling, and regularities that may be observed in a given state of the field, or even its apparent orientation toward a common function, emanate from conflict and competition, and not from some kind of immanent self-development of the structure.

Most of these ideas are very useful for the notion of force field I use. A difference between Bourdieu's approach and my use of the term is that he establishes a direct link between one form of capital and one type of field. Furthermore, he focuses on fields which develop around specific professional groups such as artists, medical doctors, intellectuals, and so on. In contrast, for the study of the ejido I do not define one type of capital around which a force field develops but instead try to distinguish the fields of force around certain resources or problems which influence the organizing process and can have a certain degree of patterning as its consequence. Furthermore - in the same way as Moore (1973) - Bourdieu talks about the autonomy of fields. He argues that some fields may be more autonomous than others in terms of being capable of imposing their own logic. For the same reasons as I set out in the discussion of Moore's semi-autonomous field, I argue against the idea of the autonomy of fields. However, in most other aspects I use elements of Bourdieu's field.

I define a *force field* as a field of power and struggle between different social actors around certain resources or problems and around which certain forms of dominance, contention, and resistance may develop, as well as certain regularities and forms of ordering. The assumption is that all forms of organizing, even the most "private" or "illegal" ones, develop within wider fields of power. In this view, the patterning of organizing processes is not the result of a common understanding or normative agreement, but of the forces at play within the field.

As we will see, in the patterning of organizing practices we can distinguish different social actors with specific roles, different access to resources and differing rights. For that reason organizing practices are closely related to forms of inclusion and exclusion of socio-political categories. This also explains that organizing practices are related to the production of meaning, or in other words to the development of "structures of feeling" (Williams 1977: 132). By studying the reflective talk and dialogue around different forms of organizing it is shown how these express forms of struggle, contention and resistance in relation to existing organizing practices and relations of power. The culture of the state is important in almost all forms of organizing but especially in force fields in which the government bureaucracy is strongly present.

For the sake of clarity, I use the concept of force field as a contextual notion to explain the development of organizing practices, and possible regularities, and ordering. It is a working concept and should not be seen as a "reality" out there or an entity with boundaries. The ultimate aim of my study is not the definition and demarcation of force fields but the explanation of the development of organizing practices. As we will see, the law and official procedures often form an important element of the force fields around forms of organizing, but their role and influence differs greatly. In this book, for example, the organizing practices around both the management of village projects (chapters three and six) and the use and distribution of the commons (chapter six) are analyzed. We find that the resources at stake, the social categories that play central roles, and the role of the law and official

procedures are very different in the two cases. The government bureaucracy and the culture of the state play a much stronger role in the village projects than around the commons. So, we deal with multiple force fields with different dynamics. Organizing practices which are studied in the book are, among others, those around: inheritance and sale of ejido plots (chapter five); the renting out of ejido plots by migrants (chapter five); the administration of the ejido, and the continuous fight for a tract of land (chapters seven and eight).

### *Some Notes on Hegemony*

Several people would suggest that in talking of the patterning of organizing practices and the production of meaning in force fields shaped through relations of power and dominance, I am actually talking about hegemony. In Gramsci's (1971) view hegemony is not synonymous with either culture or ideology, but hegemonic practices create cultural formations and ideologies which serve the interests of the leadership they represent. Different theoretical orientations have been developed around the concept and several people argue that hegemony can be an important notion once we rethink the concept and redefine it for different historical situations. More recent approaches have "taken a focus on the partiality, the eternally incomplete nature of hegemony, with its implication of the cultural as a contested, contingent political field, the battlefield in an ongoing 'war of position'" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 5 commenting on recent interpreters of Gramsci like Williams (1977) and Stuart Hall (1986)). Roseberry also proposes to "explore hegemony not as a finished and monolithic ideological formation but as a problematic, contested, political process of domination and struggle" (Roseberry 1994: 358). He proposes to use the concept to understand "the ways in which the words, images, and symbols, forms, organizations, institutions, and movements used by subordinate populations to talk about, understand, confront, accommodate themselves to, or resist their domination are shaped by the process of domination itself. What hegemony constructs, then, is not a shared ideology but a common material and meaningful framework for living through, talking about, and acting upon social orders characterized by domination" (*ibid.*: 361). This seems an interesting approach to hegemony. But one of the central questions becomes: what then are the socio-spatial referents of hegemony? Are we talking about regional hegemonic discourses, national hegemonic discourses or hegemonic discourses within deterritorialized social fields? And how then do we distinguish between these fields? Is it possible for different fields of domination to overlap each other? In this book I set out to show that ejidatarios live in a world in which socio-spatial referents are increasingly deterritorialized, transnational and fragmented. How can we then distinguish the relevant field of domination in which hegemonic processes occur? Another limitation of this approach for my study is that it cannot account for the contradictions, conflicts, and conspiracy theories that develop in the relation of the ejidatarios to the Mexican state. In this sense I am not so much interested in distinguishing a "common material and meaningful framework" that people use in their dealings with domination, but in explaining the contradiction and

inconsistencies that make up the culture of the state.

Lomnitz's work is interesting as he sets out to develop an analytical framework for analyzing cultures in regional spaces and their relation to national Mexican culture. He wants to analyze "the cultural heterogeneity that arises in spaces of hegemony" (Lomnitz 1992: 4). He defines regional culture as an internally differentiated cultural space with both a common regional cultural framework and distinct sets of understandings that are specific to the groups that compose the region. Lomnitz uses the term intimate culture "to represent the real, regionally differentiated manifestations of class culture. Intimate culture is the culture of a class in a specific kind of regional setting" (*ibid.*: 28). He claims that this way of dealing with culture will stop the endless literary publications on the Mexican character, or *lo Mexicano* as it will show how culture is actually produced in different spaces. The work is interesting for several reasons. First of all, Lomnitz pays attention to the enormous diversity in regional power structures and the cultural manifestations that go along with it. This is an important contribution to discussions on regional politics in Mexico and on the relation between power and culture. He shows well the diversity in the forms of articulation between different social groups, as well as the cultural heterogeneity that results from these relations. His concept of intimate culture is appealing as it does not define beforehand the dominant groups in a certain region. In that sense it is a flexible concept that can be used to study different situations. However, the work can be criticized for several reasons.

One of the limitations of his approach, for my work, is the fact that he only focuses on the interaction between the state bureaucracy and regional elites. What about the daily dealings between thousands of government officials and thousands of peasants? How do we analyze the interactions between ejidatarios from the state of Jalisco and officials of Mexico City and what sorts of intimate cultures interact in these situations? When we study the interactions of ejidatarios with officials we certainly notice specific cultural practices, but should we call this the distinct intimate culture of the agrarian bureaucracy? It is here that I introduce the notion of the culture of the state. I differ here from Lomnitz who uses quite different concepts of the state and the culture of the state. According to Lomnitz the state represents national society and as such is a major player in the construction of the culture of social relations. In this line of thinking the culture of the state is the "intimate culture" of the state apparatus. This differs from my approach. As I explained before I do not conceive of the state as an actor or entity with its own culture. In my analytical framework, the culture of the state is the way in which this "mighty actor" or "neutral arbiter" is *imagined* through administrative procedures, stamps, maps, theories about power, and the belief in the "right connection". This culture of the state manifests itself in the relation between ejidatarios and officials.

*Some Notes on Governmentality*

I want to discuss some approaches to the state which focus on governmental techniques and which offer interesting ideas but also have limitations for the study of organizing practices in the ejido. In their famous book *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution* (1985) Corrigan and Sayer, analyze the process of state formation in England. In their analysis they argue against the notion of state hegemony and instead maintain that the power of the state rests in the creation of subjectivities and identities by the "routines" and "rituals" of state. These are to be found in the government agencies, in the official paperwork, use of official procedures, stamping, taxing, and so on. They draw upon the work of Foucault (1979) who argues that governmentality is a complex aggregate of institutions and procedures through which power is exercised over people. Although Corrigan and Sayer's work has been much praised for their novel approach to processes of state formation, it has been criticized for a "tendency to overemphasize the symbolic dimension of state activity" and the "tendency to overemphasize the unity of the state, domination, and its consequences" (see Dean 1994: 151).

Works on governmentality conceive of culture as the constitution of subjectivities through discursive rituals and administrative practices. Thus Miller and Rose (1992) develop an approach to governmentality by looking at specific governmental technologies, such as "techniques of notation, computation and calculation; procedures of examination and assessment; the invention of devices such as surveys and presentational forms such as tables; the standardization of systems for training and the inculcation of habits; the inauguration of professional specialisms and vocabularies; building designs and architectural forms- the list is heterogeneous and in principle unlimited" (1992: 183). Although Miller and Rose certainly make an important contribution to the debate on governing techniques, one can question the usefulness of this approach in regimes of domination which are not so much based on control through governing bureaucracies and where practices of personalism, speculations, and the use of images and symbols seems to be pervasive. How does a theory focused on governing techniques deal, for example, with speculation, coercion, and the generation of hopes by a labyrinthine bureaucracy?

Thomas (1994), who provides an interesting analysis of colonialism and culture, argues that Miller and Rose make a valuable contribution in their study of economic policy and accounting systems by drawing attention to the necessary role of language and the conceptualization of inscription. However, he adds that it is not apparent that the "governmentalization" of culture, is equally productive, because colonial discourse cannot be construed as a unitary or stable archive in the fashion of a set of official statistics or reports. Thomas makes an interesting point about the inconsistent use and lack of coherence in the application of governmental accounting systems in the colonial context, due among other things to the "corruption" of governmentality in colonial contexts (Thomas 1994: 45-46). But the same point can probably also be made in postcolonial contexts. Although

practices of “governmentalization” are certainly important everywhere in the world, we should not assume their effectivity beforehand. The point is that governmental techniques always encounter populations who have already been integrated within political systems in a variety of ways. State rituals and discourses are multi-interpretable and social actors “read” and use them according to the problems they are facing and experiences they have had in the past. In other words, state rituals and discourses recombine with representations of the state that are already in circulation (Pigg 1997: 281). So, they do not necessarily constitute an effective means for controlling and disciplining populations. As we will see, in the case of the ejido most regulations have not been applied and to a certain degree ejidatarios have managed to remain outside the control of the bureaucracy. In this sense, Thomas is right in pointing out the limitations of an approach focused on practices of governmentality. On the other hand, this does not mean that governmental techniques do not play an important role. On the contrary, governmental techniques play a central role in the relation between the ejidatarios and the bureaucracy. Maps, stamps, and documents are all extremely important, but it is not their official meaning that matters. In the relation between ejidatarios and the hope-generating bureaucratic machine, all these artefacts acquire different meanings and we find a “re-enchantment of governmental techniques”.

### **Methodological Considerations**

It would be impossible to present here all of the many methodological choices made during the research but I wish to pay special attention to a number of them. In the different chapters, other methodological choices are discussed. Here I address the more general principles underlying the research. The approach of organizing as a practice, that I adopted for the study of the ejido, has important consequences for the methodology of the research. One of the consequences is that, although the broad lines of the methodology are set out before the fieldwork period starts, an important part has to be developed during the research itself. For that reason, frequent periods of analysis are part of the research project. In these periods the research material is analyzed and the research scheme can be adapted and developed further.

As I explained above, I had specific reasons for not studying the ejido from the perspective of official models and of instead working “from the ground”. Other anthropologists have made similar points. Barth points out that “it is by attending systematically to people’s own intentions and interpretations, accessible only if one adopts the perspective of their concerns and their knowledge of the constraints under which they act, that one can start unraveling the meanings *they* confer on events, and thereby the experience they are harvesting” (Barth 1993: 105). Long also stresses the importance of “identifying the problems and concepts as presented by particular social actors” (Long 1989: 247). Yet, this



working “from below” had the consequence that I arrived at an image of the ejido which was rather unusual. This became particularly clear during presentations of my research material in academic circles. While I presented the dynamic of ejido practices which I had found at the local level, the audience always referred to the official and established academic views of the ejido and wanted to divert the discussion towards the role of the CNC, the *caciques* or the nature of the political system, in what was, in fact, a search for a particular kind of theoretical closure. However, working “from below” more often than not, means postponing such closure, and often searching for other modes of interpretation and explanation which do not privilege key actors or structures such as the CNC, the *cacique*, capital, or the state.

### *Choice of the Research Location*

Considering the detailed material I wanted to gather and the fact that agrarian issues in Mexico are a rather politicized theme, I decided to study only one ejido. As Silverman and Gulliver put it: “the intensive focus on the small scale allows a deep understanding of the phenomena being analyzed, and which constitute the true purpose of the study. This permits the inclusion of ‘real people’ along with an exploration of the interdependencies of socio-political patterning, economic conditions, and cultural belief” (Silverman and Gulliver 1992: 23). La Canoa is in no way a special ejido or village. I had lived in this ejido for a short period in 1987 when I participated in a research project on the relation between irrigation organization and peasant strategies.<sup>3</sup> La Canoa is one of those many small places which do not call the attention of academics because of some special forms of local organization, well-known revolutionary history, or agrarian problematics. However, the study of these “ordinary” places may give us important insights into local ejido organizing practices. As Scott argues: “One might ask; why are we here, in a village of no particular significance, examining the struggle of a handful of history’s losers? ... The justification for such an enterprise must lie precisely in its banality - in the fact that these circumstances are the normal context in which class conflict has historically occurred” (Scott 1985: 27). I concur with Scott that the detailed study of one village or ejido gives insights into broader phenomena.

It must be recognized that the scope of the study is not defined by saying that the research concerns one ejido. “The focus on a particular place allows anthropologists to expand in a wider area as they follow the relevant processes, networks, or constraints outward from the particular locality” (Silverman and Gulliver 1992: 23). For example, different offices of the MAR in Mexico City, Guadalajara and Autlán are involved in “local” transactions of ejido land. Furthermore, the dynamics in the village and ejido can only be understood by taking into account migration to the United States and the increasingly transnationalized lives of ejidatarios. In other words, the relations that affect the production of locality are fundamentally translocal and we should try to find the means to study the production of locality in a world that has become deterritorialized, diasporic, and

transnational (see Appadurai 1997: 188). So, the research also included fieldwork at different government offices in different cities, the study of archives at different places, the study of governmental propaganda, fieldwork in the regional city of Autlán, and a visit to people from La Canoa in Los Angeles.

### *Conflicts and Tensions*

From the start of the research I tried to find areas of contention, struggle, and conflicts in the ejido or the village. The critical importance of conflicts for anthropological studies was developed explicitly by authors of the Manchester school (Gluckmann 1955, 1965, Turner 1969). Authors in legal anthropology have also made important contributions to the study of conflicts (Gulliver 1979, Nader 1969, Comaroff and Roberts 1981, Starr and Collier 1989). In contrast to several of these authors, however, I focus on conflicts not because I am interested in the constitution of normative orders, or the study of mechanisms of conflict resolution, but because in my view conflictive situations give insights into the central resources at stake, and the power struggles and practices which develop around them. The study of conflicts shows how social actors organize themselves, how groups are formed and split up, what is important for different categories of people, and how they talk about this. In this way it provides a point of entry for the study of organizing practices, ideological processes, and forms of ordering which develop in certain force fields. An additional reason to study conflictive situations was that they offered me the possibility of studying in more detail the role of agrarian procedures and "how individuals and groups in particular times and places have used legal resources to achieve their ends" (Starr and Collier 1989:2). In this way I could "analyze the relationship of the law to wider systems of social relations" (*ibid.*). The fact that conflicts were an important part of the research does not mean that I only studied the visible, the crucial, and most dramatic events. In reality, most of the organizing around serious land conflicts was "invisible", in the sense that it was done in small groups outside formal arenas, and at places and moments that most people were not aware of. Furthermore, I did not only focus on conflictive situations (see Holleman 1973 for a discussion of how a unilateral focus on disputes may be a misleading guide for the study of forms of ordering) and also studied the development of "non-conflictive" organizing practices.

### *Studying Public Events and the Social Interface*

Another focus of the research were public events. I realized that important questions and conflicts were hardly ever spoken about or settled at the official meetings and that most issues were resolved in private settings. However, although official meetings may have little to do with their formal function, they may be illuminating in other respects. First of all, formal meetings may give important clues about what is happening "behind the scenes", from the ironic remarks, the conversations and discussions in the back of the room, and the

discussions afterwards. Furthermore, these public meetings show the ways in which matters are formalized. They may show how issues which have been resolved informally are formally presented, challenged, and negotiated. Public debates also give an indication of the most powerful political or administrative discourses (see Bloch 1975 and Parkin 1984 on political language). A central aim of mine was to study these official events in relation to other kinds of gatherings and encounters. I wanted to find out what the role of formal meetings and gatherings was in the organizing practices at the local level. Did people organize these formal events in order to attain certain ends? Did they use these meetings for other purposes? Or had these meetings perhaps attained certain unintended characteristics and roles through time? Were there different types of public meetings?

The interactions between officials and ejidatarios formed a different object of study. Long (1989) develops the concept of the social interface for the study of the interactions between peasants and officials. He is especially interested in the relationship between policy, its implementation, and the final outcome. He argues that "development interface situations are the critical points at which not only is policy applied but at which it is 'transformed' through acquiring social meanings that were not set out in the original policy statements" (Long 1989: 3). The study of direct interactions between bureaucrats and "clients" can be especially interesting in situations of new government programs and changing institutional contexts, such as the transformation of Mexico's agrarian law. These interfaces reveal, for example, the role of institutional discourses, the expectations and perceptions of officials and ejidatarios, and the different contexts and processes of negotiation. In these interfaces we can also study the role of professional jargon and if, for example, legal language indeed "renders powerless the ordinary language of the uninformed" (Parkin 1984: 360).

### *Case Studies and Context*

Specific case studies (Mitchell 1983, Walton 1992) and situational analyses (van Velsen 1964, Long 1968) were elaborated during the research. These detailed studies of conflicts, people and events are central for the research as only in this way can the complexity of different organizing processes be revealed. I agree with Scott when he says that "any carefully detailed empirical case is always far richer than the generalizations that can be extracted from it" (1994: ix). Among other things, detailed studies were made of one big and several smaller land conflicts in the ejido (chapters five, seven and eight); of the election of the executive committee of the ejido in 1991 (chapter six); of the extended family life of one household (chapter four), and of the implementation of a new government project for the ejido (chapter nine). Obviously, the cases should be chosen on the basis of their importance for the theme of the research. Walton elaborates on the use of case studies and argues that, "the seemingly innocent terms 'case' and 'case study' are really quite presumptuous" (Walton 1992: 121). He discusses the duality that lies beneath the use of the term "case". On the one hand, he argues, cases imply particularity as they are situationally grounded and

provide a specific limited view of social life. On the other hand, cases pretend to be something more. "When researchers speak of a 'case' rather than a circumstance, instance, or event, they invest the study of a particular social setting with some sense of generality. An 'instance' is just that and goes no further. A 'case' implies a family; it alleges that the particular is a case of something else" (*ibid.*: 121). This "pretension" we have with our "cases" makes it all the more important to present an elaborate study of the "context" from which the cases are taken. In reality, the interesting thing about case studies is that at the moment one selects the case studies one is (implicitly) making statements about the context. For example, we may present the extensive case study of one land conflict as an example of how these cases are "normally" dealt with. However, we may also present two contrasting case studies of land conflicts to show the different elements that may be decisive in the resolution of these conflicts. This makes it clear that the choice and presentation of case studies and situational analyses "require theoretical judgments about causality, necessary connections and abstraction. Consequently they are not a rationale for naive empiricism and make great demands of analytical rigor" (Rogers and Vertovec 1995: 10-11).

#### *Interviews, Dialogues and Active Participation*

Talking to people and getting information through interviews or informal conversations is one of the main sources of anthropological fieldwork. Yet, in this study talking with people has not only been used to acquire "information" but also to study story-telling, reflective talk, and the use of certain discourses. As Cohen points out, "we could begin by paying attention to the ways in which people reflect on themselves, and then see in what ways these reflections are indicative of social and cultural context, or require such contextualisation to be intelligible to us" (Cohen 1994: 29). I looked for theories people construct about history, society, and the things that happened around them. I analyzed the way in which villagers and ejidatarios tended to express themselves about themselves, the ejido, their society, the history of their community, and other topics they came up with themselves. Attention was also paid to expressions which were frequently uttered, standard ways of talking about certain themes, and distinctions and categories people employed. I also tried to pursue the more difficult task of distinguishing differences in expressions people used in different settings, topics which were avoided, and parts of reality which were made invisible by their way of talking (see Silverman 1993, Alasutari 1995). It is important to stress that the significance of certain ways of talking can only be determined in relation to other research material. For example, only in relation to the rest of the research material may one draw conclusions about, why ejidatarios always mention certain ejido rules and not others, why officials always start talking about corruption in the institutes they work for and at the same time stress the importance of formal procedures, and why officials and ejidatarios use completely different languages when they talk about the same land conflict.

The manifold conversations I had with the same people over the course of several years

were the most important source for my research. With these people I entered into elaborate debates as I became a sort of discussant for them, "someone who was not party in the petty and hard struggles ... but who was, nevertheless, to some extent part of the picture" (de Vries 1992: 70). Especially towards the end of the fieldwork period, these interviews took on more and more the character of critical dialogues. I challenged people on certain ideas they held and deliberately confronted them with what I saw as contradictions in their statements and actions. I myself had also developed certain ideas about the ejido and the difficult relation of the ejidatarios with the state bureaucracies and I discussed these ideas with the ejidatarios. It was interesting to see how they reacted to my theories and doubts, but they themselves also started asking me questions about my personal views on the matter. This resulted in interesting research material that helped me to develop further my ideas about the most striking phenomena I found during my fieldwork. With officials I discussed my ideas about the workings of the Mexican bureaucracy. While with some people this resulted in interesting discussions with others this kind of dialogue was not possible at all. Some officials liked to be challenged on their views and they themselves liked to discuss what they saw as problems of the agrarian bureaucracy and the rural sector, but others held on strongly to their official role and formal discourse and gave standard bureaucratic answers.

Towards the end of the fieldwork period, the research acquired some elements of action research as I myself became actively involved in ejido matters. This active participation had not so much been a decision on my part as a decision on the part of some ejidatarios who thought that I could be of use to them in their troublesome relation with the agrarian bureaucracy. In this way I became enrolled in their 50 year old fight to recover a piece of land that is in the hands of private landowners (see chapter seven and eight) and I became a member of the local committee that had to formulate internal ejido rules (see chapter nine).

#### *A Census and Genealogies of People and Plots*

During the research I worked on three data-bases: a census of the village, genealogies of families of the village and genealogies of land plots of the ejido. The decision to work on these three data-bases was taken during the research. For this part of the research I worked with two young people from the village: a girl whose father is landless and a boy whose father is ejidatario of La Canoa. The census was a relatively easy endeavor. On the other hand, the genealogies of land plots and the genealogies of families were an enormous investment of time. Yet, there were several reasons for making this investment. First of all, kinship relations seemed to be very important but at the same time extremely confusing to an outsider. Everybody seemed to be related to each other in different ways. I felt that genealogies could help me to disentangle these webs of kinship relations and to estimate the role that kinship relations played in social life and politics. Secondly, with respect to the ejido plots I wanted to find out more precisely what had happened with the land over the years. In the end, the more quantitative material which was the result of the genealogies of

land plots was crucial for the contextualization of some parts of the qualitative field material. An additional methodological advantage of working on genealogies is that it proved to be an excellent way to make people talk about things that happened in the past, and about people who had disappeared or were never mentioned but who appeared in the genealogy. During more than two years I worked on the genealogies of land plots and families. Although these genealogies were very labor intensive they gave invaluable insights about movement of people, kinship relations, and land histories.

### *Conflicts During the Creation of the Text*

The process of writing in general and of anthropological writing in particular goes together with many doubts, frustrations, and decisions during the creation of the text. One of the most difficult decisions for me during the writing process was when to write in terms of generalizations and when to let in the richness and diversity of social life. When to talk in a summarizing way, presenting only my own analysis, and when to leave out my analysis and let the reader judge for herself from the material presented. When one decides to present more detailed ethnographic material the danger always exists that the reader loses sight of the theoretical or analytical points one wants to make. On the other hand, the ethnographic material presented should not be so thin as to become pure illustration either. I finally made the decision to present a lot of ethnographic material in the book in order to substantiate the points I want to make. Several of my own doubts, surprises, and theoretical struggles during the research are also included, since this gives insights into the creation of the ethnography. As Smith argues, we should try to "self consciously defamiliarize particular moments in the social world we are studying - a life history, a dispute, an element of panic, humor or despair - in order to bring into focus the work of interpretation, not just the actors' but also our own" (Smith 1996: 6).

### **Organization of the Book**

The book deals with many different themes related to the ejido and with diverse forms of organizing. For this reason no single set of concepts is central to all chapters. For example, the concept of force field is most important in chapters five and six as I there discuss the strong forms of patterning which have developed in ejido organizing practices. The concepts of the culture of the state, the idea of the state and the hope-generating machine play more important roles in the close analysis of the relation between ejidatarios and the state bureaucracy, sometimes mediated by brokers (chapters seven, eight, and nine). The first three chapters (chapters two, three, and four) discuss themes which are central for understanding and contextualizing the lives of the ejidatarios.

In *chapter two* the background of the Mexican land reform and the establishment of

ejidos in Mexico is discussed. This is followed by an account of the agrarian history of the region of Autlán and the village La Canoa. The fragmentation and diversity in local storytelling about the past show the divisions between and within families in the village and indicate that the establishment of an ejido was not necessarily the result of a "collective project" of struggle for land. In this chapter the success of the cultural project of the Mexican post-revolutionary state to transform peasant popular consciousness is also a topic of debate.

*In chapter three* the relation between the ejido and the village La Canoa is discussed. Here the tense relation between ejidatarios and landless villagers is analyzed and the way in which ejidatarios have been able to dominate village projects. The possession of an ejido plot is shown to be important not only for economic production but also, among other things, as the basis of peasant identity. These processes are analyzed in relation to the transnational networks in which many villagers and ejidatarios are today embedded.

*In chapter four* a case study of one transnational ejido family is presented. In this way the interrelation between households in La Canoa and in the United States is analyzed and the way in which ejido land may be central to sustaining transnational support networks is demonstrated. Attention is paid to a neglected theme in the literature: the return of migrants to their "home village". The forms in which the income and political relations provided by the ejido may become crucial in sustaining unsuccessful migrants are analyzed. In this context the contested relations of authority between generations are discussed as well as changing gender relations in the transnational context.

*In chapter five* an analysis is presented of the history of the arable ejido plots in La Canoa. On the basis of genealogies of families and genealogies of ejido plots an overview is given of the different types of transactions and the fragmentation of ejido plots since the 1940s. The way in which a patterning of organizing practices around inheritance, renting out of land by migrated ejidatarios and the selling of ejido plots developed is analyzed. The force fields around these different practices are discussed, as well as the different roles played by officials, official procedures, and local power relations.

*Chapter six* sets out to explain how a patterning of organizing practices developed around the administration of the ejido. It is shown that over the years the ejido commissioner has acquired considerable autonomy in his decisions but at the same time has little influence on what happens. This is related to several informal mechanisms of accountability. The way in which ejido meetings have developed into an arena of quarreling or of "playing the formal game" towards other institutions instead of for discussion and decision-making is explained. Attention is also paid to the reflections of the ejidatarios themselves on organizing processes in the ejido and their use of two contrasting discourses: the "accountability discourse of organization" and the "personal politics discourse of organization".

*Chapters seven and eight* deal with the struggle for the "lost land". This concerns a conflict over land that officially belongs to the ejido but which since the forties has been in

the hands of several private landholders. *Chapter seven* describes how under the influence of the democratic, liberalization discourse of president Salinas (1988-1994) several ejidatarios of La Canoa thought that the time was ripe to recover this land. The actions of this group of ejidatarios and their relations with several intermediaries, among others a lawyer and a priest, are followed for several years. Their reflections about this problem are studied as well as the way in which they organize themselves in relation to it.

*Chapter eight* concentrates on their experiences with several MAR engineers who arrived at the ejido to investigate the problem of the "lost land". Their many visits to offices of the MAR are analyzed and their desperate search for brokers. In these two chapters we see clearly the practices of representation and interpretation in the relation between ejidatarios and the bureaucracy, which I have called the culture of the state. We find the continuous theorizing of the people about power relations, and the role of conspiracy theories, dreams, and fantasies.

*Chapter nine* follows with an analysis of the world of the officials. Attention is given to the ways in which the officials reflect on the politicized nature of their institution and the role of the discourse of corruption in the bureaucracy is discussed. In this chapter the introduction of the new agrarian law of 1992 is also presented as well as the introduction of a new institution, the Procuraduría Agraria. The implementation of the "project of the internal ejido rules" in La Canoa is followed, in which the relation between ejidatarios and officials of the different agrarian bureaucracies is analyzed.

*Chapter ten* finally presents the main results of the research and their theoretical implications. I return to the initial discussion of organizing practices in wider force fields and some points will be further elaborated. I then discuss what the implications of this theoretical approach and the results of this research are for debates on "organization for development".

## Notes

1. The Mexican agrarian law has been changed several times this century. However, the main characteristics of the ejido regime were not changed between 1917 and 1992. In order not to cause confusion I use the term agrarian law throughout the book and I refer to the Federal Agrarian Reform Law (FARL) of 1971 if I want to comment on specific articles of the agrarian law.
2. In order to avoid confusion I use the term Ministry of Agrarian Affairs (MAR) whenever I refer to the institution that took care of ejido land affairs. For the majority of ejidatarios the name of the institution was of little importance, nor the fact that it had become a ministry in 1974; it simply was the institution that interfered in ejido affairs.  
The authorities in the implementation of the land reform were: the President of the Republic, the Governors of States and the Military Heads. Furthermore the following agencies were especially created: the National Agrarian Commission, a Local Agrarian Commission in every state and Special Execution Committees. The main institution that took care of agrarian affairs and the procuration of agrarian justice has been renamed and reorganized several times since 1915. It was called successively, the National Agrarian Commission (Comisión Nacional Agraria), the Agrarian Department (Departamento Agrario), the



Department of Agrarian Affairs and Colonization (Departamento de Asuntos Agrarios y Colonización) and finally in 1974 the Ministry of Agrarian Reform (Secretaría de la Reforma Agraria). In 1992 art. 27 of the Mexican Constitution was changed again and together with the new agrarian law a new bureaucracy was introduced alongside the MAR, the Office of the Attorney General for Agrarian Affairs (Procuraduría Agraria). A political debate started on the abolition of the Ministry of Agrarian Reform. For the time being it continues to exist.

3. This research project was entitled *Contrasting patterns of irrigation organization, peasant strategies and planned intervention: comparative studies in western Mexico* and was directed by Norman Long. Several Ph.D. theses and books were the result of this project: Brunt 1992, González 1994, Guzmán 1995, Torres 1994a, Villareal 1994, and van der Zaag 1992).

CHAPTER 2  
HISTORY, STORY-TELLING, AND THE  
CONSTRUCTION OF COMMUNITY

**Introduction: History, Master Narratives, and Story-Telling**

In this chapter I present a short history of the agrarian reform in Mexico in general and in the region of La Canoa in particular. This is followed by a discussion of life in the ejido La Canoa since its establishment in 1938. This information is important as a historical background for the discussions in the following chapters. However, in addition to providing the reader with "context" information, this journey into history also allows us to open the debate on the relation between the master narrative of the Revolution and agrarian reform in Mexico, on the one hand, and, individual story-telling on the other. In my view, individual stories about this period from the agrarian reform onwards call into question the much proclaimed success of the state hegemonic process of indoctrination of the Mexican peasantry. As Knight points out, that there was a state project of cultural transformation seems undoubtable, but the question remains how successful it has been (Knight 1994a: 60).

In this chapter I also argue that the history of the ejido played a central role in the construction of a situated community. I do not conceive of community as a "homogenous group of people who collectively fought for the land and conquered the *hacendados*". As we will see, the success of the village La Canoa in establishing its own ejido is accompanied by conflicts, struggles, and new forms of dominance in a diversified village. This is well reflected in the diversity, fragmentation, and contradictions in local stories. Yet, the establishment of the ejido, as well as the conflicts around it, have strongly influenced relationships between people and in this way have contributed to "the production of what we might call *local subjects*, actors who properly belong to a situated community of kin, neighbors, friends, and enemies" (Appadurai 1997: 179).<sup>1</sup>

Within this context of a situated community of friends and enemies, and in relation to these new forms of dominance, the local "discourse of *cacicazgo*" is analyzed as well as the "idiom of kinship" which are widely used to explain local politics and loyalties and conflicts between families.

*About the Presumed Success of a National Cultural Project*

The initiation, after the revolution, of a populist cultural project in which the diffusion of a national ideology was linked to the formation of the post-revolutionary nation-state is frequently commented on in the literature. Alonso speaks in this respect of "a selective tradition of nationalism, which is key for the consolidation of the idea of the state" (Alonso 1994: 389). The federal schooling system and the creation of the film industry in the 1930s

were important pillars of this project. "It was through film images, as Carlos Monsivais has pointed out, that the popular masses in Mexico saw themselves, their own faces and gestures, represented in the new public space of the nation, their previous sense of identity being confined to regional or local communality" (Rowe and Schelling 1991: 232).

The master narrative of the agrarian reform, in which the Mexican peasantry is presented as bravely fighting against the *hacendados* and in this way opening the way for the establishment of the ejidos, was part of the institutionalization of the revolution. As Katz points out, "in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution of 1910-20 the revolutionary peasant became a subject not only of historical study, but also of literature, films, and paintings. With his *sombrero*, his *machete*, and his rifle he has marched or ridden through countless Hollywood or Mexican films, killing brutal overseers, hacienda owners, corrupt officials, and federal soldiers" (Katz 1988: 3).

Many academics have pointed out that despite the fact that the Mexican peasant became a central figure in the official national history of the revolution, the ejidatarios and landless peasants were in fact brutally exploited by the state. The peasants never received all the land they were promised, the ejido sector received little support for agricultural production and the support that was given was monopolized by the elite which could establish better relations with the bureaucracy (Warman 1972, 1976, Bartra 1974, Esteva 1980, Paré 1984). As Warman put it, the peasants (*campesinos*) "have been declared the favorite sons of the nation and have been sacrificed in its name" (*Se les han declarado hijos predilectos de la patria, y en su nombre han sido sacrificados*) (Warman 1972: 13). These authors claimed that the national cultural project, in which the peasants played a heroic role and were said to have received the support of the state against the *hacendados*, was central in securing the loyalty of the Mexican peasantry to the state and the PRI even when they were actually betraying them.

However, on the basis of my study of La Canoa I have doubts about the "success" of this national cultural project. Knight asks the following questions with respect to the state project of cultural transformation implemented by the revolutionaries: "Did they transform popular consciousness, legitimizing the revolutionary regime? ... Or was the revolutionary project a failure, a gimcrack façade behind which the common people, the peasants especially, grumbled and prayed to old gods, untouched by the new legitimation?" (Knight 1994a: 60). In my view, powerful symbols, narratives, and discourses never have an unquestioned authority and people will always "respond, reinterpret, and challenge even as they accept and are shaped by these forms of knowledge" (Tsing 1993: 8). Alonso also points out that the production of a selective tradition by the state system is part of a powerful hegemonic process which, however, "is always challenged by alternative and oppositional traditions that dispute dominant articulations of space, time, and substance" (Alonso 1994: 389). On the basis of the research in La Canoa I conclude that the impact of this project on people's consciousness has been less than is generally claimed. Instead of determining people's consciousness these national discourses may have played more instrumental roles. I also

argue that an analysis of local story-telling and reflective talk about events and processes in the past is essential to give further insights into these processes. In the next section I discuss the difference between master narratives and story-telling.

### *Master Narratives and Story-Telling*

After many years in which “people treated the past as largely irrelevant to an understanding of how people came to do what they did” (Burke 1992: 12-13), since the 1980s there has been a return to historical perspectives in sociology and anthropology (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992, Cooper *et al.* 1993, Silverman and Gulliver 1992, Dirks *et al.* 1994). There has also been “a growing recognition that a historical anthropology is not just a narrativized anthropology, not just a matter of giving the present some sort of ancestral pedigree” (Dirks, Eley and Ortner 1994: 6). There is a strong tendency to move “from the ideal of the Voice of History to that of heteroglossia, defined as ‘varied and opposing voices’” (Burke 1991: 6).

In order to be sensitive to “varied and opposing voices” I make a distinction between master narratives and story-telling. The master narrative is told in the third person and pretends to tell a “true story”. As Whyte (1987) argues, by its mere form as a sequence of events and processes with a well-defined beginning, middle, and end, the narrative gives a seemingly natural structure and order of meaning to the events presented. This gives the narrative a strong explanatory value and perhaps an authoritarian nature. These characteristics are especially clear with respect to the master narratives of the Mexican revolution and agrarian reform as presented in school books and films. The narrative does not tell personal life histories or at least only those that are considered crucial to the process. In contrast, story-telling is much more actor oriented. Stories can tell individual, personal histories in the first person. They are related to family and individual biographies. They are often anecdotal and not necessarily intend to make points. While the master narrative of the revolution and the agrarian reform are coherent, have beginnings and ends, winners and losers, the stories local people tell about these periods can take many different forms. As we will see master narratives and stories can play different roles in the lives of people.

In this chapter I want to discuss certain aspects of historical story-telling and its relevance for socio-political analysis. In my view, story-telling about the past forms part of more general forms of “social theorizing”. “Histories and stories are ordering resources for working on and making sense of the networks of the social” (Law 1994a: 71). Social actors normally have opinions and ideas about what happens in the world around them and always search for explanations for the things that happen to them. These reflections and stories do not necessarily take the form of a narrative with climaxes, turning-points, and crises (Rosaldo 1989: 141). In addition, stories about past events or periods are not fixed but may change according to new elements and new experiences. In other words, “the past” acquires meaning in the light of present-day problems. For that reason story-telling and representations of the

past may be related to political struggles and processes of identity formation in the present. In this way, we may discover that certain generally accepted historical images or expressions have different meanings for different people, or that they are expressed and "used" for different purposes.

The first part of the chapter discusses the period of the revolution and agrarian reform in Mexico and how the villagers of La Canoa talk about this period. The second part of the chapter presents an analysis of life in La Canoa after the establishment of the ejido and how this is related to story-telling by the villagers. The focus then shifts to the divisions in the village and the role that the discourse of *cacicazgo* and the idiom of kinship play in the reflections of the villagers on local politics. Finally, the way in which festivities and scandals contribute to the construction of the local situated community is discussed.

### **Agrarian Struggle and Land Reform in the Valley of Autlán**

The Mexican revolution which began in 1910 has been extensively documented and discussed in different circles. New versions and analyses of the years of revolution (1910-1920) and its consequences still appear with great frequency (see Buve 1988, 1993, Knight 1986, 1990, 1994a, 1994b, Meyer 1991, Tutino 1986). This makes any general summary of these events a tricky endeavor. The same holds for the background and implications of the agrarian reform which was implemented from 1915 to 1992. The common - although contested - view of the Mexican revolution, is that it was a broad popular movement with strong agrarian demands. It is generally presented as a reaction to the authoritarian regime of Porfirio Díaz (1876-1910) during which the process of concentration of the land in the hands of a small group of large landowners had intensified. The Indian communities which had been granted communal property rights in colonial times by the Spanish Crown, saw their properties gradually diminished by the expansion of the haciendas and by agrarian laws issued in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> In this way a process of land concentration that had already started centuries ago, was carried to extremes. As many rural communities were robbed of their lands the majority of rural people were forced to work on the large landholdings under dreadful circumstances. Agrarian grievances of the masses of landless peasants were intensified by economic crisis and severe food shortages between 1908 and 1910. So, in 1910 the regime of Porfirio Díaz was finally overthrown with mass support from the rural population.<sup>3</sup>

The agrarian law of 1915 formed the legal basis of the agrarian reform program. In 1917 this law was turned into the famous article 27 of the Mexican Constitution. The Constitution of 1917 defined the three principal forms of land tenure in Mexico: small private property (*pequeña propiedad*), ejidos, and agrarian communities (see appendix 1 for more information).<sup>4</sup> Large landholdings could now legally be expropriated and the land granted

to peasant groups. The peasant groups who received land were organized in ejidos. Violent seizures of haciendas also took place which were later legalized by official agrarian procedures.

The revolution also implied a power struggle between the Catholic church and the state. "The local priests preached against agrarismo and - it was said - even violated the secrecy of the confessional in order to keep their landlords allies well informed. Thus, as the Church - significantly but not anonymously - aligned with the landed interests, so the anticlericalism of the agraristas became more virulent" (Knight 1994b: 16). As a product of this growing tension between the church and the state, a bloody *Cristero* war broke out in midwestern Mexico, a part of the country where clerical Catholicism was deeply rooted (see Jean Meyer 1974). The *Cristiada* raged from 1926 to 1929 and to a lesser degree in the 1930s. Although the *Cristeros* lost their fight against the state army, this certainly did not mean that Catholicism had lost its influence in the *Cristero* regions.

In the 1930s, matters calmed down. During the presidency of Cárdenas (1934-1940) the greatest amount of land was expropriated and the greatest number of ejidos established throughout Mexico. Today there are 28,000 ejidos, occupying more than half of Mexico's arable land and including over 3 million ejidatarios.<sup>5</sup> However, agrarian reform has been full of irregularities and many large landholders have been able to avoid the expropriation of their lands.

In 1992, article 27 of the Constitution was changed and the program of land reform to establish ejidos was officially abolished. The rules for the use and transfer of individual ejido plots were also drastically changed and the possibility of making the transition from the ejido form of land ownership to private land ownership has been opened.

#### *Land Reform in the Valley of Autlán*

The valley of Autlán, in Jalisco, western Mexico, covers 22,300 hectares. It lies at an altitude of 900 meters above sea-level and is surrounded by mountains. The valley has fertile soils and the several rivers that cross the valley have made the construction of small irrigation systems possible in certain parts. The town of Autlán is 450 years old and has 34,073 inhabitants.<sup>6</sup> It is an important regional commercial and administrative center and a "gateway" to the sparsely populated coastal zone of Jalisco. It is 180 kilometers from the state capital Guadalajara.<sup>7</sup> At the other end of the valley lies the village of El Grullo. Many smaller villages and isolated hamlets litter the region. There are 37 ejidos in the municipalities of Autlán and el Grullo and 3,906 ejidatarios in the region as opposed to 441 private landowners. Of the total amount of arable land, 75 per cent is in the hands of ejidatarios and 25 per cent in the hands of private landowners.<sup>8</sup> The village La Canoa is 15 kilometers by road from Autlán.

The agrarian structure of the region of Autlán at the beginning of this century was dominated by a large number of small haciendas or landholdings. There were 33 haciendas

in the Autlán region with an average size of 2,500 hectares (Muriá 1982: 110). The haciendas not only occupied the valley plain but also large extensions of mountainous lands, which were used for herds of cattle. The owners of the haciendas normally lived in Autlán or in Guadalajara and had an administrator taking care of the work on the hacienda. Some *hacendados* also had other properties closer to the coast of Jalisco. Although several haciendas were known to have irrigation systems, most arable land was rainfed and most landholdings depended on one, insecure rainy season a year (from May to November).

Well-known haciendas in the valley of Autlán - El Grullo were Ahuacapán of the Michel family and Ayuquila of the Rivera family. Both were haciendas with private irrigation systems and a well organized production system. They worked with teams of laborers from both inside and outside the hacienda and had a corresponding physical structure: the hacienda house, barracks for the laborers, storage buildings, mills, a chapel, and so on. However, most properties in the valley that were called haciendas did not correspond to this image. These haciendas consisted only of the land, sometimes with a storage building. These properties had no irrigation and did not have work to offer during the whole year. For that reason they did not work with teams of fixed hacienda laborers. Often they did not have a hacienda house, a church, or installations for laborers on the property. In the rainy season they worked with the labor drawn from villages nearby.

The hacienda La Canoa was small and poor. Within the walls of the property the only construction was a storage building for maize. The last owner of La Canoa was known as "not a bad man". This, in contrast to the owners of bigger haciendas such as Ahuacapán who were known to be very despotic and cruel. The village, which had 258 inhabitants in 1921,<sup>9</sup> did fall within the limits of the hacienda property, but the relationship between villagers and the hacienda was much more flexible than in highly organized haciendas like Ahuacapán or Ayuquila. As La Canoa did not have enough work for the villagers during the whole year, people were allowed to work on other haciendas, as laborers or as sharecroppers. Only in the rainy season did they have share-cropping arrangements with the *hacendado* of La Canoa. The relative independence of the village is also reflected in the high rate of migration of villagers. Families arrived at La Canoa, while others left to find a living elsewhere. This free mobility was not possible in the other haciendas. People in the region remember that there people had to stay put (and generally were indebted for life) and when they left it was because they were thrown out (because of a robbery, or other crime).

The man who initiated the agrarian struggle in the region of Autlán in the years of the revolution was Casimiro Castillo. He was a vegetable seller in the marketplace and organized secret meetings in Autlán. People from the surrounding hamlets also joined his group and came to the meetings. Among them were several men from La Canoa. In 1916 Casimiro Castillo started the official procedures to request land for Autlán, the way having been opened by the law of 1915 and later the Constitution of 1917. Autlán was the first village in the region to present a request for land. The ejido of Autlán was established in 1924 by

the expropriation of parts of 11 different properties (see Federal Gazette, 15th November 1927).<sup>10</sup> In 1924 Casimiro was elected to the state congress of Jalisco as the representative of the Autlán district. There his actions became a nuisance for the state governor Zuno. It is said that Zuno himself ordered Casimiro Castillo's assassination in May 1925 in a village on the coast of Jalisco.<sup>11</sup> This village was later named after Casimiro Castillo.

One of the most important and most remarkable men in La Canoa at that time was Filomeno Romero. He is the great grandfather of the majority of the people who live in the village today. Don Filomeno was a very rich man and well-known in the region. He had arrived with his wife and children in La Canoa from another village. He did not own lands in the village but he rented lands and established very good relationships with the owner of the hacienda La Canoa. He had large herds of cattle on the lands he rented. Don Filomeno supported the men in La Canoa who worked with Casimiro Castillo. Among other things, he paid for their trips to the offices of the agrarian authorities in Mexico City. The owner of the hacienda La Canoa did not cause them much trouble. Some people said that this was because his title to the land was not in order and he realized that he would lose his land anyway. However, ejidos were mostly established by the expropriation of lands of various haciendas not just one and the other landowners around La Canoa were feared enemies. La Canoa residents requested the establishment of their own ejido in 1923 before Autlán was endowed with its ejido. However, a large number of people from La Canoa were already included in the group of beneficiaries of the ejido of Autlán which was established in 1924. In the documents of the Land Reform Institute (later the Ministry of Agrarian Reform), this fact was presented as the reason why the people of La Canoa could not receive land to form their own ejido. So, for many years a group of people of La Canoa were members of the ejido of Autlán.

Then the *Cristero* war struck the region. Although the *Cristero* movement was not very strong in this area, there was a regional *Cristero* army and two serious battles were fought between the *Cristeros* and the army in 1927 and 1928. Between 1926 and 1929 the Catholic churches in the region were closed. The man who derived regional power from successfully fighting the *Cristeros* and pacifying the region was General Marcelino García Barragán. He came from Autlán and was without doubt, the most important and influential person in the region for several decades. In the 1940s the General became the Governor of Jalisco. In this position he could influence many affairs in his home town and region. In 1947 he was removed as state Governor and for a long period the General lost influence in national politics. However, he made a political come-back and in 1964 became Minister of Defence. As he was still Minister of Defence in 1968 he is held responsible for the killings of hundreds of students in the *plaza* de Tlaltelolco of Mexico City during the student protests then.

The General has had considerable influence in the region of Autlán even when he held positions in Guadalajara or Mexico City. Torres describes how the General appointed the



candidates for the presidency of Autlán and how he kept visiting the region every month to talk to his followers about necessary regional projects and public services, such as drinking water and roads (Torres 1994a: 109-122). The role of the General in land reform was variable. He supported the establishment and extension of ejidos in the region of Autlán when he was Governor of Jalisco in the 1940s. However, he was not really interested in agrarian issues and his position on specific land conflicts depended on the people involved. Although he agreed with the expropriation of landholdings for the establishment of ejidos, he also helped friends who were private landholders in their efforts to keep certain lands. One of the most famous cases in which he was involved concerns the ejido of Autlán where he opposed the expropriation of lands that were necessary for the extension of the ejido of Autlán.<sup>12</sup>

The General is also named as having been responsible for killings in the region and the illegal invasion of ejido lands. This explains the diversity of opinions about the General. A local historian Gregorio Rivera commented on these two sides of the General: *I think that the General did perhaps help Casimiro Castillo in his agrarian struggle, he must have given him directions or helped him with contacts with people in the Agrarian Institute, but the truth is that the General also acquired properties by force; some of the properties he possessed, he acquired in a way that was almost dispossession (despojo). The General is a very controversial person, opinions about him differ, to some people he was "el gran Mexicano", the great hero and for others, the worst thing one can imagine. In the ejido Ayutita they love the General very much. There they say that they received the ejido lands thanks to the General (Gregorio Rivera, interview May 1994).*

### **A Disconcerting Experience with Local History**

My first experiences in La Canoa seemed to confirm the theories about the success of the state project of indoctrination of the peasantry. I was struck by the recurring statements of the ejidatarios about the struggle for the land at the beginning of this century. Revolutionary expressions such as "land to the tiller" were frequently uttered in their explanation of the ejido system.<sup>13</sup> The ejidatarios proudly told me that their fathers and grandfathers had fought against the landowners to get their ejido established and often referred to national figures as Pancho Villa and Cárdenas to explain their agrarian history. I felt strong feelings around concepts such as ejido land, ejidatario and also "sons of ejidatarios". The ejidatarios used to say that the government and the PRI had supported them in the struggle against the *hacendados* and given them the land. I interpreted this as an indication of a continuing revolutionary spirit and as a proof of the success of the national cultural project in rural Mexico. Many of their comments appeared to come directly from school books, political propaganda talks, the government party discourse, and Mexican movies.

Yet, when I started asking more explicit questions about the experiences of their fathers

and grandfathers who had so bravely fought for the land, I came to the disconcerting conclusion that the ejidatarios could not tell me anything about this. Very few people in the village could give me information or any stories about the period of the agrarian reform. People also presented a very vague image of society before land reform. In their stories, society before the agrarian reform was divided into *ricos* (rich people) and *pobres* (poor people). The *ricos* owned all the land and the landless poor people had to work for them. Yet, hardly anybody knew the name of the last *rico* (hacienda owner) of La Canoa. Actually, very few people in La Canoa knew the more precise agrarian situation in La Canoa or the valley of Autlán before agrarian reform. Some said that there was only one *rico* in the whole region; others claimed that there were several. They generally did not know the names of the different landowners or only of one of them. The names they remembered differed from one ejidatario to another.

Only old men (of 80, 90 years) who were gifted with a good memory and had followed the activities of their *agrarista* fathers and uncles with special interest could give me more detailed information about this period and insights into the underlying processes. People who were younger and had not been young men or adults themselves during this period, sometimes remembered their fathers and grandfathers talking about these affairs. But they used to add that their fathers did not speak with them about these matters. A young ejidatario, in his thirties, for example, told me that he did not know anything about the time of the haciendas or agrarian struggle in the region as his grandfather, who could have told him about it, died when he was six years old. Although there are many women ejidatarios and some play an important role in the ejido, the women could not give much information either. Women generally used gender as a reason for not knowing more about the period of the revolution and agrarian struggle. They said that the land and agrarian struggle had been a man's affair. So, in the village, they explain their little knowledge about the situation before the agrarian reform and the establishment of the ejido by the fact that it was before they were born, that their fathers and grandfathers were uncommunicative or that it was a man's affair.

Yet, the interesting point here is not the "transfer of knowledge" from one generation to the next but the fact that apparently no local mythification of revolutionary and agrarian heroes has occurred. There are no detailed stories about local men, who fought against the cruel *hacendado* and are remembered by name and actions. The *ricos* and *pobres* are nameless and are not listed together with national figures. I had expected local histories to be going around: stories that had developed into a form of "local collective memory" connected to the national narrative.

Some people might analyze this absence of a strong local history in terms of the neutralization or suppression of local histories and memories for the sake of a nationalist project. The frequent repetition of the standard discourse on agrarian reform and the revolution (as expressed in school books and movies) could be seen as a sign of the success

of the national cultural project. However, I would object to such a conclusion as there are many other local stories which bear little relation with the "master narrative" of the national agrarian history. There are, for example, fascinating personal life histories and an abundance of stories concerning land conflicts and problems within and between families in the village. As Friedrich points out, "peasants themselves are deeply preoccupied with factionalism, political violence, land disputes, and some subset of the diverse historical details that bear on today's situation. Any one peasant spends far more time, energy, and thoughts on agrarian questions than one would guess from anthropologies and histories" (Friedrich 1986: xviii). Naturally, one can argue that discrepancies always exist between national historical narratives and stories at a local or personal level. Yet, as I said, these were no local versions of the master narrative. I will now turn to the themes that most recurred in the stories about those times.

#### *Collective Themes in Story-Telling*

An important recurring theme is the treasure of the revolution, which is mentioned in many other works on Mexico as well. People in those times are said to have hidden their belongings for fear of theft. In La Canoa people expect the gold and other valuable objects to be hidden in the *cerro* (mountainous terrain) since that was the place people fled to. However, the oldest houses in the village are also looked at with special interest. For example, the six daughters of Cayetano Lomelí the oldest man in the village (who died in 1992 at the age of 102) are sure that their father buried gold in their paternal house. He himself told his daughters so (though without indicating the exact place) but they have never found it. Naturally, people also speculate about the possibility that somebody already found the treasure and secretly took it. The topic of treasure evokes a lot of story-telling. A man told me that as a young boy he accompanied his father to a place in the *cerro* where certainly money was hidden, but he cannot find the place anymore. There are also details about what certain treasure places look like, for example, *it is a place with snails in the wall*. Stories about treasures are also linked to stories about ghosts and fear of the dead who guard the gold. Interestingly, I also heard people use the belief in treasures to explain the wealth of Emilia Romero, a detested money-lender in the village. Emilia and her husband do not possess land, they have many children and they have never worked in the United States. Nevertheless, they are one of the most prosperous families in the village. Although they engage in many activities, their wealth is apparently suspicious and some people relate this to Emilia having found a treasure from the revolution. According to some villagers, an indication of the fact that Emilia found a treasure of the revolution is that at the same time as Emilia's sudden prosperity her mother fell seriously ill (see Taussig 1980 for a debate on wealth originating in contracts with the devil).

Another event which is much commented on in the village is that the houses of La Canoa were once set on fire by the *Cristeros*. A nearby village was a known breeding ground of

*Cristeros* and attacks were organized from there. One day it was La Canoa's turn. The houses were burnt down, but nobody was killed. Some people relate how they fled to the *monte* (hills with woodland) to escape. Others explain how they tried to hide their horses and weapons. One ejidatario told me that when his parents returned to La Canoa, after having lived somewhere else, they were shocked to find their village burnt down. The *Cristeros* are depicted as allies of the *hacendados* who fought against the landless people and the *agraristas*. It is a serious insult to suggest that a member of a certain family was a *Cristero*. Interestingly, the *Cristeros* are much less described in terms of their relation with the Catholic church. As one ejidatario said: *The Cristeros were the hacendados. The agraristas fought to have their own land. The agraristas fought together with the government and won the battle.* The fact that people generally do not stress the connection of the *Cristeros* with the Catholic church may be related to the fact that people in the ejido today are very Catholic and re-define categories of the past in this context. However, it probably also has to do with the fact that situations and categories were complex and very much locally defined. As a regional historian in Autlán explained: *I was 8 or 9 years old at that time. I remember that during the mass the vicar told us that the church was going to be closed. Everybody was very sad. The people organized pilgrimages to the cerro. But to take up arms and join the Cristeros, no...* (E. Medina Lima, interview July 1995).

Another important theme with respect to the agrarian history of the village is the repeatedly mentioned wealth of don Filomeno, the great grandfather of most ejidatarios and originator of the fight for the ejido. All the people in the village who remember him or recall the stories told about him, say that he was very rich. He had hundreds of goats and pigs and large herds of cattle. In other villages in the region don Filomeno is also remembered as a very rich man. Several men in La Canoa related the story of one of Filomeno's sons who stole money from his father but was startled by the fact that the money he had taken was pure gold. One of his grandsons (himself in his seventies) says that Filomeno owned a great many books which, according to him, proves that he was of Spanish origin. Most of his great grandchildren do not show much interest in the reason for his wealth or the fact that he did not fit the image of the "traditional landless peasant" who fought against the *hacendados*. Whatever the exact personal history of don Filomeno, he certainly disturbs the picture of poor landless villagers fighting against rich *hacendados*. Here was a landless but very rich cattle owner, a friend of the *hacendados*, who guided and helped his poor fellow villagers in the establishment of their own ejido. He himself did not receive land, but many of his sons did.

These were the three themes concerning the village that recurred most often in the local stories about this period and which contribute to the construction of a situated community. However, there were also more personal stories about this time.

### *Personal Histories*

What is most striking in the personal stories about this period, is the violence, hardships, and the movement of people and the splitting up of families. Many people begin their stories by telling that they were made orphans by the loss of one or both parents. It was common for families to split up after the death of one or both parents and for everyone to go his or her own way. People also recall the harsh times and that they often had nothing to eat. People migrated in search of a living but also in order to avoid violence and disease. Many murders or "war casualties" are mentioned in these personal histories. They give an image of the revolutionary period as characterized by violence, banditry, hunger, disease, and movement. The political or heroic part of the revolution is much less commented upon. This is also related to the fact that some of the leaders in the revolutionary fights were notorious bandits. Pedro Zamora, for example, a *villista* leader in the region was better known for his plundering of villages and abducting of women than for his political projects. So, what to some people were periods of political fights with meaning and ends, to others were periods of pointless killings and violence. There were many sad stories about this period. Roberto Sánchez, for example, an *ejidatario* in La Canoa, who was born in 1922, remembers the sad history of the man Julián González who lived opposite his house. This little story is illustrative of people's living conditions. Roberto:

*When the ejido of Autlán was established Julián had received land. He had a wife and six children. Then the plague of smallpox ( peste viruela) came and his family fell ill. He took them to Autlán to find a cure, but they died anyway. I will never forget the moment he came back from Autlán. He arrived with only his eldest daughter and one of his sons. His wife and four children had died. He continued here as an ejidatario. But shortly afterwards people were sent from Autlán. We do not know who sent them, but they came to kill people for the revolution. The people here did not suspect anything and thought they were friends. They started drinking with them. When several men who were on their hit list to be killed arrived, the men from Autlán started shooting. When my father heard what was going on, he wanted to go there; his brothers and nephews were involved. But my mother would not let him go. She clung onto him and prevented him from going. They killed Julián González, Carlos Cosío and Pablo Sánchez. Then, Pablo's father Refugio shot the man who had killed his son and the others fled.*

There are many of these personal stories and they convey elements which are important for the people themselves. For many people the revolution and the years afterwards were not so much a period of political fight, but more of chaos, violence, and movement. This phenomenon of chaos is also shown in several recent works on the period of the revolution. Buve (1993) for example, argues that the period from 1910 to 1920 was a chaotic period of violence, war, and uprisings in which little coherence can be found. In some regions peasants rebelled against *hacendados*, in others not. Many people lost their lives in diverse struggles.

Bandits, *guerrilleros* and conventional armies were all operating and sometimes the distinction between political fighters and bandits was not clear. These were periods of political crisis but also of economic crisis, hunger, and movement.

*The Limited Success of the Master Narrative and the Reform of Article 27*

What is remarkable when we analyze local story-telling about this period is first of all that the local themes and stories do not directly relate to the master narrative of the Mexican revolution and agrarian reform. Secondly, villagers do not try to construct grand theories leading to closure and clear conclusions. There are many fragmented and seemingly isolated stories and themes. The categories of people involved in the struggles, such as *Cristeros* or landless peasants are locally defined and do not necessarily coincide with generally used classifications. One of the central figures of La Canoa in the fight against the *hacendado* was not a poor man but a wealthy man, while the *hacendado* was neither very rich, nor cruel. However, the *ejidatarios* are not bothered by these discrepancies between local stories and the master narrative. It is obvious that the so-called "hegemonic" state project has not been able to push aside localized story-telling. This would seem to imply that the national revolutionary discourse had a certain influence in some domains and not in others. Perhaps it is an important discourse towards outsiders and in negotiations with officials, but not in villagers' private lives or in the construction of their own identity. If that is the case then the success of the national cultural project should be seriously doubted.

In my view, the revolutionary discourse has indeed often been used in an instrumental way. Let me explain this on the basis of the following material. I mentioned before that the revolutionary expression "land to the tiller" was frequently used and that I had interpreted this expression as proof of a continuing revolutionary spirit. However, at a later stage I became aware of a very practical implication of this statement for the people. The agrarian law stated that *ejidatarios* who did not cultivate their plot themselves for two or more consecutive years, would lose the right to the plot. This is a very threatening rule in a situation where many *ejidatarios* live and work outside the region and have other people looking after their land. It means that the person who rents the land (the tiller) acquires the rights to the land. Although rules concerning the use of *ejido* land were never directly followed and always "negotiated" at different levels, they still formed a threat (see chapter five). This rule in particular has always remained very important and has probably been the *ejido* rule that has most bothered *ejidatarios*. It was probably more the practical threat implied in the expression "land to the tiller" that made it so meaningful to the *ejidatarios* rather than its ideological content. I also noticed that reference to violent and heroic struggles for land in the past was especially important in the interaction and negotiations between officials and *ejidatarios* (chapters seven and eight) and in conflicts at the local level between *ejidatarios* and landless villagers (chapters three and six).

This more practical or instrumental meaning of revolutionary expressions concerning the

ejido becomes very clear when we look at the reactions of the ejidatarios to the reform of article 27 of the Mexican Constitution and the new agrarian law of 1992. The new law abolishes many rules concerning the use and transfer of ejido plots. Ejido plots can be sold, rented out, and left unused. With this new agrarian law, the ejido form of land ownership comes very close to private landownership and the formal transformation of ejido land rights into private land ownership has become possible. When talking with the ejidatarios about this new law and the possible transition from the ejido into private land ownership at first they thought this implied that the land would be taken away from them. They fiercely expressed a revolutionary spirit and said that as their fathers themselves had fought for the land they would never let the land be taken away from them. When they realized that they would keep the land but that many rules concerning the use of the land were going to be abolished, they seemed indifferent. After some time, many said it was going to be better that way, as everybody could now do what he or she wanted with the land instead of having to get the permission of the other ejidatarios and having to bribe functionaries. Ideological revolutionary expressions were no longer raised once they knew they would be the owners of their land.

As we see, the meaning of certain expressions has to be studied with care. The ejidatarios use revolutionary images and discourse in certain situations. However, the significance of this revolutionary discourse can only be discovered in the wider context of their lives and political struggles.

### **Life and Community after the Establishment of the Ejido**

I turn now to the period of the establishment of the ejido in 1938 and the years afterwards. We saw that with the establishment of the ejido of Autlán (1924) villagers from La Canoa became members of that ejido and received a tract of land, but they were denied the possibility of establishing their own ejido. The two most important men of La Canoa in the continuing struggle to get their own ejido established were don Filomeno's son, Miguel, and Juan García. Juan García is said to have been the illegitimate child of the son of a hacienda owner in the nearby region of Ciudad Guzmán. He was very poor like most people of La Canoa. The only wealthy person in the village was don Filomeno.

In 1932, La Canoa again requested land to form their own ejido and the decision again went against them. Times changed with the presidency of Cárdenas (1934-1940), when throughout Mexico an unprecedented number of haciendas were expropriated and ejidos established. In 1937, after 14 years of administrative struggle, the MAR finally recognized that the village of La Canoa was separate from the town of Autlán and that the inhabitants needed land to make a living. It was decided to award an endowment grant to La Canoa and expropriate land from the hacienda La Canoa and three other large landholdings in the

surroundings. Only certain parts of these properties were given to La Canoa, as other parts were used to establish neighboring ejidos or remained in the hands of the former owners. At last, the people of La Canoa could establish their own ejido. The small storage building for maize in the village, that had previously belonged to the hacienda, was turned into a Catholic chapel. Villagers of La Canoa who had been ejidatarios of the ejido Autlán left that ejido and now became ejidatarios of La Canoa. The ejido Autlán yielded the land held by these ejidatarios to the newly established ejido.

As the land they received in the endowment grant was not nearly enough for all the people with recognized agrarian rights, the ejidatarios of La Canoa made a request for an expansion grant two weeks after the ejido was formally established in 1938. This request was acceded to and in 1942 the ejido received a small expansion grant. Most heads of family in La Canoa had received a plot of land by 1942 (see chapter five for more details).

The creation of the ejido of La Canoa was full of irregularities. By presidential resolution La Canoa was granted 1843 hectares of which 20 per cent (396 hectares) was said to be suitable for agriculture. The remaining part was mountainous terrain. However, during the execution of this presidential resolution in 1938 when land was measured and formally handed over to the ejidatarios, the engineer only came up with 1770 hectares. This might seem strange, but this was a common phenomenon during the execution of resolutions as the provisional projects for the establishment of ejidos often did not have very detailed maps or information. For this reason, during the execution, some land "appeared" that was not on the maps, or vice versa there was less land than officially registered. In the case of La Canoa the executing engineer, decided to take 230 hectares from other landholdings that were not officially affected in the presidential resolution. Afterwards, the MAR decided that the ejido could keep these 230 hectares and that the MAR would indemnize the owners of this land.

Nevertheless, according to the ejidatarios they never received this amount of land. First of all they did not receive all the 20 per cent of 1843 hectares that was suitable for agricultural use. A large part of this land was sold or given away at the very start. Secondly, they only received 90 of the 230 hectares that were additionally given to them. Chapters seven and eight deal in detail with this land conflict and with the struggle of the ejidatarios of La Canoa to get the land they are officially entitled to. Throughout the book I will use the term the "lost land" when I refer to this land conflict.



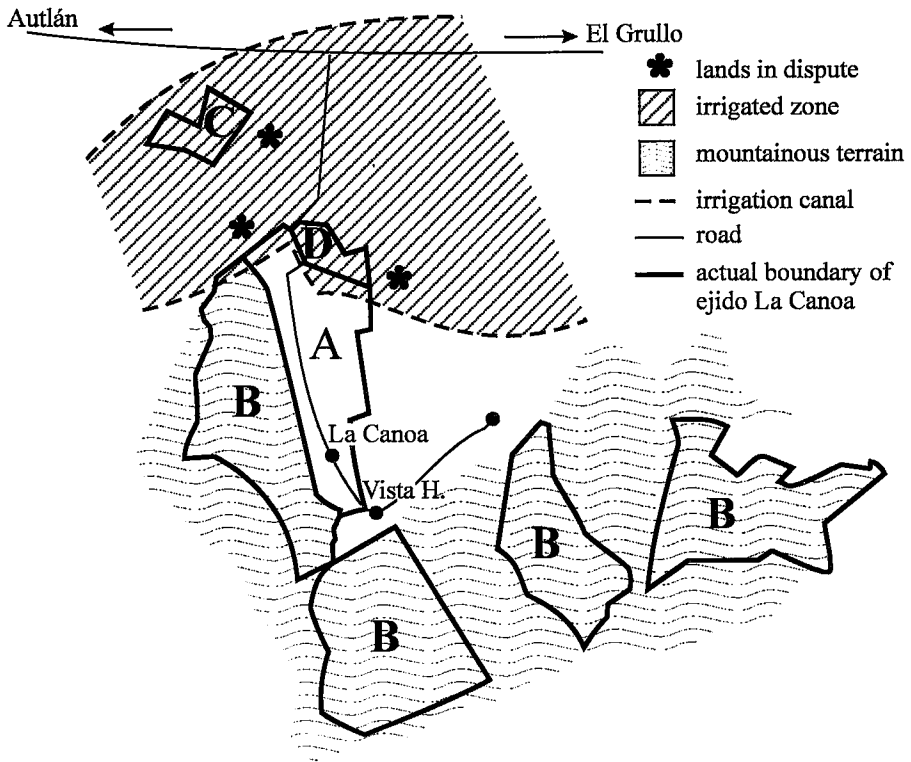


Figure 2.1 Land Situation of the Ejido La Canoa

- A = Lands the ejido of Autlán received in their endowment grant of 1924 and which they ceded to people from La Canoa.
- B = Lands the ejido of La Canoa received in their endowment grant of 1938.
- C = Lands that were erroneously given to the ejido La Canoa by the engineer of the MAR during the execution of the endowment grant in 1938.
- D = Lands that the ejido La Canoa received in the extension grant of 1942.

### *Local Bosses*

Although people received their own plot of land, life after the establishment of the ejido remained onerous. As a result of the difficult situation caused by the scarcity of land and the insecurity of the harvest (dependent on the rains between May and November), many people migrated to other regions in Mexico or to the United States. Some ejidatarios left the village and were never heard of again, in particular after three consecutive dry years from 1938 till 1941. Yet, the majority of men who had received land in the ejido, left the village to work in other regions only in the dry period. In the rainy season they returned to the village to work their own ejido plot. Whole families went to the coast of Jalisco in the dry season to

work in agriculture, leaving the village deserted. Only the richest families of cattle owners stayed in the village.

The richer men, who had initiated the establishment of the ejido, began to control several village and ejido matters. Their dominant position was first of all based on control of the maize market. They provided expensive credits for the sowing of the ejido plots and after the harvest bought the maize at a low price. Cattle was another important factor in socio-economic differentiation. Only the richer families could afford cattle and let the cattle graze on the abundant commons and on the plots after the maize harvest. Furthermore, drinking water was also a problem in the village and distinguished the rich families from the poor. Many women remember the times when they had to go and get water from the river or ask permission to get water from the private wells in the houses of the wealthier families. Some of these wealthier men in La Canoa became moneylenders who confiscated houses and plots when people could not repay their loans. Don Miguel (the son of Filomeno) and some others had built up relations with the state bureaucracy through their efforts to found the ejido. They also maintained relations with influential strong men in Autlán.

So, after the establishment of the ejido, a process of socio-economic differentiation that had already existed before land reform continued. This socio-economic differentiation was not based on the possession of land but on the possession of cattle, capital, and access to the bureaucracy and important political networks. Cochet (1992) argues that the *caciques* who were the result of the agrarian reform were not so much political intermediaries or PRI people, but, for example, people with a high number of heads of cattle which they let graze on the common ejido lands. He argues that on the basis of this differential access to natural resources the rural *caciques* often developed their position as political intermediaries. Others criticize this position by arguing that economic accumulation did not always lead to political power (Boehm 1992) or that the process could also be the other way round: economic accumulation on the basis of political control (Zepeda 1992). Particular situations obviously varied greatly, but the phenomenon of the local bosses who arose after land reform and combined political and economic control is very common in rural Mexico. However, the question is whether we should really talk in terms of *caciques*. Although in La Canoa, these men had a certain degree of control, no large-scale accumulation of plots, houses, or capital has occurred in the village. Furthermore, there were a number of families involved in the maize market or PRI politics, for example Miguel Romero, Ramón Alcázar, Fausto Alcázar, Julián Ramos and Eпитacio Ramírez. So, control was fragmented. At the same time Juan García was principally involved in economic accumulation and was not particularly interested in ejido politics. Yet, he and his most successful son Ricardo are the men who are most criticized in the village for their haughty *cacique* attitude and the denigrating way in which they treat their laborers.

Miguel Romero and Juan García, as well as local bosses in other ejidos, maintained relations with General García Barragán. It is important to stress that the General was an

inaccessible person for most people in La Canoa. General García Barragán was a neighbor of the ejido La Canoa as some of his properties adjoined the lands of the ejido. Many men from the village worked for the General and people maintained different kinds of relationships with him. Although opinions about the General differ, the common image that is conveyed is that of an impressive man who was more held in awe than loved. Although he helped his followers and did all kind of favors in return for their loyalty, many people did not feel sure about some of the actions of the General. There were always rumors going around about the General and his people. The lack of transparency about what was going on only strengthened feelings of caution. There are several stories in the village that stress the less pleasant side of the General. The property of the general was protected by armed men and dogs and several people told me about the way in which they had been threatened or ill treated when they approached too close to the property. It was said that the people defending the General's property were criminals whose release from prison the General had secured. In this way the General was sure of their loyalty to him. As a neighbor of La Canoa, the General also annexed a public path that was used by the ejidatarios. He took away the wire fence that separated his land from the path and prohibited people from using the path any longer. It was a wide path and he took a long stretch of it, but who could object about the General?

Although many people talk in negative ways about the General and his politics, some also glorify him as a symbol of Mexican revolutionary *machismo*. For example, Ricardo García, son of Juan García, talked in the most glorious way about the General. I had the following discussion with Ricardo about García Barragán.

M: *What do you know about General García Barragán?*

R: *General Barragán was "lo maximo" that someone could be!*

M: *How do you mean?*

R: *He was a poor boy who managed to become colonel, then he became general, then he became the Governor of the state of Jalisco. Then they managed to remove him from the post because he supported another faction within the party. They won the elections but nevertheless he was removed from his post. I thought that general Barragán was finished. But then, amazingly, he was able to rise again and he became the national Minister of Defence. Incredible....*

M: *What has been his influence here in La Canoa?*

R: *Very very good. When he was Governor, he gave us the school. He also made sure that the road to the village was constructed at that time.*

M: *There are also people who talk ill about the General.*

R: *But if he gave us roads. How could he have been bad..? There are people who say that he should have given paved roads. But you can't ask too much.*

As will become clear in the next chapter contacts with the General were important for the organization of several village projects. The General and his men also interfered when ejido commissioners, ejidatarios, or others were harming his interests or those of his companions. He had allies in the ejidos and villages whom he supported in different ways. However, as long as village or ejido matters they did not personally affect him or his friends he was not interested. Furthermore, the General tried to establish individual relationships with people and was not interested in collective projects. Torres' comments are interesting in this respect: "They [the agraristas in the clique of the General] wasted time lobbying and complained that the General was more willing to support them personally than to comply with the collective demands of their agrarian communities. For example, when someone approached him with an ejido problem, he would inquire instead about their personal needs" (Torres 1994a: 117). Although nobody will deny the General's influence in the region, views and opinions about his operations and specific interventions differ. In chapter seven I will discuss speculations about the role of the General in the conflict over the "lost land" of La Canoa.

### Story-Telling about Local Heroes and the Discourse of *Cacicazgo*

Whereas people have great difficulty in remembering the names of *los ricos* of the hacienda period, they are very explicit about the names of the local leaders who struggled to get the ejido La Canoa established. Filomeno Romero, his son Miguel Romero and Juan García are always mentioned as the men who fought for the establishment of the ejido. However, the contribution of these agrarian fighters to the struggle and the degree to which they are worshipped differs according to the people who tell the story.

#### *Local Leaders Remembered by their Children*

There exists a tendency for the Romeros to give most credit to Filomeno and Miguel Romero. In contrast, the Garcías tend to give most credit to Juan García. Ricardo García, the youngest son of Juan García, for example, said: *My father was one of the founders of this ejido. Actually he was the main founder. He went on many missions to Guadalajara and Mexico City to get the ejido established. The great grandfather of the Romeros supported my father.* So, according to Ricardo his father was the central figure in the struggle and he was helped by Miguel. According to the Romeros, however, Filomeno and Miguel Romero were the central figures. However, apart from these differences in attributing central roles, they agree about the participation of the three men.

Many of their children feel frustrated that their fathers never received the respect and recognition that, according to them, they deserved. Rosa Romero, an ejidataria of La Canoa and daughter of Miguel, for example, says that the crucial people in the ejido in the period

after its establishment were her father don Miguel and her grandfather don Filomeno. She remembers that her father was commissioner of the ejido and went on a lot of missions for the ejido. *But, said Rosa, people don't really appreciate these things, they gossip a lot in the ejido and there is a lot of jealousy.*

These men are presented by their children as resolute men who cannot easily be equaled. José Romero said of his father don Miguel that he was very serious and honest. *He did not play cards, did not drink and came directly home after work. None of his sons is like he was,* he commented. Ricardo García gave almost exactly the same description of his father, Juan, and went on to comment that he had never managed to become as good as his father. However, despite the pride they feel for their fathers and the fact that they like to refer to their braveness and the danger they ran, more detailed stories about them are hard to find. Their children remember especially the fear they and their mother felt when their fathers went on missions for the establishment of the ejido. They were aware of the risks their fathers were running and that the *ricos* wanted to kill them. But there are few stories about more specific actions of these men.

However, there was also another side to these "heroic" fathers. They are portrayed as responsible but incommunicative. They were brave and just but were also sometimes cruel to their own children. This is a more generally expressed aspect of the men of this period, and the stories people tell show a strong resemblance to the atmosphere Juan Rulfo describes for the neighboring region of *El Llano* in his books *El Llano en Llamas* (1953) and *Pedro Páramo* (1955). Roberto Sánchez, for example, said that his father was always very nervous because he had a lot of problems on his mind. They were very poor and Roberto's father despaired when his children asked for things that he could not give them. Then he would beat them. However, despite the fact that he was treated very badly, Roberto admired his father. Another example is that of Ramón Romero. Ramón is one of the numerous grandchildren of don Filomeno. His father was one of don Miguel's brothers. Ramón told me on several occasions that his father was very despotic: *Once we all were on my father's land; we were 10 sons and 1 daughter. My father sent me away to get water for us all. But I was still very little. I tried to carry the water but fell ... My father hit me terribly. But I could not do it, I was too little.* Men do not like to talk in negative terms about their own fathers and tend to excuse the fact that they hit them so much or treated them so brutally by adding that they had experienced very dangerous and violent situations themselves. Alternatively, they excused both father and mother (who did not dare to interfere) by saying that they lived in harsh times and often did not have enough food to feed their children.

These feelings towards their fathers may be very contradictory. Although they may resent the way their father treated them, at the same time they are very proud of the things they achieved and their courage. The heroic image of these men as fighters who did everything possible to establish the ejido is stressed, especially in public. In private or when people are drinking, the other side of these fathers may be commented upon. Lorenzo is a good example

of this contradictory relationship of ejidatarios with their deceased "heroic" fathers. Lorenzo is in his sixties and one of the 11 sons of don Miguel's first marriage. Lorenzo is clearly not a talker and especially disliked talking about his father don Miguel. Yet, when he was drunk, he would sometimes start to talk about him. Then, he would explain that his father had always been very severe with his children. Lorenzo remembered that on one occasion his father beat him severely: *My father came home late and heard me respond in a disrespectful way to my mother. My father told me to apologize to my mother, but I refused to do so. Then my father got so angry that he beat me until I fell unconscious. My mother cried a lot and looked after me. I told her that I would leave home now, but in the end I stayed.* Lorenzo also had conflicts with his father over a plot of land. Although everybody knows that Lorenzo received a plot of land from his father, Lorenzo himself denies this and claims that he received the land when the ejido was established.

Although Lorenzo clearly had a difficult relation with his father, in public he stresses the efforts his father made to establish the ejido. Lorenzo and his brothers also like to comment that their father had twenty children in La Canoa (eleven by his first marriage, eight by his second marriage and one "illegally" but recognized by him). This fact emphasizes his manhood and his impact in the village through his many offspring. Lorenzo will never allow people to talk badly about don Miguel. People still remember that on one occasion, at an ejido meeting, Salvador Lagos complained about the corruption of don Miguel and the problems he caused the ejido. Lorenzo became very angry by this defamation of his father and drew his gun which he pointed at Salvador. The people present tried to calm him down and finally Lorenzo lowered the gun. However, the event was a humiliating one for Lorenzo. In "public opinion" a "real man" only draws his gun when he intends to use it. A "real man" would therefore have shot Salvador. So this event was very detrimental to Lorenzo's self image. There were other occasions when Lorenzo pulled his gun after somebody had talked ill of his father, but he never fired a shot. Although the ejidatarios suffered brutality from their courageous fathers and may feel great resentment towards them, at the same time they honor them in public.

#### *Agrarian Fighters Considered to be Caciques*

Besides the difficult relationship with their own sons, there are many things the men who helped establish the ejido are criticized for in the village. Several villagers do not worship these men but loath them. There are several men in the village who use a discourse of *cacicazgo* and exploitation when they discuss the practices of these men. They express themselves in extremely negative terms about these local bosses of former times and often become emotional while telling these stories. Although it would be too strong to talk about factions in the village, I broadly distinguish two groups: the "establishment" and the "opposition". The "opposition" are the men who express very negative views about the old bosses and who have been very active over the years to recover the "lost land". They have

been members of different political opposition parties and have tried to get the land back in many different ways. They are extremely critical of the role of the government. Although they recognized that the government helped them by founding the ejido, they criticized the government and the PRI for the many bad things they did afterwards. Others in the ejido call them the “opposers”, “troublemakers”, or “leftists”. the “establishment” is a broad group of people who feel close to the old bosses and who maintain relations with PRI circles in Autlán.

I will present parts of interviews I had with Salvador Lagos and Ramón Romero, in which they clearly express these feelings. Salvador Lagos related the following about former times:

*There were four, five rich men in the village. They monopolized the maize of the poor people buying it at a very low price. Later in the year they sold the maize back to the same farmers for a high price. They gave us the maize in May (the start of the rainy season) and we had to pay them back in November (harvest time). They lent at a rate of one for two, or one for three. If the maize was worth ten per hectoliter, they paid five. El gobierno (the government) did not exist for us in those days and if they knew about this, they just let the rich people do as they pleased. My father had to sell his maize at a very low price, almost for free, in order to have money to feed us. In every poblado (village) there were some people with money, who bought the maize harvests very cheaply. They also borrowed money for the sowing. Some eight to ten families in the village had enough to eat. We were starving to death and nobody gave us anything. That was in the 1930s [when a number of villagers of La Canoa were ejidatarios in Autlán]. In the 1940s trucks came to the village which paid a little bit more. These trucks belonged to the ricos in Autlán, the coyotes from Autlán.*

Ramón Romero relates how the older generation of his father and uncles (all sons of don Filomeno) managed to get several plots of ejido land and often the best land:

*An uncle of mine, Elías Romero, monopolized land. He bought plots but he also lent money to poor people to cultivate their plot. If people could not pay him back, he took the land. As the rains were very bad and there was no irrigation, people often could not pay him and had to give him the land.*

Ramón also remembers how his father took land at the time of the extension, even though this land was meant for the people who had not received land when the ejido was established.

Ramón claimed that:

*This extension was a terrible mess. Many of these old men who already had land, took land in the extension. Some kept several plots. Others left their first plot to other people. They preferred to have a plot in the extension as it was land of much better quality. My father took land in the extension and abandoned the plot he had before. The extension was a mess. It was meant for the sons of ejidatarios,*

*but no, they gave it to those who were already ejidatarios. They just left the bad plots to others.*

I asked Ramón who was the ejido commissioner at that time, and he replied:

*It was almost always Miguel Romero. Miguel Romero, Ramón and Fausto Alcázar, Julián Ramos and Eпитacio Ramírez formed a small group, but Miguel was the head of the group. He always fiddled. He gave a large tract of our ejido land to one of his brothers. There were four, five men who managed the ejido, they put the people in, or removed them. I never agreed with these practices, these Mafias, not in the ejido, nor in the parties. Eпитacio was the ejido commissioner some eight, ten times. Miguel Romero some ten times as well, Ramón Alcázar as well; only they were ever commissioner; when one left the post the other one took it up. These men were superior. They knew more, had more knowledge. We did not know anything, we did not even know how the ejidos worked, nor how the Reforma Agraria worked, we knew nothing. Therefore we had to put people in office who did know. But in any case they put themselves in. They were courageous in the face of people who worked against them. In that time people used guns and pistols. Things were carambas in those days. People who had no problems tried not to get involved.*

Salvador Lagos commented about the men keeping control over the ejido:

*Some 40, 50 years ago there were dictatorial authorities (autoridades de dictadura) in La Canoa. Some three, four men decided everything in the ejido. These men also took land away from several ejidatarios and gave it to their relatives. For that reason, all the sons of former ejido commissioners possess ejido plots! Some 15 years ago, these useless people (inútiles) lost influence.*

As will become clear in the next chapters, the hatred felt for these local bosses meant that the stories about them are exaggerated. They did not monopolize ejido plots, nor were they ejido commissioner ten times, nor did the children of ejido commissioners all acquire ejido plots. Yet, these stories have to be analyzed in relation to the hatred these men caused in cases in which they did indeed dispossess someone of his plot (see chapter five).

#### *Story-Telling and Tensions Within and Between Families*

Returning to the question of local story-telling and local heroes, an interesting picture emerges. The sons and daughters of the founders of the ejido will stress the efforts of their fathers in developing the ejido and the fact that the other villagers have never appreciated their efforts. At the same time, the sons of these men had difficult relations with their incommunicative and hard fathers and developed feelings of resentment towards these "heroic" men. However, the founders are not the subject of hero worship principally because they developed into authoritarian local bosses. A lot of hard feelings exist in the ejido about these men and hard feelings do not seem to produce heroic tales. In conclusion, story-telling



about the history of the ejido is rich, but also fragmented and emotional. This is related to the enormous number of conflicts that emerged after the creation of the ejido between but also within families.

### **Factions, the Kinship Idiom and the Construction of Community**

Having discussed the history of the village and ejido La Canoa, I will now turn to present-day divisions and social life. Although it is common in studies on rural Mexico to read about village factions, and the importance of kinship and *compradazgo* relations in local politics, I found that reality is more complex than these views would have us believe. Although the villagers themselves also like to talk in terms of clear-cut divisions in the village and the central role of kinship relations, we have to be very careful in our analysis of the meaning of these statements.

#### *On the Absence of Factions and the Kinship Idiom*

Factionalism and powerful political families form a rich tradition in the anthropology of rural Mexico (Bartra and Calvo 1975, Friedrich 1986, Schryer 1980, Zárata 1993), and as much this was an important theme during my research. The division between the "PRI-establishment" and the "opposition", which I mentioned above, was the clearest form of division in the ejido during the research. However, the dividing lines were not clear-cut and most ejidatarios did not belong to either of these two "camps". The "establishment" which was a network formed around the Romeros, had most characteristics of a "political family" in the sense of persons who share the same name and which develop into a group with political purposes (Friedrich 1986: 106-107). However, although they had some characteristics of a "political family" this group had nothing like the power of the mighty political rural families described by other authors.

Since the end of the 1970s, this "political family" around the Romeros was reduced to a few men who did not aspire to strong political control but instead tried to prevent others from causing "trouble". This was not a "political family" who had monopolized land or other resources, nor had they tried to make political careers through the ejido and PRI networks. The "opposition group" was less based on kinship ties and more on political sympathies. Their main political project was to counter the influence of the "establishment" and at times it seemed that they were principally fighting the influence which this "political family" had had in the past. Memories of past injustices played an important role in the motivations of this group. In reality, the "opposition group" was more a loose network of allies in which different people participated over the years. Their activities were focused in particular on the struggle for the "lost land".

As the idea of differing interests and the organization that takes place around these was

a central component of my research project I also looked for other ways to define divisions in the village. Another common way to look for divisions is to try to distinguish factions consisting of people who follow the same leader in a political competition and who fight at one another's sides through a series of engagements but without sharing a common ideology (Bailey 1969: 52). However, it also proved impossible to define interest groups according to central problems and conflicts in the ejido and the mobilization around certain leaders. Interest groups could be distinguished around problems during specific periods but next time different interests were at stake. There were enduring problems in the ejido, as we shall see, but it was impossible to distinguish more or less stable interest groups of ejidatarios or villagers on the basis of these problems. One reason for the lack of stable groups around certain conflicts was that these were complex matters in which it was not a question of being for or against certain positions. Ejidatarios could take different positions in conflicts according to changing situations, perspectives and people involved. Positions were never fixed, and nor were the groups around certain problems. As Tapia points out "in the social web of power, political relations do not develop in a single direction nor are they produced within socially homogeneous groups. They generate alliances and oppositions; they become more diverse or homogenous, and are repeatedly reorganized according to strategies dependent on interests at stake, the actors present, the resources available and the social forces that as a whole determine the local political context" (Tapia 1992: 385 own translation).

Furthermore, all divisions in the village and ejido are cross cut by other quarrels and relationships. This is very well expressed by Barth in his study of an Indonesian village: "Certain factional cores of persons can be identified who, for the moment, share positions and interests; but most persons have their particular networks of friendship, kinship, sympathies, conflicts and enmities, which for each one of them covers less than the village as a whole. Therefore, linkages do not add up to larger factional groups, and few longer sequences of events can be identified as resulting from the systematic strategies of such groups" (Barth 1993: 119). Hence, several times when I thought that I had more or less captured the central divisions in the ejido, new problems came up and new configurations of people became visible which did not fit into my model. Ejidatarios could work together for some time and then split up and continue the work with others. Alternatively, they could start working with someone with whom they had been in a conflicts shortly before.

I often felt disturbed by these changing coalitions and networks. However, the people in the village always found logical explanation for these shifts in loyalty. Without exception these explanations took the form of kinship relations. They could say, for example: *It is logical that he has changed his position as he is a nephew of the ejido commissioner and therefore wants to support him.* or they could say: *His loyalty to Pedro can be explained by the fact that his wife is a sister of Pedro.* Villagers also liked to explain divisions in terms of family lines. For example, Rubén Romero told me that the main division in the ejido was

between the Romero and García families and that each family had always had their own candidates for the ejido elections. On the other hand, according to Iginio Núñez this supposed division between the Romero and the García families only concerned minor quarrels. Iginio: *They are both cacique families! There are both of the same. They may have small quarrels but in the end they meet again and organize themselves together. It has always been like that. Furthermore, the Romeros and Garcías have intermarried a lot and are all part of the same now.* Iginio's idea that the Romeros and Garcías were close allies was an exaggeration as the Garcías and Romeros did not get along very well. On the other hand, the fact that Rubén and other Romeros stressed so strongly their opposition to the García families seemed more related to the conflict about José's daughter Miriam who was made pregnant by a son of Ricardo García than to a long-lasting division in the ejido (see the next section). After some time I also realized that when villagers talked about *the Romeros* or *the Garcías* they only referred to one or two of these men and not to entire families with this surname. For example, when villagers talked in a disapproving way about the Garcías, they always referred to Ricardo García and not to his brothers Tomás and Juan, who never played a prominent role in local affairs.

The fact that villagers in La Canoa tend to use kinship relations to explain divisions in the ejido is similar to what Bailey experienced in the Indian village Bishara. He noticed that there were two factions in the village and when he first inquired about this, it seemed as if the two groups were recruited through kinship. "The two leaders represented different lines of descent and were each, so it seemed, supported by close kinsmen and opposed to more distant kinsmen. Closer investigation showed that this was not quite the case, and there were several examples of people changing sides and of close kin (an uncle and his nephews) being in opposed factions" (Bailey 1969: 47). Friedrich describes the same experience in the village Naranja, in Michoacán, where people tend to speak of village factions in terms of political families. However, he found out that in reality factions were not so strictly based on family lines as "each faction included at least one person from every political family" (Friedrich 1986: 107).

In conclusion, while there was always considerable activity in the village and ejido it was difficult to talk about long-lasting coalitions, factions, or family networks based on political projects, common interests, or shared histories. In the next section I discuss the role of the kinship idiom in social life.

#### *On Socializing Circles and Visible and Invisible Relatives and Compadres*

As has been stated, kinship relations are often mentioned as explanations for the political actions of other people. As will be shown in the subsequent chapters, kinship relations and "the family" are indeed highly valued in the village and many support networks exist among relatives, *compadres* (ritual co-parents), *padrinos* (godfathers) and *ahijados* (godchildren). However, as Sabeán points out, "in a certain sense, where everyone is kin, no one is kin;

that is to say, all the connections between kin could hardly carry the same meaning, moral exigency, or attitude" (Sabeán 1998: 3). This also became clear after having lived with the people for an extended period. Although it is clear that kinship relations are very close after some time one realizes that not all kinship ties are valued. In Barth's words "becoming more familiar with the community, the anthropologist discovers that there are also close kin who do not visit each other, and that people are aware of strands in the relations of close kin that are not so positively valued" (Barth 1993: 127). For example, after some time I noticed that in some families that I regularly visited they maintained close relationships with several brothers, sisters, uncles and other relatives but there were also relatives who never visited the house and who were never commented upon. The elaboration of a genealogy and discussions about it, also drew the attention to these "invisible" kinsmen.

In this context it is important to pay some attention to a central institution for the creation of social ties, *compadrazgo* (ritual coparenthood). During the rituals of the Catholic church a man and a woman may be invited to become *padrino* and *madrina* of a child and accompany the child in the church ceremony. In the life of every person there are many occasions when these relations are established. Baptism, when a child receives Holy Communion for the first time, confirmation and marriage are all well-known occasions, but people may also be invited to become godparents when children finish primary school or secondary school, when girls celebrate their fifteenth birthday, and on several other occasions. The godparents of baptism and matrimony are considered to be the most important ones.

Children address their godparents with much respect. The godparents not only assume certain responsibilities towards their godchild, but also establish a special relationship with the parents of the godchild. "The importance of *compadrazgo* stems from the fact that godparents share the parent's divine mission" (de la Peña 1984: 210). The godfather (or godmother) of a child, becomes *compadre* (or *comadre*) of the parents of this child. Literally this means co-parent. *Comadres* and *compadres* have a special bond and help and support each other whenever necessary. They always address each other as *compadre* or *comadre* which stresses the special bond. *Compadrazgo* relations are highly valued in Mexico. It will be clear that many elements play a role in the choice of *padrinos* for children. As the idea of care is central, many *compadrazgo* relations are established among close relatives. Another common option is the formation of *compadrazgo* relations with wealthy and influential bosses, in the hope that they will take care of the child and help the family when necessary. On the other hand, it is clear that not everyone can be asked to become a godfather or godmother. Normally, certain relations already exist between people which one tries to emphasize and strengthen through relations of *compadrazgo*.

Parents with many children have established many relations of *compadrazgo* in their life. Although relations of *compadrazgo* are highly valued, in the same way as kinship relations are, one discovers after some time that bonds with some *compadres* are stressed and

developed but others are not. Some *compadres* or *comadres* are not addressed in this way anymore. In some ways for the analyst those relatives and *compadres* with whom people do not have a relationship anymore are more interesting than the ones with whom they hold close relationships. Close relationships with these people are considered to be the normal state of affairs, whereas strained relations between relatives and *compadres* do not correspond with the ideology. These ruptures are often related to severe family conflicts and are not easily talked about. The “banned” relatives and *compadres* tend to become “invisible” and “inaudible”. They do not visit the family anymore, do not attend birthday parties, and are not talked about. There is not even much gossiping about these people, they are ignored.

I will now present the case of the spoilt relationship of *compadrazgo* between two sons of the agrarian fighters in the village, namely, between Ricardo, son of Juan García, and Lorenzo, son of Miguel Romero. Today, it is hard to believe that the men are *compadres* as they completely ignore each other and there is no relation whatsoever between the two families. I spent much time at Lorenzo’s house (see chapter four) and Ricardo García and his family were hardly ever mentioned there. When mention was made of them, it always was in very negative terms, but Lorenzo himself never talked about Ricardo. In earlier times relations between Lorenzo and Ricardo had been very close indeed. In those days Lorenzo asked Ricardo to be the godfather at the baptism of his son Carlos. Several small conflicts later occurred between the two men but what caused the final rupture was the scandal with the construction of the local school which will be described in chapter six. Ricardo was ejido commissioner at that time and responsible for the embezzlement of a considerable amount of ejido money. Tensions in the village ran high and people were afraid that somebody might be killed. In this period Lorenzo went so far as to ask Ricardo how much his being *padrino* was worth, so that he could buy it off; he did not want him to be *padrino* of his son anymore. Ricardo responded that he was *padrino* of Carlos and that Lorenzo and he would remain *compadres* for the rest of their lives. However, the consequences of this conflict went further than the relation between the two men. Aurora García, Ricardo’s sister, was *madrina* of Lorenzo’s oldest child Dolores. The relation between Lorenzo and Aurora as *compadres* also came under pressure because of this conflict. Aurora supported her brother in this conflict and blamed Lorenzo for criticizing Ricardo. It is illuminating to hear Aurora talk about the separation which was caused by these problems:

*Lorenzo’s attitude towards Ricardo hurt me very much. Despite the fact that Dolores is my goddaughter and Lorenzo is my compadre, Lorenzo has been very rude to us. Before these problems, Lorenzo often passed this way. He is very bold and always looked to see what I was preparing. Then he used to take a taco from the pan. In the time that this conflict was going on he once arrived and asked me: what tacos do you have Aurora? I said: there are no tacos. Lorenzo: but I see a pan full. Then I responded: but for you there are no tacos here. I said this impertinence because of all the tensions and problems going on. Lorenzo never*

*came to the house again to have a taco. Now, a long time after the conflict, he sometimes comes to the house to borrow something but he never comes for a taco anymore.*

This example shows well how past experiences to a large degree determine present relations and forms of socializing between families and how relations between relatives and *compadres* may also change. This example also illustrates the role of pride and honor. It was more than twenty years ago that Aurora insulted Lorenzo but he never again visited her to have food.

All these intrigues also explain the highly exclusive "visiting" and "socializing" circles in the village. For all families in the village visiting other houses is restricted to a small circle of very close relatives and friends. Only within these circles do we find the ideology of the "hospitable open house" where everybody can enter and will be well received. Most villagers will never enter a house if they do not have close relations with those living there. This means that "the house" as a locus of socializing is not only a form of inclusion but also of exclusion. Within these visiting circles people are very hospitable, eat together, and help each other in many different ways. Contacts with people who do not form part of this small intimate circle may take place in the street, in the church group, or in the bars. These contacts may concern exchange of information, working arrangements, the latest gossips, themselves etc. Here also circles can be distinguished of people who often talk to each other and people who will never exchange a word.

Although these tensions between relatives and *compadres* may only seem natural, it means that we have to be careful with the idiom of family and *compadrazgo*, especially in situations in which the "imagery and idiom of family ties" (Rouse 1989: 3) is central to the reflections on relations between people. Several people have studied how selection within the kingroup occurs. It has been argued that because bilateral kinship systems are less bounded than other kinship systems, it forces people to choose a limited number of kin for meaningful social relations (Lomnitz and Pérez 1987: 393). Long has argued that because in the Peruvian highlands "the kinship is open-ended ... people face the necessity of introducing into an existing kin relationship certain non-kinship criteria in order that the relationship may be more precisely specified in terms of the types of benefits, obligations and patterns of exchange that can be expected" (Long 1977: 158). Yet, the "selection" of only a small number of kinspeople for close relations and the fact that different types of benefits and obligations may be implied in kinship relations, means that there is no such thing as an exclusive "kinship domain", and that it is necessary instead to examine the uses of kinship within the varied contexts of people's practical concerns (cf. Geertz and Geertz 1975: 169 in de la Peña 1984: 206). We should be sensitive to the "political" use of the kinship idiom (see also Bailey 1969, Bloch 1971, and Barth 1993). The idiom of kinship and *compadrazgo* can bring people together but also separate them; it shows the importance of the family as an ideological construction (Rapp 1982).

*Mestizo Ejidos and (a Lack of) Community?*

There have been a large number of serious conflicts within and between families in the village. For example, there were several murders which influenced relations in the village for decades. Many resentments exist about inheritance problems and there have been several conflicts over land. Some of these conflicts are old. Others are very recent. Many of these conflicts are painful for the people involved and not always easily talked about. As kinship and ritual kinship are so highly valued people try to avoid commenting upon conflicts with their next of kin or *compadres*. In general people also try to avoid speaking ill of the deceased. Although some do not mind talking about the dead *caciques*, others prefer to say as few bad things as possible. At public meetings in the ejido people were also reprimanded when they started talking about the problems some of the deceased had caused the ejido in the past. Hence, the majority of people in the village are connected to each other by long-standing relations of real and fictive kinship, they share histories of violent conflicts, and in their daily life they have to get on with each other.

Much has been written about the internal division, distrust, and conflictive nature of Mexican villages (see the debate between Redfield 1930 and Lewis 1951). It has often been argued that *mestizo* ejidos in particular are ridden by internal conflicts, gossiping, and distrust. This is in contrast to Indian communities which are said to be much more egalitarian and cohesive. The explanation for this difference is often sought in the fact that ejidos are "not only of more recent formation but also tend to group together people from a large number of *ranchos*, such that internal ties of kinship tend to be thinner than in the Indian communities and ejidos" (Lomnitz 1992: 178). These theories about the lack of cohesion in *mestizo* villages in comparison to the Indian communities may be criticized for several reasons. First of all, as Ouweneel (1990) points out, the romantic image of the egalitarian Indian community is losing its footing and is being challenged by several authors who show the internal differentiation and unequal distribution of resources in Indian villages. Secondly, a mythical and romanticized view of community underlies these theories. Namely, the view that communities with a long and stable existence are not characterized by division, conflicts, and gossiping. However, there is no practical evidence to support this position. Furthermore, the idea that kinship relations diminish conflicts is arbitrary. Barth shows well in his study of a Balinese village that "closeness and loyalty also entail control, interference, and disapproval" and are accompanied by gossiping and slander (Barth 1993: 127). So, it seems doubtful to assume that kinship is a factor which prevents conflicts and divisions. La Canoa is a good example of the contrary.

Yet, I would argue that conflicts and tensions do not mean that there is a lack of "community". All feelings which refer to belonging to certain networks or groups of friends and enemies are part of the construction of situated communities (Appadurai 1997). In my view, the construction of situated communities also implies the marking of distinctions between different social categories and processes of "exclusion and constructions of

otherness" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 13). Furthermore, the construction of community is always related to forms of dominance (see Sabean 1984). In the same way as the history of numerous conflicts, the many village festivities strengthen "feelings of belonging". All the pleasure but also the complaints, gossiping, and quarrels contribute to the production of community. At these festivities social political divisions are strongly expressed, as well as the dominance of certain groups in the village. For example, the richest men are expected to make an important contribution to the fireworks for the annual feast and there is always competition between different sections of the village about who collects the most money for the festivities. Naturally "numerous anthropological studies have also paid careful attention to the ways in which Mexican local celebrations traditionally served simultaneously to reaffirm rights in communal lands and neighborhood structures, reinforce community solidarity, and redistribute wealth by requiring sponsors to underwrite their cost" (Beezley *et al.* 1994: xx). Hence, in La Canoa, the community as an imagined and lived entity to which a large part of the feelings and the intimate social worlds are related plays a very important role. I will now pay some attention to the festivities and scandals in the village which contribute to this construction of a situated community.

### **The Village: its Festivities, Gossiping, and Scandals**

Village life is very rich in all kinds of social gatherings. Religion plays an important role in the life of the people and almost everybody belongs to the Catholic Church. The many Catholic celebrations during which relations of *compadrazgo* are established form the motive for big parties. However, any event may be the motive for a big party if the family has money to spend. According to the importance of the event and the wealth of the family, chicken, goat or pork may be served. Other festive meals are *pozole* and *tamales*. Sometimes a pig is especially slaughtered and the whole day long the participants in the party are eating the different parts of the animal. During these festivities a lot of alcohol is consumed. The favorite drinks are beer and *tequila* or brandy mixed with soft drinks. Women and men usually separate during these events and have their own tables or places. Women may also drink a lot during these festivities although women should not get drunk. On the other hand, men may get drunk during these festivities. Children play around during this partying and have a good time on their own.

The birthday parties are very important for women. Unlike men who spend most of their time out of the house, women are expected to remain in the house and are not allowed to "walk around". So birthday parties are excellent occasions for women to socialize and have some fun. Favorite topics among women during these meetings and birthday parties are their husbands and how they are treated by them. Besides these private parties at which only people from a close circle of friends and relatives are invited, there are also many other



festivities in the village and region. For example, in August they celebrate the fiesta of the *piñatas* in La Canoa. Young unmarried men and women throw a *piñata* towards each other. The person who does not catch the *piñata* and lets it fall, has to bring a bottle of home-made punch next time. The unmarried young women have to organize these gatherings. However, the most important festivities are those of each village's saint's day. Around this day, a whole week of festivities is organized which is intended to attract people from the neighboring villages and the *hijos ausentes* (the absent children) from the United States.

In the beginning of November, La Canoa celebrates its saint, the Virgin of Guadalupe. Although the official date of the Virgin of Guadalupe is the 12th of December, according to the villagers they have always celebrated this day in November as otherwise their festivities would coincide with the national celebration of the Virgin and then nobody would visit their village. During the twelve days of festivities in honor of the Virgin they have many activities. A fair is brought to the village, dances are organized for the evenings, and bull riding takes place during the day. The last and the most important day of the 12 days celebration is the 12th of November. Then several priests come to the village, the *mariachi* from Autlán plays during the mass and the first communion of several children is celebrated. The festivities end with a display of fireworks on the 12th of November. The villagers together collect the money for the fireworks, but the wealthy families pay most of it. Gustavo Romero, a rich farmer, for example, always makes an important contribution to the cost of the fireworks. For the organization of the many activities a special group is formed which also takes care of collecting money from the villagers. Normally, this group is composed of young people of the village.

Amusingly, during the time of my research, the villagers had numerous problems with the new parish priest about the village festivities. The parish priest had only recently arrived in the village after many years during which the villagers had requested their own priest. Until then, a priest from Autlán had come to La Canoa to say mass but they wanted their own priest. The villagers themselves had cooperated in building the priest's house and finally a priest was assigned to the village. However, from the very start difficulties emerged between the villagers and the new priest. The women in the village, who are most active in the church, were annoyed by a number of innovations the priest introduced. First of all, he intended to change the date of the village festivities. These had to be changed to December as that was the real date of the Virgin of Guadalupe. However, the villagers strongly opposed his interference and had their village feasts on the same date as always. The priest also wanted to have more control over the money of the feasts. This caused great indignation from the women who had been most active in the organization of the feasts all these years. So, a subtle struggle started between the priest and the villagers. For example, on the days of the feasts the priest took so much time for the mass that the dance could not start in time.

Another important event takes place at the end of each year. The last days of the year and the first days of the new year bull riding and *rodeos* take place in the village. This is a

common form of diversion in rural villages in which young men try to stay as long as possible on the back of a bull. Besides the achievements of the men on the bull, the men on horse-back can show off their ability to lasso the legs or the head of the bull when the bull needs to be caught and sent away. This spectacle takes place in the bull ring in the village and is very popular among the villagers. The villagers cooperate in the costs of organizing these festivities. The organizers of the bull riding sell tickets to people who want to watch the spectacle and sell beer and food. The idea is that if money remains after the payment of all costs, it is used for village projects. For that reason the organizing committee is called the *Junta de mejoras* (committee of improvements), but as one woman remarked: *The only point is that they do not do the mejoras anymore. The money stays with the organizers.*

There is always a lot of gossiping and talking going on in the village around these events. It is often said that the organizers keep the profits in their own pockets, or that they drink all the beer that is left over. So every year it is said that this time there will be no bull riding as the people refuse to cooperate any longer. But in the end, it is always organized. Many people say that the bull ring is a shame and the worst to be found in the surroundings. It is true that it is in a terrible state and many women do not go to the bull riding in La Canoa because one has to make an awkward climb to get onto the boards that serve as seats surrounding the bull ring. In 1992 one of the boards broke and a group of people fell down. One person Alfonso Romero was injured. He had to have an operation on his foot and will be crippled for the rest of his life.

The most important of these village feasts are naturally those of the towns of el Grullo and Autlán. The carnival of Autlán is especially well known and many people come over from the United States to be part of these festivities. Besides the bull riding real *corridos* are then organized with famous Mexican *toreros*. During the days of the carnival in Autlán, all offices in the town are closed. These festivities have an important function in the consolidation of friendship bonds, *compadrazgo* relations, and also in the striking of business deals.

#### *A Village Scandal: the Dishonoring of a Romero Girl by a García Man*

One of the big events in La Canoa during my research was that a "son of the village" had been ordained a priest by the pope in Rome and that he would give his first mass as a priest in his natal village La Canoa. Naturally, this was a very special occasion for everybody in the village. His godmother Aurora García and one of his godfathers both gave a calf for the meal at the festivities. Another one gave a pig. Money was collected among all the villagers for the *mariachi* at the mass and for the *banda* at the feast after the mass. The meal and the party took place in the central *plaza* of the village. It was a big and very pleasant event in which people from far away participated. Even relatives from the United States came over to be present at this celebration. During the meal many comments were made about the good looks of the new priest but there was another thing that seemed to receive far more attention

that day than the priest: the presence at the meal of Miriam Romero and her baby.

Miriam was José Romero's youngest daughter who was made pregnant by Juan García (son of Ricardo García). This had been the latest scandal in La Canoa. Juan García and Miriam had been *novios* (boyfriend and girlfriend) in the village for quite some time and when Miriam got pregnant, the boy abandoned her. This caused much indignation among the Romeros but also among other families in the village. The fact that the girl got pregnant was a shame, but much worse was the fact that the boy abandoned the girl. It was said that Juan wanted to marry Miriam but that his father Ricardo was opposed to the marriage. This attitude of Ricardo was seen as another indication of the fact that he felt his children were too good for anyone in the village, even for the Romeros who were one of the more influential families. The same had happened with Ricardo's oldest son who had made two girls in the village pregnant. He finally married the second one, but only after serious threats made to Ricardo by the father's girl. Rumors said that Ricardo had offered José money to help Miriam, but this had only made José angrier and he had furiously replied: *tell me how much your daughters are worth, then I will buy one of yours!* José had sent Miriam to her brother and sister who lived in Los Angeles, where she gave birth to a daughter.

For the Romeros this was not a problem between the two adolescents Miriam and Juan but a conflict between the Romeros and the Garcías. It was speculated that matters could get out of hand and that somebody might be killed. Although it was presented as a conflict between the two families, I often found José drinking at the corner of the street with Ricardo's brother Tomás García and with Ricardo's nephew Vicente García. This was always in a friendly atmosphere. After the talks about the conflict between the two families and the possible dramatic and bloody consequences, I was amazed to see these men drinking together. When I expressed my confusion with some of the Romero men, they acknowledged that the fight was only with Ricardo and not with the other Garcías.

After spending a year in Los Angeles and having given birth to her baby, Miriam apparently thought it was time to present her daughter to the village and she arrived at the meal for the priest. This was the first time, that she openly and in public showed her daughter to the village. Miriam ostensibly walked around at the feast with her daughter on her arm. Logically, this was the cause of much gossiping and speculation. Many people did not even know that she had arrived in the village and her appearance with the baby caused much surprise. What were her intentions at being present in such a conspicuous way during an event in which the García family played an important role? Not only Ricardo García was walking around, but also Juan, the father of the baby. Although many people were surprised by Miriam's nerves, most agreed about her intentions: she had returned to the village to marry Juan. Many bets were made about whether she would succeed or fail in her plans. However, the common opinion was that she came to fight a lost battle and that she only made herself ridiculous.

A month later, Miriam was still in La Canoa and nothing spectacular had occurred.

However, there were signals that something was in the making. For example, on one occasion Ricardo García's daughters were at the house of one of Miriam's sisters playing with her children. This was a clear sign that something was about to happen for Ricardo's daughters never left the house and never socialized with other people in the village. So, the families were approaching each other and had probably already reached an agreement. Some days later, Miriam's sister said that Miriam and Juan would get married in a week. She said that Juan had told his father that he would follow Miriam to the United States if he did not let him marry her. Ricardo finally gave in and officially asked for Miriam at José's house. Miriam's plan had worked out fine.

Still within the Romero family opinions differed. Several people said that Miriam would do better not to marry Juan as this whole affair had only proved again the real nature of the Garcías. Lorenzo, José's older brother, and his wife and children in particular were very contemptuous about this wedding and made nasty jokes about it. They did not want to have anything to do with it. Miriam and Juan finally had a simple wedding. They got married in a civil ceremony and not in church. Because of the whole history they did not have a party either but only a meal for the brothers, sisters, and parents. This was organized at Ricardo's house.

This example shows the richness and density of social relations in La Canoa and how existing lines of division through the village can manifest themselves in the light of new events.

### **Conclusion: Local Histories and the Construction of Community**

We saw that the establishment of the ejido La Canoa cannot be analyzed in terms of the struggle of a corporate community which successfully fought against the *hacendados* and afterwards developed collective localized histories and heroic tales. Smith rightly argues that "when peasants ... rebel, we are often tempted to slip back into stereotypical and decontextualized notions of the peasant community as one of tradition and homogenous solidarity" (Smith 1991: 182). Smith shows how a relatively successful rebellion by a peasant community in Peru gave rise to heightened political struggle and debate within the community and how "in the push and pull of debate, history itself is reconstituted" (*ibid.*: 182). This is precisely what happened in La Canoa. There we see how discursive struggles and different reconstructions of history are related to new forms of dominance which developed after the founding of the ejido. This is not to say that there are no themes of collective importance in the ejido. But the interests and stories around it may divide people more than they unite them. For that reason I talk about a situated community (Appadurai 1997) in which people are connected to each other by different types of experiences and in which one always finds forms of dominance and various mechanisms of inclusion and

exclusion.

In this chapter the stories that villagers in La Canoa tell about the past were analyzed and confronted with the master narrative of the Mexican revolution and agrarian reform. The recent emphasis on regional histories (Benjamin and Wasserman 1990, Mallon 1995) as well as the stress on "history from below", from the subaltern or the oppressed, have led to important changes in the socio-historical analysis of the Mexican revolution. Joseph and Nugent, following the work of James Scott, see traditions of historical memory as part of popular subcultures of resistance (Joseph and Nugent 1994: 11). They try to develop "an analytical framework for simultaneously integrating views of the Mexican revolution 'from below' with a more compelling and nuanced 'view from above'" (*ibid.*: 12). Although these are very promising new perspectives, in my view, there are several elements which we should take into account when we analyze local culture and story-telling.

First of all, we should be careful not to reify the oppressed or the subaltern and in this way present an undifferentiated view of rural people. For example, who are the subaltern in La Canoa: all villagers, all ejidatarios, the poorer ejidatarios, the landless families, or other groups? In addition, we should not try to "read" coherence in local stories or "popular culture" when they are perhaps more characterized by fragmentation and diversity. Finally, as Rowe and Schelling put it "the assumption that the culture of subaltern groups is necessarily the expression of resistance to state authority creates problems of its own. To place the relationship between dominant power and the popular inside a vocabulary of conformity versus resistance entails simplification and distortion of the issues" (Rowe and Schelling 1991: 10-11). A similar point is made by Sayer who argues against reifying the state and the project of the state, but adds that it is equally dangerous and misleading to reify and to attribute undue coherence to resistance and popular culture. He makes the point that unarticulated revolutionary sentiments and subversive subscripts frequently are not projects. To treat them as projects of resistance would be a misconstruction with totalizing tendencies. In this way we would fabricate a popular culture of resistance from the diversities we are trying to make sense of. This would very much resemble the way in which "the state" is itself ideologically constituted (Sayer 1994: 372).

We observed that in La Canoa people refer frequently to the national history of the revolution and agrarian reform while they present a very unclear picture of the local agrarian history. The agrarian struggle is presented as a fight of *los pobres* against *los ricos*. However, the *ricos* are nameless: hardly anybody knew the name of the last owner of the hacienda La Canoa. On the other hand, there is a great deal of story-telling on other themes. In these stories no attempt is made to relate them to the broader national narrative of agrarian reform. Furthermore, these stories are fragmented and do not arrive at conclusions. Recurring stories are about the hidden treasures of the revolution, the occasion that the village was set on fire by the *Cristeros*, and the inexplicable wealth of don Filomeno, the great-grandfather of most ejidatarios. Other important elements in the stories of the people

about the past are the continuous movement of people from one place to another, the suffering, and chaotic violence. Yet, it would be erroneous to represent this rich story-telling as a form of resistance to the state's hegemonic project. Although certain elements may challenge the master narrative, we do not find a consistent "alternative" to this narrative. However, on the basis of this material the success of the so-called hegemonic cultural project can certainly be doubted. No connection is made between local and personal stories and the master narrative.

Contradictions, gaps, and fragmentation in stories about the period after the establishment of the ejido, are related to local level politics, family feuds and the difficult relation between fathers and sons. In the story-telling about this period, the image is sometimes conveyed that the agrarian reform in fact replaced the *hacendado* with cruel fathers and despotic bosses. Here some people hold the PRI, or the government, responsible as they did not protect the peasants against these new powerholders. Although ejidatarios are grateful to the PRI for the land they received and the support against the *hacendados*, some ejidatarios are very critical about other political practices.

However, there are more reasons to doubt the success of the national cultural project of influencing the peasants' consciousness. Besides the national history, certain expressions related to the agrarian reform and the ejido ideology can be heard at the local level. The most important ones are "our fathers themselves fought for the land" and "land to the tiller". However, these expressions are primarily used in negotiations with the agrarian bureaucracy and in the defense of their own plot of land. The point is that the expression "land to the tiller" refers to a set of rules which have been legally endorsed after the revolution, and which remained central in negotiations over land rights. This became especially clear in the reaction of the ejidatarios to the reform of article 27 of the Constitution in 1992. Whereas politicians and academics were angry and emotionally claimed that this meant the end of the ejido and the betrayal of the Mexican revolution, the ejidatarios in La Canoa reacted very calmly. When they realized that they would become the "real owner" of their ejido plot, they were happy and the image of the revolution and its famous expressions were not used. The fact that the master narrative is used especially as a discourse in relations with the state bureaucracy, puts into serious doubt the success of the much commented hegemonic project of the Mexican state after the revolution. It seems that ejidatarios have developed an identity which is much more independent of the Mexican state than is generally assumed. I would not go so far as Bantjes who argues that "the attempted cultural revolution was actually, to a large extent, a failure" (Bantjes 1997: 132). Rather, I think that the material presented in this chapter confirms Knight's position who says that "the ideology of the revolution offered a set of ideas and symbols that many - not all - social actors could appropriate, espouse, and utilize in their dealings - and struggles - with one another" (1994a: 64).

## Notes

1. Although I use some notions introduced by Appadurai (1997), I do not adopt his highly innovative but also controversial theoretical framework.
2. In 1856 the Law of Alienation of Properties in Dead Hands (*Ley de Desamortización de Bienes de Manos Muertas*) was issued which declared that all land belonging to civil or ecclesiastic corporations would be expropriated and become the property of the people renting such land. One of the main objectives of the law was to confiscate the enormous amount of properties concentrated in the hands of the Catholic Church. However, the commonly owned land of Indian communities also fell into the category of corporately held land. Although the law offered the possibility for the Indian communities to ask for the protection of their rights within three months of the issuing of the law, most communities never made this formal request because of ignorance of the new law or lack of economic resources. Many Mexicans, but also some foreigners, took advantage of this situation and appropriated most of the land of the Indian communities (see Reyes *et al.* 1974: 536-537, Mendieta and Núñez 1966: 109-114).
3. An idea of land distribution at the beginning of the 20th century can be gained from the following: in 1910 there were about 830 *hacendados* in Mexico who owned 97 per cent of the land, 410,300 farmers owned the remaining 3 per cent of the land, while 96,9 per cent of the heads of rural families owned no land (Zaragoza and Macías 1980: 2). The *hacendados* often owned several haciendas and the largest among them owned millions of hectares.
4. According to Esteva the word ejido comes from exitus, exit. In 15th century Spain, it designated the common land located at the exit of rural towns. The Spaniards used the word to refer later to the Indian communities they found in America. Struggling against the colonizers for the recovery of their spaces, the Indians got used to the word, which they firmly incorporated in their vernacular speech during the 19th century. The revolutionary claim in 1910 took the form of a recovery of the ejidos (Esteva 1980).
5. INEGI, 1990, Encuesta Nacional Agropecuaria Ejidal, 1988. Volume I: Resumen General.
6. INEGI, 1991, XI Censo General de Población y Vivienda, 1990. Jalisco.
7. Until 1935 the region of Autlán could best be depicted as an isolated hinterland as there were no roads that connected the valley to other regions. The road to Guadalajara was inaugurated in 1935.
8. Data from: El programa de desarrollo rural integral de la región Costa del Estado de Jalisco, 1985.
9. According to the Censo General de Habitantes, 1921 Departamento de la Estadística Nacional.
10. Initially Autlán asked for a restitution of land that had been taken away from Indian communities in the preceding centuries. As on most occasions in the Mexican land reform, the claim for restitution of Indian properties was not acknowledged and in 1921 the request for restitution was automatically changed by the Ministry of Agrarian Reform into a request for endowment of lands. This request was conceded and the ejido of Autlán was established in 1924. For the creation of the ejido of Autlán, part of the hacienda of La Canoa was expropriated. Autlán was a big ejido and started with more than 400 members. A large number of the members were landless people from La Canoa and Vista Hermosa.
11. Interview with Ernesto Medina Lima, regional historian, July 1995.
12. These lands belonged to very good friends of the General and although according to the resolution of the Ministry of Agrarian Reform these lands had to be given to the ejido Autlán, this never happened. At a later stage the ejido Autlán received a second extension of the ejido, but the first extension was never executed. The ejidatarios of Autlán are still trying to resolve this situation today. After the death of the General in 1979, they put considerable energy into the case again but so far without any success.

13. This expression was used during the years of the revolution and agrarian struggles to state that land should be taken from large landholders who did not work the land themselves but had their laborers till the land. The people who had rights to the land were therefore those who actually tilled it.





## CHAPTER 3

### THE EJIDO AND VILLAGE LA CANOA

#### **Introduction: the Ejido and a Transnational Village**

In the foregoing chapter we saw how dense sets of socio-political relations developed between villagers of La Canoa after the founding of the ejido. This chapter focuses in particular on the relation between ejidatarios and the growing group of landless families in the village. This relation is analyzed in the context of the increasingly transnationalized lives of the villagers. As we will see, the ejido is an important element in forging relations between people but not in the most obvious ways. Much of the literature on the ejido has too easily taken for granted the importance of ejido land as an economic means of production and has focused on the productive aspect of ejido land. However, as F. and K. von Benda Beckmann (1998) point out, property has functions other than the merely economic. Property may have functions for "social security, for the continuing of social groups, for cultural-religious and political positions, such as providing a basis for power and prestige, or for a socially acceptable fair or equitable distribution of wealth" (F. and K. von Benda Beckmann 1998: 2). This chapter demonstrates that owning an ejido plot is not always important in economic terms but can, instead, be very important in determining socio-political relations. This becomes clear when we study the role the ejido played in village politics. Hence, in this chapter we look at the force field in which village politics have developed and study the role of regional political networks and the ejido for the organization of local projects.

In this context, it is important to make the distinction between the village La Canoa and the ejido La Canoa more explicit. In administrative terms a separation exists between village and ejido. The ejido is an agrarian institution which falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Agrarian Reform, while the village is an administrative unit, falling under the municipality of Autlán. While in the beginning there was no real difference between ejido and village as almost all households received land, this situation changed over time. The number of landless families in the village grew and today the majority of households are landless. This means that the relation between ejido and village has changed drastically. As will become clear, village dynamics and ejido affairs are intricately related but sometimes in tense ways. Different categories of villagers (ejidatarios, non-ejidatarios, sons of ejidatarios and outsiders) are defined who claim differing rights, especially around conflicts.

A phenomenon which has to be taken into account in any analysis of the ejido and the village today is migration to the United States. As Kearney points out, "today an adequate ethnography of seemingly rural Mexican communities must situate them within transnational and global contexts" (Kearney 1996: 3). Most villagers of La Canoa are embedded in transnational networks, and important support networks exist between people in La Canoa

and the United States. As Rouse argues, many migrants "during the last two decades have managed to maintain active involvements with the people and places they have left behind and, in so doing, have often helped create new kinds of communities that span the international border" (Rouse 1992: 27). This chapter discusses how migration influences life in the village and how it affects the relation between ejidatarios and landless villagers.

The chapter is divided into several parts. First, an analysis is presented of the regional economy and the importance of ejido land for village households is examined. This is followed by a discussion of the role of migration in the local economy and how this combines with the "peasant way of life" in the village. Finally, the central role of the ejido in village politics is analyzed and the influence this has had on relations between landless villagers and ejidatarios is shown.

## The Village and the Regional Setting

### *Infrastructure of the Village*

Nine kilometers along the paved road from Autlán to El Grullo, one finds the exit to La Canoa. A further six kilometers along a dirt road takes one to the village. In the rainy season this road can be in a terrible state. On the way to the village one goes along the irrigation canals that irrigate part of the ejido lands of La Canoa. The dominant crop in this irrigated zone is sugarcane. At a certain point along the road one crosses the main canal and leaves the irrigated zone behind to enter the dry area. Here the predominant crop is maize which is cultivated in the rainy season from May to November. The rest of the year one only finds here leftovers of the maize and cattle grazing. Some fifteen minutes after turning off the main road, one enters the village through the broad main street. At this entrance one finds a small chapel, a shop where men can be found drinking and talking, and a wooden bull ring. The broad entrance road leads to a small central *plaza (el jardín)*, where the ejido house is situated and a little park with benches. This area where one enters the village is called *el pueblo abajo* (the village below) and is considered to be the rich part of the village because most of the bigger ejidatarios and landowners live here and one can find the wealthiest houses here. The most politically influential families also can be found here. There are certain parts in the *pueblo abajo* where several houses together belong to certain families, such as the Romeros, the Garcías, the Cosfos, the Fábregas and the Lagos. This is the oldest part of the village. From the *plaza* two sandy roads continue to the part of the village that is called *el pueblo arriba*. The *pueblo arriba* used to be the poorer part of the village. One of the sandy roads leads to the neighboring villages Vista Hermosa, el Castillo, and La Piedra. On this road one finds a big Catholic church; a new building that has never been completely finished. Today the difference between the *pueblo abajo* and the *pueblo arriba* is less pronounced than in former days. According to villagers, the reason is that many

families in *el pueblo arriba* have migrated to the USA and so they are no longer poorer than the families in *el pueblo abajo*.

According to the government census of 1990, La Canoa has 837 inhabitants.<sup>1</sup> My own research suggests that this is an overestimate. This means that many sons and daughters who live in the United States or elsewhere in Mexico were still counted in the census. In 1993 my figures were as follows. When I only counted the people present in the village at that time there were 690 inhabitants. When I included the unmarried migrant children I arrived at approximately 803 inhabitants.

La Canoa is very much a rural village. From any house, one can walk directly to the fields, the *cerro*, and the river. There are a large number of cattle and in the street one often comes across herds of cows, which are on their way to the field or on their way back to the stable. Many men ride horses but this is considered to be more a sign of wealth and leisure than of work. Today, most ploughing on the arable land is done by machines. The houses used to have large *corrales*. In these *corrales* people have their fruit trees, plants, chickens, goats, a pig, and so on. People do not grow their own vegetables, but buy vegetables in the shops in the village. Some fruits and vegetables are freely collected in the commons of the ejido.

There are several small shops and one telephone in the village, a public telephone in the shop of Lupe Medina. At certain hours of the day people are queuing to make their calls. There is little privacy when speaking on the telephone and it is a very good place to get into the details of the latest village dramas. As communication through the telephone is often bad, people tend to shout and everybody in the shop can follow the conversation and become acquainted with the latest news. This one telephone in the village is very important for the relations of migrants in the United States. Around the many small shops in the village, men may gather, buy their licor, and talk about the latest developments. There are also several bars in the village; rooms with some tables and chairs. From time to time someone tries to start a brothel with girls from outside the village. They always do this in great secrecy for as soon as the women in the village get notice of this, strong opposition starts. Until now all attempts to establish a brothel have been defeated by opposition from the women in La Canoa. The village has a large school complex for kindergarten, primary school, and secondary school (by television), a small clinic and a football field.

When we look at the perceptions of the people of their own village, we find that the villagers never talk with pride about the state of their village. On the contrary, they talk in negative terms about the condition of the roads, the *plaza*, and the general filthy state of the village. The villagers always compare La Canoa with other villages which are much better organized, where they do have a nice *plaza* with flowers and trees, and where they have paved roads instead of earth roads. However, what people do greatly appreciate about life in La Canoa is the freedom, quietness, and healthy way of life. This is especially valued in comparison with unhealthy and speedy life in Autlán, the big Mexican cities (Guadalajara and

Mexico City) and especially the United States. They also appreciate the "natural richness" of the village in terms of fruit and vegetables that are out there just waiting to be collected by the people in the commons.

### *The Regional Setting*

The Autlán - El Grullo valley is a predominantly agrarian region. There is little industry and what industry there is, is related to the agrarian sector: vegetable and fruit packing, the animal fodder industry, and maize sheller machines (*desgranadoras*). A great change was brought to the region in the 1950s when the Mexican government constructed an irrigation system which came into operation in the beginning of the 1960s. Since then almost half of the arable land in the valley has been irrigated and production and economic activities have greatly increased. In La Canoa half of the arable ejido land falls within the irrigated zone.

Since irrigation was introduced, agriculture in the region has taken on a boom - bust character (see van der Zaag 1992). The area experienced a boom in the production of melon and watermelon in the beginning of the 1960s on lands irrigated by wells. Then soils were exhausted and production dropped. Under the influence of General García Barragán a sugarcane refinery was brought to the region in the 1960s. To begin with the mill operated very badly and few people planted sugarcane. Under the presidency of Echeverría the CNC cañera was introduced and Zuñiga became head of the organization for the region of Autlán. It was under Zuñiga that the CNC took over several tasks in the production of sugarcane such as the planting, harvesting, and transport of the sugarcane and that a number of services were introduced for the ejidatarios (see Guzmán 1995). The working of the mill improved considerably. Although Zuñiga has become a controversial figure, who is especially hated by the urban elite of Autlán and El Grullo, most ejidatarios speak well of him. They recognize that he has greatly enriched himself and that he is involved in dubious affairs, but they appreciate what he did for them in their problems with the sugar mill: he achieved higher prices, better organization, more services, and more economic security. He is also greatly admired for the fact that he is so accessible and many ejidatarios, men as well as women, approach him when they have questions or problems concerning the sugarcane. Sugarcane is now the dominant crop on the irrigated lands.

However, other crops have been important and have had their own histories. For example, towards the end of the 1960s a tomato boom started when the foreign company Griffin and Brand started renting land from private farmers in Autlán. Later other companies followed and five important tomato companies were working in the region (See González 1994 and Torres 1994a). Many people either rented their land to the tomato companies or worked under contract for them. A serious problem with the tomato production was that after some three consecutive years of production, viruses and pests augmented and yields would decline. The companies then looked for other lands to rent. The depleted plots that were returned to the owner were no longer suitable for tomato production and the diseases were

difficult to eliminate (González 1994: 124). By the beginning of the 1990s the tomato companies had left the region and the packing plants in the region had closed. The larger ejidatarios and private landowners ran up enormous bank debts during the years when tomato production generated major losses and were facing bankruptcy (see Torres 1994b for a discussion about the Barzón movement which came up as a consequence of this crisis).

The crisis in tomato production affected the whole region and not only the landowners. The tomato industry had offered a lot of employment during the harvesting and in the packing plants. That was all over now. Furthermore, the tomato boom had brought the region to life. New restaurants had been opened, bars did good business, as well as the many music groups, *mariachis* and *bandas*. There was a lot of money in circulation and everybody in the region, including the people without land profited from the boom. With the tomato crisis unemployment became a serious problem in the region. There was still considerable sugarcane production in the region but this is much less labor intensive than the tomatoes. As the regional economy depends so much on agriculture, changes in agriculture are directly felt in household economies. When agriculture is in crisis, the whole region is in crisis and when agriculture is booming, the regional economy is booming. During periods of crises there is a tendency for people to leave the region and during periods of booming, people from other regions come to look for work.

Another phenomenon which brought prosperity to the region in the 1980s needs to be mentioned: namely the production and trafficking of marihuana. It is said that part of the tomato boom of the 1980s was caused by the marihuana which was hidden in the tomato boxes. Although the role of marihuana production is difficult to estimate, some of the agro-exporters have indeed been caught trafficking in marihuana. A manager of a major bank in Autlán also estimated that a substantial part of incomes in the region could not be explained and were thus, according to him, probably from drug trafficking.

One well-known drug producer and trafficker in the region was Amador García, from La Canoa (grandson of Juan García, one of the founders of the ejido). He was called *el Chino* (the Chinese) and was caught by the police at the end of the 1980s. Most people in La Canoa regret the fact that he was caught. They say that the police itself is involved in drug trafficking and that at least *el Chino* brought work, money, and parties to the village, while the police only bring trouble. People in the village recall the good times when *el Chino* was around, especially in times of crises. In 1993 there was a serious crisis in the region. There was a lack of money and work in the valley and people were having a hard time. Benita Romero, sadly recalled the good times with *el Chino*. Benita:

*In the time of el Chino everything was much better. He always had fields full of tomatoes, melons, and so on. He rented a lot of land besides his own land and he gave a lot of work to the people in the village. He was a sinvergüenza (shameless devil) in the sense that he had many women besides his family, but he was great with the people. He organized marvelous parties with music. Every year he paid*

*for the twelve o'clock Mass of the feasts of La Canoa with mariachi. Nobody knew that he was in the drugs business. We heard that later after he was caught by the police. But the police itself is involved in the drug business. He was at least a good man who provided work and treated everybody in a decent way. I am very sad that he is no longer around.*

*El Chino* was well known in the valley. Once when we were at the funeral of somebody from La Canoa in the cemetery of Autlán, somebody came to me and asked worriedly if we were burying *el Chino* García. *El Chino*, however, was only put in jail for a short time and then left for the United States leaving large debts in the village. However, every year he still pays for the Mass of the village feast and the priest publicly thanks him during the ceremony.

### **Household Economies and the Distribution of Ejido Land**

#### *Households and Support Relations*

The custom in the village is that a child who marries leaves the parental house to establish his or her own household. It is not common for a married couple to stay in the parental house. It is not difficult for the newly weds to find a house to rent or borrow, as many houses in the village are empty. Many marriages in La Canoa take place within the village itself. Even with the migration to the United States, many men return to the village to marry their girlfriend and take her back to the USA. It is widely said that love is the most important reason for a couple to marry. Naturally, there is always much gossiping and politicking around marriages. The most important themes of gossip are the economic position and responsibility of the man and the reputation and domestic qualities of the woman, but there is a great deal of freedom in the choice of marriage partners. Children who do not get their parents' consent elope and in this way force their parents to accept their choice. If possible, the family of the man helps the young couple to get started and provides a house.

Traditionally, the economic support follows the paternal line and parents will especially support the households of their sons. So, when a boy and a girl come from different villages, they tend to go and live in the boy's village. Property is mostly inherited by one of the sons. However, there are no fixed inheritance rules and the child who looks after the aged parents until their death develops certain rights to the property, even if it is a woman (see chapter five). People who possess several plots of land, often divide their property between several sons by passing plots over to them during their life.

Parents and children support each other considerably, although no fixed rules can be given and much depends on the position of the specific families and children. Unmarried children contribute to the household economy of their parents. They work in the house (girls) and on the land (boys) and if they have jobs the earnings goes to their parents.<sup>2</sup> However, this general rule is applied with great flexibility. Although many people said that the custom

was that the children gave all their earnings to their parents as long as they lived in the parental house, upon closer study it appeared that in many households these rules were not so strictly followed. Many children were allowed to use a large part of the money for themselves or to save money for their future households. Boys often started building a house for their future family. Girls could spend the money on dresses, presents, make-up, or had their own savings accounts. Even when they move away from the parental house unmarried children use to support their parents and regularly send them money. Naturally, one finds cases of "good and responsible" children who regularly send money to their parents and opposite cases of "irresponsible selfish children" (especially boys) who spend all their money on enjoying themselves and forget their family at home. When the children get married, the obligation to contribute to the parents' household diminishes. From this point on, the contribution is more voluntary and is normally more irregular. However, although these mutual support arrangements diminish, if necessary parents and children continue helping each other in different kind of ways.

When the parents grow old, the care relation is reversed and the children become responsible for their parents. They may provide the necessary money, but will also look after them if they cannot live on their own anymore. Many old people prefer to stay on their own and are visited and looked after by their children and grandchildren in the village. When the parent cannot live on his or her own anymore, he or she chooses to live with one of the children. The child who remains in the parental house longest, usually looks after their parents. So, "whether single or married, young or old, offspring are entitled to affection and help from their parents and are obliged to reciprocate, especially in their parents' old age" (de la Peña 1984: 211). As many children live in the United States today, they often try to convince their parents to come and live with them in the USA.

#### *Households and Access to Ejido Plots*

If we define the household as the co-residential domestic unit, we find that many households in the village do not only include the nuclear family. Different combinations of relatives may be found in households. Often grandparents live in with one of their children, or grandparents raise the children of their unmarried daughter, divorced son, or migrant children. Bachelors and widows or widowers may live together. There are several women-headed households, and households of women and men who live on their own. In order to show the distribution of land between households with different care tasks I distinguished four types of households in La Canoa.<sup>3</sup>



Table 3.1 Distribution of ejido plots between different types of households in La Canoa

	with ejido plot	without ejido plot	total
household type 1	8 (13)	52 (87)	60
household type 2	8 (16)	40 (83)	48
household type 3	22 (50)	22 (50)	44
household type 4	20 (45)	24 (55)	44
total	58 (30)	138 (70)	196

Note: row percentages between brackets

1 = young households with young children

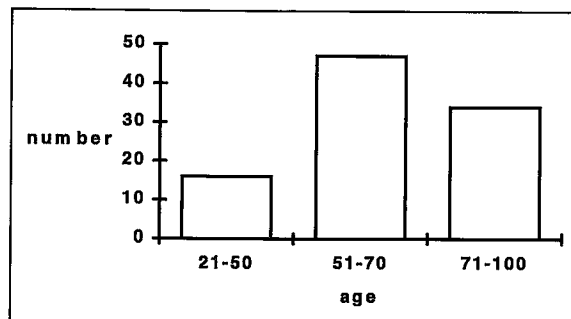
2 = household with young children and older children who have started working

3 = household without smaller children, only older children of whom some have left the house

4 = old couples without children to take care of and old bachelors

From table 3.1 it becomes clear that today 138 of the 196 households in the village do not have access to an ejido plot.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, only 15 per cent of households with young children (type 1 and 2) possess an ejido plot as against 48 per cent of older households without young children (type 3 and 4). So, younger households in particular do not possess land. Many landless people are sons of ejidatarios for whom there was no land available anymore. That ejido land remains in the hands of the older generation is also illustrated by the age composition of the ejidatarios (see figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 Age composition of the ejidatarios of La Canoa in 1993

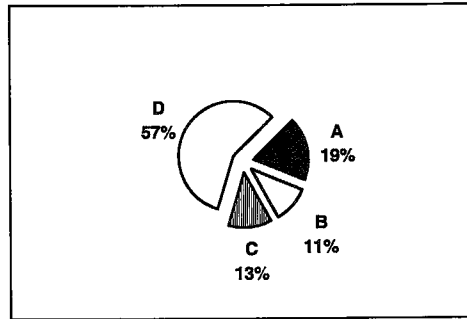


The fact that land remains in the hands of the older people not only means that the young families are in a much more difficult economic position, but also that the older generation maintains a significant control over the distribution of resources. Parents normally help their children when they need economic support, but this also means that they keep a certain amount of control over their children. As we will see in the next chapter, economic support by ejidatario fathers may go along with considerable interference in the life of the children. Another important and delicate issue which plays a significant role in the relation between parents and children is the inheritance of the ejido land (see chapters four and five). In this way ejido land ownership "marks periods of transition between generations, demarcates areas of competence, and creates bonds of dependence" (Sabeán 1990: 33).

#### *Households and Access to the Commons*

The commons have been an important resource for the growing group of landless families in the village. Most of the lands that the ejido La Canoa received were common lands, namely approximately 1800 hectares, as against only 400 hectares of arable lands. Unlike the arable lands, the agrarian law did not allow the division of the commons into individual plots. All members of the ejido had the right to an individual plot of arable land and to the use of the commons. Although officially the commons belonged to the ejidatarios, nobody complained if other families collected fruits and vegetables or hunted on these extensive terrains. Many landless families were even allowed by the ejidatarios to take a part of the commons for a *coamil*: an extensive form of maize cultivation. For the landless families the *coamil* can make a difference to the household economy. It makes it possible for them to produce their own maize and have some animals which they feed with the waste of the crop. Many of the landless families cherish their *coamil*. This also has to be seen in the light of the fact that many landless men are sons of ejidatarios, who did not inherit the plot of their father. Hence, the *coamil* is their only remaining link with the land. It remains a poor substitute, for they possess the land only as a loan from the ejido and are excluded from the ejido community. In this way they are second-rate peasants. Still it makes it possible for them to continue a "peasant way of life", which is very important for most villagers. Although the commons the ejido La Canoa received in 1938 were abundant, over the years almost all the common lands have been brought into use. (In chapter six the management of the commons is discussed in more detail).

Figure 3.2 Distribution of ejido arable plots and common lands between households in the village of La Canoa in 1993



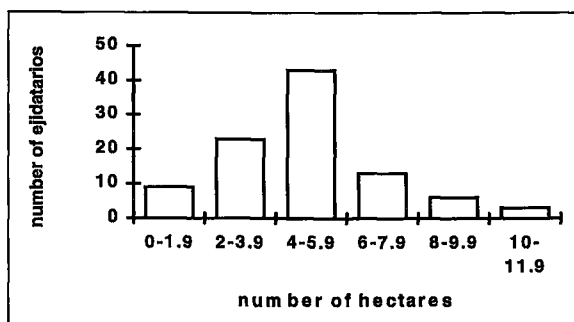
- A = households with an ejido plot and a *coamil*
- B = households with only an ejido plot
- C = households with only a *coamil*
- D = households without any land

From figure 3.2 it is clear that even if we include the *coamiles* as a form of land possession, most households in the village are landless today. Many of these landless households get their income by working as day laborers on the fields of the landowners. Others manage to get jobs in the sugarcane refinery or in the service sector in Autlán. Women also work in many different activities. Many women, for example, prepare meals for sale on Sundays, wash for other people, sew or embroider. Only the women of the poorest families work on the land, for example, in the tomato harvest. Women working in agriculture is seen as a sign of poverty. Migration, especially to the United States, is another important source of income. On the basis of a similar situation in an ejido in Michoacán, Gledhill arrived at the conclusion that “the problem of the countryside’ is not the problem of the ejidatarios, who constitute a relatively privileged minority, but the problems of the landless who remain in the countryside, or move between countryside, city and the United States. These include, of course, a high proportion of the ejidatarios’ own children” (Gledhill, 1991: 9). What complicates life for younger couples is the fact that apart from the arable land, there is no *coamil* available anymore in the commons. This makes life for young households very hard. Some live a poor existence as day laborers, some depend on their parents and many try to find a living elsewhere. Many young couples decide to join their relatives in the United States and try their luck there: they have little to lose.

### Differentiation among Ejidatarios

At a first glimpse we could say that in La Canoa the poor landless households provide the labor for the wealthy landowners. Although many people in the village would agree with this conclusion, the situation is more complex. Among the ejidatarios, we find some big entrepreneurs but also many small holders who cannot possibly live off the land.

Figure 3.3 Number of hectares ejidatarios of La Canoa possess in 1993



In La Canoa ejido land tenure is the most common form of land tenure. Only a few families bought private property land, but they are all ejidatarios. Hence, there is not a group of *pequeños propietarios* in the village which is separate from the ejido.<sup>5</sup> In figure 3.3 we notice strong differences in the number of hectares ejidatarios possess. However, since the 1960s irrigation is a more differentiating factor than the number of hectares a household possesses. Ejidatarios with irrigated land find themselves in a much better position than ejidatarios with only rainfed land.

Table 3.2 Area of rainfed and irrigated land in the ejido La Canoa in 1993

	rainfed land	irrigated land	all land together
hectares	206	232	438
number of plots	66	70	136
number of owners	55	57	94

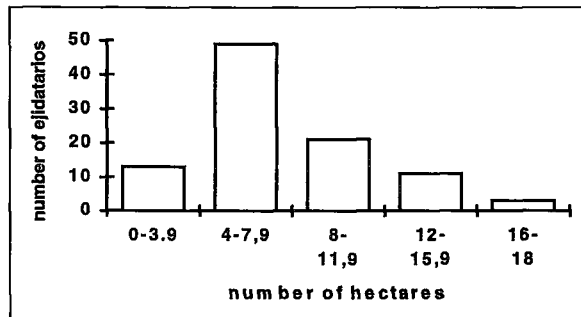
Note: The reason that the number of owners of all the land together is less than the sum of owners of the irrigated land and owners of rainfed land is that some ejidatarios possess rainfed as well as irrigated land. Three of the 97 ejidatarios do not possess an ejido plot (only a *coamil*). For this reason the total is only 94 ejidatarios.

Table 3.3 Distribution of irrigated land and rainfed land between ejidatarios in 1993

ejidatarios with only rainfed land	37
ejidatarios with only irrigated land	39
ejidatarios with both rainfed and irrigated land	18
total	94

Without entering into a complicated economic discussion on how much land a family would need to be able to live off the land, a rough indication can be gained from the figures the villagers themselves gave me. Many people told me that in order to maintain a family, one needed at least four hectares of irrigated land or eight hectares of rainfed land. Based on these figures I made a calculation in which one hectare of irrigated land is counted as the equivalent of two hectares of rainfed land.

Figure 3.4 Number of hectares ejidatarios possess when 1 hectare of irrigated land is counted as 2 hectares of rainfed land



In figure 3.4 we see that on the basis of this calculation, the majority of ejidatarios in La Canoa do not possess this minimum area of land. This explains that land is not the only or most important source of income for the ejidatario households.

To show that a pronounced differentiation exists in the distribution of land in the ejido, I present a list of the ejidatarios who are best off in the sense that they have the largest irrigated plots in the ejido. Then I present the ejidatarios who are worse off and have only a small plot of rainfed land. Chapter five explains how these differences in plot size and possession of land came into being.

Table 3.4 The seven ejidatarios who possess the largest area of irrigated land in the ejido La Canoa in 1993

	hectares irrigated land	hectares rainfed land
Pedro Romero	8.0	0
Ricardo García	7.2	0
Ignacio Romero	7.0	0
Cristina Obregón	7.0	0
Esteban Romero	7.0	0
Claudio Núñez	6.8	4
Marcos Vargas	6.8	0

Table 3.5 The seven ejidatarios who possess the smallest area of rainfed land in La Canoa and who do not possess irrigated land

	hectares irrigated land	hectares rainfed land
Faustino Romero	0	1
Clemente Aviles	0	1
Amador García	0	1
Mauro Bautista	0	1
Mario Romero	0	2
Francisco Ramírez	0	2
David Obregón	0	2

The figures in tables 3.4 and 3.5 show that there is a pronounced differentiation among ejidatarios.<sup>6</sup> Irrigated land has been the central component in the differentiation process and nobody in the ejido has become rich on the basis of rainfed land. Although it is generally said that one needs at least eight hectares of rainfed land to maintain a family, this is of course an arbitrary figure as production on rainfed land depends on the rainfall. With bad rains there is no harvest at all and this happens quite frequently. With irrigated land the problem is a different one. Producers on irrigated land can make high profits from the production of vegetables. However, a central problem for them are fluctuating market prices. Unlike maize, there was no government price control for vegetables. This means that sometimes prices are very high and one can make a large profit (much more than with maize). But when prices drop one can lose the harvest and end up with large debts.

During the time of my research Gustavo Romero, one of the biggest agricultural entrepreneurs in the village, did not harvest his crops on several occasions as prices had suddenly dropped and would not cover the costs of harvesting. On these occasions Gustavo gave villagers the opportunity to harvest vegetables for themselves for free on his land. People who do not want to take these kinds of risks grow sugarcane on their irrigated fields. Besides a secure price, sugarcane has many other advantages such as health insurance, credit

facilities, and harvesting organized through the sugarcane growers organization, the CNC *cañera*. For that reason sugarcane growers are often depicted as "lazy people". As the sugarcane refinery has reached its maximum production capacity there is now a waiting list for new sugarcane growers.

With the exception of some of the bigger entrepreneurs with irrigated land, most households with an ejido plot have several sources of income besides the land. Several ejidatarios work as day laborers on the land of others or combine their small plot with other activities such as a shop or private business. Many ejidatarios also receive money from migration. As Gledhill points out, "the possibility of sustaining a rural household by means of seasonal migration, often supplemented by income remittances by children working elsewhere, was what permitted the eventual resurrection of ejidal farming ... Migration is therefore a facet of a dialectical process of decomposition and recomposition which has marked the history of the peasantry as a social category" (Gledhill 1991: 154).

### **The Importance of Migration**

In chapter two we saw that the village La Canoa has always been characterized by a considerable mobility of people. This started before the establishment of the ejido and continued afterwards. Furthermore, migration to the United States is no new phenomenon. The state of Jalisco is characterized by a long-standing and extensive migration to the USA. Many men from La Canoa went to work in agriculture in the USA in the 1940s and 1950s. This augmented with the *bracero* program (1940-1963) introduced by the United States in order to get Mexican laborers for the harvest in American agriculture. In this way peasant farming in Mexico was combined with wage labor in the USA. However, since the 1970s a new form of migration has developed in which not only the men go to the USA but complete families leave the village. This change in the form of migration in western Mexico has been documented by other researchers as well (see Massey *et al.* 1987).

There is no single pattern of migration and people often do not know beforehand if they will ever come back to stay in the village. Migration often starts when one or two sons of the family join relatives in the USA. When work is going well, other children may follow and in the end the parents as well. Alternatively, the man of the family may decide to go to the USA and leave his wife and children in the village. Sons may later follow him and even the whole family. Migration naturally can have many reasons apart from simple economic ones. Migration also is an escape possibility for people with different types of problems in the village. Drugs dealers, people with high debts, and people who murdered someone in La Canoa, for example, have also left for the USA.

An indication of the extent of the migration to the USA is the fact that of all people born and registered in La Canoa between 1946 and 1986 and who were still alive in 1993, 23 per

cent lived in the village and 31 per cent in the United States.<sup>7</sup> Many ejidatarios have also left the village. Today many ejidatarios even have their permanent residence outside the village. Of the 97 officially recognized ejidatarios of La Canoa, in 1993, 37 lived outside the village.<sup>8</sup>

Table 3.6 Residence of ejidatarios of La Canoa in 1993

place of residence	number
La Canoa	60
Autlán	15
Elsewhere in Mexico	9
United States	13
Total	97

Ejidatarios with small plots of rainfed land, as well as ejidatarios with large irrigated plots have left the village. The ejidatarios who have moved to Autlán, remain actively involved in the ejido and work the land themselves. Ejidatarios who have moved farther away, are less actively involved in local ejido matters. Some regularly return to till the land, others rent the land out or leave it to a son or other relatives. Most of the ejidatarios who live outside the village, still show great interest in their land and would not think of selling it.

Another indication of the extent of migration is the fact that today 66 of the 262 houses in the village are empty.

Table 3.7 Occupancy of houses in the village La Canoa in 1993

Empty	66
Inhabited by people "from the village"	171
Inhabited by people "from outside"	25
Total	262

From table 3.7 it follows that there is not only emigration from the village but also a movement in the other direction. 25 of the 196 inhabited houses are occupied by "people from outside". The category "people from outside" is arbitrary and difficult to manage, but villagers use it for people who arrived at the village long after the establishment of the ejido and who cannot claim descent from the original ejidatarios. Most arrived recently. They come from states such as Michoacán and Guerrero where the economic situation is worse than in the valley of Autlán where at least one can try to find work as a day laborer on the irrigated land. These people borrow empty houses in the village and work as day laborers on the lands of people from La Canoa and other villages. However, they stay very separate



from the other villagers. Some are ethnically different from the villagers and they are often called *Indios* and sometimes condescendingly *marihuaneros* (suggesting that they cultivate marihuana in the commons). The attitude of the villagers to these “foreign” day laborers is contradictory. On the one hand, some villagers lend their houses to these people for free and there is a strong sense in the village that everybody has to be well received. On the other hand, most feel very different from them and treat them as outsiders. When there is little work in agriculture, they may leave again. On the whole, the village has grown significantly since the beginning of this century.

Table 3.8 Number of inhabitants of the village La Canoa in this century

Year	Number of inhabitants
1921	258
1950	493
1990	837

Source: National Statistics<sup>9</sup>

Although the migration to *el Norte* has a large impact on the local economy it is difficult to be precise about the resources coming from the United States. The main reason is that remittances fluctuate greatly. Some men are retired in the United States and receive a monthly pension, but such a regular income from the USA is rare. Most households have children in the USA. However, some children send money and others do not. Furthermore, migrant husbands may regularly send money and then suddenly stop sending. There may be many reasons for this fluctuation in the flow of money from *el Norte*. Naturally, one obvious reason is the work the migrants can find in the United States.

Money from the United States can be used for many different purposes. Apart from supporting daily subsistence, money from the United States is often used for special projects, such as the cultivation of a crop, the painting of a house, the paying of the medical bills, the buying of a tractor, or the establishment of a shop. Again many different types of arrangements may be found. For example, a son in the USA may send his parents money to sow the maize or prepare the land without asking anything in return. However, they may also arrive at an agreement that half of the harvest will be his.

To give an idea of the number of households that receive money from the United States on a more or less regular basis, I made an estimate.<sup>10</sup> For this estimate I excluded the “people from outside” as they form a group of people that move around and are very separate from the village. Furthermore, there is considerable “local knowledge” about the families of the village and the remittances every household receives from the USA, whereas there is no “localized” information about the “outsiders”.

Table 3.9 Households "from the village", possession of ejido plots and remittances from the United States in 1993

	with income from the USA	without income from the USA	total
household with ejido plot	38 (66)	20 (34)	58
household without ejido plot	39 (35)	74 (65)	113
total	77 (45)	94 (55)	171

Note: row percentages between brackets

From the figures in table 3.9 it becomes clear that a strong relation exists between migration and land. 66 per cent of the households with an ejido plot receive remittances from the United States, whereas only 35 per cent of the landless households from the village receive remittances from *el Norte*. So, these figures support the view that the families who are better off (ejidatarios) are also those who have most links with the United States. It has often been suggested that one needs money and social networks to migrate and that for this reason the poorest people do not migrate so easily. However, we must be careful with drawing this type of conclusion on the basis of this data. We must realize that most ejidatarios are older people who have adult children in the States, while many landless households are young couples without adult children in the USA. So the relation between land and income from the USA which is found in these figures is also influenced by the age factor.

Although land remains a highly desired asset and an important source of income for some families, migration to *el Norte* has reduced the interest of many young people in the land. Many sons in the USA have told their parents that they have no intention whatsoever of coming back and say that they do not have any interest in land anymore (see chapter four).

#### *Migration and the Peasant Way of Life*

Despite the money coming in from the USA in the village the "peasant" or "ejidatario way of life" remains important for a large part of the population. As Kearney writes about the town where he did research: "an ethnographer from the sky would have no trouble filling notebooks documenting expressions of a corresponding 'peasant culture and mentality'" (Kearney 1996: 16). However, after some of research it would become clear that the town "was maintained as a seemingly 'traditional' community precisely because of the high degree to which migrants from the town penetrated into distant and diverse socioeconomic niches elsewhere in Mexico and California. Transnational patterns of production and consumption were supporting a seemingly traditional society that in fact was in many ways fairly modern" (*ibid.*: 17). One of my experiences with one of the oldest ejidatarios of La Canoa, Pedro Bautista, fits in well with Kearney's analysis. Pedro Bautista belonged to the small group of the first ejidatarios who were still alive. I knew that he was a migrant who traveled between Chicago and La Canoa, but in the village he fitted the image of a real "Mexican

*campesino*". He took great interest in ejido affairs and liked to talk about the history of the ejido and the difficult times in the past. One day, after we had had a typical "peasant" conversation, he said that he had to return to Chicago as there were problems with his apartments. At first I thought that he must mean apartments he was looking after as a cleaner or a concierge. But then it became clear that he was the owner of an apartment complex in Chicago. This typical *campesino* who took so much interest in tilling his ejido plot and living in the village, appeared to be an entrepreneur in Chicago.

This only makes clear the importance of studying migration and the many aspects of its relation to the ejido and village. As Kearney argues "Anthropological studies of migration have been overwhelmingly framed within issues of development and underdevelopment of rural communities" (Kearney 1996: 121) but we should pay attention to the more social, political, and cultural aspects of migration as well. We have already seen that ejido land or even a *coamil* in the commons may be very important in maintaining a peasant identity. Land may also fulfill this role for migrants who earn the largest part of their income in the United States. Rouse (1989) discusses in detail the differences in life styles between the rural Mexican village and the USA. In the rural village work can be hard, but it does not follow the strict labor discipline of the United States. There is no sharp distinction between work hours and leisure time, nor between the work place and one's private home. Notions such as hard work, and honor are central in the village, as well as socializing activities that might seem like aspects of leisure in the United States, such as hosting and attending parties, and partying with friends (Rouse 1989: 133). The next chapter shows that this difference in life style is problematic for sons who have to be prepared to become future ejidatarios.

### On the Ideology of Land

What struck me from the beginning in La Canoa was that in the reflections of the local people (ejidatarios as well as landless people), land was considered to be a central asset in life. In these local theories land was the only source of wealth and the lack of land was used to explain the poverty of those without land. Estela Lagos, for example, who comes from a landless family, but is now married to one of the few young ejidatarios, said to me: *My mother always says: the people with land are millionaires*. However, Estela and her husband had difficult times and were certainly not living as millionaires. In contrast, Estela's mother was doing quite well without land. Cristina, the woman of a poor landless family in the village said to me: *There is a lot of difference between ejidatarios and non-ejidatarios. Ejidatarios have land, they have more money than we have*. Cristina still speaks with great indignation about her parents in law who had ejido land but sold it in the beginning of the 1960s and left for Guadalajara. Cristina (angrily): *And they left their two sons in the village without any land!* Other authors have also described this strong value attached to the

possession of land in rural Mexico. Luis González, a well known Mexican historian, writes that "many consider the *rancheros*' obsession with possessing land that produces very little and is the source of thousand quarrels and pains a foolishness. However, in the rural environment almost the only way to stand out, to be taken seriously, to become a respectable and respected person is to be the owner of arable and pastoral lands" (González 1988: 56 own translation). Although González description refers to *rancheros* who are private land owners and are not organized in ejidos, his characterization of the value attached to (poor) land, also applies to La Canoa.

At first, this glorification of land seemed understandable in a region that is characterized by agriculture and animal husbandry. However, as was discussed above, among the ejidatarios there are also many people who possess only a very small plot of rainfed land and who cannot possibly live off the land. While it is true that the richest families in the village are ejidatarios, it is also true that many landless families these days are richer than their ejidatario neighbors. This can primarily be explained by migration to the United States, which has reduced the importance of the land as the main factor in socio-economic differentiation. In order to understand the value attached to the land, we have to look at the many different meanings which are attached to the possession of an ejido plot.

Obviously, land is not only valued as a source of income. When I talked to Aurora García, an ejidataria in La Canoa, about the many conflicts over land in the village she commented: *All this fighting over land, while it does not produce very much. But for the people it is important to have land even it does not produce very much. It is the idea of having something; the security that the land provides.* Besides security, the land is also important for the production of maize for home consumption. The production of one's own maize has a strong cultural significance and is also important for people who have enough income to buy the maize. Maize and beans are the central ingredients of meals in the village. Today beans are mostly bought in the shops but people try to be at least partly self-supporting in their annual maize consumption. Maize is used to make *tortillas* and for festivities the maize is used to prepare *tamales*.<sup>11</sup> Households that do not possess land often cultivate some maize in their *corral*. Hence, land also has a more symbolic value as the provider of the main ingredient of the rural diet.

The possession of an ejido plot also provides a certain status. A clear social distinction exists between ejidatarios and landless families in the village. Although in middle class circles of private landowners or in the cities people tend to talk in a denigrating way about these smallholder ejidatarios, in the village their image is quite different. In the village the ejidatarios are the independent and proud people. The richer ejidatarios are very aware of their position and feel superior to landless laborers. For example, Lorenzo Romero explained that the sons of ejidatarios do not work in the fields. Lorenzo: *They pay very little for the work on the land and the laborers on the land are generally poor people from other regions. They are paid 15 thousand (\$5), whether it is man, woman, or a child. In contrast, the*

*ejidatarios* receive 25 thousand (\$8) a day and they only work when they want to. However, this quote is more an illustration of Lorenzo's feelings of superiority than a practical rule concerning day laborers. During economic crises, sons of *ejidatarios*, including Lorenzo's, also have to work as day laborers and for the same salary as others (see the next chapter).

Another topic around which the distinction between *ejidatarios* and landless villagers is strongly felt these days, is the commons. The commons have become scarce and have started to become a source of serious tension in the village. Many *ejidatarios* have started asking questions about non-*ejidatarios* possessing *coamiles*. The landless people in their turn, recognize that the *ejido* only lent them the land, and that the *ejido* remains the real owner but at the same time they are very angry with, what they call, the selfish and egoistic attitude of the *ejidatarios*, who are better-off and yet are claiming lands that landless families have been working peacefully for many years. Among the landless families themselves divisions are also created: landless sons of *ejidatarios* claim that they have more rights to the commons than landless people in the village who are not even related to the *ejidatarios* (see chapter six).

Besides the elements mentioned above which give the possession of an *ejido* plot all kinds of values besides economic ones, being an *ejidatario* also means that one can participate in government programs for the *ejido* sector, such as credit programs, subsidy programs, and so on. Landless families are excluded from most of these programs. So, the membership of the *ejido* gives access to many different resources. Some *ejidatarios* are also capable of appropriating resources which are meant for the whole village, including the landless families. As a woman of a landless family said after expressing herself very negatively about *ejidatarios*: *The government only helps the people who already have things; government support is directly taken by other people, the poor do not get anything. The government only helps the farmers.* This comment illustrates the view of landless people that the *ejidatarios* are not only better off, but also monopolize other resources and support that may come from outside. As we will see in the next section, several *ejidatarios* did indeed control projects which were meant for the entire village.

So, after some time of research in this complex "transnationalized" village I arrived at the conclusion that the "ideology" around *ejido* land in the village can best be analyzed in relation to the development of a force field in which the *ejido* dominates landless villagers. This also explains the bitterness and frustration in the way landless people talk about their poverty and explain this in terms of a lack of land. Landless people often reacted with amazement or irritation when I asked if there were any differences between *ejidatarios* and other villagers. It was as if I was asking something very obvious and was blind to what was going on. The landless families not only feel frustrated about their not having land, but also because of their second-rate position in the village. The *ejido* not only means access to land, but also control of political projects. The landless families not only have to work as laborers on the land of the *ejidatarios*, but are also politically dependent on the most powerful of

them. It is in this way that the significance of ejido land came to be power and wealth. Not because all the ejidatarios are powerful and wealthy, but because some of them are wealthy and also manage to control village politics.

However, we must be careful not to give the impression that ejido land is a highly idealized good among all villagers. There are many people, especially among the younger migrants, who do not show much interest in ejido land. Yet, this makes it all the more important to recognize that the ejido signifies different things to different people and signifies much more than an economic means of production. I will now analyze how the ejido has been able to keep control of village politics and in this way frustrated many landless villagers.

### The Role of the Ejido in the Organization of Local Projects

#### *Ejidatarios Appointing Delegados and Controlling Local Projects*

As was explained above, an administrative separation exists between village and ejido. The ejido falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Agrarian Reform, while the village falls under the municipality of Autlán. The official administrative term for the village La Canoa is *delegación*. The administrative head of the *delegación* is the *delegado*. He is responsible for village affairs and has two local assistants, who operate as armed police officers at public events and other occasions that require their intervention. However, the villagers use a different terminology. They talk in terms of the *pueblo* and the *comunidad*. The *delegado* belongs to the *pueblo* (village) and the *comisariado* (ejido commissioner) to the *comunidad* (ejido). Unlike the ejido commissioner who does not receive a salary, the *delegado* receives a small compensation for this work.

The most important activities of the *delegado* are the organization of local projects and the co-ordination of government programs for the village. Another important responsibility according to the villagers, (although not an official one), is the organization of the village parties in November and December. The position of *delegado* is not seen by the villagers as one of much influence but more one that gives opportunities to line one's own pocket through the administration of government projects. The management of resources and organization of these projects always gives room for negotiation and some enrichment.

The *delegado* in La Canoa has always been appointed by the municipality of Autlán. Only on one occasion did the municipality let the *delegado* be elected by the villagers (the *delegado* of 1986-1988). These appointments are made through the PRI party networks. The most influential ejidatarios in La Canoa have always had political connections in Autlán and they decided who would be appointed *delegado* of the village. During the time of the research, several of the Romero men (Lorenzo, José, Gustavo) were among those who decided on the choice of *delegado* in the village. On one occasion, after José Romero had

explained to me how the *delegados* were appointed and what his role had been, I suggested that he had to be an important man if he could go to Autlán and tell them who had to be the next *delegado* in La Canoa. He then laughed and said: *It is not a question of being important, but more that I have many friends in Autlán. A nephew of mine is the Police Inspector in Autlán, Héctor Romero. He is head of Seguridad Pública. If you go and talk to such a person about a possible candidate for delegado, they make sure that it will happen.* Actually, there was never much secrecy about the way in which the *delegado* was designated and on several occasions I was present when the Romeros were discussing possible candidates. When I asked Lorenzo if the candidate had to be a member of the PRI, he said that it was not necessary for the *delegado* to be a member of the PRI but that he should not be known as being of the opposition either.

The interesting thing here is that ejidatarios have been appointing *delegados*, although the *delegados* represent the whole village and not only the ejido. Hence, not only was the practice of appointing the *delegado* the privilege of a small group, it also was a form of control of the village by the ejido. This becomes especially clear when we look at the people who have been *delegados* in the village. In the village archive all the *delegados* since 1946 are listed and from 1946 to 1983 all sixteen *delegados* have been ejidatarios (several *delegados* stayed on for less than three years)! Only since 1983 have non-ejidatarios also been appointed. After four non-ejidatarios (one of them only stayed one year in his post), in 1992 an ejidatario was again appointed. This clearly shows the dominance of the ejido in political matters at the local level. The two important public functions at the local level, ejido commissioner and *delegado*, were filled by ejidatarios even when the majority of the villagers were landless.

However, it was not only by appointing *delegados* that these dominant ejidatarios influenced village affairs. Their political networks in Autlán also made it possible for them to influence village projects. The point is that government projects for the villages are administered by the offices of the municipality in Autlán. For that reason, the contacts villagers have with the PRI networks in the municipality are crucial to get access to municipal resources and different kinds of projects (see chapter nine for an explanation of the relation between politics and the bureaucracy in Mexico). In La Canoa, some influential ejidatarios have always maintained these contacts.

In this way, these ejidatarios brought many government projects to the village. For example, Ricardo García explained how he managed to get electricity in the village through his contacts with General García Barragán when Ricardo was ejido commissioner (1970-1973).

R: *The General was a good friend of my father. When my father died the friendship continued with me. I know that there are people who talk ill about him. But in my opinion he was a very good person. I myself worked very hard to get water and electricity for the village. I talked to the General and told*

*him that I wanted to organize water for the village. He told me: I expect you on that day at that time in my office in Mexico City. I went there at that day and time together with Francisco Pradera. But the General only wanted to receive me. He gave me a visiting-card and told me that I had to go to a certain office. We went there and it was the most luxurious office I had ever seen. We were treated very very well. 15 days later the machines came to do the work. The only problem was that a geologist had told us where we should dig the well but the engineer didn't want to do it there. He wanted to do it nearby the village. So, they dug it there but it never gave water. [---]*

*I also brought electricity to the village. [---] Because of the coming change of president they did the work very quickly to be sure to have finished it in time.*

M: *And did General Barragán also help you with the electricity?*

R: *General Barragán didn't help us with money but he helped us to get access to the different offices. In that way he also helped us with the electricity. I went to offices in Guadalajara and Mexico City.*

This interview illustrates that contacts with the General were important for arranging village projects. The next ejido commissioner Rubén García (1973-1976) also had important political allies in Autlán and arranged for houses to be built in the village as part of a special government program for poor families. In addition, he got a piped water system built with a subsidy from the government. Lorenzo Romero, in his turn, also maintained good relations with several influential figures in Autlán. In 1980 the mayor of Autlán asked Lorenzo to become *delegado* of La Canoa (1980 - 1983) and through his good contacts with the mayor Lorenzo managed to get a nursery and a small clinic built in the village and he arranged for an extra water well to be dug.

Although one might say that the villagers should be pleased to have these well-connected ejidatarios, all these projects are surrounded by gossiping, scandals, and criticism. The people who organized these projects are criticized for giving houses to friends instead of poor families, for not listening to the needs and wishes of the villagers but deciding on their own what the village needs, and keeping part of the money to line their own pockets. A well-known characteristic of Mexican government projects in the rural areas is that participation by the village itself is demanded in the form of labor or money. This only gives rise to more negotiations between officials and local organizers. This leads to the situation that in La Canoa many villagers stress that these local leaders always enriched themselves from these projects, while these men and their children feel frustrated that the villagers have never appreciated their efforts for the development of the village.

However, the ejido was also important for village projects for other reasons: the ejido provided the necessary land and money. Many of these projects needed a plot of land for the construction of buildings and asked for the financial participation of the village. As the ejido owned all the land, it was the ejido who had to decide on the gift of a plot of land. By



renting out the pasture of the commons, the ejido also had the possibility of generating money for some of the projects. The ejidatarios are very conscious of the fact that the ejido provides many services to the landless families. Even the football field and the bull ring are situated on ejido land! Whenever problems arise in the village, the ejidatarios are eager to stress that landless families only have access to school (built with ejido money and on ejido land) and to many other privileges because of the benevolence of the ejidatarios.

In this context one could even argue that the ejido meetings have a strong symbolic function. Although no important decisions are taken during these meetings (see chapter six), they make painfully clear who are the "insiders" and who are the "outsiders". The ejido meetings are held in the ejido house in the center of the village and only members of the ejido are allowed to attend. These meetings are held with doors and windows open and can easily be followed by people outside the building. However, although other villagers sometimes hang around the building they never enter when an ejido meeting is going on. On the other hand, the meetings for the village, which are organized by the *delegado* can be held at different places. Sometimes they are held in the open air in the center of the village or in the school. On other occasions they are held in the ejido house but then it is made explicit to the people that the meeting is meant for the entire village. So, the meetings function symbolically to discriminate between the ejidatarios and the landless.

### *Changing Constellations*

Yet situations are changing and perhaps the privileged situation of ejidatarios as well. An important factor in this changing situation is that the economic differences between ejidatarios and landless people are diminishing and that landless people are less dependent on the ejidatarios. In general, the link with the USA makes people much less dependent on income from the land and government resources. Although ejidatarios are still appointing the *delegado* of La Canoa, we saw that since 1983 they have also appointed landless villagers. Furthermore, the influential ejidatarios of former times are losing influence in power games in the regional arena. For example, in the beginning of the 1990s the water which La Canoa received from the Manantlán area since the 1970s was taken away from the village and given to other villages in the region. Although La Canoa has a waterwell, the costs of pumping the water up from the well are very high and according to the villagers the water from Manantlán is of much better quality. What made this removal of the water supply from Manantlán especially hard on the villagers was that in the 1970s when this piped water system was constructed every household contributed with several weeks of labor. That this water was taken away is a clear indication that they are losing influence in the regional arena and they themselves are very conscious of this. An important ally of theirs in Autlán, Héctor Romero, recently retired as head of the security police and is quickly losing influence in the regional power game. In this way the ejidatarios in La Canoa have lost access to an influential person in municipal politics. During the period of the research, the PRI group in

the village was very annoyed with the present mayor and his group in Autlán. In contrast to other periods, the Romero men could not get things arranged under the current administration. Little support was given for village projects in La Canoa and promises were not kept.

This changing situation was also reflected in party politics. Ejidatarios realize that through PRI politics certain things may be arranged and that for practical reasons it may be important to remain within the PRI networks. However, most ejidatarios and landless people prefer to stay as far as possible from party politics. Even the PRI men in the village could be critical of the party and explained the usefulness of the PRI mostly in instrumental terms of having influence on decisions, getting projects to the village, and so on. Now that they were no longer successful in obtaining projects, they became very critical of the political system. Hence, there was a general dissatisfaction in the village with the working of the Mexican government and the related PRI apparatus. Everybody expressed themselves in increasingly negative ways about the working of the government bureaucracies, the widespread corruption, and the shameless abuses of the police.

What seemed to be an indication of changing attitudes of PRI members towards the party was the fact that many PRI members who were asked to organize the polling-station for the mid-term elections of August 1991, refused to do so. Lorenzo Romero who had done this in other years, said that he did not want to do it any longer. Then they asked his wife María to do so, but Lorenzo prohibited her participation. José Romero and Alfonso Romero also refused, whereas in previous years they had always participated. Gustavo Romero, another PRI member, was less critical about the party and when in March 1993 the village received money from the SOLIDARIDAD program which was used to build a fence around the trees at the entrance of the village, Gustavo painted the fence in the colors of the PRI: red, green and white. Many negative comments were made about this tribute to the party and not only by the "opposition" villagers. Even for the other PRI members like Lorenzo Romero and José Romero this was too much honor for the party. But they left it the way Gustavo had painted it.

In 1994 with the national elections in La Canoa the PAN won for the first time with an overwhelming majority of 243 votes against 140 for the PRI in La Canoa (the PRD got very few votes). This victory of the opposition in the village was striking as at the national level the PRI won in relatively fair elections. However, in the region of Autlán and the state of Jalisco, the PAN did very well in these elections. More than a deliberate choice for a right wing party, this victory of the PAN in La Canoa must be seen as a vote against the maladministration of the PRI and local frustration with the municipality of Autlán. When I visited the village after these elections, I noticed that the fences had been painted again, the PRI colors had been changed to white.<sup>12</sup>

### Conclusion: Land, Politics, and Organizing Practices

In this chapter we found that the possession of ejido land has many different meanings besides that of an economic means of production. It would be silly "to deny that the production aspect of property in many historic and contemporary situations plays a considerable role in social and economic life" but we have to recognize the many other roles of property as well (F. and K. von Benda Beckmann 1998: 15). We noted many other elements that constitute the value of ejido land: the fact that the land is related to the agrarian struggle and establishment of the *comunidad*; that it gives one the identity of being an independent peasant; that it is the provider of maize, the central ingredient of the rural diet, and that the ejido has been central for local politics. Even migrants who have done well in *el Norte* may still cherish their plot and peasant identity. Hence, when we talk about ejido land, we do not refer to one type of resource but to many different resources according to the situation and people involved.

Although the number of landless families grew over the years, ejidatarios still dominate local village politics today. This is in part because of the fact that the ejido provides most resources for the village projects (land to build upon and money). However, the importance of the ejido as an organizer of local projects derived above all from the fact that some ejidatarios had the necessary political contacts to get things arranged. The whole ejido was not involved in such politicking, but certain ejidatarios with good contacts outside the ejido were. In the beginning these contacts were based on their experiences with agrarian reform and over time they developed on the basis of personal political networks with influential people in Autlán. The ejidatarios also appointed the *delegado* of the village and until 1983 they always appointed an ejidatario, although the majority of families in the village were landless.

The landless villagers naturally benefited from projects for the village, but at the same time these projects stressed their dependence on the ejido and some of its influential members. Furthermore, these projects always gave opportunities to the organizers to gain something extra or to do favors to some people to the detriment of others. In this way, these influential ejidatarios and their projects caused many hard feelings. Besides these village projects, the landless families also depended on the ejido for their *coamiles* in the commons. For many landless families the *coamiles* are their only remaining link with the land, but here again they depend on the ejido which is the formal owner of the commons. All these processes explain the frustration of the landless families and the ideology which surrounds ejido land in a time when land is not the most important means of production for most households anymore.

Other authors have also written about the phenomenon of the ejido dominating the village in local government. Jones points out that although not legally recognized as such, in many municipalities it is the ejido which has traditionally functioned as the local government. This

means that non-ejidatarios depend on ejidatarios for access to services which have often been acquired through direct negotiation between the *comisariado* and the appropriate federal agency. Furthermore, the management of these services is often conducted by the ejido. This autonomy of the ejido often means that both the municipality and the non-ejidatarios are excluded from the decision-making process even when the latter are in the majority (Jones 1996: 195).

Zendejas and Mummert (1993), describe a different case of a village in Michoacán in which non-ejidatarios participate in the ejido structure and in this way constitute broader arenas of local organization in which landless villagers and ejidatarios together participate and struggle to press for roads, piped water, and so on. This situation is different from La Canoa as some landless villagers improved their position by "using" the ejido structure, while in La Canoa landless villagers were kept at a distance by some dominant ejidatarios. However, these different cases have in common that the ejido structure was central for obtaining village projects through political networks.

In this way the ejido has been a central element in the construction of a situated community. I argued before that situated community refers to feelings of belonging to certain groups or networks, but always is related to processes of domination (Sabeau 1984) which imply that distinctions are made between different social categories, and between insiders and outsiders. Gupta and Ferguson also argue that community "is premised on various forms of exclusion and constructions of otherness" and that "it is precisely through processes of exclusion and othering that both collective and individual subjects are formed" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 13). The ejido, which determined processes of dominance in the village has been central to the construction of a specific type of situated community and in the distinction between different categories of people. It was shown that the ejido was important for defining "insiders" and "outsiders", ejidatarios, non-ejidatarios, and sons of ejidatarios, especially in relation to conflicts over resources.

Much has been written on the distribution of government resources and "the selective distribution of material benefits (agrarian reform, agricultural credit, titles for squatter settlements, low-cost medical care) which have been delivered as particular favors through clientelistic channels" (Foweraker 1994: 3). It has been argued, especially in relation to the peasantry, that political leaders capture and control the resources the state makes available to peasant society. Carlos points out that peasant hierarchies "are the principal conduit through which the Mexican state transfers economic and political goods to the peasantry" (Carlos 1992: 93). However, these personal channels through which resources are distributed do not necessarily lead to strong forms of top-down control. I would rather say that according to the specific context it may well lead to the fragmentation of local and regional power as the resources are distributed through different institutions and persons and nobody controls more than a fraction of the resources (de la Peña 1986). Furthermore, the influence of state institutions on local practices has been very limited. As was discussed in chapter one,

it has often been suggested that the Mexican state kept control over the villages through the PRI apparatus with ramifications in the village, but on the basis of my research material I would not agree with this conclusion. The PRI networks certainly played a role in local level affairs, but not in the form of control from above. It was much more an instrumental network to get access to government resources. This also explains the instrumental outlook ejidatarios tend to have on party politics.

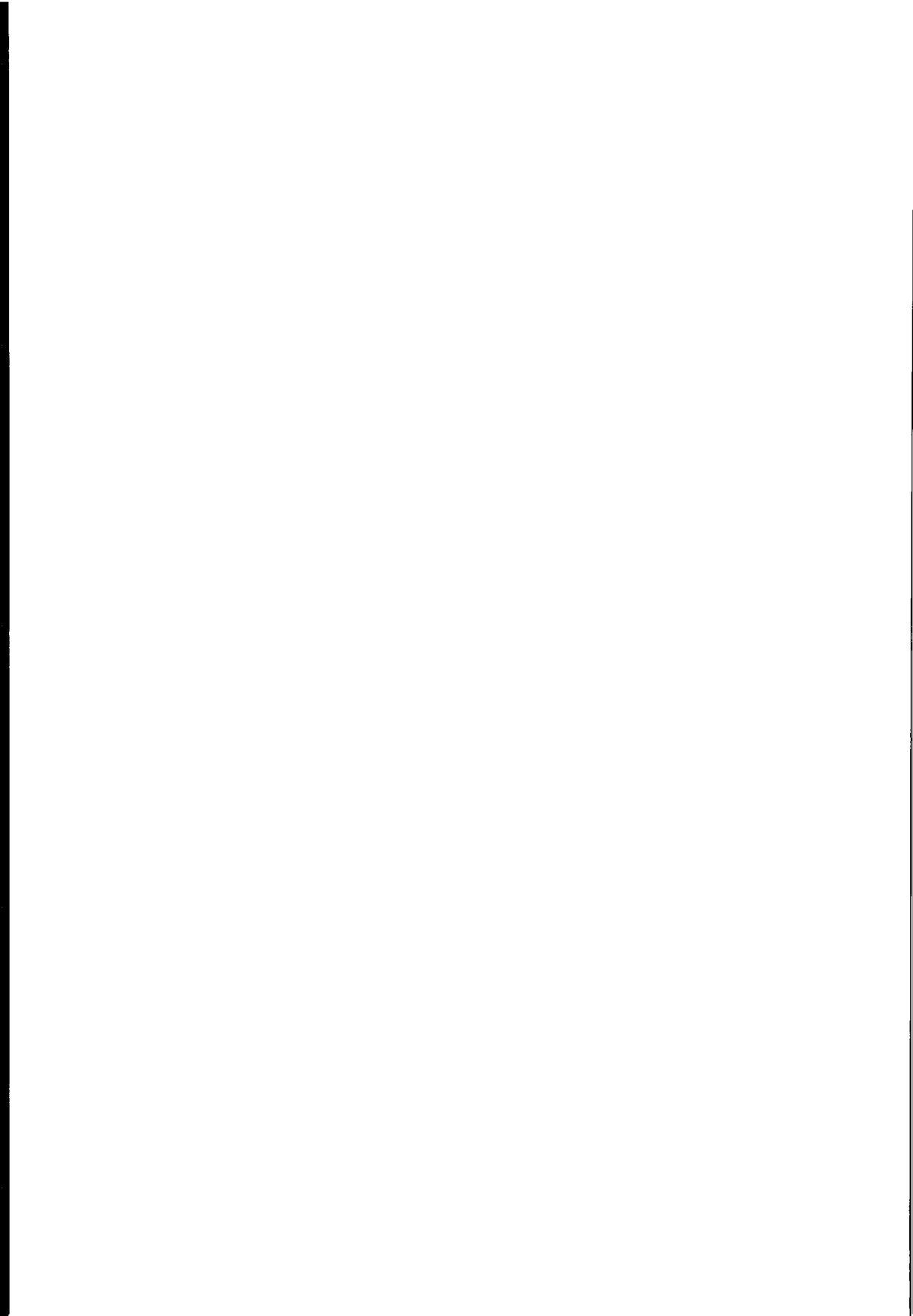
However, what is interesting and deserves more attention is the relation between these political practices and organizing practices. First of all, it explains why the most effective organizing strategy is often the use of personal political networks and not necessarily forms of collective action (Cornelius and Craig 1991). Many authors try to explain the difficulty of collective organizing among Mexican peasants (Foley 1990) and talk about "the apparently contradictory quality of peasant politics wherein the major political manifestations are individual 'apathy' and collective revolt" (Lomnitz 1992: 125). However, in chapter two we saw that this idea of "collective" struggle against the *hacendados* was more an image of the master narrative than a reality in the villages. Furthermore, what is called apathy is generally a form of "taking a safe distance from the bureaucratic machine". Organizing through informal personal networks is often the most "rational" way to operate. A second effect of this situation on the organizing process is that it has a dividing influence on groups who do try to organize collective projects. The leader of a group is never only approached as the representative of a group, but also as a person with individual interests and "political capital". Thirdly, the bureaucracy is overly dynamic and its composition is always changing. This offers many possibilities and openings as with changing people in power, other networks become effective. This is one of the central characteristics of the Mexican bureaucratic hope-generating machine; that openings can always be found. Finally, this situation strongly contributes to the culture of the state; the situation of never knowing exactly what is going on, accompanied by the continuous gossiping, quarreling, rumors, and distrust around local projects.

## Notes

1. INEGI, 1991, XI Censo General de Población y Vivienda, 1990. Jalisco. Resultados definitivos. Datos por Localidad (Integración Territorial).
2. When sons work on the land of their fathers, different arrangements may be used. When it concerns a poor family, or when there is a general crisis in the village, the boys are not paid for their labor. However, when the family is doing well, the boy may be paid the same amount of money as the other day laborers on the field.
3. Obviously, the division in household types is always arbitrary. The most important element in this categorization of households is the presence of young children. For example, a family with young children and a grandmother living with them, falls under category 1. The old bachelors are especially mentioned

in type 4 as there is quite a large group of male bachelors in the village.

4. Households with access to an ejido plot are those with (at least) one ejidatario or heir of a deceased ejidatario. Ejidatarios who live outside the village and who do not have (part of a) household in the village anymore are not counted among the 196 households. For that reason only 58 households with access to an ejido plot are included, although there are 94 ejidatarios with land.
5. Five García men bought private property land in Autlán in the past, and Ignacio Romero also recently bought private property land. Most of the García men have moved to Autlán.
6. However, this differentiation is even more pronounced than these figures suggest. Several ejidatarios with the largest plots of irrigated land have also bought private property land, for example, Ignacio Romero and Ricardo García.
7. Before 1946 births in La Canoa were registered in Autlán. Since the end of the 1980s, a growing number of women from La Canoa go to the clinic in Autlán to give birth and registration again takes place in Autlán. Therefore I take the period between 1946 and 1986 when births were registered in La Canoa.
8. In the case of ejidatarios who passed away or who sold their plots, the residence of the new owner of the land is used.
9. Sources:
  - a) Departamento de Estadística Nacional. Censo General de Habitantes. 30 de noviembre de 1921. Estado de Jalisco. Talleres Gráficos de la Nación "Diario Oficial", México D.F. 1926.
  - b) Séptimo Censo General de Población, 6 de junio de 1950. Secretaría de Economía. Dirección General de Estadística. Estado de Jalisco. México D.F. 1952.
  - c) XI Censo General de Población y Vivienda, 1990. Jalisco Resultados Definitivos. Datos por localidad (Integración Territorial), INEGI.
10. To establish the number of households who receive money from the USA I counted those households who are known to receive cheques or to have a pension from the United States, the households who have several children working in the United States and families with members traveling between the village and the United States and working in both places.
11. Formerly, the women spent much of their time every day preparing *tortillas* by hand. Today, many families buy their tortillas in the *tortillería* in the village and twice a day one can see people queuing up at the *tortillería*, especially young children. Even so, home-made tortillas are specially valued and in some houses only *tortillas* prepared by the women of the house are consumed.
12. Although it is probable that situations change and that in the future the role of non-ejidatarios in village politics will be more prominent, as well as the presence of other political parties apart from the PRI, this does not necessarily change the organizing principles in the political games (see Aitken 1997, Pansters 1997).



CHAPTER 4  
LAND, GENERATION, AND GENDER IN A  
TRANSNATIONAL EJIDO FAMILY

**Introduction: Households and the Ideology of the Family**

In this chapter the interrelation between households on different sides of the USA - Mexican border is discussed. In the foregoing chapter we saw that remittances from the United States may help to maintain peasant enterprises in the village. Yet, in this chapter it is shown that the relation between USA households and village households can also be reversed. The revenues from ejido land can become crucial for sustaining migrants of the family who are not successful in *el Norte*. The phenomenon of the "unsuccessful" migrants who return to the village has been a neglected theme in the literature so far. However, many villagers do not "make" it in the United States and return to La Canoa to see if they can make a living there. In these cases they come to depend on the parental home again. Yet, after a long stay abroad, these men and women have great difficulty in adapting to the village style of living. As Kearney points out, migrants who are denied naturalization in the United States, but cannot make a living in their homeland either "construct a new identity out of a bricolage of their transnational existence" (Kearney 1998: 129). These transnational identities can also take forms which do not easily fit into rural Mexican village life. A central problem for the men is that they have not been successful in transforming themselves into wage-laborers in the United States but are not peasants either. As we will see, this notion of a "real peasant" also influences ejidatarios in their choice of an heir for their ejido plot from among their sons in the village and the United States.

This chapter focuses on one family. More specifically, I present the interrelation between the household of a middle-aged couple in the village and the households of their adult children. I study the livelihood of different family members, by looking at the way in which they try to make a living, attempt to meet their different needs, cope with uncertainties, and respond to new opportunities and situations (Long 1997: 11). In looking at two generations I partially follow de Berteaux (1995) who proposes the study of social mobility processes by developing a different type of genealogies. In this method the unit of observation is not an individual (Ego in the old genealogies), but a set of life trajectories of individuals (and nuclear families) connected by kinship relations (de Berteaux 1995: 75). I think this use of genealogies is not only interesting for the study of social mobility but also for studying the interrelationships between households of one family (see den Ouden 1995).<sup>1</sup> By the in-depth study of the lives and events in one family different themes can be discussed in all their complexity.



In this chapter, I draw greatly upon Rouse's thesis *Mexican migration to the United States: family relations in the development of a transnational migrant circuit* (1989). His critical and sensitive views on family life and family ideology in the case of a transnational family in Michoacán, proved to be very useful for my study. Rouse points out that the household and the family are analytically important as "both a form of social organization and a nodal point of ideological constructs" (Rouse 1989: 3). However, the fact that households and the family are considered to be central in social organization, does not mean that the household is treated as a unit of strategic economic action in which the members share a collective project and common interest. Rouse, for example, clearly shows the different personal projects of several family members and how they may come into conflict. Feminist studies have also convincingly "cut through romantic assumptions about family and household unity, arguing that there exist instead multiple voices, gendered interests and an unequal distribution of resources within families and households" (D. Wolf 1997: 118, see also Thorne and Yalom 1982, Folbre 1986).

Eric Wolf stresses the importance of paying more attention to the organizing processes within the family. He argues that otherwise organization around gender and generation is treated as "an outcome, a finished product responding to a cultural script, and not visualized in the active voice, as process, frequently a difficult and conflict-ridden process at that" (E. Wolf 1990: 591). In the work of many authors on family and migration "their evidence still comes largely from what people tell them" (Rouse 1989: 37). However, when we look at active organizing within the family in combination with reflective talk by different family members, we arrive at a more complete view of relations between the sexes and between generations. In this way one also finds areas of contestation and breaks away from the romanticized view that "assumes that cohesion and coherence rather than conflict are at the basis of intra-household relationships" (D. Wolf 1997: 128). "The problem with these comforting, consensual images is that they miss entirely intra-household relations of power, subordination and perhaps conflict and dissent" (*ibid.*: 129). We will see, for example, that the changing conceptions of gender in this transnational setting are accompanied by considerable discussion of the roles of men and women.

Another important point is that we should not treat the "discourse of family obligations" as a set of generally accepted norms, but as an ideological construct. As Collier, Rosaldo and Yanagisako argue, "the Family is not a concrete 'thing' that fulfills concrete 'needs' but an ideological construct with moral implications ... Only when we view The Family as an ideological unit and as a moral statement, we can begin to unravel the more complex, dialectical processes through which family relationships are constructed" (Collier, Rosaldo and Yanagisako 1982: 37). Hence, instead of searching for "cultural norms" governing relations between the sexes and generations, I focused on organizing processes in the family and tried to distinguish established practices together with areas of contestation and conflict.

Only in this way, can we discover the politics of family life and the role that land plays

in this. Much of the analysis in this chapter is based on reflective talk by different family members, especially women. Many women were struggling with tensions and changes in the family and although they were not necessarily more concerned than the men about these, they certainly talked more easily about them.

#### *My Relation with the Romero Family*

My relationship with the Romero family started in 1987, when I lived in La Canoa to undertake fieldwork for my Masters degree. At that time I lived with doña Dolores and don Luis. Dolores and Luis have eight children of whom three lived in Los Angeles at that time. Dolores and Luis "adopted" me as one of their daughters and introduced me to the many peculiarities of Mexican country life. Ema, the oldest daughter at home took me to all the village parties where we were well protected and watched by the men of the family. In this way I was introduced to the world of the young and unmarried woman. In 1991 I returned to La Canoa, but now as a married woman and the mother of two daughters.

When I returned to the village in 1991, I soon learned that Dolores and Luis had left for Los Angeles with all their children. As Dolores was no longer in the village, we were now automatically "adopted" by her parents, doña María and don Lorenzo. They made it clear to us that from now on their house was our house in the village, or in their words: "in Mexico they were our family". The first thing that had to be arranged was a house for us to live in. After having had a look at the great number of empty houses in the village, we asked permission to live in a house that belonged to a *compadre* of Lorenzo who had moved to Autlán. As it concerned a *compadre* of Lorenzo, the permission was easily obtained and Lorenzo helped us with everything we needed to make the house inhabitable. However, although we had our own house we spent much of our time at Lorenzo and María's house and our daughters spent most of their time together with their grandchildren. I established close relationships with their daughters-in-law in the village who enjoyed talking to a "woman from outside" about the many things that occurred in their lives. We also had very pleasant gatherings with their migrant children who used to come over from the USA for special events, such as Christmas, Easter, mother's day, and the Carnival in Autlán. While enjoying many *cuba libres* we had lively discussions comparing life in the village with life in Los Angeles and discussing future family projects. We also visited their children in Los Angeles.

It is worth mentioning that my relationship with Lorenzo was not the usual kind of relationship anthropologists establish with their "informant-family". Lorenzo was a warm but also very authoritarian man, who liked to present the image of himself as the strong, independent farmer who knows how to control his life and especially his wife. According to these Mexican village standards we were a strange family that violated gender specific roles. While my husband Pieter stayed at home most of the time (struggling to finish his Ph.D. thesis on Costa Rica), I left the house to talk to the men of La Canoa. Many women

expressed their amazement and asked me whether my husband wasn't jealous then. Jealousy was an important theme in the village and many men, especially men like Lorenzo, did not give their wives permission to leave the house. Although I did not mind my role as an independent woman and was treated with great respect by the men, Pieter was in the more unpleasant position of a man who obviously did not know how to exercise control over his wife. Yet, he counterbalanced this image by going out drinking with the men and by traveling a lot on his own.

Although I was careful not to interfere in family affairs, I often challenged don Lorenzo on his strong *machista* attitudes. He, on the other hand, liked to tell me that Pieter was fooling around with other women. Especially when Pieter was away and I was on my own in the village, this was his favorite joke. On hindsight, I realize that these continuing jokes and discussions between us were a verbal struggle on gender images. For me, as well as for Lorenzo, it concerned the construction of the notion of self and the other through discourses of gender (see Pigg 1996). Furthermore, Lorenzo is the only person in the village who made clear to me that he did not want to be asked questions related to my research. This became a recurring topic in our relationship and we started making jokes about it. I told him that he was "afraid" of the questions, while he started asking me whether I was interviewing him whenever I asked him a common question. On the other hand, his honor was threatened when I asked his sons questions about the ejido or the village. Then he interfered by saying that they did not know anything about it and corrected them wherever possible. Still he felt uncomfortable about the fact that he did not cooperate more with my research. On several occasions he explained to me that he knew "too much" about the ejido and wanted to avoid speaking ill about other people. Towards the end of my field research he gave me his "word of a man" that he would give me a real interview, but he wanted to have a good drink before. We never had the interview, though.

### **The History of a Household**

María and Lorenzo live in a house at the entrance to the village. They have twelve children: three in La Canoa, two in Tijuana, and seven in the United States. In 1991 the household consisted of four people: María, Lorenzo, María's father Cayetano, and their youngest daughter Yolanda. All their children are married, except Yolanda. In comparison with other families in the village, María and Lorenzo are well off. They possess Lorenzo's irrigated ejido plot of four hectares and they take care of Cayetano's irrigated plot of four hectares. Both plots are planted with sugarcane. As explained in chapter three, the main factor in socio-economic differentiation in the village today is the possession of irrigated land. A household with access to eight hectares of sugarcane clearly belongs to the higher strata of the village. Besides the land, they have a couple of cows, some pigs, chickens and a goat

especially for Cayetano who prefers goat's milk to cow's milk. Their children in the United States also send them money now and then.

Although Lorenzo likes to show off and to distinguish himself from the poor families in the village, their "wealth" is recent and they had a very hard time when they were young. Lorenzo was nineteen when he married and María fifteen. María said to me that today she would never marry so young but that in those days there was nothing else to do. The wedding took place in 1946 and the couple went to live in a small house that Lorenzo had built before their marriage. The house consisted of one room and a kitchen. Like most other people in the village Lorenzo and María were poor. The difference was that Lorenzo's father don Miguel was an influential man in the village. Yet, that fact did not change the difficult economic circumstances in the village. Miguel gave them a large sum of money to celebrate their wedding at the yearly festivities in Autlán, but they decided to use the money to buy some appliances for the kitchen.

Lorenzo did not possess land and worked as a day laborer on the land of other people. In the dry season he went to the coast for work. When they were recently married María accompanied him to the coast. Later when they had children she stayed in the village, where her parents looked after her in Lorenzo's absence. After some years Lorenzo's father Miguel gave Lorenzo a cow and some years later he gave him one of his plots. However, even with this rainfed plot of land, Lorenzo had to find an income elsewhere.

When María had given birth to their first two children, Lorenzo went to the United States for the first time. Lorenzo went many times through the *bracero* program in which men were recruited in Mexico to work as day laborers in agriculture in the United States.<sup>2</sup> The advantage of this program was that he was assured of work and could legally enter the United States. Lorenzo went many times for short periods. He never spent a whole year in *el Norte*, but only periods of eight months. His experiences as a migrant were not always very pleasant. In the fifties he was caught by the United States border police when he tried to pass the border illegally and was treated very badly. He did not try to go to California again. The next time he went to Texas, where he has some relatives.

Still it was hard to maintain a family with so many young children. Between 1947 and 1971, twelve children were born. Fortunately, all their children were healthy and survived. The girls and boys started to participate in the household economy when they were old enough. However, all of them also went to school and several of the daughters followed more specialized courses to become a nurse and school teacher. Although María herself worked on the land as a child, her daughters never worked on the land. They worked in houses in the village and in Autlán. María remembers those years as very hard times. Apart from looking after the children, María had to prepare *tortillas* by hand twice a day, do the washing by hand, wash all the nappies (terrible in the rainy season when they would not dry), do the cooking, cleaning, fetch the water, etc. There was no running water at that time, nor electricity. As María says: *When I was lying in bed, exhausted, and a baby was crying,*

*Lorenzo used to send me out of the room because he had to rest. As if I didn't work! Lorenzo never helped me with the children. But the men also worked very long days.*

María tried to earn something extra by preparing and selling meals in the house. The older girls helped her. She also learned how to inject people as her mother was very ill and frequently needed injections. She also became a midwife to raise more income. At the beginning of the sixties Lorenzo's land received irrigation. This increased the production on his land significantly but he continued traveling to the United States. By the time his second son Javier was 17 he joined his father in Texas. Javier was the first of the sons to work abroad. The oldest son Rubén had to stay home to look after the family and the land. Later on Lorenzo did not return to work in the United States but his sons continued to go on their own. In the seventies the demand for Mexican workers in the United States continued to grow and migrant networks of people from La Canoa in Los Angeles became firmly established. Several of their daughters went to stay with relatives in the United States and married with Mexicans there. Other daughters married men from the village and later accompanied their husbands to the United States. While they planned only to stay abroad temporarily, the daughters did reasonably well in the USA and do not plan to return to the village anymore. Many grandchildren of María and Lorenzo were born in the USA and only know the village from their visits.

Cayetano, María's father had become a widower and lived with his only son in the village. When this son died, Cayetano moved to María and Lorenzo's house. Now that their children became independent and that they received income from two plots of irrigated land (Lorenzo's and Cayetano's), life became much easier for María and Lorenzo. Lorenzo was in his fifties and became more involved in local politics. He became active in the PRI networks and became a police officer in Autlán. Later, he became treasurer of the executive committee of the ejido (1979-1982) and *delegado* in La Canoa (1980-1983). Today he likes to play with the image of the proud, politically active landowner. Yet, it was the recent introduction of the irrigation system and the sugarcane which made it possible for him to develop into this figure.

For María and Lorenzo their relation with the USA has changed drastically. Instead of going to the USA for work, they now visit the USA for "pleasure". Being an ejidatario it was easy for Lorenzo to get a USA visa for María and him to visit their children in Los Angeles. So, instead of the hardship of illegally crossing the border, they now travel comfortably by airplane with official documents.

## Organization of a Household and the Patriarchal Ideology

### *The Patriarchal Ideology and the Public - Private Distinction*

Much has been written about the centrality of the patriarchal ideology and the gendered division between private and public spheres in Latin America (see Gledhill 1994: 198-206). According to Rouse this distinction between private and public is related to the fact that men are thought to be oriented primarily to honor and women to unity. Honor concerns the relationship of the family to the wider world and is thus linked to the "public domain of bargaining and negotiation identified with men while unity concerned the relationship among family members and was therefore linked symbolically to the domestic realm of emotion and nurturance associated with women" (Rouse 1989: 77). This ability to move freely between the domestic and the public gives men a much greater range of experience and contacts than women (Rouse 1989: 113). As a general image these views apply well to La Canoa. In general, the women are oriented towards nurturing the family and the house is their place. The kitchen is particularly a women's domain. In the kitchen women tend to gather, talk about what is happening and gossip while they are preparing the food. A common topic among women is criticizing the behavior of their husbands. Men can enter the kitchen but will never stay there for a long time and often do not feel at ease in this women's place. This may be a "threatening" atmosphere, especially when there are several women present. While the house in general is very much a woman's place, the street is a man's place. When women go out, it is only to do the shopping and then they have to be back. On the other hand, men often stay the whole day outside the house. They work, come home to eat, and then leave again to talk or drink with other men. "Respectable" women do not enter bars and billiard halls.

Although the terms *machismo* and *machista* are widely used in academia, the villagers of La Canoa did not often use these terms in their discussions on gender relations (see also Rouse 1989 and Gutmann 1997). Yet, under the influence of migration and the media, the term has started to be used more frequently. A concept which was often used in the village to refer to the phenomenon that men wanted to control their wives and did not want them outside the house, was the term jealousy (*celos*). Rouse points out that in the village he studied, a set of values were mentioned which emphasize "qualities such as independence, hard work, unity, honor, respect and shame. These qualities have often been described by anthropologist under the general title of 'the honor/ shame complex'" (Rouse 1989: 111). In La Canoa these notions can also be distinguished but not strongly. In many aspects the villagers were rather flexible and tolerant in relation to issues of "honor and shame". This was especially clear with respect to the control over girls. Although the reputation of girls is still important and young girls are closely controlled by their parents, the virginity of girls when they marry is not so strongly valued anymore. Many young couples have sexual relations before getting married.

Rouse argues that in the model of the patriarchal family authority is distributed hierarchically along lines of gender, generation, and age in a manner that is meant to leave jurisdictions unambiguous. This arrangement places the father at the apex or the center, the children at the base or on the margins, and the mother in a mediating position between them. Among the children, males take precedence over females, and older siblings over younger ones (Rouse 1989: 113). Although in reality, of course, few families manage to be quite as unified as this model suggests and although boundaries were always transgressed and statuses challenged, Rouse argues that the images of the family as a bounded entity and as a hierarchical system of care and commitment were undoubtedly crucial to the way that people defined their goals, construed their world, and reinforced their circumstantial claims (*ibid.*: 113-114). Although in La Canoa the definitions of authority, rights, and obligations between parents and children were contested and sometimes subject to negotiation, the above mentioned ideological images of the patriarchal family were very influential. Let me illustrate this by describing the lives of the four members of María and Lorenzo's household in 1991.

### *Lorenzo*

Today life is very relaxed for Lorenzo. Sugarcane does not require a lot of work and a great part of it is organized by the sugarcane refinery. Lorenzo takes care of the irrigation of the sugarcane and hires people from time to time to do the cleaning of the crop, or the fumigation. In this way he is always "busy" with the land although he is not doing hard work. In former times he had a lot of cattle, but today he only has two pigs, two cows, and a goat left. He does not want to have more animals to look after anymore. Lorenzo is a controversial figure in the village for things he did when he was a police officer in Autlán and later *delegado* in the village. He used to threaten people with his gun when things did not work out the way he wanted and several people told me that they disliked his high and mighty (*altanero*) way of addressing people. His nickname is *el viudo* (the widower) as he is famous for running after other women. On the other hand, to friends and relatives Lorenzo is known as a very hospitable man who enjoys receiving people in his house.

Like many other men, Lorenzo spends most of his time in the streets and does not render accounts of his activities. Often María did not know what he was doing. He used to leave the house saying laughingly that he was going to pick up a young girl in Autlán. He frequently arrived drunk but he never drank in the house. He often visited one of his *compadres* who lives in a ranch outside the village. This *compadre*, who was in his eighties, was an interesting and much commented case as he had a second wife who was more than forty years younger than he was. The couple had two beautiful teenage daughters, but most gossip concerned their little boy of two years old. People asked themselves if the man, at his age, would have been able to produce this child. So, rumors said that the boy was Lorenzo's. Logically, María hated everything that concerned the *compadre* and his family. Furthermore, the *compadre* and his family were considered to be very dirty and without

manners. On some occasions the *compadre* and his family arrived at Lorenzo's house and Lorenzo instructed María and Yolanda to treat them well. The women had little choice than to obey Lorenzo, but this *compadre* and his family were the object of much quarreling in the family.

Lorenzo was a man who enjoyed the aesthetics of "*el macho Jalisciense*" as depicted in the Mexican movies and stories about the Revolution: the image of the man always being free and in control. Lorenzo was quite a *machista* type: a proud man and a womanizer. On the other hand, Lorenzo was also a very sensitive and warm man, who had difficulty showing his feelings of affection to his wife and children. Lorenzo was very fond of his grandchildren and frequently said that he would like to have some more children of his own. Lorenzo struggled with many contradictions in himself. The clearest example was the relation he had had with his father don Miguel which was discussed in chapter two. He adored and hated his despotic father at the same time. Lorenzo had treated his own children in a much gentler way. However, although he was not physically abusive, Lorenzo was very authoritarian and has never been very communicative with his sons or daughters. He could insult his married sons severely when he was drunk. He never treated them as equals. On the other hand, he provided them with everything they and their families needed and he always got them out of trouble.

While his children were careful not to get him angry, in private they often talked in negative terms about him. The daughters, in particular, condemned his drinking, the way he treated their mother, and the fact that he spent much of the money from the sugarcane on himself. María was not happy with many of Lorenzo's actions and decisions either, but she was very careful not to comment on them.

### *María*

María and Yolanda do all the work in the house. The work is to a great extent organized around the availability of water. Only every other day is there running water in the house. Yolanda does most cleaning work and the washing in the house, while María does the cooking. In contrast to Lorenzo, María spends her days in the house and she is not allowed to leave the house without his permission. This is quite common in the village, but in the case of María the situation is worse, for there are two men she obeys, her husband and her father. She hardly leaves the house but is visited by her sisters, sons, daughters-in-law and grandchildren.

Although most men in the village did not like their wives spending much time in the streets or in other houses, Lorenzo carried this to an extreme. For example, he did not even allow María to go to the birthday party of her only sister in the village. Most women had more room for themselves than María. Other married women were out in the streets more and could at least pay visits to relatives. María often complained to other women that she never got out of the house. As she put it: *I do not even know the ranchos (hamlets) here in*



*the surroundings*. She could go to the shop at the corner when she needed something, but she preferred to send Yolanda or one of the granddaughters when they were around. She had to make sure that she was in the house when Lorenzo arrived, because he would be angry if she was not at home to serve him. The only acceptable reason for María to leave the house was to go to church.

On the other hand, María's daughters criticized their mother for obeying her father Cayetano. If Cayetano did not give María permission to go to Autlán, she would not go. However, her sisters and daughters thought this was ridiculous on her part. So, this was a rather extreme case of an authoritarian husband, a capricious old father, and a wife/daughter who was very religious and dutiful and preferred not to fight for more room for herself. However, as we will see later on, she actively supported her daughters and daughters-in-law in creating more room for themselves in relation to their husbands.

Like most other parents, María suffered from her separation from her children and grandchildren of whom most lived in the United States. She would very much have liked to have them back, but she realized that this would never happen. She understood very well that her daughters liked the material conveniences and freedom to move around which they had in the USA and which they would never have in the village. María was most of all worried about her sons in the USA. While her daughters were all responsible women some of whom were doing very well, her sons in the USA were much less responsible and some were involved in drugs, fencing stolen goods, and robberies. María was a very religious woman and prayed a lot for her sons.

María had a close relation with her children, especially her daughters. The women consulted each other often and although there were differences in authority, I never saw María behave in an authoritarian way. She also had close relationships with her daughters-in-law although there always was some jealousy and competition with respect to their acceptance by María. Yet, María tried to support all her daughters-in-law and always tried to settle conflicts between them. María very much corresponded to the image of the Mexican woman who tries to establish and maintain unity in the family. She was also very careful not to engage in gossiping and speaking ill of others. She very much lived through the ideology of *Marianismo*: the association with the figure of the Virgin which gives women the role of carrying the burden of pain and sacrificing themselves for the well-being of their husband and children. At the same time this role gave her a dominant influence in the domestic sphere and in her relation with her children.

### *Yolanda*

Yolanda was twenty years old years in 1991. She is the youngest child and the only one who is not married. She is a nurse and previously worked at the clinic in the village. She still gives injections when people ask her to do so but does not work as a nurse anymore. Yolanda is much freer to move around in the village than her mother. Naturally, she must

report where she is going and she has to be home in the evening, but in contrast to her mother she spends much of her time outside the house. She visits relatives or friends in the village, participates in the church group or goes shopping in Autlán. Yolanda's married sisters envy her for having a liberty they never had. Although formally Yolanda needs to ask permission from her parents when she wants to go to Autlán or to a village festivity in the evening, this often seems more like a formality than a real request. Her parents never told her not to go. Yolanda had not only considerable freedom of movement but also with respect to her income. She had her own bank account with savings from jobs she had had in the USA. The relationship of Yolanda with her two brothers and two sisters-in-law in the village was not without frictions. Yolanda, as the youngest child, was very direct in her way of addressing and criticizing people and this was not appreciated. Furthermore, she was considered to be lazy and spoilt. For example, her oldest brother Rubén felt considerable resentment towards her. He was often angry when she got up late in the morning. Rubén: *and look at Yolanda, she is the youngest and doesn't have to do anything! She gets up whenever she wants. It was different for us.*

Yolanda had lived for some time in Los Angeles with her married sisters, but had returned to the village because her grandfather Cayetano missed her so much. Cayetano called her regularly by telephone and once when he could not hear her well he fell ill. He told María to tell Yolanda to come back home because otherwise he would die. So, Yolanda returned to her parental home. However, she did not intend to stay very long and wanted to go back to the USA soon. However, Yolanda was under great pressure from her brothers and sisters to stay in the village and look after their parents. She was criticized for only wanting to have some fun in the United States, while her obligation, as the only unmarried child, was to look after her parents.

This tension became very clear one Christmas when Yolanda was making plans to accompany her sisters who were about to return to the United States. While Yolanda was arranging everything for her departure, her brothers and sisters made clear to her that it was her duty to stay with her parents. María did not want Yolanda to leave because of her father Cayetano. She was afraid that Cayetano might fall ill again if Yolanda left. However, María wanted Yolanda to decide for herself and she did not order the girl. When I asked María if she could not order Yolanda to stay home, María responded: *No, from the age of eighteen, the children decide a lot for themselves. I cannot keep her here if she does not want to stay. On the other hand, the last time that Yolanda went to the United States, my father asked all the time if she was alright there. If she was not he would send her the money to come back. I would like her to stay for him.* Yolanda was under great pressure and did not make up her mind. For several days she was in a bad temper. María was preoccupied and tried to convince Yolanda not to go. In the end she stayed.

Hence, Yolanda was confronted with the moral obligation to look after her parents and grandfather. She herself was very aware of this but these moral obligations clashed with her

personal interests of having a better time in the United States and perhaps finding a husband which she could not in the village. She was in the luxurious position that her mother and father gave her considerable liberty and did not try to impose a decision on her. Most pressure came from her brothers and sisters.

### *Cayetano*

María's father don Cayetano, was a special case. He was over 100 years old although opinions differed about his exact age (some said he was 101, others 104). He spent a large part of the day in bed and was very well taken care of. Often he shouted for María or Yolanda when he wanted some attention. If he had to wait too long or felt that he was neglected, he wet the bed. María sometimes complained that Cayetano did not let her do anything. He wanted her to sit next to him the whole day and when she walked to the door he told her to come back. He had the same attitude towards Yolanda. Cayetano often embarrassed María with the romances he still tried to start with every young woman around. He used to make "indecent proposals" to them and offer to marry them. Although this romantic behavior of Cayetano was the source of much fun in the family, it also was a source of some concern. What if a girl accepted and in this way became the heir to Cayetano's land? However, so far, no woman had accepted the hundred year old man's proposals. Cayetano often complained that María and Lorenzo did not give him any money. He liked to go out of the house and walk around. He also wanted money to go to Autlán and look for a girlfriend. On one occasion, one of María sons proposed to give him some monopoly money from a children's game to make him feel happy. María was annoyed by this remark and told him that he should show more respect to his grandfather. On some days Cayetano was allowed to have a *mezcal* and after happily drinking the liquor, he spent the rest of the day in bed. Later on, Cayetano's condition deteriorated and he could not walk alone anymore. Then, they put him outside in a chair to take some sun or took him out for a walk.

Cayetano had six daughters and one son, who had died many years ago. Of his six daughters María and a sister lived in the village, two others lived in Autlán and two on the coast of Jalisco. They regularly visited their father. From time to time Cayetano fell ill and his daughters and grandchildren prepared themselves for his death but he always recovered remarkably well. For example, in January 1992, Cayetano fell ill again and threw up. The doctor said that at his age he could easily pass away and everybody was very worried. Immediately all his daughters came to the village and also a grandson came over from the USA. This was an interesting case, for this grandson was the illegitimate son of one of Cayetano's daughters. Since this daughter was not married when she had the boy, the boy was raised by Cayetano and considered him to be his father. The daughters spent all their time praying at Cayetano's bed. Again Cayetano recovered. In a couple of days he was better again and everybody was very relieved. The daughters returned home and the grandson

returned to the USA.

The fact that Lorenzo managed Cayetano's irrigated sugarcane plot was not without tension in the family. Although the care for a parent gives certain rights to the land, it not necessarily means that all the proceeds of this plot are for the household where the parent lives. In this case it caused tension with María's sisters in particular as Lorenzo seemed to use most of the money for himself. Not even María knew what Lorenzo did with the money. On one occasion Lorenzo told me: *I can use Cayetano's land because Cayetano lives with us. Cayetano himself chose to live with María, so the right to the land automatically corresponds to us.* However, not everybody agreed with his view of the situation.

In addition to the present use of the plot, the future inheritance of Cayetano's land also led to speculation and gossiping. As Cayetano did not have a son anymore, it was probable that his land would be inherited by his daughter María. On the other hand, many people thought that Yolanda would be the heir of her grandfather's land because she was his favorite grandchild. The fact that María or Yolanda was going to inherit the land also caused frictions among the daughters of Cayetano. They all admitted that María took good care of their father and in this way had developed certain rights to the land, but this was valuable land and María's sisters could use some extra income. Several people in the village told me that in earlier times when Cayetano fell ill, his daughters would come over to the village to try and make him change his inheritance papers. Other rumors in the village stated that Lorenzo had forced Cayetano to make María the heir to his land.

Other people claimed that Yolanda would inherit the land. Jokes went round that the man who would marry Yolanda, would get a large plot of land. At Yolanda's 21st birthday we were teasing her about the fact that one day she would become an ejidataria. She denied it and added that she did not know anything about agriculture and that it did not interest her in the least. However, later that same evening, she told a friend of ours (whom she liked very much) that she would be the heir to Cayetano's land and she asked him if he did not know a good potential husband as she did not know anything about agriculture.

Lorenzo used Cayetano's presence in the house as a pretext for not letting María leave the house. He used to say to María that she could not leave the house as she had to look after her father. This had little to do with a sincere concern for Cayetano as Yolanda or other people were quite willing to take over this task from María. However, using Cayetano as a pretext for keeping her in the house, was a smart strategy. María and other people could blame Lorenzo for being jealous and restricting his wife too much. Yet, it was much more difficult to oppose to the highly socially valued principle of looking after one's parent and showing him due respect. Cayetano was only too happy to demand that María stayed with him.

### Households Within Transnational Networks

María and Lorenzo's house is the focal point of a set of social relations. In 1991 many people used to gather in their house. The two married sons in the village and their families always spent a lot of time with them. Their oldest son Rubén had visited the USA but never really worked there for a long time. He is married to Rosa who comes from a neighboring village and they have four children and were expecting the fifth. Rubén works as a school teacher in a village on the coast where he stays with an aunt. He only comes home for the weekends. The other son in La Canoa was Javier. He lived for many years in Los Angeles and had only recently returned from the USA with his wife and little son.

María and Lorenzo's house was always full of people, especially in the weekends and during school holidays. The children and grandchildren used to spend their afternoons in this house and have their meals there. The adults generally watched television or played cards while the children were playing. Other people who frequently visited the house were Lorenzo's brothers José, Miguel, and Estanislao. In the afternoon, the four brothers used to play cards and domino. Other relatives, *compadres*, and friends also frequently joined the group. A friend Jaime always passed by and acted as if he was a close relative of the family. He always called María aunt, but according to María they were only distant relatives. Sometimes relatives from Guadalajara arrived or one of María's sisters from the coast came over and stayed for several days. Another couple that frequently entered the house were a couple of deaf-mutes with their three children. The man was a distant relative of Lorenzo and it was interesting to see how well Lorenzo and he communicated with their hands. On summer days when many relatives were around it was common for one person or some people together to buy chicken or meat and organize a barbecue. Alternatively, the women might decide to prepare *tamales*. Coca cola and *mezcal* were bought and another pleasant event was organized.

Hence, social life at the Romero's was warm and hospitable. They were good at organizing spontaneous gatherings and parties, there was abundant food and this contributed to Lorenzo's pride. In the village "men were esteemed not only for their more menacing qualities but also for their ability to build close and harmonious social ties, both with outsiders and among members of their own group, for their capacity to earn and offer trust and for their willingness to use economic capital for social purposes such as parties" (Rouse 1989: 132). On many occasions Lorenzo himself left the house to attend to his own private affairs, but he wanted the others to stay in the house and enjoy themselves.

Although María and Lorenzo and their children are divided between different households on both sides of the border, they continue supporting each other in diverse ways. The most obvious elements of continuing relations between households are the consumer goods which are bought with "migration money" such as the television, the satellite disk, the video recorder, furniture, and so on. Summer months are normally very good for María and

Lorenzo. First, the sugarcane profits of the whole year are paid in summer. Second, the children in the United States often send extra money to their parents in this period. The married daughters in particular help their parents a lot. Most married daughters have a job in the United States and this gives them the opportunity to continue supporting their parents. This summer inflow of money can be very visible. For example, one summer, one of their daughters sent them money for a new lounge suite. As the other daughters also sent them money Lorenzo and María decided to refurbish the house. The living room was painted and the walls were decorated with new ornaments. A big fan was installed on the ceiling. The old cement floor in the living room was replaced with flagstones. Rubén, who was free in summer because of the school holidays, did most of the work. This included tapping the walls, painting, renewing the electricity installation, putting the flagstones, etc. His uncle José, who had worked in construction before, gave him instructions. In terms of the money and labor invested this was a real family project.

Two of the daughters who had sent the money for the 're-decoration', were going to come over for Christmas and everybody looked forward to seeing the surprise on their faces when they saw the "new house". When Adriana and Mariana came over at Christmas they showed a strong bond with the house and the village. During their stay Adriana and Mariana deliberated about the next improvements for the house. They concluded that they should collect more money among their brothers and sisters in the United States to change the whole floor and put down flagstones throughout the whole house. They also wanted to build a wall to separate the house from the plants in the *corral*. It was interesting to see the two migrated sisters talking to each other about the improvements that were needed in their parental house. They were the ones who were going to pay anyway. However, there were also other ways in which the children helped their parents. For example, by lending Lorenzo money for the work in the sugarcane. A couple of months later when Lorenzo received the proceeds of the sugarcane he would pay the loan back.

Their trips to the USA were also interesting because of what they demonstrated of the relations between households. The children in the USA often asked their parents to come over and offered to pay for the plane tickets. On several occasions María and Lorenzo went to visit their children in Los Angeles. One day when they were going to return to the village the house was cleaned and decorated with garlands and their sons with their families were waiting for them in the house. Javier had left to pick them up at the airport. José, Lorenzo's brother and his wife were also there as well as María's sister from the coast. María and Lorenzo arrived with five suitcases and one box. Immediately the suitcases were unpacked and everything divided among the children and grandchildren. The daughters in the USA had sent a lot of clothing for their relatives. María had brought watches for her daughters-in-law. This unpacking of the suit-cases with the clothes for their nieces and nephews is a standard ritual in the village. This also happens when the brothers or sisters pay a visit to the village. Javier and Rubén and the other families in the village cannot keep up with their migrant

brothers and sisters playing "Santa Claus". Everybody was very happy with the presents.

However, the support arrangements did not only go from children in the USA to parents in La Canoa. In their turn, María and Lorenzo helped those of their children's households that were not so prosperous or did not make it in the USA. They supported or even maintained them by providing them with food, houses, jobs, and loans whenever necessary. Lorenzo had always helped his sons. For example, he had bought Rubén - who not followed the necessary training - his position as a schoolteacher. Another way in which María and Lorenzo helped both sons and their families in the village was by providing them with milk for all the grandchildren. On some occasions Lorenzo gave his sons in the village money from the proceeds of the sugarcane.

### *Compton, Los Angeles*

Although much of the support networks and experiences in Los Angeles become clear in La Canoa itself, my visit to the villagers in the USA made certain phenomena more visible. When I paid a visit to Dolores and Luis in Compton, Los Angeles, I met many people from La Canoa whom I did not even know had left the village. In the social gatherings it felt like being in the village: the same people, the same food, and the same hospitality. The networks of relatives and villagers are very strong in the USA. For example, La Canoa has its own football team in Los Angeles and on Sundays the villagers meet at the church where a Mexican *mariachi* plays. Afterwards they go to a farmer to have fresh cow's milk with liquor, an old custom from the village. The villagers also cooperate when somebody from the village dies in the United States and the body has to be sent back to the village. Often this concerns young people who were murdered or lost their lives in traffic accidents. These are sad events which always cause a great emotional reaction in Los Angeles, as well as in the home village.

On the other hand, living in Compton obviously is not the same as living in a Mexican village. One of the things that was obvious in Compton were the ethnic tensions and violence the villagers experience in the United States. For example, Luis had been attacked twice and the second time he was shot in his legs. As a consequence of this assault he could not work for a long time. A son of Luis had also been shot in the leg. In the evening people did not leave the house anymore. Not even to go to the shop at the corner. Luis' adult sons often wanted to go out and enjoy themselves but Luis tried to do everything to keep them from going. He was very afraid that something might happen to them. Luis would prefer to go back to the "safe and healthy" life of La Canoa, but Dolores made it clear that she would not go with him as she did not want to leave her children and grandchildren in the USA.

An important difference from the village is the role of the women. Many women have their own jobs and income in the United States. Much of the time this was out of economic necessity, to pay the rents and higher costs of living. However, several women were more successful in their jobs than their husbands. For example, Mariana one of María and

Lorenzo's daughters, started to sell tupperware at the houses of Mexican women. She sold very well and obtained many bonuses for being such a good saleswoman. She made a career in the business and earned a lot of money. This was not without problems in her marriage and she had many fights with her husband. However, she did not want to give up her income and in the end her husband accepted the situation. Her husband also had a good job in an airplane factory and they managed to buy a house with a swimming pool.

It is obvious that these changing roles of women, also meant a change in gender relations. The village women in Los Angeles are clearly different from the women in the village who stay home all day. They drive around in their own cars, something which is unthinkable in the village. Many women told me about the problems they had had with their husbands about their working outside the house and having a much more public social life than in the village. On the other hand, many young Mexican husbands also started to help in the household and some said they enjoyed the different type of relation with their wives. Many parents were also very proud of their daughters for having a career and driving around in cars. For example, Luis proudly told me that Ema always drives her husband home when they go out and he has been drinking. This is in great contrast to village standards where a man would never let his wife drive, even if he had been drinking the whole night.

Social networks are central to the migration process. These include, for example, information networks about the best ways to cross the border, or about where to find jobs, but also information about how relatives are doing and where they can be found. People often arrive at the homes of relatives or friends who help them find a place to live and a job. For example, when I visited Compton, Yolanda was living with her sister Dolores. Later she moved in with another sister in another neighborhood because she had changed job. Yolanda had many different jobs and moved in with the sister that lived nearest to the job. Not all of the brothers and sisters did well in the United States. Some of the sisters did very well, together with their husbands they earned a lot, bought houses and were doing fine. However, others were in a much more critical situation.

Although most families had a better living standard (in terms of material well being) than they would have in the village, they also complained a lot about the "lack of freedom" in the United States and the high incidence of violence. A common topic of worry and discussion among migrants is the freedom of children and women in the USA and the diminishing authority of parents and husbands. Most parents do not like the prospect of their children growing up in the "violent" and "immoral" society of the USA and hope to come back to the village for their children. In this way, "Homeland" remains one of the most powerful unifying symbols for mobile and displaced peoples, though the relation to homeland may be very differently constructed in different settings" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 39). However, many migrants themselves know that it is highly unlikely that they will ever return to the village. So far no family has returned to the village with older children. Many children were born in the United States and have never been to the village.



The tension between life in the United States and life in the village becomes clear when the children of María and Lorenzo visit the village during summer holidays or at Christmas. The children from *el Norte* are easily recognized by their hair cut, the way they dress, and their language; Spanish mixed up with English. For these children the village is an interesting distraction for a few days but the visit should not last too long. The differences in life style and this alienation from their "root village" can sometimes give rise to painful situations. For example, many of these American kids do not like the "real" Mexican food their grandmother prepares. They sometimes even fall ill after eating food they are not used to. When relatives are over from the USA, *tortillas* are changed for Corn Flakes and the sale of instant meals in the village shops rises dramatically.

Migrants also complain about the strong regulation and discipline in the USA and the absence of "*relajo*" (relaxing). Working hours are considered to be very strict and there is too much supervision. Many people say that in the USA one is a slave of one's work. They use to compare this to the "freedom" of the village where one can walk into the fields and where people at least know how to enjoy life. Rouse talks in this context about two languages migrants employ even after becoming long-term settlers in the United States. The first language is the one in which they have seemingly internalized the values and beliefs of the United States working class (talking about their success as wage-earners, the pride they take in the houses, and the prestigious consumer items they have been able to buy; being proud of being well-liked by the boss for turning up on time, being a hard worker, and providing labor in a steady manner) and the second in which they seemed to have retained their old ways of evaluating and interpreting the world (Rouse 1992: 40). According to Rouse these two languages, which in many ways are contradictory, reflect basic tensions which are always present and are always capable of manifesting themselves in confusion and conflict (*ibid.*: 41). Although I agree with his analysis of the existence of two contradictory languages, in my view, contradictory languages should not only be analyzed in terms of an indication of social tensions. In my view, the handling of contradictory discourses through reflective talk is a central characteristic of all social life and is not necessarily the result of the dealing with dramatic changes in living conditions. For example, in chapters six to nine, contradictory discourses will be analyzed in the daily setting of the ejido and the Mexican bureaucracy.

### **Searching for a Solution for a Son who Failed in the United States**

With the economic crisis in the United States many migrants found themselves in increasingly difficult situations and returned to their villages in Mexico. Javier was one of María and Lorenzo's children who had not succeeded in the USA and came back to the village. Javier was expelled from the USA for possessing false papers (he used the identity papers of

somebody who had died) and fencing stolen goods. So, Javier, Elena, and their little son returned to La Canoa. Javier's oldest sister Dolores who lived in Los Angeles lent them her empty house in La Canoa. Javier had a hard time. Elena gave birth to their second child, a daughter but Javier did not even have money to buy food for his family. Javier and Elena lived very poorly and needed the support from María and Lorenzo.

From the moment they returned to La Canoa, there were clashes between the village standards and the style of life Javier and Elena had developed in the USA. First of all, they had a child but were not married. María decided that they ought to marry immediately. Yet, it had to be a very quiet and simple wedding for it was shameful that they had lived together and had a child without being married. So, they soon had their quiet wedding. For Elena, life in la Canoa was hard. She grew up in the town Autlán and had lived a long time in Los Angeles. She had a liberal attitude towards life and found it difficult to adapt to the strict codes imposed by her family-in-law, especially doña María. Although María was very gentle with her, she nevertheless made it clear that Elena should change her style of dress, could not ride a bicycle anymore and should behave like a married woman now. According to Elena, Javier also changed in the village. He started to behave like the other *macho* men in the village, which he had never been in Los Angeles. Tensions between Elena and Javier grew. According to Elena Javier had been much more affectionate to her in the United States. There he hugged her when he came home and then they would talk for hours. That was all over now. In the USA he also used to help her in the house, but in the village he refused to do domestic work. However, according to Javier he was not the one who had changed but Elena. She had become much more aggressive towards him. Elena wanted to do other things besides the domestic work and she was thinking of selling pottery with her niece or start working as a teacher again. However, Javier did not let her to look for jobs and said that she did not even manage to do the housework well.

Another problem was Elena's reputation as a free woman. Elena had had boy friends and several relations before she met Javier and Javier knew about that. However, some relatives of his kept speaking ill of her and told Javier that she was cheating on him. Elena was also hurt by remarks concerning her style of dress and make-up. When they lived in the USA Javier always liked to see her with make-up, but in the village Yolanda made jokes about it and María made remarks about the clothes she was wore. María said to her that wearing shorts was no way for a married woman to dress. So, Elena started dressing more and more like a traditional married woman in the village. As she said: *I think that in the end the only way to stand life here is to become the same as all the other people.*

However, there were also other tensions between the different brothers, sisters and in-laws. Rubén and Javier did not get along very well. Javier was irritated by Rubén's good schoolteacher behavior, while Rubén considered Javier a lazy, useless person. Although these tensions were always present, they were not openly expressed. Rosa and Elena, the sisters-in-law, got along well, although Elena felt that Rosa was the favorite daughter-in-law. Rosa

corresponded most to the image of the traditional respectable married woman: she dressed the part, behaved in a subservient way to her husband and parents in law, and procreated many children. Elena in her turn, did not behave according to the village norms. Instead of having a subservient, respectful attitude, she was a provoking, impulsive presence. She joked with don Lorenzo and tried to challenge him when the atmosphere was good. She tried hard to be respectful and helped María wherever she could, but she was much more effusive than traditional daughters-in-law. Although María tried to correct her on certain points, María and Lorenzo appreciated her cheerfulness.

Frictions also arose between Javier and his sister Dolores who had lent them her house. The lending of houses is a common source of conflict in the village. When Dolores' husband Luis came over from Los Angeles to pay a visit to his relatives in the village, he accused Javier and Elena of not looking after his house well and of using things that belonged to Luis without having asked permission. Luis was very displeased. In her turn, Elena felt very much offended as Luis had accused them in front of Elena's family from Autlán who happened to be paying them a visit. In the end Luis did not talk about it anymore, but the next time he visited the village, the same problems were raised.

Javier and Elena's position became increasingly difficult. Lorenzo and María maintained them, but a more permanent solution had to be found. As Javier was already in his forties with little experience in agriculture he could not work on the land with his father. For quite some time, Javier said that he intended to return to the United States. Yet returning to the States did not seem a real option for him. Lorenzo looked for other possibilities for his son. As a new *delegado* for the village had to be appointed, Lorenzo and his brother José talked about the possibility of having Javier appointed as *delegado*. Although the salary of a *delegado* is very low, it is at least a start. However, Lorenzo and José themselves rejected this idea as they realized that Javier did not have many friends in the village. Moreover, Javier himself said that he wanted to leave the village again.

Finally, one summer when Lorenzo had received the money from the sugarcane, a solution to Javier's problematic situation offered itself. Lorenzo had decided to build a billiard hall for Javier, so that he could stay in the village. The billiard hall was going to be built in the large *corral*, next to Lorenzo's house. They started the project by putting in a drain and building a wall to separate the billiard hall from Lorenzo's house. It was clearly a family project and Rubén, Javier, some of Lorenzo's brothers, and a nephew all worked on the project. They all expressed their opinions about the best way to run the billiard hall, about the number of tables they should put there, where everything should be bought, if he should sell food besides liquor, and so on. Javier's mood improved every day. They hoped to finish the project before the 16th of September, when Mexico's independence is celebrated, but that proved to be impossible.

The opening of the billiard hall was celebrated towards the end of September. Although I was already used to the strong separation between men's domains and women's domains,

I was surprised to notice that all the men were at the celebration in the billiard hall and all the women were in Lorenzo's house preparing the *tacos*. In the following days it became clear that the billiard hall was a Romero's place and that besides a couple of alcoholics and an occasional outsider only friends of the family used to go there. It was never really busy and I wondered how Javier could ever earn a living from this business. However, Javier had to do more than just earn a living. Lorenzo had paid for the equipment for the billiard hall, but Javier had to pay him back. As not much money was earned in the billiard hall, the situation looked gloomy for Javier. He started allowing people to play cards for money. In this way he could earn more. He also started borrowing money from money lenders in the village and in Autlán. This was a risky affair as money lenders charged approximately 10 percent a month in interest.

#### *Forms of Dependence and Interference*

Receiving financial support from their father sometimes created undesirable situations in which the sons had little control over their own lives. When he had been drinking Lorenzo liked to stress that all his children in the village depended on him. Quarrels between Javier and Lorenzo began to occur more frequently. Javier had to repay the investment his father had made in the billiard hall, but he hardly earned enough money to feed his family. During these quarrels Javier said that he was working very hard to try to earn money for his father who did not have to do anything for it. Lorenzo in his turn threatened to close the billiard hall as he had paid for everything and in this way remained the owner. Lorenzo also made comments about the ill use of the billiard hall tables and the bad management of the billiard hall.

Besides the problems of paying back his father's investments and paying back the moneylenders, Javier also had trouble with the police. Lorenzo had paid for the license for the billiard hall but the police kept bothering Javier. One day the police from El Grullo arrived in the village to check the billiard hall's license. This checking of the license was only a pretext for getting money for not making problems about the illegal playing of cards (for money) in the billiard hall. Lorenzo was the one who dealt with the police officers and explained them that he had already arranged it with (and paid) another police officer and that he was not going to pay twice. Although this was true, Lorenzo did not feel quite sure about it. Dealing with the police is always tricky and it is not clear how things work between the different groups in the police apparatus. Every time that a car arrived at the village that evening, Lorenzo immediately went outside to see whether it was the police. Although Lorenzo himself had worked as a police officer in Autlán many years ago and still had several contacts within influential circles in Autlán and El Grullo, one was never quite sure. Anyhow, Lorenzo was the one who always dealt with these contacts and never his sons. On another occasion, when Lorenzo was not at home, police officers came to the billiard hall and took Javier with them to Autlán. Everybody of the family was worried and upset.

However, they remained quiet and decided to wait for Lorenzo to resolve this problem. Elena and María were very tense as it was getting dark and the prospect of Javier spending the night in jail was not a pleasant one. The police are known for beating people up. Fortunately, Lorenzo came home and immediately went to Autlán. Later that evening he returned with Javier. Lorenzo said that he knew the head of the traffic police in Autlán and had the problem resolved through him.

A couple of months later, the billiard hall seemed to be going well at the weekends but it all depended on the economy in the region. When there was a crisis in the region, nobody spent money in the billiard hall. On the other hand, during Christmas holidays when people from the United States came over, Javier was earning well. However, Javier kept having trouble with the police. In March 1993, for example, he and three other men who were playing cards for money in the billiard hall were taken away by the *judiciales* (a police force that is greatly feared in Mexico). When they passed through a village Javier got out of the car to borrow money from someone he knew there. He paid the police 600,000 pesos (\$ 200) and they were released. Lorenzo criticized Javier for having the gambling in the billiard hall. However, this was the only way for Javier to earn something as in 1993 the region was passing through a severe crisis again. Lorenzo heavily criticized both Javier and Elena and as a result of this quarrel the billiard hall was closed for two days. Javier again started borrowing from other people in order to pay his father's investments back. Elena did not visit the house anymore as she was afraid that Lorenzo would start to criticize her again when he was drunk. After some time everyone calmed down again, but Javier was seriously thinking of selling the billiard hall and using the money to buy a little house in Autlán and establishing himself as a money-lender. However, for the moment he did not dare to talk about this plan with his father.

Hence, Javier found himself in the extremely unpleasant situation of having failed in the USA and becoming dependent again on his father. In the village he could not continue the type of relation he had had with his wife in Los Angeles and the couple had serious problems. Even with the support of his father, he was not able to make much progress in getting a steady income.

### **Another Son Returning from *el Norte***

In January 1992 I left the village for ten months. When I came back to the village in October, the family situation had changed drastically. Don Cayetano had passed away in March. Yolanda had stayed until his death but had then left for the United States. However, another son, Carlos, had come back from the United States with his wife Magdalena with the intention of staying in the village. The arrival of this son had had great consequences for the relations within the family. Carlos is one of the youngest and most "irresponsible" sons of

Lorenzo and María. He had recently married Magdalena, whom he had met in Los Angeles (Magdalena's brother is married to a niece of Carlos's). Magdalena comes from a small rural village in Nayarit where they got married before arriving in La Canoa. Lorenzo gave them his house next to the billiard hall to live in. Carlos had had many jobs in the USA but had not managed to get fixed employment. Together with his brothers he had worked in jobs like construction, mowing lawns, restaurants etc. Several times he got into trouble because of fights he was involved in. The economic crisis in the USA made it increasingly difficult for him to find work. When he had lost his last job again, he decided to leave the USA and establish himself with his wife in La Canoa.

Although Carlos and Magdalena lived in the house next to Lorenzo's, they spent most of the day with Lorenzo and María. Magdalena did the washing there, they ate and watched television there. Carlos tried to look for work and started working as a waiter in a restaurant in El Grullo. Soon I became aware that family relations had changed. Rosa and her children, who used to spend a lot of time at Lorenzo's house, hardly came anymore. Rubén and Rosa criticized María for only paying attention to Magdalena and her new baby. Elena did not visit the house very much either. So, most of the time when I visited the house only María, Magdalena and the new granddaughter were in the house. Although Magdalena was young and had only recently entered the family, her presence and interference was strongly felt. The two other daughters-in-law felt that Magdalena had "taken over" the house of their parents-in-law. As a result, the house was much less lively than it used to be in 1991. María regretted this change very much but she could not do anything about it. She missed her daughter Yolanda and her grandchildren who used to come around. Although María tried hard, she could not anymore successfully fulfill her role of the matriarch who brought unity in the family. Her husband, her sons, and daughters-in-law in the village had difficult relationships with each other. This was especially hard on María who always tried to be supportive towards her daughters-in-law and always tried to mediate between them and refrain from gossiping and destructive politicking within the family.

Relations between the three brothers that now lived in the village were also strained. Carlos was a cheerful, extrovert man and unlike his two brothers in the village he chased after women and liked to drink and smoke marihuana. With respect to the women and the drinking he resembled his father much more than his two brothers. Carlos used to engage me into the same kind of gender discussions and (indirect) gender struggles as his father. Although Carlos was a cheerful element in the house, he also caused his father a lot of trouble. Lorenzo said that Carlos was the most difficult of his children. He was not a hard worker, often had fights with people when he had been drinking and tended to lose every job Lorenzo managed to arrange for him. Yet, Carlos was the only one of the three sons who accompanied his father to the fields. Lorenzo paid him for the days he worked with him. Lorenzo and María practically maintained Carlos and his wife anyway as they spent the days in their house.

When he had been drinking Carlos could become aggressive. He had a trained body and his relatives were afraid that one day something serious might happen. On one occasion Carlos severely beat a man at a family party. The man started to speak ill of Lorenzo and commented upon the bad things he had done in the past. Carlos did not wait long and it soon came to blows. The man who had been beaten left the party calling out serious threats to Lorenzo and his family. The next day Lorenzo visited the parents of the boy in Autlán to offer his apologies. Offering apologies was very unusual for Lorenzo but he was afraid for possible repercussions for Carlos in the future. Here we see that Lorenzo's sons are confronted with the same kind of stories about their father as Lorenzo was with stories about his father don Miguel. In the same way as Lorenzo, Carlos does not accept people speaking ill of his father.

Lorenzo and María tried to convince Carlos that he had to be more responsible now that he was married. His wife was pregnant and soon he would also have a family to take care of. Carlos seemed to become aware of his responsibilities and took up the idea of selling balls of popcorn with honey in the village whenever there was a football match or during the days. It was funny to see him riding around on his bicycle selling the popcorn. However, he soon got tired of it and after some time he did not go out again. He often stayed in his bed "resting". All these things irritated his brothers Javier and Rubén and his parents. However, this staying in bed also illustrated that Carlos did not fit into the village style of living. Although life in the village could be very relaxed, it was unusual for men to lie in. A man could have a nap after a day's work or after a meal in the afternoon, but he could not stay in bed the whole morning.

In the winter of 1992 and during the whole of 1993 the region went through a severe economic crisis again. Many crops on the irrigated land were not harvested because of the low prices, there was no work, no money, and everybody was complaining about the difficult times. Even borrowing money from money lenders became impossible. Meals were reduced to *tortillas* and beans. Now that the situation had become so critical Lorenzo went to see Zuñiga, head of the CNC of the sugarcane producers in the region, to ask for a job for Carlos. He said that it did not matter what kind of a job, but that the boy urgently needed something. Zuñiga gave Carlos a job at the office. This was a golden opportunity for Carlos in a time of economic crisis and was an indication of the good relations Lorenzo still maintained with influential people in the region. Although Lorenzo and his brothers had difficulties with the municipality in Autlán about the organization of village projects (chapter three), they still had very good individual relations with powerful men in the region. Yet, the job only lasted a week. Carlos was fired for fighting with other employees.

Carlos now tried to work as a day laborer on the land when some crops were harvested. The economic crisis in the region became worse and in March 1993 Carlos even started working in the harvest of the sugarcane, as did other boys from the village. This was an indication that things really were very bad as the cutting of the cane is very heavy, dirty

work which is usually done by *cuadrillas* of poor landless people from other regions. Although Lorenzo used to boast that the sons of ejidatarios did not have to work on the land, the work his son was doing now (cutting the cane) was considered to be much worse and more disgusting than normal work on the land. However, for Carlos there was no other option as he did not want to go to the USA now that his wife was expecting their baby soon.

In March Magdalena gave birth to a daughter. After his daughter was born, Carlos began to plan to leave for the USA. He started to drink again and María tried to change his behavior. Magdalena did not dare to say or do anything against the behavior of her husband, but María as his mother commented upon it. His youngest brother Vicente who lived in Los Angeles had told Carlos that there was a lot of work in the USA and that he could arrange a job for him. So, Carlos left for Los Angeles, leaving Magdalena and the baby with his parents. After a couple of months Carlos sent money from the USA. He even sent money to repair the roof of their house and for an electricity meter for the house. In May Carlos wanted to come back, but now María and Magdalena told him to stay longer as there still was no work in the region. They told him that his daughter was eating one tin of milk powder a week costing 17,000 pesos per tin. They would not have the money to pay for that if he returned to the village. So, Carlos had to continue his stay in *el Norte*.

When Carlos finally returned to the village, things soon were as before. He became involved in several fights and did not work. Magdalena was very worried about the whole situation but hardly dared to talk to him about it. On one occasion when she had criticized him Carlos hit her. Here Carlos had gone too far and when María learnt about it she warned Carlos that he should never do that again. Although men in La Canoa liked to express themselves in "violent" terms and it was common to hear that "a real man hits his wife", the beating of wives was not a common practice and was condemned when it occurred. As Rouse points out, "local ideas about proper manliness differed from the conventional portrait in important ways. In the first place, the use of violence was not esteemed. The skill that people really respected was the ability to strike a pose so convincing in its intimations of aggression that actual violence would rarely, if ever, be necessary" (Rouse 1989: 131-132).

On later visits to the village I heard that in 1995 Lorenzo arranged a job for Carlos in the police force in Autlán. Lorenzo again had used his connections to arrange a job for his son. I now met Carlos walking around in his police uniform in Autlán when I went to the region. But shortly after he entered the police force he was fired there as well. This happened the day before Lorenzo and María were going on another trip to Los Angeles. They had to postpone the trip for a day. Carlos had had a fight with his superior about a loan. He was fired and put in jail. Lorenzo went to Autlán to get him out of jail and even managed to get him appointed again. Carlos continued in the police force but Lorenzo was losing the esteem of influential people because of his son's behavior and he was very displeased with Carlos. In fact, what was happening here is that sons returning from the United States had to learn the discipline and rules of rural Mexico again. They had to learn



the skills of dealing with honor and duty.

### Changing Gender Relations

Although the control over women by men in the village cannot be denied, gender relations are a complex field of contestation. Practices of domination are continuously challenged. We should also be aware of the fact that men and women sometimes “play” with the images of the patriarchal ideology, but that this does not necessarily mean that the practices of control are really organized according to these principles.

A common strategy used by men in the village to make it clear who is in charge is to deny women important information or leave them uncertain for a long time about what is going to happen. I noticed this phenomenon in many families in the village, even when it concerned important decisions such as migration to the United States. Leaving María unsure about what was going to happen, was one of Lorenzo’s favorite strategies in establishing his control over his wife. In the summer of 1991, for example, their children had invited them to come over to the USA by plane. Their children would pay for the tickets. María did not know if Lorenzo wanted to go and if he would take her with him. In the end, he decided that they would not go. Once during a conversation I had with María, she said: *Lorenzo does not tell me anything about anything. Not even about the debts he has or the money that he possesses. Sometimes I think that he does not even know me. That is not right, is it?*

There were also indirect ways in which Lorenzo stressed who was in control and threatened with what he could do. For example, one day when we had one of these nice gatherings at his house, Lorenzo said that it seemed him a good idea to kill and eat the goat. He immediately fixed the date for the feast. This decision caused much commotion in the family. The goat milk was one of the very few things that don Cayetano still wanted to eat. So, killing the goat would almost certainly also mean the end of don Cayetano. Lorenzo was well aware of this but still wanted to have the party with goat meat. María strongly opposed to the idea and criticized Lorenzo. This quarreling about the goat continued for several weeks and finally it was not talked about anymore. The goat stayed alive as did Cayetano. Yet, by these threats Lorenzo strengthened his authority in the family. However, this conflict also made clear that the relation between Lorenzo and his father-in-law was not without tensions. These actions were perhaps not without consequences for Lorenzo’s conscience either. When Cayetano died some years later, it was commented in the family that Lorenzo feared the ghost of don Cayetano. As Cayetano had spent his last years together with María and Lorenzo in the bedroom, Lorenzo did not dare to sleep in the room when María was not at home. On one occasion, when nobody was at home, Lorenzo even slept in his truck. This weak spot of their authoritarian father was the cause of much amusement and irony among his daughters.

On the other hand, Lorenzo could suddenly surprise María by giving her permission to do things that were normally not allowed. Occasionally, Lorenzo let María go to village feasts in the region or the carnival in Autlán. On one occasion we all had dinner in a well-known popular restaurant in Autlán and had a very pleasant afternoon. On that occasion María drank a lot and to my amazement Lorenzo allowed María to drink and behave in a way that he normally would not allow. At a certain moment Lorenzo started to sing with the *banda* and María was visibly pleased. As I felt in a joyful mood I said to Lorenzo: *One day in the year the women give the orders in Mexico!* However, Lorenzo answered: *In Mexico the men give the orders every single day of the year!*

Lorenzo's authority was not unchallenged, however. According to the situation and Lorenzo's mood, his wife and children tried to give him their opinions on his actions, influence him in his decisions, or criticize him. What most annoyed Lorenzo's wife and children was his spending money on liquor and his insulting mood when he was drunk. The one who was allowed to say most was Yolanda. She could say things to her father that nobody else was allowed to say. There were many of these occasions. On one occasion, for example, when Lorenzo had heavily criticized Javier, and I was sitting with him and Yolanda in the room, he said that he had the right to treat his son in this way because this was his house. I often felt that these explanations were directed towards me, who still had to learn a lot about gender and authority relations within the household. Yolanda reacted by saying that the house was not his but María's. Contrary to my expectation, Lorenzo did not grow angry but turned towards me and asked my opinion about it. Trying to give a "neutral" answer I said that I had no opinion about it but that in Holland the house belongs to the one who buys it. This answer pleased Lorenzo as he had bought the house and in this way I had put him in the right. Yet, Yolanda explained to me that in Mexico the house belongs to the woman even if the man buys it. This type of discussion and debating can be seen as a challenge to gender relations which is "tied to the pursuit of particular goals with arenas of conflict and so must also be understood politically" (Rouse 1989: 311). That these were "serious matters" for Yolanda is illustrated by the fact that she was never in a joyful mood during these conversations. She was irritated, angry, and was fighting a struggle on gender and authority.

However, although Lorenzo is an authoritarian husband and father who dominates a great part of his wife's life, upon closer inspection it becomes clear that his authority also involves a "playing" with images, or as Rouse calls it "an orchestration of appearances" (*ibid.*: 306). It was obvious that now that he was growing older, Lorenzo was becoming more generous. On many occasions critical things were said to him by his children and he was treated in a way that was not in accordance with the role of the authoritarian boss. In reality, Lorenzo has hardly any authority over his children anymore. He leaves his only daughter in the house very free in her actions and has no control over his sons in the village either. Only when they become economically dependent on him, can he exercise some influence over them.

However, when they have their own income, they are outside his control. Lorenzo withholds information from his wife and children and threatens a lot about things he is going to do or things he is going to prohibit but most of the time he does not carry his threats out. Lorenzo plays with the image of the patriarch more than he really is one.

I was also often struck by the *machista* attitude of Lorenzo's sons who, in my opinion, often without any reason treated their wives in a very authoritarian and denigrating way in public. However, I also realized that this was part of a ritual, of showing in public who was the boss. Interestingly, on several occasions María stopped her sons behaving in a denigrating way towards their wives. On these occasions, the sons always obeyed their mother. I sometimes even had the impression that they were "happy" that María interfered as they had publicly shown their manliness and could now turn towards other things. This feeling was especially strong with Javier, who used to insult and criticize Elena at his parents' home. This seemed more a desire to demonstrate that his experience in the United States had not turned him into a "soft" man than a felt need to correct his wife. When, for example, when Javier criticized Elena in front of all of us because the house was a mess, María often interfered and said that he should leave Elena alone and let her have her meal. This was a form of female solidarity. Lorenzo in his turn, never interfered when María corrected her sons. María also supported her daughter-in-law Magdalena in her relation with her son Carlos. On one occasion when we were all together having drinks, Carlos started drinking liquor after he had been drinking beer. María who saw that Carlos was drinking a lot told Rosa to take Carlos's glass away. Carlos noticed what his mother was doing and made a remark but he stopped drinking. For a man to be treated in this way in front of his relatives and friends was a humiliating experience. This again showed the powerful position María held in relation to her sons and that she used this position to support her daughters-in-law.

Gender relations were a topic of debate and tension in a much wider sphere. Many times we had discussions in the family about men's and women's roles and obligations. This was especially a favorite topic among the migrant children who were struggling with this theme in their own relations. For example, with several sons and daughters we once had a lively discussion about whether it was different for men or women to have sexual affairs outside their marriage. The immediate cause of this discussion was that Elena had found a condom in Javier's pocket after she had been to visit her mother in Autlán for a week. When Elena had asked about the reason for the condom, Javier had laughed. When Elena had reacted that next time she would go to Autlán, she would also carry a condom, Javier had become furious. Elena had talked with María about this experience and María agreed with her that there should be no differences in sexual norms for men and women. She said to Elena that she also had had to accept many similar painful experiences in her relation with Lorenzo.

This reaction from María is interesting. On the one hand María put pressure on her liberal daughter-in-law Elena to adapt to village norms and behave like a respectable married woman. On the other hand, María had a strong gender conscience and supported her

daughters-in-law who were fighting for more freedom and equal rights in their relations with María's sons. Her sons owed her respect and obedience and she used that authority. Although it was difficult for María to object to her father and husband, she was in a right position to criticize her sons. María knew that her sons would accept things from her which they would never accept from anybody else and certainly not from their own wives. This again shows the importance of the "orchestration of appearances". While María seemed to be the clear example of the Mexican matriarch who tries to maintain unity in the family by living according to the principles of *marianismo* and the patriarchal ideology, in her case there was also a certain degree of "playing with the ideology". If María really followed the patriarchal ideology, she would have demanded obedience from her daughters-in-law and supported her sons' domination of their wives.

Gender relations were also dealt with in the church. Once during a mass in La Canoa, the priest gave a sermon in which he supported a better position for the women in the village. He was rather strong in his expressions and said that women should not be treated as slaves, but as companions of their husbands. However, he warned that the situation should not become like in the USA either where women are the boss in house. Although in his sermon he tried to support the women of the village, by depicting the United States as the threatening example of "a society where women are in control" he only strengthened the village men's feeling that they were right. Yet, this example again shows that there was considerable reflection and debate about gender relations in this transnational village.

#### *Changing Gender Roles and Important Female Networks in a Transnational Family*

When María fell seriously ill the changing role of women in the family was clearly shown. María fell ill, was in great pain and had to have an operation on the gall-bladder. However, the hospital had a waiting list for the operation and she had to wait two weeks. Yet, the surgeon also had a private practice at which María could be operated on right away.

However, in that case the costs of the operation would not be paid by their health insurance and had to be paid by the family. Interestingly, the central roles in what followed were played by the women. Several daughters came over by plane from Los Angeles. This was not an easy endeavor as some had to borrow the money for the tickets, take days off from their work and make arrangements at home for their husbands and children. As María was in great pain, the women decided that she should be operated in the private clinic. María was happy with this development, but the question of the money bothered her. She did not want her children to pay but she knew that Lorenzo would not have the money at his disposal. It was never clear what Lorenzo did with his money but they thought that he had lent it out in loans. Still it was decided that the operation would go ahead and that the daughters would take care of the bill. Although the surgeon said that it was not a dangerous operation, other children also came over and ten of the twelve children were present on the day of the operation.

The day of the operation itself their youngest son Vicente and Yolanda directly arrived at the clinic from Los Angeles. They had taken a cab at the airport in Guadalajara to the hospital in Autlán. As usual Vicente was drunk by the time he arrived. Fortunately, the operation was successful. In the end, Josefina paid for the operation. She had to borrow the money but she and Vicente are the family members considered to be best off. The problem with Vicente is that he squanders all his money. As his sisters were irritated by the fact that Vicente spends so much money, drinks a lot, and is so irresponsible, they took a small revenge. They went out with him to an expensive restaurant in the region where they had an exuberant meal. When they left, they let Vicente pay the whole bill. According to the sisters, this was the only way in which they could make him cooperate. Still, María felt bad about her daughter paying the operation and the daughters agreed that Lorenzo should have paid for it. He received good money for the sugarcane. So, why couldn't he pay? Tensions continued but at least María had her operation and the children returned to the United States, with the exception of Yolanda, who stayed to look after her mother.

This example shows the marginal status of sons in this transnational family and the growing strength of female networks within the family. Although it has often been said that in rural Mexico parents lose the support of their daughters once they get married, here we see that the daughters have very strong bonds with their paternal home. This is related to the fact that the daughters have jobs in the USA and have their own income independent of their husband's. This makes it easier for them to keep supporting their parents in financial ways. However, this is also an example of the "responsible women" against the "irresponsible" men. At least, this is the way in which the women themselves see this situation. The example also illustrates the "burden" of close kin. As Josefina earns well, she is automatically obliged to pay her parent's bill. On the other hand, economic support also means greater influence. For example, in the discussions about what to do about the operation, the men did not play an important role. They could not, or did not want to, contribute in the costs, so they did not have a voice in the matter. This was a matter between a mother and "responsible" and "prosperous" daughters.

### **María Becoming an Ejidataria and the Struggle around Family Resources**

When Cayetano died in March 1992, María inherited his land and she became an ejidataria. María's sisters were talking very negatively about the fact that María had inherited all the land. However, although María was the formal owner, it was Lorenzo who took the honors and went to the ejido meetings in Autlán (Cayetano had been ejidatario in the ejido of Autlán).<sup>3</sup> Lorenzo had already done this when Cayetano was still alive and for him nothing substantial had changed with the passing away of Cayetano. Although María several times said to Lorenzo that she would like to go to the meetings, he never allowed her to go. María

was very interested in land questions and always wanted to know from me what was happening in the ejido and what I thought about the latest developments in agriculture. However, she made sure not to ask these questions when Lorenzo was around.

Then speculations started about whom María would register as the heir to her land. Lorenzo apparently left this decision to María and asked her on several occasions if she had already decided. It was difficult for María and once she said to me that she had no idea to whom she should leave the land. The matter was not discussed with the children. Finally, María decided to put her favorite and youngest (“irresponsible”) son Vicente as first heir and Carlos as second heir (actually, the second heir has no significance as he would only inherit the land if the first heir died before having inherited the land). When Lorenzo and María went to the United States in August that year María informed her children about her decision. This caused a huge uproar in the family. None of the daughters agreed with María’s decision. Vicente had already lived in the United States for a long time and had no intention of ever coming back to La Canoa. Vicente himself told his father Lorenzo that he had not asked for this inheritance and that if he inherited the land, he would sell it if he needed money. The sale of a plot is not what ejidatarios have in mind when they decide on the inheritance of their land. The land is considered to be family patrimony and has to support the family. Hence, it was obvious that Vicente should be canceled as the heir. María asked her daughters for advice but they were divided on who should be designated in place of Vicente. Mariana said that the land should be left to the child who took care of their parents until death, even if this happened to be a woman. In Mariana’s opinion Yolanda should inherit the land if she was the one who took care of their parents. However, María preferred a son to inherit the land. It was obvious that the three other sons, Javier, Rubén and Carlos were all interested in the land as they lived in the village and the possession of a plot with sugarcane means a substantial extra income.

Interestingly, the sons in the village were left out of the discussion about the heir to María’s land and again we see the central role of the women in the family. After their visit to Los Angeles, Lorenzo said that María was going to change the heir because everybody had been against it. These discussions about the possible heir of María’s land were interesting since normally inheritance questions are not openly discussed (see chapter 5). For example, the inheritance of Lorenzo’s land had never been discussed within the family and the sons in the village had never spoken about it with their father. Lorenzo probably wanted to make this his own private decision.

María told me in private that she had changed the sequence of her heirs. This meant that Carlos would now be the heir of her land. María was still struggling with her decision and said that she would prefer to divide the land among the four sons or to make an arrangement in which the proceeds of the land every year were divided among the four brothers. These were common considerations among ejidatarios, who were struggling with the inheritance question, but in practice this never worked out (see chapter 5). María said that Lorenzo had

told her that he had not yet registered the heir of his land but that he would put the other two sons as the first and the second heir. This meant that Javier or Rubén would inherit their father's plot. However, it was clear that the inheritance of these two plots could give rise to quarrels and conflicts in the future. The name of the heir can easily be changed and this frequently happens according to changing relations between parents and children.

### *The Frustration of the Oldest and Only "Responsible" Son*

The return of two sons who did not make it in the United States also had consequences for Lorenzo and María's other children. In the village, this was most obvious for Rubén. Rubén saw his chances of inheriting one of his parents' plots radically diminish by the return of his brothers. His brothers who had caused his parents so many problems and who had been involved in drugs and robbery, would probably inherit the land instead of Rubén. This frustration was only strengthened by the fact that Rubén, as the oldest and only "responsible" son in the family felt he did not get enough recognition from his parents.

Rubén is the only child who did not try to make it in the USA. He is the son with the most traditional lifestyle and spent a lot of time at his parents' house. During school holidays, when he was free from work, he did all kinds of repair jobs in their house. Rubén liked to recall that twenty years ago the family went through a serious crisis when María was expecting Yolanda and Lorenzo went the USA to look for work. Rubén as the oldest son had to carry the burden of the family and left school to till the land. However, despite the fact that he was the one who never caused his parents any trouble and that he often helped them with all kinds of odd jobs, he never felt appreciated. Rubén felt that his parents favored his brothers above him.

When Carlos returned from the USA and received so much support from his parents, Rubén grew more frustrated. Rubén and Rosa were both irritated by the fact that Carlos was paid for his work while Rubén never got paid for the many things he did for his father. Tensions were growing and on one occasion Rubén and Rosa directly asked María why they had given Carlos and Magdalena a house and a huge *corral*. Rosa said that she also would like to have such a *corral* to keep some pigs and chickens. This was an open critique on his parents' actions, which was highly uncommon for Rubén. That even Rosa was participating meant that they had to be very annoyed, for Rosa was always very respectful. Rubén and Rosa would never have dared to say such a thing to Lorenzo, but they tried with María. María was bothered by the accusation that one son was favored above the others.

Although Rubén had never spoken about the inheritance question with his parents he silently hoped to inherit his father's land. Rosa had told him that he was only dreaming as, according to her, Lorenzo would probably leave the land to one of the sons who had no regular job. Although Rubén did not earn much, at least he had a fixed income as a teacher. On the other hand, Rosa did not expect Javier to inherit the land either as he did not "love the land" and never worked on the land. So, this still left an opening for Rubén. Although

these were Rosa's personal reflections, it is probable that these elements all influence Lorenzo's choice of the heir to his ejido plot. In other words, Rubén's chances of inheriting the land depended greatly on the future projects of his migrant brothers.

### **Conclusion: Transnationalism and the Peasant Life Style**

This chapter showed how transnationalism works out in the daily lives of several members of one extended family. We discussed the strong support networks which exist between the household of a middle-aged couple in La Canoa and the households of their children, seven of whom lived in the United States in 1994, two in Tijuana and three in the village. As Long points out, "in many situations confederations of households and wide-ranging interpersonal networks embracing a wide variety of activities and cross-cutting so-called 'rural' and 'urban' contexts, as well as national frontiers, constitute the social fabric upon which livelihoods and commodity flows are woven" (Long 1997: 11). Rouse talks about a transnational migrant circuit to refer to the circulation of people, money and services involved in migration. However, in my view, Rouse stresses too much the formation of a "single community spanning a variety of sites on both sides of the border" (Rouse 1989: 3). In my view, we can better talk about a variety of migrant circuits and transnational settings instead of talking in terms of a single community. As we saw in the case of this family, while some children may continue their links with the village, others do not cherish these connections and are more involved in the formations of new communities which have little relation to their "home village".

The fact that children and parents feel responsible for the well-being of each other and frequently discuss their responsibilities, rights, and obligations is a continuing investment in the "idea of the family" as an ideological construct (Collier, Rosaldo and Yanagisako 1982). Yet, this study makes clear that there are different expectations and projects within the family and that we cannot treat the family or the household as a collective actor. There are strong generational and gendered divisions within the family (D. Wolf 1997). Lorenzo, for example, expected his daughters in the USA to pay for María's operation. These daughters, in their turn, criticized the irresponsible behavior of their father who had no money available for the operation. It is obvious that gender relations are changing under the influence of transnationalized experiences and gender roles are a topic of heated debate in the village as well as among villagers in Los Angeles. The most remarkable development in the Romero family is that female networks between the mother and her prosperous migrated daughters have become central in the organization of family matters.

An important phenomenon which I found in La Canoa and which is less developed in the literature is the return of migrants to the village. We can say that the men who return to their village "had bad luck" in the United States but following Rouse's argument, it could be



argued that they are the ones who have had most difficulty accepting the disciplinary regime in the United States. Rouse argues that Mexicans in the USA undergo a process of “proletarianization” in which they learn to turn up at the workplace regularly and punctually, be sober and rested and use the time for which they are paid exclusively for work (Rouse 1992: 29-31). Javier and Carlos, the two sons of María and Lorenzo who returned from the USA, both did not make it in the regular disciplinary system. One was active in illegal activities and the other was not able to keep a job and obtain a stable employment. The cases of these two men also show that although for migrants who “failed” in the USA, their “home village” may be their “last resort” it is often not the place they would prefer to be.

The return of migrant children means that during certain periods, adult children come to depend again on their parents’ income and set of socio-political relations. María and Lorenzo supported their children in many different ways: they arranged jobs for them, provided them with food, and money, and with loans for new enterprises. Lorenzo can “organize” these jobs for his sons, through his political networks and relations with influential men in the region. This also helped him several times to get his sons out of trouble when they had problems with the police (Javier with the billiard hall and Carlos with his fighting). In this way ejido land as a source of income and the ejido as the provider of important political networks remains a central factor in the lives of María and Lorenzo and their children.

Yet, accepting support by the family also means that the sons have to comply with patriarchal authority. As Barth remarks, the profound interdependence within the family and the strong ideological emphasis on respect and authority in the relationship between seniors and juniors in the family, and particularly between parents and children, can easily lead to pressures and forms of control which are experienced as stifling (Barth 1993: 130, see also den Ouden 1995). In addition to the difficulty of accepting parental authority again, for some migrants it is also difficult to adapt to the village life style. Although the “peasant style of life” is much more relaxed than that of a laborer in the United States a specific discipline also reigns in the village. A peasant family in La Canoa defines “fulfillment primarily in terms of the capacity to create and maintain independent, family-run operations, ideally based in land” (Rouse 1992: 34). In the peasant life style, a man does not stay in bed the whole day relaxing, drinking and smoking marihuana. Furthermore, as Rouse points out, while socializing in the USA is normally identified as an aspect of leisure, in the village socializing activities are important for building networks and forging reputations and in fact are vital to the local economy (Rouse 1989: 133). In rural areas establishing socio-political relations and notions of honor are very important.

In the case of Javier, we saw that his dependence on his father was accompanied by interference in his personal life which caused enormous tensions in his marriage. Yet, in the case of Carlos his non-adaptation to village norms was much worse. While Carlos was used to being fired and having different jobs in the USA, in the region his father Lorenzo was using his “social capital” to get Carlos jobs and get him out of trouble. Carlos damaged his

father's reputation by not complying with the people who did Lorenzo special favors by giving Carlos a job. By quarreling with superiors, easily starting a fight with everybody around him, not doing his work, and beating his wife, Carlos exposed a form of *machismo* that was not common in the village, this was "*machismo without honor*". This behavior was not appreciated and certainly did not help a man to build up the socio-political networks which are indispensable in a rural Mexican setting.

As we saw in this chapter, and will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, inheritance of ejido land is a sensitive subject which normally is not openly discussed between parents and children. Many elements influence the choice of an heir and an important factor is the notion that land is family patrimony and should be used for the continuation of the family. This makes the choice of an heir in a transnational family extremely difficult and also means that the "migrating behavior" of one brother can influence the others' chances of inheriting. The inheritance of an ejido plot can be used to stimulate children to return to the village. However, when María designated her favorite son in the United States as the heir to her land and he made clear that he would not return to the village and would sell the land if necessary, a new heir had to be chosen. María then registered Carlos as the heir of her ejido plot. However, this was not without problems either. Carlos was prepared to work on the land, but he had still a long way to go before being the worthy heir of an ejido plot. Fortunately, the registration of an heir can be easily changed and this is what often happens: the heir changes according to new developments within the family. In addition, Lorenzo also possesses an ejido plot which will be left to one of the children. However, for the time being Lorenzo's choice was not open to discussion. In the next chapter the organizing practices around inheritance decisions will be further discussed.

#### *Post script*

In the summer of 1998 I returned to La Canoa for a short visit. I learned that Carlos had returned to the USA together with his wife and daughter. The billiard hall was closed and the tables had been sold. Javier also had returned to the USA and had left his wife and children in the care of his parents in La Canoa. He wanted them to come to the USA once he had saved enough money. With his brothers in *el Norte* again, for the moment Rubén's chances of inheriting the land seemed to have increased.

#### Notes

1. Den Ouden (1995) makes an interesting use of genealogies in his study of the management of labor and family relations in enterprises in Bénin.
2. The *bracero* program, which was operated between 1940 and 1964 made it possible for Mexicans to obtain contracts to work brief periods in the United States, principally in agriculture.

3. Cayetano was the only ejidatario of La Canoa who remained ejidatario in Autlán when the ejido of La Canoa became independent and separate from the ejido of Autlán (see chapter two).

## CHAPTER 5

# ORGANIZING PRACTICES AROUND INDIVIDUAL EJIDO PLOTS

### **Introduction: the History of Land Transfers and Land Transactions**

This chapter has two principal aims. First of all it presents an overview of what happened with the land of the ejido since its establishment in 1938. It shows how the arable land was distributed between families in the village and what happened to these plots over the years. Secondly, specific organizing practices around the use and transfer of ejido plots are discussed. I decided to focus on three types of practices, namely the sale of ejido plots, the renting out of ejido plots by migrants and the inheritance of ejido plots. In my view, these practices are the most interesting ones as they determine the future distribution of the land and because they have most problems with the law (sale and renting by migrants) or are the cause of great social tension (inheritance). As was explained in the first chapter, the aim of the study was to find out how a certain patterning had developed in these organizing practices in relation to the intimate social worlds of the ejidatarios and in relation to the rules and procedures of the MAR.

In much of the literature the selling and renting out of ejido plots has been attributed to the influence of local powerful bosses (*caciques*) and the high degree of corruption at the MAR. Gordillo (1988), for example, argues that the *cacique ejidal* controlled access to ejido land and that through the renting out of ejido land and monopolization of plots an illegal land market developed which formed the basis of accumulation for the *cacique* (1988: 231). Although this phenomenon indeed has been documented in certain ejidos and in determinate periods, we should not assume that this was the central principle underlying land transactions in Mexican ejidos. Furthermore, land was not always and everywhere an important element in political control. For example, in La Canoa, which only received rainfed land, control over the maize market was the most important element of political control and not access to arable land (see chapter two). Yet, despite the low importance of land for political control, a dynamic land market developed in the ejido La Canoa.<sup>1</sup>

The image of the “*cacique* in control” has prevented people from studying how the manifold “petty” transactions of ejido plots were organized in relation to procedures and laws which prohibited these deals.<sup>2</sup> Ibarra, who discusses the ejido from a juridical perspective, shows very well how control by the state over internal ejido organization and ejido land use, and interference by the MAR in dispute settlement, culminated in a widespread set of relations and spheres of influence encompassing the local ejido level and different institutions belonging to the state bureaucracy (Ibarra 1989: 21). Consequently, he argues that studies from “below” of the way in which ejidos and ejidatarios become involved in the juridical structure and the state apparatus are necessary to arrive at a full understanding of these

processes (*ibid.*: 23). This is precisely what has been lacking in studies of the ejido. In addition, the inheritance of ejido plots has been a largely neglected theme in the literature.

Only an in-depth study of transactions and transfers of property rights can show how practices developed in force fields in which several elements played a role: the different values attributed to ejido land, the ideology of the family, local politics, wider social networks, and bureaucratic rules and processes in government agencies. This chapter analyzes how the agrarian law and the MAR played an important but not decisive role in these transactions. It is also argued that the development of local practices around ejido plots has to be analyzed in relation to the strong moral value placed on reciprocal care relations between parents and children and the fact that land is considered to be individual property and family patrimony at the same time. Notions of individual responsibility and honor in the striking of deals all play important roles in the practices which developed through time.

This chapter discusses the development of land transfers in the period between the establishment of the ejido in 1938 and 1992, the year that the agrarian law was changed. The most fundamental change introduced with the new agrarian law - with respect to land transactions - is that ejidatarios are now allowed to sell, buy, rent, or lease their land, activities that were all forbidden under the old agrarian reform law. Yet, discussion of the practices which developed before 1992 will give an idea of the consequences the new agrarian law may (or may not) have. It certainly shows the limited effect the agrarian law has always had on land transactions at the local level.

#### *Combining Genealogies of Families and Genealogies of Ejido Plots*

In the study of the individual ejido plots I wanted to combine a general overview of transactions with detailed studies of specific cases. Yet, I encountered serious problems in distinguishing “general trends” from “specific cases”, or “exceptions to the rules”. There were many stories and commentaries about land transfers. But how representative were the stories people told me? For example, some people said that many plots had been sold through the years and others said only a few. This obviously did not help me in finding out how important land sales had been in relation to the total number of land transfers. The ejidatarios also tended to express themselves in terms of established rules or customs. For example, they could say: *It is the custom here in the village that the youngest son inherits the land.* Although at first I tended to accept this statement, which was frequently uttered, doubts grew when many exceptions to this rule became apparent. In the many cases when the youngest son had not inherited the land, the ejidatarios always came up with logical explanations for this “exception”. So, the logic of these practices seem to lie partly in general principles and partly in the emergent properties of the situation. So, what then were the principles which informed the designation of the heir and was it possible to speak of inheritance customs in the ejido? How did the many conflict stories I was collecting relate to the non-conflictive

patterning of land transactions?

With respect to the political side of land transactions and the monopolization of land in the hands of certain families, I had the same doubts as I had about the agrarian history of the ejido. On the basis of what people told me I was convinced that Miguel Romero had been a despotic local leader who had abused of his relations with the bureaucracy to get more land for himself and his sons. But to what degree? How does one compare the amount of land a man with eleven sons at the time of the land distribution received (Miguel Romero) with the situation of a man with only one son (Claudio Núñez)? In sum, I felt that I needed a detailed picture of the wider framework. For that reason I elaborated "maps of kinship" (genealogies of people) and "maps of land transfers" (genealogies of land). The combination of these genealogies of land and people provided me with a general overview of land transactions in the ejido. Furthermore, it gave a good picture of the distribution of plots between different families in the village and how this changed over the years.

### **A Basic Contradiction in the Agrarian Law**

The Mexican agrarian law has been the object of much criticism and debate. It is well-known that "post-revolutionary states are especially prone to enacting laws of high ideals which come up against an intractable reality" (Harris 1996: 9) and the Mexican agrarian law case is no exception. Here I will discuss one fundamental contradiction that worked through all the procedures. The reason to discuss this point in detail is that it greatly influenced the practices around land transactions which developed over time. This central contradiction consisted in the fact that on the one hand the agrarian law allowed the "individual" possession of ejido plots, while on the other hand the use of the ejido plot was restricted by many "social" rules. The agrarian law not only provided procedures for the division of the arable land into individual plots but also allowed the ejidatarios to choose their own heir. This individual possession and inheritance of plots made ejido land tenure very similar to private landownership. However, the agrarian law also expressed a more "revolutionary" aim of the land reform by presenting the ejido as an agrarian community with important social duties. This was apparent, for example, in the official terminology which said that the ejidatarios only received "use rights" to the land and not property rights. An important general principle derived from the Mexican Revolution was: *land to the tiller*. This principle underlied many of the rules in the agrarian law. For example, the rule that the ejidatario had to work the land himself and could not leave it unused or rent it out. Ejido land was meant to provide a subsistence basis for peasant families and should not become an economic commodity. Furthermore, the rule that ejidatarios were not allowed to possess more than one plot was an indication of the social character of ejido land tenure. As they only possessed use rights to the land the ejidatarios could obviously not sell the land either. The use rights to

the land could be taken away from the ejidatarios if they infringed the agrarian law and the ejido assembly could then "transfer the use right" to somebody else.

This tension between the "individual" and "social" character of ejido land tenure became especially clear in the registration of ejido land. Although almost all ejidos made use of the opportunity to divide the land into individual plots, the law never provided the procedures for the registration of ejidatarios in relation to a specific plot of land. Hence, maps of the individual ejido plots were seldom made. In this way, the agrarian law never carried through the individualization of land tenure which it itself had set in motion. At the MAR ejidos were registered with their name, a map of the total ejido (if the ejido was lucky) and a list of ejidatarios (members of the ejido). On the basis of this list, certificates of agrarian rights were issued with a number. These numbered certificates accredited ejidatarios as members of the ejido and provided them with certain rights. The first and most important right was the usufructuary right to an ejido plot and the right to designate the heir of the land. However, it also gave them rights to use the common lands and the right to receive a free *lote* within the urbanized zone of the ejido (see chapter six).

In terms of the law, the numbered ejido certificates referred to a specific plot of land (*unidad de dotación*) and protected the ejidatario in his or her agrarian rights. However, as individual plots were never measured, the link between a plot and the number of the certificate was never formally established. Nevertheless, for the ejidatarios these certificates acquired a very important, even symbolic value. It was their proof of land rights. The certificates were issued after a long delay (some ejidatarios had to wait for more than thirty years) and were cherished and well guarded by most ejidatarios. Some even refused to show them to others out of fear that something might happen to the certificate. Although ejidatarios acknowledged that the basis of their security of land tenure was not so much official registration at the MAR, but recognition by the other ejidatarios, the ejido certificates had an important legal-symbolic value. This arrangement of individualized land use without any formal registration of land plots would have been logical if the management of the land would have remained within the ejido community. In that case the MAR would not have needed exact information about land use within the ejido by the different members. Then it would have been a question of internal arrangements by the ejidatarios. However, enormous formal complications and bureaucratic discrepancies were raised by the fact that the government wanted to keep control over ejido land use and in this way tried to guarantee the "social use" of the land. The MAR was the institution that was going to check on the right use of individual ejido plots. Furthermore, in the case of problems over ejido plots this ministry was also the place the ejidatarios had to recur to to settle disputes. But how was the MAR to keep control over ejido land use and resolve internal ejido land conflicts if they had never made a register of individual use of plots in the first place? As we will see, this peculiar registration of ejido land in Mexico has had a great influence on the organizing practices which developed around the use and transfer of ejido plots.

*The IUP (Investigación de Usufructo Parcelario)*

In order to keep control over the "social use" of the lands, the Investigation of Use of Plots (*Investigación de Usufructo Parcelario*) (IUP) was introduced. The aim of the IUP was to check if ejidatarios used their land in a legal way. In cases where they did not, the land could be taken away from them and the ejido assembly had to decide to whom the land should be given. There were several steps involved in this IUP. The first step was for an official of the MAR to visit the ejido with the official list of ejidatarios and their certificate numbers. An ejido meeting was convened in which the official named one ejidatario after the other. The assembly had to say whether the ejidatario concerned was still working the land himself, or whether somebody else was tilling his plot.

The procedure of the IUP only recognized three categories of ejidatarios. First, those who were in the official list and had been working their plot without problems. These were the ones who simply stayed on the list as official ejidatarios. The second category were ejidatarios who had ceased to till the land themselves for two or more years. They would lose their agrarian rights and the ejido assembly had to say who had been working these plots during this time. These persons would then officially be proposed as the new ejidatarios with the agrarian use rights to the plots. The third category were ejidatarios who had been improperly issued with certificates as they had never received a plot in the ejido.<sup>3</sup> These certificates would have to be canceled. The dispossession of an ejidatario from his or her agrarian right was seen as a serious issue and after this meeting of the official with the general ejido assembly, several other steps followed. For example, the ejidatarios who were to be dispossessed of their rights were given the opportunity to defend their position at the office of the MAR. After the final decision was taken by the MAR, the dispossessions were published in the Gazette of the State.

In practice, the IUP functioned in a way that had very little to do with control over land use. Instead it became a way to disguise legally permitted transactions that had not followed the formal procedures, as well as many illegal manoeuvres. This was encouraged by the fact that the IUP only distinguished three categories of ejidatarios and that the ejido assembly had the decisive vote at the meeting of the IUP. As an ejidatario in La Canoa told me: *If we ejidatarios did not want to let the functionaries interfere, they had no way to know what was going on here.* The point is that the assembly could "hide" every type of land transfer under the second category – ejidatarios who had abandoned their plot which was being tilled by someone else. Anyhow, as no register of the plots belonging to specific ejidatarios existed, the IUP soon presented totally distorted views of land transactions and new land possessions.<sup>4</sup>

Inheritance of plots provides an example of disguising legally accepted practices that did not follow the formal procedures. Many sons inherited land from their fathers without these changes ever being registered. For example, in the case of La Canoa, an IUP was held in 1974 on the basis of the ejido census of 1942. At the IUP meeting in June 1974 in the ejido,



the assembly agreed that 45 of the 109 registered names, no longer tilled their land themselves and the agrarian rights of these people were transferred to the people who had been working these plots. So, these cases were recorded in the IUP under the second category of people who had ceased to work their own plot and were dispossessed of their land rights. In reality the great majority of these 45 cases were simple and lawful inheritance cases. As the IUP used the ejido census of 1942, these inheritances had not yet been registered. Moreover, the registering of the transfer of ejido rights to an heir after the death of an ejidatario, was a very slow procedure. The officials often asked money for the new registration and for these reasons many ejidatarios did not bother about the registration of the heir. So, in 1974 all the inheritances of ejido plots in La Canoa were registered as people who had been dispossessed of their plot which had consequently been given to someone else. It will be obvious that this led to a situation in which official statistics and registers give few insights into land use and transactions in the ejido.

Another part of practices "covered" by the IUP were illegal land sales. The official who visited the ejido for the IUP was often uncertain whether the changes in ejido members concerned inheritances, sales, dispossession of plots or what, nor was he particularly interested. Officials had to cope with procedures that did not offer them any instruments of control and which did not bear any relation to what was going on "on the ground". Officials themselves often played an active role in the legalization of illegal transfers through the IUP. Ejidatarios often tried to strike a deal with the official before or after the meeting of the IUP. As the MAR official who regularly attended La Canoa, explained to me: *We often became aware of the illegal sale of ejido plots at the meeting of the IUP. Or people themselves came to talk to us before the meeting took place. We helped them by making the transfer of the agrarian right to the new name easy, by not asking questions. In return we received money from them.* In this way, these sales could also provide some room for negotiation and an extra source of income for the officials of the MAR.

However, it was not only a question of money. Both officials and ejidatarios knew that they were dealing with procedures that did not bear any relation to reality. At one of the IUP meetings in La Canoa at which I happened to be present, the official himself suggested an ejidatario put one of his plots in the name of his son as he was not allowed to possess more than one plot. On several occasions during this meeting the official deliberated with the ejidatarios about the best way to formalize the many illegal situations. Although afterwards the official received some financial compensation from a few ejidatarios, many more illegal situations had been legalized by him during the meeting. Here we see how in quite an open atmosphere during a public meeting, an official and ejidatarios together tried to squeeze "illegal" practices into "official rules and categories".

This awkward registration of ejido plots also led to an interesting dynamic in the case of land conflicts. In the official documentation around land conflicts reference is always made to the number of the ejido certificate and the related plot (*unidad de dotación*). Yet, because

of the active land market the numbers often did not bear any relation anymore to the original plots that were handed over at the first land distribution. However, the ejidatarios had clear maps of ejido land distribution and trajectories of plots in their head. (Most ejidatarios only have this knowledge of the parts of the ejido they are involved in, not of the whole ejido.) So, for the people involved in the conflict it always was very clear which plot they were fighting over. When they were fighting over a plot that was referred to with a certain number in the MAR documents, they knew exactly which of the (for example) five plots of the ejidatario was in dispute.

From the above it will not be surprising that the official settlement of land conflicts says little about what really happened to the land. Still, the official administration remains very important as it provides the legal language and categories according to which deals have to be formalized. Many people prefer to "play the official game" as far as possible. As we will see, the fact that most of the time the rules were not followed, did not mean that the rules did not have influence.

### Land Distribution at the Start of the Ejido

La Canoa received arable land on three occasions: in 1924 together with Autlán, in 1938 at the establishment of the independent ejido La Canoa and in 1942 with the extension of the ejido. In total the ejido received approximately 450 hectares arable land and 1800 hectares common lands in the mountains. The arable land they received was immediately divided into individual plots, while the common lands remained in collective use (see the next chapter).

The age and gender structure of the family at the time of the land distribution was very important for the number of plots a family received. Only married men, widows, and boys over 16 could receive a plot of land. This meant that young boys who were married were "lucky" as they were given preference over unmarried boys. It also meant that families with many boys in the "right age" acquired many more plots than families with younger children. Naturally, people augmented the age of their sons by one or two years, but in general families with older boys acquired more land.

I decided to elaborate the genealogy of land plots from 1942 onwards. At that time the three stages in which the villagers received land had been finished and the ejido was "completed". Another reason for taking 1942 as a starting point for the genealogy of transactions of land plots is that I got hold of a very valuable document at a MAR office in Mexico city. This was a census by the RAN (*Registro Agrario Nacional*) of the ejido La Canoa in 1942. In this document the 109 people were listed who were recognized as ejidatarios in La Canoa. The ages of all these 109 people are given, as well as the complete names of their wives (only men and widows were listed) and all children with their ages in 1942. Furthermore, the census gives the number of years people had been living in La

Canoa. This RAN census has been very valuable for my research, since besides helping me with the genealogy of land, it also helped me with the genealogies of families.

Ironically, although this was a very valuable document for my research, it said very little about its official topic: the people who received land in the ejido. Many people who were registered as ejidatarios in this list, never received land. Others only received land many years later. My data on who had received land by 1942 was drawn from the genealogies of ejido plots which I elaborated together with the ejidatarios. The total number of people appearing in this 1942 census of La Canoa is 379, including the children. These figures imply that there were 71 households (the sum of married men, older unmarried men and widowers and widows) in the village. All the 109 people listed were recognized as ejidatarios and received a certificate number referring to their agrarian right. However, of these 109, only 77 possessed a plot of land in 1942.

Table 5.1 Land distribution in La Canoa in 1942

	with agrarian right	with ejido plot	without ejido plot
married men	58	51	7
old single men and widowers	5	5	0
widows	7	5	2
young unmarried men over 16	39	16	23
total	109	77	32

Several figures in the table are immediately brought to one's attention. Most remarkable is the fact that seven married men did not receive land, whereas 16 unmarried young boys did. Although it is tempting to attribute this to local power relations, situations were more complex and different factors appear to have influenced this process. First of all, it is true that several of these young boys were sons of the local agrarian leaders and received the land on account of the good contacts their fathers had with the officials. However, other young boys received land because their mother was a widow. Hence they received the land instead of their mother. In the case of the married men who did not receive land, different factors also played a role. Several of them were not born in the village and had only recently established themselves in the village. Others were sons of the local agrarian leaders. In these cases it could be said that the fathers, who acquired several plots, received the land instead of the sons. This shows again the role of patriarchal influences. Cayetano Lomelí also was one of the seven, but he did not receive land because he was an ejidatario of Autlán.

We have to realize that in 1942 all land was rainfed and that land possession in the ejido did not offer a basis for subsistence. When we look at the possession of land in 1942 by the families of the two agrarian leaders and compare this with the families of two of the ejidatarios of the "opposition", Salvador Lagos and Iginio Núñez, we see the following.

Figure 5.1 Land possession in 1942 by the two agrarian leaders and by two families who today belong to the "opposition", and the ages of the different family members

Agrarian leaders

<b>Miguel Romero</b> (47; 2 plots)	x	<i>Engracia Jiménez</i>	<b>Juan García</b> (63; 3 plots)	x	<i>Hermelinda Lomeli</i>
		<i>Rosa (26)</i>			<b>José (37; 1 plot) (married)</b>
		<b>Francisco (24; 1 plot) (married)</b>			<b>Rubén (35; 1 plot) (married)</b>
		<b>Miguel (20; 1 plot) (married)</b>			<i>Elena</i>
		<b>Estanislao (19; 1 plot)</b>			<i>Alicia (27)</i>
		Lorenzo (18)			<b>Juan (26; 1 plot) (married)</b>
		<i>Soledad (18)</i>			<b>Tomás (23; 1 plot) (married)</b>
		<i>Federica (16)</i>			<i>Aurora (20)</i>
		José (12)			<i>Esperanza (16)</i>
		Emilio (10)			Ricardo (14)
		<i>Ignacia (9)</i>			<i>Margarita (8)</i>
		Filomeno (4)			

Families of men who today belong to the "opposition"

Cayetano Lagos	x	<b><i>Epigenia Romero</i></b> (widow 43; 1 plot)	<b>Claudio Núñez</b> (46; 4 plots)	x	<i>Clara Fábregas</i>
		Salvador (19)			Iginio (16)
		<i>Magdalena (16)</i>			<i>Enedina (12)</i>
		<i>Soledad (14)</i>			<i>Dolores (10)</i>
		Alberto (12)			<i>Teresa (5)</i>
		Gerardo (10)			<i>Maria (3)</i>
		Miguel (6)			

**bold** = received land

*italics* = female

We can see that Miguel Romero, who is most criticized for monopolizing ejido plots, did indeed possess several plots in 1942. Juan García possessed even more plots as did his sons. This can be explained by the fact that his sons were older. In contrast, Epigmenia Romero, Salvador Lagos's mother, only possessed one plot of land in 1942. Epigmenia was a widow at that time and she had inherited the land from her late husband. Salvador did not receive land at the establishment of the ejido although he was the eldest son and 19 years old in 1942, but only received land years later. So, comparing these three families, Salvador's family had a much worse start and there was clear inequality in land distribution between these three families. However, when we look at the situation of Claudio Núñez, Iginio's father we see that he was also able to monopolize land. While Iginio is one of the men of the "opposition" who uses a language of *cacicazgo* and who talks a great deal about the shameless Romero bosses who monopolized land in the ejido, his own father Claudio also possessed four plots in 1942, although his oldest child and only son Iginio was only 16 years old at that time.

Hence, while there obviously has been an unequal distribution of plots among families in the village, no strong deductions can be made about the monopolization of ejido plots from the start in the hands by certain *cacique* families. It remains difficult to compare the number of plots different families received because of differences in family structure and especially the age of boys at the time of the distribution. Families with older sons also received land in the name of these boys and the father tilled the land of the unmarried sons. Although local politics played a role in land distribution, and above all in the number of plots households received, almost all households in the village possessed at least one plot of land in 1942. Real competition for land only started afterwards when the population grew and there was no land available anymore. There was no land available for the sons of ejidatarios and they could only hope to be the heir of their father's land. In this way a category of landless households was created that would grow steadily with the years. Land became a scarce resource in a region with hardly any other sources of income and ejido land gradually turned into a valuable commodity.

As the ejido had received land from four different haciendas, the land was rather dispersed. Some plots were up to an hour and a half's walk. In the beginning, everybody preferred to have land near the village as it rained more in that zone and it was easier to get there. So, several people exchanged plots (*permuta*). Ironically, the land that was going to be part of the irrigation project in the 1960s, was the land that was farthest from the village. Hence, ejidatarios who exchanged several hectares of land far away for only one hectare nearby, eventually came out very badly. For example, Aurora García's late husband, Daniel Fábregas, changed five hectares of land where it never rained for two and a half hectares of better land near the village. However, the five hectares became part of the irrigation system and today are sown with sugarcane, whereas the two and a half hectares remained rainfed. This had been a very unlucky exchange for Daniel.

Table 5.2 Acquisition of land by people who were recognized as ejidatarios but who were landless in 1942

	without land in 1942	never land	land at a later stage
Married men	7	4	3
Widows	2	2	0
Young unmarried men	23	7	16
Total	32	13	19

In table 5.2 we see what happened to the 32 people who were recognized as members of the ejido in 1942 but who had not received land in the ejido by then. Although many of them never received land and saw their ejido certificate canceled at a later stage, most managed to get their own ejido plot in the end. Here again, the young unmarried men are the ones who did relatively well. 70 per cent (16 of 23) of the young men who had no land in 1942, managed to get a plot at a later stage. Although several of these landless ejidatarios got a plot through inheritance, most of them acquired land by other ways. This is shown in the following table.

Table 5.3 Types of acquisition of land by landless ejidatarios since 1942

	inheritance	clearing of land	abandoned land	dispossession	total
Married men	0	1	2	0	3
Young unmarried men	7	2	6	1	16
Total	7	3	8	1	19

Hence most land is obtained by the abandonment of plots by other ejidatarios and by clearing new land. In total eight men received or took land that had been abandoned. However, this does not automatically mean that eight ejidatarios abandoned their plots. Abandoned plots were often divided into smaller plots and given to several people. Three men acquired land by clearing parts that had not been included in the arable land. This was land situated on the fringes of the ejido or concerned land under water that was drained. Dispossession means that land was taken away from a migrated ejidatario (without his consent) and given to somebody else in the village.

The diverse events which occurred over the years make it artificial to analyze processes of land acquisition only in general terms. I will give two contrasting examples of stories about land. Ramón Romero is a good example of a young boy who was registered as ejidatario in 1942 but who did not receive land at the start. He managed to get ejido land later on.

*Ramón Romero: a plot through a box of beer*

Ramón was one of the young unmarried boys who were excluded from the land distribution of the endowment and extension. He was 16 years old in 1942 and one of the middle sons of Andrés Romero, who acquired several plots of land. Like several others who did not receive a plot of land at that time, Ramón was officially registered as an ejidatario of La Canoa and received the official ejido certificate which proved his membership of the ejido. For Ramón this official membership of the ejido was important as he hoped to get land at a later stage. Like many others, Ramón left the village. He went to Guadalajara and then to Mexico City where he entered the military school. He came back to the village when his father fell ill and died. Then he decided not to return to the military school. His father left his plots to Ramón's eldest brother and to one of his grandsons. So Ramón remained landless. However, he still was an official member of the ejido and hoped to acquire some land in the future.

Ramón's chance to get some land came a couple of years later. One of the men who had received a plot of ejido land, had left for the coast of Jalisco and never returned. It was decided by the ejidatarios that the plot of 3 hectares that he had left behind, would be given to one of five men in the village at that time who were officially members of the ejido but who had never received a plot of land. Ramón was one of the five. Ramón made clear to his uncle Miguel Romero that he was interested in the plot, but his uncle did not want him to have the land and refused to help him. An official of the MAR was to come to La Canoa to conduct a lottery among the five men. Ramón said to me that this plot "cost him" a box of beers and twenty pesos. Ramón:

*I went to see the official of Agrarian Reform in Autlán. He told me to bring him a box of beer. He said that he would do the lottery with numbers on balls. The left ball would be the "right one". At the ejido meeting at which the plot was raffled, one of the five participants managed to get there before me, but luckily he chose another ball. When it was my turn I said: let's see whether I am lucky and I took the right ball. Things always happened in these ways, bad habits in everything, everything...*

Ramón proved to be even more lucky as his land was in the part that received irrigation later on. Later on Ramón cleared a plot of three hectares of rainfed swampy land that was not used by anybody. So, Ramón now belongs to the privileged landowners in the village although he had to arrange it himself and without help from his influential and rich father and uncle.

Let us now contrast this story with the story of one of these men who left their plot behind. In this case the man who left the plot returned to the ejido in his old age and I could therefore hear his side of the story.

*Juan Rivera: bad luck in leaving his plot*

Juan Rivera passed the years of the Revolution in Autlán and came to live in the village when two of his sisters married men from La Canoa. He is now an old man in his eighties who walks with great difficulty. He is a widower and never had children. He is taken care of by the family of one of his sister's sons. Juan was actively involved in the distribution of plots at the start of the ejido La Canoa. He remembers how they received wire netting to demarcate the different plots of the endowment grant. He himself was actively involved in this. In the lottery, Juan received one of the plots. As he was one of the few ejidatarios who knew how to read and write, he was several times ejido secretary. However, he was never much involved in ejido politics. Juan is one of the ejidatarios who left his ejido plot to try his luck elsewhere. Juan:

*I have land here, but I worked the land and it did not produce anything. It did not rain in these years. I had a house here which I lost to Elias Romero as he lent me money for the cultivation and I could not pay him back. So, he kept the house. When the land did not produce and I lost my house, I paid my debts and left for Colima. Miguel Romero, who was ejido commissioner at that time, asked me what I wanted to do with my land. I told him: lend it out to someone who has to maintain a family and when I get back, we will see how we settle it... Juan worked on the construction of roads and as cattlebreeder in different states of Mexico.*

In the meantime the irrigation system started working in the valley and Juan's plot of three and a half hectares was one of the irrigated plots. Vicente Cosío, the man whom they had given Juan's land to, had passed away and the ejido had passed the right to use the land to his widow Elena Michel. Juan was officially canceled as member of the ejido. Juan returned to the ejido after many years when his wife fell ill. When he returned, he saw that his land was irrigated and that Elena was working it.

*Juan: I said to Elena: Elena, every year that they pay you the sugarcane, you should help me with something. She responded very irritably: I never asked you to give me the land. You did not give it to me. The ejido gave me the land. She has my land and does not help me with anything. The other cañeros (sugarcane growers) tell me that every year she receives 18 or 20 million pesos [six and a half thousand dollars] and she has never given me anything. I would like to go to a lawyer. Perhaps I could get the land back. Once a lawyer told me that it would be easy to get the land back. I would like to get the land back in order to sell it and get myself cured. I need an operation. For two years I have had severe pains. Other people sold their land, but I never did. I never rented it out either. I worked it year after year in the beginning but it did not produce. Year after year we lost on it.*

*Why does this woman not want to help me with a little money. She can keep the land for her children. I cannot work anymore. The teachers of the secondary school also told me that it would be easy to recover the land as I never signed an agreement for the ejido to give my land to somebody else.*

Although Juan's frustration is logical, his claim to the land is very weak. He left his plot a long time ago and Elena has been the recognized ejidataria for a long time. Some people in the village state that Elena was indeed very ungrateful towards Juan and was not even prepared to give him a glass of water. Elena in her turn, had her own history. She became a widow seventeen years ago when the youngest of her twelve children was only three years old. She and her children always had to work hard to maintain the family. The boys worked as day laborers and the girls did domestic work in other houses. Elena herself always did extra washing and ironing work for people in the village and embroidery. Hence, in her case the land was a valuable and necessary support for the family economy.

### **Migration and the Renting out of Ejido Land: a Risky Endeavor**

I decided to pay special attention to the renting out of ejido land by migrant ejidatarios and the organizing practices which developed around this. This is particularly interesting since



the agrarian law prohibited the abandoning or renting out of ejido plots for more than two consecutive years. Yet, migration became increasingly important in the lives of the ejidatarios and many rented out their land for many years in succession. I was interested to know how these arrangements were organized in the light of a law that did not allow this. I also wanted to find out what the influence of the law and the MAR finally had been on these practices. It was obvious that these practices took place within fields of tension as many ejidatarios mentioned that migrant ejidatarios risked their land being taken away from them.

In the first years after the ejido was established several migrants were dispossessed of their agrarian rights. At that time the interest in the land was not so great and although the dispossessions certainly caused tensions the affected ejidatarios did not try to stop the dispossession by lodging a formal case at the MAR. The local powerholders, and especially Miguel Romero, had considerable influence in the taking away of plots from migrants and the redistribution of abandoned or confiscated plots. The following example illustrates this point.

*Iginio: a migrated ejidatario being dispossessed of his land rights*

Iginio was registered as an ejidatario in 1942 but had not received a plot of land. However, his father Claudio possessed four plots of land and later passed one to Iginio. After receiving the plot, Iginio went to work in grape cultivation in the United States. He stayed several years in the USA and his father Claudio took care of his plot during his absence. Then an *IUP* was held in the ejido. Miguel Romero was commissioner at that time and he wanted to take the plot away from Iginio and another ejidatario who was in the United States. The MAR official told Claudio that for 100 pesos he would not make a problem about his son living elsewhere and Iginio could keep the land. However, Claudio refused to pay the official. Iginio in his turn refused to come back to the village. Iginio said that in that period he was having a good time in the USA and was not very interested in the land. So, the agrarian rights of Iginio and the other man were withdrawn and the plots were given to José Romero, one of Miguel's son who had no land. When Iginio returned to the village years later he received another of Claudio's plots. However, Iginio never forgave don Miguel and still grows angry when he talks about the case.

Don Miguel not only aimed to accumulate land for himself and his family but also helped many other people. We saw that in the case of Juan Rivera who left his plot to the ejido, he gave the land to Vicente Cosío, a landless villager. Pedro Bautista also remembered how don Miguel helped him with a plot of land.

*Pedro Bautista: receiving the plot of a migrated ejidatario*

Pedro's father Antonio had received land in the ejido at the start, but he sold his house in the village and left for Atlán with his family to start a little goat farm. From then onwards he did not use his ejido plot anymore. When Antonio died, the goats were divided among the four children and Pedro returned to La Canoa. He was 24 years old at that time. He tried to reclaim his father's land but that had already been given to somebody else. However, don Miguel, who had been a good friend of Antonio said that he would help Pedro. After some time Pedro was

given the land of an ejidatario who stayed most of the time in Mexico City. This man was angry as he wanted to keep his plot, but being most of the time in Mexico City his position was not a strong one and the land became Pedro's.

However, as land became scarcer and more valuable over the years, and especially after the arrival of irrigation in the sixties, migrants did not take such a passive attitude anymore if the commissioner or somebody else threatened to take their land away. Most migrants had become wealthier and had more means to fight for the land. Real legal fights in which the MAR would become involved and which could take many years were something most people wanted to avoid. Several people who intended to dispossess migrants of their land, preferred to give up when they realized it would become a difficult case. So, the individual plots remained stable in the hands of their "transnational owners" and no land was taken away from migrants anymore. At this stage not even don Miguel succeeded in taking land away from migrants ejidatarios. However, as migration and renting out the ejido plot remained a risky situation migrants used to take several precautionary measures.

One precautionary measure was the payment of the ejido land tax. This tax was collected by the ejido treasurer and written down in a book. The ejidatarios received a receipt of payment. Although the amount of money paid was negligible, this tax acquired a different and very important role. It became a "proof of land use". People who rented out their land, insisted on paying the tax themselves as this was considered to be an important proof of their being in the ejido and working the land themselves. If, instead, the leaseholder paid the tax and had the receipts in his name, he could try and claim rights to the land at the MAR. Furthermore, in the case of an official investigation (for example, during an IUP) the payment of the land tax by the leaseholder would weaken the position of the migrated ejidatario. In addition to paying this land tax every year, the migrant ejidatarios also tried to be present at the IUP meeting in the ejido. When an IUP meeting was announced by the MAR, migrant ejidatarios in the United States were immediately informed by their relatives in La Canoa and if possible they would return from the United States. The migrant ejidatarios also tried to remain good friends with the ejido commissioner and paid officials if necessary. In this way, they would not make problems about their case.

For the official the migrant ejidatarios provided an interesting way to raise some extra money. They tried to strike deals with these ejidatarios in the sense of not making problems about the fact that they lived in the United States if they paid some money. However, the power of the official was limited. He depended on other ejidatarios and often on the ejido commissioner for information about ejidatarios who were living abroad. These situations could be interesting for the ejido commissioner and offer room for negotiation as he was in a position to inform the functionaries, or to ask money from the migrated ejidatario. The following example illustrates this dynamic well.

*Pedro Bautista becomes a migrant himself*

We saw before how don Miguel helped Pedro Bautista to acquire a plot of land of an ejidatario who lived in Mexico City. However, Pedro himself also migrated and later entered into problems with don Miguel. The following part of an interview I had with Pedro, shows this very well.

M: *Did you never have problems with your land because of your residence in el Norte?*

P: *I never rented my land to others and never had problems. Only on one occasion. Miguel Romero has always been very good to me, but later when he became commissioner again he changed and tried to make life difficult for me. But I always paid the land tax. They could not take the land away from me. When there was an IUP meeting the commissioner always warned me and I came over from the USA. On one occasion I was warned by Pedro Montaña, who was commissioner in Vista Hermosa at that time. He said that this time things looked very bad for migrated ejidatarios with the IUP. He told me to be present at the IUP meeting in Vista Hermosa [a neighboring ejido] in order to be better prepared for the meeting in La Canoa. I went to the IUP meeting in Vista Hermosa and heard all the problems there. After the meeting we went to Pedro's house together with the MAR official. The official asked me: how long have you lived in the USA? I said: five years. He said: don't you know that that is prohibited? I said: yes, but I also know that we have the obligation to maintain our family. The official said that he could arrange the matter if I gave him ten thousand pesos. I told him that I did not have that amount of money. He said: how can I believe that after five years in the U.S, you do not have this money? I answered him that even if I did have the money I would not give it to him as there was no reason to do so. When I left to go home, the official followed me and told me where I could leave him the money. But I did not pay.*

M: *And what happened finally when he arrived at the IUP meeting in La Canoa?*

P: *Nothing, I thought that he would cause me trouble, but nothing happened. The same happened when David [an official of the assistance office of the MAR in Aulán] came to do the IUP.*

M: *When was that?*

P: *That was when Ignacio Romero was commissioner (1985-1988). At the meeting in which they checked the land titles David did not say anything about my case. But after the meeting David told Ignacio to tell me to come to Aulán on a certain day and time. Ignacio said that they were threatening to take the land away from me. I did not go to see David. Three days later Ignacio and David visited me at my house. I said that I did not want to talk to David as he only wanted money and I did not intend to pay any money. David said: You don't live here. I said: No, but that is something that cannot be avoided. I am still a Mexican and was never nationalized in the USA. We were quarreling like that for an hour. Then I said: Is it money that you want? David said that he did not want money. I said: I have been ejidatario for more than 50 years. I always paid my tax. If you think you can take the land away from me, try it. But in that case I will lodge an official complaint about what you are doing here. I was already retired from my job in the USA then. I have never heard anything about it. I know they cannot do anything against me. I have my ejido certificate.*

Although Pedro likes to stress that he never paid anything to avoid trouble, other ejidatarios told me that Pedro always paid the ejido commissioners to keep him informed about what was going on and to support him at the IUP meetings. Pedro's situation was less risky than that of other migrated ejidatarios as most of the time he himself came over to till the land

in La Canoa or his sons managed the land. Also the fact that, unlike Iginio, he always came over to be present at the IUP meetings, made his position much stronger.

The renting out of ejido plots by migrants was not only a risky endeavor because the migrant infringed the law, but also because the leaseholder was building personal rights to the plot. The person who rented and tilled the same ejido plot for several years, legally acquired rights to this plot (the land belonged to the person who tilled it). Hence, unlike many other illegal transaction where nobody had a personal interest in interfering, with these renting arrangements the leaseholder could turn into a personal enemy of the migrant ejidatario. This becomes clear in the following example.

*A leaseholder tries to acquire the rights to an ejido plot*

In the sixties Daniel Fábregas started renting two and a half hectares of rainfed land from Ignacia Hernández, a widow who lived in the United States with all her children. When Daniel died, his sons continued renting Ignacia's land. Before dying Daniel had told his wife Aurora García: *That land is yours, don't let anybody take it away from you!* Every year Ignacia came to the village to agree on the renting arrangement and pay the land tax. However, Aurora had twice paid the tax before Ignacia arrived in the village and Ignacia had been furious about it.

When Ricardo García, Aurora's brother became commissioner (1970-1973), Ricardo told Aurora that he could easily dispossess Ignacia of her land rights and pass these to Aurora or one of her sons. They decided to start a formal procedure at the MAR to start this process. Aurora found herself in a good position. She had worked the land for many years, she had paid the tax several times, and she had the support of the ejido commissioner. However, Ignacia was not prepared to lose the land and she fought back. Among other things, she claimed that she had been living in the village all these years. As tensions between the families in the village rose and things seemed to get out of hand, Aurora told her sons not to put any more efforts into the case.

By not putting any more efforts into the conflict, and by stopping their dealings with the MAR bureaucracy, it was most probably that Aurora would lose the case. Especially as Ignacia actively negotiated with the MAR officials. In 1973 the MAR issued an official decision in which Ignacia was indeed recognized in her rights to the plot. So, Ignacia kept the land.

After having won the case Ignacia and her sons worked the land themselves for three consecutive years. They obviously did not want to run any more risks with renting arrangements. Later Ignacia sold the land to another ejidatario. As will be discussed later on, sale of ejido land was a safer option than renting the land out. Aurora regretted the affair very much as she would have preferred to continue renting the land or, even better, buy the land. For several years the two families did not speak to each other. However, now relations have been normalized and they even visit each other again.

The migrated ejidatarios were well aware that the danger came from the leaseholder and for that reason they were very careful to whom they rented their land. They often left a relative in charge of the land. The other ejidatarios followed the strategy of not causing problems. As long as they were not involved as a potential beneficiary and knew that it was very improbable that the land of the emigrated ejidatario would be allotted to them, they would not start any trouble. So, no objections were ever made in the majority of renting

arrangements by migrants.

In conclusion, we can see a certain patterning of organizing practices around the renting out of land by migrated ejidatarios. These practices changed with the changing value of ejido land. When the value of the land was low, and people had less resources to fight a powerful ejido commissioner, several migrants were dispossessed without fights being made about it. In that period the law worked in the favor of the powerholders. With land becoming more valuable and ejidatarios acquiring more resources and experience, the practices changed. The resources at stake became more important, and people were prepared to fight for it if necessary. Local power relations had less influence, and the support of the ejido commissioner was not sufficient anymore to dispossess a migrant ejidatarios of his land. So, practices developed which strengthened the private property character of ejido land possession. The MAR officials were in a weak position. As we saw, they had no register of individual ejido plots and they certainly held no registration of the renting out of plots or residence of the ejidatarios. The MAR officials were totally dependent on information from ejidatarios and could only act in cases where someone wanted to start a conflict with a migrated ejidatario. The organizing practices which developed as precautionary measures (paying the ejido land tax, coming over from the USA for the IUP meetings, and paying officials and commissioners) meant that there was a lot of "legal game playing". I call this "game-playing" as these activities had no real effect on the practices about land, it happened in the margin. The only effect of the agrarian law was that it opened (a little) room for negotiations. Yet, the migrated ejidatarios had the most powerful position. In conclusion, we see organizing practices in which the individual ejidatarios had considerable autonomy and in which the agrarian law and the bureaucracy only stimulated some "legal game-playing" activities in which officials and commissioners had a limited "bargaining position" and could earn some extra money.

It can be expected that the new agrarian law of 1992 will finish off with the "bargaining position" of officials and the official "game-playing" with respect to renting out by migrants as it permits the renting out of ejido land.

### A Myriad of Transactions and the Fragmentation of the Land

Table 5.4 Types of transactions with ejido plots between 1942 and 1993<sup>5</sup>

Inheritance	96
Buying and selling	29
Dispossession	3
Exchange of plots	8
Abandonment	4
Total	140

Table 5.4 shows that the arable land has been a very dynamic field with respect to transactions.<sup>6</sup> When we compare the situation of 1993 with that of 1942, we see that certain families have been able to acquire many plots in the years after the establishment of the ejido. For example, Miguel Romero and his sons started with five plots (approximately 20 hectares altogether) while in 1993 the widow and children of Miguel Romero together possessed seven plots of ejido land (approximately 26 hectares together). Juan García and his children possessed seven plots in 1942 (24 hectares) and 10 plots in 1993 (36 hectares). The most dramatic concentration of land is to be found in the case of a brother of don Miguel, Andrés Romero. He and his sons possessed nine plots in 1942 (30 hectares) and 14 plots in 1993 (46 hectares).

Figure 5.2 Possession of plots by three families in 1942 and 1993<sup>7</sup>

<b>1942</b>	<b>1993</b>
<p><b>Miguel Romero (2 plots) x Engracia Jiménez</b>  <i>Rosa (26)</i>  <b>Francisco (24; 1 plot)</b>  <b>Miguel (20; 1 plot)</b>  <b>Estanislao (19; 1plot)</b>  Lorenzo (18)  <i>Soledad (18)</i>  <i>Federica (16)</i>  José (12)  Emilio (10)  <i>Ignacia (9)</i>  Filomeno (4)</p>	<p>Miguel Romero x <i>Engracia Jiménez</i>  <b>Rosa (1 plot)</b>  Francisco  <b>Miguel (1 plot)</b>  <b>Estanislao (2 plots)</b>  <b>Lorenzo (1 plot)</b>  <i>Soledad</i>  <i>Federica</i>  <b>José (1 plot)</b>  Emilio  <i>Ignacia</i>  Filomeno</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>x Guadalupe Medina (1 plot)</i></p> <p><i>Teresa</i>  Ramón  Juan  Federico  <i>Lorena</i>  Victor  José Luis  Mario</p>
<p><b>Juan García (3 plots) x Hermelinda Lomeli</b>  <b>José (37; 1 plot)</b>  <b>Rubén (35; 1 plot)</b>  <i>Elena</i>  <i>Alicia (27)</i>  <b>Juan (26; 1 plot)</b>  <b>Tomás (23; 1 plot)</b>  <i>Aurora (20)</i>  <i>Esperanza (16)</i>  Ricardo (14)  <i>Margarita (8)</i></p>	<p>Juan García x <i>Hermelinda Lomeli</i>  <b>José (2 plots)</b>  <b>Rubén (1 plot)</b>  <i>Elena</i>  <i>Alicia</i>  <b>Juan (1 plot)</b>  <b>Tomás (2 plots)</b>  <i>Aurora (1 plot)</i>  <i>Esperanza</i>  <b>Ricardo (3 plots)</b>  <i>Margarita</i></p>
<p><b>Andrés Romero (5 plots) x María Moreno</b>  Esteban  <b>Mario (30; 1 plot)</b>  <b>Tomás (27; 2 plots)</b>  Victor (25)  <b>Sergio (24; 1 plot)</b>  Faustino (22)  Inocencio (19)  Joaquín (17)  Ramón (16)  Diego (12)  <i>Rosaria (9)</i>  Francisco (7)</p>	<p>Andrés Romero x <i>María Moreno</i>  Esteban  <b>Mario (1 plot)</b>  <b>Tomás (2 plots)</b>  <b>Victor (2 plots)</b>  <b>Sergio (1 plot)</b>  <b>Faustino (1 plot)</b>  <b>Inocencio (2 plots)</b>  Joaquín  <b>Ramón (2 plots)</b>  Diego  <i>Rosaria</i>  <b>Francisco (3 plots)</b></p>

In the case of Andrés Romero the situation is even more extreme as Andrés left one of his plots to a grandson and two other plots have been taken away from him and given to others in the ejido. This means that a growth of eight plots in his family has to be explained! One may wonder how this expansion has been possible when we take into consideration that the ejido has not received more land since 1942 and no large scale dispossession has occurred. Let us see where they got their extra plots from.

Table 5.5 Types of land acquisition by Miguel Romero, Andrés Romero, Juan García and their children between 1942 and 1993.

	inheritance	dispossession	buying	clearing	abandonment	total
Miguel R. and child.	1	1				2
Andrés R. and child.		1	4	2	1	8
Juan G. and children	1		2			3
Total	2	2	6	2	1	13

From table 5.5 it becomes clear that the buying of land from other ejidatarios has been the most important mechanism through which these families acquired more land. The abandoning of ejido plots, fragmentation of ejido plots, and buying and selling of parts of it has been a wide-spread phenomenon in the ejido.

#### *Increasing Fragmentation of Ejido Plots and an Increasing Number of Ejidatarios*

On the basis of the genealogy of land I concluded that in 1942 the land was divided into 119 different plots among 77 ejidatarios. As a result of fragmentation of plots and the clearing of new land, in 1993 there were 136 plots divided among 94 ejidatarios (three of the 97 ejidatarios do not possess an ejido plot but only a *coamil*).<sup>8</sup> As the amount of land has only scarcely augmented (by clearing new lands) it is clear that the average size of plots has diminished, as has the average number of hectares each ejidatario possesses. This becomes clear in the following table.



Table 5.6 Distribution of land in the ejido La Canoa in 1942 and 1993

	1942	1993
ejidatarios with land	77	94
total number of hectares	422	438
number of plots	118	136
average number of plots per ejidatario	1.5	1.4
average size of plot in ha.	3.6	3.2
average number of ha. per ejidatario	5.5	4.7

Although the figures are not dramatic, table 5.6 shows that succeeding generations work ever smaller plots of land. An important subdivision of plots has taken place since the establishment of the ejido. A great number of plots nowadays measures less than two hectares. This serious fragmentation of the land is above all due to the transfer of plots to more than one child and to the sale of fractions of plots. However, this does not mean that the total amount of land ejidatarios possess is that small. Many ejidatarios have more than one plot of land. Some ejidatarios possess up to five different plots.

### The Many Elements Influencing the Inheritance of Ejido Land

The inheritance of ejido plots also formed an interesting theme of study. Before the ejido was established, all ejidatarios had been poor landless laborers. So customs concerning the inheritance of land did not exist. The agrarian law left the ejidatarios relatively free in the choice of their heir and only made the restriction that the plot could not be divided and that the agrarian right had to be left to one heir.<sup>9</sup> So, it was interesting to study what kind of inheritance practices finally developed.

What happened is that inheritance practices developed which are strongly embedded within the ideology of the family. Ejido land tenure is seen as a form of private property, but also as family patrimony within patriarchally organized families. There is a strong feeling that the "owner" of the land has certain moral obligations to take good care of the land and make sure that it will be there for his or her children. Land and the inheritance of land are used to keep continuity in the family. Mutual obligations of care between parents and children influence the choice of the heir and ensure that there is no fixed person in the family with a "natural right" to inherit the land. As we saw in chapter four, this makes the inheritance of land a long-lasting process in which any new development may lead to a change of the heir. It will be obvious that this gives rise to many tensions and conflicts. As Sabeau points out, "property can focus attention and create expectations, provide opportunities to exhibit skill and character, and establish connections and cooperation or

points of resentment and disruption” (Sabeau 1990: 33).<sup>10</sup> As we saw in chapter four, the increasingly transnationalized lives of ejidatarios and their children only seems to make the inheritance question more complex.

The notion that the land is family patrimony and that it should be used to maintain and support the different members of the family and not just one means that many ejidatarios want to leave their plot to more than one child. So, the official rule that only one person could inherit the agrarian right causes certain tensions. If the land is left to one son, he is often made to promise that he will look after the other brothers and sisters once the parents have passed away. For the same reason the land is also often passed from the husband to the wife, who can continue looking after the land for the benefit of the whole family. F. and K. von Benda Beckmann talk in this respect of “the social continuity function of inherited property” which “instills a sense of responsibility to guard and maintain the property” (F. and K. von Benda Beckmann 1998: 18). Inheritance by a wife may be seen as the postponement of the transfer to the next generation. Often it is not clear yet who will be the most appropriate heir to the land in the future and then the land can better remain with the longest living partner. At the transfer to the next generation, the land normally returns to a man as parents prefer a son to inherit the land over a daughter. I will give several examples of inheritance cases as this is the best way to show the complexity of the issue.

The idea that all the children should profit equally from the land is well expressed by Elena Michel. She is the widow discussed above who received the land of Juan Rivera.

*Elena Michel*

Elena is a widow who owns three and a half hectares of irrigated land with sugarcane. She has 12 children of whom four live in the United States. Only one son (the oldest) lives in the village with his family. Elena lived on her own but recently a daughter got pregnant and moved back in with her. Now she lives with her daughter and grandson. I asked her what the inheritance customs were in the village with respect to land.

E: *The custom is that the youngest boy inherits the land.*

M: *Why is that?*

E: *I do not know. Actually it seems better to me to leave the land to a daughter, who divides the product of the land every year among all brothers and sisters. Daughters-in-law are always very greedy. If you make such an arrangement with a son, you run the danger that the daughter-in-law wants to keep everything for herself. Daughters are better in that respect.*

M: *But then you may have the same problem with the sons-in-law...*

E: *(laughing) Yes, that is true, sometimes I think that I would do better to sell the land and spend the money, in order to save them all this trouble.*

Several ejidatarios expressed the idea of selling the land and divide the money among the children. In particular, ejidatarios who have no children left in the village anymore talked about this possibility. With the change of article 27 of the Mexican Constitution and the

agrarian law in 1992 the sale of ejido land has become a legal and relatively easy transaction. On the other hand, the sale of land goes against the idea of land as family patrimony. So, people find it difficult to decide to do this.

As was already mentioned an important element that influences inheritance decisions is the element of care and obligation. A son that has looked after his parents until death has created certain rights to the land of his parents. This may sometimes lead to awkward situations among brothers and sisters who do not want one of them to look after their parents too much and in this way create rights to the land. In their turn parents also consider another element of care in their decisions. They often prefer to leave the land to children who really need it and preferably to children who live in the village. For example, they may decide to leave the land to the only son who has no job. Alternatively, as we saw in chapter four, a son who migrated to the United States and declares that he does not intend to come back, may be replaced as heir by a son in the village. All these considerations taken into account, imply that the choice of heir is not an easy one. It also explains why officially registered heirs are often changed. For example, most of the people who were listed as the heirs of the ejidatarios in the register of the RAN in 1942 in the end did not inherit the land.

The ejidatario can change the designated heir whenever he or she wants to. Before 1992 the ejidatarios had to go to the offices of the MAR to register or change the designated heir. There they had to deliver a letter which had to be signed by the majority of ejidatarios and signed and stamped by the ejido commissioner. Although this was an easy procedure, many officials tried to make it more complicated and asked money from the ejidatarios. One of the officials of the promotoría in Autlán, David, was always prepared to help ejidatarios with their inheritance papers in exchange for large amounts of money. In the case of María's land (see chapter 4) he asked Lorenzo for 500,000 pesos (\$170) to register the heir at the office in Guadalajara. When a couple of weeks later María decided to change the heir, he again asked for the same amount of money. From other ejidatarios I heard that he had asked for 1,500,000 pesos (\$500) or even 2,100,000 pesos (\$700) to register an heir. This obstacle which David caused the ejidatarios in the registration of their heir could have important consequences. For example, on one occasion Juan García told me that he wanted to change the heir of his ejido plot but that David had asked him 1,500,000 pesos. Juan had refused to pay and asked me what he had to do to change the heir in Guadalajara. A couple of weeks later Juan had died without having been able to change his inheritance papers.

In the case of ejidatarios who possessed several plots, these were often transferred to different children and this transfer often started when the ejidatario was still alive. This happened when the ejidatario was warned that the agrarian law prohibited the possession of more than one plot and that plots might be taken away from him. Some plots were then put in names of one or more sons. In some cases this was only a formality and the father remained the "real owner" and continued to use the land as before. If the registered son did not show much interest in the land and left the village, the father could then put the land in

the name of another son. However, in other cases a gradual transition of property rights took place as father and son worked together for many years and the father more and more handed the management of the land over to the son. However, normally the authority of the father in decisions over land remained very strong.

Through these practices land could be divided among different sons from one generation to the next. This partly explains the growth in the number of ejidatarios in La Canoa from 1942 to 1993 (see table 5.6). I will illustrate this with the example of an ejidatario who left part of his land to two of his sons during his life and left his remaining land to another son. This case also gives insights into the many elements which influence the choice of an heir and the problems the change of heir may cause within the family.

*Julio Pradera: building up inheritance rights by looking after the parents*

Julio Pradera received one hectare of land in the part that La Canoa received together with Autlán and three and a half hectares later in the extension grant. Julio had 7 sons and 2 daughters. His two oldest sons received land themselves at the founding of the ejido. However, the other five sons remained landless. From the beginning Julio had put his son Federico down as the heir to his land. Federico was the oldest son after the two who had received land themselves. At a certain moment Julio decided to give the one hectare in the Autlán part, to two of his other landless sons. Although it was not much land, they could at least produce some maize for home consumption. This still left three sons landless. Federico knew that he would inherit the remaining plot of three and a half hectares. All sons married and the youngest son Manuel stayed with his parents, working their land. After some years his father told Manuel that he wanted to arrive at an arrangement with him. He said that if Manuel would take care of him and his mother and would pay for them if they fell ill, he would leave the land to Manuel. Manuel said that it was not necessary for his father to leave him the land and that he would continue to till his land and look after them anyhow. Manuel's father was lucky as his land fell within the irrigation project and received irrigation in the sixties. Manuel married and his wife came to live in the parental house. (This is not very usual and according to Manuel's wife the young couple suffered greatly from the interference of the mother-in-law). When his father fell ill, he told Manuel that he wanted him to have the land and that he did not want Manuel to have problems with Federico. Julio realized that once he would pass away, Federico (the official heir) could immediately take the land away from Manuel. Another solution would have been to register Julio's wife as the heir but she did not want to be involved in ejido matters or go to the ejido meetings. So, Manuel went to the promotoría in Autlán and arranged the papers to change the heir from Federico to himself. The papers were signed by Manuel's father, a majority of ejidatarios and were to be signed and stamped by the executive committee of the ejido. The ejido commissioner at that time did not feel very happy with the affair and said to Manuel that he would have preferred Julio to come and sign these paper in his presence. However, he signed and stamped the papers anyhow. The commissioner's objection was logical as the sudden change of heir by old and dying ejidatarios can be the cause of tremendous conflicts. Then the papers were sent to Guadalajara. Federico, who heard that he had been removed as heir of Julio's land, was furious. All these years he had dreamt of becoming an ejidatario. He was very attached to the land and had always worked his *coamil* in the commons.

When his father died Manuel continued working the land as he had been doing for many years already. However, the ejido treasurer at that time, continued using Julio's name for the ejido tax.

Registration in the ejido always is very behind on inheritances. However, Manuel was angry that they did not change the names and he refused to pay the ejido contribution for several years. This offered an opening to Federico. The ejido commissioner at that time, Rubén García, told Federico that he could easily take the land away from Manuel and pass it to Federico. He offered Federico his assistance in lodging a case at the MAR. He told Federico to pay the ejido contribution for his father's land. He suggested that this would help him in the struggle to get the land transferred to his name. Federico paid Rubén and an official who was helping him for their efforts and hoped to get the land.

One of Manuel's *compadres* told him that Federico had been paying the contribution and had started procedures to get the land. Manuel told Federico that he should give up the struggle as there was no way in which he could ever recover the land. *Not even our mother could take the land away from me, if she wanted to*, he told him. However, Manuel still went to see the ejido treasurer. He managed to get the name on the tax payment changed from Julio to Manuel and from then on Manuel paid the tax himself.

Manuel told his brother Federico that he had better leave the case, as people tried to raise his hopes only in order to get money from him. However, Federico was angry and stopped speaking to Manuel for a time. Manuel never heard anything about a formal case against him concerning the inheritance. Federico let the case resting. After a time, Federico started talking to him again and relations have been normalized. Manuel is not so much angry with Federico but more with Rubén García and the MAR officials as, according to Manuel, they only tried to get money from Federico, while they knew that it was a lost case from the start.

Manuel was well aware of the fact that when his father had passed away, he could have recovered the hectare that his father had given to two other brothers, as this formed part of the possession of his father. But Manuel said that he would not act against the will of his father. These two brothers in the end sold their land. Yet, the buyer of the land realized that Manuel was the legitimate owner of the land and could cause him problems in the future. So, he went to Manuel and asked him if he agreed to the sale. Manuel told him that he agreed to it because their father had given them this plot of land and it was their responsibility. Manuel did not sign any document concerning the land. The buyer was Samuel, a brother of Manuel's wife. He was already an ejidatario, so no extra paperwork had to be done in order to make him an ejidatario. Still it was very much a question of trust between Samuel and Manuel. If Manuel later claimed that the land had been his and that he had not agreed to the sale by his brothers, Samuel would have had a difficult time trying to keep the land.

Manuel: *I did not sign any paper and told Samuel that I agreed to it. The only thing that can happen in the future is that they come from the MAR office in Guadalajara and that they call my name and ask me how many hectares of land I possess. I will tell them: four. And they could say: but here it says five hectares. I will then answer: but my father gave one hectare to my brothers. If the commissioner or somebody else then commented that my brothers had sold the land, the official might ask me if I had agreed to the sale. I will then answer: No, but I did not want to impede them because it was my father's will to leave this land to my brothers. As in the majority of land sales, no problem was ever made about it.*

In the case of Julio we notice several considerations that play a role in the choice of heirs and the transfer of land rights to the next generation. The fact that Manuel had looked after his parents for a long time upto their death, gave him certain rights to his father's land.

Although it is logical that his elder brother was very disappointed at being removed as the heir of the land after having been registered as the heir all those years, he did not have a strong case. When their father finally made the formal change of heir before his death, there was little that Federico could do to fight for it. Moral principles played a role in the decision of Manuel to respect his father's decision to give part of the land to two of his brothers. This division of lands had already taken place a long time before his father's death, so everybody had been used to this situation and accepted it. For the same reason, out of respect for his father, Manuel accepted the fact that his two brothers decided to sell this land.

Although he did not agree at all with their decision. The one who took most risks at this land sale, was the buyer. However, he accepted Manuel's word that he would not make problems about it. Manuel is a very respected man in the village and this oral agreement offered enough security to proceed with the purchase of the land. What we find here is a complex combination of moral rights and obligations, locally developed inheritance practices and the influence of formal rules and procedures. This complex combination of elements can be found in many inheritances and can lead to different outcomes.

The following example also illustrates expectations and quarrels around an inheritance. Here the inheritance from grandfather to grandson is canceled by the interference of a father who wants to secure the future position of a disabled son. The aggrieved son decides to accept his father's decision even though he knows that his father is acting illegally and he could easily win a formal case against his father. In this example, elements of care among relatives also play a central role in inheritance decisions.

*Claudio Núñez: assuring the future of a disabled son*

After Claudio Núñez became a widower, he went to live with one of his four daughters in Autlán. Hence, this daughter expected to inherit Claudio's land. However, Iginio, Claudio's only son, insisted on his father coming to live with him in La Canoa. Finally, Iginio convinced his father and Claudio spent his last years with him in La Canoa. The last years of his life, Claudio was an invalid and needed a lot of care. He was caringly looked after by Iginio's wife. In 1992 Claudio died and a delicate situation arose about the inheritance of his land: almost seven hectares of irrigated land and four hectares of rainfed land.

Years before his death Claudio Núñez had made his will, which had already caused a lot of problems. He had told his children that Joaquín, one of Iginio's sons, would be the heir to his land. One of his daughters was so angry about this that she said that she wasn't her father's daughter anymore. Over the years she had calmed down. However, another arrangement was made as well. An oral agreement was made between Claudio, Joaquín, a daughter of Claudio, and a nephew that, although Joaquín would officially inherit all the land, he would leave one hectare to this aunt and nephew.

Joaquín who inherited his grandfather's land when his grandfather died in 1992, was 23 years old, single and preoccupied with the establishment of a workshop in the village. He had followed a technical career which he had not finished, but he felt he knew enough to start a locksmith's workshop. He had a girlfriend in the village whom he wanted to marry, but first he needed to establish himself professionally in order to maintain a family. Joaquín was very religious and

involved in church youth groups in the village for the improvement of the village. Although he put a lot of energy in it, his workshop developed very slowly as the crisis in the region was severe and people did not have much money to spend. The land his grandfather left him was very welcome to him. Joaquín started to develop a serious interest in ejido affairs and went to some ejido meetings. He also became actively involved in a group that had to establish new internal ejido rules (see chapter 9).

However, it soon became clear that Iginio had other intentions for the land that Joaquín had inherited. Iginio wanted this land for another of his five sons, Antonio. Antonio is ill and Iginio and his wife always worried a lot about him. Antonio has always helped his father in the field. Iginio and his wife know that Antonio will never be able to do anything other than work on the land and that he will probably never marry. Hence, they wanted Antonio to inherit the land as a form of insurance. In this way he would at least be able to maintain himself when his parents passed away. So, Iginio decided to change the papers and make Antonio the heir to Claudio's land instead of Joaquín. Joaquín's dreams of becoming an ejidatario vanished. Although Joaquín felt bad about his father changing the inheritance papers, he also understood his father's concern for Antonio. Furthermore, he decided not to challenge his father's authority. However, he did not agree with the way his father was operating. Joaquín:

*My grandfather left the land to me, but there was more. We had made a promise to leave one hectare or more of this land to my aunt and nephew. My father was against this, as my aunt always behaved very badly. But to be honest, my nephew never did anything bad, only my aunt. This agreement was made between my grandfather, my father, my aunt, and me. I loved my grandfather very much and always listened to him. He liked that very much; somebody who listened to him. Perhaps that was the reason that he left the land to me. If I was another type of person I could claim the land and my father could not do anything about it. But if this is the way my father wants it.... if my brother needs it ....*

Although Joaquín accepted his father's decision, he felt extremely frustrated about the whole affair. A short time later, Joaquín suddenly left the village and found work in Las Vegas.

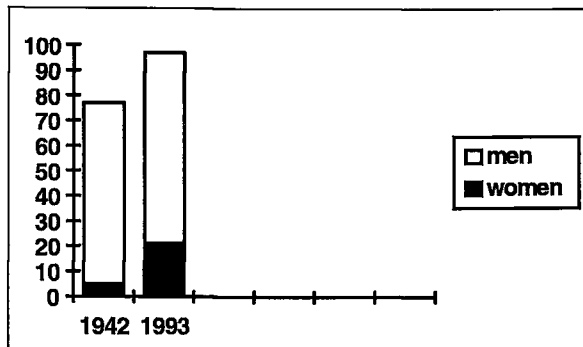
The fact that so many factors influence inheritance decisions and that no fixed inheritance pattern exists, is reflected in the inheritances between 1942 and 1993.

Table 5.7 Types of inheritance of ejido plots from 1942 to 1993

husband - wife	16
father - youngest son	18
father - eldest son	9
father - intermediate son	10
passing over from father alive - son	14
father - only son or only child	7
brother - brother	5
father - daughter	4
mother - son	5
mother - daughter	2
grandfather - grandchild	3
uncle - nephew	3
total	96

Although many people tend to give a common rule for inheritance, such as: *the custom here is that the youngest son inherits the land*, table 5.7 shows a great variety in types of inheritance. It is true that of all inheritances the transfer from father to youngest son is the most common one, but 81 per cent of all inheritances were not from father to youngest son! So taking this as a general rule would give a very distorted view. As was mentioned before, preference is given to sons over daughters. Only when there are no sons left in the family or in special cases, is the land passed to a daughter or a granddaughter. There are, for example, several cases of ejidatarios who left the village with the whole family except a daughter. In these cases, the father passed the land to the daughter.

Figure 5.3 Number of male and female ejidatarios in 1942 and 1993





It is interesting to note that the number of women ejidatarias has grown considerably between 1942 and 1993. This is mainly caused by inheritance. Of the first group of 77 ejidatarios, 5 (6 per cent) were women, whereas of the 97 ejidatarios today, 21 (22 per cent) are women. These first 5 women were all widows. Of the 21 women today, 14 are widows. This growing importance of women in the ejido is an interesting development. Even if the women transfer the land to one of their sons at their death, the fact that many ejidatarios leave the land to their wives and that women tend to live longer than men, means that an important part of the ejidatarios will always be women. Despite the fact that people always claim that the land and the ejido is a man's affair, being the legitimate owner of the land gives women more influence in what happens to the land and the spending of the proceedings from the land. Women also start playing a more active role in the ejido administration (see the following chapters).

Table 5.8 The ways in which the ejidatarias in La Canoa today acquired land since 1942<sup>11</sup>

from 1942 onwards	2
inherited from husband	11
inherited from father	4
inherited from mother	1
purchase	3
total	21

Although it is clear that most women have become an ejidataria by inheriting the land of their husband, we can also see that there are many other ways in which women have obtained land. Here the same holds as with the other figures. When we talk in general terms or trends, and say that the most common way for women to obtain land is by inheritance from her husband, we would not be lying. However, at the same time we would convey an idea of established customs and certain general rules that do no justice to the diversity of practices and the many "exceptions to the rule".

#### *The Difficult Choice of an Heir*

Inheritance is a sensitive subject, that is often not openly discussed within the family. Although there may be a lot of speculation and gossip, it is considered to be a decision of the ejidatario him or herself which is not open to discussion among siblings and their parents. Although we have already seen the tensions, expectations, frictions, disappointments, and joys, which inheritance decisions may cause among "would-be heirs", we may find the same feelings among testators. Many ejidatarios have great difficulties in deciding on the heir of their property and women ejidatarias in particular talked to me about their problem in choosing an heir. When I asked people about inheritance customs in La Canoa, many said that the custom was that the youngest son inherits the land except when he could be described

by the phrase “*no sirve*”. Then another son inherits. This “*no sirve*” generally means that the man in question does not work and spends his money on women and alcohol. In other words, men who are considered to be irresponsible. People are afraid that they will sell the land and prefer another heir instead. This becomes clear in the case of Juana Sánchez.

*Juana Sánchez*

Juana is a woman of 73 years old. She inherited five hectares of rainfed land from her husband. She has six sons and three daughters. Four of her sons live in the village. The youngest son is still living with her in the house, the others are all married and have their own houses. The most obvious solution would be to leave the land to the (youngest) son Heriberto who lives with his mother. But Heriberto is a known drunkard and Juana is afraid that he might sell the land. She has three other sons in the village to whom she could leave the land instead. However, besides the fact that this will cause a conflict with Heriberto, this brings her to another difficult decision: which of the three brothers, Jaime, Angel, or José? All the three other brothers have an interest in the land. At the moment, the brothers in the village work their mother’s land together with a brother in Autlán. They divide the produce and give a part of it to their mother.

Angel is the son who has been most successful. He is a teacher and school inspector. His wife is a teacher as well and they are doing very well. However, Angel also uses his position to support his relatives. For example, he organized a job as a cleaner in a school nearby for Jaime, who has been unemployed for quite some time. He also tried to help Jaime’s wife to get a job as a teacher in La Canoa. Angel is also the son who most supports their mother. So, besides being successful, Angel is considered to be the typical good, responsible son and brother. Therefore, Juana put Angel as the heir to her land. Her wish is that the land will be for Heriberto and that he will till the land, but that Angel will see to it that he does not sell the land. As the land will formally be Angel’s property, Heriberto will not be able to sell it. However, not everybody is sure that Angel will keep the promises he has made to his mother that Heriberto has the right to till the land. Some of these doubts were expressed in the following conversation between Jaime (Juana’s son) and Javier Romero.

*Jaime: My father always wanted Angel to inherit the land, although he is the one who needs it least. I would like to inherit the land myself as I need it more than Angel who is a school inspector and has a wife who is working as a teacher as well. We all agreed that Heriberto is the one who has most rights to the land, as he lived with my mother, works the land, and does not have another job. But he is an irresponsible drunkard and we agreed not to let him inherit the land. Angel is the heir and I am sure that he will help his brothers.*

*Javier: That remains to be seen.... The one who has more, always wants more...*

Juana’s case was often mentioned by the people in La Canoa as an example of the difficult situation an ejidatario can be in when he or she has to designate the heir to the land. Although most people understand Juana’s decision to put Angel as the heir instead of Heriberto, they are not convinced that it will produce a good outcome. Although there is an informal agreement between Angel and his mother, legally the land will be Angel’s when his mother passes away. These informal agreements do not have any legal value and in the past there have been many problems with this kind of agreements. Furthermore, it means that

in the next generation the land will stay with Angel's children. If Heriberto married and had children of his own, there is no way in which the land will ever go to his children. Most ejidatarios expect that serious problems will emerge in this family about the inheritance when Juana dies.

The ejidataria Aurora García has a different kind of problem in the choice of an heir.

*Aurora García*

Aurora García is another widow who inherited the land from her husband. She is 71 years old and owns two and a half hectares of rainfed land and one and a half hectare of irrigated land. She has ten children of whom three live in the United States. The scarcity of land that developed in the generation after the founding of the ejido is well illustrated by the position of her sons. Aurora has five sons in the village who do not own any land. Yet most of these sons earn their living from agriculture and animal husbandry. For that reason several sons and Aurora work together. The sons till their mother's land together, join their cattle, rent extra lands etc. This is one of the few cases of very close cooperation between different households of one family in the village. The sons give their mother part of the maize after the harvest of her plot and they give her anything else she needs. An unmarried daughter lives with Aurora and looks after her. This daughter has a job at the social security office in Autlán. In Aurora's case it is very difficult to decide to whom she will leave the land. She has five sons and one daughter in La Canoa and all are considered to be "good children" in the sense that they respect and support her. Although some do better than others, they can all maintain their families. When I asked Aurora about the possible heir of her land, she said:

*At the moment we use the land in good harmony. In my opinion it is going fine now. I never have to oversee what they are doing. I get everything I need from them. I have the impression that everything goes well, but who knows.... (laughing). For that reason I want to leave the land to my youngest son Mauricio in the United States. He does not need the land and is arranging papers to migrate permanently to the United States. As he does not need the land, the others can go on working the land together as they do now.*

On the other hand, she is afraid that land might be taken away from Mauricio for living outside the ejido. Aurora:

*I am only afraid that they may take the land away from Mauricio for living outside the ejido. That is forbidden. However, many ejidatarios live outside the ejido.... I could also leave the land to Gregorio [one of the sons in the village], but I am afraid that his sons will claim the land later on. Many people say that the problems are caused by the next generation.*

Interestingly, in order to avoid making a choice among the sons she is working with in the village, Aurora prefers to nominate another son who has no interest in the land. In this way she hopes things can go on the way they are today and she does not have to show a preference for one of the sons in the village. This is one of the difficult inheritance cases that may develop in different directions. For the brothers in the village, who are working with their mother, the situation could change drastically when their youngest brother inherits the land. On the other hand, they may decide to buy the land from their brother. Recently two

of the brothers already bought a plot of ejido land.

We saw that property “marks periods of transition between generations, demarcates areas of competence, and creates bonds of dependence” within the family (Sabeau 1990: 33). The different principles that guide inheritance practices offer flexibility but also cause difficulties and tensions for ejidatarios as well as their children. It is a dream of many ejidatarios that their children will work the land together or at least will all benefit from its produce once they pass away. However, they realize at the same time that this is not a realistic option. Although a son who inherits the land may promise that he will give part of the revenue of the land to his brothers and sisters, one never knows what will happen in the future. People are quick to provide examples in which this type of arrangements did not work out.

In conclusion, in the inheritance practices ideas concerning the land as family patrimony and mutual care and obligation between parents and children are most important. These notions which guide the inheritance decision can lead to many different outcomes in the ultimate choice of an heir. Family relations are complex and can change over time. In an increasingly transnational context, sometimes contradictory considerations are taken into account in the choice of an heir (trying to get children back to the village through inheritance or, on the contrary, favoring children in the village). This explains that inheritance is a source of tremendous tension within families and can strongly influence the relation between different family members.

The influence of the agrarian law on inheritance practices has been limited, as the rule that only a child or partner could inherit coincided with the intentions of the ejidatarios. On the other hand, the official rule that the property can not be divided and that only one child can inherit the land has influenced inheritance decisions of ejidatarios with one plot. Even if they preferred to divide the plot among several children, they registered only one as the official heir. In the end, this always meant that the official heir, backed by the law, took all the land. In the case of ejidatarios with several plots, this rule had no effect as they often passed plots over to different sons during their life. Relation with other ejidatarios played a minor role in inheritance practices.

In the next section a famous local example is described of a case in which the wish of an ejidataria to divide the land among her four sons and the impossibility of legalizing this situation caused tremendous conflicts. In this case local relations between ejidatarios did play a role.

### **A Serious Inheritance Conflict: the Lagos Brothers**

The case that was most mentioned during my stay in the village as the proof that leaving the land to more than one child, always ends in trouble, is the case of Epigmenia Romero. Epigmenia was the widow of Cayetano Lagos. She was one of the few widows with ejido

land in 1942. She had inherited the land from her husband, who received four hectares of land when the ejido Autlán was established. Epigmenia was Cayetano's second wife.

Salvador was born in 1924 as the first son of this couple. Cayetano died in 1936, leaving Epigmenia to bring up six small children. Salvador, being the oldest son, felt responsible for the family although he was only twelve years old. He had a heavy responsibility, especially because he was followed by two sisters and his three younger brothers were still very small. His youngest brother was only a few months old when their father died. From the age of fourteen Salvador went to work in the coast of Jalisco in the dry seasons. Salvador also went several times to the United States. Salvador told me proudly that "he married all his brothers and sisters" and built a house for all of his brothers. Although he was the eldest son, he himself did not marry and waited for his brothers and sisters to marry.

Salvador had been listed as an ejidatario in 1942 but, like many other young boys, he had not received land then and only received a plot of two hectares in 1950. This was land that had been abandoned and was given to two ejidatarios who had not received land before. One of them was Salvador. Salvador's brothers were not on the list and were not recognized as ejidatarios as they had been too young in 1942. All these years Salvador stayed with his mother and tilled her land as well as his own land. According to Salvador, his brothers and sisters respected him more than many children respect their father. Salvador finally married in 1960 at the age of 35. He and his wife Cecilia moved to their own house and had eight children.

Salvador continued working Epigmenia's land and he maintained her. His brothers remained landless, but two did quite well. Miguel, the youngest produced ice-llies and Alberto worked as a waiter in Autlán. His brother Gerardo was the poorest of the four brothers. Epigmenia first lived with her daughters and then moved with her daughter-in-law from her first marriage, Aurora García, who had also been widowed. Towards the end of the 1970s Epigmenia decided to divide her four hectares of rainfed land among the four sons from her second marriage. The sons of her first marriage had received land themselves. So, Salvador and his three brothers all received one hectare. According to Salvador his mother had told him: *Son, you are the owner of the land, as you did everything for your brothers, but I want the four of you to benefit from your father's land.* She told her sons that she wanted to see them work together peacefully and see to it that nobody tried to take the land away from the others. She left a paper with the ejido commissioner that this was the way in which she wanted the land to be worked: divided among the four brothers. This paper was signed by the four brothers and the members of the executive committee of the ejido. So, from then on each brother worked a part of their mother's land. The land was divided into four different plots and the four worked the land separately.

However, only one of the brothers could be the official heir. Epigmenia decided to make Alberto (the waiter) the heir of her land. She called her sons and explained to them why she wanted Alberto to inherit the land. She said it was because Salvador already owned land, is

an ejidatario and has a lot of cattle, Gerardo would receive one hectare of ejido land from an uncle and Miguel, the youngest one, was doing very well without land. For that reason, she had decided to leave the land to Alberto. However, the three other brothers took this decision very badly and it caused a lot of trouble in the family. The other brothers did not trust Alberto. Alberto was a waiter and spent little time on the land. While the three other brothers were close and lived together in the same street, Alberto had always been different. His wife had never been accepted by the wives of the other three brothers and Alberto and his wife had lived outside the village for a long time. Salvador told Alberto that he would see to it that he never inherited the land. Miguel threatened Alberto in the fields with a *machete* and Alberto's son was called names by Salvador during a football match. The women also became part of the fight and started offending each other. On one occasion, one of Alberto's daughters got drunk at Miguel's house and was made to look ridiculous. While the nieces had always visited each other, Alberto's daughters were not allowed to visit Miguel's house anymore.

Although the three brothers hoped that Alberto would respect Epigmenia's wish that the land should remain divided among the four brothers after her death, they were well aware of the fact that their brother would be the legitimate owner of the land once their mother passed away. Salvador said to me in 1987 when Epigmenia was still alive: *According to the certificate of agrarian rights, only Alberto will be the owner of the land. If mother dies tomorrow or the day after tomorrow, he can say to us: leave the land! For he is the legitimate owner. We agree that if Alberto wants all the land, we will leave him all the land. Legally we cannot do anything about it even though mama's wish was a different one.*

Salvador added that he did not understand why his mother had not put him as the first heir. Although I did not talk to Epigmenia at that time and later she had passed away, there were several elements that may have influenced her decision not to put Salvador as the heir. First of all, Salvador was the only son who already possessed an ejido plot, had a lot of cattle and who was doing fine. However, what was probably more important was the fact that Salvador had been an alcoholic for many years. During that period he had spent his money on alcohol. He had sold his cattle and neglected his children. As was discussed before, most parents did not want to leave their land to alcoholic sons for fear that they would use the money in the wrong way or perhaps sell the land.

Whatever the reasons behind Epigmenia's decision to put Alberto down as the official heir, she wanted the four brothers to have equal parts of the land. For over ten years while Epigmenia was still alive, each son worked his part of the land, but relations between the three brothers and Alberto remained strained. When Epigmenia fell ill and was dying, Salvador made a final intent to change his mother's mind and change the inheritance papers. A couple of days before her death in 1988 Epigmenia signed a document, drew up by Salvador, that changed the heir from Alberto to Gerardo. The ejido commissioner, Ignacio Romero, helped with the document and signed it. Epigmenia died and now a fight started

among her sons about the inheritance of her land.

Naturally, Alberto was hurt by what had happened all these years and he was very angry about Salvador's last manoeuvre. Salvador had received help from an official of the assistance office of the MAR in Autlán. For that reason, Alberto decided to go directly to Guadalajara and lodge a complaint at the MAR against his brother for letting their mother change inheritance papers a couple of days before she died, when she was not competent anymore. Alberto also had the support of several other ejidatarios in La Canoa. He is known as a nice quiet man, whereas Salvador has the reputation of being a trouble-maker. Gustavo Romero, the new ejido commissioner also supported Alberto against Salvador and his two brothers. Lorenzo Romero, who is a friend of Alberto's, accompanied him to the MAR office in Guadalajara. Lorenzo was eager to hurt Salvador as he had never forgiven him for insulting his father Miguel Romero during an ejido meeting (see chapters two and four). As Alberto had been registered at the MAR as the heir of his mother for all these years, and the papers from the Autlán office had not yet been processed, Alberto had few problems in Guadalajara and was registered as the new owner of the land.

In 1989 Alberto asked his brothers for the hectare of land that they had been working for more than ten years and from then onwards he worked all the land himself. According to Alberto he would never have taken the land away from his brothers if they had not tried to remove him as the official heir of the land. During the ejido meetings it was obvious that Salvador had difficulty in accepting his brother Alberto as a new ejidatario. However, Salvador has gradually become less hostile towards his brother. In the beginning of 1993, Alberto arranged his own inheritance papers. His only son, who lived in the United States was registered as the heir of his land. This son, who is a known alcoholic claims that he will return to the village one day and stay there.

In this case, several elements are interesting. First of all the choice of heir was a difficult one. No moral obligation towards a child that had taken care of his or her mother until death existed. Still, Salvador clearly felt that he had certain rights over the land as he had taken care of his brothers and sisters when his father had passed away. Although he did not want the land so much for himself, he felt that he had at least some rights to say what should happen to it. However, Epigmenia decided to put Alberto as the heir and hoped he would let the four brothers each have their one hectare of land. She made her four sons even sign an agreement in which they said every one of them would till one hectare of land. The arrangement between the four brothers worked well when Epigmenia was still alive but everybody in the ejido foresaw the problems that would emerge when she died. Then the official heir could do whatever he wanted with the land and this was exactly what happened in the end.

As Epigmenia had removed Alberto as the heir to her land shortly before her death, Salvador and his brothers could still have tried to have Gerardo recognized as the official heir

but this would have been a long (and dirty) fight which they did not want to get involved in. Furthermore, Alberto had considerable support from many ejidatarios which would make his position very strong in an official conflict. With respect to the one hectare that their mother had lent to each of the sons, the brothers could not claim any right whatsoever. Everybody realized that the paper they had written years ago in which they declared their agreement with Epigenia's decision that every son would have the right to work one hectare did not have any legal value. It only was a moral obligation to respect their mother's wish, but moral obligations did not play a role in relations that were spoiled by dirty conflicts.

### **Organizing Practices Around the Sale of Ejido Plots in La Canoa**

In table 5.4 we saw that 29 plots have been sold in La Canoa between 1942 and 1993. Many of these sales concern only parts of ejido plots that were sold. Of the 29 ejido sales, 20 concerned land in the rainfed area and 9 land in the area that has been irrigated since the sixties. As of yet, ejido plots have always been sold to people within the community, that is to say to sons, brothers, or sisters of ejidatarios. Hence, it was an internal landmarket. People "from outside" have never bought land in the ejido.

There were several elements which influenced the development of organizing practices around the sale of ejido plots. According to the agrarian law, the ejidatario who sold his plot, as well as the person who bought the plot would lose the right to the land. Although this certainly was a threatening prospect, the sale of plots was less risky than the renting out of land. In a land sale, unlike a renting arrangement, both parties infringed the law and would lose their rights. This meant that both parties would be careful not to make problems about the issue. This in contrast to renting arrangements in which the leaseholder was building up rights to the land at the expense of the migrant ejidatario.

Many ejidatarios had mixed feelings about the sale of ejido plots. The main reason against land sales was that land was considered to be family patrimony. The ejidatario as the official "owner" of his or her plots was not considered to be the only person with rights to the land. According to most ejidatarios, the other members of the ejidatario's household: his wife, his children and even grandchildren had certain rights to the land. For that reason, ejidatarios who sold their land without any urgent need for money were heavily condemned by the ejidatarios and other villagers. Especially when they left their partner or children without land. In the same way people often felt ashamed about the fact that they sold a piece of land in the past.

However, despite this moral judgment on ejido land sales, ejidatarios did not interfere in the transactions of others. A strong sense of individual responsibility reigned and if somebody wanted to sell, the others would not make it impossible. They would gossip about it and criticize the ejidatario who had decided to sell his land, but they would not interfere.



This attitude of the other ejidatarios was very important for the people involved in the land sale for they needed the approval of the ejido assembly for the transfer of the ejido land right from one person to another. Notions of honor also played an important role with respect to land sales and the support of the other ejidatarios. The common view was that if people had agreed on a transaction they should not go back on it later. So, people who later on tried to recover land that they had sold in the past, could not count on the support of the other ejidatarios. As we will see, this support of the majority of the ejidatarios could be crucial in a land conflict.

Nevertheless, because of this ever present “menace” of the agrarian law, which prohibited land sales, people tried to “formalize” their illegal arrangements in a way that made it look like a permitted transaction. In this way they hoped to be safe in the future if someone created problems. Land sales were formally presented as a “voluntary transfer of use rights” from one person (the seller) to the other (the buyer). The majority of ejido members had to agree to the “voluntary transfer” of the land and signed a document. (They always knew that it concerned a sale.) There were additional ways to protect the sale. One was to put the new owner down as the successor of the one who was going to sell. In this way, one avoided officially registered heirs claiming their rights at a later stage.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, it was important that the partner of the ejidatario who sold the land signed his or her agreement with the “transfer of rights”, as well as their children. This was important since if an ejidatario “transferred his rights” without the permission of the rest of the family, the sons or wife could later on try to claim the land. The above mentioned elements were all very usual but there were no fixed common rules in this respect. There are for example, people who sold ejido land without informing and asking permission at the ejido assembly or without putting the buyer down as their successor. Others sold land without the permission of their wives. These arrangements were more risky and led in some cases to problems at a later stage.

Apart from these formal precautions, it was helpful to assure the favorable attitude of officials of the MAR, so that they would not make problems about the sale. Therefore, they were often paid a certain amount of money “to keep quiet”. These functionaries of the MAR often were actively involved in the sales as they knew better than anyone else the working of the bureaucracy and the best way to arrange and formalize these transactions. When we look at what eventually happened with land transfers in La Canoa, we see the following. The great majority of illegal transactions was silenced forever and never mentioned or reported in the formal arena. Ejido land sales in La Canoa were never canceled, although on several occasions people have tried to cancel them in a formal procedure.

Hence, with respect to ejido land sales, a patterning of organizing practices developed which went very much against the “letter” and the “spirit” of the agrarian law. However, these organizing practices were less characterized by tensions than the organizing practices around the renting of land by migrants and around the inheritance of land. The reason for

these lesser tensions was the fact that in the organizing practices around land sales it was not so much a question of opposing interests (like siblings fighting for an inheritance within the family or a leaseholder building up rights on the plot against the migrant ejidatario) but of mutually agreed transactions in which both parties had something to win. Furthermore, in the sale of land the fact that the ejidatarios considered land to be private property and felt it was a question of individual responsibility if ejidatarios decided to sell it, made that the ejidatarios acquired a high degree of autonomy. Again the officials were not central to the development of these organizing practices as they had no means to check or influence the situation. They depended on the information provided by ejidatarios. In the land sales the agrarian law also worked above all as a “distant threat” and stimulated the development of “legal and official game-playing”, activities on the margin which did not really influence what was going on but were carried out as form of precaution (legalizing the land sales as voluntary land transfers, obtaining the consent of the ejido assembly, paying ejido commissioners and officials, etc).

I will now relate in detail the history of a sale of an ejido plot in the 1960s in La Canoa. The case illustrates how people bypassed the law, how ejidatarios and officials were all involved in these arrangements, and how disagreements were fought out. Although several ejido plots have been sold in La Canoa, this case is the most commented upon by the ejidatarios as it is one of the few cases in which the former owners tried to cancel the sale at a later stage.

### **The Story of a Famous Illegal Sale of an Ejido Plot in La Canoa**

The sale of the ejido plot which will be discussed in detail took place in 1962. The buyer was Gustavo Romero, who had been an ejidatario since the establishment of the ejido. After he had worked a couple of years in the United States in the 1950s, he returned to the village and developed his farm with the money he had saved. In 1962 Gustavo himself was ejido commissioner in La Canoa. Obviously, this position helped him in the purchase of the ejido plot. However, what was more important than his being ejido commissioner was the help he received from his uncle Miguel Romero. Miguel knew how the MAR functioned and had several influential contacts. It was known that there were functionaries at the MAR who helped with the sale of ejido plots and the paperwork for the legalization of these illegal arrangements in exchange for payment. However, Gustavo felt he did not need these functionaries as he had the help of his uncle Miguel and a friend in Autlán. This friend in Autlán had been involved in the agrarian struggles and agrarian procedures for the establishment of the ejido of Autlán. Afterwards he developed into a famous broker between ejidatarios and the bureaucracy. He said to Gustavo: *Why would you go to these idiots (pendejos) at the Agrarian Institute?* So they did all the paperwork among the three of them

and Gustavo paid the friend a small amount of money for his work.

The ejidatario who wanted to sell his plot was Mario Sánchez. There were serious problems in the village with the Sánchez family at the time of the land sale. A brother of Mario had killed a son of Juan García in a conflict over cattle that had damaged crops on a field. People in La Canoa were disconcerted by the murder and a hostile attitude developed towards the Sánchez family. Speculations circulated about a possible revenge from the influential García family against the Sánchez family. In this atmosphere of hostility Mario decided to sell his ejido land, leave the village with his wife and children, and establish himself in another region.

As usual with the sale of ejido plots, the sale was formally presented as a transfer of agrarian right. Mario declared that he voluntarily transferred his agrarian right. As the law does not allow the possession of two agrarian rights by one person, Gustavo decided to register the plot he bought on the name of his son Raúl. To "play safe" Gustavo furthermore asked Mario to put Raúl formally down as the heir of his agrarian right. As Mario had no successor registered for his land, this was easy to arrange.

At the ejido meeting where the transfer of the ejido right from Mario to Gustavo had to be approved, Miguel Romero was chairman. All the ejidatarios present at the meeting knew that the "transfer" concerned the sale of an ejido plot, but the case was presented in terms of a legally permitted transfer of ejido rights. A majority of ejidatarios were present at the meeting and signed the document. Although not all ejidatarios approved of the sale of ejido plots, in this case things were accepted more easily because of the problems in the ejido with the Sánchez family. Mario and his wife both signed their agreement to the transfer of Mario's agrarian right. After the meeting the papers were sent to the offices of the MAR in Guadalajara and Mexico city. Gustavo was the new "owner" of the land, which was registered in his son's name. Mario left with his family for the coast of Jalisco.

Years later Mario and his wife separated and Mario's wife, Angela and their sons tried to recover the land. They came to Gustavo's house several times to talk about it, but Gustavo made it clear to them that nothing could be done about it anymore. Angela and her children then decided to go to the MAR in Mexico city. However, Gustavo had already gone there years before and talked to several people in order to check that all his papers were in order. Gustavo was informed about this visit of Angela to Mexico city, because a close relative of his, Sylvia, worked at that time as a secretary at the MAR. Sylvia told Gustavo that Angela accused Gustavo of invading their land and that she told the functionary that her husband had obliged her to sign the agreement of transfer and that he had threatened her. According to Sylvia, the functionary had not paid much attention to it and asked her why she only remembered this more than ten years after this had taken place. He said he would keep her informed about the case. When they had left, Sylvia explained the case of her relative Gustavo to the functionary.

However, the efforts of Angela at the different offices of the MAR had had some results

as became clear at the IUP that was held in La Canoa in 1974. Mauro, the functionary of the MAR who came to La Canoa to do the IUP, had Gustavo listed as the invader of the land that he had bought. Mauro told the ejido commissioner Rubén García this, the day before he was to come and do the IUP. Rubén immediately informed Gustavo about it and Rubén and Gustavo decided to go straight away to Autlán that evening to talk to the functionary.

Rubén and Gustavo arrived at the promotoría of the MAR in Autlán. They were told that Mauro had gone to the movies, and they were recommended not to bother him. However, Gustavo and Rubén went directly to the cinema and told the girl at the entrance to go and get the functionary. This act is significant as it shows a particular style of dealing with the bureaucracy and gives an indication of Gustavo's status. Gustavo is a self-confident entrepreneur, conscious of his position and prepared to strike a deal. His attitude contrasts with that of many ejidatarios who are characterized by a frightened, over-respectful attitude, who would not do anything that might disturb a functionary. By this act it also immediately becomes clear to Mauro that Gustavo had the support of local powerholders, such as the ejido commissioner, who accompanied him. According to Gustavo, Mauro came outside and Gustavo introduced himself and the commissioner. Rubén then explained to Mauro what had been going on with the land and the problem that Angela was causing Gustavo. They then took Mauro out for dinner. Some days later, when the meeting of the IUP was held in La Canoa, the sale of the land came up. Mauro told the ejidatarios that the transfer of land right was totally in order and he told Angela that she had better leave.

It is important to pay attention here to the relation between Mauro and Gustavo and the way in which functionaries of the MAR get "compensation" for their services. It is very common for the engineers or lawyers of the MAR to receive payment for whatever task they do for ejidatarios. We saw that even simple administrative tasks such as the registration of inheritance papers often have to be paid for. Naturally, these compensations depend on the kind of work or "favor" done and the parties in the negotiation. Standard compensation for an engineer who visits an ejido is the payment of his gasoline, of his hotel bill and they are often taken out for dinner and to any place the official wants to go. Although these kinds of services or payments may be called "bribes" or "corruption", by the people involved these are considered to be logical forms of reciprocity and seen in terms of the development of certain types of relationships and even forms of friendship.

According to Gustavo, for example, he and Mauro ended as good friends after he had taken Mauro out for dinner in Autlán. Gustavo is proud of the fact that Mauro did not ask him for any money for his services. Gustavo claims that he only took Mauro out for dinner in gratitude and definitely does not see this as a form of payment. Besides certain immediate benefits, the different parties also make an investment for possible arrangements in the future. Mauro, as an official of the MAR, is interested in establishing relationships with influential local people who will "treat him well" and may be of help in future arrangements. Gustavo has developed a way of dealing with officials in which, according to him, he "does

not pay” but “knows how to treat them” and in this way attains his ends. This creation of a “useful alliance” between Mauro and Gustavo is illustrated by two other incidents. Some time after this IUP meeting in La Canoa, Gustavo saw Mauro arriving at the village. Gustavo went towards him and Mauro told him that he was looking for the commissioner, Rubén García, as he needed money for gasoline to get back to Guadalajara. As the ejido commissioner was not in the village Gustavo decided to give Mauro a certain amount of money himself. Mauro left pleased. On another occasion, Gustavo went to the MAR in Guadalajara. Mauro saw him, left his office, and came immediately towards Gustavo to embrace him cordially (*un abrazo*). He told Gustavo that he would help him with whatever problem he had in the future. But according to Gustavo he has had no further problems and *one does not approach the MAR if one does not have problems*. Although this alliance between Gustavo and Mauro does not seem to have developed any further since then, this is the type of relationship that is often established between influential ejidatarios and functionaries and can eventually develop in many different ways.

Although his position was rather secure, some years later Gustavo changed the papers again and put the land he had bought in the name of his son Pedro instead of Raúl. The reason being that his son Raúl had remained in the United States and did not show any intention of returning to La Canoa. As there always exists a risk that land may be taken away from ejidatarios who have migrated to the United States, Gustavo preferred to put the land in the name of his son Pedro who lives in La Canoa. However, in the exploitation of the land nothing has changed. Gustavo has been the owner and tiller of this ejido plot since 1962. When asking in the ejido who is the owner of this plot, people always respond that it is Gustavo. Pedro Romero, his son, only appears as a name on the formal list of ejidatarios.

#### *The Official Settlement of the Conflict: Social Networks and the Law*

In the archives of the MAR, I found several documents referring to this land dispute. It is clear that Angela had reopened the case before the IUP meeting and that for that reason the case was registered on the IUP list as an illegal land invasion by Gustavo. After the IUP meeting, which clearly had an unfavorable outcome for Angela, she lodged a complaint at the MAR against Gustavo and Mauro together. She said that they had been conspiring together against her interests. She tried several ways to attain her ends. She used lawyers, went to different offices of the MAR and even wrote a letter to the Mexican President. These are common practices: to pursue the case through different “entrances” and via different channels and a letter to the Mexican President is always popular (the only thing that happens to these letters is that they are channeled to the offices of the MAR).

What is interesting is that in the official documents Angela never referred to the sale of the land. This is logical as she had obviously known about it and had even signed her agreement to it. In this way she herself had infringed the law. Therefore, she tried to recover the land on the basis of other arguments. First, she blamed Gustavo (as he was the one who

titled the land) for invading the land that belonged to her husband. At a later stage she accused Raúl (the officially registered ejidatario) of not living in the ejido. She even asked two ejidatarios of La Canoa to make an official declaration at a notary's office that Raúl Romero did not live in La Canoa but in the United States. These declarations were included in the letters sent to the MAR.

Nevertheless, the resolving departments of the MAR decided in favor of Raúl on the basis of two arguments. First, that according to the ejido assembly, he had been in peaceful possession of the land for more than 12 years. Second, that Raúl had officially been registered as Mario's heir and not his wife.

When we look at "the facts" of this land sale in terms of the law, the situation is rather clear. According to the law Gustavo would not only have lost the land he bought, but also the ejido land he already possessed. By entering into the illegal act of buying ejido land and another illegal act of monopolizing ejido plots, he would lose all his ejido rights to the land. The seller Mario would also forever lose his rights to ejido lands as well as his wife who had signed her agreement to the transfer. Mario and Gustavo's plots would return to the ejido community and the general assembly could grant the land to others.

Yet, the "facts" were never revealed in the presentation of the conflict at the MAR. In the documents I found about this case no comment is ever made about the illegal character of the land transfer between Mario and Raúl. So, the official presentation and resolution of land disputes give a very distorted view of what really happened. People with experience can to a certain degree "read through" the official language and documents and deduce the real version of the events. Every official of the MAR, for example, understands that a voluntary land transfer between non-relatives most probably signifies a sale of land.

However, even if the sale had been denounced, Gustavo would not have had his rights to the land taken away easily. He had the support of the general assembly of the ejido at the local level. It is important to pay further attention here to the crucial role the ejido assembly played in agrarian procedures. There is a general tendency to argue that "money" and "relations" determine the outcome of conflicts at the MAR. In these views, the people who win a conflict are the people with the best relations both within and outside the MAR who can influence the agrarian procedures and rules in their favor. As an official with a great deal of experience in the MAR told me: *The decisive elements in the resolution of conflict cases are "not rules" but "relations"*. However, this same official added that certain practices had also developed within the MAR that ejidatarios who had sold their land, should not go back on it. Furthermore, he explained to me that the MAR did not easily go against the will of the ejido assembly even though it had a right to do so. This means that certain organizing practices had also developed within the MAR which went against the agrarian law and which gave great power to the local ejido assemblies (even in covering illegal transactions). So, if the assembly said that a certain transaction concerned a voluntary transfer of ejido rights, this was accepted by the MAR. Normally, the MAR did not interfere with decisions taken about

individual ejido rights by the assembly, nor did it check information provided by the assembly. In this case, the assembly had declared (supporting Gustavo) that Raúl had been in possession of this land since 1962. Whether this was true or not, was not investigated. The two official declarations of ejidatarios that Raúl did not reside in La Canoa did not make any difference. It was the statement of three persons against that of the majority of ejidatarios who had said differently. This enormous influence of the local ejido assembly in land affairs implied that people with much support or control at the local ejido level could barely be “touched” by the agrarian bureaucracy. By way of conclusion, we can say that a combination of Gustavo’s influence at the local level, his use of legal forms, and his clever dealings with the bureaucracy guaranteed his illegal transaction.

### *Sales in the “New Way”*

The new agrarian law which was issued in 1992 allows the sale of ejido plots. Actually, this is an adaptation to reality as land had already become a commodity in most ejidos throughout Mexico. However, before the ejidatarios are allowed to sell the land, the individual plots of the ejido have to be officially measured and registered. Yet, the interesting thing is that the ejidatarios did not wait for the measuring of their plots but immediately reacted to this new law by organizing the land sales in a “new way”. They no longer talked about a transfer of right, nor asked the consent of the ejido assembly, nor did they put the buyer as the heir of the seller. Ejidatarios who wanted to sell their plot directly went to a notary or a lawyer to draw the acts of a land sale. One of the first men who wanted to buy an ejido plot in La Canoa after the change of the agrarian law, was Ignacio Fábregas. Ignacio first went to the MAR office in Autlán to ask if they could help him. David said that he could help him with the land transfer but he asked him for a large amount of money for the transaction. Then Ignacio went to see a lawyer and asked him if it was already permitted to organize ejido land sales as real sales, in the “new way”. The lawyer explained to him that it was not allowed yet, but that there was no problem in doing it in the new way as these sales would be respected anyhow. The lawyer charged a much smaller amount of money than David. So, Ignacio and the ejidatario who sold his plot decided to let the lawyer handle the sale which took place at the office of a notary. To be on the safe side, they invited the ejido commissioner to come as well and sign the document. So, this time neither the ejido assembly, nor the MAR were involved in the transaction. This quick adaptation to a new reality is interesting because according to the agrarian law these new transactions would only be allowed in the future when the plots had been measured. However, ejidatarios as well as officials, and lawyers realized that nobody would cancel this new type of sales. Most ejidatarios preferred these new rules as now they did not need the consent of the ejido assembly anymore, nor the assistance of MAR officials who always asked for money. Since the new law was issued several plots have been sold in La Canoa, but during the period of my research (until mid 1995) no important changes in the ejido land market had occurred.

**Conclusion: Organizing Practices within Multiple Force Fields and the Role of the Law**

In this chapter we analyzed how in La Canoa different sets of organizing practices developed around the individual ejido plots. The study showed that the influence of “the state” and “the *cacique*” has been exaggerated in the literature. Although local bosses, or *caciques*, and the agrarian bureaucracy definitely have influenced land transactions, they have not been central in the distribution and transfer of plots in La Canoa. Only in the first years after the establishment of the ejido, was the official rule which prohibited the renting out or abandoning of ejido plots used to take land away from ejidatarios who left the ejido for a long time. These dispossessions and the re-distribution of these plots were influenced by local political relations. However, when land became scarcer and more valuable with the irrigation in the 1960s, ejido land possession became more and more a form of private property and land was never taken away from migrated ejidatarios anymore. The main reason for this development was that with land becoming more valuable and ejidatarios becoming wealthier, nobody let the land be taken away from them anymore without a fight. This meant that in order to dispossess an ejidatario of his or her land a long and dirty struggle had to be followed in which the MAR would become involved and the outcome was never clear. This was not a pleasant prospect even for local powerholders. We saw that many illegal transfers of ejido plots have taken place between the establishment of the ejido in 1938 and 1992. Many ejido plots have been sold and many others have been divided into several plots and were passed to several children. Yet the fate of the majority of these illegal arrangements in La Canoa was the same. While they sometimes were vehemently criticized at the local level, they were never brought up in the official arena.

*The Law as a Distant Threat and the Bureaucratic Machine*

Although the agrarian law was seldom applied it had considerable influence on the organization of illegal transactions. As far as possible, ejidatarios tried to organize their illegal transactions according to the accepted procedures and in this way hoped to avoid problems in the future. The fact that the official rules remained important was the reason that the ejidatarios often repeated the rules that were most threatening to them: the prohibition of the sale of land, the prohibition of land rental and the prohibition against leaving the land to more than one heir. These were also the rules they used to refer to when they tried to explain the ejido system. These were the rules which were seldom enforced but at the same time formed the biggest threat to their property. The fact that transactions were always carried out “in the shadow of the law” (F. von Benda Beckmann 1992) meant that the legal agrarian rules remained a powerful weapon in negotiations and bargaining even when affairs were settled according to other criteria. This can be called the “bargaining and regulatory endowment” which is constituted by state law even when the law is not applied Galanter (1981).



If an illegal transaction or a conflict case was formally denounced at the MAR and officials became involved it was not clear at all what was going to happen. The process of formal decision-making in the case of disputes could take a long time and could involve different departments in different cities. Official documents could easily get “lost” or procedures be delayed for years. In the resolution of conflicts money and relations played an important role. So, the official bureaucratic world was quite obscure. However, the formal settlement of land conflicts was hardly ever followed to its conclusion. People who felt that they would lose a case or who feared that it would end in a dirty fight with negative consequences for their personal life, often decided to withdraw from the case in the middle of the process and before a formal decision was taken. In this way they left “the victory” to the other party. Yet, this “non-resolution” and the fact that conflict settlement by the MAR took such a long time also meant that tensions could linger on for a long time. The possibility that somebody would take the case up and set the MAR bureaucracy in motion was always present. Cases were never closed and one could always try to reopen them. We saw that MAR officials have been very eager to stimulate ejidatarios to lodge formal complaints and start a formal case even if they had little chance of winning.

As the MAR has many different offices and a complex organizational structure ejidatarios often went to many different offices to find officials who were willing to help them. If they were not heard or listened to at one office, they used to go to another to see if they had better luck there. The notion of “forum-shopping” for situations in which disputants shop for forums for their problems and forums compete for disputes is applicable to this situation (K. von Benda Beckmann 1981: 117). Even though it concerns only one institution, the bureaucratic labyrinth of the MAR offers countless entrances. One never knows what the best “forum” is and where it will finally lead to.

Another phenomenon which we saw in Gustavo’s case and which is common in land conflicts is “playing the game” at different levels. Local level relations in the ejido are crucial but we also noticed the necessity of arranging things in Guadalajara and the desire to settle problems at “the center” in Mexico City. Often it is not clear whether this is really necessary. For example, for the registration of inheritance papers and assignment of rights, it is sufficient to go to the state capital Guadalajara. From there information is sent to Mexico City. However, people think that the offices in Mexico City are the “higher” and therefore the more “powerful” ones. Officials themselves also urge ejidatarios to go to other offices, or to go to the “center”. This leads to situations in which people and documents travel around from office to office and from city to city and keep the bureaucratic machine working. However, it also points to the spatial dimension of the relation between the ejidatarios and the bureaucratic machine. In chapter seven and eight I return to this theme and elaborate it further.

*The Re-enchantment of Governmental Techniques*

An element which helped the ejidatarios “keep the law at a distance” was the fact that the MAR did not keep a register of individual ejido plots and had no means of controlling the use and distribution of plots. However, although the MAR had little influence on what happened in the ejidos, many procedures were followed to keep some form of control. In this context I talked about legal and official “game-playing” as this created some room for officials and others to earn some extra money, but without being of any real effect on what happened to the land. However, what is more interesting is that this led to a situation in which procedures and documents acquired meanings which had little relation to their official function. For example, the IUP, a procedure to check on ejido land use, turned into a procedure for the legalization of illegal transactions and the formalizations of legal actions which had not followed the official procedures. The numbered ejido certificate took on an important symbolic value for the ejidatarios, even though it did not bear a “real” relation to their plot and their security of land possession rested on the recognition of their fellow ejidatarios. The receipt of ejido tax payment became a “proof of residence” in the ejido (in the case of migrants), instead of a proof of payment. This phenomenon in which official documents and procedures get different meanings, is what I call the re-enchantment of governmental techniques (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1993). It also shows the limitation of perspectives focusing on governmentality. Certainly, we find a complex aggregate of institutions and procedures. We find a great deal of official paperwork, many complicated procedures, stamping, taxing, and so on. However, this does not lead to a “strong state” which exercises control over ejidatarios. On the contrary, we find ejidatarios with great autonomy and freedom in their land transactions and a state-bureaucracy with very little control over local land issues.

*Multiple Force Fields Instead of Different “Normative Orders”*

As I talked about the influence of ideological notions in the patterning of organizing practices and about the high degree of autonomy of the ejidatarios, it might seem that I come close to certain notions developed within legal anthropology. Legal anthropologists might talk in this situation about the development of a semi-autonomous field (Moore 1973) or the co-existence of a “variety of normative orders and suborders” (F. von Benda Beckmann 1992: 1-2). Indeed, in La Canoa we found alternative forms of ordering and even resistance to state law. Yet, the central limitation of these approaches lies in the fact that they stress the normative side of organizing practices and pay too little attention to the fact that struggle and power relations are central components of the patterning process. With respect to the dealings with ejido plots, many practices were not based on normative standards, but on what - people thought - was practically and politically attainable and what was not. As Wiber shows in her work on property and the law in the Philippine Uplands “conflict over resources is often couched, not in terms of normative expectations, but in terms of what the market will bear”

(Wiber 1993: 11). As Sierra points out, official laws are not separate from local normative notions, but “constitute a frame of reference that people incorporate or manipulate in their daily lives” (Sierra 1995: 241). So, instead of studying the discrepancy between the “local normative order” and the “official legal order” we should study the role the official laws play in the development of different organizing practices.

We saw that several factors were crucial in the development of organizing practices around ejido plots in La Canoa. To begin with, ejidatarios thought of ejido land possession as a form of private property and considered it to be the responsibility of each family to do whatever they liked with the plot. Another important element is the strong feeling that it is better not to interfere in someone else’s business unless you are personally involved. However, there were also more strategic and practical reasons not to meddle in the transactions of others. It could be in everyone’s interest that such transactions were tolerated. If you accepted it from your neighbor now, he would not make problems if you did something similar in the future. Furthermore, even if an ejidatario did not agree with an ejido land sale and wanted to lodge a formal complaint about it, it was very improbable that in the case of a formal settlement he himself would receive the land. So, why bother and make trouble? In the existing force field, there was little to gain from denouncing illegal transactions. Hence, these practices were not only based on values concerning property relations but also on what was politically attainable.

The force fields around the renting out of land by migrants, the selling of plots, and the inheritance of land were composed of many different elements: ideological notions in which land is considered to be family patrimony; the formal legal setting (the agrarian law, formal procedures, and dealings with MAR officials); the complex relations between parents and children; the changing value of ejido plots (by the growing scarcity of the land, the arrival of the irrigation system, and the increasingly transnationalized nature of family economies); local power relations; different types of relationships between ejidatarios; ideological notions of individual responsibility and honor in the striking of deals.

The organizing practices around inheritance showed a dynamic which was different from that around the renting out and selling of plots. While in the practices around inheritance, notions of care and obligations within the family were central, in the fields around renting out by migrants and land sales, notions of honor (in the striking of deals) and personal responsibility were more important. This can be explained by the fact that the organization of inheritance took place within circles of close relatives, while the renting out and selling of land took place in the wider circles of ejidatarios and villagers of La Canoa. Another important difference was that in the inheritance practices the question of illegality, circumventing the law, and dealing with officials played a much less important role. Finally, the inheritance practices are more characterized by tensions and conflicts than the practices around the renting out and the selling of ejido plots (see appendix six for an overview of the different organizing practices).

The organizing practices which developed around individual ejido plots (with regard to inheritance, land sales, and renting out of land) and which gave people considerable security in land possession, is ironic in the light of the new agrarian law which was introduced with the argument that the measuring and registration of individual ejido plots and the issuing of individual property titles would finally give the ejidatarios legal security. A strong form of legal security had already developed without land titles and without registration by the state. The strong forms of ordering which had developed over time also imply that a new legislation will never affect existing practices in a direct way, but will only mean a new element in historically developed force fields, made up of many different elements. As F. and K. von Benda Beckmann point out "new legislation ... *interferes* with existing property rules and property relationships. Whatever effects the introduction of new property forms may have, they will always be shaped by the historically grown property regimes" (F. and K. von Benda Beckmann 1998: 2). I fully agree with this view, only rather than talking of property rules I would talk of historically developed organizing practices concerning access to land. As Sabeán points out "property is not a relationship between people and things but one between people about things" and "all social transactions take place within a field of rights, duties, claims, and obligations, which taken together comprise the system of property holding" (Sabeán 1990: 17-18).

## Notes

1. The widely held view that power relations determined the land market has prevented many academics from studying what actually happened with the land. Gledhill (1991) presented the first detailed historical study of the history and transfer of ejido plots in an ejido in Michoacán. He demonstrated the existence of a complex and active land market that was certainly not characterized by monopolization of land by *cacique* families and that showed different types of inheritance.
2. Valuable exceptions are *El desarrollo agrario de México y su marco jurídico* by L. Zaragoza and R. Macías (1980) and *Estructura agraria y desarrollo agrícola en México: Estudio sobre las relaciones entre la tenencia y el desarrollo agrícola de México* by S. Reyes, R. Stavenhagen, S. Eckstein and J. Ballesteros (1974).
3. Villages often did not receive enough arable land for all the people who met the requirements for receiving land in the ejido. So, a significant number of people in the village (above all young men) were recognized in their agrarian right and were official ejidatarios but they never received land.
4. Without information from the ejidatarios themselves, there was no way for the official to find out if people had sold part of the land, had bought other plots, had rented their land out, etc. Hence, the official registration of the ejidatarios could remain the same even though people had changed plots, had bought extra land or only possessed a fraction of their original plot.
5. One must take into account that what is counted in this table are transactions and not necessarily plots. For example, if an ejidatario sold half of his plot and left the other half to his son as his heir, this is counted as one inheritance and one land sale.

6. As only the transactions from 1942 onwards are included many of the cases of dispossession of agrarian rights and abandonment of plots are not included. The abandoning of plots mostly happened before 1942.
7. In the case of people who passed away the number of plots they left to their heirs are counted.
8. As far as possible I have tried to organize the land under the 94 official ejidatarios. This means that I registered the land of people who have passed away but are still registered as the official ejidatario under the name of this ejidatario and not under the name of the heir and next owner.
9. The agrarian law stated that the ejidatarios could designate the heir of the agrarian right from amongst their partner and children. If there was no partner nor children, the right could be designated to a person who was economically dependent on the ejidatario. Article 83 continues saying that if the ejidatario has never designated the heir of his/her agrarian right, the right will be given to one of the persons described in article 81. According to article 84 the agrarian right is considered to be vacant if inheritance in the foregoing way is impossible and in that case the ejido assembly (following certain guidelines) can assign the right to somebody else.
10. See also den Ouden 1995 for a discussion of the role of inheritance in family enterprises among the Adja in Bénin, where there were no rules of succession and fathers had the difficult task of picking out the sons who were best able to take over from them.
11. The reason that the figures in this table do not seem to coincide with the figures from the foregoing table is that in this table people are counted while in the foregoing table transaction with plots are counted. For example, if an ejidataria had five plots and left two plots to one daughter and the other three plots to three different sons, this appears in this table as one ejidataria who received land from her mother. In table 5.12 this is counted as two cases of "mother - daughter" inheritance and three cases of "mother - son" inheritance.
12. Obviously, this remained an awkward arrangement as the agrarian law stipulated that the heir had to be chosen from among the partner and children of an ejidatario. So, officially inheritance by someone else would be illegal.

CHAPTER 6  
**ORGANIZING PRACTICES AROUND THE  
EJIDO ADMINISTRATION**

**Introduction: in Search of Leaders and the Flow of Action**

In this chapter the administration of the ejido is discussed. When we talk about the ejido administration we refer to a broad range of activities. In the foregoing chapter we already saw that the ejido has several official tasks in relation to the individual ejido plots, but the ejido also has to administer the commons and the urban zone. Besides the administration of different types of land, the ejido acquired additional administrative tasks when government programs started to use the ejido as an intermediate organization to channel resources, such as agricultural inputs and credits. So, the administration of the ejido involves many different activities.

In this chapter I set out to explain how organizing practices developed around the administration of the ejido and how this is related to control over resources. As has already been mentioned the agrarian law, which determines in great detail the local administration of the ejido, bears little relation to practices which developed "on the ground". In La Canoa one of the most remarkable developments is that the ejido commissioner has developed a high degree of autonomy in his decisions concerning the ejido, but at the same time has little power and authority. At first sight this may sound like a contradiction but it will be shown that the autonomy of a leader does not necessarily mean that he is "in control". This is caused by the fact that a certain patterning of organizing practices has taken place over the years which leaves little room for abrupt changes of established routines by individual ejidatarios or commissioners.

It will also be shown that although the ejido commissioner or other ejidatarios may not be publicly asked to render accounts of their actions at ejido meeting, other effective forms of accountability exist outside the formal channels. There are several ways in which ejidatarios control their commissioner and events that take place in the ejido. This dynamic has led to a situation in which official procedures do not fulfill their official roles but have acquired different meanings. For example, ejido meetings play no role in the publicly rendering of accounts or arriving at collective decisions but rather have become arenas of quarreling and confrontation. On the other hand, the formal structure and official administrative rules can become important again in serious ejido conflicts. Then the "official game" is played in combination with informal ways of exercising pressure.

*Ejido Administration in Academic Debates*

Much has been written on different aspects of the ejido administration, but most works stress

the “*cacique* style” of ejido management. It has often been commented and shown in detailed studies that the position of commissioner as well as other positions in agrarian institutions were used to gain control over ejido resources (economic accumulation) and to develop a position of intermediation between ejidatarios and the state (political power) (Warman 1972, Bartra 1975, Paré 1975, Friedrich 1986). It has frequently been argued that Mexican peasants in leadership positions “aspire to positions in the hierarchy largely for the economic advantages these positions confer on themselves, their kin, and other members of their power blocs” (Carlos 1992: 93). Others have pointed out the ways in which local bosses used the executive committee of the ejido to dispossess people of their land, extort money from the ejidatarios, and make the ejidatarios sign documents to support their arbitrary transactions (Martínez 1980: 181). In their valuable work on agrarian issues in Mexico, Reyes *et al.* (1974) also point out that in reality it is often the executive committee that controls ejido affairs.

Although these studies are very valuable for the analysis of political process in certain areas and periods in Mexico, in my view, they do not necessarily present an adequate representation of the way in which ejido administrations have developed and how this is related to control over resources. Furthermore, although these studies give important insights into the development of leadership, they are useless for the analysis of situations in which this type of leadership is not present. How should we analyze ejido organizing practices and politics in situations where there are no local bosses interested in developing a political career through the ejido? I would argue, that the dominance of such bosses is not an all-pervasive phenomenon. In any case we should not assume the existence of these mechanisms beforehand. As Law put it “if we want to understand the mechanics of power and organization it is important not to start out *assuming* whatever we wish to explain” (Law 1992: 380).

### *Searching for the Real Action and the Center of Control*

If we do not want to start from a one-sided focus on bossism and leadership for the study of organizing practices and power but on the other hand know that official organigrams give little insight into what is going on, we have to think of alternative ways to approach the ejido administration. This dilemma was especially pressing during the first period of the research. Although from the start of the study I realized that much of the organizing occurred outside the formal and public setting, it was still frustrating to deal with this formal part of the ejido administration. Ejido meetings were seldom held, few ejidatarios attended the meetings and few matters were discussed on these occasions. In addition, the ejido archive provided very little information. There was no registration of land possession of the individualized land, the urbanized area, nor the commons. There was no information on the organization of ejido projects under the different ejido commissioners, nor minutes of ejido meetings. This was rather depressing at the start of the research.

On the other hand, although ejido meetings were seldom held and decisions were seldom taken on these occasions, things were always going on in the ejido and suddenly seemed to have been decided somewhere by some people. In a similar fashion, information concerning the ejido always seemed to circulate in small undefined circles. Thus, there was a lot of organizing taking place in - what appeared to be - informal and changing settings. At first, I felt frustrated that meetings had been held in the ejido, and things had happened that I had not been aware of. This experience closely resembled John Law's experiences during his study of organizing practices in a nuclear laboratory in Great Britain. Law describes it in the following way: "I had a terrible anxiety about being in the right place at the right time. Wherever I happened to be, the action was not. Sometimes people would say: 'Did you hear what happened at such-and-such meeting?' ... 'Did you hear what happened to so-and-so?' Always it seemed to me, that the *real* action was going on somewhere else" (Law 1994a: 45-46).

I was slightly comforted when I realized that many ejidatarios found themselves in the same position. They had not heard anything about a meeting or about the visit of an official. They had not been aware of decisions that had been taken either. However, while most ejidatarios did not seem to be bothered by this phenomenon, it certainly did disturb me. The ejido was my research object and I felt it necessary to know what was going on and to "follow the flow of action". During the research I gradually found out to whom I had to go in order to find out what was about to happen. Towards the end of the research when I myself became actively involved in several ejido projects (see the following chapters), I felt that I had finally "gained control" over my research object. The odd thing was that, in the same way as Law describes for his study, "other people, those excluded from these meetings, sometimes assumed that where I was, *there* was the action, and they'd ask me questions - questions that I'd have to deflect - about what had happened at 'important' meetings" (Law 1994a: 46). In La Canoa it was not so much a question of being present at "important" meetings but more of being part of a network in which ejido affairs were discussed and decided.

However, even though being present at important meetings or having access to central networks gives interesting insights, it only explains part of the organizing process. As Law points out, "since there are discontinuities in place, and discontinuities in ordering, it follows that the largest part of the action is always generated elsewhere" (Law 1994a: 47). This is certainly true. In fact, a locus or center of control which directs the ejido does not exist. Actually, this belief in a center of control prevents us from seeing the complexity of the historical force field in which the organizing practices and forms of ordering have developed.

Following Wolf's (1990) suggestion that we should follow the flow of action, I decided to approach the ejido administration by studying the organizing practices around concrete resources, projects, areas of contestation, and overt conflicts. In chapter five this approach was used in relation to the arable land. In this chapter it will be developed for those projects



which throw most light on the administrative aspects of the ejido. An advantage of this approach, which focuses on specific resources or projects, is that artificial boundaries between, for example, the ejido and the village are immediately dissolved. At the same time it shows how different social categories may be positioned around struggles over resources and how ideological notions may be used in an instrumental way. In relation to the flow of action considerable attention is paid to the “flow of ideas” that guide people’s organizing behavior and to the way in which ejidatarios themselves reflect on organizing practices in the ejido.

### The Central Role of the Ejido Commissioner

#### *Formal Responsibilities of the Executive Committee*

Every three years the general assembly of the ejido, which includes all ejidatarios, elects the executive committee (president, secretary and treasurer). Besides the executive committee, a *comité de vigilancia* (vigilance committee) is also elected every three years which has to control the functioning of the executive committee. The executive committee of the ejido is called *comisariado ejidal* and the president of this committee is the *comisario ejidal* (ejido commissioner). However, the ejidatarios do not use the term *comisariado ejidal* for the whole executive committee but only for the *comisario ejidal*. This is amusing as it suggests that the *comisario ejidal* on his own represents the whole executive committee, which indeed is often the case. When the ejidatarios refer to the whole executive committee, they use the term *mesa directiva* or only *mesa*. The executive committee is responsible for the daily administration of ejido affairs and has to represent the ejido in relations with outside agencies. However, the highest authority at the local level is the general assembly of all ejidatarios (see appendix four for an overview of ejido commissioners in La Canoa).

In his capacity as the formal representative of the ejido the commissioner has to sign and stamp every ejido document in order for it to be valid. For that reason he is in possession of the official ejido stamp, an important administrative instrument. Not only documents that concern the whole ejido have to be signed and stamped by him, but also documents concerning individual land transfers and inheritance papers. In La Canoa the ejido archive with the official documents stays in the house of the ejido commissioner. This means that it moves every three years, together with the ejido stamp to the house of the newly elected commissioner. The archives of the ejido are very incomplete. It is said that some commissioners deliberately took documents from the archive to hide their illegal transactions and their stealing from the ejido or to make it impossible to prove that certain agreements had been made between the ejido and certain ejidatarios. I indeed found a “private archive” in the house of Ramón Romero who had been ejido commissioner in the beginning of the eighties. According to him, he had appropriated these documents to save them from future

corrupt commissioners who might want to take these document away. As we will see in the next chapters, these were documents that were important in the struggle for the "lost land".

The official functions of the executive committee imply a variety of activities: checking on land use, informing the assembly, maintaining correspondence, following different steps in administrative and legal procedures, dealing with officials, etc. Land conflicts in the ejido also imply work for the executive committee as they have to sign and stamp papers and give their opinion about the conflict. To do a good job, the members of the executive committee sometimes have to spend a lot of time on it. For certain matters, the executive committee has to go on trips to Autlán, Guadalajara, or Mexico City. These matters might include, for example, lodging a complaint against officials working in the region, or border conflicts with neighbors or inheritance conflicts. They can also be called to present themselves in offices in relation to different government programs or land conflicts. The expenses of these trips are paid out of ejido funds, but the loss of work on their farm is not compensated.

Another responsibility of the executive committee is to collect the land taxes of the individual ejidatarios and *coamileros* and pay the tax to the government. This tax is a very small - almost symbolic - amount of money. However, as we saw in the foregoing chapters, the tax receipt can play a central role in ejido land conflicts which involve migrated ejidatarios. The executive committee also has to render accounts of the receipts and expenditure of the ejido to the general assembly. The income of the ejido consists above all of the money earned from the renting of pasture in the commons. The ejido expenses can be very diverse. They can include traveling costs of members of the executive committee to MAR offices in Guadalajara or Mexico City, telephone costs, maintenance of the ejido building, payment of meals and other expenses to officials, building of water reservoirs, and fencing of parts of the commons.

Besides rendering accounts to the general assembly, the executive committee also has to inform the MAR extensively about the productivity of the ejido: how many hectares are cultivated, which crops are grown, how much credit is used, how many agricultural machines the ejido possesses, and how many head of cattle. However, the reports for the MAR tend to be very incomplete. The reports of La Canoa which I found at the MAR office in Mexico City did not correspond at all to the actual situations. The executive committee also has the responsibility of convening general ejido meetings every last Sunday of the month and other meetings when necessary. Hence, there are always things going on in the ejido that require action by the executive committee and general assembly. The members of the executive committee do not receive a salary or compensation for their work.

### *The Autonomy of the Ejido Commissioner*

I will first discuss how the position of ejido commissioner has gained considerable autonomy in decision making and will then show how this is combined with an absence of centralized management in the ejido. In La Canoa, as in many other ejidos, the ejido commissioner is

the central figure in the ejido administration and sometimes almost eliminates the role of the general assembly. Many decisions which should be taken by the general assembly are taken by the commissioner on his own. He often validates documents with his signature and the stamp without consulting the general assembly. He decides on his own to lend parts of the commons to ejidatarios or landless villagers. He decides to whom he sells the ejido pasture and how the ejido will spend the money. It is common that in the case of conflicts between ejidatarios, the commissioner reaches an agreement with one of the parties and interferes on behalf of this party. In conflicts between ejidatarios, the one with the support of the commissioner often has a better position. Hence, the ejido commissioner is a central figure in ejido matters and for all ejidatarios at a certain moment in time he may become a crucial person or in other words an “obligatory point of passage” (Callon and Law 1992: 46).

Not only is the general assembly marginalized by the commissioner, but the vigilance committee also plays no significant role. This is understandable when we realize that in former times the vigilance committee was composed of the people who had lost the ejido elections for the executive committee. Although formally they have a controlling task, in practice the ejido commissioner and his assistants hold power. This development of an executive committee and especially ejido commissioner with a very large degree of autonomy is accompanied by the fact that a financial account of the revenue and expenditure of the ejido is seldom provided and is never very specified. During the time of the research when accounts were presented this always happened very quickly and without questions being asked about it.

#### *Explaining the Position of the Commissioner*

The fact that the role of the commissioner extended far beyond his formal competence seems to be a general phenomenon in Mexican ejidos. Explanations can be found in the agrarian history which led to the founding of ejidos and in the way in which politics and bureaucratic practices in Mexico are closely interrelated. In the previous chapters we saw that the men who made the most efforts to establish the ejido La Canoa had developed good political contacts in the bureaucracy, whereas the other ejidatarios lacked contacts, information, and resources. In the first decades of the ejido, these “founders” had great influence in the village and the ejido. The power of these men was first of all based on their role in the local history of the agrarian struggle and not so much on this newly created ejido structure. These local bosses controlled the maize market and provided expensive credits, they possessed a lot of cattle and were the ones who provided the poor families with work in the rainy season. In this context the position of ejido commissioner automatically seemed to correspond to these local bosses.

Although the other ejidatarios might have wanted to oppose these men, this was a risky endeavor as they depended on them. Elections in the ejido at that time were a public event and people just had to queue up for the man they were voting for. Hence, voting for

somebody else was dangerous. Furthermore, the idea of demanding that these men render accounts of their actions was out of the question. So, the idea of the general assembly being the highest authority at the local level, was hollow from the very moment the ejido started to operate. The commissioner, or the people who controlled the executive committee, took the decisions that formally corresponded to the general assembly.

However, agrarian history and local power relations were not the only factors that made the commissioner develop into an "independent operator". The embodiment of the ejido in the figure of the commissioner has also been stimulated by another characteristic of the Mexican bureaucratic machine, namely the fact that officials always try to establish personalized relationships with formal representatives of organizations. It is a common phenomenon in Mexico that formal representatives of organizations or leaders of movements never act only in their capacity as official spokesman, but also in their capacity as a person who operates in different personal and political networks. Officials always try to establish personalized relations with "clients" of the institute. The person they deal with is not only interesting for the position he represents but also for the political relationships he may have and the information he may provide. Hence, for the officials of the agrarian bureaucracy ejido commissioners were not only important because they were formal representatives, but also because they were influential people at the local level, and through them they could get important information and open space for negotiation in conflicts. In my own experience with visits of ejidatarios to the MAR, officials always wanted to talk to the commissioner. If someone wanted to discuss matters that occurred in the ejido, the first question they asked him or her was if he or she was the ejido commissioner. If not, they were told that the commissioner should come and talk about the matter. Hence, a combination of local socio-political differentiation and the importance of personal relations in the Mexican bureaucratic and political system led to the expansion of the autonomy of the commissioner at the expense of the general assembly.

#### *Limited Control by the Commissioner*

Even though some ejidatarios like to recall the terrible practices of the former *caciques*, the degree to which these powerful men used the executive committee of the ejido for enrichment and political control was limited. As we saw in chapter five, no concentration of land in the hands of local leaders has occurred. In reality, the management of the ejido does not bring great financial benefits. One may buy the pasture of the commons cheaply, try to keep some ejido money in one's pocket, try to get a better share of farming credits, or go on missions to Mexico City paid by the ejido, but most wealthier ejidatarios are not interested in these small benefits. We also saw that in internal ejido land conflicts, obtaining the support of the commissioner, though useful, is not necessarily decisive for the outcome. Although it is always argued that local leaders tend to monopolize relations with the bureaucracy, the bureaucracy offers many different entrances. In land conflicts, negotiations with officials of

the MAR play an important role and the commissioner is not necessarily the best negotiator. We could even argue that in the bureaucratic arena the local boss may sometimes lose his privileged position as other qualities are required than those useful in the local setting. In chapter five we noticed that in the different conflicts of Aurora García, Salvador Lagos, and Federico Pradera the support they received from distinct ejido commissioners in the end was not decisive for the outcome. So, in the case of La Canoa the idea that from the position of ejido commissioner one can effectively control ejido matters seems an exaggeration.

Since the 1970s forms of control became even weaker as the old bosses died off and none of their sons has been able to develop into the same kind of figures. A great deal of politicking is always going on and some people have more influence than others, but power structures have become much more fragmented. Because of the general improvement of the economy and migration to the United States ejidatarios have become less dependent on local bosses. They say themselves that they also have become more capable of dealing with the bureaucracy. I will now show a few other principles which underlie organizing practices in the administration of the ejido.

### **Different Factors Influencing Ejido Management**

In this section, three examples are presented which make it clear that the influence of the commissioner is restricted and contested and that the force field in which the organizing practices around the ejido management have developed are composed of many different elements.

#### *Punishment of the abuse of power by an ejido commissioner*

When Ricardo García (son of Pedro García, one of the founders of the ejido) was commissioner of the ejido (from 1970 to 1973) a serious conflict arose the effects of which still can be felt today. The central actors in this conflict were Ricardo and the treasurer of the ejido, Inocencio Romero. Both were then among the biggest farmers in the ejido.

At that time there was a government program for the construction of schoolbuildings, which asked for a financial contribution from the village. La Canoa already had a small school but needed a much larger building. The ejidatarios of La Canoa decided to sell the pasture from 600 hectares of common lands for five years in a row. This resulted in a large amount of money which could be invested in the school project. The executive committee of the ejido took responsibility for the school project. However, Ricardo convinced Inocencio Romero, who as treasurer of the ejido had received the money, to use this money for equipment Ricardo needed for his farm. At a later stage, he would return the

money.

When meetings about the building of the school were organized, Ricardo did not turn up anymore. He withdrew from active involvement in the school project. The other ejidatarios started to get angry and suspicions mounted about the use of the ejido money. Not only was a lot of money involved but the building of the local school was also endangered. When they realized that the whole project could fail because of the possible sabotage of the commissioner and secretary of the ejido, several ejidatarios took measures. They looked for help from important PRI politicians in Autlán, among others, Héctor Romero. Héctor informed the mayor of Autlán, who summoned Ricardo to call a meeting in the ejido and return the money to the ejido. Ricardo held the meeting but he could not return the money as he did not have it anymore. The conflict continued and Ricardo and Inocencio were sent to jail for several days. In the end Inocencio managed to borrow enough money to pay back the ejido. Later on he settled the matter with Ricardo. The school was built in La Canoa. Ricardo García declared that he would never send his children to this school. He kept his word and despite the practical troubles, all his eleven children went to school in Autlán.

This incident, together with the way in which Ricardo, as a very rich farmer, exploited the laborers working for him, made him a man disliked by most people in the village. Today many villagers still do not talk to Ricardo or his wife and children. They remain very isolated from activities and festivities in the village. In his turn, Ricardo feels that the efforts he and his father made for the development of the village never were appreciated. He recalls the troubles he went through to have water and electricity installed in the village.

This example is interesting as it shows how political networks with people in Autlán may be used to influence dynamics in the ejido La Canoa. Several ejidatarios contacted Héctor Romero and the mayor of Autlán to stop Ricardo. However, the interesting point here is that Ricardo himself maintained good relations with this political group. The fact that he was punished despite his good political contacts, meant that he had gone too far in his manipulation of ejido funds. The opposition to him in the village had grown so strong that the people in Autlán had to interfere and stop him. This shows that even well-placed powerholders have to know how to “play the game” and should not enrich themselves too much.

Ricardo’s position was also weak as he had never created groups of loyal followers in the village. More than anyone else he is criticized for the unpleasant way in which he treats the villagers and ejidatarios who work for him and for not keeping his promises. This position clearly limited his room for operation. In the end, Ricardo came out as the most damaged person in terms of political networks and his status in the village.

Finally, this example makes clear that ejidatarios use different ways to get somebody to render accounts. When the normal methods through ejido meetings or directly addressing the person in question do not work, they look for other ways to put pressure on him or her.

The next example shows another common aspect of organizing practices, namely the appropriation of resources through personal networks.

*The appropriation of resources through personal networks*

The BANRURAL credit program for maize was one of these government programs in which the ejido was used as an intermediary structure to channel resources. For several years the credit program of BANRURAL was automatically connected with a governmental crop insurance program through the insurance company ANAGSA. This implied that part of the credit for the ejidatario was immediately used by BANRURAL to pay the fee for the crop insurance. In the case of the loss of a crop, ANAGSA repaid the loan to BANRURAL and the ejidatarios were let off their debts. The ejidatarios could receive a new credit the next year.

Although this system made the credit rather expensive (because of the high fee for the crop insurance) ejidatarios with rainfed land liked the remission of debts in the case of bad harvests. However, this remission of debts only took place if the loss of a crop was due to bad weather and not to the neglect of the crop by the ejidatario. So, inspectors of the ANAGSA and BANRURAL offices in Autlán would come and visit the ejido in order to see if the crop was well taken care of. At the last visit of the season, the ejidatario as well as the ejido commissioner had to be present as an assessment of the harvest was made by the inspector. The ejidatario had to sign that he or she agreed with this assessment. The assessment of the total harvest of a plot was important as it determined the percentage of the loan the ejidatarios had to repay. With a high production they had to repay a higher percentage of the loan than with a low production. The ejido commissioner would mediate in case of problems between the ejidatario and the inspector.

As will be clear these field inspections offered interesting possibilities for negotiations between field inspectors, commissioner, and ejidatarios. However, although some negotiations took place, at the beginning of the nineties all ejidatarios, except for some close relatives of one of the officials of the BANRURAL office in Autlán, had entered into serious problems with BANRURAL and ANAGSA. This official, Marcos Vargas, who was born in La Canoa, always made sure that his mother and brother, who are ejidatarios in La Canoa, were treated generously by BANRURAL and ANAGSA. His mother, always obtained the best arrangements. Her crops were always assessed to be a total loss due to bad weather even if the crops were not lost. She also received

credit and remission of debts for many more hectares than she possessed. However, Marcos did not help other ejidatarios in La Canoa.

Ejidatarios complained that BANRURAL did not pay the fee for the crop insurance to ANAGSA and that for that reason they were not indemnified by ANAGSA when their crops were lost. Other problems were the late payment of the credit and the excessively high assessments of harvests by inspectors. In the beginning of the nineties most ejidatarios had stopped working with BANRURAL and complained bitterly about corruption at the institute. The problems with BANRURAL and ANAGSA were a problem at the national level and the government credit system for the ejido sector was changed.

For a certain period BANRURAL also provided credit for tractors to groups of at least ten ejidatarios. As most ejidatarios in La Canoa prefer to work on their own and be the only owner of a tractor, they found an easy way to buy a tractor with credit from BANRURAL. They asked several good friends and relatives to sign the credit contract with BANRURAL and in this way, they bought the tractor officially as a group. In reality, only one ejidatario took the credit and owned the tractor. He was the one who was responsible for the repayment of the credit. As the whole group was officially responsible for the repayment, this was a relation of trust with the tractor owner. Several tractors were bought in this way by ejidatarios in La Canoa. Naturally, it was the richer ejidatarios with irrigated land who bought these tractors (Amador García, Rubén García, Ignacio Romero, Inocencio Romero). Also for these arrangements the signature and stamp of the executive committee were needed. No problems occurred with these arrangements.

In these examples of BANRURAL, we see the appropriation of resources through personal networks. In the credit program for maize close relations between an official and some ejidatarios in La Canoa proved to be more important than negotiations between the executive committee, ejidatarios, and officials. In this case, most appropriation of resources took place by the officials of BANRURAL and ANAGSA and their relatives in the ejido. However, in the case of the BANRURAL credit for tractors, the appropriation took place by a select group of richer ejidatarios. So, depending on the circumstances and the other actors that play a role, the appropriation of resources may take different forms. Yet, it is notable that in both cases the commissioner did not play a central role.

In the next example again different aspects of ejido organizing practices are shown. This example illustrates how conflictual situations may linger on for many years without resolution. However, in the end a group of ejidatarios may join forces and tackle the question. The reason why so many conflictual situations linger on for a long time without anything being done about it is that the “resolution” or “ending” of conflictual situations is



accompanied by hard fights, family quarrels, and violence. The following conflict evolved around a part of the urban zone of La Canoa.

*The ejido retakes control*

A famous local conflict around the urban zone is the conflict of “*las Malvinas*”. This concerned a tract of land within the urban zone of the ejido, near the commons. As in former times nobody used this land the ejido gave Elías Romero, one of the richest ejidatarios, permission to use it for the cultivation of maize. However, the land was lent to him on condition that it would be returned to the community when more land was needed for the construction of houses. According to the ejidatarios an agreement was drawn up which was guarded in the ejido archive. Elías used this land for many years. When he passed away, his wife Petra Sánchez and their sons continued to use this land. However, the pressure of the population on the urban zone was growing and in the seventies the ejido decided to ask for the land back from Petra.

Petra said that the ejido had given this land to her husband and she refused to return the land. The conflict dragged on for many years and Petra and her sons tried to keep the land by all possible means. The agreement in which Elías declared that he would return the land when the ejido would ask him for it, had disappeared from the ejido archive. For many years Petra refused to give in and the ejido did not get the land back. Since at that time the war between England and Argentina about the Falkland Islands (*las Malvinas* in Spanish) was taking place, the ejidatarios started referring to this part of the village as *las Malvinas*, a name it retains today.

Francisco Romero was the ejido commissioner (1982 - 1985) who decided to make a real effort to recover this land. Besides lodging an official complaint at the MAR, he hired a lawyer. Francisco was supported by the majority of ejidatarios. Francisco and several ejidatarios had to go on many trips to the MAR offices in Guadalajara and Mexico City. Petra and her sons also hired a lawyer and tried to get several ejidatarios on their side. However, apart from some close relatives of Petra, all the ejidatarios supported the commissioner in his efforts. Manuel Pradera remembers that one of Petra’s sons visited him to make him sign a letter which said that he as ejidatario agreed to Petra possessing this land: *But I did not sign. I told him: as far as I know the ejido only lent your father the land, they did not give it to him. I do not have a personal interest in this matter. You can try and see what you can get out of it, but it is your fight. Later on I had to sign the papers of the ejido that said that I agreed that the land should be taken away from her.*

During this period the ejido meetings were well attended. Although Francisco

was supported by the majority of ejidatarios, for him personally this fight was not a pleasant one. He was threatened by Petra's brother and one day he was even put in jail accused of illegally invading Petra's terrain. The ejidatarios immediately reacted and got him out of prison in one day. Rumors went around that one of Petra's sons intended to kill Francisco. Finally, after many incidents and much tension in the village, the MAR reached a decision which said that the land had to return to the ejido. The conflict was formally won by the ejido, and the ejidatarios took the land. The recovered land was immediately divided into *lotes* for the construction of houses. As the ejido had spent a lot of money on lawyers, trips to the cities and on officials, the people who received a *lote* had to pay an amount of money to cover these costs. The widow was offered two *lotes* for her sons, but she refused. Many villagers stopped talking to Petra and her sons for years. Shortly afterwards Francisco Romero left with his family for the United States.

These three examples show very different aspects of organization and practices of control in the ejido. They make clear that a simple analysis in terms of bosses or *cacique* families who arrange everything in their own favor by monopolizing relations with the bureaucracy is highly inadequate as a general explanatory model for the management of the ejido. One of the aspects which in my view is much more central to the management of the ejido is the one that is illustrated in the last example. Namely, the fact that the costs that are involved in the resolution of conflicts and in "retaking control" over certain ejido matters may be extremely high in personal and social terms. Retaking control often means quarrels, tensions and fights. This is precisely the reason why there is no interference in many ejido matters and we can speak of a lack of centralized control. This becomes very clear in the practices which have developed around the common lands in the ejido and which are causing increasing tensions in the ejido and the village. I will now relate the practices around the commons in more detail.

### Who is Managing the Commons?

When I asked ejidatarios during the research what they thought were problematic issues in the ejido, many came up with the *cerro* (mountainous terrain). As was discussed in chapter three, the ejido received large extensions of mountainous terrains which had to remain in common use. These mountainous commons of La Canoa have always been used for different activities and provide many resources. According to the season, the commons may be used for collecting fruits (*pitayas, tunas*) and vegetables (*nopales, guamuchiles*), for hunting, gathering firewood, agro-forestry, and for the herding of cattle. The herding of cattle is

especially favorable in the humid parts of the commons, where people have built water reservoirs. Fields of the commons which are used for the herding of cattle, are called *esquilmos*. The *esquilmo* can be sown with pasture, but it can also be natural vegetation. A famous and widespread use of the commons is also the *coamil*: an intensive form of maize cultivation. Another well-known use of the commons, especially in more isolated regions, is for the cultivation of marihuana.

Ejidatarios and other villagers never refer to these lands as the commons, but always talk about *los esquilmos*, *los coamiles* or *el cerro* (the general name for these mountainous terrains). Although the official legal name of this part of the ejido is *tierra de uso común* (land of communal use), some people had never heard of this term before I mentioned it to them. However, whatever its name, it is clear to everyone that this land belongs to the ejido and not to the village.

According to the agrarian law the general ejido assembly had to develop regulations for the use of the commons. The executive committee had to supervise the exploitation of the commons and report irregularities like it did with the arable land. Although in La Canoa regulations for the use of the commons were never made, over the years a certain patterning of organizing practices developed. Today the commons are divided into several parts with their own use. A large part of the commons has been fenced for the ejido and the pasture from this part is sold every year. This forms the most important source of income for the ejido. Some parts of the commons are rented to a neighboring ejido that uses them for the cultivation of maize and in exchange leaves the waste after the harvest for La Canoa. Another part of the commons is fenced and used for the collective herding of the cattle of ejidatarios of La Canoa. In the rainy season, the cows are brought here to eat the fresh grass. Recently a water reservoir was built here for the animals. The remaining part of the commons have been divided into individual *coamiles* or *esquilmos*.

These individual *coamiles* and *esquilmos* in the commons are not only important for the landless families but also for the ejidatarios. Ejidatarios often cultivate maize on the *coamil* as a form of minimizing risks. As the mountains have a different type of soil and precipitation pattern, the *coamiles* sometimes give better maize harvests than the rainfed arable land which is more prone to drought. Different maize seeds are also used. So, in years of drought the crops below (on the arable land) may be lost while the harvests of the *coamiles* may be saved. However, there are also ejidatarios who think the *coamil* is much too labor intensive and they show no interest in the *cerro*. On the other hand, for many landless families their plot in the commons is very important as it is the only way for them to continue the peasant way of life (see chapter 3).

The way in which people have received their individual *coamil* or *esquilmo* differs. Some people just took a *coamil* without asking anyone's permission. Most people, especially the landless families, asked the ejido commissioner permission to take a *coamil* and this permission was always given. These arrangements were made with the commissioner and not

with the general assembly of the ejido who officially had to decide on this. Sometimes these agreements were written down but this was rare; most of the time these were oral agreements. When people had been given permission by the commissioner to take some hectares of the commons they often took more land. As these agreements were not written down, it was very confusing who had given permission for what. For example, sometimes an ejidatario or a landless man claimed that commissioner Romero gave him permission to take land in the commons, while commissioner Romero denied this and said that probably it had been commissioner Paz. In his turn, commissioner Paz denied everything. However, whoever gave permission, the *coamiles* were not taken away.

No map or register of land in the commons exists either. Interestingly, there is much less common knowledge in the ejido on the use of the commons than on the use of the parceled lands. Whereas several men could give me rather exact information about the division on the arable land "below", nobody could do this for the commons "above". It was only through combining information from several people that I myself could draw maps of the division of the commons. The fact that much more knowledge exists about the division and use of the arable land may be explained by the fact that the division of the arable land was executed from the moment the ejido was established, whereas the division of the commons was a gradual process. Furthermore, the commons cover a much larger area than the arable land and are much less accessible. In addition, the possession of new plots in the commons was often only known by the ejido commissioner or not even by him.

Over the years the pressure on the commons increased. Now that the *cerro* has become rather crowded, people have started fencing their plots in order to defend their *coamil* and avoid damage by cattle. Although the users of the commons - ejidatarios as well as landless families - realize that officially they cannot claim individual rights to specific plots, people who have been working the same *coamil* for many years feel that they have developed certain property rights. To such a degree, that the *coamiles* are even passed over to the next generation, rented out or sold! In the same way as with the ejido plots in the arable part, in the case of conflicts people claim to have certain rights to plots on the basis of the payment of their tax. Everybody using part of the commons, has to pay a certain amount of money per hectare. This amount of money is very little, but in the same way as with the arable plots, the tax receipt has become a form of acknowledgment of property rights to the land.

Many ejidatarios are annoyed by the fact that the commons have become almost totally occupied as they realize that soon there will be no land available for themselves nor their children anymore. Another issue that is considered to be a serious problem by many ejidatarios is that some ejidatarios have taken and fenced enormous parts of the commons and sell the pasture for their own benefit. Some ejidatarios rent the pasture lands for 200,000 (\$ 67) per hectare to cattle owners, while the ejido only charges a symbolic tax of 1,000 pesos (\$ 0.33) per hectare to the local users of the land. Another problem concerning the commons that illustrates well the scarcity of all types of land in the ejido, is the fact that people have

started building houses in the commons. Some fourteen houses have now been constructed there. In the same way as with the *coamiles*, people have often received individual permission from the ejido commissioner and again a lot of confusion exists about which commissioner gave permission to whom. Again these have been oral agreements and they have never been endorsed by the general assembly. The following example illustrates well that these organizing practices in the commons have developed outside the formal setting and that official procedures which one can follow do not exist.

*The awkward situation of a formal request*

Once during an ejido meeting the son of an ejidatario wanted to ask formal permission of the assembly to take a plot of *coamil* in the commons. The man, a lawyer who does not live in the village anymore, wanted to follow - what according to him were - the correct formal procedures. He had already come to several other ejido meetings but these had all been canceled because of the low attendance. This time the ejido meeting would take place and the man could finally present his formal request to the ejido assembly. However, this was a rather awkward situation. The ejidatarios are not used to formally being asked permission to use a part of the commons during ejido meetings. Now that the lawyer raised the subject, and formally asked permission to take a *coamil*, many ejidatarios used the opportunity to complain about the fact that everybody has taken land in the commons, that there is no land available anymore, and that it is a total mess which should be regulated. In the end no decision was taken during the meeting and the man did not get his formal permission to take a *coamil*. However, it was not prohibited either. The lawyer was annoyed by the whole affair and said that he could better just go and take a *coamil* without asking anybody any permission.

That was indeed the best thing for him to do. This was acknowledged by the ejidatario Manuel Pradera with whom I had the following discussion.

Mo: *Do you have an esquilmo?*

Ma: *No, but I am thinking of taking a piece of land near here which nobody has enclosed so far. I will first ask the ejido [meaning: the commissioner] if they lend me this piece of esquilmo. If they say no, I will just take it. Because if one just takes it, they don't do anything. But first I will ask them. If I don't take an esquilmo, soon everything will be occupied. And I have my sons to think of... Many ejidatarios just took esquilmo without asking permission and gave it to one of their sons later on.*

Although most of these practices were accepted and the ejido did not actively intervene in the practices in the commons, many ejidatarios were very worried about what was going on. In the most extreme cases of land appropriation several ejidatarios wanted to intervene.

However, as the conflict of “las Malvinas” showed, it would imply a long and dirty struggle to win parts of the commons back. This is illustrated by the following example.

*The ejido trying to take control again*

During the time of the research, the ejido started taking up one of the most serious problems caused by Refugio Sánchez, an ejidatario of La Canoa who lives in Autlán. Refugio possesses many hectares of commons and recently confiscated a public path and part of a *coamil* that is used by Macario Paz, another ejidatario of La Canoa. As Macario lives in the United States, his wife Teresa looks after the *coamil* together with their sons. The executive committee of the ejido supported Teresa’s complaint and the general assembly also decided that Refugio had to give Teresa the land back. Most ejidatarios were extremely annoyed by the fact that Refugio had for many years fenced an enormous part of the commons, rented the land out to others, and kept the money for himself. On one occasion during an ejido meeting Refugio was asked to pay the ejido a large amount of money for the renting out of “his” part of the commons. At this meeting a MAR official had been present and Refugio promised to pay this amount of money to the ejido. However, nobody knows if he ever did and everybody doubts it.

This time Refugio refused to return the land and the public path and the members of the executive committee together with Teresa went to several offices in Autlán to lodge a formal complaint and to ask for official intervention. However, as usual, the case against Refugio developed extremely slowly and the lodging of official complaints at offices of the police, the MAR, and the Procuraduría Agraria (PA) in Autlán had had no effect.

Refugio himself warned Teresa and the executive committee that he had many influential contacts in Autlán and that they would never get the land back from him. To prove his influence he sent the Autlán police to Teresa’s house to accuse her son of trespassing and make him pay a fine. Refugio also claimed that the fact that the ejido treasurer made him pay the tax for all his land in the commons, was a recognition by the ejido that this land belonged to him. Despite these hindrances, the executive committee continued with the case. However, during the period of the research the situation did not change.

*Established Organizing Practices and the Language of Differing Rights*

When we look at the commons we can distinguish different processes. Although its management has never been formally regulated, certain patterns in organizing practices have developed. In the same way as with the parceled land, large part of the commons have become a form of private property. Alongside this process, the commoditization of the commons has begun. For some people a plot in the commons is interesting as a form of

speculation and business and not so much for own production. Even though everybody recognizes that the possession of a *coamil* is a loan, people feel that they have developed certain “customary possession rights” to “their” *coamiles*. So far, nobody has been removed from land they have taken into use.

Now that land in the commons is becoming scarce, many ejidatarios have started to openly question the possession of *coamiles* by non-ejidatarios. The landless people in their turn, recognize that the ejido only lent them the land and that the ejido remains the “real owner”, but at the same time they feel that they have developed certain possession rights to their *coamil* or *esquilmo*. They are very angry with, what they call, the selfish and egoistic attitude of the ejidatarios, who are better-off and yet are claiming lands that landless families have been working peacefully for many years. Take, for example, José Luis. He is a man in his sixties who arrived in La Canoa in 1954 to visit an uncle. At that time, there was a lot of work in cotton production and José Luis stayed to work in the cotton. He and his wife never left the village and the ejido lent them a *coamil* in the commons. Today José Luis sells sweets and *raspados* (ice) at a table in the center of the village. He is a nice quiet man, who is respected by everybody. However, when he talks about his *coamil*, a fighting spirit emerges. José Luis explained to me:

*The comunidad [ejido] wants to take away the coamiles from us. In the times that we received the land, there was a lot of land above which they did not use; they lent it to us; as long as we cultivated it, we could keep it. They lent me 1.5 hectare. Afterwards I took more. I possess two hectares now. I have been working this plot for 15 years now. Three years ago, the ejidatarios started talking about taking the coamiles back. The government does not allow them to take it away from us; it is not mine but ... if they really want to take it away they can. But all the people with a coamil agreed that we won't let this happen. We will go to Guadalajara or to Mexico City. The ejidatarios have more than enough land and should not take the coamiles away from us.*

However, the non-ejidatarios are very careful about expressing these feelings in public as they realize that their position is one of dependence, and the ejidatarios have the legal right to decide. It is interesting to notice that among the landless families themselves divisions have also been created: sons of ejidatarios claim that they have more rights over the commons than landless people in the village who are not even related to the ejidatarios...! Some sons of ejidatarios even feel that they have more rights than the ejidatarios, as they are the first generation of men who were excluded from the ejido. Hence, some landless sons of ejidatarios feel abandoned by the ejidatarios who only think of their own interests. For example, Gerardo Lagos, who himself is a landless son of an ejidatario said the following when he was discussing the problem of the commons with several men:

*It's a scandal that everybody is taking land wherever he likes, without taking into account the people who really need it: the sons of the ejidatarios! I myself am the son of an ejidatario and it hurts me to see how people with a lot of cattle go to the cerro and fence in some land*

*without consulting anybody. I will go to the cerro and take some land myself as well. Let them accuse me in an ejido meeting. Then I will talk against the abusers. What we need is another revolution! I know of people who are not ejidatarios, nor sons of ejidatarios and they give them land in the cerro!*

Hence, as was already mentioned in chapter three, some groups claim to have more rights to the commons than others and in this way they use a language of differing rights. The ejidatarios use a language which is based on the agrarian law which states that the commons belong to the ejido and not to the village. The non-ejidatarios use a language of moral rights and of the revolution to claim rights to their *coamil*. Hence, around the problems with the commons different categories in the village are distinguished and different groups get organized. These social categories have different interests and sets of different rights are claimed.

When we look at the agrarian law, we see that in contrast to the parceled land, the individual right to a *coamil* is not legally protected. According to the old agrarian law (before 1992) the commons cannot be divided into individual plots and nobody can claim individual rights to parts of the commons. The right to the use of the commons is a collective right of all ejidatarios. Ejidatarios, as well as non-ejidatarios are very aware of this official rule. However, in the same way as with the parceled land, it is not clear what the role of these official rules in future conflicts will be. Although nobody has been removed from the commons so far, as with the arable land, these official rules may play a role in the future. We saw that in the case of the parceled land, the prohibition on selling or renting ejido land, influenced the way in which these transactions were organized but did not prevent large scale selling and renting of ejido plots.

#### *Developments to be Expected in the Future*

If the ejidatarios decide to fight as a group against the non-ejidatarios who possess *coamiles* they would be in a very strong position. However, although a lot of discussion is going on in the village, there are several reasons that prevent the ejido from taking the *coamiles* back from the landless families. In the first place, the ejidatarios are very divided on the issue and much more serious conflicts are going on among ejidatarios themselves. In the second place, although people like to have a *coamil*, the value of this land is low and not comparable to the value of the arable land. Finally, there are also other types of relations between ejidatarios and non-ejidatario *coamil* possessors. Many ejidatarios are close relatives of these landless *coamileros*. They may be their brothers or sons. So, although the ejidatarios may be annoyed about the over-exploitation of the commons, dispossessing their brothers and sons of these lands is another matter.

In the future the issue will only become more complex. As well as the existing dynamic, more elements are starting to play a role, for example, the deforestation of the mountains. Much of the mountains have been burnt down to sow maize on the *coamiles*. This is seen by



some people as the cause of the serious erosion which is occurring. The forestry police controls these practices but this only seems to lead to negotiations about permits. Furthermore, control of the cultivation of marihuana in the commons is an element which plays a permanent role and leads to interference by the drug control police. Another problem is that neighboring ejidos are invading the commons of La Canoa and have started law suits to keep these lands. In this way the commons are changing from a relatively unproblematic area in which all actors had considerable autonomy into a highly contested area of socio-political struggle in which many different interests and actors are involved and in which the role of the state bureaucracy will only become more pronounced.

The new agrarian law which was issued in 1992 and the regulations which appeared afterwards opened the possibility of renting out the common lands even to commercial enterprises. Under certain conditions, the use of the commons as a collateral for loans is also allowed, as well as the division of the commons into plots for individual use. The sale of plots in the commons is still prohibited. Although the situation differs from that of the parceled land (different resources and social actors are involved, different official rules apply) it is to be expected that a process of privatization also occurs in the commons. In contrast to the parceled arable land, however, in the commons non-ejidatarios will also participate.

## Ejido Meetings

### *Meetings as Arenas of Bickering and Indecisive Confrontation*

When I started the research, I thought that although official meetings may give very little insight into the central negotiations and decision-making processes concerning the ejido management, they would be illuminating in other respects. They would give important clues about what is happening "backstage". By listening to the ironic remarks, the conversations, and discussions in the back of the room I could get an idea of things that were going on. Furthermore, these meeting would show how informally arranged affairs are formally presented, challenged, and negotiated. The public debates at the meetings would give an indication of the most powerful political discourses. An important aim was to study the relation between these public official performances and negotiations in other settings. However, although I felt that I started with an "open" and "flexible" attitude it was difficult to deal with the meetings I found in the ejido. The point was that I still held to a modernist view of a meeting as: a public gathering of people in which information is given, arguments are presented, debates take place, voting occurs, and decisions are taken. Even if everything at the meeting had been prepared beforehand and if this was just the "playing out of the formal game", in my view, this was what a meeting should more or less look like. Yet, what I found in the ejido did not remotely correspond to this image.

The ejido meetings were characterized by many ejidatarios talking and quarreling at the same time. There was seldom a central discussion and when there was it soon dissolved into side-discussions in which old fights were recalled and often the same people started criticizing each other again. None of the three commissioners I knew over the years, had any authority at these meetings. They were just one of those talking, giving an opinion, or quarreling. Only officials who sometimes attended the meetings had any form of authority and could decide on the direction of the discussion. However, ejidatarios used to give little support or cooperation to the official's theme. When an official attended the meeting for a special purpose, he drew up an act of the meeting which had to be signed by the ejidatarios. However, during the meetings which were held without an official, minutes were hardly ever kept or acts drawn up. Although the meetings were held to discuss important ejido matters, collective decisions were never taken and voting never took place. Different people expressed their opinion and that was it. When accounts of income and revenue were presented they were always quickly passed. Certainly, there were always people complaining about these accounts, but the commissioner was never obliged to give a public explanation. Many side remarks were made during the meetings in the style of: things should be different, more ejidatarios should attend the meetings, people should learn to listen to each other, the rules should be followed, and so on. During the meetings ejidatarios used to walk in and out of the building. Outside the building small groups discussed what was going on inside. When they thought they had heard enough, the ejidatarios left the meeting.

It was obvious that I had to give up my plan to study political rhetoric and discourses in which decisions were formally presented, negotiated, and challenged. There was no public debate. Not even the commissioners spoke up and nobody had to defend decisions by making use of political discourses. The only thing that became very clear during these meetings were the areas of contestation in the ejido. The same conflicts about the "lost land" and the commons, for example, always came up and without exception ejidatarios accused each other of things that had gone wrong. However, these were loose accusations, in the sense that no central discussion would follow in which attempts were made to resolve these issues.

Although Bailey (1969) describes a very different situation in the village of Bisipara, India, there are some similarities in the meetings he described. The difference with the situation in La Canoa is that in his study he distinguishes clear-cut village factions and presents an analysis in the form of the "playing of the public political game according to certain generally accepted rules". In La Canoa there were no clear-cut factions or established groups and although there is some patterning in the meetings I would not talk in terms of the "rules of the political game". Yet Bailey nicely describes how in the village council people publicly accused each other of failure to contribute to common tasks, of embezzling of village funds, and other matters and how this always led to heated debates. Yet, decisions were never reached on these affairs and after these open confrontations the affair would slip back to the more covert competition of gossip and backbiting. "Then sooner or later, there

would be another confrontation of just the same kind, followed by another period of gossip and slander" (Bailey 1969: 89). The interesting similarity is that in Bailey's study, as in La Canoa, public meetings have become an arena of "bickering and indecisive confrontation" and not of decision-making and resolution (*ibid.*: 90). Before elaborating further on the diverse roles of meetings in the ejido, I will present some more details.

### *Organization of Meetings and their Symbolic Aspects*

During the time of the research meetings were convened whenever the executive committee felt there was a reason for it or when officials called a meeting. Meetings were normally held on Sunday afternoons. The meetings were announced by sticking posters on the walls of certain houses in the village and sometimes by a car driving around with a loudspeaker. Still, many ejidatarios were often not aware of meetings that were planned and only found out afterwards that they had taken place. The ejido meetings always took place in the ejido building (*casa ejidal*) in the center of the village. There is one room in the *casa ejidal* with a table and some chairs. The door of the *casa ejidal* remained open during the meetings and the windows were also open. This meant that the meeting could easily be followed by people gathering outside the building.

The first time an ejido meeting is called, half the number of ejidatarios plus one need to be present for the voting. If less ejidatarios are present, no decisions can be taken and the meeting has to be called a second time. The second meeting decisions are valid irrespective of the number of ejidatarios. This official rule is well followed by the ejidatarios. This is also the reason why few ejidatarios attend a meeting the first time it is called as they know that a second meeting almost always has to be called. More people may attend at this second meeting, but during the time of my research, the attendance of the meetings was generally very low.

Ejidatarios themselves often say that they feel that they should go to the meetings, but immediately give several reasons for not wanting to go. First of all, the real decisions are taken outside the meetings. If somebody has to arrange a matter, he or she directly goes to the ejido commissioner or to other people of importance. Secondly, ejido meetings can be unpleasant and sometimes result in an aggressive atmosphere in which problems and conflicts become worse instead of being resolved. Long-standing conflicts between ejidatarios or things that happened a long ago are often dug up. Finally, many affairs the meetings deal with, are of no interest to the ejidatarios.

Naturally, the type of meeting determined the attendance of the ejidatarios. For the meeting in which MAR officials arrived to check on the use of the individual ejido plots (the IUP) even ejidatarios who lived in the United States came over. These IUP meetings, though chaotic, followed the agenda set by the official. On the other hand, on one occasion when officials of BANRURAL came to the ejido to talk about possible credits, only three ejidatarios arrived, not including the ejido commissioner. So, the meeting was canceled. Yet,

this lack of interest was a statement by the ejidatarios that they did not want to work with BANRURAL anymore. Other meetings which were convened by officials to inform ejidatarios about new government programs, for example about deforestation, also did not find much enthusiasm and often had to be canceled. Many ejidatarios had other channels which provided them with relevant information. However, other themes were of more interest to the ejidatarios. For example, the meetings at which officials came to talk about the change of article 27 of the Constitution and the new agrarian law and about the new subsidy program PROCAMPO were much better attended.

As we saw in chapter five, 21 of the 97 ejidatarios are women. The ejidatarias always sat together and often brought some needlework with them. Women hardly ever spoke up at the meetings. Some women declared to me that they would prefer their husbands to go the meetings as they did not feel at ease in these male-dominated spheres. However, I never saw one of the women ejidatarias being represented at the meetings by their husbands. If the ejidatarias did not attend the meetings, their husbands sometimes stayed outside the ejido building to find out what was happening, but they never entered the building. This was understandable as these men found themselves in a rather unpleasant position. They managed the land of their wives but were not the formal owners of the land. They did not want to run the risk of being humiliated at an ejido meeting by being told that they should leave and bring their wives instead. On the other hand, there were also women ejidatarias who loved to go to the ejido meetings or to the meetings of other organizations, such as the CNC meetings for sugarcane growers. So, with respect to the position of women in the ejido no fixed pattern could be distinguished. In the following chapters it will become clear that the role of women in the ejido was much more important than was generally assumed.

Officially, only ejidatarios can attend ejido meetings and vote. This rule could be problematic in the case of a deceased ejidatario whose land had not yet formally been transferred to the inheritor, in the case of migrated ejidatarios, or in the case of old and disabled ejidatarios. In the case of deceased ejidatarios, the inheritors were always accepted at the meetings as full ejidatarios. As we noticed in chapter five, the official MAR register of ejidatarios was a mess and the official transfer of an agrarian right to the inheritor could take many years. So, the ejidatarios worked with - what could be called - a "practical register" of ejidatarios. This means that they themselves knew very well who possessed certain ejido plots and who were the "real" ejidatarios.

In the case of migrated or old ejidatarios, matters were more complicated. Migrated or old ejidatarios could be represented at the meeting by a son or a wife. However, to vote an official warrant could be required. Interestingly, these requisites depended to a large extent on the situation and the people involved. While the wife of a migrated ejidatario could attend ejido meetings and vote for her husband for a long time, suddenly somebody might object to her presence and ask for the warrant. In periods of conflicts and tension in the ejido, in particular, there was suddenly little flexibility with respect to the attendance of ejido

meetings. Although the periods that I stayed in the ejido were relatively quiet, and comments were never made about the presence of people who had no right to be at the meetings (myself included), I noticed that non-ejidatarios themselves avoided attending the meetings. The husbands of women ejidatarias or sons of old ejidatarios seldom showed up at the ejido meetings. In the rare occasion they did, they refrained from speaking up. So, we see that although certain rules may be applied with great flexibility, they may become instruments in periods of conflicts. Again we notice the sensitive distinction between being a “real ejidatario” or only a “stand in”.

However, ejido meetings could also play symbolic roles in other ways. This is well illustrated, for example, in the following case in which the conspicuous “non-meeting” by ejidatarios conveyed an important message to the commissioner. This happened in 1993 when an ejido commissioner (whose election will be discussed in the next section) wanted to resign because of personal problems and conflicts in the ejido. He convened several meetings to present his resignation. However, the ejidatarios knew that he wanted to present his resignation and nobody came to the meetings. This conspicuous non-presence of the ejidatarios was a message that they did not want him to resign and in this way they made it impossible for him to make his resignation official. Besides the fact that the other ejidatarios did not want him to leave, nobody wanted his deputy (*suplente*) to replace him. As the commissioner insisted on leaving his post he decided to invite a MAR official to put more pressure on the other ejidatarios. However, the official was informed by the ejidatarios about what was going on and he was asked not to present himself at the meeting. So, the official did not arrive and only the commissioner and his deputy arrived at the meeting.

A strange situation developed in which for several months it was not clear who was the ejido commissioner. The official commissioner had given the ejido stamp to his deputy to show that his intention to resign was serious. Many ejidatarios were annoyed by this manoeuvre as the ejido stamp is considered to be an important official instrument. A weird situation evolved in which people who went to the commissioner’s house to get their papers stamped, were accompanied by the commissioner to the house of his deputy who stamped the papers. The commissioner understood very well that people were annoyed about this and he recognized that the ejido stamp was an important official instrument which should be handled with caution, but if the ejidatarios did not come to the meeting to accept his formal resignation, these were the consequences.

However, in private, pressure was put on the commissioner by different ejidatarios to stay on. Finally, the commissioner understood and accepted the messages of the empty meetings and the personal pressures and he stayed on. At the next meeting no comments were made about this affair. This example makes clear that meetings may fulfill several symbolic roles. It also illustrates that events at the meetings have to be analyzed in conjunction with modes of accountability that take place outside the public sphere.

*Meetings and the Playing of the Official Game*

The ejido meetings and acts drawn up at these meetings become important as the "formal game" has to be played towards outside agencies. This happened, for example, in the case of "las Malvinas" which was discussed before and also in the conflict between the ejido and Refugio Sánchez (see the discussion on the commons). When Refugio appropriated a public path and invaded *coamiles* possessed by other ejidatarios, an ejido meeting was organized to tackle this question. Thirty ejidatarios arrived at the meeting and this was the only meeting during my research where an official act was drawn up by the ejidatarios. The act was signed by all the ejidatarios present and stamped by the commissioner. The executive committee went to several offices in Autlán with that document. This shows that for the struggle in a different arena - in this case the arena of public offices in Autlán - the official ejido structure and official procedures can play an important role again. Although, at the same time, the playing of the formal game is only part of the struggle in these wider arenas and political influences and personal networks have also to be mobilized.

This meeting pattern in the ejido is often labeled by academics, as well as officials, as disorganized and as a consequence, they argue, it is necessary for ejidatarios to learn "how to organize themselves". Yet, in my view, these meetings have to be analyzed in relation to historically developed organizing practices in the ejido and in relation to forms of accountability outside the formal setting. It is obvious that these meetings do not follow the official formula in which the executive committee presents the problems and issues in the ejido to the general assembly which then discusses the points and takes decisions by voting. There is no question of publicly accounting for one's actions either and the commissioner can take several decisions on his own. However, there is no concentration of power in the position of the commissioner either. The commissioner is bound by many restrictions and when he goes too far or damages the interests of certain people, they will let him know and he will be stopped. He is not stopped so much by people speaking up at a meeting, but by their talking to him in private, and their use of other political networks and gossip and rumors to stop him.

In this context, meetings have acquired other meanings. In La Canoa the meetings give ejidatarios the possibility of expressing their opinions and feelings and stressing the differences and tensions in the ejido. The meetings are an arena of expression and contestation. In these meetings there is a strong sense of the value of the individual. The commissioner has no more authority than anybody else. The meetings also have more symbolic functions by showing who is an insider and outsider and who is a real ejidatario or only a stand in. The low or high attendance at meetings can send important messages to officials or commissioners. The meetings, as well as acts drawn up at the meetings, may become important again for the playing of the official game. However, in order to be really effective, this has to be combined with pressures and organizing through unofficial channels.

### The Unpopular Position of the Ejido Commissioner

We have already seen that all organization in the ejido or the village is mediated through personal or political networks. Many issues are negotiated informally and not through formal bureaucratic channels or public meetings. In addition, all ejidatarios are related to each other and this means that every project may soon become embedded in a dense web of socio-political relations. These characteristics of ejido and village organizing practices, mean that many people choose not to take action. Even issues that in the opinion of most ejidatarios should be dealt with are not tackled. While many ejidatarios have clear opinions about what is going wrong in the ejido and what should be changed, at the same time they feel powerless or are afraid to do something about it. They know that they will get into problems with their neighbor, uncle, or *compadre* and that is something they want to avoid. In addition, most ejidatarios are old people who have already had many experiences with conflicts and murders in the village and they do not want to become involved in these problems anymore. So, several people told me that the best strategy is not to do anything. As somebody said, even the politically most innocent act will in the end annoy someone. Rubén Romero, gave a nice explanation of this phenomenon of “not doing anything” being the best strategy, when I asked him how the *delegado* was doing: *The one who doesn't do anything is good (es bueno el que no hace nada). The people don't talk about the delegado we have now. He doesn't annoy anybody. He is a bad worker (para trabajar es malo). But the point is that whatever you do, you will always have opponents. For example, if you want to make a street you will annoy the people who do not want a street near their house or through their land. If you want to prohibit the cows from walking in the street you will have problems with the cattle owners. If you want to let the people pay their water according to the quantity they use, you will also have problems with cattle owners, etc. Everything good he is doing, is bad for someone else. And then he has his friends, his compadres and his relatives whom he doesn't want to harm...*

As a consequence of this situation, most villagers do not want to take any formal responsibility and most ejidatarios do not want to stand for a post in the ejido. Some people are very explicit about their wish to stay away from an official position. For example, Manuel Pradera is a very capable and much respected ejidatario who never gets into trouble with anyone. On many occasions he has been asked to become ejido commissioner or *delegado* or to take a position in special committees. He is asked to fill formal positions especially when conflicts are going on as nobody will doubt his integrity. However, so far he has always refused because he does not want to get involved in all kinds of problems and, as he says, he does not *want to be used in the political games of other people*.

Besides the fact that one can easily get into conflicts with other people, the leaders of organizations and projects are always criticized. There always is a lot of uncertainty about what is going on. So, there is always room for rumors, complaints, and gossiping. The executive committee of the ejido is always held responsible for everything that goes wrong.

If they do not go on trips for the ejido, they are blamed for not working on behalf of the ejido or it is said that they have been bought by the *caciques*. If, on the other hand, they go on many trips, they are blamed for spending ejido money on nice trips, hotels, restaurants, and other amusement.

In addition to all this criticism, the commissioner may become involved in delicate matters which he would like to avoid. He can be asked to negotiate on behalf of the ejidatarios with inspectors of BANRURAL. In the case of serious problems in the ejido, the commissioner is often held responsible and on several occasions the commissioner of La Canoa was put in jail. The commissioner also has to deal and negotiate with a range of engineers. Engineers from the Ministry of Agriculture often come to explain new programs, inspectors from the forestry police can come by and fine people who burn the commons, the judicial police occasionally invades the ejido to check on marihuana production. In 1994, for example, the ejido commissioner was summoned to accompany the judicial police to a part in the commons of La Canoa where they had found marihuana. Although the commissioner was not personally held responsible, this was not a very pleasant experience for him as exchanges of fire often take place between the judicial police and marihuana producers.

Finally, the position in a executive committee is not remunerated, but in order to do the job well, the members of the committee may have to neglect their crops or their animals on several occasions. For all these reasons the positions in the executive committee are not very popular among the ejidatarios. The position of commissioner is especially unpopular. Most ejidatarios have no interest in a position which implies little authority, possible involvement in a series of conflicts and continuous accusations by fellow ejidatarios. Ignacio Romero, who had been commissioner from 1985 to 1988 told me: *I would not like to stand for the post of commissioner again. You do not gain anything from it and there are always a lot of problems in the ejido.* During his own administration Ignacio was very active campaigning for the "lost land". However, it was said that he suddenly stopped working on the "lost land", when he was really making headway. It was rumored that he was given a plot of private land in exchange for abandoning the case. Ignacio himself said that he bought the land; but others assured me that he was bribed with this land.

To a certain degree the executive committee and the commissioner can decide themselves how active they want to be in the ejido, how fairly they want to do the administration and how much they want to get involved in conflicts. There have been different executive committees with different agendas. The fact that every executive committee develops its own specific ways of dealing with their peculiar position is well illustrated by the executive committee of 1988 - 1991.

#### *The conspicuous non-management of an executive committee*

From 1988 to 1991 the executive committee consisted of Gustavo Romero (commissioner), Mauro Bautista (secretary) and José Romero (treasurer). The



three of them agreed to do as little as possible in the administration of the ejido. This conspicuous non-management of the ejido implied that they only held three meetings in the three years they held power, that they did not interfere with the commons, the parceled land, or the urban zone, and that they only went on three missions to Guadalajara and Mexico City. They did not do anything about the many border problems La Canoa has with other ejidos and private landowners either.

There was a lot of complaint in the ejido about the passivity of this committee and towards the end of their administration an official complaint was even lodged at the MAR. An official came to the ejido to investigate the case and the executive committee promised to organize more meetings. However, nothing changed.

As ejidatarios always complain about ejido money that “gets lost” this executive committee decided to use the ejido money for the renewal of the roof of the ejido house and to build a big kiosk in the central *plaza* of the village. In this way it would be “visible” where the money had gone. Although most ejidatarios appreciated the decision to build the kiosk, there were also complaints that they should have used the ejido money to resolve conflicts in the ejido and to fight for the “lost land”. Yet, most complaints concerned the fact that no meetings were held.

José Romero the treasurer explained to me why they had not organized more meetings during their term: *I know that we have the obligation to organize a meeting every month, but these meetings do not make any sense. We have not been on missions. So, there was nothing to talk about.* When we discussed the criticism that he should have organized more ejido meetings, Gustavo Romero, the ejido commissioner, told me the following: *There was no reason to convene more meetings as the people are not interested in meetings and they never attend.* Gustavo was tired of all the complaints. He had been ejido commissioner in 1962 and according to him the people had been much more united then. Gustavo: *But here in the ejido there are always a lot of problems and politics going on.* Mauro Bautista, the secretary, told me laughingly that he only had written one act in his three years as ejido secretary. When we talked about the low attendance of ejido meetings he laughed and told me: *Once there was a meeting and I thought that it would not go ahead. As I very much like bull fighting, I went to a bull fight and did not go to the meeting. When I came back I asked someone if there had been a meeting. He answered: no, not even the executive committee was present!*

What is interesting in the management of this executive committee is that they developed their own strategy to cope with the conflictual situations in the ejido. Namely, to do the least

possible and not to take any initiative to interfere in conflicts. Mauro had taken advantage of his position to buy the pasture from the commons at a low price but the members of this committee did not fill their pockets with ejido money. Instead, they built a kiosk as a visible remembrance of their administration.

### **Reflective Talk and Two Contrasting Discourses of Organization**

The ejidatarios themselves often reflect on the organizational characteristics of the ejido and their role in this. In reality, this is a dialogue with the modernist discourses on organization as propagated by the government. Officials always say to the ejidatarios that they should accept their responsibilities, follow the formal rules, and organize themselves better (see chapter 9). This places the ejidatarios in a dialogue between their “practical knowledge” and a “modernist organization discourse”. This becomes very clear in discussions with ejidatarios about the ejido. For example, many ejidatarios say that they know that it is their duty to attend the ejido meetings but at the same time they can explain to you why they often prefer not to go. They realize that they have the responsibility to fulfill official functions in the ejido, but then start explaining why they do not want to do this. They say that they should ask the commissioner to render accounts of his actions but then start explaining that this would be senseless.

Ejidatarios know very well that organizing never occurs according to the formal model. Nor do they mind about the fact that in the view of outsiders their ejido is so “disorganized”. They have a lot of freedom in their operations and nobody interferes with their land transactions. Furthermore, they have considerable security of land tenure. So, most of the time there is no reason for the ejidatarios to want the ejido administration to work differently and in a so-called modern, democratic way. On the contrary, they are happy that there is no centralized control. On the other hand, in conflictive situations central management and formal rules may become useful. In these situations we see that some ejidatarios start using an “accountability discourse” which stresses the necessity of following modern organizing principles.

#### *The “accountability discourse” of organization*

The accountability discourse presents a modern bureaucratic model of the ejido. According to this model, every ejidatario should assume a position in the executive committee and take responsibilities if he or she is asked to do so. The executive committee should organize meetings and the ejidatarios should all attend these meetings. At the meetings decisions should be taken about the important affairs in the ejido and the implementation of the decisions should be open to inspection. The executive committee should render accounts of their actions at the

ejido assembly. The executive committee should defend the interests of the whole ejido at the different institutions. Ejidatarios who do not follow the official rules should be punished, they should be fined, or even lose certain rights to the land.

This accountability discourse is only used in situations in which certain ejidatarios want to retake control over issues in the ejido. Formal bureaucratic organizing gives power to the management (see Morgan 1986, Reed 1992). So, when somebody expropriates large parts of the urban zone or the commons, or when the ejido commissioner operates in a way that some ejidatarios do not like, then a (growing) number of ejidatarios may say that things should be done in the formal way, and that the official rules should be followed. The ejidatarios start stressing the importance of formal rules and using the accountability discourse of organization if they think that the rules are useful in winning a conflict or retaking control over areas where the ejido does not have much influence anymore. This became very clear when I worked with the ejido commissioner and some other ejidatarios on a set of internal regulations for the ejido (see chapter 9). While I did not see much use in formulating rules, some of them were extremely enthusiastic about the prospect of formulating more rules and in this way getting the commons under their control again.

Another discourse which is very strong in the ejido, and everywhere else in Mexico, is what I call the “personal politics discourse” of organization.

*The “personal politics discourse” of organization*

In this discourse people in official functions will always use their position to favor themselves and friends. It is argued that there is always a lot of *favoritismo* (favoritism) and politics in organization and that in the end everything is determined by money and relations. The people with the most money, or with the most influential relations, will always come out on top. In this discourse it is said that personal enrichment is the main reason for people to take an official post. For example, Mauro Bautista, the outgoing ejido secretary, said to me that nobody has a public function for nothing: *Politics always has its advantages, nobody does it for nothing*. This also is an illustration of the fact that politics and organization are seen as intricately related.

The model of organization which is presented in the personal politics discourse is more an imagery of power and politics than an accurate representation of organizational practices. As was shown in this chapter, in the ejido there are no people who abuse their “powerful position” as commissioner. The “personal politics” discourse of organization is above all used when people want to express their frustration with specific situations or with how things in general work in the ejido and in the bureaucracy.

The ejidatarios also have a two-sided attitude towards this discourse. They may complain about favoritism in the ejido management but at the same time will acknowledge that they themselves make use of these mechanisms. They may explain that this is a weakness in themselves, and say: *as Mexicans, we ourselves are to blame for it or: it is hard to change these things as they form part of our life, of the way we are*. At the same time they are proud of the fact that they as Mexicans know how to support friends and relatives.

The accountability discourse, as well as the personal politics discourse of organization present models of organizing which do not exist in reality. They are used in conflicts and struggles in the ejido. The ejidatarios themselves also struggle with these contradictions in their reflections on the organization of the ejido. Law (1994a, 1994b) talks in this respect about the many organizational narratives which can be found in every organization. Law shows how participants in an organization may present very different and contradictory narratives about what the organization is about. These narratives can be contrasting and inconsistent. These narratives can deal with particular conceptions of agency, self-interest, activity, opportunism, and performance. According to Law these manifold narratives of organization show the decentered nature of organizations as no narrative can completely capture the dynamic of the organizing processes. All narratives are true and incomplete at the same time. In practice neither of these two extreme discourses in the ejido captures reality.

A limitation of Law's work, however, is that he does not show the role of these different organizational narratives in processes of control and relations of power. Furthermore, the construction of the self in relation to the wider force field is not elucidated. The works of Pigg (1992, 1996) offer important insights on these issues. Following Pigg, I would say that the activity in which I found myself participating when the ejidatarios were reflecting on and theorizing about the organization of the ejido, "involved representations of self and other" (Pigg 1996: 161). In the same way as Pigg busied herself "documenting people's beliefs for purposes of scholarship" and "came across many people who were questioning their own and other's beliefs in the name of science" (Pigg *ibid.*), I busied myself documenting people's organizing behavior and came across people who were questioning and reflecting upon their own and other's organizational actions. That this was a debate with "modernity" became particularly clear when ejidatarios apologized to me for what they said was a total lack of organization in the ejido. After ejido meetings, they used to come up to me and say that they felt ashamed about the way that these meetings evolved and adding that I was probably startled by this chaos. Although I tried to convince them that it was not my aim to evaluate these meetings, they saw me as an "exponent of modernity" with whom they entered in debate. They knew what "modernity" looked like and they had often been instructed about it by government officials.

Yet, although the ejidatarios' theorizing and reflecting may partly be analyzed in terms of a dialogue with "modernity", it also has to be seen in relation to preoccupations with

control and power. These reflections and contrasting discourses on organization in the ejido played a role in conflicts, in efforts to change situations in the ejido and in attempts to retake control over ejido resources.

### **The Ejido Elections of 1991: the Preference for a Colorless Commissioner**

In October 1991 Gustavo's Romero's term as ejido commissioner would come to an end and a new executive committee was going to be elected. Obviously, the preparations for these elections were interesting for my research. By studying the mobilizing before the elections, I could find out the different interests at stake in the ejido and the possible existence of different factions. Yet, the elections of 1991 were another illustration of the unclear configurations in the ejido and only blurred the divisions which I had painstakingly distinguished. It became clear that it was impossible to speak of groups or factions which at every election presented candidates for the executive committee. It was also impossible to distinguish interests or problems which divided ejidatarios according to more or less stable lines. However, what made the elections of 1991 interesting is that a group of ejidatarios with a "hidden agenda" managed to win the elections and opened the way for the execution of their "secret plan".

The ejidatarios present *planillas* (slates of candidates) for the election of the executive committee.<sup>1</sup> In the election the ejidatarios vote for the *planilla* as a whole. Most of the time, there are two *planillas*. The custom is that the *planillas* are not made public until the day of the elections. However, although the organization of the *planillas* is surrounded by secrecy, it soon becomes clear who are actively preparing a *planilla*. For example, in 1991 I noticed that several weeks before the elections some ejidatarios frequently gathered. For example, several Romero men (Gustavo, Lorenzo, José) and Juan Alcázar often came together at the *Tamarindo* tree in the middle of the entrance road, where both Lorenzo and Gustavo live. Iginio Núñez and Salvador Lagos also often met in Iginio's *corral*. However, few ejidatarios showed any interest in the forthcoming elections and only small groups of ejidatarios were preoccupied with it. In the weeks before the elections, I tried to study the way in which the two groups were mobilizing their networks for the election.

#### *Planilla 1*

I learned that Salvador Lagos and Iginio Núñez had decided to organize a *planilla* that would work on the many problems the ejido La Canoa is involved in, and especially on the case of the "lost land". Pedro Bautista and other ejidatarios of the "opposition" joined them, as well as some ejidatarios of La Canoa, who live in Autlán. Their choice of candidates was based on several considerations. Salvador and Iginio knew that they themselves would be unacceptable as ejido commissioner to the majority of ejidatarios. Not only had they both had

many personal confrontations with what they called the *cacique* families, but they were also considered to be too conflictual by many other ejidatarios. As the organizers themselves would be unacceptable as ejido commissioner they had to look for an acceptable candidate. They chose Raúl Pradera. Raúl is a quiet, not conflictual and generally respected ejidatario of La Canoa. He had been treasurer of the ejido from 1985 to 1988. He is someone who never takes outspoken positions in conflicts and prefers instead to stay in the background. He seldom speaks out in ejido meetings.

Iginio and Salvador then asked Vicente García to be their candidate for secretary and Guadalupe Medina for treasurer. Guadalupe is a widow who inherited the ejido land from her late husband Miguel Romero. Guadalupe was Miguel's second wife. She owns a shop in the village and runs the public telephone. She had already been ejido treasurer from 1982 to 1985 and she is a much respected woman in the village. Vicente García was a young ejidatario who had never had much involvement in politics and who had never before had a post in the ejido. Although these were good candidates, given that the organizers of the *planilla* wanted to resolve the land conflicts of La Canoa and especially the "lost land", the choice for Guadalupe and Vicente puzzled me. First of all, Guadalupe's late husband Miguel was said to have been the main cause of the trouble with the "lost land". As I had noticed that Guadalupe always spoke well of her late husband, it amazed me that they would ask her to help resolve problems that her late husband had caused. Secondly, the choice of Vicente García also seemed peculiar as he was very close to his uncle Ricardo who is one of the people who illegally possesses a part of the "lost land".

I discussed my feelings of confusion with Salvador. I told him that knowing their intention to work on the "lost land", it seemed strange to me that they had asked Vicente García and Guadalupe Medina to join their *planilla*. Salvador then explained to me that they had told Vicente that they wanted to resolve the problems with the land of La Canoa and that Vicente accepted the post in the *planilla*, knowing the intentions of the organizers. Salvador and Iginio had deliberately chosen Vicente in order to get votes from the Garcías in the ejido. With respect to Guadalupe Medina, Salvador said that when he and Iginio discussed their intentions to regularize the borders of the ejido with her, Guadalupe agreed to support their plans. Although Raúl Pradera seemed to be a strategic choice to win the elections, it was to be seen how far the organizers of the *planilla* would be able to manipulate him if they won the elections.

### *Planilla 2*

The group, which gathered at the *tamarindo* tree and which I call the "establishment", had great difficulty in forming a *planilla* and had apparently not put much effort into it either. Several men asked José Romero, who was the outgoing treasurer, to stand for the post of commissioner but José refused. They insisted strongly but José persisted in his refusal. He was tired of all the trouble with the ejidatarios. As he said: *As a local delegado one at least*

*receives a salary and people pay you when they slaughter animals, but as an ejido commissioner one does not receive anything. It takes a lot of energy if you are responsible and want to do a good job.* The outgoing commissioner Gustavo Romero showed little interest in making any efforts to organize a new planilla for the elections. Before the elections of 1988, which they had won, a group of approximately twenty ejidatarios had gathered several times. However, this time most of these men showed little enthusiasm. Lorenzo Romero was not prepared to stand for a post himself either. As nobody showed much enthusiasm, nothing was done. Only a week before the elections they felt that they had to do something. A couple of days before the elections, Lorenzo visited Manuel Pradera and asked him to be their candidate for ejido commissioner. However, as usual, Manuel refused. This was a pity for them as Manuel would have been an acceptable candidate to all the ejidatarios. As Manuel refused to be a candidate it was decided to put Juan Alcázar forward as their candidate for commissioner. This was not a very good choice as Juan is known as a political person who is very close to the PRI-Romeros and who always tries to arrange things in a way that benefits him or his family. The candidate for treasurer was Ricardo García Jr., the oldest son of Ricardo García. José Romero was in the end prepared to be candidate for treasurer again.

### *The Day of the Elections*

The 15th of October Rigoberto of the MAR arrived at La Canoa to organize the election of the executive committee. Sixty ejidatarios arrived at the meeting which is a high number when one takes into account that 37 of the 97 ejidatarios live outside the village. Rigoberto read out an official document in which the change of the executive committee was announced. Then he asked the people to present their *planillas*. Iginio Núñez and José Romero gave Rigoberto the paper with their *planilla*. Besides the three members of the executive committee there are twelve more people in each *planilla* for functions without much responsibility. Rigoberto first named all fifteen members of the first *planilla* (the “opposition”) and then continued with those of the second *planilla* (the “establishment”). This caused a lot of confusion. Many members who were on the list of the second *planilla* had never been asked if they wanted to participate. Number five in the second *planilla* reacted: *Nobody told me anything about this, I did not know that I was in any planilla!* Rigoberto continued with the other candidates in the *planilla* but then several ejidatarios were called who were already candidates in the first *planilla*. Even the secretary of the first *planilla*, Guadalupe Medina, appeared in the second *planilla*. While Rigoberto continued calling the candidates of the second *planilla* a cheerful atmosphere developed in which people were laughing and started making jokes about what a mess this second *planilla* was.

Rigoberto then put a lot of effort in changing and completing the second *planilla*. He asked the ejidatarios who appeared in both *planillas*, which one they wanted to be in. They all wanted to be in the first one as they had not been asked and knew nothing about their

participation in the second *planilla*. Rigoberto and several Romero men then tried to persuade other ejidatarios to take a post in the second *planilla*. However, several ejidatarios who were invited, refused stubbornly. The women ejidatarias in particular were asked but they all refused. It was difficult to get the second *planilla* completed. Only after great pressure was put on the ejidatarios and it was stressed that the twelve extra posts implied little responsibility, did some of them accept. In this way and with great difficulty they finally managed to complete the second *planilla*.

Then the election could start. The ejidatarios had to fill in the ballot papers and put them in a box. After everybody had voted, they counted the votes in public. Raúl Pradera's first *planilla* won by a large majority. He won with 42 of the 60 votes. The new executive committee was then formally installed and the various members took their oaths. The meeting was closed and people stood about talking in small groups and slowly left the building.

### *Reflections After the Elections*

Many ejidatarios supported Raúl Pradera in these elections because he was a respectable, quiet, and unconflictual man. Raúl gets along well with everybody, minds his own business, and has never been involved in political networks or doubtful practices. Even the members of the other *planilla* had no problem with Raúl winning the elections. José Romero, for example, told me that Raúl Pradera is a good man. José: *The only problem with him is that he is a weak man. The men who pushed him to the fore for these elections, will try to manipulate him to their own interest.* It is true that the organizers of the winning *planilla*, Salvador Lagos and Iginio Núñez had promoted their *planilla* with the intention of having them work on the recovery of the "lost" ejido land. This had been a *planilla* with a hidden political agenda. Some ejidatarios were aware of this "secret pact", but not all. In addition, as we will see in chapter seven, even the members of this new executive committee had different ideas about what they had agreed upon.

What is well illustrated by the elections of 1991 is that most ejidatarios prefer to have a commissioner who is not politically outspoken. Salvador Lagos and Iginio Núñez of the "opposition" are unacceptable to the majority of ejidatarios, as are Lorenzo Romero, Juan Alcázar, or Ricardo García who belong to the "establishment". On the other hand, a well respected and quiet ejidatario who was always asked to be their candidate for commissioner by different and even opposing groups was Manuel Pradera. However, he always refused. The fact that it is important to most ejidatarios who becomes commissioner is illustrated by the high attendance at the election meeting. Although only a small number of ejidatarios were actively involved in the organization of *planillas* most ejidatarios were present at the election. More than trying to support "their man", they try to avoid "the wrong person" becoming commissioner.

The central aim of the ejido politics of the Romeros seemed to be to avoid people from the "opposition" administering the ejido. This was not because these people would have too



much influence, but because they can be troublesome. The fact that the Romeros were more interested in preventing others from becoming commissioner than themselves having any control became very clear with the administration of Gustavo Romero (1988-1991) which tried to be as inactive as possible in all matters but they did not steal money from the ejido either. The other Romeros did not want to have a post in the ejido themselves. They only wanted to prevent “troublemakers” from becoming commissioner. The Romeros did not mind at all that Raúl Pradera had become commissioner. He was considered to be a good guy. They had no intention of trying to control him or impose a better person instead. Their only fear was that other people would try to manipulate Raúl.

### **Conclusion: Decentered Management, Access to Resources, and Forms of Control**

Someone who would approach the ejido La Canoa from a formal organization perspective would easily arrive at the conclusion that the ejido administration is a mess. Rules are not applied and most ejidatarios do not seem to know the rules nor are they interested in them. Very few people come to the meetings and the meetings are not held very regularly. When there are meetings, many ejidatarios do not seem to be aware of these. Most ejido affairs are arranged informally and hardly anything is ever decided during official meetings. The ejido commissioner seems to have taken over the role of the general assembly and often operates on his own. From a formal organization perspective, the lack of attendance at the meetings, the lack of public accountability, and the lack of transparency would be explained as backwards and pre-modern. It would be argued that the ejidatarios of La Canoa should be better educated in their tasks as community members and that they must be made conscious of their tasks as a group with collective resources and interests. Actually, this is the kind of modernist development discourse which one often hears from government officials who say that ejidatarios lack certain skills and should be helped to organize themselves (see chapter nine).

Yet, I have shown that there is only “apathy” and “disorganization” when we approach the ejido from a modernist organization perspective. On the other hand, when we study the ejido from a practice approach of organizing, we see considerable patterning and ordering with respect to the access to resources and forms of control, and accountability. The main task of the ejido administration concerns the management of the different types of land: individual ejido plots, but also large tracts of commons and the important urban zone. In addition, the ejido plays a central role in the organization of several government programs, such as the issuing of credit. For that reason, I studied the organizing processes around these different resources, and also looked at specific projects, and areas of conflict.

Although the force fields around the ejido management differ according to the type of resources or conflicts involved (arable plots, common lands, urban zone, government credit,

etc.), a central factor in the way in which the ejido management developed is the dense webs of social relations through which people in the ejido and village are all connected to each other. At the same time, everybody operates in personal networks which can be mobilized against each other if necessary. The strong notions of individual responsibility and the private property character of land in all the different areas of the ejido give great freedom to the individuals involved, but also means that the ejido as the official "center of management" does not have much control over these resources (the situation of the commons will be discussed further in chapter ten).

In the everyday context of ejido management, matters are organized in small groups in private spheres. Often these are loose, shifting constellations of people instead of enduring groups with long-lasting commitments. This dynamic obviously has important implications for the formal bodies of the ejido. It means that important decisions are not made in public meetings, but by small groups which are not directly accountable to the ejido assembly. It means that the ejido assembly has little influence in daily ejido matters. On the other hand, although the ejido commissioner and the people around him take decisions on their own they have very little room to operate in. Their decisions may concern whom they sell the pasture in the commons to, or how many trips they have to go on to Mexico City, but they cannot decide to evict somebody from an individual ejido plot or to take land back from somebody in the commons. In this way these historically developed organizing practices have led to a situation in which the executive committee of the ejido does not have the power that is generally attributed to it. We have also seen that several mechanisms of accountability and control exist outside the formal channels. The most important ones are personal contacts, the use of wider political networks, and rumor and gossiping.

Ejido meetings have also acquired a meaning which has little to do with public presentation of information, decision-making and rendering of accounts by the executive committee. Public meetings can be dangerous as places where the honor of people can be attacked. For example, men who come to the meeting instead of their wives who are the official ejidatarias and could in this way become the object of laughter and ridicule. Similarly, people who are blamed for things they did in the past and money they embezzled may be attacked. In that sense meetings are a place of performance, of possibly losing face, and of questions of honor. Meetings have become a place of bickering and accusations (Bailey 1969), but they have also acquired more symbolic meanings of showing who are insiders and who are outsiders, and attendance at meetings can be used to show support for or resistance to certain developments.

However, we should not underestimate the role of the formal ejido structure and the agrarian law either. Although "formal organization is not *what* is happening" (Barth 1993: 157), the official structure remains important in conflictual situations. We saw, for example, that the agrarian law is present in the form of a language of claims people make on certain resources and a language of differences in rights (between ejidatarios, non-ejidatarios and

sons of ejidatarios). In this way the law and the legal system remain important as they provide a language and forums for supporting or fighting existing orders (Merry 1992: 360). In the case of serious conflicts the official ejido structure is particularly important as the game is then played through official channels. Then we also see the mobilization of larger groups, and initiatives to take collective action. In these conflicts the majority of ejidatarios may try to give the ejido assembly and the ejido executive committee their official role again. Yet, as this goes against established practices and always hurts the interests of certain families in the ejido and the village, the social costs for some of those involved are always high. (Even when the official procedures are followed in serious conflicts, this is always combined with politicking in small networks in the informal spheres.)

The ejidatarios themselves engage in frequent discussions about the organization of the ejido. I distinguished the “personal politics discourse” and the “accountability discourse” of organization. These discourses can be seen as organizational narratives which capture part of the organizing process and show that organizations are always of a decentered nature (Law 1994a, 1994b). On the other hand, these discourses also need to be analyzed as part of “representations of self and the other” and as such a dialogue with a modernist discourse propagated by officials in which ejidatarios are depicted as “disorganized” and “backwards” (see Pigg 1996). Finally, these discourses play a role in concrete conflicts. The “personal politics discourse” is used when ejidatarios want to express disagreement with what is going on. This discourse is related to the culture of the state. Within this imagery of power and politics it is claimed that people only take official functions for their own benefit and that everybody in official posts favors themselves, their friends, and their relatives. For that reason, gossiping, backbiting, and speculations about what is going on always surround official positions and make these positions highly unpopular. The “accountability discourse” of organization, in which the importance of following the formal rules is stressed, is especially employed when ejidatarios think that the official rules can be helpful in specific conflicts.

## Notes

1. While in former days the *planilla* that lost the elections automatically became the vigilance committee, today every *planilla* has to include candidates for the executive committee and their substitutes as well as candidates for the vigilance committee and their substitutes. Three more candidates have to be included for commercialization, credit, and production. So, a *planilla* consists in fifteen ejidatarios. However, the only posts of importance are those of the executive committee.

## CHAPTER 7

### THE "LOST LAND" I: THE PRIEST AND THE LAWYER

#### **Land Conflicts and a Different Approach to State - Peasant Relations**

This chapter and the next one deal more explicitly with the relation between ejidatarios and the Mexican state. In these two chapters I follow the struggle for the "lost land" of La Canoa, in which the ejidatarios try to recover land that belongs to their ejido but which is in possession of several private landowners. For over 50 years the ejidatarios have tried to recover this land and have demanded that the Ministry of Agrarian Reform (MAR) resolve this conflict, yet, without significant results so far. Under the influence of the public speeches of President Salinas (1988 - 1994) in which he claimed that under his presidency land conflicts in Mexico would finally be resolved, several ejidatarios decided to make a final attempt. Their fight, which I followed closely for several years, shows well how ejidatarios organize themselves in relation to the Mexican state and illustrates the working of the hope-generating bureaucratic machine and the influence of the culture of the state.

The land conflict between the ejido La Canoa and several private landowners is not a special case. The legal status of a lot of land in Mexico remains ambiguous. "Agrarian reform proceedings are often stretched out over decades, and much land in Mexico is held without formal tenure status which, almost by default, usually means that it is treated as private property" (Binford 1985: 181). The non-resolution of land conflicts is also a common phenomenon and the agrarian arrears (*rezago agrario*) of the MAR are notorious (see Reyes *et al.* 1974, Zaragoza and Macías 1980, Bartra 1980, Binford 1985). Numerous studies have commented on the peculiarities of the MAR administration, such as, never answering letters or only answering them after several years and the practice of letting peasants wait in vain at the office for hours or days. It is also well known that MAR officials frequently ask for money for their services or receive presents and meals from ejidatarios.

Schryer points out that many scholars argue that the law ultimately serves the interests of the rich and powerful (Schryer 1986: 308). This is explained by the pervasiveness of clientelism which makes the use of the law largely discretionary and means that the "Mexican law is at the disposition of the political authorities, and always has a casuistic content, being applied only if and when the authorities ordain it" (Foweraker 1994: 10). In this line of thinking the law is always on the side of the persons who are best placed within the political bureaucratic networks. If an ejido fails to receive attention "it must be because its patron in the state government has failed to do his job, or because community residents themselves have not been skillful or persistent enough in cultivating enough patrons, or the right patrons, in the right government agencies - 'the myth of the right connection'" (Cornelius and Craig 1991: 57).

The dominance of these models is the reason why there are so few detailed anthropological studies which include the legal and administrative dimensions of land conflicts in Mexico (exceptions are Binford 1985 and Schryer 1986). However, Schryer (1986) shows in his study of land conflicts in Mexico that on certain occasions the law can also work in the favor of the lower classes. However, of even greater importance than the question of who the law serves, is the fact that in many cases land conflicts linger on for decades without resolution, in other words, that the law is not applied for the rich or the poor. I argue that more attention should be paid to how these conflicts linger on forever and are “played out” within specific force fields in which relations between peasants and the state are organized. For example, in the case of the “lost land” of La Canoa ejidatarios have been involved in this land conflict for over 50 years. One could say that this case is not worth paying much attention to as it is improbable that the ejidatarios will ever recover the land. But we could also ask what makes these ejidatarios go on for over 50 years? Why do ejidatarios spend so much energy and money on a case which they themselves on many occasions say that they are doomed to lose? Are these expectations, dreams, and fantasies not a central part of relations between ejidatarios and the Mexican state?

Models of state-peasant relations based on corporatism and intermediation theories are highly inadequate for analyzing continuing struggles like that of La Canoa. These models do not set out to explain why ejidatarios go on fighting for something that is apparently impossible to achieve (the recovery of the “lost land”). They cannot explain why people mobilize, and why so much money and energy is spent over and over again on a “lost case”. One way to account for this phenomenon would be to argue that such ejidatarios are simple-minded and stubborn figures who have no idea of the working of the political-bureaucratic system. Yet, this goes against the fact that Mexicans are known to be very cynical about their own political system. Many studies (including large scale surveys) have argued that the majority of Mexicans think that power is highly concentrated, that they do not expect to receive attention or equal treatment from the bureaucracy and the police, and that they are cynical about their own ability to influence political decisions (Almond and Verba 1980, Cornelius and Craig 1980, 1991, Camp 1993, Foweraker 1994). So, how can we explain these continuing struggles in the light of this general distrust of the political system and the bureaucracy? As was said in chapter one, in order to explain this phenomenon we need an approach to the Mexican state which takes into account the cultural dimension of power.

### *Imagining the Center*

In chapter one I argued, following Abrams, that “we should abandon the state as a material object of study whether concrete or abstract while continuing to take the idea of the state extremely seriously” (1988: 75). The ejidatarios themselves do never talk about “the state” and tend to use more decentered notions of power. They talk about *el gobierno* (the government), *los caciques* (local bosses), *los ricos* (the rich people), *los pequeños* (the private

landowners), *los funcionarios* (the officials), *el presidente* (the president) and *nosotros, los pobres* (we, the poor people) in their reflections. Yet, on the other hand, the *ejidatarios* believe in the existence - somewhere - of a center of control which can help them settle their conflict over the "lost land". In other words, they search for the state in the form of "a neutral arbiter above the conflicts and interests of society" (Alonso 1994: 381) or in the form of an influential figure (preferably the Mexican president) who is strong enough to make sure that the law is applied. This belief is what I call their "idea of the state".

As their dealings with the bureaucracy and politics are so frustrating and unsuccessful and do not seem to get them anywhere, *ejidatarios* look for intermediaries who are more capable than they are in dealing with the bureaucratic machine. At the same time, brokers present themselves to the *ejidatarios* as the right person to resolve their problems. Unlike traditional approaches on intermediation, I argue that brokers do not necessarily have a role in effectively connecting communities or peasants with the state, but that they play a central role in the imagination of state power. In the search for the "right intermediary" and the presentation of themselves as the "right connection", *ejidatarios* as well as brokers are implicated in the construction of the "idea of the strong state".

#### *Becoming Enrolled in an Agrarian Conflict*

As this was a situation in which confidence, distrust, and gossip played an important role, I will outline what my own position in this conflict was. What certainly helped me in doing this research was the fact that I could return to La Canoa several times for long periods. In this way it was possible to establish enduring relationships with certain people. I became involved in this struggle through Lupe Medina, the treasurer of the *ejido* and the second wife of the late don Miguel. Lupe was a religious and independent woman who sometimes felt insecure in the male - dominated *ejido* world. She liked to talk to me, a woman outsider, about her problems and doubts in her private life and also with respect to the land conflict. Sometimes, in the beginning I felt that she was not able to assess situations in a realistic way. Later, when I myself was carried away by the fantasies around the "lost land", I realized that her views and expectations were not merely idiosyncratic constructions but that they reflected the working of the "hope-generating machine". As time passed, I got more and more integrated in the group that was fighting for the "lost land" and also established good relationships with several of the men. Some of them liked talking to me as they wanted me to write everything down about the problems of La Canoa and - what they called - the widespread corruption in Mexico.

Towards the end of the research, my position in this group changed as they noticed that I worked in the MAR archives in Guadalajara and Mexico City and had interviews with officials and lawyers about the case. They started seeing me as possibly useful. They asked me to accompany them on missions and visits to the MAR and other offices. Then, they noticed that I was treated in a different way and sometimes had more access to officials than

they had. They were amazed by this as hitherto they had seen me as an eternal student who had never learned to speak Spanish without an accent. The officials, in their turn, treated me as a woman from Europe, doing research for a doctorate. This was something that seemed extremely interesting to some of the officials and much more interesting than the problems of the ejidatarios. In the beginning I tried not to speak up during meetings of the ejidatarios with functionaries and only wanted to be present without participating. Many of the officials actually assumed that I was Lupe's daughter, which was an easy "cover-up". However, after the ejidatarios had seen that I was sometimes listened to better than they were, they gradually tried to position me in the role of broker or adviser and wanted me to talk to the officials. This changed my research to a certain extent. Not only because it was no longer possible to take a passive role during these social interfaces with officials, but also because the only theme the ejidatarios really wanted to talk about with me was the "lost land" and how things were going. Every conversation with the people in this group went straight to this theme. Instead of trying to find out their theories and feelings, it now became much more a form of dialogue in which my own position and theories also became involved. This change of position made it possible to express more clearly doubts about my own theories and theirs and confront them with - what I saw as - contradictions in their views or actions. In this way more "dialogical" research relations were established (de Vries 1992: 70).

My role as a "broker" did not help them much further in their struggle for the "lost land". They must have drawn the obvious conclusion that after all I did not have the necessary contacts and influence. What on some occasions made me feel uncomfortable was the fact that it became clear to officials of the MAR and the private landowners in the region that I was involved in the conflict case of La Canoa. Several times I was asked about this by MAR officials in Autlán. Although it never caused me serious problems, I also had my moments of personal doubt during the study of this case. I tried to maintain good relationships with some private landowners possessing part of the "lost land". Still, most of my sympathies were with the ejidatarios, fighting for what was rightfully theirs.

### **Predicament of the Conflict**

The conflict of the "lost land" dates from the establishment of the ejido in 1938. Certain lands that officially had to be transferred to La Canoa ended up in the hands of some private landowners. As can be seen on the map in chapter two different tracts of land were involved in the conflict and they all have their own histories and specific legal agrarian aspects.

There were different ways in which people referred to - what I decided to call - the "lost land". The ejidatarios talked about "the land below" as it belonged to the lower part of the ejido. Alternatively, they said "the land of the *pequeños*" (meaning the private landowners), or more vaguely, "that land" when they knew that the people present knew what they were

talking about. So, they used unspecific terms when they referred to this problem. Yet, when they were asked specific questions about this conflict they gave more detailed information and mentioned the names of the different fields (*potreros*) and landowners involved.

*About the Enemy: the "Pequeños"*

Most of the people who illegally possess parts of the "lost land" live in Autlán. Some of them acquired the land in 1938, while others inherited the land or bought it at a later stage. One of the owners of the land is Ricardo García, who is also an ejidatario of La Canoa and lives in the village. As we saw in previous chapters, he is disliked by people in the village because of his *cacique* attitude and things he did in the past. Héctor Romero, a former head of the public security police in Autlán and cousin of many Romeros in the village, also possesses a part of the "lost land". He is not a pleasant person to have as an enemy as the police in general have a very bad reputation in Mexico. Héctor was also known for having beaten up people in jail. Another unpleasant enemy who owns land of La Canoa, is the lawyer Salvador Mendoza. Lawyers are generally distrusted by the ejidatarios (as well as by many other Mexicans) but this is especially true in this case as he is associated with assassinations in the region. He also has important political connections in Mexico City. José Luna, head of the regional association of horticulture producers is another of the many people who today possess part of the "lost land". Most of these people are not really influential anymore within the regional elite. Ricardo García and José Luna both went bankrupt and have huge debts and serious problems. Héctor Romero is considered by other regional powerholders to be a bad politician who never managed to rise above head of the security police and has retired from that job. The lawyer Mendoza does not live in the region anymore.

Obviously, these *pequeños propietarios* deny that they illegally possess the land and many of them said that they were tired of the continuing accusations of the ejido La Canoa. The ejidatarios realize that the way in which these men oppose the ejidatarios' attempt to get this matter resolved is by bribing the bureaucracy and through their political connections in Guadalajara and Mexico City. Besides money and politics, there is also the threat of violence. Although many people in La Canoa do not personally know their enemies, the stories about them give enough cause for speculations about the bloody revenge that is to be expected if La Canoa were successful with their efforts to recover the land. Many people in the village have been murdered for lesser causes. Several ejidatarios say they have been threatened by the *pequeños* in the past.

*The General and the "Lost Land"*

Although the ejidatarios themselves did not mention General García Barragán as one of their main enemies in this conflict in the past (he died in 1979), I was particularly interested in knowing more about his role in this conflict. As the fight for the "lost land" was very much



a regional question (most of the illegal owners are from influential families in Autlán) I often asked the ejidatarios explicitly if the General had not had an active role in this matter. However, most people responded that although the General had been very influential he never had much to do with land questions, except for the plots he managed to get for himself. At the same time, the ejidatarios related incidents and anecdotes concerning the General and the “lost land”. Several people told me that the unmarried sisters of the Michel family in Autlán, who are daughters of a famous regional *hacendado* family and who possess part of the “lost land”, gave the General a part of their land in exchange for his support in defending their position against La Canoa. So, it was obvious that Barragán had interfered in this conflict and that his offspring were still involved.

Yet, we see here the same process as we saw with the agrarian history of the region and the establishment of the ejido La Canoa (see chapter two). People tend to talk in terms of anecdotes and seemingly isolated stories. Histories and analyses of power are highly fragmented. The point is that although the influence of certain people at regional, state, or national level may undoubtedly be present, the actual dynamics of power always remain highly opaque. Who is pulling the strings at different levels, and who influences the officials of the MAR at which moments remains unclear. Even if one could trace that an official had received personal instructions from the General to hinder the investigation of this conflict, this would only have been one anecdote amongst many in an endless struggle that has been going on for over 50 years.<sup>1</sup> However, this does not mean that people are not aware of influences or lack the capacity to see broader structures. On the contrary, we could say that sociological and anthropological analyses sometimes impose a coherence in power games that does not necessarily exist for the people involved. By imposing this artificial order, there is a tendency to neglect one of the most important aspects of power relations in Mexico; namely, obscurity and opacity. This obscurity and opacity are central elements in the culture of the state and form part of the worlds within which people operate and theorize about what is going on.

### *The Other Enemy: the Ministry of Agrarian Reform*

From the very moment the ejido was established the ejidatarios have tried to acquire all the land the ejido is entitled to. They have repeatedly demanded that the MAR resolve this conflict. In reality, the conflict with the *pequeños propietarios* has turned into a conflict with the MAR about the non-resolution of the conflict. The struggle with the MAR has focused on two elements. First of all they have requested that the MAR deliver the definitive map of their ejido. Although it may sound strange that the ejido has no map of its property this is quite common in Mexico. In the agrarian reform procedures were not always strictly followed or finished. Especially under Cárdenas (1934-1940) priority was given to handing over the land instead of following of the procedures to the letter. For that reason, many ejidos in Mexico do not possess a definitive map of their lands. So, the absence of a map was

not necessarily an indication of border troubles or land invasions. However, in the case of La Canoa this map has special importance as it would indicate which lands belong to the ejido and where the *pequeños propietarios* are invading their land. In the second place, the ejidatarios have demanded that the MAR measure their lands according to two other official MAR documents which clearly indicate the borders of their ejido and the total number of hectares they should possess: namely the presidential resolution of the endowment (*Resolución Presidencial de la dotación*) and the act of possession and marking of boundaries (*acta de posesión y deslinde*). So far, their pressure on the MAR has had little result: they never received the map nor was their land ever measured. However, the MAR did not resolve the conflict in favor of the *pequeños propietarios* either. The conflict was simply never resolved. For the ejidatarios this meant that they kept hoping and fighting for what rightfully belonged to them. For the *pequeños propietarios* it meant that all these years they were confronted with accusations from the ejido and formal MAR procedures which they had to counter.

According to the ejidatarios the problem with the MAR is that the officials let themselves be bribed by the private landowners. The ejidatarios themselves are not against bribes, nor do they mind paying for the officials' services, but they feel that they can never pay as much as the *pequeños*. However, apart from possible corruption and bribing of officials, the opaque structure and procedures of the MAR already form an enormous obstacle for the ejidatarios. Without getting into the impressive organizational chart of the MAR we can say that many different delegations and offices within the MAR are involved in the case of the "lost land" of La Canoa. While the division of the MAR in Guadalajara was relatively easy to handle as it was only one building with different offices, the MAR in Mexico City was a nightmare. In Mexico City the MAR has, since the earthquake of 1985, consisted of many different buildings spread out over the city. Each building is a labyrinth in itself.

Yet, visiting the different offices was a necessary evil. It was always stressed that people had to go and put personal pressure on the officials. Letters and documents easily ended up in drawers and might never have been answered if the ejidatarios did not personally present themselves at the offices. The ejidatarios knew from experience that letters were never answered or only many years after they had been sent or delivered. This left the ejidatarios little choice other than to go to the city. However, all these visits implied an enormous investment on the part of the ejidatarios. An investment in terms of money and time but also in terms of emotion and energy. The trip by from La Canoa to Guadalajara (via Autlán) took them approximately four hours. This means that they had to spend eight hours traveling if they wanted to make the trip in one day. In order to go to Mexico City, they first had to go to Guadalajara and then spend an additional eight hours on the bus to Mexico City: a trip of two days at least. Besides this time spent traveling, it was not easy for the people from the village to go to the metropolis. They were often taken advantage of by cab drivers and other people who immediately recognized *campesinos* visiting the big city. In addition, they had

to suffer humiliations at the hands of officials and others who often let them wait for hours or even days and treated them in a contemptuous way.

Besides the complex organizational structure, the agrarian procedures are complicated and the documents use a language which is often difficult to disentangle. Although I studied the agrarian laws and procedures and received assistance from both within and outside the MAR, a great part of the documents and procedures remained senseless to me. To a large extent they contained formalities and references to other documents and different delegations in the MAR. So, I realized that for ejidatarios who generally were not very experienced in reading and writing, these documents were impossible to decipher.

### *Storytelling about Don Miguel and the “Lost Map”*

There were many stories in the ejido about the “lost land”. In these stories the late Miguel Romero played a central role. For example, one tract of land which the ejido lost was given by Miguel Romero to his brother Javier when Miguel was ejido commissioner. He gave this land as a loan and on the condition that it had to be returned to the ejido afterwards. However, this land was passed on to several other people and parts were sold as private property. This land never returned to the ejido. Although this only concerns a part of the “lost land”, this is the story which was most related by the ejidatarios. Iginio Núñez, for instance, remembered that when he was a young boy an engineer from the MAR came to La Canoa and went to the fields with don Miguel. Iginio:

*Several boys from the village accompanied them and I was one of them. When they were at the lands, the engineer asked don Miguel: Do you agree that this was all ejido land? Don Miguel answered: Yes. Then the engineer asked: And did you give all this to your brother? Then don Miguel turned around and walked back to the village. He did not say a word anymore. From that moment onwards I knew what was going on.*

The other tracts of land concerned properties which the ejido should have received but never had in its possession. In these cases it was much less clear what exactly happened and who was involved. However, as don Miguel was one of the founders of the ejido and for a long period was the most influential man in local politics, he was held responsible by many ejidatarios for these problems as well. On the other hand, don Miguel himself made many efforts to recover the lands and to get the definitive ejido map. Several of his sons were also very active in the fight for the “lost land”.

The definitive map was a common theme in local story-telling. We have already seen that the ejidatarios have been asking the MAR to deliver the definitive map of the endowment for years. Many consider the absence of this map to be the central problem. The ejido has many provisional maps and maps of the extension of the ejido which do not help them any further. They need the definitive map of the endowment. Many speculations circulate about this map. Many ejidatarios say that this map, which clearly indicates the right ejido borders, existed

in former times. Several claimed to have seen it. Others said that they never saw it but they knew that it existed. It was said, for example, that don Miguel had documents concerning the ejido, which he kept privately. He told his wife Lupe that after his death, she should give these documents to the ejido commissioner. It was said that Lupe gave these documents to Ramón Romero and that later they disappeared. However, the only thing Lupe remembered was that one day her husband Miguel sat round the table with two of the sons from his first marriage. They had a map on the table and talked about the land. Lupe thought that perhaps this was the map they always had looked for, but she never saw it again.

There was another story that was often repeated although in different versions. In this story it was said that many years ago don Miguel himself went to Mexico City to do something about this problem. The ejido had given him money to pay for the hotels, the food, and everything and Don Miguel left for fourteen days to get the map. In one of the versions he returned to the ejido and said that he had lost the money. In another version he returned and told them that he had received the document but that he lost it on his way back. This story can refer to the same event or to different ones. But in both stories the conclusion is the same: don Miguel was given ejido money to get the central document and wasted it.

### **Fifty Years of Fighting the "Enemy"**

#### *Shifting Constellations Around the Ejido Commissioner*

During certain periods, core groups developed in the ejido which took up the fight and then when nothing was achieved, these groups dissolved again. A central figure in these groups was always the ejido commissioner. Without the support of the commissioner it was very difficult to work with the MAR as it is the commissioner who has to sign all the ejido documents and who is the only legitimate representative of the ejido. So, if there was a commissioner who did not want to tackle this issue, the case would rest for several years. On the other hand, with an active commissioner, an enthusiastic group and help from "knowledgeable outsiders" they could make headway in the bureaucracy and with agrarian procedures. This is clearly reflected in the number of documents one can find in the agrarian archives in Guadalajara and Mexico City about the different ejido administrations. Certain commissioners of La Canoa have been very active in this struggle for the "lost land" and many documents signed by them can be found in the MAR archives.

Although the figure of the ejido commissioner has always been important in the struggle for the "lost land", the coordination of the activities and the process of decision-making had very little relation to the formal organization of the ejido. The struggle for the lost land followed the same organizing processes as were discussed about the management of the ejido in chapter six. It was often not discussed at the ejido assemblies and the decision to go on a mission was generally made by small groups, as was the contracting of a lawyer, the

spending of ejido money, and so on. Frequently, they needed more money than was available in the ejido. This was needed for the missions to Guadalajara and Mexico City and to pay the officials, lawyers, and others involved. This extra money was collected by the core group. They would register who cooperated and with how much money. The idea was that this financial contribution would be taken into account when the land would finally be recovered and distributed among the ejidatarios.

In this small group around the commissioner, certain people often participated. Iginio Núñez, Ramón Romero, Salvador Lagos and Roberto Sánchez, for example often took part in it. Ejidatarios of La Canoa who live in Autlán also used to join, as well as a man called Federico Chávez, who is not even ejidatario in La Canoa and lives in Autlán. Federico's sister is an ejidataria in La Canoa and Federico hopes to be one of the beneficiaries of the land. Some people in La Canoa appreciated his help as he was better educated and knew how to handle the bureaucracy better. Also Mónica, a teacher from La Canoa, who worked in Guadalajara tried to help. Sometimes the people stayed at her house when they had to go on a mission to Guadalajara for several days. Mónica also hoped to be compensated with a plot of land in the future. Over the years numerous ejidatarios of La Canoa have actively participated in this struggle. This includes ejidatarios who today do not want to continue with this struggle anymore. In this way, the "lost land" has become important in shaping a collective memory of struggle even though at a particular point in time only a small number of ejidatarios were working on it.

People who actively participated in missions to Guadalajara or Mexico City in former times, still like to recall those times. Stories go round that people only ate beans or even stopped buying beans in order to save money for these missions. Others remember how their father sold chickens or a pig in order to finance trips to Mexico City. It was said that the ejidatarios who went on missions sometimes hardly ate or only had water and a potato as they had no money to spend on food. People resentfully recalled how others in the ejido laughed at them when they talked about the "lost land" and how they were going to recover it.

### *Recalling the Fight for the "Lost Land" in the 1970s*

It is interesting to pay some attention to the efforts made by ejido commissioner Macario Paz (1976-1979) in the struggle for the "lost land". Macario himself migrated to the United States, but many people still remember the activities during his term as ejido commissioner and there are also many documents in the archive of the MAR in Mexico City which refer to this period. His wife Teresa still lives in the village. Macario was supported in his work by the secretary and treasurer of the ejido at that time, respectively José Romero and Estanisloa Romero, both sons of Miguel Romero. Ramón Romero, Iginio Núñez and Roberto Sánchez also actively participated in Macario's activities. The ejidatarios received help from a lawyer of the Communist Party and most ejidatarios of the "group of the lost land" became

members of this party. As Ramón remembers, the lawyer never asked them for any money and said that they could always stay at his house. Ramón:

*He said, this is your house, you can sleep and eat here. I am going to get this matter arranged for you. After some time the lawyer suddenly disappeared and twenty days later he was found dead in a ravine with bullet wounds. Then things slowed down. We tried to get help from other places, the CNC and the Liga de Comunidades Agrarias, but didn't achieve much in all those years. Recently I met one of the men who used to be in a high position in the Communist Party at that time. He now is member of another opposition party and he suggested that I should visit him and talk about the case. He said that he had a friend who is deputy and who might help us.*

What makes Macario's efforts especially interesting is that he was illiterate, he could neither read nor write. His wife Teresa registered everything during his terms as commissioner. Ramón recalled:

*I had to read him everything, but he understood it very well. Despite the fact that he could not read, he was aware of everything, he knew what he had to do, he knew what he was fighting for.*

Teresa, proudly said about Macario:

*And if you had only known him! He was ugly and hardly received any education, he was an orphan, both his father and mother died when he was very young. But he was very good! He knew exactly what he had to do in the institutions. Once someone who had seen him operate in the office, asked him if he was a lawyer!*

But Teresa remembered above all the tensions and atmosphere of distrust at the time Macario was commissioner. Teresa:

*Macario went on many missions to Guadalajara and Mexico City. He was often threatened. The really dangerous person is the nephew of Salvador Mendoza, he is a lawyer. Once in Guadalajara he tried to kill Macario with a car but Macario escaped. Esteban Romero promised to let his beard grow as long as nothing would happen to Macario. When he died he had such a long beard! He and Macario put the cross on the hills near La Canoa. The members of the directive committee always went together to protect each other: Macario, José Romero and Estanislao Romero. José Romero often did not feel like going. He used to say: do we have to go again?! But in the end he always went along. Macario sometimes abandoned his work on the land to go on missions.*

During Macario's term as commissioner a MAR engineer was sent to measure the ejido lands. This engineer was recalled sympathetically by everybody. Teresa recalled:

*In the time that Macario was commissioner, an engineer came to measure the land. The ejidatarios here protected him day and night. He was cripple and sometimes they had to carry him to certain parts. He worked well but he never*

*finished the job. We have never seen him again. They made him disappear or they sent him somewhere else.*

Teresa still keeps the little book in which she wrote down who cooperated with how much money during that period.

### *On an Impossible Fight and Sweet Dreams*

According to the ejidatarios, a problematic aspect of their struggle is that many people in the ejido are relatives or *compadres* of the private landowners who possess the “lost land”. Most people are related to the Romeros or Garcías who possess part of these lands. For that reason it is said that they will not go ahead with the fight. Furthermore, the people know that ejidatarios of La Canoa can also be bribed. As we saw in the previous chapter, Ignacio Romero, who was ejido commissioner from 1985 to 1988 and had achieved a lot in the fight for the “lost land”, was accused of having been bribed by the *pequeños* with a plot of private land. Ignacio said that he bought the land, but several ejidatarios claimed that the land was given to him in exchange for stopping the fight against the *pequeños*. Hence, in their own reflections on this conflict, the case is extremely complicated. The ejidatarios have to fight rich, powerful, and dangerous *pequeños propietarios*, corrupt bureaucrats, and last but not least, fellow ejidatarios who are on the side of the *pequeños* or let themselves be threatened or bribed.

One may ask why the ejidatarios have persisted in this project when it seems impossible to bring it to a successful and peaceful end. This tenacity has to be explained in relation to two phenomena which were discussed in previous chapters: land scarcity and migration to the United States. Many ejidatarios would like to have a larger plot themselves. However, the prospects for their sons are even more important. Many ejidatarios hope that their sons would stay in the village or return from the United States if they could only acquire a plot of land. The “lost land” became even more desirable in the 1960s when it became part of the irrigation scheme. Since then, the value of the “lost land” for the ejidatarios has grown, as have the interests at stake for the *pequeños propietarios*.

The ejidatarios knew that the situation was very difficult but they had one example which they often mentioned to prove that it was possible to win against the “rich and powerful”. This was the case of Corral de Piedras on the coast of Jalisco. In that case ejidatarios and landless people succeeded in expropriating the land from private landowners who illegally possessed the land. This was approximately forty years ago. In that case influential politicians and even the state Governor became involved. Ejidatarios in La Canoa told me many times how the ejidatarios and landless people in Corral de Piedras finally won the battle against the *pequeños* and how several trucks of police came to protect them against the landowners. Although several people were killed, the ejidatarios and landless families finally recovered the land. The ejidatarios also used this story to stress the importance of unity. In Corral de Piedras the families of men who were killed or who were put in jail, were taken care of by

the other fighters.

At the time of the research many ejidatarios had lost interest in the case. They thought that after so many years during which the land has been tilled by others, La Canoa has probably lost the rights to these lands anyhow.<sup>2</sup> Besides, they felt that it was a hopeless fight of the ejido against these influential private landowners and the MAR. Several people admitted that they were afraid of the private landowners. They thought that the ejido would never win the battle without bloodshed. For that reason, most ejidatarios wanted to leave this - in their eyes - useless fight behind. For the same reasons, they were against the spending of ejido money on missions to Guadalajara and Mexico City or on meals and bribes for officials working on the case.

However, although most ejidatarios did not believe in a solution anymore, particular political conjunctures could raise their enthusiasm again. This was the case when President Salinas (1988-1994) announced a fight against corruption in the MAR and promised to resolve land conflicts in Mexico.

### **Resuming the Fight Against the *Pequeños* in 1991**

#### *Salinas and his Modernization Discourse: New Policies, New Hopes*

President Salinas' discourse on modernization and his speeches on the eradication of corruption in the MAR had a considerable impact in La Canoa. The change of article 27 of the Mexican Constitution and the agrarian law in 1992 and the accompanying programs to register all ejido lands were also well received. Although mixed feelings existed with respect to the plans to privatize ejido land, ejidatarios liked the fact that all the lands would be measured and that the ejido borders would now finally be established. At least, this was what the president had promised. Interestingly, it were the leftist and most critical ejidatarios, like Iginio, Salvador, Ramón and Roberto who seemed most favorably disposed towards this president and to have high hopes for the resolution of the conflict of the "lost land". Obviously, in the case of La Canoa the marking of boundaries had a special implication. It meant that a measuring would take place which they had not been able to obtain in more than 50 years. They hoped that in this way the conflict with the *pequeños* would finally be settled in their favor.

Salvador related with great enthusiasm that the Mexican president himself had said that he wanted to stop the invasion of ejido lands by private landowners and that the ejido boundaries would be marked within a year: *The president himself says that he wants the ejidos to communicate with him if there are problems.* These messages that the agrarian conflicts would be settled in a short time raised many expectations among the other ejidatarios as well. For example, Iginio said:

*I think the problem will soon be resolved. President Salinas said that all the problems will*



*be resolved in the last two years of his presidency. I cannot wait to see the changes. Let's see if the government is really going to help us!* On another occasion Iginio said: *Salinas said that he wants that all the lands that officially belong to the ejidos will be given back to them in 1991. That will help us this time.* At the same time Iginio added that the stories about the changes in the ejidos and the support for the agricultural sector almost seemed too beautiful.

But even people who had been very pessimistic about the possibility of ever recovering the “lost land”, now became amazingly optimistic. Manuel Pradera, for example, who had always been very pessimistic and reluctant about the case and did not have much of a fighting spirit, said in December 1991: *I think that we will finally recover the land. There will be conflicts with the pequeños but we will solve them peacefully.* Yet, other people were less impressed by Salinas' promises. According to José Romero with the new agrarian law and programs it would be more difficult than ever for La Canoa to recover the lands: *Now that the ejido will be privatized and cease to exist, it is very improbable that they will return land to the ejido.*

#### *An Executive Committee (1991-1994) With a Hidden Agenda*

In chapter six we saw that a small group of ejidatarios who were motivated by Salinas' messages organized a *planilla* for the elections of the executive committee of the ejido in 1991. They had a clear agenda in mind and had organized the *planilla* with the aim of taking up the fight against the *pequeños* if they won the elections. Their *planilla* won by a large majority and so the way was opened for them to manipulate the members of the committee for their project. We will follow this group from 1991 to 1994 and see that the strategies and the constellation of the group changed several times. Interestingly, the central person in this three-year period became doña Lupe, the widow of the late don Miguel. Women had been active in ejido matters before. For example, Teresa, Macario's wife had often participated in the meetings and the missions for the “lost land” in the 1970s. However, this was the first time in the history of the ejido of La Canoa that a woman had such a dominant and public role in ejido matters. I will first present the members of the executive committee and discuss their position with respect to the “lost land” when they took office in 1991.

#### *Raúl Pradera: Ejido Commissioner Against his Will*

As we saw in chapter six, Raúl was not very enthusiastic about being a candidate for ejido commissioner in the 1991 elections. He was a shy, not very decisive person and like the majority of ejidatarios he preferred not to have any responsibility in the ejido. He was 55 years old and married to Magdalena, a niece of Ricardo García. They had never had children. Raúl only had a small plot of rainfed land and a couple of cows. However, he also administered the ejido plots of two of his brothers who were ill and without children. Iginio and Salvador had insisted strongly on him being the candidate for ejido commissioner and in the end he gave in. Raúl knew that Iginio and Salvador had proposed him with the idea

of tackling the question of the "lost land". He told them that he was prepared to work for the ejido but only with the support of the other ejidatarios and in a legal way. Like many other ejidatarios, Raúl had mixed feelings about the "lost land". He had heard stories about people occupying lands of La Canoa and was willing to work for the ejido to try to get these lands back. Raúl was also encouraged by the new government discourse of democracy and stories about the final settlement of land conflicts and marking of ejido boundaries. He thought that perhaps this could help them. On the other hand, Raúl thought that it would be very difficult to win against the private landowners who would always go to the MAR in Guadalajara to bribe the officials. Raúl clearly did not have a personal drive to go after the "lost land": he did not have children. So the unpleasant prospect of having children for whom there is no land available anymore and who "are forced" to go and find a living in the United States did not play a role for him. The fight for the "lost land" was for him a service to the community. He wanted to do it for them. He saw it as his duty.

*Vicente García: Ejido Secretary and Spy*

Vicente was one of the younger ejidatarios. He was in his thirties and had four young children. He had a special relation with his uncle Ricardo García who had looked after Vicente after his father was murdered thirty years ago.<sup>3</sup> Vicente inherited his father's land and later bought private property lands. Salvador and Iginio had proposed Vicente García as secretary in the *planilla* as a strategic move to win the elections with García votes. However, everybody around the executive committee seemed to have mixed feelings about Vicente. They knew about his close attachment to his uncle Ricardo who possessed part of the "lost land" and was one of the "enemies" in this fight. In the beginning they thought that perhaps Vicente would really be prepared to work for the "lost land". In 1991, shortly after the elections I asked Iginio if he felt sure about Vicente fighting against his uncle Ricardo. Iginio answered: *He will have to. We will demand it from him.*

However, the idea that Vicente was a spy for his uncle in time became very strong. The feeling grew that Vicente informed his uncle about what the group was doing and even passed important documents on to him. These feelings about Vicente's loyalty to his uncle were probably correct. This became clear to me during an interview I had with Vicente and his wife shortly after the elections. When I was talking with Vicente about the question of the "lost land", Vicente's wife Ana interfered and wanted to know from her husband precisely what his position was and why he did not work more actively with the other members of the executive committee.

*Ana: But then you should join forces and you should accompany the executive committee on their trip to Mexico City.*

*Vicente: Don't you understand?! I cannot do things like that. My uncle Ricardo would think that I am doing this against him. I cannot possibly do that.*

Hence, Vicente himself felt very uncomfortable with the situation and did not intend to

become a spy in the sense of secretly working for his uncle. His loyalty towards his uncle was primary to him and he wanted no secrets about it.

*Doña Lupe: Treasurer and Worrying Mother*

The case of Doña Lupe was especially interesting as she had been the second wife of the late don Miguel, the cause of all the trouble. Miguel had married Lupe when his first wife had died and most of his children were already married and had left home. Don Miguel was in his fifties then and Lupe was twenty five. Lupe was born in a village on the coast of Jalisco. At the age of five she lost her mother and at the age of eight she lost her father. A priest then brought her to the Michel family, an important *hacendado* family in Autlán. Two unmarried sisters of the Michel family agreed to look after the young girl. When she grew older, Lupe started working at the market place in Autlán. It is there that she met Miguel, who used to buy his coffee at her stall.

After the wedding Lupe came to live with Miguel in La Canoa. Miguel and Lupe had seven children. Miguel died thirteen years ago when he was in his eighties. Lupe always spoke with great affection and admiration about her late husband. Miguel left Lupe eight hectares of rainfed land near the village, the house, and animals. Lupe had already started a shop years ago when Miguel grew older. For the last couple of years, she has also managed the only telephone in the village. She lived of the money she earned in the shop and the telephone and a small allowance she received after her husband's death. One of her daughters in the United States also sent her money on a regular basis. The land was administered by Juan, her only son in the village who lives with her in the house, together with his wife and young son.

All of Lupe's children, except Juan, live in the United States, in Los Angeles and Las Vegas. Juan drinks a lot which makes Lupe despair. Sometimes she called her sons in the States and asked them to come back to the village. She said that her house was big enough for several families. They could also build more rooms outside the house as she owned quite an extensive terrain around the house. Lupe said that there was enough land and income from the shop for several families to live off. On several occasions she happily told me that one of her sons had decided to come back with his family. But they never came. Lupe worried a lot about her children in the United States and prayed for them often. She had good reasons to worry as one of her sons was involved in drugs and had been in jail together with other boys from La Canoa. When they had asked Lupe to be part of the *planilla*, she first refused and told them to look for a better person. However, when they continued insisting she finally accepted but said that she hoped that the question of "that land" would never be touched again. Lupe had heard rumors in the ejido that her late husband Miguel had given ejido land away to a brother of his. She said that she never knew about this but she did not deny the possibility either. Yet, despite her hesitations, Lupe was to become the fiercest fighter for the "lost land".

### The Struggle Begins: *Licenciado* Salazar

So far, we have seen that the central group in the ejido after the elections of 1991 was very heterogeneous. Of the executive committee (Raúl, Vicente, and Lupe) nobody was really interested in going after the "lost land". The "initiators" had to pressurize them to go on missions and put pressure on the MAR. The people who most actively wanted to fight for the "lost land" were Iginio, Ignacio, Salvador, Ramón, and Roberto. Two ejidatarios of La Canoa living in Autlán also participated.

One of Raúl's first official tasks as commissioner was to go to Mexico City where he was summoned with respect to problems in the procedures for measuring the ejido borders. On this visit he received one of the provisional maps the ejido already had in tenfold. For Raúl this trip to the metropolis was a frightening experience, even though he was accompanied by two other men. After this trip, there were several general ejido meetings about the "lost land" and how they should deal with the problem. They also went on trips to the MAR office in Guadalajara. However, nothing spectacular happened until September 1992 when Lupe had a talk with the parish priest of the church in Autlán.

Doña Lupe was a very religious woman and maintained good relations with the parish priest Father López in Autlán. She kept in regular contact with him in order to organize religious events and pilgrimages to nearby villages. She would not easily bother him with "more earthly" problems but one day in September 1992, when she felt that their activities to get the ejido map were leading nowhere, she summoned up her courage and decided to talk about it with Father López. She made a phone call and Father López listened to her story. He said that he knew a lawyer in Guadalajara who was very experienced in agrarian problems and who could probably help them. By chance, the lawyer would come to Sayula, a town nearby, next Monday. According to Lupe: *Everything was arranged, as if ordered by God*. Lupe informed Raúl and it was decided that Lupe would go with Ramón to the meeting in Sayula.

On Monday the delegation from La Canoa went to Sayula and met the lawyer Salazar who arrived with several bodyguards. Father López was present as well and Lupe and Ramón were cordially invited to an abundant meal with meat and fish. Salazar listened to their story and said that he had a lot of experience with agrarian matters and that he could certainly help them. He assured them that La Canoa would get the land back and he promised that he would personally take care of their case. He added that it would "rain money" in La Canoa as it was a large tract of land that they would recover. At this occasion they gave him 2.5 millions (\$ 830) from the ejido funds as a down payment.

It had been Lupe's personal initiative to contact Father López and she had not discussed it with anybody. However, the others thought it was a good initiative. It was obvious that a priest could be an important broker and that was exactly what they were looking for, someone with influential contacts who could ensure that the ejidatarios of La Canoa were

taken seriously. They all agreed that on their own they would never achieve anything with the agrarian bureaucracy. All the people working on the “lost land” were very enthusiastic about Salazar. As Salazar was a friend of a respected priest they were very optimistic. These were rare moments when a feeling of “togetherness” and team-spirit in the group developed and they all agreed about what to do.

In the following months Salazar visited the region a couple of times. He had also taken up other cases Father López had asked him to look at. When Salazar came to Autlán he met with the ejidatarios at the church of Father López. On one occasion he visited La Canoa and went to the house of the ejido commissioner Raúl. Raúl was ill at that time and could not leave his house. This was the only time Salazar and Raúl met. Raúl preferred not to go on missions and was happy that others were prepared to do the work.

Salazar made clear that he wanted more money from the ejidatarios. Not for himself, as he explained, but to bribe officials in the MAR. He explained to them that he did not approve of these practices and that he knew that it was illegal but that otherwise nothing would be achieved. The ejidatarios know from experience that nothing can be done without bribes and they were eager to use the money the ejido had earned with the sale of the pasture of the commons to bribe some officials. Anyhow, these bribes were nothing compared to the value of the land they were about to recover! So a delegation from La Canoa went to Guadalajara to visit Salazar at his house and paid him 11.5 million (\$ 3,800). Lupe and Vicente went as members of the executive committee. They were accompanied by Iginio and Ramón. The following anecdote is illustrative of the way the ejidatarios move around the big city. They arrived in Guadalajara by bus and continued by train. However, Lupe got out of the train too early and they lost her. When the three men returned to the station where she got off the train, she had disappeared. The men were worried and decided to go to Salazar’s house and see if she was there. But when they arrived at Salazar’s house, it appeared that Lupe had not arrived or phoned. Now they were really worried. While they were talking about what to do, Lupe finally arrived. Fortunately, she had the address and the telephone number of the *licenciado* and she had arrived by taxi. She had been very worried herself as she carried the 11.5 million pesos for Salazar.

Salazar showed them the letter he had written for the case of La Canoa and which would be sent to the President Salinas. The ejidatarios were very pleased with this letter and signed with gratitude. The letter was then sent away. The ejidatarios received a receipt for the 11.5 million pesos they paid Salazar. During this first visit to Salazar’s house, the ejidatarios met other members of Salazar’s family: his wife and mother. The ejidatarios were impressed by the security measures that were taken. They had to pass several doors which were immediately locked with keys. Together with the bodyguards they saw in Sayula, they interpreted this as a clear indication of the fact that Salazar was an important man who had made many enemies in his fight for the poor ejidatarios. Salazar said that the matter would be settled in a couple of months.

For Vicente García this visit to Salazar was the only occasion he participated in a mission during his period as ejido secretary. After this trip he asked Lupe for the documents to make some copies. Lupe was reluctant but as he insisted so much she gave him the papers. Vicente returned them the following day. However, everybody in the group was convinced that Vicente had made these copies to show them to his uncle Ricardo and tell him what they were up to with Salazar.

### **The Letter to the Mexican President**

village: La Canoa  
municipality: Autlán  
state: Jalisco

Subject: complementary execution and marking of boundaries of the endowment and extension grant

Lic. Carlos Salinas de Gortari  
President of Mexico

Raúl Pradera, Vicente García, Lupe Medina, respectively chairman, secretary, and treasurer of the executive committee of the ejido La Canoa, municipality Autlán, Jalisco appear before you through this letter, representing the ejidatarios belonging to the endowment and first extension of the agrarian community mentioned above, with the aim of asking for your valuable intervention as the highest agrarian authority in our country, with the object of resolving the agrarian problems affecting our ejido, for that reason we take the liberty with all respect, to relate the following history;

On the 14th of July of 1937, our ejido was endowed by Presidential Resolution with 1843-00-00 hectares of pasture lands of which 20% was arable, encumbering the properties of La Canoa and La Herradura, in the municipality of Autlán, Jalisco.

On the 11th of February 1938, the Presidential order of 14th July 1937, was executed, which endowed our agrarian community with 1843-00-00 hectares for 46 plots, including the school plot, for the use of the petitioners, leaving under reserve the rights of 67 individuals in order that the creation of an agrarian population center would be promoted, encumbering the estates La Canoa, La Herradura and La Piedra or Ixcuintle.

On the 20th May of 1942, the Presidential Resolution was pronounced, that granted our ejido 191-00-00 hectares of lands of different qualities, of which at the execution of the Presidential order we only received 76-00-00 hectares in possession and which are those we till at the moment.

But the point is, SR. PRESIDENT, that with respect to the endowment grant of our ejido, we lack approximately 540-00-00 hectares to arrive at the 1843-00-00 hectares that were granted to our ejido, and that at the moment we do not have them all, requesting from this moment a general marking of boundaries and at the same time the carrying out of the complementary execution in our agrarian community, interpreting faithfully the Presidential Resolution dated the 14th of July 1937.

In the same way we have to clarify SR.LIC.CARLOS SALINAS that with respect to our first extension grant of our Ejido La Canoa, municipality Autlán, Jalisco, we were not given the total amount of 191-00-00 hectares of lands of different quality granted to us either, and that we only possess and use 76-00-00 hectares, for which reason we request that from this moment, the 115-00-00 hectares remaining be turned over to us in order to

fulfill the Presidential Resolution dated the 20th of May of 1942.

This means SR. PRESIDENT, that the Presidential Orders that allotted our ejido an endowment grant and a first extension grant were not legally executed, and that in total approximately 655-00-00 hectares of which 80% are arable lands and 20% mountainous pasture lands remain to be handed over, for that reason LIC. CARLOS SALINAS, it is urgent for us that as soon as possible you send instructions to THE MINISTER OF AGRARIAN REFORM, LIC. VICTOR CERVERA PACHECO, so that he gives instructions to personnel of the *Dirección General de Tenencia de la Tierra* and that they proceed with the execution of the Presidential Resolutions of the Endowment Grant and First Extension Grant, in the same way we request that the Presidential agreement of land purchase dated the 23rd of October of 1950, signed by the President of the Republic LIC. MIGUEL ALEMAN VALDEZ, is carried out so that the lands bought from and paid to SR. ANASTACIO MICHEL can be incorporated into the ejido regime.

What we presented to you here SR. LIC. CARLOS SALINAS DE GORTARI, PRESIDENT OF MEXICO, is the real truth of the problems our agrarian community is facing, and the urgent necessity of the execution of Presidential Resolutions, is because we need the remaining lands, as we have very little arable lands and the lands that by chance remain to be handed over to us are almost entirely lands that can be used for agriculture, which of course would benefit all members of our community by naturally making a fair distribution of the lands that can be used for agriculture among those who deserve to receive them according to the economic contributions made to resolve the present problem, which our ejido suffers, in the same way, we ask you with all respect to order the Ministry of Agrarian Reform, and more concretely, the Secretary of the Department to send personnel and to proceed with the constitution of the Center of Ejido Population, which is mentioned in our Presidential Resolution dated the 14th of July of 1937, marking of course the best place for the Establishment of the Population Center, which will be formed by the 67 ejidatarios with rights under reserve, and also by the sons of ejidatarios of the endowment as well as the extension grant of our ejido.

We would like to thank you in advance SR. PRESIDENT CARLOS SALINAS DE GORTARI, as highest agrarian authority in our country, for the favorable solution to the problems we set out to you.

Yours faithfully,

La Canoa, mun. Autlán, Jalisco 8th October 1992.

The Executive committee of the ejido La Canoa

Raúl Pradera  
presidente  
(signed by Iginio)

Vicente García  
secretary

Lupe Medina  
treasurer

c.c. Lic. Victor Cervera Pacheco, Minister of Agrarian Reform, Mexico City

c.c.C. Minister of Agrarian Affairs, Ministry of Agrarian Reform, Mexico City

c.c.C. Director of Land Tenancy, Ministry of Agrarian Reform, Mexico City

c.c. Lic. Carlos Rivera Aceves, Governor of State of Jalisco

c.c. Lic. Alejandro Pelayo, Delegate of the Ministry of Agrarian Reform in the State of Jalisco

The ejidatarios were very happy with the letter to the Mexican President. First of all they liked the fact that the Mexican President was addressed and in this way incorporated into their struggle. Being the highest authority in the country his involvement could make a real difference in their struggle for the land. Secondly, they liked the number of hectares Salazar had calculated. Not all the members of the group had an idea of the amount of hectares that La Canoa missed, but the amount of 540 hectares certainly seemed on the "right side". Thirdly, they were pleased by the reference made to the people who had always been active in the fight for the land and that they should be compensated for their efforts when the land was to be recovered. This letter to the President only circulated in the small group and was not presented at the general ejido assembly or to other ejidatarios.

As it was through Lupe that Father López had brought La Canoa into contact with Salazar, she seemed the right person to follow up on this relation. Furthermore, she was the one who managed the only telephone in the village which made her position even more central. Her central role was emphasized by the fact that she was the only one Salazar wanted to inform and always asked for. Raúl, who would have been the more obvious person being the commissioner and official representative of the ejido, was glad to have Lupe take over this responsibility. He did not want to lose much time on the case and preferred others doing the work. Raúl always felt insecure in relation to lawyers and engineers and did not feel very capable of handling these matters. So, gradually and without it ever being formally or informally decided, Lupe became "the person in charge".

#### *More Expenses and Fantastic Stories at the CNC*

When more paperwork needed to be done, the ejidatarios visited Salazar at his office at the CNC (the national peasant confederation, affiliated to the ruling party, the PRI). They were impressed by the number of secretaries working for him. There they also met the secretary general of the CNC Jalisco who talked about the problems he always had with large landowners in his struggle to obtain land for the ejidos. They also met Salazar and the secretary general at a CNC meeting in Autlán where they discussed what else had to be done. The latter told the ejidatarios that his brother was killed because of a land conflict he was dealing with. On another occasion Salazar described them how he himself had once been put in prison because he had succeeded in taking land away from large landowners which was then given to ejidatarios. Lupe and the others were very pleased with these stories as this proved to them that these men knew how to deal with difficult land problems and had a real fighting spirit.

According to Lupe, Salazar had good connections with President Salinas and had direct access to Los Pinos (the presidential residence). She asserted that Salazar was one of the national leaders of the CNC. When I said to her that if that was true his name should appear in the newspapers and on television, she recognized that this was not the case. However, these logical objections could not temper her enthusiasm. These fantasies about the "right



connection” and influential positions, were also generated by Salazar himself. For example, on the many occasions that Lupe made a telephone call to Salazar’s house to ask what was going on and why nothing had happened, Salazar or his wife used to talk about the other important matters he was involved in or the meetings Salazar had with the state governor or the director of an organization, and so on.

On several occasions Salazar said that he needed more money and they took money to him in Guadalajara three more times. By the beginning of 1992 they had paid him 23 million pesos (\$ 7,600): partly from ejido funds and partly from contributions by individual ejidatarios. Salazar explained that the total amount they would have to pay him was 32 million pesos (\$ 10,600), but that the remaining part could be paid when the ejido received the land. If necessary they could sell part of this land in order to pay him, he told them. The ejidatarios liked the prospect of selling part of the new land as in this way they could also recover the ejido funds which they already used for Salazar without the consent of the ejido assembly. The ejidatarios only received receipts for 14 million pesos (\$ 4,600). Naturally, the question of receipts is rather awkward in an “atmosphere of bribes”. However, the ejidatarios were well aware that in the future they, and especially Lupe, who was ejido treasurer, could be asked to render accounts of the spending of ejido money to the other ejidatarios. They knew that if everything went well, nobody would bother about the spending of this money. However, the question of receipts became increasingly important to them when they did not feel sure about the outcome of their actions.

Every day Lupe became more enthusiastic about the prospect of new land for the ejido and her sons. People who came to her shop sometimes said that it would be better to save the ejido money rather than go on missions and spend it on a lawyer. But Lupe did not let herself be discouraged. Lupe was animated and full of hope. Salazar raised more hopes and expectations by asking the people what kind of project they would like to have for La Canoa, once they received the land. He could arrange an additional project for them. Salazar said that they could think about a chicken farm for the ejido. However, Lupe thought of a paper factory as they could use the waste from the sugarcane refinery in the area for the production of paper. She even talked about her plans with Zuñiga, leader of the sugarcane producers of the CNC in the region. Zuñiga said that it seemed a good plan to him. With respect to the land they would recover, Salazar promised to bring police forces from Mexico City if things got out of hand. He told them again that they should be very careful that the private landowners did not know about the letter they had sent to the Mexican President.

Expectations ran even higher in the small “group of the lost land” when Salazar asked them to make precise plans for the land they were about to recover. Part of the land would be used for a new residential area where houses could be built. Another part would be used for the building of the paper factory. The remaining part would be used for 25 plots of about three hectares for “sons of ejidatarios”. They also incorporated plots of eight hectares for each of the *pequeños propietarios* who would lose their land. This was a generous gesture,

but it was also a way of easing their own minds. Lupe in particular sometimes felt bad about taking the land away from the *pequeños*. She hoped that by leaving them eight hectares each everything could be resolved without serious problems. She very much hoped that everything could be settled harmoniously. However, problems were to be expected not only with "the enemy", but within the ejido itself as well. The question of the 25 individual plots naturally was a delicate issue. There were a lot more than 25 "sons of ejidatarios" interested in plots of land. So, who was going to take the decision on the distribution of the new plots? Amusingly, this was decided by Ramón who was not even a member of the executive committee! He established the list in consultation with Lupe and Iginio. Raúl, the commissioner, was not even involved. Naturally, the sons of Lupe, Iginio, and Ramón were well represented in the list. They put two sons of Ramón who live in Guadalajara on the list as well as two sons of Iginio and two sons of Lupe who live in the United States. Raúl would also receive one plot. Mónica, the teacher from La Canoa, who lives in Guadalajara and always supported them, was also listed as one of the beneficiaries. In order to justify their decisions to themselves when they talked about it, or to me when I asked about it, they repeated the stories about the sacrifices they and other people had made in the past, for this case. After they had made the decision, the list was sent to the MAR office in Mexico City. It was never discussed at an ejido meeting and never made public.

#### *Meetings in Small Groups and the Forging of a Conspiracy*

It was a loose configuration of persons who worked together for the "lost land", who took decisions and went on missions. In fact, they never all gathered together. Raúl, Iginio, Salvador, Lupe, and Ramón visited each other frequently to talk about the issue. However, only two or three of them would meet and deliberate and then talk to one or two of the others. There were not long-standing relations of friendship or close kinship between them either. Naturally, there existed the long-standing relationships of people who have lived together in a small village for a long time and share certain knowledge and memories. But before this executive committee was elected in 1991, these people did not visit each other. In other words, they did not form part of each other's "socializing circles" (see chapter two).

After they started working with Salazar they no longer discussed the question of the "lost land" at the ejido meetings. It was Raúl and Lupe (both members of the executive committee) together with Iginio Núñez and Ramón Romero (not members of the executive committee) who decided to use the ejido money for the bribes. Decisions about the missions to Autlán or Guadalajara were also taken within small groups. The ejido assembly was hardly ever informed about their trips nor about the spending of money. However, the "group of the lost land" did not feel completely at ease about their way of operating. They argued that actually the ejido assembly should decide on these trips and should at least be informed about the money that was spent. In December 1992 I asked Lupe if they were taking all these decisions

with Salazar without informing the ejido assembly. She responded: *Yes, at the moment we do not talk about this at the ejido meetings. But we will soon have to inform them about the spending of the ejido money. This has to be done with great discretion. For me it is a heavy burden. I am responsible for the ejido money and we have already spent 19 million.* However, on the other hand, there were several good reasons justifying their silence. First of all, talking about their projects at a general ejido assembly would cause a lot of problems as a large number of people would be opposed to spending ejido money on this conflict. So asking for consent at the ejido assembly would probably mean that they would be hampered in their freedom of action. Secondly, they argued that few ejidatarios attended the meetings. Thus, convening a meeting would be useless anyhow. Thirdly, according to their “conspiracy” theories a high degree of secrecy was required. Otherwise, the enemy would know what they were doing and all their efforts would have been in vain. Salazar and Father López had also emphasized that they should work as secretly as possible. Father López had even warned Lupe that some people of La Canoa were talking too much and that they had to be more careful.

Father López himself was getting into trouble because of his involvement in the conflict of La Canoa. He was known as a politically involved priest and already had several enemies among the elite in Autlán. Not only did he try to help several ejidos who had problems with private landowners, but he also interfered in other political matters. For example, when Cardinal Posadas was murdered under suspicious circumstances at the airport in Guadalajara in 1993, López wrote a critical article about the Mexican government in an important national journal. He also used to go to the meetings of the municipal authorities to hear what was going on. If people objected to his presence he said that he was sent by the bishop. However, most of the times the bishop had not sent him at all. On the contrary, the bishop had warned López to stay out of politics. The private landowners in Autlán soon learned that López was helping the ejidatarios of La Canoa. López was told by one of the private landowners to stop this interference, adding that López was “playing with gunpowder”.

#### *The Ejido Commissioner Becomes Nervous*

Raúl, the commissioner, who had participated in this way of working from the beginning, started feeling increasingly uncomfortable with the situation. Rumors were being spread in the village about the lawyer and the ejido money. The total amount of money that the ejido had paid to the lawyer varied in the different stories, but most ejidatarios knew more or less what was going on. The ejidatarios also knew soon enough that a list had been made for the beneficiaries of the “lost land”. However, as they did not believe in the recovery of the land, they were not bothered about the list either. What bothered them was the - in their eyes - completely pointless spending of ejido funds. Although Lupe was seen as the central person in the matter, the ejidatarios held Raúl responsible and in the streets they talked to him and criticized him for letting this happen. Although Raúl felt uncomfortable and actually agreed

with the critique of the ejidatarios he did not want to jeopardize the efforts of the people working on the "lost land", nor did he want to criticize Lupe. He became increasingly nervous and even signing documents seemed a tricky question for him. He feared that the *pequeños* and the MAR would get him to sign documents saying that La Canoa renounced their rights to the 'lost lands'. As the official documents are written in an official procedural language that is hard to decipher for the ejidatarios, his fear was understandable. What for Raúl was even worse than being criticized for letting Lupe arbitrarily spend ejido money was the idea that he could be blamed for the defeat of the ejido and forever held responsible for this by the entire ejido community. For that reason, Raúl avoided signing all documents. For example, when he was called to come to sign documents at the MAR office in Autlán he did not go. Generally, these were documents that had nothing to do with the "lost land" but referred to other matters.

### More Dealings with Salazar and Growing Doubts

In January 1993, Salazar told Lupe that he had finally obtained the definitive map of the ejido La Canoa. He would come to the ejido to measure the land and see whether the borders of the ejido coincided with the map. He asked Lupe to come to the *plaza* in Autlán. He would meet her there to give her the map of the ejido and the official letter of the land transfer, signed by the Mexican President. He said that La Canoa was the first ejido in Mexico whose problems would now be resolved. Lupe went to Autlán and waited the whole day. Salazar never arrived. Afterwards, Lupe was told that Salazar had had an accident on the way to Autlán and had been busy all day keeping the people who were involved in the accident out of prison. Lupe gradually developed mixed feelings about the *licenciado* and his heroic stories. She told me, for example: *I do not believe that this letter is signed by the president. A president does not sign these documents himself.*

Lupe was in constant contact with Salazar and his family. She had his home telephone number and phoned him regularly. Most of the time Salazar was away and his mother or wife talked to Lupe. Some weeks later Lupe said to me that Salazar was lying to her all the time when he said that he was so busy. Lupe: *When he wants to come to Autlán, they always call him away for other matters. The other day he planned to come to La Canoa, but then he had to inaugurate a dam....* Some weeks later Salazar told her that next week the engineers would come to measure the land and that he himself would visit La Canoa on Saturday. But Lupe was already preparing herself for new disappointments: *I do not believe that the engineers will come this week. And Salazar won't come either. Lawyers do not work on Saturday.* Sure enough, the engineers did not arrive, nor did Salazar.

Several ejidatarios who had been enthusiastic about Salazar in the beginning were losing faith. However, they had no clear ideas about what exactly was going on. For example, when

I asked Iginio for his opinion he said that Salazar was not necessarily corrupt but certainly did not give priority to La Canoa. Raúl also said that it was difficult for him to judge Salazar as he only met him on one occasion. During a long period people were not sure about Salazar and were moderate in their opinion about him. The point is that it was very difficult for everybody to judge where the obstacles in their fight were coming from. They always had to base their opinion on scarce and contradictory information, insinuations, rumors, and unintelligible documents. When more time passed without anything happening, opinions about Salazar became more negative and he was considered to be a “corrupt thief” who had robbed La Canoa of a large amount of money.

The actions around the lawyer and the “lost land” became the territory of an increasingly smaller group. The “group of the lost land” was reduced to two persons now, Lupe and Ramón. Raúl was often hardly aware of what they were doing or when they went on missions. Lupe liked to work with Ramón as he was one of the persons who knew most about the conflict between the ejido and the *pequeños*. Furthermore, he worked with great enthusiasm and did not mind spending time and energy on the case. He had a lot of experience from former missions for the “lost land” and according to Lupe he “talked well” when dealing with officials and lawyers. Salvador and Roberto were both too old to participate very much and Iginio was a difficult man to work with. He was very stubborn and always used to blame others when things went wrong.

In the years in which Ramón had participated in missions and when he himself was commissioner, he had collected many documents of the ejido which he guarded in plastic bags in his house. Some documents were copies of documents of the ejido archive. Others were originals that were lacking in the ejido archive. This “private ejido archive” was of a great help when Raúl became more negative about the case and refused to give documents to Lupe. Then she could always ask Ramón for documents. Lupe often wanted Ramón to phone Salazar but although Ramón phoned him from time to time, they never did give him any information. The only person the *licenciado* and his family wanted to deal with was Lupe.

Lupe also started incorporating Teresa as she did not like to be the only woman when they had to go on missions. As was mentioned above Teresa had had an active role in the struggle for the lost land 20 years ago when her husband Macario was commissioner. Teresa was still enthusiastic about the case. As Macario worked and lived in the United States and she did not have small children at home anymore, she could easily accompany Lupe. She lived in the house opposite Lupe’s, so she often walked in to ask what had happened and how things were going. Teresa also hoped for land for her sons who were working in *el Norte* now.

They were summoned by Salazar to come to Guadalajara several more times. On one occasion Salazar told them to come to Guadalajara in order to accompany the engineer who would do the measuring work in La Canoa. Lupe went with Ramón and they were both very

excited. They waited three days at the MAR waiting for the engineer and only left the MAR office to have lunch or to sleep. In these three days, they tried to phone Salazar, but he was always away. Finally, on the third day, they met Serrano, the engineer responsible for La Canoa, but he did not accompany them to the village. He said that the orders for the mission to La Canoa had already been in his office for several weeks and that all this time he had been waiting for them to come. Now that they had finally arrived he would prepare his work. He sent them back home and said that he would let them know when he would arrive in the village. In the next weeks they did not hear anymore from him.

Two months later, Salazar told them to come to Guadalajara again. He said that he had elaborated a new map of the ejido as the old one had been lost. The new map was ready and they could come and get it. Salazar summoned them to come to the office of the SARH in Guadalajara. As the ejido had run out of money they had to collect money from the individual ejidatarios and other interested people for this trip. Another way of financing missions was for every person to pay her or his own expenses. But in the end Lupe paid most of the missions and other expenses. This time Lupe asked Teresa, Ramón and Ignacio Alcázar to accompany her. Ignacio is an ejidatario of La Canoa who lives in Autlán and has always been involved in the struggle for the "lost land". The group from La Canoa went to the office Salazar had told them, but he never showed up. They sat there in the office waiting and looking at each other. Ramón had to go back the same day as he had people working in the sugarcane whom he had to pay. Teresa had to go back for the same reason. Ignacio has milking cows and did not want to stay either. So, they returned without anything having been achieved. Afterwards, I asked Lupe what she thought was going on.

M: *What do you think is going on? Is Salazar too busy, has he been bribed...?*

L: *I think it is partly that. I think the people at the office work against it because of money, or friendships with the landowners.*

I often sat in Lupe's shop to talk about the case. However, when people came in we always stopped the conversation or changed the subject. Sometimes the situation became awkward when Ricardo García or his wife or daughters entered the shop to make a phone call. Lupe was always very friendly to them, especially to the daughters. She once said that she felt sorry for them as they would lose the land. But the fight had to go on otherwise La Canoa would lose the land forever. On another occasion she told me that she regretted very much having talked about their fight with Rosa Romero. The point is that a daughter of Rosa is married to Pepe Mendoza, son of Salvador Mendoza, owner of part of the land that belongs to La Canoa. According to Lupe things went wrong from the moment she informed Rosa. She presumed that Rosa had talked to her daughter and that they had arranged things in Guadalajara.

Although Lupe remained hopeful, after this visit to Guadalajara Teresa too seemed to have lost her faith in Salazar

T: *He is lying all the time and Lupe cannot get to him anymore. He is never at*

*home, or the telephone is occupied. His wife always says that he is on mission. But lawyers also have the weekends free! Another reason for my loss of faith is that at a previous meeting in Guadalajara, when we took him out for dinner, he did not want to eat. He only took some toast with fish. We invited him to have more but he did not want to. He feels, of course, that he is not doing his work well and for that reason, he did not want to have more. But if he does not have time for our case, he should just say so. Another reason for not trusting him is that he never brought us any valuable document. The only thing he gave Ramón is a project map of the ejido. But what is that worth? We already had many of those. Salazar is also inventing stories. The other time, when he had to come to Autlán, he supposedly had a car accident. Last time, it was even worse: he was caught in a exchange of fire because of a land conflict he is working on.... Instead of making progress, we only go backwards!*

*M: But what precisely do you think is going on? Do you think they bribed Salazar or is he just too busy?*

*T: From what I can see, he is forgetting us.*

This answer is interesting as it indicates that something is going wrong but she still does not define the cause of the evil. She does not characterize Salazar as a good guy or a bad guy either. Evil can come from many different directions and can affect all people. This position towards Salazar was characteristic for all the people of the “group of the lost land”.

However, while Raúl, Teresa, Iginio and Ramón could easily say that they did not believe in Salazar anymore, for Lupe the implications of “giving up” on him were more severe. As ejido treasurer she was responsible for the money they had spent on him. Furthermore, she was the one who had brought the ejido into contact with Salazar. So, for her the implications were more serious. That was the reason she held on. She wanted to believe in Salazar. She kept phoning him and never broke off the relationship with him as hopes or “wishful thinking” lingered on. However, her faith in the licenciado was eroding seriously. She laughed about - what she now considered to be - the lies Salazar had told her before and which she had believed. The one with the accident and the other one with the exchange of fire on his way to Autlán. But the laughing was painful for her. She was deeply upset by the whole affair and wanted to visit her children in the United States. They had already sent her the money to come over. Two of her children were having their marriages blessed in church and three grandchildren were going to be baptized. For Lupe, these religious events were very important and she longed to go. However, she still hesitated as Salazar had suggested that people would come soon to measure the land. Salazar told Lupe that she had to be around for the marking of boundaries but that everything would be over by the 20th of May. Then she could leave for the USA. By the 20th of May nothing had happened.

### Shifting Constellations and Individual Frustrations

During the year that they worked with Salazar the "group of the lost land" that had initiated the project before the elections of the executive committee of 1991 completely lost their harmony and team spirit.

#### *Salvador Quits*

Salvador, who together with Iginio had been the main organizer of this executive committee and who all this time had participated in discussions and decisions in the small group quite abruptly left the group. It never became clear to the others quite why. He told them that he was tired of all those years of fighting. Afterwards he told me that his decision was also influenced by pressure from his wife and children to abandon the case and by the fact that they had recently discovered that he had a serious illness. His wife told me that she was very happy that he had abandoned the case as she was afraid of the problems it could bring them. The people who continued fighting for the "lost land" believed that fear of what might happen to his family was Salvador's main motivation to quit. Still it was strange that from one day to another he changed from a strong supporter of the case into a strong opponent. He started warning the others of the bloody consequences their activities might have. He said that the *pequeños* would never have their land taken away from them without bloodshed. Although this was something that everybody was convinced of, it was strange to hear this talk coming from Salvador who had always had such a fighting spirit and used to use a "revolutionary" language.

Salvador said that at the start he had had great faith in Salazar, but that he had lost it in the meantime. Salvador was a very religious person and he did not want to blame Father López in any way. According to Salvador, Father López had only recommended the *licenciado* but he had nothing more to do with the case. He was annoyed that everybody talked so openly about Father López' involvement as it could be dangerous for him. He added: *I am tired of unjust people, all these missions and the people who always work against the ejido. I do not mind anymore if La Canoa does not recover the land. I am tired of it.* On another occasion Salvador told me that La Canoa would never recover the land, because of: *this corporation of bastards, these lawyers who do everything for money.* Salvador could grow very angry and emotional when he recalled his experiences with the MAR in Guadalajara: *This cochinated corruption. The officials hid their faces and they hid the law.*

Salvador had been one of the obvious persons to be put on the list of beneficiaries for the new land as he had always supported the struggle. So Ramón and Lupe had proposed to put two of his children on the list. But Salvador refused. He did not want to have any member of his family on the list. Salvador told them: *If this goes ahead people will be killed and I do not want my children to be involved in this.* Lupe had responded that he should not be afraid as Salazar had promised to send soldiers to protect them, but Salvador had replied:



*And will they stay with us for the rest of our lives?* On several occasions Salvador severely criticized his *comadre* Lupe. He would say that she should quit or that otherwise people would be killed. He also said that he would hold her responsible if people would be killed.

### *Iginio's Anger*

At this point, Iginio became very critical about everything and everybody. He and Salvador had organized the executive committee of the ejido in order to fight for the "lost land". Yet, now he had lost his fighting companion Salvador and was being sidelined by Lupe who did not invite him to go on the missions anymore. Furthermore, he had lost faith in the *licenciado* whom he now called "*Lupe's licenciado*". Although at the start he had been convinced about Salazar's good connections, he now said that it was nonsense that Salazar had direct access to the Mexican President. At the same time he became more critical of Father López. He did not accuse him of deceit but he expressed his disapproval of a priest handling agrarian matters: *Perhaps I should not say so, but I think it is absurd that a priest interferes in agrarian problems.*

The fact that Lupe when organizing private meetings and missions clearly preferred Ramón to Iginio was resented by Iginio. Although most people preferred not to go on missions because of the time lost and the tiresome and frustrating interactions with MAR officials, for those interested in the case missions had their advantages. Information gathered during the missions was often withheld or documents carefully guarded. So, the only way of knowing what was going on was to be there. Participating in the missions was the only way to be on top of what was going on and that was what Iginio wanted. However, as long as Lupe was the one who controlled their relations with Salazar, Iginio could not do much about it. On several occasions Iginio told me that he did not understand why Lupe always wanted Ramón to accompany her. Iginio told Lupe that Ramón, being a Romero, was not to be trusted. *He likes money*, he said. According to Iginio, 15 years ago when Ramón was ejido commissioner he made arrangements with the private land owners. As he put it: *He is of the same race as the Romeros who stole this land from us.*

Iginio now also started to adopt the accountability discourse of organization (see chapter six). He said that the money they spent on the *licenciado* was money from the community and that therefore they had to render accounts of their activities to the community. They could not work in secrecy. So, Iginio now started criticizing a way of working he had agreed to and participated in before. He also argued that it was not right that Ramón had made a list of beneficiaries of the new land as this should be decided by the whole ejido. Hence, now that Iginio could not control what was going on anymore, and no longer belonged to the circle of people who made the decisions, he used the accountability discourse to "retake control".

*Raúl Tries to Resign*

Raúl, the commissioner, had also lost faith in Salazar and agreed with the other ejidatarios that it was wrong to spend ejido money on a hopeless case. Raúl was heavily criticized by Iginio for not doing enough as ejido commissioner, for being too scared, and so on. Raúl became tired of the whole affair: a lawyer who did not keep his promises, ejidatarios blaming him for badly spending ejido money, and members of the small group who criticized him for being scared. To make matters worse, one of his brothers fell seriously ill and Raúl himself had a horseriding accident. He had made a serious fall and hurt his back. Raúl had had enough! He decided to quit as ejido commissioner. Iginio Núñez, who was formally his deputy, was more than happy to take over. Rumors soon went around. Raúl presented the accident with his horse and the fact that he had to spend time with his brother who was very ill as the reasons for his resignation. However, he said to me that the most important reason for him was the situation with the "lost land". People were criticizing him from all sides, there was no unity among the ejidatarios themselves, not even among the people who agreed to work on the case. He was fed up with it.

Iginio was eager to take over as he had very strong feelings about what was going on in the ejido and what had to be done about it. As commissioner he could also control Lupe and become involved in the matter again. However, there was strong opposition from the other ejidatarios to the idea of Iginio taking over. Iginio was considered to be a difficult man and was not acceptable as commissioner to the majority of ejidatarios. He was known for always criticizing everybody and everything and not being able to work with anybody. However, the ejidatarios understood that Raúl wanted to resign. He was considered to be too weak by some. Others said that he was a good man, who could not bear these problems. They noticed that he had become very nervous lately. As was discussed in chapter six, these questions were speculated about in many circles but were not openly discussed at an ejido meeting. By not attending the meetings which Raúl convened to make his resignation, they tried to put pressure on Raúl to stay on, which he finally did.

However Raúl still felt very unhappy about the whole situation: *I still would like to resign, these people want me to go on with something that has no solution.* What bothered Raúl most about the whole affair was the lack of unity in the ejido. He was now very much opposed to decisions being made by small groups and also started using the accountability discourse of organization. Raúl also disagreed with the fact that Ramón had made the list of people who would receive the new ejido plots. When I spoke to Raúl, he said to me that this had to be decided at a meeting of the ejido. Raúl:

*Decisions have to be made in public, at the ejido meetings. I would have continued with the case if there would have been a majority. But we are not united. There are only two, three persons with an enormous faith. We should give it up now. Something that never happened in the past is not suddenly going to happen now. Furthermore, the people who possess these lands, have influential*

*contacts in the government, or they pay money. That is what we need for this case, money. And that is what we lack. Besides, imagine all these years that they already possess this land. That will not be taken away from them anymore. Even if we recovered the lands, the present owners would not accept it. You can find people who commit a murder for a million pesos. That is what will happen then. What can we do? Everywhere it is the same, it is useless!*

### *Indirect Forms of Accountability*

Gradually, the voices in the ejido critical of spending ejido money on the lawyer grew stronger. Now that it had become clear that nothing was going to be achieved, several ejidatarios wanted the ejido money back. José Romero, who had been treasurer in the former executive committee and who had built the kiosk with ejido money was one of the people who was very angry about the spending of ejido money on an unattainable goal. However, Raúl felt sorry for Lupe. In his view it was wrong that she organized small meetings to discuss these affairs. However, he did not blame her for the things that went wrong with the lawyer or the loss of the money. Raúl told the protesting ejidatarios that they could ask Lupe for the money at an ejido assembly if they wanted to, but that he would not endorse such a claim. Yet, the ejidatarios found it difficult to call Lupe to order directly. She was criticized by people in the village for being a clever woman who looked after herself well. It was said that she earned good money from the shop and the administration of the only public telephone in the village. However, criticism of her was never very harsh. She was generally respected and her integrity as treasurer of the ejido was never in doubt. This was in contrast to some previous members of the executive committee in the ejido who were accused of spending ejido money on their personal projects. This executive committee was criticized for spending ejido money on a lost case, but it was not suggested that they had appropriated ejido resources for their own use or pleasure. While everybody was talking about the lawyer and the ejido money in informal circles, nobody wanted to take the initiative to ask Lupe formally to render accounts.

However, under pressure from the ejidatarios Raúl decided that the ejidatarios would no longer make payments to Lupe, who was the ejido treasurer. Instead Raúl would collect the money for the tax and the sale of pasture from the commons. Lupe was hurt by this decision. For her this was a motion of no-confidence and she became very emotional when Raúl came to tell her this decision. Raúl felt sorry for Lupe. Yet, the next payment for the sale of a part of the pasture was made to Raúl. When Raúl had received most of the money of the pasture, he immediately spent it on the building of water reservoirs in the commons. In this way Raúl made sure that the money could not be spent on intermediaries and nobody in the ejido seemed to object to his decision.

*Lupe's Frustration*

Lupe felt very alone as hardly anybody supported her anymore. She said to me that Raúl was probably working on behalf of the rich people (the owners of the "lost land") because his wife is a niece of Ricardo García. Lupe was also annoyed by the lack of support from her own son Juan. Juan laughed at her efforts to recover the "lost land" and thought it a waste of time. On one occasion José Romero asked Juan if they were not afraid of Héctor Romero, who as former police officer in Autlán can easily mobilize police forces against the ejidatarios. When Juan told this to Lupe it made her nervous, but she said: *God put this into my head and therefore I will carry on.* However, Lupe did not sleep well anymore and thought about all the things that might happen to them. She felt not so much scared for herself as for Juan and his wife and young son. Ramón assured Lupe that if she dropped the case, he would continue. However, despite her illness and fears Lupe did not really think of dropping the case. As she said: *I will finish what my husband wanted to do but did not succeed in doing.* She still lived with the dream of her children and grandchildren living in La Canoa with their own plot of land.

Now that she was no longer sure of Salazar, she started to worry about the money she had spent. She only had receipts of 15 million pesos but they had paid much more. She would not be able to prove this to the ejido assembly. Now that she felt so isolated in the village, she appreciated my company more and more and wanted me to stay with her in the shop. Sometimes she showed me the documents to convince me that it was really true that a commission was appointed for La Canoa or that a new map had been made. Generally I did not see in the documents the things she wanted me to see. Most of the time the documents only referred to numbers of other documents and letters and did not contain concrete information about missions. I told her that I had my doubts about the contents of the letters and gradually she showed me more and more documents to comment upon.

Lupe continued working with Ramón. Although Ramón was prepared to go on supporting Lupe, he had also stopped believing in Salazar. Talking about the problems with the bureaucracy Ramón said: *Mexicans like money. Here everything works with money, Even if you kill somebody with your car, you can avoid problems with money.* This remark is interesting for several reasons. First of all, Ramón talked about Mexicans in a general way. No distinction was made between, for example, corrupt people and honest people, or between the honest ejidatarios and the corrupt officials. In this view everybody in Mexico is corrupt (or can be made corrupt) and this is the way the system and society works. The example Ramón gave about killing people with a car refers to himself. People who worked for him had been drinking and driving and had killed people with Ramón's car. So, Ramón himself had paid to stay out of trouble. With respect to the dangers they were running, Ramón said that he was not afraid that anything would happen to him in the fight for the land. Ramón: *I have a belief, everybody has his destiny. People will always die for the land. But if one dies in the struggle at least one knows that it has not been for nothing and that others will benefit*

*from it.*

Then Father López went to the MAR in Mexico City and when he returned he said that things were going well. He had had a talk with the Mexican president and he had talked with Salazar. Father López said that the 23 millions they had paid Salazar was very little as the people at the different offices asked for enormous bribes. Father López told Lupe not to worry. He also promised her that he would use his personal relations with *Los Pinos* (the presidential residence) to help them further. Father López told me that he had been to school with one of the guards of President Salinas and in this way he was able to arrange certain things. He also knew the Governor of Jalisco from a party where they had had a chat together and this was also a contact he could use.

### **Alternative Projects**

#### *Raúl Places His Hope on PROCEDE*

By March 1993 the new agrarian institute, the Procuraduría Agraria had opened an office in Autlán and had started its work in the region. The following anecdote illustrates well the atmosphere of obscurity, distrust, and insecurity around land issues. When the Procuraduría Agraria (PA) had just started working in the region and ejidatarios had not yet heard much about them, the executive committee of the ejido was asked to come to the PA office in Autlán and bring the ejido stamp in order to sign some papers. Raúl and Lupe decided not to go as they were afraid that this might be a trick of "the enemy". As the committee from La Canoa never arrived at the PA office in Autlán, the officials of the PA decided to go to La Canoa themselves. By coincidence they did not find any member of the executive committee the day they went: Raúl was working in the fields, Lupe was in the church, and Vicente was in Autlán. Then the officials of the PA returned to Autlán and made a phone call from the office to make an appointment with the executive committee for another day. When they visited the ejido again on the agreed day, they explained that the form the executive committee had to sign was an official request for assistance with the elaboration of the internal ejido rules (something that did not have any relation with the recovery of the "lost land", see chapter nine). However, Lupe and Ramón still did not trust them and decided to call Salazar before signing the document. Salazar told them that there was no harm in signing this document and so they signed.

Although the young inexperienced officials did not impress the ejidatarios very much (see chapter nine), the ejidatarios liked the PROCEDE program which they were talking about. In this program all ejido lands would be measured, even the individual ejido plots. The ejido did not have to show any initiative as it was a program organized from above. The ejidatarios only would have to cooperate with the different procedural steps. Raúl was particularly happy with this program. This meant that everything would be done automatically, without the ejido

having to go on endless missions, and without paying lawyers and bribing officials. According to Raúl, the best thing was to wait and see what the government would do with the PROCEDE program. Now that Raúl saw a new opening, he took a more active attitude again.

*Iginio Decides to Work with the CCI (Central Campesina Independiente)*

We already noticed that Iginio had distanced himself or - in other words - had been excluded from the group and had taken an independent position. Yet, he wanted to continue the struggle to recover the land and was looking for new entrances. A friend of his suggested that he should go to a meeting in the neighboring ejido Las Paredes where Pablo an engineer from the Central Campesina Independiente (CCI) would be. The CCI is a so-called independent peasant organization which in practice is related to the PRI. According to this friend Pablo knew a lot about agrarian problems. Iginio went to see Lupe to make copies of some of the documents they had been elaborating with Salazar. Lupe did not want to give him the papers, but finally gave in and allowed Iginio to make some copies. At the meeting in Las Paredes Iginio showed the papers to Pablo. Pablo read the documents and said that nothing positive could be deducted from the papers. He commented that it was a bad sign that Salazar was "walking alone" (meaning that he went to the offices of the MAR without the people from La Canoa accompanying him). Pablo asserted that if he took the case of La Canoa, two people from the ejido would always have to accompany him. They had to see where he went and what he was doing. According to Pablo this is necessary as: *Money is everywhere. Everybody can be bribed at a certain moment.* Listening to Iginio's stories, Pablo said that it was quite possible that Salazar had been bribed at one of the offices. He added that the CNC, where Salazar supposedly worked, never helps a peasant: *It is a nest of bandits, sons of caciques.* He told Iginio to come to his office in Guadalajara if he wanted him to work on the case.

Iginio was enthusiastic about this new broker and the next week he immediately went to Pablo's office in Guadalajara. He was impressed by the large number of people who came to the office and the fact that they were all common people (*gente humilde*). Pablo told Iginio that he needed the people of the executive committee of La Canoa to sign a document stating that they officially handed this case over to him. He said that the documents of the ejido were very incomplete and that he would get them all the documents they needed. Furthermore, he promised him that he would get them the money back that they had paid Salazar. Pablo added that the ejido had to cooperate and, among other things, had to pay certain "expenses". The expenses would consist of payments to the lawyers who would look for the missing documents and the payment of a couple of meals. Before returning to La Canoa, Iginio took Pablo out for lunch.

Iginio was very happy with the new development with Pablo. In this way they would not only get all the documents they needed in their fight for the "lost land" but they would also

get all the money back they had lost with Salazar. Iginio informed Lupe about this new development, but she reacted very negatively, interpreting it as a manoeuvre against her projects. Raúl was interested but preferred to work with the PROCEDE program of the PA. He asked Iginio to accompany him to the PA office in Autlán where he had been summoned to come. Iginio was pleased now with Raúl whom he saw as working more enthusiastically on the case. At the PA office they had found out by now that La Canoa did not possess the definitive map of the ejido and for that reason could not participate in the PROCEDE program. They told Raúl to go and get this map at the MAR office in Guadalajara. Once he had the map, they told him, the ejido could be incorporated into the new measuring program. The PA official who told them this had not yet studied the case of the ejido and was not aware of the problems involved. He thought that the ejido archive was just a terrible mess and that papers were missing but he was unaware of the fact that for over 50 years they had been fighting to get this map. The PA official assured Raúl and Iginio that the map had to be at the MAR office in Guadalajara.

So, Iginio and Raúl went to Guadalajara to get the map. They decided to visit Pablo first so that he could help them with the MAR. Pablo wrote a formal request for the ejido map and with this letter they went to the MAR. There they were told that the letter had to be signed by the complete executive committee of the ejido. Furthermore, they needed the ejido stamp which Raúl had forgotten to bring along. So they had to return to La Canoa to have it signed by the treasurer and the secretary of the ejido. However, the official added that there was no problem at all with the map and that once the letter was signed and stamped he would have the document ready in 10 to 15 days. It would only cost them 50,000 to 60,000 pesos (\$ 17 to 20). Iginio and Raúl returned to La Canoa. Iginio had been very angry with Raúl for not bringing the ejido stamp. He told Raúl that he should resign if he was afraid. Raúl felt very insulted by the insinuation that he was afraid.

When Iginio and Raúl went for the second time to Guadalajara to get the map, the official of the MAR office told them that Salazar was known as a swindler and that for 500,000 (\$ 167) he could search for the map or have it elaborate if it was not there. So, the price had gone up from 50,000 to 500,000. The official searched for documents of La Canoa in the archives. At a certain moment he told Raúl and Iginio that he wanted to go outside and have a coffee. When they were having their coffee he told them that he wanted compensation for everything he had done for them that day. He had gone to different places within the building and made copies of several documents. He did not say how much money he wanted and Iginio told Raúl to give him 50,000. The official said that this was not enough by far. Raúl told him that they could not pay him more as they would not have enough money to return to the village. In the end, they gave him 100,000 (\$ 33). The official said that next time they should not come to him if they had so little money. Obviously, he had not found the map and the documents he had given to them were already in the local ejido archive. So, it had been a useless trip.

Reflecting upon the situation Iginio thought that Pablo also wanted money from them. Pablo had not asked them any money this time, but other people at the CCI office had told Iginio how much they had to pay him. Iginio's suspicion proved to be right as the next time Pablo told Iginio that for 10 million pesos (\$ 3,300) he would take the case of La Canoa and would also start a lawsuit against Salazar to get the money back they had paid him. Iginio had replied that he would have to ask the ejido about this first. Although it is common for officials to ask for money for the work they do, Iginio knew that under the present circumstances it was impossible to get ten million from the ejido. Furthermore, Raúl had been insulted too many times by Iginio and no longer wanted to go on missions with him. As Iginio had no formal position in the ejido he could not do anything on his own.

### **Conclusion: the Decentered Labyrinthine Bureaucratic Machine**

In this chapter we saw how the ejidatarios sought the "right connection" which could give them access to the "center of control" which would then resolve their problems. The ejidatarios could have decided to invade (part of) the "lost land" but, as far as I know, this was never contemplated. They preferred to enrol the Mexican President in their operations. The Mexican President can be seen as the personification of power in a society where personal relations are central for the organizing process. In fact, the ejidatarios create the fetish of the President and give the state a face by writing the President letters and trying to enrol him in their projects. The idea of the state suggests coherence, coordination, and consistent top-down working, from the President to the bottom. According to Abrams the state-idea is a "message of domination - an ideological artifact attributing unity, morality and independence to the disunited, amoral and dependent workings of the practice of government" (Abrams 1988: 81). Taussig following Abrams poses the question of whether it might turn out, then, that "the fantasies of the marginated concerning the secret of the center are what is most politically important to the State idea" (Taussig 1992: 132). Are the fantasies of the ejidatarios concerning the powerful center not what leads to State fetishism and "the cultural constitution of the modern State - with a big S?" (*ibid.*: 112)

In this context of a decentered bureaucratic machine and the impossibility of getting "effective access" to the center, brokers thrive well. In the brokers the ejidatarios hope to find people who, unlike them, know the codes and invisible ways through the labyrinth. The ejidatarios search for brokers everywhere: in different networks of friends and relatives, in peasant organizations, political parties, or in the MAR itself. The ejidatarios work with several brokers at the same time in the hope that one or several together may have enough "political capital" to get the machine working. Yet, by searching for brokers with special access, the ejidatarios contribute to the imagination of state power. They invest in the idea of the state.



In their turn, brokers also invest in the idea of the state by presenting themselves as people who have privileged access and knowledge to make the machine working. An important strategy of brokers is boasting about their relations with influential people. They often claim to have special access to the presidential residence *Los Pinos* or even having direct contact with the Mexican President. They also tend to personally know the State Governor and frequently have meetings with him. These stories are a form of impression management which people employ “to influence the systems of meaning surrounding them and their activities” (Morgan 1986: 177). The fact that everything is played out in the context of a labyrinthine bureaucratic machine means that brokers can never be held responsible for things that go wrong. In this way the bureaucratic machine offers ample opportunities for different types of brokers.

However, although officials and intermediaries all have their own personal agendas, it would be simplistic to assume that they always deliberately try to deceive the ejidatarios. For example, Father López was a well-known priest in the region. I have no indication that he was a swindler. My impression was that he did not have the slightest idea about agrarian matters but hoped that his relations were influential enough to help the ejidatarios in their fight for the land. Yet, he also exaggerated his influence and contacts with the Mexican President and often told the ejidatarios about his visits to *Los Pinos*. Engaging in this practice of impression management is part of the culture of the state in which access is a central component. If you want to convince people that you can make a difference for them, you have to impress them with your relations.

Yet, the culture of the state not only consists of practices of impression management but also of practices of interpretation and reading. The ejidatarios were no passive recipients or “consumers” of fantasies but very much wanted to believe that their brokers were the right connection. The stories and fantasies had to take enormous proportions as the ejidatarios knew that only a person with “extraordinary qualities and access” could help them with their problems. In this context they could even prefer the dubious, influential lawyer over honest but powerless brokers. The lawyer with a great style of living, a big house, beautiful secretaries around him, driving around in big cars and with many bodyguards seemed more able to play a role in this highly opaque politicized bureaucracy and in the fight against the *pequeños propietarios* than people who looked more like the ejidatarios themselves (see Bayart 1993 on the politics of the belly). Hence, the ejidatarios interpreted many events and things in ways that would fit in with their fantasies. For example, Lupe always attributed the intermediaries with higher functions than they really had. As we will also see in the next chapter, according to her they were never normal employees of the CNC or other peasant organizations, she always assumed that they were heads of these organizations. In the beginning when everything looked fine with Salazar the ejidatarios not only believed his great stories but also drew conclusions about his importance on the basis of elements which equally well could be interpreted in another way. For example, the fact that he was always

accompanied by bodyguards, his luxurious offices, and the locking of all doors can be interpreted in several ways. However, this was "read" by the ejidatarios as a sign of his working for the poor peasants and his being threatened by the private landowners. This polyvalent nature of "reading" becomes clear when at a later stage Iginio says that he has more confidence in the man from the CCI as he has a poor office and only poor people come to visit him. Here the opposite signals are used to prove the same point. This "reading" by Iginio of the poor office appeared to be as arbitrary as the reading of the luxurious office, for this man also wanted a large amount of money for helping La Canoa. In the next chapter more examples of this "wishful reading" will be given.

An important pillar of the hope-generating machine is the presidential system in which every new president introduces new programs and proposes important institutional changes (see chapter nine). This was shown in a clear way by President Salinas who, among other things, promised to bring justice to the Mexican countryside. This propaganda influenced the ejidatarios of La Canoa to launch another effort to recover the "lost land". However, La Canoa was not the only ejido: many ejidos with land problems tried to resolve their problems under the presidency of Salinas (see Torres 1994b). Despite bad experiences in the past, the introduction of new programs with every new president always raises some hopes among the population as sometimes things are indeed changed or achieved (see Grindle 1977). Yet, even in periods when the ejidatario had high expectations, or started to believe the most fantastic stories, doubts were always there. Confidence was never absolute. For the same reason, people never seem to be surprised when things did not work out in the way they had expected or hoped. They were disappointed but never seemed to be surprised. Irony played an important role in this process. People could laugh about themselves: about the stories they had believed in and how they had been deceived. But the laughter was always painful. As Beezley *et al.* point out, "the use of humor as a cunning commentary on contemporary affairs continues in Mexico... a kind of 'gallows humor' that turns the labyrinthine bureaucracy, the political fraud, and the devalued currency into jokes has become prevalent" (Beezley *et al.* 1994: xxv). Yet, the most remarkable thing is that these experiences did not lead to passive cynicism. The ejidatarios went on fighting, investing, hoping, and believing.

In short, I argue that in their search for the right intermediary who can make the connection to the center the ejidatarios are implicated in the process of the construction of the idea of the state. The power of the state is to a high degree imagined and cultivated by the search for brokers, the reification of maps, the fetishization of documents and procedures, the incredible stories of the intermediaries and the fantastic beliefs of the ejidatarios. In the next chapter attention is paid to the "spatial aspects" of the relation between the ejidatarios and the hope generating machine and to maps and documents as techniques of imagination.

**Notes**

1. I found one document in the archives of the Ministry of Agrarian Reform in which a MAR engineer, who had started measuring work in La Canoa, was explicitly summoned by the head of the MAR in Guadalajara to stop the work immediately as serious problems were arising with private landowners in the region.
2. They explained this by referring to the central rule concerning their own ejido plots: "land to the tiller", the rule that land could be taken away from somebody if he had not worked it himself for more than two years. As the "lost land" had been worked for more than 50 years by other people, they thought that the ejido had automatically lost the rights to this land. However, legally this case is different as the rule of "land to the tiller" concerns land use within the ejido. The land they are fighting for is land that officially falls under the ejido regime and is used as privately owned land. Here the agrarian law has always been very clear. Land that falls under the ejido regime can never become privately owned land. Not even after having been used in this way for many years.
3. Mario Sánchez who sold his land to Gustavo Romero (see chapter five) was the brother of the murderer and therefore had to leave the village.

## CHAPTER 8

### THE “LOST LAND” II: THE ENGINEERS

#### **Introduction: Officials, Ejidatarios, and the Culture of the State**

This chapter continues to follow the same conflict of the “lost land”, however the MAR engineers now play a central role. The unflagging efforts by Lupe and Ramón had not been in vain and the bureaucratic machine of the MAR was set in motion. In a period of eighteen months, five different MAR engineers in succession were ordered to investigate the case of La Canoa. While in chapter seven we saw flows of ejidatarios to many different offices in Autlán, Guadalajara and Mexico City, in this chapter we see flows in a different direction: engineers from Guadalajara visiting the ejido La Canoa. This continuous movement of ejidatarios, brokers, and engineers between the ejido and offices in different cities makes clear that “any theory of the state needs to take into account its constitution through a complex set of *spatially* intersecting representations and practices” (Gupta 1995: 337).

We saw many characteristics of the bureaucratic machine which contribute to its hope-generating nature. For example, the fact that agrarian cases are never “closed” and that the bureaucratic machine can always be set in motion again. Officials or intermediaries never say to the ejidatarios that they should give up. On the contrary, they always offer “new” and “better” openings and options to get matters finally resolved. Furthermore, it is always stressed that one should combine following the right procedures with putting personal pressure on officials to ensure that the case is really taken care of. In this way, “legal processes can easily take on a life of their own, in a nightmare of papers, procedures and authorizations” (Harris 1996: 10). But there is more to it. By stressing the importance of official procedures, by employing an unintelligible legal-administrative language, and by claiming that by following the official steps it is possible to recover the “lost land”, officials and engineers contribute to the “idea of the state”. They provide the techniques of imagination and give the ejidatarios new ideas for their struggle. The stress on the importance of formal procedures suggests that a logic exists in the operation of the bureaucratic machine. Yet, in reality the working of the bureaucracy is fragmented and dispersed and there is no “hidden reality of politics, a backstage institutionalism of political power behind the on-stage agencies of government” (Abrams 1988: 63). The hope-generating bureaucratic machine does not work according to functionalist principles but is, instead, made up of thousands of uncoordinated actions without a center of control. We could even argue that what gives the machine coherence are the enjoyments and pleasures, fears and expectations. It becomes a “desiring-machine” (see Deleuze and Guattari 1988).<sup>1</sup>

Lower officials normally have little insight into what is exactly going on within the bureaucracy. Furthermore, they have little influence on political decisions in relation to land

conflicts. Officials are under pressure from different sides and develop their own styles of operation in a complex politicized bureaucratic world (cf. Arce 1993, de Vries 1997). As they seem unable to resolve La Canoa's problems, ejidatarios and officials together theorize, speculate, and gossip about what is happening behind their back and about who is the man, or the MAR department, working against the ejido La Canoa. In this process it is normal, for ejidatarios as well as officials, to handle contradictory information. They work with different options at the same time and will not easily discard a new possibility. Never discarding any option (even the most extreme ones) and never being completely sure about the position of anybody is an important attitude towards the "desiring-machine".

As I argued in chapter one, notions of governmentality as a complex aggregate of institutions and procedures and modern forms of discipline and ruling through which power is exercised over people (Foucault, Corrigan and Sayer, Miller and Rose) are of limited value for the Mexican case. These works stress the standardization of procedures through which people become impersonal clients of the institutions. Yet, here we do not find standard governmental techniques but an endless diversity of agencies and administrative procedures. New plans of action and openings to the system can be invented all the time. We do not find the impersonal treatment of the clients of the system. On the contrary, officials as well as ejidatarios will always try to "personalize" relationships as this is considered to be the only form of meaningful and useful interaction. On the other hand, governmental techniques such as stamps, maps, official (unintelligible) terminology, and the use of formal titles of officials play an important role as the everyday routines and rituals of the bureaucratic machine. However, as Comaroff and Comaroff argue, this routinization and ritualization of practices "always require careful and situated reading" (1993: xxiii). Although on occasions they may be in harmony with existing forms of domination, on other occasions they may acquire very different meanings.

This chapter focuses upon the interaction between ejidatarios and officials. Here I follow Long (1984, 1989) who introduces the notion of the interface in order to analyze the encounters between different groups and individuals involved in the processes of planned intervention. The interface reflects different types of power relations and different patterns of negotiation between, for example, peasants and government officials. According to Long such interactional studies offer a middle-ground level of analysis which reveal specific aspects of state-peasant relations. Drawing upon Long's insights I set out to study what interface situations show about the culture of the state and the working of the hope-generating bureaucratic machine.

## The MAR Engineer Serrano Arriving in the Village

### *The Presumed Delivery of the Definitive Ejido Map*

In September 1993, David, one of the officials of the MAR office in Autlán, personally visited the ejido commissioner Raúl at his house to inform him enthusiastically that finally, after fifty years of waiting, the map of the ejido La Canoa had arrived. He said that a delegation of officials from Autlán and Guadalajara would come and deliver the map to La Canoa and he suggested that the ejido should at least prepare an abundant meal for them to celebrate this special event. Raúl and the other ejidatarios did not seem to believe that the "real" map would be delivered but a meeting was convened anyway. Raúl asked Lupe to prepare the meal for the officials as she was the ejido treasurer and lived near the ejido house, but Lupe refused. Ramón and Lupe were still working with Salazar and did not believe that David was telling the truth. They said that it was not necessary to offer these officials a meal. However, according to Raúl, it would be very impolite not to offer them a meal even if they did not bring the promised map. In the end, Iginio's wife prepared the meal.

At the meeting a delegation of five MAR officials arrived: the three officials from the Autlán office and two from the Guadalajara office. Some eighteen ejidatarios attended the meeting. David solemnly declared that they had come to deliver the map that was requested by commissioner Macario Paz in 1976. Then he pulled out several maps. Ramón was the first person to look at them. He passed them to Ignacio Romero and Iginio Núñez. They immediately said that these were the same maps they had already received on many occasions. These were the project map and the definitive map of the extension. Not the desired definitive map of the endowment.<sup>2</sup> Then a discussion started about the problems of the "lost land". David and the other officials declared at length that they had every intention of helping La Canoa and that the ejidatarios should come and see them at their office next week. After the meeting, the officials and several ejidatarios had a meal and abundant drinks at Iginio's house. Lupe and Ramón did not go.

What is interesting about this event is that nobody seemed surprised or annoyed about the course of things. Ejidatarios are always prepared for deceptions. This event also shows how ejidatarios try to maintain good relationships with officials even if they do not trust them. In their turn, the officials offer the ejidatarios their help and propose new openings in the bureaucratic machine. As it is never clear what role each official plays in the obstruction or execution of the procedures or what his or her role may be in the future, the ejidatarios are very careful not to spoil relationships. This is also related to the general awe and caution with which those in authority are treated. Even though nobody in the ejido had expected that the real map would be delivered, they still considered it necessary to "treat the officials well". However, we should be careful not to analyze this as submissive behavior on the part of the ejidatarios. During the meal, ejidatarios and officials ate and drank together in a

pleasant atmosphere. There was much laughter and enjoyment. This is characteristic for the relation between ejidatarios and officials: one tries to enjoy the moments of transactions. Even if not much has been achieved, one at least tries to foster the relationship.

### *Serrano Shows Up*

In chapter seven we saw that Serrano, an engineer from the MAR office in Guadalajara, received orders to go to La Canoa and do the measuring work in the ejido. Ramón, Lupe, Teresa and Ignacio Alcázar went to Guadalajara several times to talk with Serrano and ask him when he would finally arrive. He always gave them a date, but he never showed up. He also made several appointments to meet them in Autlán, but did not arrive there either. On one of these occasions, after we had been waiting the whole morning for him in Autlán, I walked away with Lupe and Teresa. They were laughing about all the lies they had been told by Salazar and Serrano which they had believed. They repeated every one of them and were making fun of themselves.

The 25th of November 1993, Serrano said for the hundredth time that he would arrive that day in La Canoa. Lupe and Ramón were waiting in the shop for his phone call from Autlán where they would meet him. Ramón expressed his feeling as follows: *between hope and disbelief*. Ramón was in a negative mood. He talked about the infamous television newsreader (Zabludowski) who always acted as a spokesman of the PRI. As he put it: *I do not believe in the Mexican President nor in politics anymore, I have been through so many things*. Lupe and Ramón recalled everything that had happened to them in the last two years and laughed at all the promises they had believed in. While the three of us were waiting in the shop, Lupe decided to call Serrano's office again. The secretary told her that Serrano had left with his suitcases for La Canoa. However, even with this information we did not really expect him to arrive. Yet this time Serrano did arrive.

He visited La Canoa in the evening. He was a man in his forties and was pleasant in his dealings with the ejidatarios. I introduced myself to him but he did not seem to be surprised at the presence of a foreign student in the ejido. He seemed more surprised to meet Raúl, the ejido commissioner of La Canoa. During his visits to Guadalajara Ramón had pretended to be the commissioner of La Canoa. Serrano was annoyed by this fact but Ramón did not mind. Ramón knew that pretending to be the commissioner was the only way to be taken seriously and he had achieved his goal. Upon his arrival in La Canoa, an ejido meeting was convened for twelve o'clock the next day. Serrano stayed in a hotel in Autlán. Lupe was tired and nervous; she took several aspirins. Rumors soon spread throughout the village. Nobody else had been aware that an engineer had been sent to do the measuring work in the ejido. Hopes were raised and more ejidatarios expressed their enthusiasm about this development. Even Iginio who was so critical about Lupe and Ramón's operations, thought that this would be their last chance to get things arranged.

The next morning, the atmosphere was exceptionally harmonious. Lupe was happy as she

felt that the ejido was united again. She was pleased that other members of the directive committee were participating again. There was a general feeling of unity and generosity that was very rare in the ejido. When Serrano arrived, everybody entered the ejido building and the meeting started. Ramón was very nervous. Some twenty ejidatarios attended the meeting. Serrano read his work order and said that they gave him ten days for the job. He said: *It is my duty to work in the interest of the ejido. This ejido has many problems and complications. We want to clarify that. If there are no legal or technical impediments, we will elaborate the definitive map.* Serrano explained that he would start the measuring next Wednesday and that all the neighbors of the ejido had to be formally informed by then that lands of La Canoa would be measured and their common borders marked. The ejidatarios also had to organize teams to carry the measuring instruments around in the fields and clear some paths if necessary.

Serrano opened a provisional map of the ejido and Ramón, Iginio, Raúl and Vicente went to have a look. Some other ejidatarios were also having a look. Other ejidatarios left the meeting and went outside. The men at the map were all talking at the same time. They often disagreed about the neighbors of the different plots who had to be notified, and it was clear that few ejidatarios had a view of the total situation. It was a long list of neighboring private landowners. It was agreed that Serrano would go to Autlán together with Ignacio and Alberto Alcázar, to write the letters to the neighboring ejidos and private landowners. The neighbors of the ejido were invited to a meeting with Serrano and the ejidatarios of La Canoa in the town hall of Autlán on the following Tuesday at 12.00. Everybody was very hopeful, especially Ramón. Ramón did not budge from Serrano's side. He felt that the arrival of Serrano was Lupe and his achievement.

Everybody went slowly outside in small groups. Gabriel and Vicente García went to Raúl and said that he should at least offer Serrano a meal. However, Serrano himself went to Raúl and asked him for the payment of his hotel night in Autlán and the expenses of his trip from Guadalajara to Autlán. Raúl said that he did not have any money at the moment but promised that they would pay him these expenses on Tuesday. Alberto and Ignacio Alcázar accompanied Serrano to the *casa ejidal* in Autlán where they found a typewriter to write the letters to the neighbors of La Canoa. Afterwards they took Serrano out for dinner. They delivered some of the letters together and then Serrano left for Guadalajara. Alberto and Ignacio delivered the remaining letters.

Raúl, Ramón, Iginio, Roberto and Pedro stayed on at the *casa ejidal* in La Canoa discussing the latest developments. I asked Raúl why they were going to pay Serrano. Raúl said: *That is usual and it is important to treat these men well, so that he will do a good job. Otherwise he might not finish the work.* Iginio agreed with Raúl and repeated this point. However, they all hoped that Serrano would stay in the village next week as the costs of a hotel in Autlán were high. Ramón said that he was very pleased with this development, but that he was also worried and wanted to look after Serrano himself.



Ramón: *I would like Serrano to stay at my place. In that way I can keep an eye on him. They have to let me win on this. The pequeños are now going to try to bribe the engineer. They can easily find him in the hotel in Autlán, but also in the center of La Canoa, whereas they will never come to my place [in the hills, at the outskirts of the village].*

Pedro: *But can you receive him?* [referring to the primitive state of Ramón's house].

Ramón: *We will arrange that. Lorenzo and José Romero are probably informing Héctor Romero now.*

M: *But who says that they haven't already bribed Serrano in Guadalajara?*

Ramón: *This order comes from Mexico City.*

M: *But at the MAR they can have given him some instructions.*

Ramón: *But the work order which he read out was very good, those are clear measuring orders.*

Iginio assented.

Roberto: *If you want to alter these orders you have to be very smart in corruption. Ramón to Raúl: from now on you have to be very careful about signing documents. You should not sign anything without consulting us!*

Ramón to all of us: *This is a very happy day in my life!*

### *Organizing the Field Teams*

The next Sunday after the meeting with Serrano, an ejido meeting was convened to organize the teams that would accompany Serrano in the fields. Rumors had spread in the village about Serrano's visit and approximately thirty ejidatarios attended the meeting. The meeting started in a joyful atmosphere. Alberto Alcázar from Autlán had taken the position of chairman and was sitting at the only table in the room of the *casa ejidal*. He was often asked to lead meetings as he was a good speaker and could read and write well. However, not all ejidatarios liked the "know-all" Alcázars (Alberto and his nephew Ignacio) from Autlán. Different things were dealt with at the meeting, but I will only reproduce the part that dealt with the teams to be formed for next Tuesday.

Alberto: *We all have to be united now in this case!*

Ramón was visibly happy and exclaimed: *How much time have Lupe and I been working on this case in secret!*

Ignacio Alcázar: *Let's organize the teams for the first three days. But we have to be united. Unity makes strength (La unión hace la fuerza)!*

While they were talking about which twelve men would accompany Serrano each day, Ignacio Alcázar suddenly said: *Ramón registered fifteen or twenty sons of ejidatarios on a list, isn't that true Ramón?* [referring to the list of beneficiaries in case the land is recovered]

Ramón starts to justify this, but Ignacio continued.

Ignacio: *My question is the following: if we get the land back, would a woman whom I know*

*and who is the sister of an ejidatario here, be considered for a plot of land? She would like to participate in the work and always participated in the missions.*

José Romero: *If her expenses for the missions were not paid by the comunidad [meaning the ejido funds] yes, she will be considered, otherwise not.*

Lupe: *Nothing has been paid by the comunidad, everything was paid out of our own pockets, by "cooperacha" [meaning: everybody contributes what they can or want to].*

José: *So, you are saying that the ejido still has all the money?!*

Ignacio: *The money of the comunidad has been spent on one person [referring to Salazar].*

Vicente García: *This engineer Serrano was sent by the government and nobody here has had anything to do with that. The ejido funds have been poured into a bottomless pit.*

Sebastián Romero (furious): *When have they ever asked me for money to contribute to these missions, when was a meeting convened to discuss this?*

Emotions rose and at the entrance of the building people were also quarreling loudly. Raúl stood up and became nervous. Lupe rose as well as the meeting had become a complete chaos. The sons of Lupe and Teresa arrived and Lupe got very worried. She feared that her son would start fighting if he heard somebody speaking ill of her.

Alberto tried to calm the people down and said: *We are not dividing a cake; we are making a working plan. Neither Ignacio, nor me, nor Vicente is keeping the land.* José Romero then went to the table to register for the work teams. Alberto wrote him down and José left. Matters calmed down and the other ejidatarios also went to the table to put themselves on the list or to pay for others to do the work in their name.

What happened at this meeting was that the prospect of the possible recovery of the "lost land" gave rise to disputes about the distribution of this land. The list of beneficiaries of the "lost land", which was made by Ramón, had not caused any problem as long as nobody believed the land could be recovered. But now that "the impossible" seemed to have become "possible", this list became a point of dispute. Yet, for most ejidatarios it was too soon to get into that discussion as nothing was certain yet. It was also interesting to see that during this meeting a lot of references were made to the spending of ejido money on the lawyer Salazar, but that it did not lead to a general discussion or the taking of decisions on the subject. As usual, the executive committee was not directly asked to render accounts of their actions and the spending of ejido money.

Despite the quarrels at the meeting, the atmosphere in the ejido was one of hope. People became more animated and even ejidatarios who had been against the fight for the "lost land", now participated in the field teams. For example, although José Romero had always been against the way in which Lupe and Ramón were operating, he participated in the field teams. All their hopes now rested on Serrano.

### *Waiting for Serrano*

On Tuesday several ejidatarios went to the town hall for the meeting with Serrano and the neighbors of La Canoa. One by one the *pequeños propietarios* entered the town hall. Finally, there were some six of them; much less than the total number of neighbors who had been invited to come. It was a tense atmosphere of confrontation of the ejidatarios and the *pequeños propietarios*; both parties in the conflict were waiting together for the MAR engineer who would resolve their conflict. Lupe was very nervous. Raúl was terribly nervous as well and started to apologize to the *pequeños propietarios*. He said to them: *It seems that the endowment is not complete, but I do not know, I have no idea*. An engineer of the SARH, who was asked by one of the *pequeños propietarios* to be present at the meeting, said: *If you don't have a definitive map, they cannot do anything*.

After they had been waiting some time, Lupe went to a restaurant to call the MAR in Guadalajara and ask what had happened with Serrano. They told her that Serrano had not been to the office since last Thursday. They continued waiting in the town hall. After an hour a clerk asked for Raúl Pradera. He gave him the message that Serrano had just called to tell him that his car had broken down. Everybody reacted with disbelief. One of the *pequeños propietarios* said: *His car broken down, nonsense! Why doesn't he come by bus then?! A form of reconciliation between ejidatarios and *pequeños propietarios* was felt. Both parties had been deceived by the MAR official. Raúl seemed relieved that a confrontation with the *pequeños propietarios* was avoided. Raúl and the other men from La Canoa shook hands with the *pequeños propietarios* and they all left the building.*

The next day Lupe called the MAR again. Serrano's secretary told Lupe that it was not true that his car broke down and that she had no idea what was going on. Serrano had not been to the office since last week. A couple of days later the secretary said that Serrano had arrived unshaved at the office one day to collect some documents and then left again. She repeated that what Serrano had said about the car breaking down had been a lie. Lupe also talked to Ramírez, Serrano's boss. He said to her that he had no idea what was going on and that all this time he had assumed that Serrano was doing his measuring work in La Canoa. He instructed Lupe to go and look for Serrano in the different hotels in Autlán. Serrano never came to Autlán or La Canoa again.

### *Lifting Part of the Veil*

Some weeks later Ramón and Lupe got hold of Serrano on the telephone. He told them that if the ejido was prepared to pay for it, he would do the measuring as a private project in the Christmas holidays. Then they did not hear from him anymore. Shortly afterwards, I made an appointment with Juan Fernández, head of the department of development and local organization of the MAR office in Guadalajara. I established contact with him through friends who were active with peasant organizations and whom he used to help with advice on agrarian matters. After a more general talk, I presented Fernández with the case of Serrano

in La Canoa. It appeared that Fernández knew Serrano well and had been his boss at another department of the MAR. To my surprise, Fernández summoned Serrano to his office before I had even finished talking. I was not very happy about this direct confrontation with Serrano but could not do much about it anymore. I will present part of the conversation that followed after Fernández had called for Serrano.

M: *What is the sense of calling for Serrano now. He will only give the official version of what happened.*

F: *From the answers he gives I can deduce what has happened.*

Serrano entered the room displaying great deference to Fernández.

F: *What were you going to do in La Canoa?*

S: *The demarcation of a land area that supposedly was bought for the ejido by the MAR and that seems not to have been completely handed over to the ejido.*

After a discussion on the technical side of the job in which Fernández disagreed with Serrano about the implications of his work in La Canoa, Serrano became uncomfortable.

F: *Why was the work stopped?*

S: *Orders from the delegate [head of the MAR office in Guadalajara], he told me to stop.* Fernández gave me a significant look and Serrano left.

M: *So the delegate himself stopped the work?*

F: *He said so, not me.....*

So, apparently Pelayo, head of the MAR in Guadalajara, had personally interfered to stop the measuring work. As it was obvious that higher officials had to be involved in this land conflict and Pelayo had a bad reputation, this did not seem so strange. I told the people in La Canoa about my findings in Guadalajara. As usual, they listened with great interest and were not surprised.

### **A New Broker: the Gatekeeper in Mexico City**

All this time Lupe and Ramón continued paying visits to the MAR offices in Mexico City to keep applying pressure for the measuring work to be done. Sometimes they were summoned to come to the offices in Mexico City to sign papers or to bring some documents. During one of those visits to the MAR buildings they met a man, Antonio Macías, who offered his assistance. There are always many "gatekeepers" at the offices of the MAR; men who worked at the MAR or the peasant unions before and know their way in the bureaucracy. As most of the ejidatarios feel lost in the MAR, these gatekeepers offer their assistance. This assistance is normally paid for in meals or money. These men can be useful to the ejidatarios as they lead them around and bring them to the right places. However, there are also people who only try to take advantage of the insecurity of the ejidatarios.

Ramón and Lupe explained to me that at first they had been a little bit afraid as they did

not know Antonio but when they showed him their papers he took them to the different offices. He helped them a great deal and Lupe and Ramón were impressed that he seemed to know all the people at the different desks. Lupe stressed that he had been so nice and did not want to charge them anything. But they gave him 100,000 pesos (\$ 33) which made him very happy. Antonio said that he would help them with everything and said that he did not agree with the insolent way in which ejidatarios are treated by the officials.

During this visit to Mexico City Lupe and Ramón stayed with two sons of don Miguel's first marriage, stepsons of Lupe. The wife of one of them accompanied them to the offices of the MAR. She noticed that Lupe and Ramón were going around with Antonio and warned them that this boy would only "relieve them of their money". Yet, the fact that the people at the different offices appeared to know him and treated him well was interpreted by Raúl and Lupe as meaning that he was an important person who might be of great use to them.

According to Lupe, Antonio was head of the *Liga de Comunidades Agrarias* (a peasant organization affiliated to the ruling PRI). According to a friend of mine, who did some research, Antonio Macías did indeed work for this organization, but was only one of the assistants of the head of the Liga de Comunidades Agrarias. Ramón told me that Antonio was their last hope. Yet, I was amazed that after two years of deceit, Ramón could believe in a person he had just met and be so enthusiastic about him. So, I asked Ramón: *Don Ramón, how can you believe in Antonio when you just met him and do not know him?* Ramón replied: *It is not a question of belief but of hope. I hope that this will work out well. I do not believe in anything anymore. But hope is the last thing one gives up.*

After this visit to Mexico City, Antonio regularly phoned them (expensive collect calls) to ask how things were going. One day, Antonio offered to come to Guadalajara to "undo the knot" at the MAR office. According to him, the MAR office in Guadalajara was obstructing the procedures for measuring the land in La Canoa. Antonio wanted his airplane ticket and his expenses for the day paid for. Lupe did not want to go to Guadalajara as she refused to spend more of her own money on the matter. So, Ramón would go on his own to receive Antonio. Lupe and Ramón convened a meeting with the supporters of the fight for the "lost land" in order to collect the money. Some twelve people arrived at this private meeting but they did not collect the required amount of money and Ramón would have to pay part of the expenses out his own pocket. In Guadalajara, Antonio and Ramón went to the MAR office and Antonio asked for the work order which Serrano had received for the work in La Canoa. He made copies of it and gave one to Ramón. Ramón gave him 650,000 pesos (\$ 217) but Antonio said that that was not enough. He told Ramón that he not only needed money for the airplane but that he also had to maintain his family and his parents. So he asked Ramón for more money. Ramón also had to pay for his breakfast and the cab to the airport. Then he left for Mexico City again.

On the basis of this visit Ramón's faith in Antonio decreased. The only thing Antonio did was to get Serrano's work order. However, Ramón was above all disappointed because

he noticed that Antonio was not the important man Ramón had assumed him to be. At the Guadalajara office nobody knew Antonio and they paid little attention to him. They asked him for an identity document which he could not give. According to Ramón, he only had a little piece of paper which did not impress anyone in the Guadalajara office. Ramírez, the engineers' boss, did not even want to receive him. All of this made Ramón conclude that Antonio was not an important person and could therefore never be of much help.

When Antonio later phoned them and said that he wanted to come to Guadalajara again, Ramón told him that he should only come with orders from Mexico City. Yet, Lupe and Ramón remained in contact with him. When they were working with the different engineers, they also kept in touch with Antonio as they might perhaps need him in the future. In the beginning of December 1993 Antonio phoned them and told them to participate in a demonstration in Mexico City for Colosio, the PRI candidate in the presidential elections of 1994, but they did not go. Sometimes Lupe became annoyed with Antonio as his frequent collect phone calls from Mexico City were very expensive. Lupe showed me the bills with all Antonio's collect calls from Mexico City. It was a large sum of money.

Like Salazar and Serrano, Antonio made many promises and told them many things that appeared not to be true. For example, in December Antonio phoned Lupe to tell her that Serrano would come again to the village on the 20th of December. Lupe told me: *Antonio always pretends to be an important person*. Serrano did not arrive.

However, in the beginning of January 1994 Lupe was very enthusiastic again after a phone call from Antonio. He called on Friday to tell her that he had gone to Guadalajara with the *oficialía mayor* (high official) of the MAR in Mexico City. According to Antonio, the *oficialía mayor* had been very angry with Pelayo, the head of the MAR in Guadalajara, and had asked him what was going on in Guadalajara. He gave Pelayo orders to start the work next week. Antonio told Lupe that the engineer would come on Monday and that he himself would visit La Canoa next Tuesday or Wednesday. However, he urged them to send him 700,000 pesos immediately as he did not have money to travel next week. He needed the money before Monday. Lupe believed Antonio but had her doubts as well. Together with Ramón she decided to collect the money Antonio had asked for but not to send it right away. When I was at Lupe's house on Monday, Antonio phoned from Mexico City. Lupe asked me to listen with her on the other telephone. The conversation between Lupe and Antonio went as follows.

A: *The work order will now be sent to Guadalajara by fax and then everything will start.*

L: *You remember that you told me on Friday that they would come today?*

A: *Yes*

L: *I called Guadalajara and there they say that they know nothing about it. You know, people here lose confidence by these small things. For that reason I could not collect the 700 pesos. The people do not want to contribute*

*anymore.*

A: *Don't worry, you know that the high official committed himself to la Canoa's case on Friday. I will call you tomorrow after they sent the fax.*

[Antonio phoned from his home and we could hear a baby crying in the background]

L: *What is the name of this official and what is his telephone number?*

A: *His name is Raúl Pineda. I don't have his telephone number at hand but I will give it to you tomorrow. Then you can check for yourself that everything is alright. But tomorrow I will phone you after the fax is sent. If you allow me to call collect again. Otherwise, I will let them call you directly from the MAR office.*

L: *Tomorrow we are not here.*

A: *You are not?*

L: *No, we are going to Guadalajara to talk to the head of the MAR, Pelayo.*

A: *But that is not necessary anymore, everything is arranged.*

L: *Yes, but we have an appointment for tomorrow.*

A: *I don't think it a good idea that you go to Guadalajara. Naturally, you have to decide yourselves, but it is a pity to make a trip if it isn't necessary. It is a pity because of the money you will spend on it. They are already working on the case here. But you have to decide for yourselves. I will call you when you are with Pelayo then. The fax will probably arrive at Pelayo's office at 12.00.*

L: *We have an appointment with Pelayo at 11.00.*

A: *Then I will call you there. You will see that everything is fine.*

L: *The point is that the people here have lost faith after all the experiences we have had. I haven't lost faith, but the other people have.*

A: *They will arrive this week. But it will not necessarily be the same engineer that comes.*

Then the phone call ended. Lupe did not feel very confident about the distrustful way in which she had addressed Antonio. She liked the person of the *high official* in Antonio's stories: that sounded as an important person. On the other hand, she did not trust Antonio's stories and promises anymore.

Several things surprised me in this phone call. First of all, it was clear that Lupe had become much more skillful in her dealing with brokers. She confronted Antonio with the contradictions in his own stories, but she did not directly say that she did not believe him anymore. She said that the others in the ejido had become distrustful, not she. Secondly, Antonio directly reacted to the changing attitude of Lupe. He was respectful and did not talk about money anymore. We can see here that actions labeled as "corruption" are made up of complex practices, with strong performative aspects (Gupta 1995: 379). It is a play one can

be good or bad at. It is not a vulgar way of wheedling money out of other people. When Antonio felt that he was losing ground, he changed his attitude and did not raise the issue of the money anymore. Another reaction could have been to become angry with this incredulity on the part of the ejidatarios and say that they are ungrateful for everything he had done for them. Actually, that is a much more common reaction of officials or brokers when they are confronted with criticism or distrust from ejidatarios. However, Antonio chose another way out. Nothing happened that week and Antonio did not call for quite some time. According to Lupe he certainly felt exposed.

However, some time later Lupe herself decided to call Antonio again when they did not achieve anything through the other channels. When Antonio offered to come to Guadalajara again, she responded that it would be better for him to try to get a mission organized from Mexico City. They would then pay him afterwards when they received the land. Antonio never showed up anymore.

### The Priest Visiting the Head of the MAR in Guadalajara

#### *Lupe and Father López*

Lupe had lost faith in Salazar. When she phoned Salazar he never answered anymore; he was never at home, nor at his office. After a while Salazar moved to another house and also changed his telephone number. Salazar was unreachable. Lupe went so far as to say that she did not know whether she could trust Father López. After all Father López had brought them into contact with Salazar and why had he told them that Salazar was doing a good job? However, Lupe's faith in Father López was soon restored. During a visit Lupe and I paid to Father López, he said that he was very sad that Salazar had behaved in such a miserable way with La Canoa and had only been interested in money. He explained that his faith in Salazar was based on the fact that Salazar was the *compadre* of the former priest. However, according to Father López the ejidatarios of La Canoa were also to blame for the failure. First of all, they had done everything without the consent of the ejido assembly and secondly, they had let the news get out that they were fighting to recover the land. Salazar had caused Father López several other problems. Besides La Canoa, Salazar also had been dealing with other ejidos for Father López. Father López had tried to find out where Salazar had moved to and had discovered his new telephone number which he passed on to Lupe. Now he was trying to find out Salazar's new address, so that he could pay him a "surprise visit".

Father López said that Héctor Romero, the former head of the security policy and one of the *pequeños propietarios* who possessed a part of the "lost land", had visited him twice now to tell him to abandon the case of La Canoa. Héctor had added that he was the godfather of the mayor of Autlán and that Father López should be very careful. Another *pequeño propietario* had also told him to stop and did not greet him anymore when he came to mass



on Sunday. However, Father López said that he was not afraid and that from now on he would spend more time on La Canoa. He wanted to take advantage of the time that Salinas was still in power. Then he could still use his influential contacts. After this talk with Father López Lupe was enthusiastic again. Some weeks later I met Father López in the street and he told me that the bishop had told him to stop interfering in agrarian conflicts. Father López did not agree with the bishop, he said, but sometimes he got tired of everything. He also complained about the fact that there was no unity in La Canoa.

### *The Priest Meets the Head of the MAR*

In the beginning of 1994, Father López used his contacts in Mexico City to make an appointment with the head of the MAR in Guadalajara, Pelayo. Pelayo had the reputation of being very corrupt and, as we saw before, it was said that Pelayo himself had ordered the suspension of the measuring work in La Canoa. For Lupe and Ramón the prospect of meeting Pelayo was very exciting because they knew that he was very influential and they hoped that through Father López and his powerful contacts, Pelayo could be pressed to work in the interest of La Canoa. So, the appointment with Pelayo was a special occasion and we were all a little nervous. Lupe, Ramón, Father López, and I went to the appointment. Lupe tried to persuade Raúl to come as well but he did not want to go. He only gave his written authorization as commissioner. I had made an extensive file with copies of all the relevant official documents.

The day of the appointment Lupe, Ramón, and I caught the 6 o'clock in the morning bus in Autlán in order to arrive at the 11 o'clock appointment in Guadalajara. Father López stayed the night before the appointment in Guadalajara. Ramón had dressed himself in a special way for the occasion. He had told me before about the importance of dressing well for the officials and of not going as the typical *campesino*. This time he certainly did not correspond to the traditional image of the ejidatario visiting the MAR (*sombrero, guaraches, plastic bag with documents*), but he looked rather weird. He had put on a long old coat and had an old bag across his chest. A pencil stuck out of the middle of the bag. When we arrived at the MAR, Ramón left for the bathroom to smarten himself up. He remained in the bathroom for a long time and returned with a wet face and wet hair. As we were early we left to have breakfast. Lupe and Ramón had not slept well the night before. They were too nervous to have breakfast. Lupe told us that she had had nightmares in which her son took her from La Canoa to the bus station in Autlán and while they drove on and on, they never arrived at the bus station.

When we returned to the MAR we found Father López who presented us to an ejidatario of Tuxcacuesco. It became clear that Father López's visit to the head of the MAR was not only to defend the case of La Canoa, but also those of the ejidos Tuxcacuesco and Apulco

and of the *comunidad indígena* of Autlán, which all have serious land conflicts with private land owners. Apparently, Father López was becoming a broker in agrarian conflicts. At eleven o'clock Father López was called for the appointment with Pelayo.

The five of us entered the room. Father López shook hands with Pelayo and did not further introduce us.

Father López started to explain the reason for his visit. In contrast to the usual attitude of ejidatarios, the priest was self-confident and gave lengthy explanations. He carefully stressed the point that he was the friend of one of President Salinas' personal secretaries. Pelayo was a little irritated by all this talking but remained respectful. López noticed Pelayo's impatience but went on with his roundabout descriptions. He talked about the lawyer who had asked twenty million pesos from the ejidatarios of La Canoa and then disappeared. When López talked about the problems of La Canoa, Pelayo asked for more precise information. I will present part of the dialogue that followed.

Pelayo: *What kind of problems are you talking about?*

López looked at Lupe to answer the question.

Lupe (insecure): *Eh, we have a "rezago", a problem...*

Pelayo (irritated): *But does it concern an agrarian action (acción agraria) that was never finished or internal agrarian rights? What is the problem about?*

Ramón took over and started with much enthusiasm a very unclear story about land that was taken away from the ejido.

Pelayo phoned Ramírez and told him to come immediately to the office.

Pelayo (irritated) to Lupe and Ramón: *And who are you, are you members of the directive committee of the ejido?*

Ramón: *No, I am not.*

Pelayo to Lupe: *And you?*

Lupe: *I am the treasurer of the ejido.*

Pelayo: *And the ejido commissioner, he didn't want to come?*

Lupe: *Eh, no eh, a relative of his is ill and he couldn't come, but he (pointing to Ramón) is the secretary of the ejido.*

Ramón: *I am the substitute of the secretary* (he said substitute at a very low voice so that only the word secretary was well heard).

Pelayo: *And don't you have any documents with you?*

Ramón came to me to get the documents I had with me and I gave him the ones I thought were most relevant. Ramírez, the head of the engineers, arrived now. He was very friendly to us and Pelayo gave him the documents and asked Ramírez: *What is this all about?!*

Ramírez read the documents and said to Pelayo: *This is what we were discussing lately.* They started discussing the matter between the two of them in legal terms which were unintelligible to us. Pelayo read the work order of Serrano and asked the visitors: *And this work has never been done?*

Ramón (vehemently): *No, he only came for one day, then he invited all the neighbors of the ejido to a meeting and never came back, then you apparently recalled the order, then on the telephone he offered to do the measuring work during his Christmas holiday but then we would have to pay for it ourselves!*

Pelayo to Ramón: *This work has never been finished?*

Ramírez: *No, I wanted to talk to Serrano about it but then the holidays came...*

Pelayo to Ramón: *What kind of work is this of these engineers! Issue immediately another work order for another engineer!*

Pelayo to us: *We will immediately write a new work order.*

Lupe: *Does that mean that they will measure all the ejido land and not only the 126 hectares; they are invading us on all sides.*

Pelayo: *This commission only concerns informative work, which will be sent to Mexico on the basis of which they will elaborate the definitive ejido map. Where lies La Canoa, near Autlán?*

Father López started explaining to him in great detail how to get to the village.

Pelayo: *Perhaps we will come and visit you one day.*

Ramón and Lupe (happy): *That would be fantastic!*

It was decided that next week an engineer would come to the village to finish the work. Ramón would return to Guadalajara next Friday to arrange everything with the new engineer. Practical issues were now discussed. Father López repeated several times that the MAR engineers, who came to any of the four ejidos he was taking care of, could always stay at his house next to the church in Autlán. When the discussion on La Canoa was finished they continued with the case of Tuxcacuesco. The same dynamic repeated itself. Pelayo asked for very technical and formal procedures and neither the ejidatario from Tuxcacuesco nor Father López could give any answers to these questions. Again many new work orders were immediately issued. When everything was discussed, Father López gave a final speech in which he explained that he, as a priest, preferred not to interfere in these matters, but in these cases thought it was necessary to intervene. He said: *These people often have no idea about what is going on. They tell them that a commission will come and in the end nobody comes. And these are very poor people. Last time they prepared a birria for the people of the commission that would come and they did not show up..* Pelayo and Ramón listened without any expression on their faces. Father López extensively and patiently thanked Pelayo and Ramón and again dropped the names of the people at the MAR in Mexico City and the office of Salinas who had arranged this meeting for him. We all shook hands and said good bye.

Father López, Lupe and Ramón were very pleased with the results of this meeting. Most of all they liked the fact that so many decisions seemed to have been taken and that a new engineer had been ordered to go to La Canoa. However, Lupe was bothered by the fact that Pelayo had said that the work only concerned information gathering. Ramón was full of

enthusiasm, although he said that he was not so hopeful as when Serrano had arrived. However, he thought that the priest's involvement had made a big difference. In my opinion, however, this all had been a theatrical performance by Pelayo and Ramírez as they had to be well aware of what was going on. The ejidatarios were treated very well during this visit. This in sharp contrast to other occasions when Pelayo and Ramírez had not been prepared to receive or talk to ejidatarios from La Canoa and had treated them very rudely. Ramón had had especially bad experiences with Ramírez before. The different attitude certainly had to do with the fact that Father López had used his contacts in Mexico City to make the appointment and the fact that he himself had come to the appointment.

The conversation shows several characteristic elements of the interaction between ejidatarios and functionaries. First the usual questions in formal legal terminology, the question of documents, and the asking for the ejido commissioner. Then, when reference is made to irregularities on the part of the MAR office, the functionaries do not react at all. Although this time Ramón was very direct in his insinuation of Pelayo's involvement in the withdrawal of the work order, the ejidatarios do not easily call functionaries to account for irregularities. In his turn, Pelayo blames everything on Serrano, he reacts indignant at the way in which the engineers work and reacts with much action-power and immediately issues new work orders and appoints new engineers. In this way, he suggests that the problem is of a technical administrative nature and will soon be resolved. He raises hope by suggesting that he will visit them soon.

### **The Second Engineer: Castañeda**

Two weeks after our visit to Pelayo, the next MAR engineer from the Guadalajara office arrived: Castañeda. Now quite a different situation developed. The directive committee of La Canoa and the neighbors of the ejido were summoned to a meeting at the town hall. This time there was an attractive young woman among the *pequeños propietarios* whom nobody from La Canoa knew. After Castañeda had read out his work order, the girl went towards him with some documents which he silently read in great detail. The other *pequeños propietarios* grew impatient and wanted to leave. Iginio asked the young lady who she was. It became clear that she was the daughter of one of the families that illegally possess part of the "lost land". After reading the documents the girl had given him, Castañeda asked the ejidatarios a lot of silly questions about the situation of the land he had to investigate and it looked as if he had not prepared for the job. He looked for a long time at the maps and then very slowly folded the maps one after the other. Everybody was watching him in astonishment and the ejidatarios of La Canoa started to get bad feelings about this engineer. Castañeda proposed to take a look at the fields. While we left the building Castañeda stayed on the staircase talking with the girl and a man who joined them. The people of La Canoa

noticed this and their distrust of him grew. The engineer was apparently establishing good relationships with the “enemy”. The girl left to get her truck and said that Castañeda could come with her. Ramón, immediately joined the girl and Castañeda in her truck. The others all followed in other cars.

In the field the atmosphere was very negative. Everybody realized that things were going badly. Castañeda was only reading documents and walking around with the girl in the sugarcane fields. Castañeda and the girl separated themselves from the ejidatarios and they talked in a confidential way as if they had known each other for a long time. They started eating some of the sugarcane in the field. The fifteen ejidatarios from La Canoa stood in small groups commenting that the situation looked unfavorable. After some fifteen minutes, Castañeda said: *Let's go and draw up a report*. Although everybody from La Canoa agreed that the engineer was not doing his job, nobody asked him a question. Castañeda said that he would draw up the report at the office of Albamex in Autlán (the company and home address of the girl's father). So, now a situation was created in which the ejidatarios were going to draw up a report at “the house of the enemy”. We drove to the office of Albamex in different cars.

At the office there were two other women with a victorious expression on their face and who were giving each other signals all the time. Again I had the feeling of being part of a theater play. The ejidatarios were worried but did not know what to do. At a certain moment I went to the table where Castañeda was writing. I introduced myself as coming from the Agricultural University of Holland and being very curious about the meaning of the task description in his work order: *Localización topográfica* (topographic localization).

C: *That is what we just did: looking at the field and then indicating that on the map*

M: *So the work is finished now?*

C: *Yes*

It was obvious that the ejidatarios would be deceived again on the basis of obscure agrarian terminology, but there was little that could be done. It was decided that Castañeda would finish his report on his own and that he would present it later in the afternoon in La Canoa. The ejidatarios left the engineer at the house of the “enemy” and returned to La Canoa.

#### *A Meeting with Castañeda in La Canoa*

The ejidatarios realized that this time they had been openly taken in by the MAR engineer and only some fifteen ejidatarios showed up at the meeting with Castañeda in the afternoon. They wanted to question Castañeda's work, but they did not know how to do this well. The meeting with Castañeda started in the following way.

Ignacio: *The Indians took it in their own hands* [referring to the rebellion in Chiapas, which broke out at the beginning of 1994], *we are not much Indian*.

Ramón: *It would be good to be Indian, to be taken into account!*

Castañeda was chewing gum, had a very disinterested expression on his face and did not

react. The others started complaining about all these engineers who always come to the ejido and never finish their work.

Ramón to Castañeda: *How did you see the field, what land are we lacking?*

Castañeda: *That is something that I have to calculate now.*

The ejidatarios gave Castañeda some documents to show that the land of the Pabellón, where they had been in the afternoon, had been bought by the MAR for the ejido.

Ignacio: *Here it says that the MAR paid for the land.*

Castañeda: *I have searched for documents to prove that but I haven't found anything.*

Ignacio started a detailed explanation but Castañeda showed no interest and was looking at other papers.

Ignacio: *We did not expect you to do only the work you did today.*

Ramón started reading out another document that proved their point, but Castañeda did not react and continued reading his own material.

Ignacio: *In that case we take up arms, just like in Chiapas!*

The ejidatarios started making jokes among themselves and Castañeda continued reading.

Ramón: *El Pabellón is already known in the whole of Mexico; in all the different offices, even in Los Pinos (the presidential residence)!*

Castañeda now started reading out the report he had written about his activities. The report gave a description of the land area. Quarrels arose among the ejidatarios about many details in the report. Castañeda took advantage of the division among the ejidatarios and accused Iginio of giving him false information.

Castañeda: *And afterwards they will think that I deliberately made these changes. So everybody should know that you gave me this information!*

Ramón: *The report says nothing about the land that is lacking.*

Castañeda: *That is a calculation that I now have to make.*

Doubts were rising among the ejidatarios as to whether they should sign this report or not. Everybody felt that Castañeda was deceiving them. Several people went outside. They did not trust Castañeda at all. People were talking in small groups and deliberating about whether they should sign his report or not. The *delegado* of the village, who is also an ejidatario, joined the group outside the building. He noticed that the work order talked about work till the 28th of January, while today it was only the 24th of January.

Raúl (fiercely): *If we sign now, we will never recover El Pabellón!*

The general conclusion was that Castañeda's work was very suspect and that they should better not sign agreeing with the report. All entered the ejido building again. When Castañeda finished reading his report, Iginio was the first to bravely show the dissatisfaction of the ejidatarios with his work.

Iginio: *I do not agree, nothing has been measured!*

Castañeda (angry): *And haven't we been to the fields then?! This cannot be measured.*

After this angry outburst of Castañeda, the ejidatarios became insecure and changed their attitude. They started criticizing Iginio. They said that the work order only talked about a *localización topográfica*. Iginio himself also felt insecure now.

Castañeda: *I do what they order me to do.*

Vicente García to all ejidatarios: *Are we going to sign this or not?*

Ignacio Romero: *I say yes.*

Alberto Alcázar: *The fear of signing is natural after what has happened, but this report does not oblige us to anything.*

Ramón: *I think it is correct.*

Vicente: *Some say it is all right, others say it is not.*

In the meantime I tried to persuade Lupe to ask Castañeda why they gave him five days for this job while he finished it in one afternoon. Lupe did not dare to ask him. Then I asked Ignacio Alcázar who passed the question to Alberto Alcázar.

Alberto to Castañeda: *Why does it say five days on the work order?*

Castañeda: *The other days are for the calculation in Guadalajara.*

Now there were no means left for the ejidatarios to judge or question the engineer.

Nobody made a critical remark anymore and everybody signed the report. When he was packing his things together Castañeda accused the ejidatarios of having caused Serrano serious trouble by accusing him of corruption. As Castañeda put it: *Rumors circulate in Guadalajara that Serrano asked 100 million to do the job and this caused him serious problems with Pelayo.* Ramón and Lupe responded that Serrano had offered to do the job in his holidays but that he had not mentioned a sum of money.

Afterwards it became clear that Castañeda had misled the ejidatarios in several ways. First of all, the work order of *localización topográfica* of the field El Pabellón implied that he should have stayed several days to measure the land. Secondly, Castañeda had received a second order for more measuring work in the ejido, which he never showed the ejidatarios.

Although the result of this visit was unsatisfactory, this meeting is illustrative of several aspects of the relation between ejidatarios and officials. First of all, we noticed a strong atmosphere of dissatisfaction on the part of the ejidatarios. Yet, they preferred not to directly express their disapproval. At the start of the meeting this discontent was indirectly expressed by several references to the armed struggle in Chiapas. Although in this conflict many other things besides land problems are involved, the ejidatarios stress especially this aspect of the conflict. The ejidatarios in La Canoa started referring to Chiapas not only in the context of meetings with officials but also among themselves. They did not feel related to the Indian population, but they had great sympathy for the problems these groups had with the Mexican state and private landowners.

Other indirect remarks by the ejidatarios also made it clear that they were dissatisfied with Castañeda's work. Actually this was one of the few occasions in which the ejidatarios

openly, and in front of the official himself, questioned his integrity. The ejidatarios disliked direct confrontations with officials. In this case, obscure agrarian terminology was again a central weapon of the official. He could easily eliminate the opposition by lying about agrarian procedures and the meaning of certain administrative terms. When the official pretended to be offended by the distrustful attitude of the ejidatarios, the ejidatarios quickly lost their confidence and signed the report. It is also significant here that the ejidatarios do not want to break off relations with the MAR. Even though they distrust officials, they do not want to spoil the relationship. They want to continue the relation with the bureaucratic machine. Signing documents is one of the acts through which this relation is maintained and they invest in the idea of the state.

Castañeda in his turn did not try to establish a friendly atmosphere. All the time he remained cool and distant. He lied about the procedures and acted offended when they openly criticized him. From the start of the meeting he tried to create dissension among the ejidatarios and took advantage of quarrels among them. His hand was also strengthened by the fact that only a small group of ejidatarios came to the meeting.

#### *Unmasking Ramírez, the Head of the Engineers*

Two weeks after Castañeda's visit to La Canoa, a large group of ejidatarios went to see Hernández, the new head of the Procuraduría Agraria in Autlán to discuss a problem with the commons. When they had finished talking about the commons, Castañeda's recent visit to La Canoa was mentioned. Hernández had been a MAR official before entering the Procuraduría Agraria and without saying anything he took the telephone and called Castañeda's boss Ramírez. He talked very cordially with Ramírez whom he apparently knew very well. Then he said that a representation of La Canoa was at his office and explained that they were dissatisfied with the fact that measuring work was never done. Ramírez told Hernández that a commission from La Canoa recently visited the MAR together with Father López to cancel Serrano's work. Obviously, this was a blatant lie by Ramírez.

After the phone call Hernández explained us what Ramírez had told him. Lupe immediately reacted by saying that it was a lie what Ramírez told him as she herself was at that meeting with Pelayo and it had been precisely to ask why Serrano's work was never finished. The ejidatarios developed their speculations that the Guadalajara office was working against them. Hernández listened to all the stories and did not discard the possibility that the Guadalajara office was obstructing the procedures. He recognized that many things might be at stake. He suggested to them that they do everything directly through the offices in Mexico City and ask for an engineer from there if they felt that the Guadalajara office was hindering their efforts. He gave them a telephone number of the man of the MAR in Mexico City whom they should call and visit. He promised that next time he himself would come and inspect the engineer's work.

The interesting thing about this visit is that a higher official does not deny the possibility



that people he himself knows very well are perhaps involved in dubious practices. He does not dismiss certain conspiracy theories out of hand. The point is that everybody knows that the bureaucracy and politics are highly intertwined and that anybody might become involved in one way or the other. Again a new entrance is presented to the ejidatarios: they get a new telephone number in Mexico City. Once more they are promised that an official will personally come and visit them.

Lupe and Ramón were not sure if they should go on with the MAR in Guadalajara or abandon the Guadalajara office completely. Ramón said that he did not trust Ramírez and thought that he was playing a “double game”. On the other hand, since their visit with Father López, Ramírez had changed his attitude and had become very friendly. Despite Ramírez’s apparent lie Ramón said that he thought that Ramírez was now taking La Canoa’s side. This clearly was a situation in which Ramón was confronted with conflicting messages about the trustworthiness and loyalty of one specific person and was constructing his “theories” in order to be able to continue the struggle.

### **Distrust, Conspiracy, and Dealing with Contradictory Information**

As they were working through different channels and nothing seemed to work out well, mutual distrust as well as mutual accusations continued among the ejidatarios. I maintained contacts with the different people separately and they could express themselves in very negative terms about each other. For example, Ramón expressed negative views of Raúl and Iginio.

R: *Raúl is a fool and Iginio a shameless devil. Iginio works with the “other party”.*

M: *But isn’t Iginio also working to recover the land?*

R: *Yes, but through other channels. But he also works for the others; he probably received money..!*

In their turn, Raúl and Iginio accused Lupe and Ramón of operating on their own in the hope that they could keep the “lost land”. Iginio: *They hope to divide the land between the two of them.* People blamed each other for everything that went wrong and insinuated that others had their own private agendas against the interests of the ejido.

One phenomenon that bothered the ejidatarios fighting for the “lost land” was the fact that the private landowners always managed to know what they were doing. According to the ejidatarios, the *pequeños* always seemed to know about their missions and made sure to bribe the officials before they arrived at the office. Roberto Sánchez said: *When we went on a mission to the MAR in Guadalajara we saw the pequeños in the bus coming back from Guadalajara. We always had secret meetings for this case but there was always a traitor. He informed the pequeños and they went to Guadalajara before we arrived. When we arrived at the MAR offices, the officials were already bought.* Similar stories were told by others. Lupe,

for example, said that on their last trip to the MAR she saw Ricardo García at the bus station in Guadalajara. She assumed that he had been to the MAR to counter their actions. Teresa recalled that on one occasion in the past she and Macario had been waiting in a restaurant for somebody who would help them. When they looked through the window they saw the person they were waiting for, talking to "the other party". In Teresa's words: *Sometimes you do not know who you can trust and who not. Not even of your own family. Sometimes it is better to work with outsiders.* To stress this point she gave another example of a relative of Lupe who worked at the MAR and promised to help them with everything. Afterwards it became clear to them that she was working for the *pequeños*. So, according to Teresa not even relatives were to be trusted.

In this way the ejidatarios were always speculating about the role of everybody else and an important component in their strategies was secrecy. Failures were often blamed on information reaching the "enemy". Information leakages were a main danger as the private landowners could directly impair anything La Canoa had accomplished. This caution about passing on information also concerned the ejido documents. We noticed that even within the loose configuration of people that was working on the "lost land", they were very reluctant to pass important documents to each other. However, plenty of other reasons, besides traitors who passed information to "the enemy", could always be found to explain why things went wrong. For example, somebody could argue that they had not reacted in time to certain letters, or that the commissioner had signed the wrong document. A common critique was also that they had not paid the engineer enough, or had not treated him "well enough".

In their conspiracy theories the ejidatarios also speculated about the "location of evil". Some ejidatarios considered the MAR office in Guadalajara to be the main problem and thought that as long as everything was arranged through Mexico City it would be all right. They hoped that the officials in Guadalajara would be overruled by their superiors in Mexico City. Some also commented that the documents and the maps in Guadalajara were falsified and that the "true documents" were still in Mexico City. On other occasions it was said that the "real documents" were in Guadalajara but that the officials refused to give them.

All these speculations were fomented by the continuous stream of contradictory messages they received from different sides. All the people they worked with said something different to them and all the time they received information they should act upon. Many times they were told to come immediately to Guadalajara and Mexico City to arrange some documents. On one occasion, for example, an official of the Guadalajara office told Iginio that La Canoa should hurry with their case as he had heard that a lawyer in Autlán was "legalizing" the illegal land titles of the *pequeños propietarios* for one million pesos per hectare. This was a disquietening message. However, fortunately it was followed by a much more hopeful message. Suddenly, one day, the happy news was spread in La Canoa that the Mexican President Salinas had said on television that La Canoa would be the next ejido to be measured. Several ejidatarios, Lupe, Iginio, Ignacio Alcázar, and others, passed me this

rumor. Some said that Salinas had made his declaration on television and others said it was on the radio, but all were equally hopeful and enthusiastic after this fantastic news.

As I had been doing some research of my own, I gradually discussed with the ejidatarios the information I had found in the MAR and the conclusions I myself was arriving at. I felt that this might lead to difficult conversations as my ideas sometimes went against their views. However, it was obvious that the idea that there could only be “one valid theory” was my problem and not theirs. They had no difficulty with different theories. They always listened carefully when they received new information. They were looking for all types of data and were interested in all findings. But they did not necessarily arrive at conclusions about the truth or reliability of information. Nor did they try to arrive at coherent and absolute theories. They could live with contradictory information and opposite versions at the same time. For the same reason, they never seemed to be surprised by information that was in apparent contradiction with their own versions and beliefs.

#### *About “Hard Data” and Reading Maps*

As I myself became fascinated by this highly complex conflict and tried to come to grips with it, I studied many documents and maps. I also tried to arrive at a clear analysis of the situation and talked everything over with the ejidatarios. Yet, after some time of research I came to the conclusion that my use of maps, documents, and figures was different from that of the ejidatarios. First of all, I discovered that there was great uncertainty about the size of the “lost land”; figures about the numbers of hectares that were involved differed. Most ejidatarios said that they did not know how much land was involved. Others gave different figures. For example, Salvador said that it concerned approximately one hundred hectares, whereas Iginio told me that it was 200, almost 300 hectares. Manuel Pradera said that he heard people say that it concerned more than 100 hectares and 3 or 4 different land areas. Vicente García told me that besides the fact that they did not know how much land they lacked, nobody actually knew how much land La Canoa had in its possession. Once when I mentioned the 540 hectares that were missing, according to the letter that Salazar had written to the Mexican president, Raúl exclaimed: so many hectares?! Some time later, I worked one afternoon with Ramón and Raúl to make a summary of the problems of La Canoa for Father López, who had asked for a clear and understandable explanation of the problems of the ejido. This analysis was above all based on Ramón’s information. On the basis of what he told me about the different fields and problems I arrived at a calculation of approximately 260 has that the ejido missed. The greatest part concerned rainfed land, but an important part was irrigated land.

Yet, after Salazar had sent the letter to the Mexican president, which said that they were lacking 540 hectares, the ejidatarios started using this figure. For example, Lupe who had never before mentioned the number of hectares involved, started talking about the 540 hectares the ejido was missing. Iginio, who had before talked about 200 or 300 hectares now

also talked about the 540 hectares they were missing. In other matters I also noticed that people who had studied the documents sometimes gave exactly the same information as I had found in the archives. Hence, they seemed to use figures they had found in the documents.

In this context I also developed mixed feelings about the role of the ejido map in their struggle for the "lost land". As we saw, the ejido map is the central object for the ejidatarios in their struggle. By recovering this map, they hope to win the conflict. So, I showed the ejidatarios several maps of La Canoa to explain to me the problems of the different fields and the problems with the existing maps. However, when I showed Lupe the map of the extension of the ejido on which the endowment lands were also indicated, and asked her to indicate the location of the lands that were "lost", she responded that she was not capable of doing so. She said that she could not do anything with the map and instead started explaining the situation to me in "physical terms" referring to certain points in the lands: a bridge, a house, certain fields etc. So, she did not know how to link the land she knew so well in practical terms with the lines on the paper. Teresa could not do so either. However, when I showed the map to Teresa she recognized the names of certain fields on the map and in the same way as Lupe she explained the physical position of these lands and their histories. Men who had not been actively involved in the struggle also could not "read" maps. For example, when I showed the commissioner Raúl maps of the ejido and asked him if he could tell me where the "lost lands" were situated he said that he could not do anything with a map.

As many people apparently could not "read maps", I developed the feeling that the map they were chasing after perhaps stood for something else. The men of "the group of the lost land" who for many years had studied documents, maps and the agrarian law, certainly had no problems in indicating the different parts of "lost land" on the map, but all their stories differed. Some gave more technical details to distinguish the "real map" from the "useless maps". For example, according to Iginio the name of this "real map" was the "combined map" (*plano conjunto*) and it clearly indicated the correct ejido borders. Iginio said that in order to distinguish between good maps and the bad maps it was important that the maps were signed by the right engineer.

Naturally, the fact that people do not agree on the data concerning the "lost land", can be explained by the difference between the life-world of the ejidatarios and the official legal-bureaucratic world. Furthermore, many different fields (*potreros*) are concerned in the "lost land" which all have different histories and are involved in conflicts with distinct legal and administrative aspects. As we saw, the establishment of the ejido has been unclear from the beginning; procedures have not been followed, lands have never been measured, and documents gave contradictory information about borders and areas. This explains why local story-telling about the "lost land" is to a certain degree shaped and changed by the interactions and experiences with the agrarian bureaucracy.

Yet, the most interesting phenomenon is the way documents, events, and maps are read

and interpreted in the light of a labyrinthine bureaucratic machine. Their focus on the map should be seen as the embodiment of the conflict in an administrative artefact: a re-enchantment of a governmental technique. Their concentration on the map makes it possible for the ejidatarios to establish a relationship with the bureaucracy; it is a recognized administrative document they can ask for. In this way, the map has become a fetish. Besides making it possible to engage the bureaucracy, the fetishized map also plays an important role in the local mobilizing of people; it is a material object upon which a collective sentiment is fixed (see Durkheim 1965 [1912] on fetishes). Although the ejidatarios disagree amongst themselves about the details of the conflict, the fetishized map can raise feelings of collective interests and makes people join forces when necessary.

### *Contradictory Information*

This also explains why the ejidatarios have no problems in dealing with contradictory information and can easily switch positions. For example, after some time of research I individually told them that according to the official data a definitive ejido map of La Canoa was never made when the ejido was established. This meant that there was no map that got “lost” and that there was no map hidden somewhere in an office. I thought that this was a sensitive theme and that the men who were closest to the fight for the “lost land” would not be pleased with me talking about the possibility that the map had never existed. However, they did not mind hearing “another theory”. For example, Iginio and Ramón listened to my findings with interest, but without drawing any conclusions. Others even seemed to like my theory about a map that never existed. When I said to Lupe that I believed that the definitive ejido map had never existed, she said that she agreed with me and that everybody had always falsely accused her husband of giving the land to his brother and getting rid of the map. She said: *I never knew anything about that. The map that I saw here on the table perhaps was not the definitive map. May be it was only a big map of the surroundings... of the state of Jalisco..!* Raúl also liked “my theory” that the map was never made. He said that this information was new but convinced him that they could never influence the state of affair and should not spend any money anymore on the case. Raúl felt that “my theory” strengthened his position. Again this shows that the map is an artefact, an embodiment of the fantasies constructed about the “lost land”. It is the embodiment of a fight which people want to play out in different ways. At the same time, it is very probable that the ejidatarios who today are tired of the struggle and say that the map was probably never made, tomorrow again go after “the map that once got lost” when they try to recover the land.

After they had lost contact with Salazar, Lupe and Ramón easily distanced themselves from the data Salazar had given them which they had believed in before. For example, on one occasion, I carefully tried to say to Lupe that after a thorough study of their case it could appear that they really lacked much less than 560 hectares. But Lupe was not hurt by my remark. She said that she had never known the number of hectares they were fighting for

anyway. When I suggested that Salazar had perhaps written this letter to please them, Lupe reacted: *Not to please us but to deceive us!* When I talked to Ramón about the fact that the letter to the Mexican President and the list of beneficiaries for the "lost land" that they had established had, according to other people, not been done properly, Ramón reacted: *The lawyer only did that to get money from us, he brain washed us...*

The conclusion to be drawn from this is that in their struggle for the "lost land" the ejidatarios are always theorizing, speculating and "reading" messages and that this is related to the working of the hope-generating bureaucratic machine. The point is not that the ejidatarios "believe" everything officials or brokers tell them. Rather, they deal with many points of entry to the bureaucratic machine, work with many brokers at the same time, receive numerous often contradictory messages, and it is not clear precisely what is happening. In this labyrinth they try to construct a certain order or logic which helps them to decide how to go on. But they never hold on to their own theories strongly. They quickly change ideas and never seem surprised about anything. One day they can say of one of the ejidatarios that he is probably "bought" by the *pequeños*, and the next day they can work with him again. They have the same attitude towards brokers. They can have lost faith in a broker or official because of a bad experience or an apparent lie, but can work with him again shortly afterwards.

### **The Third Engineer to Arrive at the Ejido: Morales**

The next time Raúl and Ramón visited the MAR in Guadalajara to demand the continuation of the measuring work, they found the building almost empty. They were told that everybody had gone to the funeral of one of the engineers: Serrano. Serrano had supposedly died of a liver disease. For the ejidatarios, Serrano was added to the long list of MAR engineers who had "vanished" after they had started a measuring job in La Canoa.

After Castañeda a third engineer was assigned to La Canoa, but the man refused to go to the ejido. By now La Canoa had the reputation among the engineers of being a difficult ejido and nobody wanted to go there. Then another engineer was appointed who suddenly was called away for another job. Finally, a fifth engineer, Morales, was given the task. He was the third engineer in this period to arrive at the ejido. Morales arrived in La Canoa on the 15th of March of 1994. Lupe happened to be away then as she had left for the USA to visit her children. Her son Juan decided not to tell her anything about the arrival of Morales.

Morales was in his thirties and had a pleasant, open attitude towards the ejidatarios. He knew many details about the land problems of La Canoa and had apparently done a thorough study of the case before coming to the ejido. He was the only engineer who brought the pieces of machinery for the measuring. The ejidatarios were delighted with this engineer and had a lot of confidence in him from the start. At his first meeting in La Canoa Morales told

the ejidatarios that they should say at the MAR office: *If the measuring work is not done well, we will do the same as the people in Chiapas....* He said that the ejidatarios should help him with everything and that they had to be united. Morales had a populist style of operating. He was very capable in his dealings with the ejidatarios and the other parties. At the meetings he gave answers to the many unrelated questions people always ask about agrarian procedures and made many jokes. He said that he was a great admirer of Emiliano Zapata, the revolutionary fighter who demanded land reform in the beginning of this century. He stressed that the work had to be done quickly before Salinas left the presidency as then the MAR programs would probably be changed again.

At the meeting at the town hall in Autlán in which the neighbors of La Canoa were informed again about the measuring work, the same girl arrived who had been walking with Castañeda. This time she arrived with a man who told Morales that he was a friend of the girl's family who owned lands that adjoined the lands of La Canoa. He said that they were prepared to help Morales with everything he needed. Morales said that the owner of the land himself should come or that otherwise they should come with a letter authorized by him. The man was displeased by Morales' answer and he and the girl left without saying anything. After this event, the ejidatarios were even more pleased with "their engineer". Although I understood that the ejidatarios liked this engineer much better than all the others, again I was surprised to see them so hopeful and enthusiastic. I asked Teresa how it was possible that people seemed to believe without reservation every time, when they had been deceived so many times. Teresa said: *That is because we are exhausted and want this so very much to happen. You can compare this with the situation that you are very tired and very thirsty; then you buy a glass of water at any price.*

There was only one drawback with Morales. It soon became clear that he was an alcoholic. Although drinking by men was never considered to be a problem in the village, in the case of Morales people soon noticed that this was a serious case. He did not eat, drank enormous quantities and had trembling hands. However, the ejidatarios did not think that this was necessarily a problem for the measuring of the land. During the day Morales could function fine. It was only in the evening that he started drinking and passed out.

Morales stayed several days in a hotel in Autlán. The ejidatarios had several informal gatherings with him. He very much enjoyed talking about agrarian matters and explaining his views and theories. To my surprise, even Raúl, who I had never seen drinking before, was drinking during these meetings. The ejidatarios expressed their feelings, doubts, and presented their "conspiracy theories" about who was sabotaging them. Morales gave his own views on the matter and said: *I am conscious of the fact that there are many interests in this zone that work in the favor of the private landowners. General García Barragán has had great influence here.* According to Morales, Serrano's work was not canceled because of political pressures or because Pelayo, the head of the MAR, had been bribed by the *pequeños* but because the rumor was spread that Serrano had asked 100 million pesos to finish the job.

He said that Serrano died of cirrhosis and had not left a report. About Castañeda, Morales said that he was corrupt: he never finished the job, did not leave a report, and it was rumored that he was walking around "in love". According to Morales, his boss Ramírez was honest otherwise he would not have sent him to do this job. Ramírez had only told Morales that it was a very difficult case but had not given him "special instructions". Morales gave the ejidatarios many copies of important documents he had found in Guadalajara and told them not to tell in Guadalajara that he had given those to them. When I took a photograph of him with the ejidatarios, he did not want the documents to appear on the photo and put them away.

So, Morales claimed that the problems with the different engineers so far had little to do with bribing or political influences. On the other hand, he did not deny the possibility that people might try to stop him. He explained that he was aware of the influence of the late General Barragán and his allies in this region and suggested that they might try to influence the measuring work. He acknowledged that it was possible that *pequeños propietarios* were now talking to his boss to try to recall his work order. He therefore suggested that the work should be done very quickly and promised the ejidatarios that he would immediately inform them if his work order was recalled. He stressed the necessity of putting pressure on the offices. Morales was only sent to do the measuring of one land area, El Pabellón, and he said that as soon as he was finished they should demand that the MAR measure the next part. Morales advised that: *If necessary you should go with large groups from La Canoa to the office and with the women as well.* He gave the example of an ejido who arrived with a group of screaming women and explained that that is something they are very afraid of. He explained that the situation in Chiapas also worked in their favor as well as the fact that Salinas' term was coming to its end. According to Morales, Salinas wanted to finish most of the projects he had started. He suggested that if necessary, the ejidatarios should look for publicity in the newspapers and through other channels. So, Morales was giving the ejidatarios practical advice to deal with the MAR in a more political way. However, he also blamed the ejidatarios themselves for not knowing their own borders well and for quarreling among themselves.

On another occasion when I was alone with Morales we talked for a long time about the problems of La Canoa and their dealings with the MAR. I explained to him why we thought that Pelayo and Ramírez were involved and had canceled the measuring. Morales listened carefully and said that it could be that they were indeed involved. He said that personally he did not like Pelayo and explained that when he had to arrange difficult matters he called his friends at the offices in Mexico City to ask them about the best ways to "play the game". Besides contacts at the MAR, he also had good friends in other government offices (*gubernación*) who could sometimes help him. According to him La Canoa was not such a difficult case. Morales said: *People are much too scared. They always talk about killings and murders but in reality this does not happen so often.* He said that he was against the uprisings



in Chiapas but that he used Chiapas if this helped him to pressure the MAR and search for fair solutions to land problems. Morales said that he loved his work at the MAR and that according to him there was no other job in which you experience so much. He hoped for a career through PRI networks and supported Colosio as PRI candidate for the presidency. He aspired to the position of Ramírez or even Pelayo with the change of president in 1994. Unfortunately for Morales, Colosio would later be killed and Zedillo become president. This meant that other PRI networks became influential.

### *Measuring the Field*

The measuring of El Pabellón would take place on Saturday. Again there was a lot of gossiping going on. Teresa accused Iginio of sending his son Joaquín to assist Morales because he wanted to ensure that Joaquín would get one of the plots of the “new land”. Iginio was speaking ill of Father López and said that he was to blame for the problems with Salazar. When Morales heard this he was pleased as he was very opposed to the Catholic Church. However, Ramón objected to them blaming Father López. Raúl was irritated by the fact that Lupe had not returned from the United States. However, despite the common gossiping and quarreling, there was an atmosphere of hope again.

At seven o’ clock on Saturday morning everybody was waiting at the ejido house in the village but Morales did not arrive. Then they decided to go to El Pabellón but they did not find him there either. Then they went to Autlán, where they found him at the hotel, which he was just about to leave. He had been drinking the night before. At a quarter past eight the work in the field started. There were thirty men, which was a high number as only approximately thirty ejidatarios possess lands in El Pabellón and not so many people were needed to carry the instruments. Teresa and I were the only women. Some men were paid to help with the measuring work by the ejidatarios who possessed plots in El Pabellón. Gustavo Romero, for example, paid for two men. Others who did not possess land in El Pabellón participated to see what would happen. Some were accused of only coming out of curiosity and others of participating out of interest in the land that might be recovered.

Morales decided to measure the land that the ejidatarios actually possess. In that way he could later calculate how much they lacked. Ramón did not agree with this procedure as he preferred to measure the land that belonged to the ejido according to the “act of possession and marking of boundaries of the endowment of 1938” (*acta de posesión y deslinde*). Ramón did not agree with the point where they started the measuring operation either and the whole day he stood aside of the rest. For the measuring procedure sticks were put in the ground following the present borders of the ejido and a laser machine which stood at the next stop determined the distance to the stick. When this was done, the next part of the border was measured.

Several quarrels broke out among the ejidatarios about where to put the stick. For example, Gabriel García claimed that the border made a curve near the drain of the irrigation

system. However, this would mean that the drain fell within the land area of the ejido, which would only add some useless land to the number of hectares they had in their possession. Others said that there never was such a bend in the border. Morales got annoyed by the quarrels of the ejidatarios and decided for himself. Morales wrote everything down in great detail. He also noted the names of all the neighboring owners of the lands. It became clear that the ejidatarios who knew most about the problems with the "lost land", did not agree about which lands formally belonged to La Canoa. According to Ramón, they were missing lands on all sides, but according to Iginio and others they were only missing on the northern side of El Pabellón. Raúl said that he hardly ever visited this area as he himself had no plot there and he had no idea at all about the right borders. As Morales only measured the land the ejido has in actual possession these disagreements about the right borders did not cause problems with the measuring work. Despite the disagreements, it was a pleasant day in which we walked, talked, ate, and laughed a lot.

In the afternoon the measuring was finished and money was collected to buy beer and soft drinks. Ramón was offended when they asked him to contribute as he had already paid so much out of his own pocket for the missions to the MAR. Others immediately said that he was right and that he did not have to pay but Ramón was still offended and did not stay for the drinking session. It was a very relaxed drinking session and after the bottles were finished the group broke up and everybody left. Raúl, Iginio and Morales went together to Autlán. At two o'clock in the morning Morales arrived with Iginio. Morales decided to stay in the village and continued drinking with Iginio. He stayed in Iginio's house. In the morning he was invited to a party at another house. From there they took him to the football game in La Canoa and afterwards Morales left for Guadalajara.

Morales' style of operation obviously differed from that of the other engineers the ejidatarios had been dealing with so far. Morales was ambitious, enthusiastic, and enjoyed being in the field with the ejidatarios. The fact that he slept in Iginio's house and stayed part of the Sunday in the village illustrates his different style. However, we can also see similarities in the way he deals with politics in the MAR. Like many officials, Morales did not deny the fact that political pressures influence agrarian conflicts and that the efforts to measure the ejido lands of La Canoa could be sabotaged from above. Again we find an official who will not deny the possibility that others or he himself may become involved in the political game. It is also apparent that he has no insights into what precisely is going on and who are pulling the strings. Although Morales appreciated Ramírez, he listened to critical theories about him and he did not deny the possibility that Ramírez might be playing a dubious role in this affair. In the case of Morales we find the same contradiction with respect to the management of political land conflicts as we found in the case of other officials. Although, on the one hand, he acknowledged the political pressures that probably work against the ejido, on the other hand, he used the formalist bureaucratic discourse which says that the case is not

difficult at all providing one follows the formal procedures. Yet, Morales is less legalistic in his advice than others and put more stress on the importance of political pressure. He suggested the ejidatarios put pressure on the MAR by going there in large groups with screaming women and looking for publicity. He also stressed again the importance of unity among the ejidatarios themselves.

*The Struggle Comes to an Unhappy Ending*

At the end of March, Morales told the ejidatarios that he had finished the job and that they should come to Guadalajara to demand the continuation of the measuring work. Morales did not say anything about the number of hectares he had calculated. They received a provisional map which Morales had elaborated of El Pabellón but nothing was said about the number of hectares that were lacking, nor about the people who were invading ejido lands. Many visits to the MAR followed. Morales was also elaborating the total map of the ejido but without measuring any of the other land areas. The group of the "lost land" realized that the map that was going to be elaborated would not include the "lost land". However, everybody was tired of these years of struggling and they seem to come to terms with the idea that they would never recover the "lost land". La Canoa was now confronted with new problems with the neighboring ejido La Piedra which had invaded a large part of the commons of La Canoa. For that reason many ejidatarios felt the urgent need to have a definitive map, even if it contained errors, to fight possible future conflicts. They agreed that Morales had done a good job and was not to blame for their problems. The ejido paid Morales ten million pesos (\$ 3,300) to finish the map.

In May 1994 I left the region to go and settle in the neighboring state of Michoacán. Until the end of 1995 I paid several visits to La Canoa. At the beginning of 1995 Father López had been replaced and sent to another region. Before he left the region he had told Lupe that the ejido should be happy with the land they possessed and that they would get into serious trouble if they continued this fight. President Salinas' administration had ended at the end of 1994 and numerous scandals about murders, drug trafficking, and stealing by his administration had followed his leaving office. Lupe laughed about the hopes they had had when Salinas came to power and talked about helping the ejidatarios.

Lupe about Salinas: *He brought the campesinos down, we failed (nos hundió a los campesinos, no pudimos). Salinas also stole from Mexico; I saw that on television in the United States; there they say everything, here they don't.*

M: *Would you try it again?*

Lupe: *I have no faith anymore, it is impossible to beat the rich (Ya no tengo fe, contra el rico no se puede). In Chiapas the rich people possess everything.*

She made an additional remark about Serrano's death.

Lupe: *That was a suspicious death...he did not return to the village; he got cirrhosis, they say he worked well... perhaps they startled him.*

Lupe was never called to account for the money she had spent on Salazar. No questions were asked about it at the ejido meeting in which the ejido accounts were presented. Raúl had asked the other ejidatarios not to cause her any trouble as she had spent the money with good intentions and she herself had suffered a lot. Lupe was very grateful for this.

Lupe said: *They are good people, they do not blame me for anything. I can breathe quietly now.*

Ramón had also become resigned to the idea that most of the "lost land" would not be recovered in the near future, but he concentrated on the struggle for the land that was lacking in one small part of the "lost land", El Pabellón. He had found more documents at the MAR and Ramón thought that they would have a chance. Ramón had contacted the man who in former times had helped them at the Communist Party and this man had recommended two lawyers affiliated to the opposition party PRD to Ramón. Ramón continued working with the Alcázars and with two young ejidatarios who had never been involved in the struggle for the "lost land" before. So, a new configuration of people was formed and the struggle for the "lost land" continued. A never-ending story.....

### **Conclusion: Modern Myths and the Culture of the State**

Considering the history of agrarian reform and land conflicts in Mexico it is improbable that the ejido La Canoa will recover the "lost land" in the foreseeable future. Only in the right historical and political setting would this be possible. At the same time, their famous examples of Corral de Piedras, as well as the recent problems in Chiapas, or the agrarian struggles at the beginning of this century show that these "right historical and political settings" always involve considerable violence and many deaths. This threat of violence is continuously felt in the struggle for the "lost land". It is felt in the threats and warnings made to the ejidatarios and the priest, in the presence of bodyguards, doors that are locked, lawyers who disappear or are found dead in a ravine, and engineers who never return or die mysterious deaths.

Many academics and officials with whom I discussed this desperate struggle for agrarian justice and these repeating stories of hope and deceit told me that, although this was a common phenomenon in Mexico, not all ejidatarios let themselves be treated in this way. They used to say that the ejidatarios in La Canoa had to become more alert, and had to read documents more carefully in order to deal with the officials on equal terms. Naturally, it is true that ejidatarios with more nerve will be treated with more care and will perhaps be less easily deceived than others. For example, during the time of the research Lupe became much more clever in her dealings with brokers and officials. Ramón had already many years of experience in the fight for the "lost land" and had a much less submissive attitude towards officials than most ejidatarios. However, their increasing skills in dealing with the

bureaucracy would not fundamentally change the force field around this land conflict (in the next two chapters I return to this discussion).

In the interface situations between officials and ejidatarios we can distinguish, what by others would be called, “rituals of rule and resistance” (Beezley *et al.* 1994). Rituals in terms of symbolic practices which form part of “more embracing ‘discourses’ and ‘technologies’ that establish or contest regimes of rule” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993: xvi). These rituals form part of the culture of the state. Elements in these rituals are first of all the establishing of a position of authority by the officials. There may be a certain severeness in the way officials address ejidatarios, while ejidatarios behave very politely using the titles of the officials, not taking too much of their time, apologizing for their problems, thanking the officials extensively when they leave again, and offering presents and meals. When a more workable relationship has been established between ejidatarios and officials, the rituals can become much more festive. Ejidatarios and officials both celebrate their deals together in a pleasant atmosphere.

In the interfaces, the officials can use more specific techniques to dominate the ejidatarios. Firstly, they have access to unintelligible legal terminology and procedures which they can easily use as a weapon to eliminate the opposition of the ejidatarios. Secondly, they can deliberately engage in the practice of fantasizing, theorizing, and boasting about their relations. It is obvious that the interface situations do not follow a fixed script as they have a performative dimension (Gupta 1995) which manifests itself in the different “operation styles” of the officials (de Vries 1997: 97). Some officials, like Pelayo (head of the MAR Guadalajara) and Castañeda have an authoritarian operation style, while Serrano and especially Morales use a much more populist operation style with the ejidatarios. In Morales’ case this operation style formed part of his political project within the PRI and the MAR.

Ejidatarios also deal differently with interface situations. Ejidatarios are very careful with authority relations but sometimes openly contest the position of officials. The ejidatarios can be extremely hopeful and cooperative with the engineers when they come to do the measuring of the land. However, at the same time they are reluctant and look for signals to know whether the man is to be trusted or not. In all these situation trust is very important but can never be absolute. During the same meeting with government officials, one can find elements of enthusiastic cooperation and agreement, but also distrust and cynical jokes by the ejidatarios. The ejidatarios know that officials may be under pressure from different sides. They recognize that they are not necessarily bribed but can also be threatened or just taken away from the case by their superiors. However, the ejidatarios want to maintain their relation with the bureaucratic machine as that is the only way in which their problem can be solved. So, while in other situations (see chapter five and six) we sometimes find strong forms of distantiation or resistance to the “state machine”, in this case they need the “state machine” to operate on their behalf.

In the struggle for the “lost land” imaginations play a central role in trying to gain

control over a messy labyrinthine machine. The ejidatarios construct theories which help them to find a certain order or logic and in this way makes it possible to decide how to proceed. By attributing a logic to the uncoordinated actions of the bureaucratic machine, ejidatarios as well as officials become implicated in processes of fetishization and reification. Maps, presidential resolutions, and agrarian documents can all become "sacred objects", fetishes. The definitive ejido map on which the ejidatarios focused their struggle, is the embodiment of the conflict in an administrative artefact; a re-enchantment of a governmental technique. This becomes especially clear when we realize that most ejidatarios cannot read maps in an administrative way. Yet, their imagination around the map is one of the things that help the ejidatarios to deal with the bureaucratic machine. The map is the source of much local story-telling, speculation and fantasies, a kind of myth. But it is a "modern" form of mythology; a mythology which developed in relation to a "modern" administration. As Comaroff and Comaroff (1993) point out, modernity has its own enchantments and rituals.

In the introduction I pointed out that more attention should be paid to the spatial dimension of the working of the state machine. In the struggle for the "lost land" we see "flows" of people, documents, and telephone calls going into different directions. Ejidatarios travel to government offices in Autlán, Guadalajara, and Mexico City. In their turn, MAR engineers and brokers travel back and forth between Mexico City, Guadalajara, and La Canoa and often "disappear" on their way. Documents concerning the "lost land" are scattered over many offices in different cities. Letters and documents move from one place to another, sometimes taking years to arrive, or "disappearing from the face of the earth". Important documents may be found in plastic bags in the private houses of ejidatarios, or at one of the numerous desks of officials of the MAR. Many phone calls are made to offices and private houses in different cities. These manifold activities and travels not only characterize the decentered nature of the bureaucratic machine but also point to the "spatial matrix materialized in the operation of the state system" (Alonso 1994: 384). Another important "spatial element" of the operation of the bureaucratic machine are the encounters in different "locales" such as offices, private houses, restaurants, and other places in which all kind of transactions are negotiated and celebrated by meals, breakfasts, drinking sessions, and parties. These encounters show that the "symbolic and material organization of social space" are central elements in the construction of the idea of the state (Alonso 1994: 381).

All these flows and situated actions contribute to the construction and imagination of places with specific significance (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). We find theories and imaginations about what happens in the different places, reflections about the localization of evil, the localization of the fetishized map, or of centers of power. At certain moments, the ejidatarios located evil in the MAR office of Guadalajara, and at other moments in one of the agencies in Mexico City. The bureaucratic machine itself contributes to these spatial constructions and imaginations. Ejidatarios are summoned to come to different places in the bureaucracy and the officials participate in the theorizing about which offices they should

avoid and which places the obstacles come from. In this way, the bureaucratic machine contributes to the imagination of “evil places”.

In the next chapter we see that the processes of imagination and fantasizing which have been described in the last two chapters for the ejidatarios are not specific to the peasantry. We will see how also officials “within the bureaucratic machine” became entrapped within fantasies inspired by the Salinas regime.

## Notes

1. Several authors use the metaphor of the desiring-machine introduced by Deleuze and Guattari (1988). In his study on the working of the development bureaucracy in Lesotho, Ferguson points out that his use of the “machine” metaphor is motivated not only “by science-fictional analogy, but by a desire (following Foucault [1979, 1980] and Deleuze [1988]) to capture something of the way that conceptual and discursive systems link up with social institutions and processes without even approximately determining the form or defining the logic of the outcome” (Ferguson 1990: 275). Ferguson defines the “machine” as “an anonymous set of interrelations that only ends up having a kind of retrospective coherence” (*ibid.*). Goodchild (1996) discusses how knowledge, power and desire operate in Deleuze and Guattari’s texts. He explains that in their views the machine is made up of thousands uncoordinated actions and does not have a center of control. The consistency and power of the abstract machine are desire; it is a “desiring-machine” (Goodchild 1996: 50-51).
2. On another occasion, when Raúl and I were working in the local ejido archive, we found more than ten maps of the extension of the ejido. It seems this was the map they always received when they asked for the definitive map of the ejido.

## CHAPTER 9 INSIDE THE “HOPE - GENERATING MACHINE”

### **Introduction: Officials and Institutional Projects**

In the previous chapters we saw that the ejidatarios have a long history of experiences with the state bureaucratic machine. Yet, despite its central role in agrarian matters, the Ministry of Agrarian Reform is a largely neglected subject in the academic literature. The MAR is generally depicted as a highly corrupt political instrument which has only contributed to the continuing exploitation of the peasantry. The bureaucracies responsible for rural areas and the peasantry have above all been analyzed in terms of their role in rural class struggles and in the reproduction of the Mexican state. For example, several studies have shown how large parts of the resources destined for rural areas have only led to the reproduction of the bureaucracies and to the increase of existing differences between rural producers (Gordillo 1984). Although these are important insights, I think it is also necessary to pay attention to the internal operation of the bureaucracy. Despite a few good studies (Grindle 1977 and Hardy 1984) “there has been far too much loose theorizing and too few concrete studies of the internal structure and functioning of Mexican government organizations” (Binford 1985: 197, see also Zepeda 1988 for a similar critique).

Interesting views on the operation of the bureaucracy have been developed by scholars who have focused on the implementation of government programs (Appendini 1988, Arce 1993, Long 1988, 1990, van der Zaag 1992). Their work on the different institutional projects of government officials and the interaction between functionaries and “clients” demonstrates that state intervention exhibits its own dynamic, manifested in the transformation of programs on the basis of power struggles within and between institutions and by the different strategies that “clients” develop to appropriate, resist, or negotiate intervention (de Vries 1997). In this chapter I continue this line of work by paying special attention to the way in which officials and their “client-ejidatarios” interact in the implementation of several new government programs for the ejido sector.

Much attention will be paid in this chapter to the reflections of the officials on their work, the bureaucracy and their relation with ejidatarios. Interestingly, within the bureaucracy there is much more discussion about corruption and how to fight this phenomenon than among ejidatarios. For ejidatarios paying for services is an essential part of their relation with the bureaucracy. It is a social given and they do not theorize much about it. On the other hand, for officials concern with corruption is related to their own search for legitimacy. Officials talk a lot about acceptable and unacceptable forms of compensation for official services. This concern with corruption is related to government discourses which stress the fight against corruption in government agencies.



This governmental discourse against corruption played an important role in the propaganda around the change of article 27 of the Mexican Constitution in 1992, which changed the legal basis of the ejido system. In this chapter I discuss how the programs which accompanied the change of article 27 propagated a new style of intervention, in contrast to the so-called corrupt practices of the MAR, and how this raised high expectations among young officials of the new institute, the Procuraduría Agraria. In these new agrarian programs considerable emphasis was also put on the importance of local forms of organization and of initiatives from the ejidatarios themselves. However, case studies from the region of Autlán make clear that this “new bureaucratic style” and the enthusiasm with which young officials implemented the new programs could not possibly change the historically developed relations between ejidatarios and officials. Although the law was changed and a new institute was established, situations soon returned to “normal” and the old stereotypes of the lazy ejidatarios and the unreliable officials were reinforced in the interactions between ejidatarios and officials. Yet, this time the “machine” had not only raised many expectations among ejidatarios, but also among officials. This shows that officials who start taking the messages too seriously may also fall prey to the “fantasies of the machine”.

Before analyzing how the stereotypes reproduce themselves in relation to the working of the hope-generating machine, a short analysis is provided of the interrelationship between the bureaucracy and politics in Mexico.

### **The Interrelation between Politics and the Bureaucracy**

Much has been written on the Mexican political system. Without entering into the manifold debates in political science, I will present the characteristics of the Mexican political system that are most important for understanding the working of the agrarian bureaucracy. One central element in the Mexican political system is the dominance of the PRI, the official party, since its establishment in 1929. Although recently, opposition parties have been gaining influence and the system seems to have opened up, the PRI apparatus remains strong in many areas. The party has officially won all presidential elections so far. Another characteristic of the Mexican political system is the centralization of power in the office of the presidency. “The president, operating with relatively few restraints on his authority, completely dominates the legislative and judicial branches” (Cornelius and Craig 1991: 24-25). Once the new PRI candidate for presidency is appointed by the outgoing president (the famous *dedazo*), everything is reorganized around this new man. He is destined to be the man of almost “absolute power” for the next six years (*el sexenio*). Characteristically, every president introduces his own government programs and the projects of his predecessor are criticized and stopped. Until recently the president did not encounter much opposition from the PRI dominated congress and the real debates and struggles were fought out in the

informal circles of the mighty PRI family.

The figure of the Mexican president has been a favorite theme in discussions on Mexican politics. We saw in the previous chapters that the ejidatarios in La Canoa hoped for personal intervention of the Mexican President Salinas to resolve their land problems with the *pequeños propietarios*. The ejidatarios wrote him a personal letter about their problems, and the rumor was spread that Salinas himself had talked about La Canoa in the media. Several intermediaries also claimed to have special access to the president. These stories in which the president himself becomes enrolled are very common in Mexico. Lomnitz explains how in the nineteenth century a sharp distinction was already made between local and national authorities, especially the president of the republic. "The ideology was that even though there could be injustices propagated by selfish politicians at all levels of the system, the president himself was innocent of these processes, and direct contact with the president would result in the impartment of justice" (Lomnitz 1992: 307). As he puts it the power of the president is the "result of the persistent importance of personal relations in Mexican political power. Because people know that personal links are the prime form of access to political favor - and because this is especially so at the level of the presidents ... it is no wonder that in Mexico the president of the republic makes public appearances like a kind of *deus ex machina* who heals by mere contact" (*ibid.*: 308).

Another important characteristic of the Mexican political system with important consequences for the working of the bureaucratic machine, is the close connection between the bureaucracy and party politics. There are different factions within the PRI party and a long time before the outgoing president announces who will be the PRI candidate for the next elections, bureaucrats align themselves with the pre-candidates. There is a high element of risk in this support of pre-candidates. If one lines up with the pre-candidate who becomes the official PRI candidate for presidency, one is assured of a good position for the next six years. However, if one supports the "wrong" pre-candidate, one has to look quickly for other ways to assure one's position. With every change of president almost all high and middle level personnel in all government bureaucracies are replaced. This does not mean that the people who are removed from their post remain unemployed. Many find a job at another government institution. So, an enormous shift of personnel occurs in which only some (who have poor connections with the new political networks) will fail to find a new position. However, they know that they have the possibility of re-entering at a later date. The frequent turnover of high and middle level personnel also means that officials are often placed in charge of organizations and programs they know little about.

Since the mid-1980s, however, the electoral process has become more competitive and the Mexican political system is slowly changing. However, although the changes in the electoral process and the growing importance of other political parties besides the PRI have received ample scholarly attention, "the relationship between the electoral process and the issue of political culture has hardly been examined" (Pansters 1997: 30). For the moment,

there remains a strong interconnection between politics and the bureaucracy in Mexico.

The relation between politics and the bureaucracy has been demonstrated by Grindle (1977) in her study of CONASUPO, Mexico's staple commodities marketing agency, under the presidency of Echeverría (1970-1976). As I found it in my fieldwork, her analysis is still valid for a large part of the bureaucracy. For that reason I discuss her work extensively. Grindle shows how with the approach of the day of the change of president, officials are increasingly engaged in politics instead of doing their work. By the fifth year of the *sexenio*, the shadow of the upcoming presidential selection already begins to be felt, but the last year of the *sexenio* is really characterized by intense behind the scenes politicking and by equally intense inattention to official duties. Because all bureaucratic positions which become available depend upon personal appointments, future employment possibilities depend upon the cultivation of personal and political ties to individuals who might be influential in the future (Grindle 1977: 49). However, the networks through which individuals are tied into extended coalitions and alliance structures within the government are not entirely stable or durable. The individual's future generally does not depend upon relations with a single influential person but on the ability to call upon a wide range of contacts and alliances (*ibid.*: 51).

According to Grindle the influence of the bureaucratic elite cannot be overestimated. The bureaucratic elite is linked to the political elite and to economically powerful people in the private sector. However, on the other hand, the bureaucracy also plays a central role in the political process. Bureaucratic positions and the resources that go with them can be used for political purposes. These characteristics of the Mexican political and bureaucratic system are accompanied by another well-known phenomenon: cooptation. "The Mexican regime is sophisticated in its use of cooptive mechanisms such as the timely distribution of government jobs in order to ameliorate potential or actual opposition" (*ibid.*: 45). The different Mexican governments have always been very able to offer positions to professionals and intellectuals who were dissatisfied with government policies and political repression.

On the other hand, Grindle also draws attention to the fact that the bureaucracy is accessible to the wider population. She shows that bureaucratic positions are widely spread throughout the population. Most members of the middle class, have held a political or governmental office at one time of their lives or else have had a relative or *compadre* involved. For ambitious individuals among the lower socioeconomic groups, the same possibility also exists (*ibid.*: 46). All this makes it clear that the bureaucracy cannot be seen as an apparatus separate from the rest of society. It is directly linked to high and low politics and everyone, from lower social groups to members of the opposition, in one way or another may be or become part of the bureaucratic machine.

Yet, this does not mean that job performances do not play a role and that everything within the bureaucracy is organized according to political considerations. As Grindle points out "It is wrong to assume that there is little pressure on the individual to perform

satisfactorily the responsibilities assigned to him. ... Within the bureaucracy, there is frequently great pressure on confidence workers to achieve the performance goals" (*ibid.*: 50). "Most middle and high level officials will be found in their offices, long after the work day has officially ended, concentrating on the tasks they have been assigned ... Successful job performance, implying expertise, innovativeness, and efficiency, does indeed play an important part in ensuring one of a brighter future within the government" (*ibid.*: 51). Hence, there exists a tense coexistence of the two principles for success in the bureaucracy: good job performance and the cultivation of personal/political relationships.

Grindle stresses that although this system implies that a lot of time and resources are lost in the political reshuffling every six years, it also makes it a very dynamic system. Every six years, new people develop policies which are implemented with enormous zeal and enthusiasm. Each administration tries to introduce new programs and leave an impact. During the first years of the term of a president, new programs and projects are developed and implemented with enormous force. People at the right place and with the right connections may achieve a great deal during this period. They only have to try to finish in time and remobilize their contacts and energy towards the end of term.

Although Grindle provides one of the best analyses of a largely neglected object of study in Mexico, the bureaucracy, there are several limitations in her work. Grindle is above all interested in analyzing the Mexican political system which she describes as a "corporate and authoritarian regime, dominated by a party-bureaucratic apparatus and pervaded by extensive clientelist relationships among the population and the political elite" (*ibid.*: 177). In the same way she characterizes the bureaucracy as "a highly politicized, particularistic, and ascription-oriented administrative apparatus" (*ibid.*: 175). Although this type of analysis is shared by many other analysts of the Mexican political system (see for example Cornelius and Craig 1991 and Camp 1993), in my view it does not pay sufficient attention to cultural processes and forms of dialogue within the bureaucracy. Officials are treated too much as goal-oriented strategizers and not much attention is paid to the ways in which officials constantly problematize ongoing issues and how they themselves deal with the contradictions created by the hope-generating machine.

Grindle, as well as most other political analysts, sees corruption as a direct result of the close relationship between party politics and bureaucratic practices. However, corruption is a label which is used for a wide range of activities and this makes it a "slippery object". The talk of corruption is also a way of constructing the phenomenon and therefore we should pay more attention to the role of the "discourse of corruption" in politics. Furthermore, by analyzing "corruption" only as a dysfunctional side-effect of the bureaucracy, many dimensions of so-called corrupt practices have not received enough attention. These include, for example, the performative side (Gupta 1995), the strong feelings of personal care for others in doing favors (Lomnitz 1992) and the enjoyment and pleasure in "playing the

game". The aim of this chapter is to show how officials deal with the political dimension of their job, the role which the *discourse of corruption* plays in the bureaucracy, and how officials reflect on their work in the "hope-generating machine".

### *Doing Research in the Agrarian Bureaucracy*

The research with officials in the bureaucracy differed greatly from the work in the ejido, and therefore I will discuss some peculiar aspects of this part of the research. The fact that politics and bureaucratic practices are intricately related, can immediately be felt in any study within Mexican institutions. First of all, there is always much politicking going on and officials will be careful about providing sensitive information. However, the high mobility of personnel in the institution also makes it possible to meet people who are about to leave office and who are prepared to talk more freely about what they know and think. So, in this sense the politicized character of the bureaucracy can be both an advantage and a drawback for research at the same time.

A common strategy in conducting research within an institution is to use "contacts" in order to get access to certain people. Often people themselves offered certain "entrances" in the institutions when they knew what I was interested in. Many officials I met gave me new contacts and in this way networks within the bureaucracy could spread out in many different directions. I was also sometimes warned to avoid certain people. People would say, for example, that I should talk with Felipe but that I should avoid any contact with Felipe's superior as he would make it difficult for me to hang around and ask questions. Officials tried to help me through their personal friends within the institution and never in formal ways. When I asked them, for example, where I could get certain information they never answered in terms of the departments I should go to. They always thought about whom they knew at certain offices who could help me. So, their help consisted in giving me the right contacts.

Although these contacts always helped, a strong atmosphere of caution reigned in the MAR. Many MAR officials, and especially the ones in higher positions, clearly did not like people sneaking around in the institution. Even if I entered the institution through personal friends, I could obviously not be placed within political bureaucratic networks. On the other hand, they wanted to give the impression of being as polite and helpful as possible. The following episode is an illustration of this atmosphere of secrecy. Through one of "my contacts" I contacted Figueroa, a middle aged man who had worked at the MAR for many years and knew all the ins and outs. Although he was extremely busy, he received me in his office together with several of his assistants. After I had given my "standard introductory speech", people were sent away to get the files on La Canoa. Then Figueroa excused himself for being so busy and brought me to Laura who would explain everything I wanted to know about the MAR procedures to me. Laura was sitting at a desk outside Figueroa's office and for that reason I had assumed that she was the secretary. However, she was a young lawyer

who obviously did not belong to the confidential group around Figueroa. Laura was immediately interested in my research and remembered that she had worked recently on the dossier of La Canoa. I also remembered having seen her name on several letters in the ejido. Figueroa found some documents about La Canoa but he did not want to show them to me. However, Laura skillfully took the documents from his hands, saying that with these documents she could explain the general agrarian procedures to me. She searched for more documents in her cabinet and carefully showed me the correspondence she had in her desk so that I could write everything down in my note-book. However, she put the files away when Figueroa came to see what we were doing. Figueroa came to us all the time as if to check up on what we were discussing. When he came, Laura stopped discussing the problems of La Canoa and started talking about general agrarian procedures.

This and other similar experiences strengthened my feeling that officials in the MAR worked in different networks and that there was considerable distrust and tension within the ministry. It was also made clear to me that it was important to strike up strategic alliances. On the basis of mutual sympathy or interests officials could decide to establish a certain rapport with me as researcher. In the case of Laura she had only entered the MAR a year and a half ago to learn more about agrarian law. She intended to leave the MAR at a later stage to work at a private lawyer's office of some friends. She said that she detested the corruption at the MAR and that she was happy to provide me with information. She hoped that I could help the ejidatarios of La Canoa. So, within the MAR there were officials with different personal projects and not only was there distrust towards "outsiders" but also among themselves.

In the beginning I assumed that there was one central archive of the MAR in Mexico City in which they would have all the documents of the ejido and an overview of the official state of affair of the different procedures. So, one of my main aims in Mexico City was to try and get access to this central archive. However, the description of the MAR archives given by Zaragoza *et al.* still seemed very accurate: "The archives of the agrarian files probably constitutes one of the most archaic forms to keep documents. There is no registration or control of current files. ... There is nowhere where one can get information about the processes that are going on with respect to a file in the different offices and departments of the MAR" (Zaragoza *et al.* 1980: 586 own translation). This was exactly what I found in the MAR. Many departments had some bits and pieces of information on La Canoa. Several divisions could get some information about the ejido on their computer. But this information was very fragmented and a general overview of the state of affairs was nowhere to be found. Officials also told me that they themselves sometimes had great difficulty in locating specific files for their work.

I finally found out that the MAR kept several archives some of which were open to the public, while others were not. During the time of my research there was one public MAR archive in Mexico City where they kept all the agrarian files of ejidos. There was another

division of the MAR where all the maps of Mexican ejidos were kept. The general archive proved to be very incomplete. MAR officials were allowed to take files out of this archive, which implied that files of an ejido could be spread out over many offices in Mexico City and could stay there for many years. Indeed, I found files of La Canoa on the desks of different departments I went to. This also meant that if one was looking for specific documents it was impossible to find out where they could be and if they were still there. Documents could easily get lost after some years on a desk. As Laura rightly put it when I asked her if it would be difficult to get access to the MAR archives: *You will get access to certain archives. But the problem is to find out why papers are lacking, why maps have not been made and in whose interests that has been..... Furthermore, there are certain departments within the MAR which never give any information. For example, the department that deals with payments by the MAR for confiscated land does never provide any information.*

In conclusion, during the time of the research I noticed an atmosphere of suspicion and conspiracy in the different offices of the MAR. Even when it was possible to establish valuable relations with certain officials, there always was much discretion and caution. Irrespective of the information gathered in the different interviews, this atmosphere in the MAR coincided very well with the public image of the MAR as a highly politicized institute.

### **Officials about La Canoa and “Normal” and “Abnormal” Irregularities**

In the previous chapters we have seen that officials reacted to La Canoa’s problems with the “lost land” in a number of standard ways. Even after they had recognized that political influences probably interfered with the measuring of the land in La Canoa, and after they had drawn the conclusion that the ejidatarios in La Canoa would probably never recover the land, they could give a long explanation of the procedures to be followed. In addition, they gave long lists of recommendations to make the struggle of the ejidatarios of La Canoa possible: they had to draw up formal contracts with all the professionals they were working with; they should carefully study all the work orders before signing their agreement with the work of the engineers, and so on. In sum, the ejidatarios should go on focusing on the procedures and putting pressure on the MAR. This contradiction of stressing the importance of procedures while acknowledging that the real basis of these conflicts is distinct, becomes clear in the following example.

#### *An external agrarian lawyer’s assessment of the case*

I will present part of a conversation I had with Manuel, an agrarian lawyer in Mexico City who had worked for many years in the MAR and was finishing a book on agrarian law in Mexico. Manuel worked for the agricultural office of the PRI in the Mexican Congress and

I had already had several conversations with him about land rights in Mexico. The day that Serrano did not arrive at the town hall (see chapter eight) I decided to call Manuel and ask his opinion about the situation of La Canoa. I explained him the events surrounding Serrano who had not turned up.

Manuel: *And didn't they phone him at the MAR to ask what had happened?*

M: *The engineer himself phoned the town hall to say that his car had broken down and that he would be there in four days.*

Manuel: *But he has to come now, because they gave him these days to do this measuring job, he cannot wait four days. What kind of land is it?*

M: *Irrigated land.*

Manuel: *Then it is very probable that the case has been stopped by the private landowners, especially as it concerns irrigated land, and the MAR itself is probably heavily involved in the matter. Do the people of la Canoa have a copy of the work order of the engineer? That is very important; it is important that they keep on putting pressure on.*

M: *I don't know whether they have a copy of the work order, but anyway what is the sense of putting pressure on when they have been fighting for this case for more than fifty years and these officials have always been bribed..!*

Manuel: *What kind of Kafkesque ideas are these? Let them come to Mexico City.*

M: *They have been there recently but they told them that the case is sabotaged in the office in Guadalajara.*

Manuel: *And does the office in Mexico City have no authority over the office in Guadalajara?! They have to keep on putting pressure on. And they have to come to Mexico City to "buy functionaries".*

M: *They have recently paid a large amount of money to a private lawyer in Guadalajara who was going to help them and then disappeared.*

Manuel: *They shouldn't pay private lawyers but functionaries of the MAR!*

The interesting element of this conversation is the fact that Manuel accused me of Kafkesque ideas when I talked about the impossibility of the case proceeding any further, whereas he himself made clear that this is a political case which has probably been stopped from above. Another interesting element is that although he said that it is a political case, he kept stressing the importance of formal documents and of following the official procedures. This contradictory attitude is typical of officials. They will immediately admit the political side of land conflicts but afterwards will continue to stress that the legal and administrative procedures have to be followed. Although Manuel has nothing to do with the case and has no personal interest in it whatsoever, he also suggests that the ejidatarios should do things differently: that they should go to Mexico City and buy officials instead of paying a lawyer in order to speed up the bureaucratic process. This also is a general phenomenon. Lawyers,



officials, and others always know the “right way” to get these things resolved and can always tell you why things are going wrong. In this way, the officials also live in a world of contradiction which they themselves help to reproduce by suggesting new ways of handling (unresolvable) conflicts and by offering new openings and raising hopes again. Actually, this is the same kind of dynamic as we have already seen among ejidatarios: “knowing how things work”, but at the same time “hoping and believing” in the rationality of formal procedures. In this way, both ejidatarios and officials actively engage in the cultural representation of the state.

In their own daily work, this reification of procedures by officials is even more understandable as they have to deal with a myriad of procedures and bureaucratic steps. They only operate in a very small part of the whole administrative process and normally do not have an overview of the whole problematic of specific ejidos. They tend to concentrate on technicalities and numbers of files. They know that within the MAR many activities concern a legalization of illegal transactions (see chapter five) and they know that serious land conflicts are negotiated at other levels. They themselves may become involved in a small part of these negotiations but most of their time is dedicated to a small technical part of the administrative bureaucratic process. Even if an engineer receives orders from above to change a map in favor of certain private landholders, he can still dedicate a great deal of time and skill to producing a technically well elaborated map.

#### *About Normal and Abnormal Irregularities in Agrarian Procedures*

This formalistic way of working meant that I had to adapt my “research strategy” with officials. When I explained the problems of the ejido La Canoa in “normal terms” officials did not take me seriously. They often became annoyed - in the same way as they did with the ejidatarios - that I could not express myself in official terminology. Hence, I undertook an extensive study of agrarian legal procedures in order to understand the legal side of the problems of La Canoa and in order to have an “intelligent” conversation with officials.

Yet, even when I explained the problems of La Canoa in formal terms, the many irregularities did not interest the officials. The fact that the map of the ejido La Canoa was never made and that engineers never finished their measuring work, were considered to be normal phenomena. The fact that not all land had been handed over to the ejido was also very usual according to the officials and could be related to many different factors. Hence, all these “abnormalities” were not exceptional and did not deserve special explanations.

However, in the many talks I had with MAR officials they often studied the technicalities of the documents of La Canoa and in this way I discovered two administrative flaws that amazed them. Namely, the fact that the presidential resolution of the endowment of the ejido was never published in the Federal Gazette and, secondly, that an extension of the ejido had been executed without the endowment having been completely finished (without publication in the Federal Gazette and without a definitive map). To me this did not seem very

interesting. After the many irregularities I had found, these only seemed insignificant details. However, for the officials this was very different. Their attitude completely changed when they found out about these two matters. Many said that this was impossible and that they had never heard of such a case before. I will illustrate this point with parts from two interviews. The first is from a talk with Laura at the MAR.

*Laura about irregularities at the MAR*

During my talk with Laura she looked through the documents in her desk to explain to me what was going on in La Canoa. After having read the documents, she said that the ejidatarios of La Canoa had sent a letter to the MAR in 1977 in which they asked for the map of the ejido and the measurement of the ejido lands. As the MAR did not react, the ejido started a lawsuit against the MAR (an *amparo*) which they won. The judge ordered the MAR to pay several fines and to answer the letter. In 1993 the MAR finally answered and said that they could not comply with La Canoa's request as neither a provisional, nor a definitive map of the endowment of La Canoa existed.

L: *That is the way in which matters are settled: purely formally.*

M: *Isn't it strange that a letter from 1977 was only answered in 1993?*

L: *That is quite normal, there are much worse cases.*

So, the answering of letters after more than fifteen years also belonged to the category of the "normal irregularities". Yet, Laura was extremely surprised when she found out that the extension of the ejido was carried out without the endowment having been finished. We talked about this with her boss Figueroa who also said that this was impossible. However, the information he had gathered in the archive on La Canoa said the same. He was also amazed and said that this could not be true.

*Alejandro about the peculiarities of La Canoa*

Another day I spoke with a lawyer Alejandro at another office of the MAR (the office of the *cuero consultivo agrario*). He looked up the information he had on La Canoa on cards in the office. Alejandro also noticed that the presidential resolution of the endowment was never published in the Federal Gazette.

M: *Is it usual that the presidential resolution of the endowment is not published?*

A: *In some cases it has not been published. But this case of La Canoa is very weird as an extension of the ejido took place afterwards.*

M: *What can be the reasons for not publishing the presidential resolution of the endowment?*

A: *Political reasons, a mistake, that it was left on a certain desk. Then a new investigation is necessary and a new judgment by this office of the MAR.*

Alejandro reading further.

A: *But this is a strange case. They published the presidential resolution of the extension but for the publication of the extension they needed the data of the publication of the*

*endowment...*

Alejandro started reading the cards again.

A: *In times of Cárdenas, very strange things happened. For example, in some cases they first executed and only afterwards formulated the presidential resolution. I know of more cases in which there was no publication of the presidential resolution, but I know of no other case in which they got an extension without the endowment having been published in the Federal Gazette.*

Several elements are interesting in this context. First of all, it is clear that in this MAR world full of irregularities, some irregularities are “normal” and others are “abnormal”. It was “normal” that presidential resolutions under the presidency of Cárdenas (1934-1940) were executed before the presidential resolution was formulated. It was “normal” that the MAR took ten or twenty years to answer a letter. It was “normal” that no definitive map of the ejido was made after the execution of the presidential resolution. It was “normal” for ejidos to request the measuring of their land from the MAR and never get a response. It was “normal” that engineers arrived to do a measuring job and suddenly disappeared. These were all common practices in the MAR that did not surprise any official. Yet, the fact that the presidential resolution of an endowment was never published in the Federal Gazette was certainly “not normal”. The fact that an extension followed an endowment that had never been completely finished was “not normal” either. These irregularities were highly exceptional. Although to me these two elements did not seem especially interesting, I had finally found the way to get the attention of officials and talk to them on their own terms. This information always triggered their professional interest and made it possible to have a dialogue.

Another interesting point is that while these were the most important irregularities for the officials, the ejidatarios of La Canoa were not even aware of these “highly uncommon and special details” of their ejido. When I discussed these points with the ejidatarios, it appeared that nobody of the group of the “lost land” knew about them, nor were they very interested. However, in order to be taken seriously by the officials it would have been better to have started with these two points instead of talking about stolen land and missing maps. On the other hand, while the ejidatarios would certainly have received much more attention from the officials if they had started their talks with these two points (as I eventually did), it would not really have mattered. Better communication between ejidatarios and officials would not have changed anything about the political influences in agrarian issues. The primacy of political over legal-administrative principles in serious land conflicts between ejidatarios or *comuneros* and private landowners is obvious in Mexico (as recent events in Chiapas illustrate).

## Officials Theorizing about Corruption and the Ways to Fight it

Besides the "big land conflicts", like the "lost land", we saw in chapters five and six that there are many other ejido affairs in which the MAR plays a role. These include, for example, internal ejido conflicts over plots, the selling and legalizing of land sales, and problems in the urban zone. In these matters the role of the MAR was also notorious and we noticed several well-known practices. We saw, for example, officials who asked ejidatarios for money for a certificate which is officially free; officials were taken out for dinner in exchange for assistance with procedures and legalizing illegal transactions; officials who asked for presents in exchange for falsifying papers or making papers disappear, and engineers who received money to elaborate a map.

### *Ejidatarios on Corruption*

Although the ejidatarios pay for many services of the bureaucracy they will not easily use the term corruption when they talk about these practices. They see this as normal transactions in which an exchange of services or favors takes place. *That is the way we are used to it in Mexico*, is a usual expression. All people pay money to get things arranged, documents changed, etc. It is part of life. The ejidatarios try to use the influence of their relatives, *compadres*, or friends in bureaucratic positions if necessary. So, ejidatarios do not see the functionaries as corrupt in contrast to themselves who are honest. Furthermore, the ejidatarios do not mind paying when they feel that they are treated well and get what they want. On the contrary, these successful transactions make them feel very pleased and give them the feeling that they are capable of dealing with the bureaucracy. If the transaction was successful, they will try to continue their relationship with this same official. These transactions often take place in a pleasant atmosphere of partying and abundant meals and may strengthen useful relationships. So, when ejidatarios pay the official at the MAR office in Autlán to register the inheritor of their land in the MAR office in Guadalajara, they do not call this corruption. When they invite officials to big meals in exchange for all the paperwork they did, this is considered to be a normal compensation and an act of gratitude. The bribe (*mordida*) which is paid for help with illegal actions, such as the legalizing of illegal land sales, is also seen in the same light.

On the other hand, these same favors or compensations may be called corruption when they take place in unbalanced exchanges; when ejidatarios feel that there is no balanced reciprocity. Hence, ejidatarios use the label corruption when they pay money or do favors and this does not bring them the services they expect in exchange. When, for example, they pay a lawyer and nothing is accomplished or when they pay an engineer who never finishes the work, or when amounts of money are asked for which are considered to be too high for the favor done, they may talk about corruption. However, no fixed rules can be given about what are considered to be acceptable transactions and what not. This very much depends on

the situation and the people involved. Furthermore, as it is often not clear to the ejidatarios what exactly is going on or what exactly officials or intermediaries are doing for them, they tend to be careful in their judgment. Hence, corruption is not so much seen as a personal characteristic, but above all as a characteristic of society in general. Ejidatarios know that all engineers will be confronted with different kinds of pressures. Some will yield more easily to these pressures than others, but all are moving within certain limits and conditions set by wider influences.

However, the ejidatarios use the term corruption above all in a general way, to refer to the “way in which the system works” and to refer to the fact that “justice is never done”. So they tend to use the term as a form of social criticism, referring to the accumulation of experiences in which they have been deceived, promises were made that were not kept, and money was accepted while nothing was done in return.

### *Officials on Corruption*

Officials, in their turn, talked in much more specific ways about corruption. In the different chapters, we saw that the awkward agrarian rules and procedures gave ample room for manipulation by officials. However, not all officials take advantage of the many opportunities offered by these situations and not everybody operates in the same way. Officials could reflect extensively about different colleagues and what was acceptable behavior and what not. For example, Rigoberto of the MAR office in Autlán expressed very negative views of his colleague, David, who during all these years had greatly enriched himself by asking for money for every service and never said no when people asked him to arrange illegal matters. Although Rigoberto himself also accepted money in exchange for favors, in his view, David was “over-demanding”. Actually, this view was shared by many people in the region, officials as well as ejidatarios. For example, Federico the municipal official of Autlán who was responsible for agrarian matters in the hamlets that fall under Autlán (*coordinación de agencias y delegaciones*) and later for the PRONASOL program, once said:

F: *At the MAR they are very corrupt, especially David. We all like money but that man exaggerates! Some years ago he came to deliver quite a number of ejido certificates in the region and he charged 500,000 for each certificate!*

M: *He cannot do that, can he?*

F: *Yes he can, but it should not be done.*

Again we see that an official does not deny that he himself also receives money (Federico: *we all like money*) but that he makes a distinction between reasonable forms of exchange and abusing one’s power. The moment that an official is seen to be only oriented towards personal enrichment, the term corruption is used. Naturally, again there was no absolute standard for corruption. But there were some broad agreements. For example, everybody in the region talked about the corrupt David, but I never heard Federico and Rigoberto being labeled in that way.

Even when I spoke to officials for the first time, they often started talking about corruption. For example, in September 1993 I had a long interview with an official who was sent to the SARH office in El Grullo for the *cartera vencida* program. This program was introduced to organize the repayment of the debts that many ejidatarios had at BANRURAL (see chapter six). Francisco was the third official to be sent to do this job in a period of two and a half months. After we had been talking about the program Francisco himself started talking about what he called "the problem of corruption". For Francisco corruption was to be found among ejidatarios (abusing credit given to them) as well as among officials (accepting favors). He talked in a very negative way about ejidatarios, who according to him have a very low cultural level. However, he also spoke derogatively of his colleagues who accepted meals, cars, and women in exchange for favors.

F: *On one occasion a friend of mine offered me two women and a holiday to the United States. I told him that I would not accept it and that if he wanted to negotiate he had to come up with something much better. What he offered me was nothing compared with what he was asking me to do. This friend got very angry.*

*I never accept anything from anybody and that is the reason that I have been selected for this work. The only thing that I accept are meals but nothing more.*

M: *But sometimes it may be understandable that officials accept things, when salaries are very low.*

F: (firmly) *That is never an excuse! If you need money, there is only one solution: to work! And you are always much better off in a government post than in the private sector. I know that from experience as for a while I combined a government job with a job in the private sector. If people offer me things, I say: with all respect, I cannot accept that. Then people ask me: why not? and I say to them: because of my own conviction. For me the most important thing is to be loyal to myself, not loyal to the head, not loyal to the institute, not even loyal to the Mexican President, but loyal to myself.*

Other officials also felt the need to define their own position towards the phenomenon of corruption even when I had not touched this theme. Manuel (who worked in the Mexican congress), for example, commented that his friend who worked at the office of *tierras y aguas* of the MAR (and who would help me to get some maps of the ejido La Canoa for free) was a "little corrupt" but not much. To stress the difference between forms of corruption, Manuel then gave the example of a MAR official who had asked for a pair of socks from a very poor woman. Manuel: *that goes too far!* However, I felt that this example was more to assure me that Manuel also had certain moral standards than that the example itself was particularly significant. Yet, Manuel did not pretend to be a "good soul". He enjoyed talking about his own games in the "corrupt" atmosphere.

In many other occasions, fun and joking accompanied discussions about the phenomenon, even in public meetings. For example, in January 1994, the head of the SARH in the region,

Olivar gave a talk about the organization of the PROCAMPO program at the ejido house in Autlán. The meeting took place in a pleasant atmosphere. There was much confusion about the payment in the subsidy program. Olivar explained that people who had registered in the first stage of the program would soon receive their cheque, but the others who had only recently joined the program would receive their cheques at a later point. So, they should not worry if they had to wait longer than others. Olivar (jokingly): *I say this, so that people won't think: ah, Olivar naturally keeps my cheques.... Furthermore the cheques arrive in the persons' names, so nobody else can do anything with them. Are there any more questions?*

So, corruption was a “hot issue” within the bureaucracy. Discussions on the subject occurred much more among officials than among ejidatarios. Officials apparently felt it necessary to define their position in relation to this theme. In their comments they tend to make elaborate distinctions between different forms of favors. Naturally, this is an indication of the political importance of the phenomenon which is also reflected in the attention given to it in the media and government discourses. However, I argue that the “talk of corruption” by officials is more than an attempt to conform to a politically powerful discourse. By reflecting on corruption, officials also problematize the wider workings of the agrarian bureaucracy, the ongoing changes in the Mexican political economy and their own role in this process.

#### *Officials about Solutions for Exploitation by the “Corrupt Bureaucratic Machine”*

Officials had elaborate ideas and theories about agricultural development. Most officials blamed the Mexican government for its bad policies in agriculture and animal husbandry. Many also blamed the United States which was depicted as the main enemy of Mexico. They argued that the USA intended to destroy Mexican agriculture in order to avoid competition with Mexican products on the markets which were opening up under NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement). On the other hand, in the case of the ejidos, officials also used to blame the ejidatarios themselves for their difficult situation. Ejidatarios were depicted as lazy, uneducated, and lacking initiative. Officials always commented upon the widespread interpersonal distrust in the ejidos and the existence of factions which impeded the development of local projects to the benefit of all people. So, besides being distrustful and lazy, ejidatarios were also characterized as conflictive and uncooperative. Together with bad government policy and the USA as enemy this seemed to be the worst scenario for development and progress.

Even among progressive bureaucrats, the figure of the “distrustful, closed and distant” ejidatario deeply informed their thinking and was reinforced by experiences with ejidatarios in their daily work. The point is that ejidatarios often do not show much interest in new government programs and do not attend meetings or walk out in the middle of them. They also tend to make cynical comments about the officials' speeches and show little faith in the governmental discourse used by them. Obviously, this attitude of “passivity” and ejidatarios'

distrust of officials and new government programs has developed on the basis of many bad experiences in the past. When I confronted officials with this explanation, they would immediately recognize the point. Yet, they still felt that ejidatarios had to change their attitude for their own benefit. Many officials who wanted to work on behalf of the ejidatarios had become frustrated by these experiences. This has led to the contradictory situation in which, on the one hand, the ejidatarios are considered to be "the victims of a corrupt system" and, on the other hand, they are considered to be responsible for this situation due to their "apathy". This contradiction can be felt in a conversation I had with Rigoberto of the MAR about the new agrarian law in Autlán in April 1993.

M: *I have the impression that in the ejidos people know very little about the new law.*

R: *They know about it everywhere.*

M: *But they take a wait and see attitude; they seem to think that it does not matter as long as nobody touches their land.*

R: *That is the way they always are, they have little interest, they should make the effort to be better informed.*

M: *But I have the impression that their lack of interest has to do with their past experiences with the bureaucracy. The fact that one official says this, and the other that, and that rules seem to vary according to the official they are dealing with.*

R: *That is true, and these things really have happened. But the ejidatarios always remember those bad things that happened on one occasion many years ago.*

This "lack of initiative and education" on the part of the ejidatarios was seen by officials not only as an enormous hindrance to development but also as an obstacle in the fight against corruption. During my research I spoke to many officials and people working for other organizations who tried to fight corruption in general and in the agrarian bureaucracy in particular. Their ideas about the solution were very consistent: education and organization. These were the means through which the ejidatarios could defend themselves against a corrupt government bureaucracy. This leads to the paradoxical situation of officials trying to improve the situation of the ejidatarios by helping them to organize themselves against the state machine. This is illustrated in a talk I had with Saldaña, a SARH official in the region of Autlán who was known as a leftist who supported the ejidatarios. I will present part of a dialogue I had with him on the reform of the agrarian law in 1992.

S: *In my opinion the law is positive, but what is going to be decisive is a process of profound education and consciousness raising (conscientización) among the ejidatarios. Otherwise the danger of a monopolization of plots exists.*

M: *But why education, isn't it more a political problem?*

S: *Exactly, that is true, but for that reason the consciousness of ejidatarios has to be raised. They have to organize themselves against this. In many ejidos they don't know what is happening. Therefore I said: train the ejidatarios. There is a lack of knowledge. We want*



*to give the ejidatarios information, so that they become restless and pay attention to what is going on.*

*M: And who should give this education? The same government with whom the ejidatarios have had so many bad experiences?*

*S: The government should implement this. Those who have most interest in all this are the ejidatarios themselves. It's unfortunate that not all of them are enthusiastic about this. And the change is drastic.*

However, Saldaña knows very well that even under the former agrarian law if a big entrepreneur wanted to buy ejido land in the region, neither the law nor well-educated ejidatarios were able to stop him. So, although officials may acknowledge the political underpinnings of the problems, they look for solution in non-political terms.

In the same way as the ejidatarios, these officials are not naive about their society, but they are entrapped in a world of contradictions. While the ejidatarios may distance themselves from the bureaucratic machine and react cynically, for the officials the bureaucracy is their world of work. Officials have to believe in the new projects and programs and in the potentiality of the bureaucratic system in order to be able to work. They themselves are part of it. This leads to the image of the optimistic official and the skeptical peasant. An image one often comes across when officials come to introduce new government projects.

### **The Reform of Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution**

I will now discuss the way in which the change of art 27 of the Mexican Constitution, which formed the basis of land rights in Mexico, was presented in 1992. The public debate around the reform of article 27 clearly shows the political importance of the discourse against corruption. Together with the change of article 27, the agrarian law was changed. The changes in the law were rather drastic and caused many emotional debates.<sup>1</sup> The most important elements of the new agrarian law in comparison with the old federal agrarian reform law are the following. Firstly, the Mexican agrarian reform has come to its end, land will no longer be expropriated in order to establish or enlarge ejidos. Secondly, the ejido form of land tenure will continue to exist, but in a "modern" form. As was discussed in chapter five, in this new form, ejidatarios will be allowed to sell, buy, rent, or lease their land, activities that were all forbidden under the old agrarian reform law. Thirdly, the law opens the possibility for ejidatarios to work in association with private enterprises (stockholding companies) and individual investors. Furthermore, a new program was introduced, PROCEDE, aimed at measuring all the individual ejido plots. Hence, for the first time in history, ejidatarios would now have their individual plots registered and receive

individual land titles.<sup>2</sup> Once the land was registered, ejidatarios could decide to change from the ejido regime to private land ownership. In the government propaganda accompanying the changes it was claimed that all these transformation would bring more legal security in land tenure for ejidatarios. Furthermore, ejidatarios would now be able to mortgage their land, obtain credits at commercial banks, and become "dynamic entrepreneurs". According to the official propaganda all these improvements would finally lead to an increase in agricultural productivity. It is no coincidence that this argument carried weight at a time when Mexico was negotiating the free trade agreement (NAFTA) with Canada and the United States.

The most important institutional change that accompanied the reform of the agrarian law was the creation of the Procuraduría Agraria (PA) (Attorney General's Office for Agrarian Affairs) in March 1992. In government publications the widespread corruption in the MAR was presented as the main source of agrarian problems in the country and the cause of the continuing exploitation of the ejidatarios. It was declared that drastic changes were required and a new agrarian institute, the PA, was established which would bring justice to the Mexican countryside. This public blaming of corruption in a certain institute as the cause of the problems, and presenting the solution in terms of new programs is not new. The same happened, for example, with CONASUPO under the presidency Echeverría (Grindle 1977).

The new PA would now deal with agrarian problems and would direct the different programs, such as PROCEDE, that would make the transfer from the ejido regime to private land ownership possible. However, the MAR still had to settle the huge number of unresolved agrarian conflicts, the famous *rezago agrario* (agrarian arrears) which included cases such as the "lost land".

However, as we will see, the fascinating part of this story is not so much the legal and institutional transformations but the fact that large parts of the population, not least in intellectual and academic circles, let themselves become inspired by this governmental discourse of democracy, the cleaning up the institutions, and new ways of governing. As we will see, not only the ejidatarios were inspired by this propaganda (chapters six, seven and eight) but also large sectors of the bureaucracy.

#### *First Reception of the Changes in the Region of Autlán*

Shortly before the new agrarian law was to be issued, government officials from different institutions in the region were mobilized to inform the ejidatarios about the coming changes. The SARH, the MAR, the municipality in Autlán, BANRURAL, and FIRA,<sup>3</sup> among others, were all involved in the effort. After taking a short course on the new law in Guadalajara, the officials were sent to the ejidos. In La Canoa a meeting was held on December 8, 1991.<sup>4</sup> This meeting deserves some attention as it shows how the officials had totally adopted the Salinas discourse of radical change and democratization. It also gives an idea of the usual reaction of ejidatarios to new government programs. Two officials from the SARH and FIRA did the presentation in La Canoa and 22 of the 97 ejidatarios attended the meeting.

One of the officials talked extensively about past government corruption and failures and declared that all this was about to change. He referred repeatedly to the theme of social transformation. The image of the President played a central role in his narrative, with Salinas cast as the great initiator and mover of the new transformations. The official stressed that he had been sent by representatives of the President himself.

Official: *The President has become aware of the situation in rural areas. He is conscious of the low living standards and therefore has decided to take these initiatives. He wants communities to have a better life.*

It was a discourse of modernization and liberalization: the rural areas are poor but the government will invest heavily to improve the situation. Agricultural enterprises should be big and modern, and farmers should work together and with agro-industrial enterprises. There was a strong emphasis on joining plots and working in associations. He made much reference to responsibilities, rights, and obligations. The functionary made it clear that paternalism would come to an end and that farmers would have to take responsibility for themselves: if they take out bank loans, they should repay them; if they want services from the SARH, they will have to pay for them, etc. The functionary made the point that the ejidatarios themselves are responsible for determining the future of the land.

The ejidatarios toned the functionary's message down by relating it directly to concrete situations they are involved and interested in, such as the case of the "lost land". If the official gave an example from a distant ejido, the ejidatarios responded with examples from neighboring ejidos. They also tried to elicit information with direct bearing on particular personal situations, such as their debts with BANRURAL. They showed minimal interest in the official's calls to work together and form associations. Most ejidatarios did not participate in the discussions, preferring to "wait and see". Those who did participate expressed their dissatisfaction and frustration with the bureaucracy. For example, the following dialogue.

Iginio Núñez: *But can we still receive land that has never been handed over?*

Official: *Yes.*

Iginio: *We've got to support these changes!*

Another ejidatario: *And now the engineers are willing to do the surveying, right?*

Official: *Yes. I know about the problems you've had with the engineers who never came, who didn't take the measurements properly, etc. But from now on it will be different.*

Another ejidatario: *But they never come to measure the land.*

As will be clear, all these remarks were related to the struggle for the "lost land".

In the following part of the dialogue they referred to the problems with BANRURAL.

Salvador Lagos: *BANRURAL has treated many of us very badly. For example, we wanted to plant in May but we didn't get our loans from BANRURAL. We only got the money much later. In the meantime, the people at the bank were speculating and making money on our*

*loan money!*

Iginio Núñez: *The government is going to invest a lot of money in agriculture. In years past, the government money never reached us.*

Official: *If you're talking about people who used to monopolize the money, we want to put a stop to that.*

So, the functionary enthusiastically used the official discourse to present the changes to the ejidatarios, but could not conceal the effects of past experiences. Elements of radical change, modernization, blaming the corruption of the MAR, and an end to paternalism were central in his speech but did not convince the ejidatarios. In this meeting the ejidatarios assumed their usual skeptical attitude. Their distrust towards new government programs was apparent, as well as their lack of faith in government officials.

### **Young Officials Dealings with Ambiguous Institutional Environments**

The establishment of the new Procuraduría Agraria (PA) was fascinating from an institutional and political point of view. The head of the new institute was Arturo Warman, a recognized academic who had published excellent works on the way in which ejidatarios and landless peasants in Mexico had been exploited by the Mexican state.<sup>5</sup> According to some people the appointment of Warman was a clear case of the famous cooptation of critical outsiders by the Mexican state. However, many other people considered it to be an indication that the government really was prepared to do things differently. Warman repeated the government rhetoric about doing justice to the Mexican countryside. He expressed this goal in *Espacios*, a magazine published by the PA.

*Our goal is to resolve issues.... It is also to treat the peasants with respect. We must play a key role in creating a new agrarian culture that rejects paternalism and puts peasants in charge of their own lives. (Warman in Espacios no. 1 March-April 1993, p. 3 own translation).*

The PA tried to develop a "modern" institutional identity that would contrast with the MAR. PA functionaries should establish friendly and egalitarian relationships with the "new rural producers". Its new ideology and energetic institutional identity extended to all PA offices, from Mexico City to Guadalajara to Autlán. Many young PA officials started their work with great enthusiasm and expectations. To underscore the contrast between themselves and the MAR, some of the new PA functionaries even refused offers of soft drinks when they visited the ejidos, emphasizing that it is strictly forbidden for them to accept anything from the ejidatarios. The young professionals from the PA were very proud of their different style. Federico, one of the new PA officials, for example, said: *The ejidatarios are often amazed to see how young we are. It is a different image. Sometimes they think we work in the same way as the people before. They prepare meals for us and offer us money. Or they*

*bring home-made cheeses to the office. We can't accept these things, but we have to refuse them tactfully.... This causes trouble with the MAR.... They want to make money out of everything.*

The fact that Warman was the head of the new institute was a source of inspiration for many young officials.

At the higher levels within the PA, officials were well aware of the political aspects of land questions and the many problems the implementors would find in the field. I had several interviews with officials working at Arturo Warman's office in Mexico City, who developed the new programs of the PA. They were bright, enthusiastic people who enjoyed having critical discussions about the agrarian problems in Mexico. Yet, in the same way as many other critical officials I had talked with, they also seemed to see the "solution" to the exploitation of the ejidatarios in terms of education and organization. They used a strong discourse of raising consciousness among ejidatarios and making them "take control of their own lives". They hoped to counter the influence of local and regional powerholders by educating the ejidatarios.

#### *An Enthusiastic Head of the Regional PA Office*

The Autlán office opened its doors in March 1993. It was one of five offices of the PA in Jalisco and covered 20 municipalities encompassing 244 ejidos. The staff of the Autlán office included 6 agrarian specialists and lawyers (*visitadores*) and 16 assistants. The specialists were professionals with varied academic backgrounds: for example, a biologist, agricultural engineers and lawyers. Their work consisted primarily of resolving disputes over land in the ejidos and initiating the PROCEDURE program. Like other PA offices, the Autlán office started with young people recently graduated from the university and with little or no experience with agrarian issues in Mexico. After having completed intensive courses on the old agrarian reform law and the new agrarian law and six months of fieldwork, these staff came to the PA office in order to prepare for the survey of ejido land (PROCEDURE) and settle land conflicts.

When I first met José Luis, the head of the Autlán office, in April 1993, I found an enthusiastic, informally dressed, ambitious young man in his twenties. He appeared to be a social worker instead of the lawyer I had expected. José Luis explained to me that before entering the PA, he worked in a hospital. When he saw the announcements for the PA he decided to attend the training course. He asked for leave of absence from his job to do the course. The course went very well, so José Luis decided to leave his job at the hospital and go and work with the PA. I asked José Luis what he hoped to achieve in his work for the PA.

*José Luis: What I intend to do in this job is to bring progress to rural Mexico, so that the campesinos won't be deceived anymore. If I can make a contribution, that's it. If one of the 244 ejidos under my responsibility makes headway because of my involvement, I'll be*

*satisfied.*

Another example that José Luis stressed of the new approach was that they were going to listen to the ejidatarios and treat them as adult people. Ejidatarios could receive free legal assistance at the PA and if ejidatarios arrived with lawyers, the lawyers would be ignored. José Luis: *When ejidatarios visit the office with a lawyer, the lawyer often starts talking. We tell them to let the ejidatarios speak for themselves. Then the lawyers often react by saying that the ejidatario is not able to talk about it very well. We then say that the ejidatarios are very able to talk about it and if not we will find another form of understanding each other. We ask the lawyer to keep quiet or to wait outside. After the talk we tell the ejidatarios that they can get a free lawyer at our office.*

Naturally, this sounded like a very sympathetic aim. But after the many conversations I overheard between officials and ejidatarios I did not see quite how officials and ejidatarios would find "new ways of talking to each other". This was another clear example of the new approach adopted by the PA. José Luis talked in caring terms about the exploited ejidatarios. He had made pictures of ejidatarios and meetings of ejidatarios which he had put in the entrance hall of the PA building and he enjoyed explaining the photographs to me.

In the talks I had with José Luis it became apparent that he knew most of the articles of the old and new agrarian law verbatim and became angry with himself if he made a mistake. Yet, it was difficult for him to distance himself from the books and talk about real-life agrarian issues. He had fully adopted the discourse and ideology of the new institution and tended to answer my questions and doubts in terms of articles of the law. I explained this by the fact that he had never had any experience with rural people and agrarian problems and seemed to be "brain-washed" by the PA courses. Yet, he was the head of a regional office responsible for 244 ejidos!

*Antonio: Living the Tension between Reality and a New Institutional Project*

Antonio was one of the assistants who, in contrast to the university educated *visitadores*, came from a rural village. Instead of being proud of using a different institutional style he saw the problems of suddenly changing common practices to which people had become used. Antonio: *People are often offended when we do not want to stay for a meal. They say: we are poor, but you can eat here; the food isn't poisoned. But we hardly ever accept. Sometimes it is a pity, especially in the more isolated villages. There people are used to being hospitable and they automatically serve you a plate of food. They do not want anything else from you. But others start talking business.*

He was one of the few PA officials who from the start was skeptical about the possibility of recovering lands. After a talk between Ramón Romero and Antonio in which Ramón had told him about the "lost land" and that he expected that they would soon recover these lands, Antonio talked to me when we left the village.

A: *That man thinks that they will recover the land, but that will never happen.*

M: *But if these lands officially belong to the ejido?*

A: *The private landowners are politically very strong. No land will be taken away from them anymore.*

This went against the optimistic legalistic PA discourse that maintained that in the end all conflicts would be legally settled. However, although Antonio was one of the few PA officials who expressed himself in a more realistic way about the possibilities for change, on other occasions he also used the strong legalist discourse of the new institution in his relations with ejidatarios. An example is the following dialogue with Ramón Romero.

R: *Two people here in the ejido recently sold their plots.*

A: *That is not yet allowed by law. First the land has to be measured; then when the new certificates are issued, ejidatarios can sell their land.*

R: *You say that because that's what is written down, but the reality is different! We are very cunning in finding other ways to get things done. These people got their papers, went to a notary, and completed the sale.*

A: *But these land sales can be annulled.*

R: *Maybe according to the books. But it's not registered as a sale; they say that the rights were ceded to the new buyer.*

A: *In that case nothing can be done about it.*

R: *We are very clever. That's how we used to sell our land.*

A: *But do you think it's okay to let people tinker with the rules?*

R: *Maybe not. David at the MAR office has bent the rules a lot. That office is terrible; it's a snake pit.*

A: *Why do you go back to these people when you know they are corrupt and that we provide free services?*

R: *Why do you think? Because David knows the law so well and he knows how to get around it, whereas you just say that we can't sell the land.*

This exchange sheds light on the double attitude of the ejidatarios towards the corrupt practices at the MAR. On the one hand, they detest corruption when it hinders their efforts to get fair treatment in their conflict with the *pequeños propietarios*. On the other hand, they themselves use the services of "corrupt" officials, when necessary, to arrange matters outside the law. So far, the young functionaries of the PA had not been able to convince the ejidatarios that their new institutional style was a feasible project.

On the other hand this dialogue is also interesting with respect to Antonio's position. Antonio himself comes from an ejido and knows from experience that Ramón is right. However, he now has a job in which programs are presented in a legalistic way. Ejidatarios like Ramón who seriously doubt the feasibility of the new project make Antonio's work difficult from the very start. Actually, Antonio was very displeased after this conversation as his authority had been seriously questioned. This shows well the difficult position of

officials who have to introduce supposedly legal, modern, democratic programs into situations which are characterized by negotiations between ejidatarios and officials. Afterwards, Antonio expressed his frustration with the ejidatarios of La Canoa. He visited the ejido on several occasions and said to me that he was irritated by the fact that people did not come to the meetings, showed so little interest in their own affairs, and did not know the rules.

### *Encountering a Difficult Reality*

Despite their enthusiasm, the young PA staff in Autlán soon encountered severe problems. Most of the specialists had never lived in rural areas or worked with farmers or ejidatarios. Since they came with good intentions, determined to change established practices in the agrarian sector, they were surprised by the ejidatarios' mistrust. While the staff was eager to start the work that lay ahead, the ejidatarios often showed little interest in cooperating. Rubén, one of the lawyers of the PA office in Autlán, was from Guadalajara. He was the first of his group (of politically active lawyers) to move to the agrarian sector. According to Rubén: *Our work in the ejidos isn't easy. The people are very distrustful. The point is that policies have changed 180 degrees and people still have to get used to that.* Others complained about the fact that the ejidatarios are such closed people and not prepared to settle their conflicts harmoniously. So, while they started their work with the image of the good farmer who had been exploited for so many years, they now started repeating the same old stereotypes.

The PA staff also became frustrated by the fact that they were presented as the initiators of change but in practice had little influence. They discovered early on that they lacked authority. For example, when they couldn't get the disputing parties to reach an agreement, they had to send the case to the new agrarian tribunals, even when it was very clear who was in the right. Moreover, the situations before them was much more complex than they had been told. The very legalistic and transformationist discourse of the PA was not much help in conflicts with long histories and in which multiple interests were involved. In these highly political conflicts over lands, in which the MAR is often directly involved, the PA officials felt that they could do nothing, exacerbating their feelings of powerlessness.

So, they had to deal with distrustful ejidatarios in complex and conflictual situations in which they lacked authority. Last but not least, the work load was enormous, with 6 officials responsible for 244 ejidos. Moreover, there was great emphasis on extensive registration of all activities in the PA. The officials had to fill in many forms and were working all the time to have their reports ready before deadlines. I often found them working until late in the evening. Besides their daily work they also had to continue with courses and examination on agrarian matters.

By the time of my later visits to the Autlán office, the atmosphere was changing. Although they were still friendly, the functionaries were always worried and tense. José Luis



had changed from an enthusiastic, relaxed person into a harried boss. He tended to answer my questions more and more in terms of the standard PA discourses, articles in the agrarian law, and by giving me PA booklets. After six months of being head of the PA office in Autlán José Luis was sent back to the PA office in Guadalajara where he had to work as a *visitador*. This was a demotion. Some time later I happened to meet him there. He was very friendly and relaxed and said that he was happy with the new situation. In his new position he could learn many things. José Luis was not the only person to be changed position. Many of the PA officials in Autlán disappeared after some time. Some of them had been fired, while others were sent to other offices. There was much reshuffling of personnel at the PA at all levels. In October 1994, the *visitador* who had been responsible for La Canoa was also moved to the PA office in Guadalajara. Several secretaries of the Autlán office also left the institute.

#### *The PA and the MAR Growing Closer*

José Luis was replaced by Guillermo, a much older agricultural engineer, with years of experience in the MAR! I asked Guillermo how he had arrived at the PA.

Guillermo: *I never thought of applying for a job at the PA since they wanted young people and nobody from the MAR. However, I had previously worked on a project with Arturo Warman (now head of the PA) and his people, and they wanted me in the new institute. I had to take the course with all these young people who had just finished university, and I came out among the top 5 of 215.... They offered me my choice of state, and I decided to come back home, to Jalisco.*

Guillermo also had a social motivation for the job:

*There is still much inequality in Mexico and very bad government. I will only be happy when the poor in Mexico, including the peasants, have a dignified life. The stories that everything is changing and the people are having a better life now are nonsense. I once started a book about my experiences, but you do not earn anything with books.*

It is interesting that Guillermo was asked by former colleagues at the MAR to “come over” to the new institute. Here we see again that with new projects and programs, political changes are made in the bureaucracy and the new heads try to take people with them whom they have worked with before. It also is an indication of the fact that in the end the break with the practices of the MAR would not be that drastic. Gradually, more and more officials from the MAR entered the PA. The higher positions in particular were filled with people from the MAR. The head of the PA delegation in Jalisco, for example, also came from the MAR. The fact that certain “cliques” in the MAR moved to the PA reinforced interinstitutional networks between the two organizations and caused more frustration among the young PA officials.

In October 1994 I had a talk with Cristina, a young lawyer and one of the *visitadores* of the PA office in Autlán, who had then been working there for one year. When I remarked

that I had noticed that many MAR officials had entered the PA, she said the following.

*Cristina: They told us that they wanted new people, but the reality is different. The high PA functionaries come from the MAR. The best positions are taken by MAR people; they are more experienced. There have been many frictions and problems between the PA and the MAR. A fight. They tell us that we have to temper the situation, but that is difficult, they hinder you in your work. The MAR offices in Autlán and La Huerta are the most difficult ones. There are things we cannot do. The new head of the PA in Jalisco comes from customs; these are all political appointments; they sometimes put people in charge who have no idea at all about these matters.*

Defining a new institution that was clearly differentiated from the MAR had been a theme present in all the offices of the PA. However, the relationship between the PA and the MAR became a different one. In fact, from the very start the two institutions were not separate at all; they were closely related, both in their formal organizational structure (the PA falls officially under the MAR)<sup>6</sup> and in their interpersonal networks. The PA and the MAR also overlapped in their tasks. Although responsibilities and tasks were supposedly different and separate, in practice they often converged (for example, both agencies advised and assisted in many ejido affairs). This led to a complicated relationship between two parallel, competing, and overlapping institutions.

Forms of competition between the local offices of the two institutions in Autlán developed. For example, the three officials of the MAR office felt threatened by the arrival of the PA office in Autlán. Under the new agrarian law, the role of the regional assistance offices of the MAR was abruptly curtailed; activities that previously required assistance from MAR officials could now be undertaken by the ejidatarios alone. For example, the MAR would no longer investigate plot usage (the IUP), and elections of the executive committee in the ejido would not require the involvement of a MAR official. Furthermore, newly arriving officials from the PA would be advising on agrarian problems, establishing procedures for conflict settlement, and directing the program of land surveys. So, a form of competition and obstruction developed between the offices of the PA and the MAR. The MAR officials refused to allow the PA to see ejidos' files and the PA tried to cancel illegal land sales which David of the MAR had organized. In March 1994, Guillermo, head of the PA office in Autlán, expressed frustration over his lack of authority vis-à-vis the MAR. Guillermo: *I even received orders from above to avoid conflict with the MAR since "in the end we are one and the same organization"*. These tensions between functionaries reflect the ongoing power struggles within and between the two institutes at higher levels. However, this was not primarily a conflict between two institutions. It would be better described in terms of a clash between different institutional projects related to political struggles that cross-cut institutional borders.

The institutional experiences of the ejidatarios of La Canoa with the PA have not been very different from their earlier experiences with the MAR and other government institutions.

In the beginning the atmosphere in the PA was certainly very distinct from the atmosphere at the MAR. There was a more open, cordial and relaxed ambiance. But soon the same practices which they had condemned so much in the MAR, entered the PA. Appointments were made with ejidatarios but the officials never showed up. Many promises were made to the ejidatarios which were not kept. Ejidatarios who came from far away had to wait for hours in the building to speak to an official. So, also the image of the waiting ejidatarios was reproduced. Officials refrained from interfering in political sensitive matters and did not interfere in many cases, even if they were explicitly asked to do so. In many cases they could not really do anything. Together with the other problems, the atmosphere in the offices also changed and became much more like that of the MAR. According to most ejidatarios in La Canoa, the officials of the PA will end up just like those of the MAR.

The idea was also growing among the officials that in the end things might work out in a different way and that the PA might develop characteristics similar to other institutions. Several enthusiastic young officials at all levels left the institute disappointed. At the top, Arturo Warman was replaced under the new President Zedillo (1994- ). The atmosphere of optimism and radical change had disappeared. A third head of the PA office in Autlán was appointed. I spoke to him in July 1995. Instead of using a legalist, modernist discourse claiming that everything would soon be different and that lands would soon be measured and conflicts settled, he said that they found many problems everywhere. Whereas the PA had started with the declaration that all lands would be measured within a short period, this new head said that PROCEDE would take at least ten more years. Distance was taken from the rhetoric of the former President of the republic Salinas and from the former head of the PA, Warman.

### **The Project of the Internal Ejido Rules in a New Institutional Environment**

It is worthwhile paying some attention to one of the programs that was introduced with the new agrarian law, the Internal Ejido Rules (*Reglamento Interno*) project. The implementation of this program shows well what may happen when the “initiative of the local people” and the “local organizing capacities” are made central to government programs “imposed from above”. This case-study also illustrates how some people may take advantage of the unexpected and unintended opportunities created by a new program (Long 1984, 1990).

The possibility of formulating Internal-Ejido Rules (IER) already existed under the old agrarian reform law, but was given new prominence by the PA. In the IER each ejido could specify more specific rules concerning the internal administration of the ejido at the local level. According to the official PA propaganda the ejidatarios had to become “independent” and “self-reliant”, after more than a half-century of state tutelage. The IER was presented as the perfect way for the ejidos to show their self-determination. The IER project was based

on the idea that consciousness raising and local organization were central to progress in the ejidos. Each ejido had to formulate its IER according to its particular local situation and the aspirations of the ejidatarios.

Although this project may sound good in general terms, it becomes much less appealing when we take into account the reality of ejido organizing practices as they have developed over time. In the previous chapters it was shown how organizing practices have developed in La Canoa around different ejido resources. We noticed that forms of ordering evolved in which the ejido commissioner and the ejido assembly do not have much influence anymore. We also found that the official rules only have a limited and indirect influence on these practices. Taking this into consideration, the project of formulating local rules becomes much less appealing. On the contrary, one might ask, what could be the use and the effect of more rules? I will now present the experiences of La Canoa with this program.

At the start of the IER project in the region of Autlán, the SARH, the MAR, and the PA all participated. But gradually the MAR started taking over and the other institutions withdrew from further activities. In May 1993, Raúl Pradera, the ejido commissioner, was visited at his house in La Canoa by the head of the MAR office and David. They told Raúl to sign a document in which he asked the MAR office in Autlán for assistance with the elaboration of the IER. Raúl signed the document but he felt very unsure about the matter. He did not like working with the MAR again. He was afraid that David would ask the ejido for money in exchange for his assistance with the IER. Actually, Raúl had hoped that from 1992 onwards everything would be taken over by the PA. So, the next day Raúl went to the PA office in Autlán to ask if they could not help the ejido with the IER. However, not only did the PA official show little interest in becoming involved in the IER project, but he confirmed that the MAR was the institute elaborating most of the IERs in the region. For the ejidatarios this was one of the many disappointments they would have with the new PA.

As I had several contacts with officials and had much documentation about the new laws and programs, Raúl and the others started relying more and more on my information and advice. I gave them booklets about the changes which I had received at the offices and several copies of the new agrarian law. I also informed them about the PROCAMPO subsidy program that would soon start and provided them with details about the progress of the PROCEDE program. Raúl asked me to accompany him to the different offices and be present at meetings with officials more and more.

In June 1993 a meeting was held in the ejido about the IER. I was surprised to see the head of the MAR office in Autlán, Manuel, himself at the meeting. He never used to visit the ejidos. Later I learned that he was under great pressure from the Guadalajara office to finish IERs. Manuel explained that a small committee had to be formed in La Canoa which could elaborate the IER. He said that he would personally give assistance to this committee. He stressed the importance of the IER for getting loans in the future. After various questions,

a discussion started about who should be in the IER committee. Two young men were proposed, sons of ejidatarios who had received secondary education, Joaquín Núñez and Sergio Sánchez. Joaquín and Lupe proposed me for the committee. Then it was decided to have some older experienced ejidatarios as well. So Miguel Romero and Ignacio Romero also became part of the committee. The five of us signed the papers of the IER committee. The meeting came to its end and it was decided that the IER committee would meet with Manuel the next day at his office.

At the meeting with Manuel at his office the next day, his attitude was less friendly. He made it clear that he did not have much time to work with us. He said that he had written down ten points to start the work. He read out the points which were formulated in a very legalist terminology. Manuel asked if we understood all the legal terms. Joaquín answered that he did not understand the term juridical person and Manuel explained it to him. Then I asked Manuel if these same ten points were given to all ejidos. Manuel was visibly annoyed with my question and said that he had made this list especially for La Canoa as the situation in all ejidos was different. However, it was obvious that the ten points he had written down came directly from the agrarian law and had nothing to do with the situation in La Canoa. Towards the end of the meeting, Manuel turned to Miguel Romero, the oldest man and only ejidatario present (Ignacio Romero had not come). He asked Miguel for his opinion on the latest developments with the ejido legislation. Miguel reacted in the following way: *Fine, fine, I read about the IER and also parts of the new law and it all seems fine to me..* Some days later Miguel told Joaquín that he did not see the point of the IER and he did not come to the meetings anymore.

I started to feel that the whole project of the IER was a ridiculous endeavor. Framing this document was too big a challenge for the ejidatarios. The rules had to be based on the new agrarian law, but the law restricts what themes can be addressed. Therefore, the ejidatarios first had to know the law in detail in order to know where variation was possible. On the basis of that study, they could then formulate their own Internal Ejido Rules. Since many ejidatarios can barely read, this task of studying the agrarian law was all but impossible. However, more importantly, the new agrarian law appeared to be open to various interpretations and again education did not seem to be the only issue here. This became clear when a university-educated Mexican friend who was working in another region helped an ejido to establish its IER. This IER was then rejected by the RAN for including local rules which went against the agrarian law. In this way, it seemed that the new laws were used to stifle local creativity and only strengthened the practice of legal reification. Some entrepreneurial types soon grasped that the new program offered interesting possibilities and they went to the ejidos to offer their services in developing the IER, in exchange for substantial payment. For example, the MAR office in Autlán offered its services to several neighboring ejidos, for 20 million pesos. David had also told Iginio Núñez that La Canoa would have to pay 20 million pesos for assistance with the IER if the

committee did not succeed in doing the job on its own. In other ejidos people from outside the region arrived to offer their assistance with the IER and charged large sums of money. However, some officials of the SARH office in El Grullo became aware of this and managed to convince the ejidatarios not to work with these people. According to these SARH officials these people had to be (ex-) government officials as they knew everything about the IERs. They also knew very well how to deal with the ejidatarios and which ejidos they had to go to have some success. A drawback for these entrepreneurial types was that in many ejidos the ejidatarios didn't see the value of developing the IER. So, these types threatened the ejidatarios that without an IER they wouldn't get credit from the banks anymore. Although this threat seemed to work in some cases, in most ejidos the people were not impressed, and the price for assistance with the IERs dropped (in the Autlán region, the price fell from 20 million pesos to between the 3 and 5 million pesos).

Officials of the PA office in Autlán were very well aware of what was going on. However, there had been many tensions between the PA and the MAR at many different levels and the PA office in Autlán was operating very carefully and trying to avoid conflict with the MAR office in Autlán. So, there was little support for the ejidatarios from that side. I even learned that ejidatarios had come to the PA office on several occasions to lodge complaints against MAR officials but had been discouraged from doing so by the PA officials.

When the two older ejidatarios on the IER committee of La Canoa withdrew from further activities, I was left on the committee with two young men who were not even ejidatarios. So, there seemed little reason to continue with the job. Furthermore, most ejidatarios did not show any interest in the project and I myself did not believe in the usefulness of more rules. However, the ejido commissioner Raúl urged us to go on. He was afraid that otherwise the officials of the MAR office in Autlán would take over and charge the ejido a large sum of money. So we continued the work and I was amazed by the zeal and enthusiasm of the two young men, who clearly hoped to become ejidatarios in the future.

The work on the IER led to many interesting discussions as we had several meetings with a group of ejidatarios. The ejido commissioner Raúl, the two young men and several ejidatarios certainly did not share my distrust of rules. They believed in the usefulness of a more formalized way of operating in the ejido and of formulating strict rules for themselves. They thought that this might help them to solve the many internal problems of the ejido, and especially the problems with the urban zone and the commons (see the accountability discourse discussed in chapter six). They talked with great enthusiasm about how they would fine ejidatarios who did not attend ejido meetings. They also fantasized about strict rules for the use of the commons, but there was no agreement on the type of rules. Iginio, for example, wanted *coamiles* to be taken away from the non-ejidatarios and all the commons to be divided among the ejidatarios. This drastic proposal was not supported by the others. They also talked about the possibility of including a rule that ejidatarios who sold their plot

had to pay a certain percentage of the purchase money to the ejido. Yet, there was a lot of discussion about how much the percentage should be. The most interesting thing was that talking about rules and new ways of organizing ejido affairs raised so much enthusiasm within this group. On the other hand, the majority of ejidatarios showed little interest in this project of new ejido rules.

At the request of Raúl, I had gathered together some IERs of other ejidos and on the basis of the agrarian law and these examples we formulated a framework in which the local rules could easily be integrated. After several discussions in small groups we elaborated a provisional IER in which the local ideas were “translated” into a formalist legal terminology. The idea was that this provisional IER would be discussed at the ejido assembly which would take the final decisions about the different rules. When Joaquín and I visited Raúl to discuss this provisional document, Raúl did not react very much. After asking several times what he thought about it, he said that several things were unclear to him. On further questioning it became apparent that he had not understood anything of the formal language. As it seemed ridiculous to have an IER that not even the ejido commissioner was able to understand, we talked about the possibility of writing a short IER in normal language for use in the ejido and a formal legalist IER in order to deal with institutions. Raúl was very enthusiastic about that idea.

In conversations with officials at the headquarters of the PA in Mexico City in August 1993, I learned that they were well aware of what was going on in the field with respect to the IER project. Two young lawyers working for Arturo Warman realized that not only was the IER program failing to promote the new ideology of an independent ejidatario, it was creating new opportunities for people who wanted to exploit ejidatarios. Their boss Fabiola, who was an anthropologist and part of the head team of the PA, had just returned from a meeting with Warman and said:

*I just received orders to work further on an instruction booklet for the IER. We wanted to distance ourselves from former practices in which the MAR dictated everything. We wanted the ejidatarios to do it themselves. It now appears that it did not work that way. The regional assistance offices of the MAR jumped in and now ask for money from the ejidatarios: they sell IERs. For that reason we decided to make an instruction booklet after all. When we talked about the problem that the RAN only accepts officially formulated IERs, Fabiola said:*

*One of the problems is that the RAN only accepts formal IERs that follow a certain model. We want to make different types of IERs, for example IERs in which certain matters are not dealt with yet. On certain matters we want to wait until the ejidatarios themselves are ready for them. But the RAN does not accept that. We will have to negotiate about that with the RAN at a later stage.*

So, the central office of the PA had finally decided to publish a booklet in which the project of the IER was explained and in which a sample of IERs was presented which the

ejidatarios could copy, filling in sections where there was room for variation. Hence, the IER project had turned into an arena of conflict between different institutions of the agrarian bureaucracy (the MAR, the RAN, the PA), and in which some ejidos were the "victims".

When I returned to La Canoa, I informed them about this latest development and we decided to wait for the new PA booklet before continuing with the IER. However, the MAR office was not happy with our taking such a relaxed attitude. Manuel was under great pressure from the Guadalajara office to finish more IERs in the region. Autlán was the regional assistance office of Jalisco that had the fewest IERs finished. So, on several occasions Manuel talked to Raúl and to me and asked us why we did not work harder. We all gave evasive answers as we did not want to mention the forthcoming PA booklet. Manuel had already shown his frustration with the new PA on many occasions. However, Manuel had to report about the progress of the IERs to his superiors and he suggested Raúl write a letter saying that La Canoa did not want an IER. In that way it was no longer Manuel's responsibility. However, that was something that had to be avoided. We tried to keep Manuel on a string and avoided him as far as possible.

In September when I was working in the local ejido archive of La Canoa, I was amazed when I suddenly found an IER of the ejido that had been elaborated two years before. I showed it to Raúl who was also surprised and said that he had never known of its existence. He asked me to read it and explain what it said to him. I talked about it with other ejidatarios but only Iginio seemed to remember that a couple of years ago, under the ejido administration of Gustavo Romero, they talked about an IER. But it was never heard of anymore and was never presented at a general assembly. The others were astonished to hear that the ejido already had an IER and had never heard about it either. The IER had been elaborated by Rigoberto of the MAR office in Autlán and was very extensive and well done. Many of the rules that the ejidatarios wanted to include in the new IER, such as fines for people who did not attend the meetings, were already in this IER. After having found this IER, I became even more convinced that the formulation of more new rules was a useless endeavor.

The PA booklet about the IER appeared in December 1993, almost a year after the IER project had begun in the Autlán region. As the booklet was published by the PA, most ejidatarios never learned of its existence; the IER projects in Autlán were in the hands of the MAR. We had some more meetings in La Canoa and together with the booklet we made a provisional IER. Fernández, the head of the organization and rural development division of the MAR in Guadalajara (and Manuel's boss) told me that specialized assistants were soon going to be sent to the region to give free help with the IERs. We decided to wait for the assistance of this specialized MAR official from Guadalajara to do the final work. By now Manuel had become very angry with our "laziness" and everybody tried to avoid him. Raúl feared that Manuel would visit him at his house and make him sign letters.

However, in March 1994 Manuel arrived at a meeting in the ejido together with the



official. The young official presented himself and explained that he had been sent with the special task of helping ejidos with the IERs. He would be the person responsible for the IER in the region of Autlán. It now became clear that the ejido commissioner Raúl had positioned me in a broker's role. When the official tried to fix a day with the ejidatarios to work on the IER, Raúl asked me if that day would suit me. I explained to him that I would be away for some days. Raúl then told the official that they wanted me to be present at the meeting. I started feeling very uncomfortable with the fact that he was publicly questioning the trustworthiness of the official and putting me in a position between the ejido and the bureaucracy. The young official reacted in a very friendly way and said that they could still start the work and then discuss it with me later on. Salvador Lagos then added: *You can do the work but then you should give it to her so that she can judge the work.* This was a clear manifestation of the distrust of the ejidatarios towards the institution. After the meeting Raúl asked me what they should do. I said that I saw no harm in working with this man as long as they did not have to pay. As I was finishing my fieldwork period in the region I could not participate in the meetings with this official. But the ejidatarios later told me that they had several good meetings with this official and that he finally finished the IER.

#### *The Researcher Positioned in the Role of a Broker*

Although the ejidatarios had positioned me in a broker's role, I was not one of the most usual and useful types. I did not give the impression of being a very knowledgeable and politically well placed person. Although I traveled a lot and had many contacts outside the ejido, it was clear that I did not have the right connections to help the ejidatarios. However, I gradually became a sort of information broker (see Grindle 1977: 155) in the sense that I gave them all the details I found in the archives and discussed with them information about different government programs. However, it was not only ejidatarios, but also officials who started to approach me as an intermediary for La Canoa. They said, for example, that it was good that I was helping the ejidatarios with the IER and they passed information on to the ejidatarios through me. Some suggested that I could ask for money from the ejidatarios for my activities. Other officials stressed the fact that I should help the ejidatarios more in their contacts with the bureaucracy and advised me to accompany them on their visits to the offices. Several higher officials promised after an interview with me that they would personally study the case of La Canoa and that I could visit them together with the ejidatarios. An example which is illustrative of the role I was gradually positioned in, was a phone call with Federico in March 1994. Federico worked for the municipality of Autlán and was responsible for the coordination of government projects in the villages. In this position he was also responsible for the PRONASOL projects, including the *crédito a la palabra* program. As Raúl did not know much about this last project and wanted more information, I decided to talk to Federico. I had already established a friendship relationship with Federico and we often talked about various matters affecting the region. This is part of

the conversation we had.

M: *How is that program organized? How many people from La Canoa can apply for credit in this program?*

F: *In La Canoa 20 people can apply.*

Then he added:

*Are the people in La Canoa good at paying back their loans?*

M: *I have no idea, you should not ask me.*

F: *How many ejidatarios does the ejido La Canoa have?*

M: 97

F: *Then, make it 25 who can get a loan.*

Then Federico continued explaining the procedures and how the ejidatarios should apply.

The amazing thing in this talk was that I felt that Federico started negotiating the number of people in La Canoa who could get a loan with me. The fact that he added five extra loans was as if he was doing me a personal favor. Although my first reaction was one of amazement, I later realized that this was a clear example of how people started to see La Canoa as falling "under my care". This makes clear that the institutions are also searching for relations with individuals, intermediaries, whom they can use in their work in the different villages and ejidos. For certain matters, I was placed in the position of a broker between La Canoa and the institutions - a role which I had not sought and which I was not ready to play for a long time.

#### *Some Reflections on a New Law and a New Institute*

Looking back on this period, it is clear that Salinas' discourse on democracy and his promise to eradicate corruption was extremely successful in raising hopes regarding the possibility of bringing about fundamental changes in society. The deception when he left the presidency in an atmosphere of economic crisis, political murders and drug trafficking in which he apparently played a central role, was all the more severe. As we saw in the previous chapters, his projects for the agrarian sector made some ejidatarios believe that they would finally recover lands that belonged to the ejido. However, many officials also thought that with the support of this president they could fundamentally change the agrarian situation. They hoped that justice would finally be done. All were in the end deceived.

PA officials as well as ejidatarios realized after some time that nothing had changed and that they had to readjust their aims. A new agrarian law and the establishment of a new institution obviously did not change the political character of many land conflicts in Mexico nor the established practices in the relationship between ejidatarios and the state bureaucracies. The old practices and stereotypes (about ejidatarios as well as officials) soon re-emerged, seemingly stronger than before. It was obvious that the political conjuncture had not changed in favor of the ejidatarios or landless peasants. On the contrary, despite an official government discourse in which the ejidatarios would finally receive what rightfully

belonged to them, the Salinas regime supported the large private landowners.

### **Conclusion: Officials in a World of Contradiction**

In this chapter we have seen that we need a sophisticated approach to analyze the dynamics of the government bureaucracy and its officials in order to understand the relation between ejidatarios and the “Mexican state”. The image of the “corrupt and unscrupulous official who only tries to exploit the poor peasants” is a stereotype that does little to increase our understanding of this relationship. The state bureaucracy is a complex constellation of people, projects, social networks, and more or less organized groups which seem to be in continuous movement. Officials develop certain professional standards for their work, while at the same time they are part of a politicized bureaucracy in which they have to ensure their own position. Like ejidatarios they may sometimes feel more like “a victim” of the bureaucratic machine with little room for manoeuvre, than “an implementor” of the state programs. The majority of officials try to do their job, while at the same time they enjoy the favors of being part of the state bureaucracy and certain political networks. Most officials do not deny that they themselves ask favors or sometimes operate on political/personal instead of professional/bureaucratic grounds. Undoubtedly, there is considerable pleasure in “playing the game”. As Gupta (1995) demonstrates well, the practice of bribing is not simply an economic transaction but a cultural practice that requires a great degree of performative competence (Gupta 1995: 379). It is obvious that people develop different standards and degrees to which they agree with favoritism, or follow formal standards. For that reason, “there are always divergent and conflicting assessments of whether a particular course of action is ‘corrupt’” (Gupta 1995: 388). However, ejidatarios, as well as officials, are confronted with contradictory demands in their daily lives. Yet, the difference between ejidatarios and officials is that in the world of the official, party politics and political lobbying are much stronger and dominate a much greater part of one’s life than in the daily lives of most ejidatarios.

Many authors have endeavored to come to grips with these opposite principles which determine the working of the bureaucracy and of society in general. DaMatta (1991), for example, argues that in Brazil two conflicting but complementary notions operate simultaneously: the notion of the individual and the notion of the person. The notion of the individual emphasizes the universal application of the law to all subjects. On the other hand, the complementary notion of the person demands a singular application of the law, which should be bent especially for the person in question (DaMatta 1991: 180-182). Hence, “the realm of individuals is to be found in this impersonal world of laws, decrees, and rules as they are applied and implemented in practice” (*ibid.*: 186). In contrast, in the realm of the person “reciprocity, loyalty, charity, and goodness are basic values for which the core and

focal point is a *system of persons*" (*ibid.*: 183). According to DaMatta one notices in Brazilian society a complex dialectic between these two notions. In the same line of argument, Lomnitz (1992) talks about the coexistence of legal bureaucratic rationalism and personalism in the Mexican bureaucracy. Lomnitz argues that "during the whole regnum of the PRI (1929 to date), there has been tremendous tension between rational-bureaucratic practices and practices that are founded on other kinds of principles, such as friendship, kinship, and personal loyalty" (Lomnitz 1992: 297). Although the tension between these opposing principles is very clear, in my opinion, we could arrive at a deeper understanding of this phenomenon by paying more attention to the role of discourses of corruption.

On the one hand, the discourse of corruption forms part of the "culture of the state" and "analyzing the discourse of corruption draws attention to the powerful cultural practices by which the state is symbolically represented to its employees and to citizens of the nation" (Gupta 1995: 385). In government propaganda in Mexico the fight against corruption is presented as a central facet of a successful modernization of society and the lack of the effectiveness of the government apparatus is often blamed on corrupt elements within the system. Furthermore, accusations of corruption have become a powerful weapon in the political power game. In this context the discourse of corruption deflects attention from more fundamental types of criticism of the regime and has conservative effects. By blaming "corrupt elements" for things that go wrong, the "idea of the state" as "a neutral arbiter above the conflicts and interests of society" remains intact. Within these theories no radical changes are necessary. Once the "rotten" parts have been removed from the system, "the state" can do its work. Agencies are closed, programs canceled, and new initiatives are presented with great enthusiasm and optimism. The hope-generating machine continues.

As we saw, ejidatarios use a discourse of corruption which differs from this governmental discourse of corruption. Ejidatarios use the label of corruption above all as a form of social critique, referring to the accumulation of experiences in which they have been deceived. The ejidatarios do not mind paying large sums of money as long as they get what they want. In these cases they talk about successful transactions and do not use the term corruption. On the other hand, what frustrates them is that they often do not succeed in these negotiations. In the case of the "lost land" they paid large sums of money but never got anything in return. They were lied to and deceived all the time. The fact that they are fooled around with or are made to pay excessive sums of money makes them feel stupid and in this context they complain about the corruption of the government agencies and shameless, corrupt officials. Hence, when they complain about corruption they are not so much "voicing their exclusion from government services" but are rather expressing "their frustration because they lacked the cultural capital required to negotiate deftly for those services" (Gupta, 1995: 381).

In the case of officials, we found much more specific talk about different types and degrees of corruption. Officials often themselves started talking about what they called "the

problem of corruption” in the bureaucracy and they felt the need to define their position in relation to this phenomenon. This preoccupation with corruption is obviously related to the fact that it is such a strong theme in public debates. However, by reflecting on the subject, officials not only subject themselves to a dominant discourse but also problematize their role as officials and the working of the bureaucracy. We have seen that this leads to several contradictions in committed officials’ theorizing. On the one hand, the discourse of corruption defines different categories of people such as the innocent and credulous ejidatarios and the “corrupt” official. Functionaries often talked about ejidatarios as victims of the corrupt bureaucracy. On the other hand, officials also blamed the ejidatarios for being distrustful, not willing to change, and doing nothing to improve their own situation.

In their strategies to fight corruption officials tended to stress the importance of the organization and education of the ejidatarios. In the light of the history of relations between ejidatarios and the state bureaucracies, the stress on the organization and education of ejidatarios is extremely ironic. Stressing the solution in forms of organization ignores the fact that the “hope-generating machine” tends to frustrate collective forms of organizing. By stressing the importance of educating ejidatarios in the fight against corruption, it is suggested that there is a “logic” in the operation of the machine which one can learn. Yet, we have seen that the more political a conflict has become and the higher the interests at stake, the lesser the bureaucracy follows formal logics. In previous chapters I argued that by stressing the importance of the official rules and procedures officials contribute to the “idea of the state”. By putting emphasis on the rules they suggest that an administrative bureaucratic logic exists in the operation of “the machine”. By stressing the importance of education for the ejidatarios, they also contribute to the “idea of the state”. Yet, like the ejidatarios, officials are not naive and know better than anybody else that many matters are not arranged according to official rules but according to other criteria. However, by recognizing this reality their own legitimacy as officials is at stake.

The officials live in a world of contradictions. Like the ejidatarios, the officials may be deceived once they start believing the fantasies created by the hope-generating machine. We saw that this happened with the change of article 27 of the Mexican constitution and the establishment of the Procuraduría Agraria. Officials who worked with enormous enthusiasm and believed that they could change established bureaucratic practices, were in the end as deceived as the ejidatarios. In the previous chapters we saw that ejidatarios are always promised that their problems will be studied and dealt with. The bureaucracy will never say no. On the contrary, it will always raise hopes and be very optimistic. It is argued that this characteristic of generating hope is an important element of the culture of the state. It is also expressed every time with the inauguration of a new president. Problems in society are defined and the malfunctioning of the government is admitted. Massive new programs are introduced to improve society. Although many people react cynically to all these promises, at the same time they start believing in some of them. This is not a form of false

consciousness but it is a form of fantasizing; and sometimes part of the fantasies may come true as many things happen and change in society. However, for the officials, the new programs and promises are more than fantasy; they are their daily work environment. Although upon reflection they may recognize the impossibility of the programs and the contradictions in their own theories, believing is the only way to survive and make headway in the bureaucratic machine.

## Notes

1. See Nuijten 1993, for a discussion of the public debate around the reform of article 27 of the Mexican Constitution.
2. The aim is that the program of PROCEDE will be applied to all ejidos. In this program all ejido land and individual ejido plots will finally be measured and registered. Ejidatarios will then receive individual certificates for their plots. Once they have these certificates, the ejido can decide to transform the ejido domain into private land ownership (*pleno dominio*). If the majority of ejido plots have been measured, the ejido assembly can authorize the concerned ejidatarios to adopt full domain over their plots. If all ejido members decide to adopt full domain over their plots the ejido regime comes to an end. Only if 20 percent of the ejidatarios (or at least 20 ejidatarios) decide to continue, they can continue as ejido.
3. Institution which organizes second-level government funding for agriculture.
4. For an extensive description of this meeting, see Nuijten 1995.
5. Warman's most famous books are *Los campesinos: hijos predilectos del régimen* (1972) and *Y venimos a contradecir* (1976).
6. According to the new agrarian law, the PA is a decentralized agency of the Federal Public Administration falling under the MAR.



CHAPTER 10  
**ORGANIZING PRACTICES IN THE MEXICAN EJIDO:  
A CONCLUSION**

**Introduction: Organizing, Power, and Development**

This book began with the argument that anthropology should pay more attention to the relationship between organizing processes and relations of power (cf. Wolf 1990). I situated organizing practices within wider force fields, thus highlighting power relations without assuming the nature of certain configurations of power beforehand. The in-depth study of the ejido La Canoa offered the possibility of a deeper understanding of manifold forms of organizing, such as the struggle for the establishment of the ejido, the construction of support networks among migrants, the organization of village projects, the arrangement of illegal land transactions, the organization of the fight of ejidatarios against *pequeños propietarios*, the management of the commons, and forms of organizing around new government programs. Besides providing insights into the many aspects of the Mexican ejido, the life of transnational ejidatarios and state-peasant relations in Mexico, the study of these diverse forms of organizing helped me to develop an analytical framework for the study of organizing practices in an increasingly “deterritorialized” world.<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter the conclusions of the work are presented and I draw out some of the implications of the research findings for the debate on “organization for development”. I argue that both the labeling of existing organizing practices in the ejido as “disorganized”, “chaotic”, and “corrupt” and the widespread belief that “modern”, “democratic”, and “collective” forms of organization can improve the situation of “poor peasants”, form part of broader discourses of development (cf. Ferguson 1990, Escobar 1995, Apthorpe and Gasper 1996, Grillo and Stirrat 1997). I also contend that besides ignoring the logic and value of existing forms of organizing which generally are of a more fragmented nature, many theories neglect the fact that all forms of organizing - including the so-called democratic and modern ones - create or strengthen power differences. This chapter sets out to show that one can certainly formulate suggestions for supporting “local” organizations as long as one takes into account existing organizing processes and the force fields in which these have developed. However, before presenting these practical suggestions, I briefly return to the theoretical discussion started in the first chapter.



## Organizing Practices in Multiple Force Fields

The argument of this book is that organizing practices develop within multiple force fields with differing dynamics, rather than within one over-arching field. Force fields cohere around certain problems and resources and lead to forms of ordering in which we can distinguish socio-political categories with differing positions and interests. It is argued that these socio-political divisions are not always the same. Around the different resources and problems discussed in this book we found, for example, ejidatarios pitched against landless villagers (village projects, the commons), ejidatarios against *pequeños propietarios* and officials (the “lost land”), and divisions based on age and gender (inheritance questions). The concept of force field helps us to analyze the weighting of different kinds of socio-political networks, the influence of law and procedures, and the role of the state bureaucracy.

An analysis in terms of organizing practices within multiple force fields shows that in relation to certain resources or problems people may have much “room for manoeuvre” (Long 1984, 1990), while around other resources they may have little individual influence. For example, while the ejidatarios have developed a high degree of autonomy around the arable land and the commons, around the “lost land” they obviously operate in a force field in which they are relatively powerless. At the same time, force fields are always in flux. For instance, the force field around the common lands in La Canoa is changing in that differences in the interests of ejidatarios and landless families are becoming more pronounced, and interference from different state agencies is increasing. This will certainly lead to changes in the organizing practices around the commons in the future, although not in predefined ways.

I have stressed throughout the book that the patterning which develops in organizing practices and the accompanying forms of domination and struggle are related to active dialogues, self-reflection, irony, and the production of multiple meanings through imagination and the work of interpretation. These reflections and dialogues around relations of force were explicitly discussed for the ideology of the land (in the context of ejidatarios’ domination over landless villagers), the ideology of the family (in the context of inheritance decisions in an increasingly transnationalized setting), the different discourses on organization (in the context of tensions in ejido management), and for the amazing forms of imagination surrounding power and the state (in the context of the struggle for the “lost land”). These dialogues reflect a continuous active engagement of social actors with the world around them and should not be seen merely as enactments of dominant discourses.

Of course, the existence of multiple fields of power impinging on different dimensions of our lives has always been a reality. But today in a world where media and migration have a strong effect on the “work of the imagination as a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity” (Appadurai 1997: 3) the existence of multiple force fields is even more evident. Ejidatarios live in a transnational world in which identity formation and socio-political

processes can no longer be seen as automatically tied to certain localities or even nation-states. This is a widespread phenomenon and several authors have stressed that the deterritorialized and transnationalized world we are living in today not only forces us to look “outwards”, but also calls for different theoretical notions (Appadurai 1997, Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Thus, I argue that the study of organizing practices within determinate force fields, as developed in this book, provides an analytical strategy that can help us to understand these new (and old) realities (see appendix six for a schematic overview of the organizing practices and force fields which were discussed in the different chapters of the book).

### **Returning to Resistance, the Culture of the State, and State Intervention**

In chapter two I said that in the same way that we cannot assume the existence of a hegemonic state project, we cannot assume the existence of a popular project of resistance to the state either. In the subsequent chapters interactions between ejidatarios and officials were described in many different settings. On the basis of this material I conclude that in the Mexican context the basic problem with the notion of resistance is that people often do not have clear images of the “opposing class” or the categories they are fighting against. They may talk in broad terms about *los ricos*, *los pequeños*, or the “corrupt officials”, but in concrete situations it is very hard to determine if somebody should be resisted or cooperated with.

Ejidatarios often do not know if they have to be in favor or against a state official or if they should support or resist a new government program. They have ample experience with projects and programs that they perceive to be highly corrupt. Hence, the apparent distrust, disinterest, and the wait and see attitude that officials complain about manifests a sensible skepticism with regards to the hopes and expectations raised by the bureaucracy. It is in the process itself that attitudes and positions develop and they often remain ambivalent. A government official should be received with some suspicion but can in the end prove to be a “good guy”. Alternatively, he could prove to be a man with good intentions but who is manipulated by his chiefs.

So, when ejidatarios do not show much initiative or do not participate in new government programs, it is not that they deliberately refrain from every form of action that is initiated by the government, or that they manifest a form of resistance against interference from outside. The distant and distrustful attitude can best be described as a form of “keeping a distance”. This “keeping a distance” is not part of a larger project and their attitudes can change according to how the situation develops. In this way we find complex attitudes which combine elements of resistance and compliance at the same time. In addition, any initiative or program can develop and be appropriated in unpredictable ways (Arce 1993, Long 1988,

1990, de Vries 1997).

When the ejidatarios really felt that they were being deceived, they could make this clear to the officials. In many meetings they made objections to and cynical remarks about the propaganda talk of officials. Their awaiting attitude, cynical jokes, moments of enthusiasm, but also their silently leaning to the wall and leaving in the middle of the meeting can be analyzed in terms of a ritual or a style which they have developed on the basis of many experiences. It is not a “lack of interest”, a “lack of initiative”, or a “lack of education”, but styles and rituals, in which practices of dominance and resistance interact in complex ways; rituals of rules and resistance (Beezley *et al.* 1994) form part of the culture of the state.

This brings us to another point, namely that when officials present new government programs they think in terms of incorporated ejidatarios. In fact, ejidatarios are always already incorporated in official structures, but not in standard ways. For example, the big entrepreneurs among the ejidatarios have been quite skilled in establishing useful contacts with some bureaucrats and influential politicians in the region, who can give them the information and entrances they needed. Hence, these big entrepreneurs are often not enthusiastic about attending the meetings convened by officials who come to introduce new programs, as they have their own contacts. At the same time, ejidatarios live in a world that develops to a large degree outside the grip of the state bureaucracy. For example, the fact that ejidatarios do not show much interest in more “modern” and “advanced” forms of production, may be very frustrating for the SARH officials and only confirm their opinion that ejidatarios are backwards. However, when we take into account that many ejidatarios are migrants and that they may combine their ejido plot with several other sources of income, they should perhaps be labeled as extremely “modern”. While officials may fantasize about high production in ejidos by joining several ejido plots, the ejidatarios generally prefer to combine their ejido plot with migration to Los Angeles. This “independent” and “distant” attitude of the ejidatarios frustrates the work of many officials: it makes the ejidatarios “uncontrollable”.

### *Imagining the State*

As has been shown, ejidatarios have a complicated and contradictory relation with the Mexican state. The state was their ally in the fight against the *hacendados* during the period of agrarian reform and it has also been the provider of all kinds of services (schools, water, electricity). But in other instances the state is viewed as a corrupt and violent enemy which is greatly feared and distrusted by the people. Hence, we have an image of the Mexican state as the protector and oppressor of the ejidatarios at the same time. Images of the state conjoin notions of evil with goodness. For that reason, the ejidatarios may be supportive and enthusiastic towards the Mexican president at one moment, and cynical and distrustful about his speeches at another moment. Or they can laugh about themselves being deceived by the

democratic and liberalizing discourse of a president who later on proved to be one of the worst swindlers the country ever saw. The ejidatarios can be proud of being part of the project of the Mexican nation-state but at the same time they can criticize powerholders for their corruption and for squeezing the peasants.

I have argued that the continuous theorizing about power and politics in society not only concerns a rationalization of actions but also an investment in the "idea of the state". This does not mean that practices of authority and control do not exist but that people's imaginations are important for what they think and decide to do. These imaginations which are constitutive of the culture of the state, are based upon a myriad of experiences and are mediated by a series of governmental techniques and by the media, education, and movies.

The culture of the state is central to the operation of the bureaucracy as a hope-generating machine. It was shown that the hope-generating bureaucratic machine gives the message that everything is possible, that cases are never closed, and that things will be different from now on. This permeates all aspects of life and triggers powerful responses. However, rather than producing a certain rationality and coherence, the bureaucratic machine generates enjoyments, pleasures, fears, and expectations. Although people are never naive, during certain periods they can become inspired and enthusiastic about new programs and new openings that are offered to them. One peculiarity of the Mexican bureaucracy is precisely its ability, at certain points and in certain circumstances, to overcome people's skepticism and, indeed, entice them to start fantasizing again about new projects, hence recommencing a never-ending cycle of high expectations followed by disillusion and ironic laughter (cf. Beezley *et al.* 1994 and Torres 1994a).

Interface situations (Long 1984, 1989) in which ejidatarios and officials deal with each other help to render possible these forms of imagination. Here we find most clearly the rituals of the state. Ejidatarios and bureaucrats are implicated in the construction of the idea of the state through processes of rationalization, speculation, and the construction of fantasies but also through processes of fetishization, that is the attribution to certain objects such as maps and documents with special powers. In this complex of desire and fantasy, inscription is very important. People develop a fetishism around certain official documents, even when they cannot "read" these documents according to official standards. The same can be said of bureaucrats who tend to reify the law, in spite of "knowing" that official procedures do not play a decisive role in the outcome of highly politicized land conflicts. In these processes, the "idea of the state" is objectivized and fixed in maps, documents, and other legal texts. However, we should be careful not to equate the strong influence of the culture of the state with a strong state-apparatus. The study of La Canoa precisely showed us that while the culture of the state may be strongly felt in many aspects of life, the state bureaucracy has not had much control over local organizing practices.

*The Dividing Effects of the Bureaucratic Machine*

We saw in this book that personal relationships, rather than collective organizing, have been central to obtaining village projects, jobs, access to credit, protection from the police, important information, and so on. Yet, although these personal political networks may be successful for some, they create hard feelings among people who are “less well connected” with political circles and who therefore have less influence on, for example, the outcome of land conflicts or on village projects. For that reason, all government projects and government intervention is surrounded by gossip, speculation, complaints and criticism of “local” organizers. By privileging a few figures with good political networks, state intervention contributes to the creation of local divisions among people and the fostering of conspiracies. In this way we can conclude that state intervention itself tends to cause divisions and frustrate collective projects. Krotz points out that experiences with cooperatives in Mexico have shown that every intervention in a socially conflictual reality, such as rural Mexico, reveals, aggravates, and creates conflicts (Krotz *et al.* 1985: 36). I would argue, however, that the cause does not lie as such in the conflictual nature of rural Mexican society, but in the particular ways in which “local” people are approached by the bureaucratic machine as well as the sometimes disruptive nature of intervention itself.

The fostering of divisions by the bureaucratic machine became especially clear in the case of the “lost land”, when the ejidatarios had to deal with a continuous stream of contradictory messages from the state bureaucracy. One day they were told that the map was found and the next day that the map never existed. At one office they heard that a MAR engineer would arrive in the ejido tomorrow and another day that the engineer had disappeared because he was accused of corruption. As the ejidatarios work with several brokers and officials at the same time it is never clear why certain things are finally achieved or sabotaged. If something does not work out well, there are many people who can be blamed for it. Sometimes the officials and intermediaries deliberately create divisions by saying that some ejidatarios are leaking information to the enemy, or they blame one of the ejidatarios for giving false information. Several brokers made clear that they only wanted to work with one specific person of the ejido. In this way, the fighters for the “lost land” were entrapped in a world of speculation and conspiracy in which everybody blamed each other for things that went wrong.

Gledhill points out that the essence of the post-revolutionary experience in Mexico is precisely the removal of initiative and bargaining power from the base. Even developments in state policy towards the ejidos, that might be considered “improvements” in a narrowly material sense, are increasingly negative from this point of view (Gledhill 1991: 30). In this sense, from the agrarian reform onwards, top-down and politically motivated forms of state intervention have had a disruptive and dividing influence. Aitken also argues that “the increased entrance of state institutions into local areas can create further fragmentation of communities as local disputes and problems can be mediated potentially through diverse

patrons within the political system” (Aitken 1997: 292). It is precisely this type of intervention by the state apparatus and the fabulous hopes and fantasies generated by the bureaucratic machine which frustrate collective local organizing and explain the so-called lack of unity at the local level. In the light of the foregoing it is ironic that it is precisely in bureaucratic circles that so much emphasis is put on the need for ejidatarios to organize themselves. Many officials blame the ejidatarios for being divided among themselves and for not showing any interest in their own development. Paradoxically, while on the one hand, state intervention fosters division in ejidos and villages, on the other hand officials and development workers blame the ejidatarios for not being more united.

I always felt very uncomfortable when officials asked me to suggest new government programs for the ejido sector. After so many years of study, they felt that I should at least be able to formulate ideas for new development projects. However, I arrived at the conclusion that the problem was not a lack of good ideas or committed officials but the contradictory and divisive influence of the hope-generating machine. But how could I explain to these committed people that, in my view, any new government program tends to create division and contradiction? It was easier to explain to them that it is difficult to formulate general government programs when the government’s aims with regard to ejido lands are different from those of the ejidatarios. Many officials accepted the point that while the success of state intervention is dependent on villagers’ active and continuous involvement or “participation”, many ejidatarios deploy deterritorialized livelihood strategies in which they combine their plot with income from migration to the United States. The issue, however, is how to devise strategies of organization that build upon existing organizing practices that are not coordinated by a center (a board, manager, or assembly) and which are not fixed to particular territories. This is a point to which I now turn.

### **The Role of Organization and Education in Development Debates**

The image of the rural poor as “victims” of exploitation and lacking in organizational capacities is pervasive in much development literature, as are high expectations that new collective forms of organization can improve the situation of the poor (Esman and Uphoff 1984, Korten 1987, Harris 1988, Curtis 1991). Within the various development discourses villagers and ejidatarios are depicted as “traditional”, “unmotivated”, or “apathetic” or, on the other hand, as “victims” of the pervasive and “corrupt” bureaucratic machine. In the best case they are seen as “opportunistic” and highly “self-interested” people unable to align themselves with a wider socio-political project. Harris, who discusses the role of NGOs for development projects, argues that as local organizations grow stronger “they will be able better to resist the pressures of corrupt bureaucracies” (Harris 1988: 8). He adds that those affected by poverty “must understand their needs, select a solution, agree on their

involvement and responsibilities and work out how to organize themselves” (*ibid.*: 9). Following this line of thought it is argued that development workers can “empower the poor” by helping them to develop better forms of organization. In these works “the stress is on the deficiencies of traditional institutions which people, treated as passive objects, are incapable of changing” (Hobart 1993: 12). Today local communities and local organizations are also given a special role in natural resource management. Many works on sustainable development, formulate solutions in terms of returning responsibility for the management of natural resources to local communities (Ghai D. and Vivian j. 1992, Berkes 1995, Baland and Platteau 1996). Together with these ideological notions of community and democratic organizing, we find a stress on education and consciousness raising in development discourses. As Brohman (1996) points out, for a growing number of anti-poverty workers education and “conscientization” are believed to be critical for instilling self-confidence among the poor and making them understand the causes of their problems (1996: 264).

Although these works are based on a real concern for the position of the poor, they can be criticized for their unrealistic views on the relation between organizing and power and for their simplistic use of the notion of community. Firstly, these approaches tend to ignore the multi-dimensional differentiations among the poor or rural people themselves based on economic differences, gender, age, and ethnic identities. As Brohman argues, “the tendency within bottom-up developments projects has been to conceptualize communities in homogeneous terms” (Brohman 1996: 271). Also Leach *et al.* complain that “it is striking the degree to which simplistic notions of community are being reinvented in the context of practical efforts towards community-based sustainable development” (Leach *et al.* 1997: 11, see also Quarles van Ufford 1993 for a similar critique). In this book it has become clear that forms of community are always characterized by differentiation, struggles, and forms of domination. Instead of starting with some notion of community, I would therefore propose to focus on existing practices of organization within defined force fields.

Secondly, even though several approaches claim to start from existing forms of organizing, they do not take into account forms of organizing which are not based on collective projects but are of a more fragmented, non-formal nature. For example, Curtis stresses the importance of organizations through which “people collectively advance their wealth and well-being” and “through which a major part of the value produced is shared either amongst the participants or more widely the community” (Curtis 1991:1). Although he claims to work from a “bottom-up view”, he does not try to understand why in many situations people prefer to work in individual networks instead of collective projects, or why we can find villagers working in continuously changing constellations instead of in more enduring groups. However, as shown in this book, historically developed patterning in organizing practices often implies loose constellations of social networks, within trans-local social fields. Curtis does not take into account that more formalized collective actions may imply political dangers and risks, nor the fact that intervention itself may have a dividing

effect on people. No attention is paid either to the fact that people often have good reasons for adopting a wait and see attitude instead of making a “personal cost-benefit calculation” which shows whether “the benefits of the project outweigh the costs” (Curtis 1991: 30). The point is that people may choose different kinds of involvement and appropriation which change over time and which cannot be captured by a model based on so-called “rational decision-making”. The general point of critique is that these works ignore existing fields of power and the capacity of the poor villagers to analyze their own situation and deploy forms of organizing which fit best in these contexts. By ignoring this capacity of the local people and by ignoring the logics behind existing organizing strategies, these development discourses tend to “disempower” the poor.

In fact, the idea that new forms of organizing can make a dramatic difference to the lives of the poor is based on the notion of social and legal engineering: the belief that by changing rules one can change society. This is a dangerous belief. As Stiefel and Wolfe point out “processes of legal and institutional reform by themselves probably have little chance to sustain a democratic process and prevent new authoritarian structures from emerging” (Stiefel and Wolfe 1994: 200). All rules and procedures may be used and abused in many different ways as organizations are always embedded in wider force fields. As this book has shown, official rules and procedures may influence the development of organizing practices in many different and often unpredictable ways. Although rules and formal structures may influence established practices they can never control or transform them in planned ways (see also Benda Beckmann 1993, Long 1988, 1992, Long and van der Ploeg 1989). We could even argue that the patterning of organizing practices occurs as the side-effect of formal laws and formal structures which in effect are never applied as such.

The stress on new forms of organization in development debates is accompanied by a stress on education and consciousness raising. During the research I found this emphasis also strongly present among officials and other people trying to work for the benefit of the ejidatarios. They said that the ejidatarios should develop their knowledge of official rules in order to fight a corrupt bureaucracy. There are several things that can be said about the possible value of education. On the one hand, it is certainly true that by learning the rules and procedures, it is possible to develop one’s capacities in “playing the game”. Morgan points out that in “seeing organization - with its rewards of success, status, power, and influence - as a game to be played according to their own sets of unwritten rules, organizational game players often have a significant influence on the structure of power relations” (1986: 178). Ejidatarios with more nerve, more knowledge of the rules and better capacities in “playing the game” with officials, will be treated with more caution and will be less easily deceived than others. On the other hand, organizing is not only about acquiring more power by improving one’s qualities in “innocent games”. While for the legalization of illegal land sales in the village, one can build up experience and enhance one’s capacities in dealing with officials, negotiating about transactions and learning the different languages



which can be used, in the case of land conflicts such as the “lost land”, more technical, legal, or organizational knowledge and capacities will not fundamentally change the situation. Learning about the official rules and procedures does not change the existing power relations around serious land conflicts. We could even assert that we engage with a dangerous ideological fallacy when we argue that education can make a crucial difference. There is a danger in this belief of getting lost in a world of voluntaristic fantasies in which we ignore the political dimension of many developmental problems.

### **“Modern” Organization versus Existing Organizing Practices in the Ejido**

When development workers or officials complain about “disorganization” or talk about “a lack of organization” in the ejido they in fact refer to the absence of organizing principles belonging to the ideological construct of the formal, “modern” organization with “transparent” procedures and mechanisms of accountability. I will criticize the assumptions underlying this ideological construct, and confront it with forms of ordering and accountability which have developed in the ejido La Canoa.

#### *Staying out of the Grips of the State Machine*

It is obvious that there are many ways in which people organize activities in their daily life. We saw, for example, the skills ejidatarios from the village have developed in organizing the crossing of the well guarded US border and maintaining themselves in illegal circumstances in *el Norte*. For these matters no organizations are set up but networks are mobilized which provide crucial information, financial support, and practical help. However, the ways in which ejidatarios have also managed to circumvent the law with respect to land transfers is a clear indication that there is absolutely no lack of organizing skills and inventiveness. On the contrary, people have been very inventive and skillful in organizing different personal matters and in defending their own interests in their daily life.

The above mentioned forms of organizing remain to a large degree outside the control of the state bureaucracy. According to Appadurai large residual spaces exist where the techniques of nationhood, directed towards spatial and social standardization, are likely to be either weak or contested (Appadurai 1997: 190). This points to a weakness in governmentality and indicates that there is considerable room to “exit” (Hirschman 1970) from the official system. Thus much organizing remains outside the control of the state and this can have important advantages for the people concerned.

Although in development debates so-called informal or corrupt practices are considered to be detrimental to the poor, they can also provide them with a certain freedom and liberty in their actions. This is well illustrated by the way in which migrant villagers in La Canoa argue that there is much more freedom in Mexico than in the USA since in Mexico rules can

always be bent or “bought”, whereas in the USA rules are applied much more strictly. Ejidatarios feel this strict application of rules as a restriction on their personal freedom. In this study it became clear that there were advantages especially for ejidatarios in remaining at a distance from the law and outside an effective controlling state machine. With respect to the individual ejido plots and the common lands, the ejidatarios and landless villagers acquired a high degree of autonomy. Despite a strong “presence of the state” in the field of individual ejido plots, there was little “control by the state”, and the effects of intervention were minimal.

The phenomenon that by avoiding incorporation into a bureaucratic organization, ejidatarios prevented themselves from becoming subjects controlled by the state, is also discussed by Krotz. He argues that the many illegal transactions with ejido land at the local level, made ejidatarios averse to any new formal form of organizing coming from outside which would restrict their freedom (Krotz *et al.* 1985: 24). This fear of more control from above also becomes evident when ejidatarios are reluctant to have their land plots registered and do not want to provide data on the amount of land and cattle they possess and maize they produce. They fear that information and registration will in the end lead to more control from above (for example, in the form of checks on land use and land transactions and taxes).

#### *Concerning the Difficulty of Autonomous Organization*

Although it is easily accepted that villagers are conscious of the risks involved in engaging the state bureaucratic machine, it is more difficult to see that villagers may be equally reluctant to become involved in “local” or “community based” organizations. Yet, villagers may have good reasons to be reluctant about involvement in *any* type of more formal organization. The point is that it seems impossible to think of any “village” or “community based” organization in which the state does not become involved in one way or the other. What is most striking “is the degree to which the state has become implicated in the minute texture of everyday life” (Gupta 1995: 375). As said, a strong presence of the state does not mean that there is much “state control” but often only that there is much “game playing” which indirectly affects organizing practices. Yet, this still means that *local* organizing initiatives are influenced by state law and bureaucracies.

There are different ways in which the state influences local forms of organizing. For example, in the context of a state bureaucracy that has a history of establishing special contacts with influential well-placed people, it may be much wiser not to be organized in a formal “local” or “community-based” organization. There is a high risk that the leaders or representatives of these organizations will establish personal relations with the state bureaucracy and “there is in fact a danger that the elites may regroup and become re-empowered” by the creation of village development committees (Singh 1988: 44). In this atmosphere it also seems very reasonable to be reluctant to put your money and energy in a local cooperative. So, although many development theories stress the importance of

“building self-reliant village organizations” (Poulton 1988: 32), there are many situations in which it can be important for people to remain outside more formalized forms of organizing, whether these are governmental, non-governmental, local, community based or whatever.

Many people who have worked with peasant organizations in Mexico have explained the difficulties they encountered and many authors have tried to deal with the complexity of peasant organizing in Mexico (Esteva 1987, Foley 1990, Villarreal 1994). Esteva, who has considerable experience in working with peasants in Mexico, describes his frustrating experiences when he and others worked with ideas of empowerment of the peasants and local forms of organization. On the basis of his experience Esteva has distanced himself from second level organizations such as federations, unions, associations, and political parties with which he has had bitter experiences. Instead he tries to organize *issue* campaigns in concert with others through short meetings, well defined in time and space, for the exchange of ideas and experiences, or for specific “battles” that are shared (Esteva 1987: 148).

These experiences with local organizing should be taken into account in the discussions about organization for development. Although in much of this literature a distinction is made between community based organizations, non-governmental organizations, and governmental agencies (Poulton and Harris 1988, Curtis 1991, Bebbington *et al.* 1993), in practice these differences are hard to maintain. For example, from a formal organization perspective, the ejido is an organization which is difficult to categorize. It is not a public sector institution, nor a private organization. It is a form of locally based organization imposed by the government, and subject to many laws and regulations. This ambivalence of the ejido being at the same time “a state apparatus of political control and an organ of peasant representation” (Fox and Gordillo 1989: 131) has always played an important role in the debate concerning the ejido. Yet, the ejido is just one of many organizations and institutions which cannot easily be classified as governmental, non-governmental, local, etc. For that reason we should study the wider force fields in which organizing takes place and examine what relations with the state bureaucracy exist, rather than trying to distinguish (artificial) organizational categories.

### *The Ideology of the Modern Organization*

The idea that “modern” forms of organizing work in the interest of the collectivity and in this way can “empower” the group is stimulated by the fact that many writers on organization define “organizations as groups of people who come together in pursuit of common goals” (Morgan 1986: 341). According to this line of thought it is argued that by introducing organizations with procedures which secure accountability and democratic forms of decision-making, the whole group is empowered, as people with formal responsibilities can be effectively controlled and the decision-making remains with the majority. Yet, the reality of organizing is different. Morgan points out that although “we are usually encouraged to think about organizations as rational enterprises pursuing goals that aspire to satisfy the

interests of all, there is much evidence to suggest that this view is more an ideology than a reality. Organizations are often used as instruments of domination that further the selfish interests of elites at the expense of others. And there is often an element of domination in *all* organizations" (1986: 274-275). Hence, collective and more formal organizations may also become important instruments of control and domination and do not necessarily lead to more power and freedom for the "excluded" or the "poor".

At the same time, organizing practices which do not follow the rules of "modern" organization can show their own mechanisms of control and accountability. An important conclusion of the research on the ejido La Canoa is precisely that situations which at a first glance seem to be disorganized, like the ejido administration, can have strong organizing patterns. I also concluded that the lack or ineffectiveness of a decision-making body does not necessarily mean that there is a blatant abuse of power. We found that there is no center of control regarding ejido management in La Canoa. An ejido commissioner who has much autonomy in his decisions and does not render accounts of what he does, is easily labeled from a modernist point of view as an undemocratic situation. Yet, in La Canoa the autonomy of the commissioner only concerns minor matters and he does not have much influence on what is going on in important questions.

The fact that no decisions are taken at ejido meetings, that the executive committee is not asked to render accounts, and that many ejido affairs are arranged in small loose constellations of people, can also be labeled as an example of an undemocratic form of organizing in which some people can easily abuse their position at the expense of the other ejido members. Yet, in La Canoa very effective means of accountability exist outside the formal structures. Although many things are not discussed at ejido meetings, people find out what is going on in the streets and other places. Commissioners can be criticized by fellow ejidatarios and called to account for the spending of the ejido money in many other settings. So, although meetings are often not held and although the general assembly is not the decision-making body in the ejido, there are other ways in which the ejidatarios check on what is going on and keep control over the executive committee. Effective ways of controlling the commissioner and stopping him in the case of abuse of power include, for example, the use of regional political networks, gossip, and the exclusion of his relatives from other village activities. The politics of honor also plays an important role in the room for manoeuvre that people create for themselves and in the way they are judged by others. Although Lupe, for example, as ejido treasurer spent a large amount of ejido money on a lawyer without the consent of the other ejidatarios, she was never asked to return the money. The other ejidatarios knew that she had not spent the money for her own profit and, although they disagreed with her, they did not want to cause her problems. Yet, Ricardo García, as ejido commissioner, was stopped through political networks when he embezzled ejido money and used it for his own enterprises.

*The Role of the Accountability Discourse of Organization*

Ejidatarios themselves also engage in discussions on “modernity” and the typical features of “modern” forms of organizing. I distinguished the “personal politics discourse of organization” and the “accountability discourse of organization”. Both discourses are very common in the bureaucracy and government propaganda and can be found in the ejido as well. The personal politics discourse of organization provides a language for reflecting on the workings of power. It stresses that power is concentrated by corrupt politicians at the top and that people take formal responsibilities only for the sake of personal enrichment. The personal politics discourse can be used both as a form of social critique or as a way of justifying and rationalizing certain types of outcomes and social relations. The accountability discourse of organization, on the other hand, provides a language of order and control. It stresses the way in which organizations should work according to models of modern organization. When ejidatarios employ this discourse, they say that decisions should be taken at meetings by the ejido assembly, that the executive committee should publicly render accounts and that everybody should follow the official ejido rules. This discourse justifies or asks for certain forms of intervening in ongoing situations which are considered to be unacceptable.

The accountability discourse of organization is only used when ejidatarios are unsatisfied with specific matters and want to “retake control”. As long as the informal operations of small groups in the ejido work well, the other ejidatarios do not mind. Everybody knows that things are not achieved by formal forms of organizing but only through personalized relationships and nobody minds paying officials in balanced transactions. Yet, the accountability discourse is used when it becomes clear that the small group around the commissioner will not achieve the expected result. This was clear in the struggle for the “lost land”. In that case the people who themselves had started working in small groups which decided to spend ejido money, started to refer to the “accountability discourse” when they lost influence in the small group or no longer agreed with the chosen strategies. For example, after having participated himself in these informal groups, the ejido commissioner Raúl started stressing the need of formal forms of organizing when he did not support the actions of the group around Lupe anymore. Only then did Raúl say that decisions should be taken at meetings and not by small groups of friends or members of the executive committee. Furthermore, other people who wanted things to happen in a different way suddenly started using this accountability discourse although they had favored working in informal groups in the beginning. So, the accountability discourse was used as a discursive weapon to retake control. This also happened in the case of the commons in which the ejidatarios were pitted against the landless villagers. Several ejidatarios stressed the need to follow the official rules and the official role of the ejido in the commons, as they hoped that this could help them against the landless people with plots in the commons. In their turn, the landless villagers fought the official rules with a discourse of moral rights and justice.

In conclusion, despite the absence of so-called transparent, democratic organizing mechanisms, in the ejido La Canoa there is no question of easy abuses of power or nepotism. We find strong forms of ordering with respect to control over resources which have developed over time. Only in the case of serious conflicts does the “playing of the formal game” become important. The ejidatarios themselves also use the discourse of modern organization but only in the case of conflicts in which they hope that the formal structure and rules can be an effective weapon against their adversaries.

#### *Local Organization for the Management of the Commons*

The discussion on natural resource management and development is especially interesting for the situation of the commons of La Canoa. As was discussed in chapter six, these are large extensions of mountainous terrains which have become almost totally occupied and have been divided into individual plots which are treated as private property. According to government agencies, these lands show serious problems of erosion. After having read how the management of the commons in La Canoa takes place, it is obvious that the idea of devolving the responsibility of the commons to the local community would be meaningless. Although the ejido is formally responsible for the administration of the use of the commons, in practice the ejido management is powerless in the force field that has developed over time and which transcends the ejido and the locality. Landless families, ejidatarios in Los Angeles, political connections in Autlán, the forestry police, and the drug control police are all involved and try to get some control over different aspects of the commons. Hence, organizing practices are shaped within force fields that are deterritorialized and composed of shifting sets of actors.

Fortunately, several people have criticized the unrealistic images of community and local organizations which dominate policy thinking and development programs for the management of natural resources (Fairhead and Leach 1995, Leach *et al.* 1997, Mosse 1997). In a study on deforestation in Guinea West Africa, Fairhead and Leach, for example, show that environmental management often depends less on community-level authorities and sociocultural organizations than on the sum of a much more diffuse set of relations: a constellation more than a structure (1995: 1027). In this constellation many elements play a role, such as different production patterns and commercialization possibilities. They point out that in one of the regions they studied there have been many social and economic changes, but that “these changes are rendered visible in the landscape largely through changing land use and management priorities, not through organizational ‘breakdown’ and vegetation degradation” (*ibid.*). Two elements in their analysis are interesting for the case of the common lands in La Canoa. First of all, that environmental management depends on a constellation, or in other words a force field, in which many elements play a role. Secondly, that changes in landscape and land use are not necessarily the result of an “organizational breakdown” or “organizational incapacities” but are more often the result of changes in the

socio-economic setting and the wider field of power in which organizing practices develop. What has happened with the commons in the case of La Canoa is not the result of the “lack of organization” at the local level or an “organizational breakdown” but is due to the dynamics of, what I would call, a force field which developed over the years and which transcends the locality, even though officially the management rests with the ejido.

### **Practical implications**

Arguing that organizing processes are embedded in wider force fields, which involve complex webs of relationships and related modes of imagination and interpretation, does not mean that one cannot offer practical suggestions with respect to forms of organizing in these contexts. It only means that we have to be modest in our aims. In order to explain how studies of existing organizing practices can help us to develop strategies to support “local” organization I will discuss some general principles that one could follow in order to establish a project or support existing initiatives in La Canoa. These principles are based on the results of the study of the ejido and village projects discussed in this book. As I am talking in general terms, I can only identify some very broad principles. In doing so I follow Morgan’s precept that an analytical scheme for the study or development of organizations should be seen “as a sensitizing or interpretive process rather than as a model or static framework” and should be able to “cope with ambiguity and paradox” (Morgan 1986: 342). Yet, as one will notice, even these broad principles in the analytical scheme are very different from what is suggested in many manuals on “empowerment” and “local organization for development” (definition of the target group, meetings to discuss problems and define common needs, training of the participants). Although I talk about a hypothetical case in which I, as an outsider, was asked to support or establish a local project, the case is not that theoretical. As discussed in chapter nine, I became involved in a local project for the internal ejido rules and the ejidatarios increasingly asked me to advise them on what to do. This made me think about the best strategies to follow in these situations. It must be added that the reason that some ejidatarios asked me to support them and asked me for advice on the best ways to operate was not because they considered me to have more “knowledge” about their situation than they had, but because they were aware of the fact that I had established networks within the bureaucracy which could be useful.

In order to support a local project, the best thing would be to start with a small group of interested people. A larger group can be informed but it is probable that at the start only a small group will really be interested. Others will take the usual wait and see attitude and perhaps join at a later stage. According to the type of project, there will also be people against it (local wisdom: whatever you do, it will always go against the interest of some people). So, instead of trying to formulate a big formal project around collective interests,

it is preferable to start with a small initiative, with a few people. Depending on the type of project, one should “play the game of relations”, by using influential contacts and different socio-political networks. This mode of operating through personal relations and networking in different directions is a central element of effective organizing. More generally we can argue that “the real effectiveness of organized efforts of the excluded depends to a large extent on the nature of their alliances with other social groups and, of course, on their relations with the state and its agents at the local and national level... the state and its agents at local and national levels remain key actors in the ‘game of participation’” (Stiefel and Wolfe 1994: 204). In addition, I would argue that it is important to pay attention to the interpretative elements in these relationships. A good knowledge of the practices of interpretation and performances which constitute the culture of the state is necessary: one has to know how to deal with people, how to establish personal relationships with officials and representatives, how to do favors and reach agreements. To be successful one has to know the importance of organizing meals, parties, but also the sensibilities involved in nationalist, religious, and regional symbols and histories. However, one also should understand how to distance oneself from the fantasies created by the hope-generating machine which makes many promises but does not keep them. So, one has to develop ways of “playing the game” but keeping a certain distance at the same time. Once the project becomes more crystallized other people at the local level will automatically follow and participate. However, in my view, the links of the project towards the outside world need to be taken care of before one thinks in more detailed terms about the organizational forms at the local level. In this context, the elaboration of formal rules and official organization designs is not the most appropriate way to start.

I will now give another example in order to show the practical implications of this approach towards organization. It has already been shown that many ejidatarios complain about their lack of control over the commons. One of the last serious problems was that of Refugio Sánchez who not only fenced large part of the commons and sold the pasture, but also invaded another terrain and confiscated a public path. Despite official ejido decisions in which the general assembly decided that he should leave the path and the land, and despite formal complaints at different offices in Autlán nothing had changed. This is a specific problem in which the majority of ejidatarios cannot deal with this one ejidatario and many feel powerless. It also shows that formal rules and “democratic” decisions are not sufficient to change unequal power relations. In order to tackle this problem seriously, one should again work through the informal channels and work according to the logic of already existing organizing practices. In this case, the most obvious way would be first to try to deal with the political side of the problem. As it is clear that Refugio has good connections with the police in Autlán, one should fight him in the political arena. In this case political connections at the regional level have to be cultivated and worked upon. Once this higher political support is assured, one could return to the mobilization of the people at the local level again and focus



on the formal part, by following formal administrative procedures. Past experiences have shown that ejidatarios will in the end be mobilized once they feel they have the support of higher levels and if the majority really want to tackle issues even if it involves people they are related to. However, again it would be an elaborate combination of outside political relations, local mobilization, and the following of the official procedures.

So, one always has to study the principal resources at stake, the politically dominant actors and existing forms of ordering. The role played by the formal structures and procedures also has to be clear. Naturally, there are political influences of different orders. While the case of the “Malvinas” and probably of Refugio have serious costs, they are not impossible. Yet, with respect to the “lost land” of La Canoa and manifold other land conflicts in Mexico the situation is different. Here a degree of politicization is necessary, which would mean “a war of positions” which could have life-threatening consequences.

In conclusion, I object to the uncritical use of the notion “modern”, “democratic”, “community based” organizational forms which are seen as the obvious solution to specific socio-political problems or for natural resource management. I argue that all forms of organizing develop in determinate force fields which explains to a high degree the peculiarities of organizing practices. From this perspective I analyzed why in La Canoa practices of organizing acquire such loose and deterritorialized forms rather than adopting forms that are legally recognized (within communities, associations, etc.). While discourses of formal organization may be complicit with bureaucratic attempts to territorialize, and hence control, people’s activities, villagers may prefer to embrace the opportunities created by increased globalization and deterritorialization. As existing organizing practices have important consequences for the implementation of new government programs or development projects, they have to be taken into account in the design of any new development project. Before assuming that new forms of organization can contribute to the solution of fundamental developmental problems we should first ask ourselves how existing organizing forms are embedded in wider fields of power and how they relate to the state bureaucracy and a given culture of the state. Then we should ask ourselves how the organizational forms which we have in mind would fit into these contexts. Furthermore, we should be modest in our aims and accept that there is no way to “control” the organizing process, not even by an external “specialist”.

This conclusion about organization for development can be summarized in seven points:

- (1) We often find organizing practices in the form of non formalized forms, such as different personal networks (family, friendship, *compadrazgo*), group-formations, individual alliances, ad-hoc constellations, and individual relations with officials or higher placed politicians. These organizing forms may be of a loose and deterritorialized nature.
- (2) When we study these apparently loosely structured organizing practices in relation to specific problems or resources over a longer period of time, we will discover certain

forms of patterning and regularities. This patterning can refer to the way in which access to resources is arranged, but also to forms of accountability, the way in which conflicts are dealt with, and so on.

- (3) These historically developed forms of patterning in organizing practices have to be analyzed in relation to the specific force fields in which organizing occurs. For that reason, we have to distinguish the central resources at stake, the different groups with specific positions and interests, and the role of the law, official institutions, and functionaries. We also have to realize that force fields generally transcend local and even national borders.
- (4) More often than not the patterning of organizing practices is of a decentered nature, which means that there is no single center of control and that there is no single group or organizational body which controls the organizing process.
- (5) The notion of modern, democratic organization which stresses public accountability and transparency is an ideological notion. Every type of organizing creates power differences and fosters new (or old) forms of domination. In fact, the patterning of organizing practices often develops as a side-effect of formal organizations and legal regulations and takes unintended forms.
- (6) If one wants to develop new or change existing forms of organizing to improve the position of certain groups, one first has to study the existing organizing practices and the force fields in which these have developed.
- (7) One has to be modest about the aims of such a project as force fields are made up of many different elements which are constantly in flux. This means that one may influence but can never “control” organizing processes.

## Notes

1. Appadurai argues that there is an urgent need to focus on the cultural dynamics of what is now called “deterritorialization”. According to him, the concept deterritorialization “applies not only to obvious examples such as transnational corporations and money markets but also to ethnic groups, sectarian movements, and political formations, which increasingly operate in ways that transcend specific territorial boundaries and identities” (Appadurai 1997: 49).



## Appendix 1

### Land Reform and Ejido Legislation in Mexico

#### *The Constitution of 1917*

Article 27 of the new Mexican Constitution of 1917 established the state's dominion over all land and water in the republic and defined the three principal forms of land tenure: small private property (*pequeña propiedad*: constrained by maximum permitted landholding), ejidos, and agrarian communities. Article 27 formed the basis for the Mexican land reform. The Mexican agrarian law has been changed several times this century. However, the main characteristics of the ejido regime were not changed between 1917 and 1992. The agrarian law of 1917 offered Indian populations the procedure of restitution through which they could reclaim rights to lands that had been taken away from them in the past. If the restitution was awarded they could establish agrarian communities. However, in order to get their lands restituted the Indian communities had to prove their claim by official land titles. Indian communities who started the procedure of restitution of property by claiming the existence of former community rights to certain lands, frequently changed the petition into a request of endowment, once it became clear that they could not provide the necessary documents that would prove the existence of these former rights (Ibarra 1989, Zaragoza and Macías 1980). As a consequence, the establishment of ejidos became a much more common procedure than the creation of agrarian communities. To illustrate this point, between 1916 and 1934, 124 agrarian communities were established as against 5,598 ejidos (Escárcega and Botey 1990: 25).

In the "modern ejido", that was established after the Mexican revolution, a group of landless villagers collectively received land which in most cases was subsequently subdivided on an individual basis. Apart from the parceled agricultural land, the ejidos received dry pasture lands and woodlands for collective use. According to the law, these common lands could not be divided into plots. These common lands generally formed the major part of the ejido, with an average of almost 77 per cent of the total area the ejido received (Reyes *et al.* 1974: 458). Very few collective ejidos were established in which productive activities were carried out on a cooperative basis and land was not divided into individual plots. In some cases these collective ejidos divided the land into individual plots at a later stage.<sup>1</sup>

#### *Procedures for the establishment of ejidos*

New institutions were established to implement the agrarian reform as laid down in the Constitution and agrarian law of 1917. The agrarian law specified the procedures to be followed by the petitioners, as well as the different government agencies in order to grant land to a community. The legal process of the Mexican agrarian reform, as well as the organizational structure and the budget of the land reform departments have been changed

frequently since then. The authorities in the land reform were: the President of the Republic, the State Governors, and the Military Heads. Furthermore, the following agencies were especially created: the National Agrarian Commission, a Local Agrarian Commission in every state and Special Execution Committees. The main institution that took care of agrarian affairs and the procuration of agrarian justice was renamed and reorganized several times since 1915. It was called successively; the National Agrarian Commission (*Comisión Nacional Agraria*), the Agrarian Department (*Departamento Agrario*), the Department of Agrarian Affairs and Colonization (*Departamento de Asuntos Agrarios y Colonización*) and finally the Ministry of Agrarian Reform (*Secretaría de la Reforma Agraria*). In 1992 article 27 of the Mexican Constitution was changed again and together with the new agrarian law a new bureaucracy was introduced alongside the Ministry of Agrarian Reform, the Office of the General Attorney for Agrarian Affairs (*Procuraduría Agraria*). In 1995 a political debate about the abolition of the Ministry of Agrarian Reform started. For the time being it continues to exist.

The requirements for the establishment of an ejido were changed several times. The agrarian law of 1929 stipulated that only villages with at least 20 residents eligible to receive land, would be considered for the establishment of ejidos. (This concerns the Law of Restitution and Endowment of Lands and Water of 1929. I take this law as an example as this was a time in which many petitions for endowment of ejido land were filed.) On the other hand, state capitals and villages of more than 10,000 inhabitants did not have rights to form their own ejido (unless they had less than 200 people eligible for an ejido plot). Individuals were qualified to receive an ejido plot if they were Mexican, male, and at least 16 years old. If they were married, there was no age limit. Women could only receive land if they were widows or family heads. Furthermore, the individuals applying for ejido lands should have lived in the village for at least six months prior to the request for endowment and make a living from agriculture. The agrarian law also established the minimum size of ejido plots. In the 1929 law the minimum size of the ejido parcel varied between three hectares of irrigated land and ten hectares of rainfed arable land of low quality. The ejido lands granted to the community had to be divided into equal plots by an engineer of the Agrarian Department. Afterward these plots were assigned to the different ejidatarios in a lottery. If the number of plots was insufficient for the number of people recognized to have agrarian rights, preference had to be given in the following order: 1) married with children; 2) married without children; 3) single men older than 21 years; 4) single men between 16 and 21 years old. However, it often happened within the ejido that the land was divided between many more people than were officially recognized as ejidatarios. In this way the individual plots were much smaller than the law had prescribed.

The 1929 law also specified which landholdings could be expropriated. The property could be any public or private landholding within a seven kilometer radius of the center of the petitioning community which measured more than 300 hectares of rainfed land of regular quality, 180 hectares of rainfed land of good quality, or 150 hectares of irrigated lands.

Expansion grants were endowed in cases where an ejido did not have sufficient land to sustain the total number of eligible ejidatarios. In many cases ejidos were established by an endowment grant and at a later stage received one or two expansion grants. According to the 1929 law the ejido had to wait until ten years after the endowment grant was awarded, before they could start the request for an expansion grant. Some years later this requirement was canceled and no time was required anymore between endowment and the request for expansion. Many ejidos wrote the petition for expansion immediately after the endowment had taken place.

In the first period of land reform, the land for the constitution of ejidos and agrarian communities was mainly taken from the haciendas. Often several parts of the same hacienda were expropriated in order to satisfy the endowment and expansion needs of different petitioning villages. At a later stage, when population pressure became higher and it became difficult to find private land for expropriation, more and more unexploited national terrains were used for the establishment of new ejidos. Alongside the formation of ejidos and agrarian communities, small private properties were established. These properties were to a high degree the result of the division of the haciendas. First of all many *hacendados* themselves decided to divide their landholdings into smaller units that were put up for sale in order to avoid expropriation for agrarian reform. Secondly, large haciendas were often divided into smaller properties and registered under different names, while in practice they remained one unit of exploitation.

One of the most severe problems of the agrarian reform was the question of indemnization of the owners for the expropriation of their lands. In the beginning of the land reform the agrarian law stipulated that the expropriations would take place by indemnization but without specifying the amount nor the installments of the payments. During the first period, the indemnization was one of the factors that slowed the process of redistribution of the lands. Later on the law was made more specific on these points, but in reality *hacendados* were hardly ever indemnized. Successive governments proceeded with the agrarian distribution without bothering much about the question of payment of the lands. The landholders in their turn refused to accept money as this would have meant that they recognized the legitimacy of the expropriations, something they refused to accept (Reyes *et al.* 1974: 33-34). The ejidatarios who received the land, never have had to pay for it. The endowments and expansions, as well as the restitution of common lands have always been free.

The small private property owners who did not own more land than legally permitted, could receive certificates that their properties could not be expropriated (*certificados de inafectabilidad*). The procedures to get this document were complex and lengthy. But they protected the landowner from expropriations. In 1978 only 15 per cent of all private property owners had a certificate that their property could not be expropriated. This was not only because of the lengthy and complicated procedures, but also due to the fact that many of the owners did not have property titles to the land, lacked maps of their land, or had other kinds

of legal problems. These owners did not want to spend large amounts of money on the regularization of their land (Zaragoza and Macías 1980: 485-486).

The Mexican land reform has often been criticized for its long and complicated procedures, which offered the *hacendados* ample opportunities to defend themselves and delay handing over of the land. Naturally, landowners tried to avoid expropriations by all possible means. An element, which illustrates the great implication that administrative procedures may have for the outcome of agrarian processes, is the fact that the landless people themselves were obliged to take an active role in the request for land. An alternative process which might have produced an effective distribution of land in the shortest possible time - declaring the subjects to be benefited, the lands to be affected for distribution, and the distribution of the lands to the villages, whether they requested it or not- was never proposed. The other way has produced a very slow process of distribution (Zaragoza and Macías 1980: 18). Apart from the slowness of the process, some individuals or entire villages refused to request land for fear of the repercussions from the *hacendados*. Related to this, the individual requirements of the Mexican agrarian reform process have also caused many problems. In the 1920s and 1930s in many parts of the country, population centers did not meet the minimum legal number of individuals with rights to endowment, either because it were very small hamlets or because the people feared the threats by *hacendados* or priests. Under these circumstances, the first agrarian census frequently included individuals who did not meet the legally established conditions. For example, young people were included who were not yet 16 years old, the minimum legal age (Reyes *et al.* 1974: 436).

Yet, as time went on, fear of the *hacendados* waned and the rural population grew. As a consequence more and more landless people requested land and often there was no land available anymore for expropriation in the surroundings of the village. Even if there was land available, there was generally not nearly enough for the number of people in need of land. In this way, a growing number of people in the rural areas became "ejidatarios with reserve rights" (*ejidatarios con derechos a salvo*).<sup>2</sup> These were peasants who were recognized as having individual agrarian rights and who formed part of an ejido village but for whom there was no land available either in the endowment or the expansion grant. The idea was that their rights to the land were acknowledged and that they would receive land plots as soon as more land became available. In reality most of them never received land. To give an idea about the size of this group of people: between 1915 and 1978, there were 834,410 ejidatarios officially registered at the Ministry of agrarian reform with "reserve rights" waiting for a plot in the future (Zaragoza and Macías 1980: 477). To address the problem of land scarcity in ejidos, the law offered the possibility of creating a new population center in another zone. Thus, people in the ejido who had not received land could proceed with a petition for land in another region. However, it was often difficult for people to leave their place of origin and abandon their family. Furthermore, land became scarce everywhere and the land that could be expropriated or was offered in other regions was often of bad quality. Of course, there were and still are extensive landholdings in Mexico on very good lands, but these are or have

been “untouchable” because of their owners’ political connections.

During the procedures for restitution, endowment, expansion, or the creation of new population centers, various steps had to be followed which involved the different agencies of the Ministry of Agrarian Reform and also the State Governors and the Mexican President. At several points in the process requests for land and official decisions with respect to the requests (in the form of presidential resolutions) had to be published in the *Diario Oficial de la Federación* (Federal Gazette). Several maps also had to be made during the procedure for land endowment. First general maps in order to indicate the different large landholdings that were suitable for expropriation and to show the village that requested the land. At a later stage provisional maps were made on which the lands that would form the ejido were indicated. This map was used during the execution of the final resolution. After the land had finally been handed over a definitive map of the ejido had to be made, which legally recognized the ejido borders. Another important document for the legal recognition of the ejido lands was the *acta de posesión y deslinde*. In this document, the engineers described the exact route they had followed during the handing over of the land.

One of the aspects that created most problems during the implementation of the land reform was the land survey and the mapping. The different maps that had to be elaborated at various stages of the process of expropriation and establishment of the ejidos were often not made or later appeared to be “wrong”. For example, in many ejidos the final definitive map of their land which would clarify the legal situation of the ejido in relation to their neighbors, was never made. In 1976, out of a total of 23,561 ejidos, there were 5,000 without a definitive map (Zaragoza and Macías 1980: 461 and 485). Related to this phenomenon is the fact that many ejidos have an “overlap” as the same land of an hacienda was given to several ejidos. Apart from political reasons these phenomena often also had technical or practical causes, such as a lack of resources to send engineers out to do the measuring work or a shortage of educated engineers, who could do this job. Furthermore, the elaboration of a map of individual ejido plots, the final stage of the complicated process of endowment, was seldom carried out. In the great majority of ejidos, after having received the land, it was internally divided among the ejidatarios, without a map or formal registration of the different individual plots ever being made.

The agrarian procedures in Mexico have also been criticized for the fact that the agency responsible for conflict settlement in agrarian matters fell under the Ministry of Agrarian Reform itself. There was no independent agency of conflict settlement. In the case of conflicts with the MAR, it was possible to take out an *amparo* against the MAR. The *amparo* is a constitutional guarantee for the protection of civil rights (the Mexican *Habens Corpus*). This is a provision of the Mexican Constitution which allows people to ask for the protection of the juridical system against the actions of a government authority. However, this often implied that the cases arrived at the office of judges who did not have any understanding of agrarian matters. Furthermore, this option was often only used to drag administrative procedures out for a long time in order to try to settle and negotiate the situation in the



meantime. In the 1920s the *amparo* was extensively used by *hacendados* in order to slow the agrarian reform and avoid expropriation (Reyes *et al.* 1974: 14). At a later stage, ejidatarios also started making use of this right when they thought they were victims of an injustice. To give an idea of the size of this phenomenon: between 1971 and 1976 more than 9,000 proceedings against different actions by the MAR were lodged at the Supreme Court and other related courts (Zaragoza and Macías 1980: 459).

Because of the many irregularities during the implementation of land reform, numerous problems and conflicts over land have since arisen. They have caused great uncertainty and problems in many ejidos in Mexico. These are often internal problems, but conflicts with neighboring ejidos or private landholders also abound. For that reason, many ejidatarios and ejidos have been struggling for many years to clarify their legal situation or have been claiming land that according to them belongs to the ejido but is in hands of other people. On the other hand, other ejidatarios, ejidos, or private landholders have done everything possible to maintain the status quo and not to clarify the legal situation. They have, instead, tried to stop the procedures and falsify documents in order to “legalize” their “illegal” situation. This has resulted in an enormous number of unresolved land disputes at the MAR, the famous *rezago agrario* (agrarian arrears or pending cases), which consists in thousands of unresolved land conflicts.

## Notes

1. The establishment or abolition of a collectively administered ejido had to be agreed upon by 75 per cent of all the ejidatarios. Furthermore, it had to be supported by a technical study of the MAR and approved by the Mexican President (article 130 of the Agrarian Law).
2. “Between 1940 and 1960 the number of Mexicans increased from 20 million to more than 35 million. Most of the newborn were in the countryside” (Hart 1986: 14). (Hart, J. (1986) Agrarian Reform. In: W. Raat and W. Beezley (eds) *Twentieth-Century Mexico*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press. pp. 6-16)

Appendix 2  
**Central Actors and Political Divisions in La Canoa**

**Filomeno Romero:**

The great grandfather of all Romeros in La Canoa and many other villagers. It is said that he arrived in La Canoa from another region. He was a rich landless cattle owner who established good relations with the *hacendado* of La Canoa. Filomeno supported the villagers in their struggle for the establishment of their ejido.

**Miguel Romero:**

One of the eight sons of don Filomeno and one of the founders of the ejido. He turned into a local boss after the establishment of the ejido and was ejido commissioner several times. He is held responsible for the problems with the “lost land” and the confiscation of the plots of several migrant ejidatarios. Miguel and some of his brothers are especially criticized for their control over ejido affairs and the way they used their position to get more land for themselves.

**Hectór Romero:**

A cousin of Miguel Romero, who possesses a part of the “lost land”. Hectór lives in Autlán and belonged to influential political networks. He was head of the security police in Autlán. He was used by several people in La Canoa as an intermediary in cases of conflicts or when political influence was necessary. Among other things, he helped the ejido to stop Ricardo García when he embezzled the ejido money which was intended for the building of the local school. Hectór also made sure that the municipality in Autlán appointed as *delegados* in La Canoa the men that the PRI - Romero network in La Canoa had decided upon.

**Lorenzo Romero:**

One of don Miguel’s twenty children. Lorenzo was the fifth son of Miguel’s first marriage. He was a police officer in Autlán and *delegado* in La Canoa. He has never been commissioner of the ejido, but has held several other ejido posts. During a long period he belonged to the PRI group in the village who decided who would become *delegado* of the village.

**Pedro García:**

One of the men who is seen as founder of the ejido La Canoa. The Garcías became well-to-do through the years. Pedro and his sons are above all criticized for their haughty *cacique* attitude towards other villagers and their exploitation of people working for them.

**Ricardo García:**

The youngest son of Pedro García who became one of the richest ejidatarios. He also bought private property land and possesses a part of the “lost land”. He is disliked by many people in the village because of his haughty attitude and the way he enriched himself at the expense of others. He caused a scandal in the village in the 1970s when he was ejido commissioner and embezzled ejido money which was collected for the building of a local school. In the village he and his family are rather isolated. He only gets along with some close relatives and people in Autlán. At the end of the 1980s he went bankrupt with the tomato cultivation. Since then he is in serious financial trouble and under the constant threat of having his properties seized.

**Manuel Pradera:**

A much respected ejidatario in La Canoa who was frequently asked by different people to accept a post in the ejido, but who always refused to take any formal responsibility.

Although it is impossible to speak of clear factions in the village there are some broad division lines. At the risk of simplification I have used the labels the “establishment” and the “opposition” in chapters that deal with local politics.

**The “establishment”:**

The ejidatarios who are most identified with the PRI networks and have had most control over the choice of *delegados* in the village during the time of the research: Lorenzo Romero, José Romero, Gustavo Romero.

**The “opposition”:**

These men were often called the opposers, troublemakers, contraries or leftists by the “establishment”. They were the only ejidatarios who during the time of my research used a discourse of *cacicazgo* and exploitation when talking about the bosses of the past. They were the ones who had been most active in the struggle for the “lost land” in former years. They had been members of different opposition parties. In the 1970s, several of them were member of the Communist Party: Roberto Sánchez, Iginio Núñez, Ramón Romero, Salvador Lagos.

Appendix 3  
**The Romero and García Families**

*Italics* = female

**Bold** = person who plays a role in the ethnography

**The Romeros**

I. Filomeno Romero x *Emilia Topete*

Jesús  
Javier  
José  
Federico  
a. Andrés  
**b. Miguel** (ch 2, 5)  
*Luisa*  
*Cecilia*  
*Luz María*  
Pedro  
c. Julián

La Andrés Romero x *María Morena*

Esteban  
Sergio  
Inocencio  
Mario  
**a. Ramón** (ch 5,7,8)  
Victor  
Diego  
*Rosaria*  
Faustino  
Francisco  
Joaquín  
Tomás

**I.b. Miguel Romero x Engracia Jiménez**

*Rosa*  
 Francisco  
*Federica*  
 Miguel  
**a. Lorenzo** (ch 2, 4)  
*Soledad*  
 Estanislao  
**b. José** (ch 2, 6)  
 Emilio  
*Ignacia*  
 Filomeno

x **Guadalupe Medina**

*Teresa* (ch 6,7)  
 Ramón  
 e. Juan  
 Federico  
*Lorena*  
 Victor  
 José Luis  
 Mario

x *María Jiménez*  
*Isabel*

**I.c. Julián Romero x Margarita Rivera**

**Gustavo** (ch 3, 5, 6)  
 Pablo  
*Virginia*  
 Samuel  
*Rosa*  
*Josefina*  
 Macedonio  
*Angela*  
 Francisco

**I.b.a. Lorenzo Romero x María Lomelí (ch 4)**

*Dolores* (USA)  
 Rubén (La Canoa)  
 Javier (USA and La Canoa)  
*Carmen* (USA)  
*Teresa* (USA)  
*Mariana* (USA)  
*Josefina* (Tijuana)  
*Adriana* (Tijuana)  
*Luz* (USA)  
 Carlos (USA and La Canoa)  
 Vicente (USA)  
*Yolanda* (USA and La Canoa)

**I.b.b. José Romero x Soledad Lomelí**

*Emilia*  
*Luisa*  
 Ismael  
*Elvira*  
 Sergio  
**Miriam** (ch 2)  
 Inés

*Dolores Romero* x Luis Ramos (USA) 8 children

Rubén Romero x *Rosa Durán* (La Canoa) 5 children

Javier Romero x *Elena Figueroa* (USA and La Canoa) 2 children

Carlos Romero x *Magdalena Juárez* (USA and La Canoa) 1 child

The Garcías

I. José García x *Delfina Vargas*  
 Raúl  
 a. Juan

I.a. **Juan García** x *Hermelinda Lomeli*  
 José  
 a. Rubén  
*Aurora*  
*Esperanza*  
 Juan  
*Elena*  
 Tomás  
*Margarita*  
**b. Ricardo** (ch 2,3,6)

I.a.a Rubén García x *Antonia Núñez*  
 Carlos  
 Everardo  
*Eloisa*  
*Josefina*  
**Vicente** (ch 6, 7)  
*Antonia*  
 Gabriel  
 José

I.a.b. **Ricardo García** x *Ignacia Topete*  
*Eva*  
 Ricardo  
*María*  
**Juan** (ch 2)  
*Ignacia*  
 Oscar  
 Miguel  
*Sonia*  
*Patricia*  
*Elizabeth*  
*Laura*

Appendix 4

**Ejido Commissioners of La Canoa and the Planillas of the 1991 Elections**

**Executive committee 1988 - 1991**

	<b>Executive Committee</b>	<b>Substitutes</b>
commissioner:	Gustavo Romero	Lorenzo Romero
secretary:	Mauro Bautista	Gabriel García
treasurer:	José Romero	Cristina Hernández

	<b>Vigilance Committee</b>	<b>Substitutes</b>
commissioner:	Juan Alcázar	Pablo Romero
secretary:	Rafael Cosío	Francisco Pradera
treasurer:	Francisco Romero	Ernesto García

credit:	Salvador Lagos
commercialization:	Ricardo García Jr.
social action:	Esperanza Aviles

***Planillas at the elections for executive committee in 1991***

**planilla 1**

	<b>Executive Committee</b>	<b>Substitutes</b>
commissioner:	Raúl Pradera	Iginio Núñez
secretary:	Vicente García	David Obregón
treasurer:	Guadalupe Medina	Samuel Romero

	<b>Vigilance Committee</b>
commissioner:	Roberto Sánchez
secretary:	Rolando Lomelí
treasurer:	Francisco Pradera

**first *planilla* 2**

	<b>Executive Committee</b>	<b>Substitutes</b>
commissioner:	Juan Alcázar	
secretary:	Ricardo García Jr.	
treasurer:	José Romero	

others: Esteban Romero, Ignacio Romero, Francisco Pradera, Guadalupe Medina, Salvador Lagos

**final planilla 2**

	<b>Executive Committee</b>	<b>Substitutes</b>
commissioner:	Juan Alcázar	Francisco Romero
secretary:	Ricardo García Jr.	Esteban Romero
treasurer:	José Romero	Dorotea Romero

	<b>Vigilance Committee</b>
commissioner:	Miguel Romero
secretary:	Abelardo Romero
treasurer:	Virgilio Ramos

There was no registration in the ejido of the different executive committees since the establishment of the ejido. Through ejido documents which were signed by the executive committee and through information provided by the ejidatarios, I could establish the following list of ejido commissioners.

***Ejido commissioners of La Canoa***

<b>1994 - 1997</b>	Ramón Romero	<b>1964 - 1967</b>	Gustavo Romero
<b>1991 - 1994</b>	Raúl Pradera	<b>1961 - 1964</b>	Gustavo Romero
<b>1988 - 1991</b>	Gustavo Romero	<b>1958 - 1961</b>	Daniel Fábregas†
<b>1985 - 1988</b>	Ignacio Romero	<b>1955 - 1958</b>	Pablo Romero†
<b>1982 - 1985</b>	Francisco Romero	<b>1952 - 1955</b>	Daniel Fábregas†
<b>1979 - 1982</b>	Sergio Romero† replaced by Ramón Romero	<b>1949 - 1952</b>	Miguel Romero†
<b>1976 - 1979</b>	Macario Paz	<b>1946 - 1949</b>	Epitacio Ramírez†
<b>1973 - 1976</b>	Rubén García	<b>1943 - 1956</b>	Miguel Romero†
<b>1970 - 1973</b>	Ricardo García	<b>1940 - 1943</b>	Epitacio Ramírez†
<b>1967 - 1970</b>	Marcos Vargas		

Although it is tempting to draw conclusions on the basis of the fact that so many Romero men have been commissioner, this fact alone does not give much insight into local politics. The point is that the Romeros are in the majority in the village and among the Romeros there are ejidatarios of the “establishment” and ejidatarios of the “opposition” and ejidatarios who do not clearly belong to one or the other. Gustavo Romero has been three times commissioner, but unlike his uncle Miguel he is not criticized for dirty ejido politics. Despite his good contacts with regional influential men and despite him being one of the wealthiest men in the village, Gustavo never aspired to become a local boss and an intermediary in relation to the bureaucracy.



## Appendix 5

### Main Actors in the Struggle for the “Lost Land” in 1991-1995

**Initiators of the struggle under the presidency of Salinas and organizers of the planilla for the elections of the executive committee of the ejido of 1991**

*main figures:*

Iginio Núñez, Salvador Lagos

*supported by:*

Ignacio Romero, Alberto Alcázar, Ignacio Alcázar and others

*winning executive committee:*

Raúl Pradera (commissioner), Vicente García (secretary), Lupe Medina (treasurer)

**Reconfiguration of networks after some time of struggle for the “lost land”**

main figure: Lupe Medina maintains contacts with Father López and lawyer Salazar

mainly supported by: Ramón Romero and Teresa

*People who are excluded:*

Iginio Núñez: because of his difficult attitude

Salvador Lagos: decides to quit under pressure from his family

Raúl Pradera (commissioner): does not believe in the recovery of the land anymore

Vicente García (secretary): remains loyal to his uncle Ricardo who possesses part of the “lost land”

#### **Brokers**

**Father López:** introduces the ejidatarios to the lawyer Salazar

**Licenciado Salazar:** lawyer affiliated to the CNC Guadalajara

**Pablo:** engineer of the Central Campesina Independiente (CCI)

**Antonio Macías:** gate keeper at a MAR office in Mexico City, assistant of the head of the Liga de Comunidades Agrarias

#### **MAR Guadalajara and the engineers**

**Pelayo:** head of the MAR office in Guadalajara

**Ramírez:** head of the engineers at the MAR office in Guadalajara

**Serrano:** the first engineer who visits La Canoa, dies of cirrhosis

**Castañeda:** the second engineer to visit La Canoa; works ostentatively on the side of the

*pequeños propietarios*, walks around with one of the daughters of the *pequeños propietarios*  
**Morales:** the third engineer to visit La Canoa, measures one of the fields of the “lost land”

**Important person in the past**

Macario Paz: ejido commissioner who was very active in the struggle for the “lost land” in the 1970s. During his term as commissioner the ejido worked with the Communist Party.

<b>Force Field Around</b>	<b>Ch.</b>	<b>Resources at Stake</b>	<b>Central Actors</b>	<b>Influence of Law and the Bureaucracy</b>	<b>Organizing Practices</b>	<b>Reflective talk Ideological Notions</b>	<b>Consequences</b>
<i>Inheritance of ejido plots; choice of heir</i>	4, 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>individual ejido plots</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>family members, close kin</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>little influence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>parents: continuously putting out feelers to their children; their behavior (responsible, irresponsible, caring or not); their plans for the future; their capacities of being a worthy ejidatario</li> <li>children: care creates rights and expectations</li> <li>relations extend towards the USA</li> <li>continuous speculation about inheritance, frequent change of heir</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>gender and generational ideologies,</li> <li>ideology of the family</li> <li>land as family patrimony</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>many problems, frictions and emotions within families surrounding inheritance decisions</li> </ul>
<i>Recovery of the "Lost Land"</i>	7, 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>large areas of irrigated land</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ejidatarios</li> <li>pequeños propietarios</li> <li>officials</li> <li>brokers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>central role by offering endless openings and hopes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>forming small changing constellations of people</li> <li>working with many brokers at the same time</li> <li>continuous "flows" of people and documents in different directions and between different cities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>continuous speculation about, power, politics, corruption, and the Mexican President</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ejidatarios fight a "lost battle" and are powerless</li> </ul>
<i>Village projects</i>	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>government resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ejidatarios with good political connections</li> <li>political elite in Autlán</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>important as resources are channeled through bureaucratic channels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>formation of individual political networks of a few of ejidatarios</li> <li>cultivation of relations with influential people in Autlán</li> <li>organization of village projects by a small group of ejidatarios</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"ideology of the land" reflects frustration of landless villagers</li> <li>much gossiping and complaining about village projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>dominance of village projects by well-connected ejidatarios</li> <li>no "hegemonic" control; with loss of influential relations, people lose influence</li> </ul>
<i>Renting out of ejido plots by migrants</i>	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>individual ejido plots</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>migrant ejidatarios</li> <li>other ejidatarios/villagers</li> <li>ejido commissioner</li> <li>MAR officials</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>strong influence of the law as a "distant threat"</li> <li>law has never been applied</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>renting out of plots to people who can be "trusted"</li> <li>much "legal game playing"; returning for the IUP meetings, paying the ejido land tax as proof of residence in the ejido; paying officials and commissioners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>notions of trust in personal deals</li> <li>ideology of individual responsibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>much illegal renting out of land by migrants</li> <li>serious problems and tensions around renting arrangements</li> </ul>

Force Field Around	Ch.	Resources at Stake	Central Actors	Influence of Law and the Bureaucracy	Organizing Practices	Reflective talk Ideological Notions	Consequences
<i>Sale of ejido plots</i>	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>individual ejido plots</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ejidatarios and relatives</li> <li>other villagers</li> <li>ejido commissioner</li> <li>MAR officials</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>played a small role as a "distant threat"</li> <li>law has never been applied</li> <li>little control by the MAR</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>individual transactions based on trust and honor and on support by ejido commissioner and the ejido assembly</li> <li>"legal game playing"; legalizing illegal transactions with the support of MAR officials</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>land as family patrimony</li> <li>individual responsibility,</li> <li>honor and trust</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>an active illegal ejido land market</li> <li>much autonomy for the ejidatarios; buyers and sellers</li> </ul>
<i>Management of the ejido</i>	6, 7, 8, 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>variable resources:</li> <li>disputed urban plots; <i>coamiles and esquilmo</i>, etc.</li> <li>ejido credit; ejido pasture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ejido commissioner</li> <li>ejidatarios</li> <li>regional political figures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>only in the case of serious conflicts the formal legal procedures become important</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>commissioner operating with a high degree of autonomy</li> <li>few meetings are held and no decisions are taken during meetings</li> <li>meetings fulfill symbolic roles of inclusion and exclusion</li> <li>matters are settled through personal political networks</li> <li>indirect practices of accountability and control</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>continuous discussion about organization: the "accountability discourse" of organization versus the "personal politics" discourse of organization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>no central ejido management</li> <li>all forms of ejido property (land for houses, commons, arable land) have turned into a form of private property</li> <li>resolution of conflicts at high social costs</li> </ul>
<i>Access to common lands</i>	3, 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>common lands; <i>coamil and esquilmo</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ejidatarios</li> <li>landless sons of ejidatarios</li> <li>landless villagers who are not sons of ejidatarios</li> <li>ejido commissioner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>hardly any influence so far</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>individually asking permission of the commissioner</li> <li>taking "free" land without asking permission</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>discussions on differing rights between ejidatarios, sons of ejidatarios, and landless villagers</li> <li>use of discourse of "formal rights" versus discourse on "moral rights" and "social principles" of the Mexican revolution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>common lands have turned into private property for ejidatarios as well as landless villagers</li> <li>common lands have turned into a commodity which is used for speculation, passed on to children or sold</li> <li>tensions are growing between ejidatarios and landless villagers</li> </ul>

Schematic overview of organizing practices in different force fields

## Glossary

<i>banda</i>	popular music band
<i>birria</i>	traditional dish prepared with pork or goat meat
<i>casa ejidal</i>	ejido house; the building where the ejidatarios hold their meetings
<i>cerro</i>	mountainous terrain
<i>coamil</i>	term used for an intensive form of maize cultivation in the hills, as well as for the plot where this maize is sown
<i>coamilero</i>	peasants who borrow <i>coamiles</i> from the ejido
<i>comuneros</i>	members of a an agrarian community ( <i>comunidad</i> )
<i>comunidad</i>	a form of collective land tenure which differs from the ejido and which was above all established by indigenous communities; the ejidatarios and villagers of La Canoa use the term <i>comunidad</i> to refer to the ejido
<i>corral</i>	yard near the house used for animals and cultivation of crops
<i>corrida</i>	bullfight
<i>cuadrilla</i>	work group organized for the cutting of the sugarcane
<i>esquilmos</i>	fields of the commons which are used for the herding of cattle
<i>lote</i>	a plot of land for the construction of a house
<i>licenciado</i>	title used for a university degree, but which is often used to refer to lawyers
<i>machete</i>	long knife used for cutting down weeds in the fields
<i>mariachi</i>	popular music characteristic of the state of Jalisco
<i>mezcal</i>	a distilled liquor made from the heart of <i>agave</i> plants
<i>monte</i>	hills with woodland
<i>piñata</i>	a pot of stone (often filled with sweets) which is broken with sticks
<i>plaza</i>	central square in town
<i>pozole</i>	special Mexican dish consisting of soup of cooked maize with pork
<i>rodeo</i>	a common form of diversion in rural villages in which young men try to stay as long as possible on the back of a bull
<i>taco</i>	a tortilla with some food in it
<i>tamales</i>	a traditional Mexican dish consisting of maize dough cooked within maize leaves often containing meat or sugar and fruits
<i>tortillas</i>	staple made from maize dough, similar to pancakes
<i>tortillería</i>	shop where tortillas are made and sold

## Acronyms

ANAGSA	Aseguradora Nacional, Agrícola y Ganadera, S.A. (National Agricultural and Livestock Insurance Company which provided insurance subsidies for ejidatarios working with credits from BANRURAL)
BANRURAL	Banco Nacional de Crédito Rural (National Bank for Rural Credit)
CCI	Central Campesina Independiente (Independent Peasant Confederation)
CIOAC	Central Independiente de Obreros Agrícolas y Campesinos (Independent Farmworkers and Peasants' Confederation)
CNC	Confederación Nacional Campesina (National Peasant Confederation, affiliated to PRI)
CONASUPO	Compañía Nacional de Subsistencias Populares (National Subsidized Staple Products Company)
FIRA	Fideicomisos Instituidos en Relación a la Agricultura (Second-level government funding for agriculture)
INEGI	Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática (National Institute for Statistics, Geography, and Informatics)
PA	Procuraduría Agraria (Attorney General's Office for Agrarian Affairs)
PAN	Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party)
PRD	Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Party of the Democratic Revolution)
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party).
PROCAMPO	Programa de Apoyos Directos al Campo (Direct Agricultural Support Payments Programs)
PROCEDE	Programa de Certificación de Derechos Ejidales y Solares Urbanos (Ejidal Rights Certification Program)
PRONASOL	Programa Nacional de Solidaridad (National Solidarity Program)
RAN	Registro Agrario Nacional (National Agrarian Registry)
SARH	Secretaría de Agricultura y Recursos Hidráulicos (The former Ministry of Agriculture and Hydraulic Resources)
SOLIDARIDAD	Programa Nacional de Solidaridad (National Solidarity Program)
SRA/MAR	Secretaría de la Reforma Agraria/ Ministry of Agrarian Reform



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## Summary

### **In the Name of the Land: Organization, Transnationalism and the Culture of the State in a Mexican Ejido**

This study is based on research carried out during several periods from mid 1991 to mid 1995 in the ejido La Canoa in Jalisco, western Mexico, and in several government agencies. The study focuses in particular on the period between the 1930s and 1992 when the Mexican agrarian law was fundamentally changed. The last chapters of the book discuss the change of the agrarian law in 1992.

The study shows how over the years organizing practices developed with respect to the access to ejido plots and the management of the ejido which differed from the prescriptions of the law. For example, the division of the arable plots, the selling of these plots, renting them out, or leaving them unused were all illegal practices which became common in ejidos throughout Mexico. It also became a common phenomenon that instead of the ejido assembly, in which all ejidatarios are represented, the head of the ejido, the commissioner, took decisions on his own. Likewise, the rules were also seldom applied in the resolution of land conflicts by the Ministry of Agrarian Reform (MAR). Land conflicts between ejidatarios and private land owners abound and many have never been resolved. In this study the conflict of the "lost land" is discussed. This concerns a conflict over land that officially belongs to the ejido La Canoa but which since the thirties has been in the hands of several private landholders

In this book it is argued that the labeling of the above mentioned practices in a functionalist way as "disorganized" or "corrupt" forms part of modernist discourses of development and does not bring us any nearer to an understanding of these dynamics, nor to an insight into the precise role played by the official rules and formal institutions. It is argued that these practices are the result of active organizing by ejidatarios, as well as officials and other social actors. Furthermore, it is shown that in the myriad of activities which are labeled as "illegal", "disorganized", and "corrupt" we can also distinguish certain organizing patterns. For example, in chapter five it was shown that in the many "illegal" arrangements with ejido plots we can distinguish a certain pattern in the way these were organized and that in these arrangements other ejidatarios, officials of the MAR, the ejido commissioner, and the ejido assembly play specific roles. In chapter six a different form of patterning of organizing practices has been discussed. There it was shown, among other things, that the executive committee of the ejido never renders accounts of their activities at public ejido meetings, but that alternative forms of accountability exist and other effective mechanisms by which the ejidatarios control their executive committee. Namely, through informal channels, gossips, and regional political networks. In this context the ejido meetings have turned into arenas for bickering and confrontation and have developed symbolic roles

in distinguishing between “insiders” and “outsiders”. At the same time the official ejido structure becomes important in the case of serious conflicts. Then the “formal game is played” together with the use of informal political pressures.

It is argued that this structuring of organizing practices in unexpected and often “invisible” ways always occurs around the management of resources, and in relation to institutional settings. This book sets out the way that all forms of organizing take place in wider force fields. A force field is defined as a field of power and struggle between different social actors around certain resources or problems and around which certain forms of dominance, contention, and resistance may develop, as well as certain regularities and forms of ordering. The assumption is that all forms of organizing, even the most “private” or “illegal” ones, develop within fields of power. In this view, the patterning of organizing processes which we may find are not the result of a common understanding or normative agreement, but of the forces at play within the field. It has been shown that the development of forms of ordering in organizing practices is closely related to forms of exclusion of certain social categories. Different groups can be distinguished with differing roles, different access to resources, and differing rights. The concept of force field also helps us to analyze the precise role of the law and official procedures.

The assumption is that multiple force fields exist which develop their own dynamic and have different specific implications for the people involved. This means that in relation to certain resources and problems ejidatarios may develop a high degree of autonomy, while around others they have little “room for manoeuvre”. The organizing practices around the arable plots in the ejido led to much autonomy for the ejidatarios, though the law, the bureaucratic procedures and the officials were always present as a “distant threat”. On the other hand, the bureaucracy has been much less present in relation to organizing in the common lands. Around the commons ejidatarios and landless villagers have great autonomy to act without interference from the state bureaucracy. While, around the arable land and the commons the ejidatarios have developed a high degree of autonomy, around the “lost land” they obviously operate in a force field in which they are relatively powerless. There we find ejidatarios in a hopeless fight against private landowners. Hence, we cannot talk in a generalized way about the structural position of ejidatarios vis-à-vis regional elites, or about the nature of their relation with the Mexican state. This differs according to the resources and problems at stake.

In this approach, social theorizing, reflexive talk, and story-telling by social actors are considered to be a central part of the organizing process. These dialogues reflect a continuous active engagement of social actors with the world around them. Furthermore, the creation and re-creation of stories are considered to be a way of ordering the world around us and of arriving at the best strategies to be followed in the organizing process. Organizing practices are always related to the production of meaning and in this book it has been shown how the organizing practices around different resources in specific force fields are accompanied by reflective talk, ideological notions, irony, and the production of multiple meanings through

imagination and the work of interpretation. These dialogues reflect forms of struggle, contention, and resistance in relation to existing organizing practices and relations of power.

As has been shown in this book, ejidatarios have a complicated and contradictory relation with the Mexican state. The state was their ally in the fight against the hacendados during the period of agrarian reform and it has also been the provider of all kinds of services (schools, water, electricity). However, in other instances the state is viewed as a corrupt and violent enemy which is greatly feared and distrusted by the people. Hence, we have an image of the Mexican state as the protector and oppressor of the ejidatarios at the same time. Images of the state conjoin notions of evil with goodness. For that reason, the ejidatarios may be supportive and enthusiastic towards the Mexican President at one moment, and cynical and distrustful about his speeches at another moment. Or they can laugh about themselves being deceived by the democratic and liberalizing discourse of a president who later on proved to be one of the worst swindlers the country ever saw. The ejidatarios can be proud of being part of the Mexican nation-state project but at the same time they can criticize powerholders for their corruption and for their squeezing of the peasants.

I have argued that the continuous theorizing about power and politics in society not only concerns a rationalization of actions but also an investment in the "idea of the state", in other words, an investment in the belief of the existence of a center of control. This does not mean that practices of authority and control do not exist but that people tend to look for a coherence and logic which does not exist. These imaginations which are constitutive of the "culture of the state", are based upon experiences and are mediated by a series of governmental techniques and by the media, education, and movies. The "culture of the state" is central to the operation of the bureaucracy as a "hope-generating machine". The "hope-generating machine" gives the message that everything is possible, that cases are never closed, and that things will be different from now on. This permeates all aspects of life and triggers powerful responses. However, rather than producing a certain rationality and coherence, the bureaucratic machine generates enjoyments, pleasures, fears and expectations. Although people are never naive, during certain periods they can become inspired and enthusiastic about new programs and new openings that are offered to them. Yet, doubts never totally disappear.

It is also argued that in this context of a decentered "hope-generating machine" without a clear center and coherence, brokers do often not play a role in effectively connecting ejidatarios to "the state", but play a role in the imagination of state power. By suggesting that they are the "right connection" to higher levels and to the "center of control" brokers contribute to the "idea of the state". In the same way, by searching for the "right connection" which can help them to resolve their problems, ejidatarios invest in the "idea of the state". Ejidatarios and bureaucrats are implicated in the cultural representation of the state through processes of rationalization, speculation, the construction of fantasies, etc. but also through processes of fetishization, that is the attribution to certain objects such as maps and documents with special powers. In this complex of desire and fantasy, inscription is very

important. People develop a fetishism around certain official documents, even when they cannot “read” these documents according to official standards. The same can be said of bureaucrats who tend to reify the law, in spite of “knowing” that official procedures do not play a central role in the outcome of highly politicized land conflicts. In these processes, the “idea of the state” is objectivized and fixed in maps, documents, and other legal texts. Hence, see a “re-enchantment of governmental techniques” as they acquire symbolic meanings beyond their administrative functions.

## Resumen

# **En el Nombre de la Tierra: Organización, Transnacionalismo y la Cultura del Estado en un Ejido Mexicano**

Este estudio se basa en una investigación realizada durante varios períodos - desde mediados de 1991 hasta mediados de 1995 - en el ejido La Canoa en Jalisco, Occidente de México, y en distintas agencias gubernamentales. El ejido en México es un régimen de propiedad corporativo que fue instaurado después de la revolución.

El ejido La Canoa fue fundado en 1938 y está compuesto por terrenos de cuatro haciendas expropiadas. Los terrenos comprenden parcelas agrícolas, tierras de uso común que no fueron divididas en parcelas individuales y un conjunto de lotes urbanos. Casi todas las familias en La Canoa recibieron una parcela individual y recibieron derechos de usar las tierras comunales. En el transcurso del tiempo la población del pueblo ha crecido fuertemente y actualmente la mayoría de las familias en la Canoa no posee parcelas agrícolas. Sin embargo si se permite el uso de las tierras comunales y la construcción de casas en el segmento urbano del ejido. La migración a los Estados Unidos es muy importante para la economía local y muchos pobladores permanecen temporalmente o definitivamente en Los Angeles.

El estudio muestra cómo prácticas de organización se han desarrollado durante los años con respecto al acceso a parcelas ejidales y la administración del ejido, prácticas que difieren notablemente de lo que la ley prescribe. Por ejemplo, la división de parcelas agrícolas, la compra y venta de parcelas y el arrendamiento son prácticas ilegales comunes en muchos ejidos en México. Otro fenómeno común es que el comisario ejidal tome todas las decisiones personalmente sin consultar la asamblea ejidal. Similarmente, las reglas son aplicadas raramente en la resolución de conflictos por la tierra por la Secretaría de Reforma Agraria. Conflictos entre ejidatarios y pequeños propietarios (propietarios privados que pueden poseer grandes extensiones de tierra) abundan y muchos nunca han sido resueltos. En este estudio se analiza uno de estos conflictos, el de "la tierra perdida". Se trata de un conflicto por tierra que oficialmente pertenece al ejido de La Canoa pero que nunca le ha sido entregado y que desde los años treinta está en manos de varios pequeños propietarios.

El argumento central del libro es que el etiquetamiento de estas prácticas de una manera funcionalista como "desorganizadas", o "corruptas", forma parte de un discurso modernista de desarrollo que nos impide entender el conjunto de dinámicas organizativas. Tampoco nos ayuda a entender cual es el papel preciso de las reglas oficiales y de las instituciones formales. En el estudio se muestra que estas prácticas son el resultado del accionar de un conjunto de actores: ejidatarios y pobladores no-ejidatarios, funcionarios gubernamentales y las élites regionales. También se analizan patrones de organización que surgen en actividades muchas veces denominadas como "ilegales", "desorganizadas" y "corruptas". Por ejemplo,



en el capítulo cinco se analiza el papel que ejidatarios, funcionarios de la Secretaría de Reforma Agraria, el comisario ejidal y la asamblea ejidal juegan en arreglos ilegales con parcelas ejidales. En el capítulo seis se analizan otros patrones de organización y se muestra que, entre otras cosas, la mesa directiva del ejido nunca rinde cuentas de sus actividades en asambleas ejidales y que existen otros mecanismos a través de los cuales ejidatarios controlan la mesa directiva. Este control se hace efectivo a través de canales informales de comunicación, rumores, y redes políticas regionales. En este contexto las asambleas ejidales se han convertido en arenas de confrontación y de riñas y adquieren un papel simbólico en la distinción entre ejidatarios y no-ejidatarios. Sin embargo, en el caso de conflictos serios la estructura oficial del ejido sí adquiere gran importancia. En estos casos se sigue el “juego formal”, en combinación con presiones políticas de tipo informal.

Este ordenamiento de prácticas organizativas en formas no anticipadas y muchas veces “invisibles”, siempre ocurre alrededor de ciertos recursos y en determinados contextos institucionales. Además se asume que todas las formas de organización, incluso las más informales o ilegales, se desarrollan dentro de campos más amplios de poder que en el libro denominamos campos de fuerza. Se define un campo de fuerza como un campo de poder y de lucha entre diferentes actores sociales alrededor de ciertos recursos y problemas y alrededor de los cuales ciertas formas de dominación, controversias y resistencia surgen, además de ciertas regularidades y formas de ordenamiento. En el estudio se analiza cómo el ordenamiento de prácticas organizativas en el ejido está estrechamente relacionado a patrones de diferenciación entre ejidatarios y de exclusión de otras categorías sociales. El concepto de campos de fuerza también es útil en el análisis del rol preciso de la ley y de los procedimientos oficiales.

Lo anterior significa que en relación a ciertos recursos y problemas ejidatarios pueden desarrollar un alto grado de autonomía, mientras que alrededor de otros solamente tienen un pequeño margen de maniobra. Las prácticas organizativas alrededor de las parcelas agrícolas en el ejido permiten un alto grado de autonomía para los ejidatarios, a pesar de que la ley, los procedimientos burocráticos y los funcionarios siempre están presentes como una “amenaza distante”. Por otro lado, la burocracia ha estado mucho menos presente en relación a formas organizativas en las tierras de uso común. Alrededor de estas tierras los ejidatarios y los pobladores sin tierra mantienen mucha autonomía sin que se permita la interferencia de la burocracia estatal. Mientras que alrededor de las parcelas agrícolas y las tierras de uso común los ejidatarios han desarrollado un alto grado de autonomía, alrededor de la “tierra perdida” ellos obviamente operan en campos de fuerza en los que tienen poco poder. En ello encontramos a ejidatarios envueltos en una lucha sin esperanzas contra los pequeños propietarios. Podemos concluir que no se pueden hacer generalizaciones sobre la posición estructural de los ejidatarios en relación con otras categorías de propietarios o sobre sus relaciones con el estado Mexicano. Mucho depende de los recursos y problemas en juego.

Dentro de esta perspectiva formas de teorización social y de narración reflectiva por parte de actores sociales son considerados como una parte central en el proceso de organización.

Estos diálogos reflejan un compromiso continuo y activo de los actores sociales con el mundo a su alrededor. Además, la creación y re-creación de historias es considerada como una forma de ordenar la realidad y de desarrollar estrategias de organización. Prácticas organizativas siempre están relacionadas con la producción de significados y en este libro se ha mostrado como las prácticas organizativas alrededor de diferentes recursos en campos de fuerza específicos están acompañados de narración reflectiva, de nociones ideológicas, ironía y la producción de múltiples significados por medio de formas de imaginación y de interpretación. Estos diálogos reflejan formas de lucha, disputas y formas de resistencia en relación con formas existentes de organización y relaciones de poder.

Ejidatarios tienen una complicada y contradictoria relación con el estado Mexicano. El estado fue un aliado en la lucha contra los hacendados durante el período de reforma agraria y también ha realizado una serie de servicios (escuelas, agua, electricidad). Pero en otras instancias el estado es visto como un enemigo corrupto y violento, muy temido por la gente. Existe una imagen del estado Mexicano como simultáneamente el protector y opresor de los ejidatarios. Imágenes del estado combinan nociones de generosidad y maldad. Por esa razón los ejidatarios a veces asumen una actitud positiva y entusiasta hacia el Presidente Mexicano y en otros momentos se comportan de una manera cínica y reciben sus discursos con mucho recelo. Los ejidatarios pueden estar orgullosos de ser parte del proyecto de construcción del estado-nación Mexicano, pero al mismo tiempo pueden criticar a los poderosos por su corrupción y por explotar a los campesinos.

He argumentado que la continua teorización sobre poder y política en la sociedad no solamente significa una racionalización de acción social pero también una inversión en la "idea del estado", en otras palabras, una inversión en la creencia sobre la existencia de un centro de control. Esto no significa que prácticas de autoridad y control no existan pero que los actores sociales tienden a buscar una cierta coherencia y lógica donde no está. Estas imaginaciones son constitutivas de "la cultura del estado" y están basadas en experiencias que son mediatizadas por una serie de técnicas de gobernabilidad y por los medios, la educación, y el cine. La cultura del estado juega un papel central en la operación de la burocracia como una "máquina generadora de esperanzas". La "máquina generadora de esperanzas" lanza mensajes comunicando que todo es posible, que los casos nunca se cierran totalmente y que las cosas siempre pueden cambiar. Sin embargo, en vez de producir una cierta racionalidad y coherencia, la máquina burocrática genera goces, placeres, temores y expectativas. Si bien la gente nunca es ingenua, en ciertos momentos pueden llenarse de entusiasmo e inspiración sobre nuevos programas desarrollo y nuevas aperturas ofrecidas por la máquina burocrática. Al mismo tiempo, el recelo nunca desaparece.

En el libro se sostiene que debido a la existencia de esta máquina generadora de esperanzas sin un centro ni coherencia, intermediarios muchas veces no juegan un papel efectivo en conectar a los ejidatarios con el estado, pero más bien tienen un rol en la imaginación del poder del estado. A través de sus ofrecimientos de hacer conexión con personajes en los más altos niveles, y con los "centros de control" los intermediarios

contribuyen a la construcción de la “idea del estado”. De la misma manera, por medio de la búsqueda de la “conexión acertada” que puede ayudar a resolver todos los problemas, los ejidatarios invierten en la “idea del estado”.

Ejidatarios y burócratas están implicados en la construcción de la “cultura del estado” por medio de procesos de racionalización, especulación, la construcción de fantasías, etc., pero también por medio de la construcción social de fetiches, es decir la atribución de poderes especiales a objetos como mapas y documentos. En este complejo de deseo y fantasía, inscripción es muy importante. Algo similar vemos en el caso de burócratas que tienden a reificar la ley, a pesar de “saber” que en conflictos altamente politizados alrededor de la tierra procedimientos oficiales no juegan un papel central. En estos procesos, la “idea del estado” es objetivizada e inscrita en mapas, documentos, y otros textos legales, en lo que podemos llamar un re-encanto de técnicas gubernamentales.

## Samenvatting

# In de Naam van het Land: Organisatie, Transnationalisme en de Cultuur van de Staat in een Mexicaanse ejido

Deze studie is gebaseerd op onderzoek dat is uitgevoerd in verschillende perioden tussen 1991 en 1995. Het onderzoek vond plaats in de ejido La Canoa, in Jalisco, west Mexico, en in verschillende overheidsinstanties. Het onderzoek richt zich op de ontwikkelingen die zich hebben voorgedaan in de Mexicaanse ejido tussen de jaren dertig en 1992. In de jaren dertig zijn de meeste ejidos in Mexico opgericht, terwijl in 1992 een belangrijke wijziging heeft plaatsgevonden in de Mexicaanse agrarische wet, waardoor de ejido vorm van land eigendom nu sterk lijkt op privaat land eigendom. In de laatste hoofdstukken van het boek wordt aandacht geschonken aan de invoering van deze nieuwe agrarische wet in 1992.

De ejido La Canoa werd opgericht in 1938 door onteigening van stukken land van vier verschillende haciendas. Dit land bestond uit akkerbouw land wat meteen verdeeld werd in individuele percelen, bergachtig terrein wat volgens de wet in communaal gebruik moest blijven en niet individueel werd verdeeld (de *commons*), en een gebied dat bestemd was voor het bouwen van huizen. Vrijwel alle huishoudens in La Canoa ontvingen een individueel perceel akkerbouw land bij de oprichting van de ejido en ze konden vrij gebruik maken van de *commons*. In de loop der jaren is de bevolking van het dorp echter sterk gegroeid en tegenwoordig bezitten de meeste huishoudens in het dorp geen perceel akkerbouw land. Het wordt de landloze families echter wel toegestaan gebruik te maken van de *commons* en huizen te bouwen in het bebouwde deel van de ejido. Migratie naar de Verenigde Staten is zeer belangrijk voor de lokale economie en veel dorpelings verblijven tijdelijk of definitief in Los Angeles.

In dit boek wordt geanalyseerd hoe zich in de loop der jaren organisatie praktijken hebben ontwikkeld in de ejido met betrekking tot de toegang tot ejido land en het bestuur van de ejido. Hierbij is gekeken naar het beheer van de verschillende typen land (het akkerbouw land, percelen voor het bouwen van huizen, het bergachtige communale land) maar ook naar de rol van de ejido in de organisatie van dorps projecten, en de uitvoering van overheidsprogramma's die via de ejido werden georganiseerd (bijvoorbeeld krediet programma's voor de boeren).

De praktijken die zich hebben ontwikkeld in de ejidos verschilden sterk van wat de wet voorschreef. Het verkopen of het voor langere tijd verpachten van ejido percelen was bijvoorbeeld verboden bij de wet, maar werd algemeen gebruik in veel ejidos in Mexico. Het was ook gebruikelijk dat besluiten aangaande de ejido niet op vergaderingen werden genomen (zoals de wet voorschreef), maar door de ejido commissaris (de officiële vertegenwoordiger van de ejido) alleen. Een andere ontwikkeling die zich heeft voorgedaan is dat met het toenemen van de druk op het land, ook de *commons* in toenemende mate verdeeld werden

in individuele percelen. Deze percelen in de bergen worden gebruikt voor een intensieve vorm van maïs verbouw en voor het houden van vee. Ook hier zien we dat het land in de praktijk geprivatiseerd raakt en dat, ondanks het verbod in de wet, percelen verkocht worden en vererfd. Verder is het algemeen bekend dat in het geval van land conflicten die opgelost moesten worden door het Ministerie van Land Hervorming, de wet ook vaak niet is toegepast. Er bestaan zeer veel land conflicten tussen ejidos en particuliere land eigenaren in Mexico en de meesten zijn nooit opgelost. In dit boek wordt één zo'n land conflict behandeld, namelijk het conflict van het "verloren land". Dit betreft een groot areaal land dat officieel tot de ejido La Canoa behoort, maar dat sinds de jaren dertig in de handen is van enkele particuliere land eigenaren. Ondanks jaren van strijd van de kant van La Canoa heeft het Ministerie van Land Hervorming het conflict niet opgelost.

De hierboven genoemde praktijken met ejido land worden in de literatuur meestal afgedaan met de termen "corruptie", "chaos", en "desorganisatie". In dit boek wordt echter gesteld dat het op deze wijze etiketteren van bestaande praktijken niet bijdraagt tot een beter inzicht in de achterliggende dynamiek. Het plakken van dit soort etiketten helpt bijvoorbeeld niet om te bepalen wat de rol is geweest van de wet en de officiële procedures in deze ontwikkelingen. Deze studie laat zien dat ook al wordt de wet niet toegepast, ze vaak wel degelijk van invloed is. Ze bepaalt namelijk de onderhandelingspositie van de verschillende mensen die betrokken zijn bij illegale transacties. De agrarische wet en de ambtenaren hebben bovendien een grote rol gespeeld bij het legaliseren van illegale transacties in de ejido. In dit boek worden deze verschillende praktijken geanalyseerd en wordt gekeken wat de rol is geweest van lokale machtsrelaties, regionale machtsverhoudingen en de ambtenaren van het Ministerie van Land Hervorming.

Deze studie laat zien dat als we een langere tijdsperiode nemen, of een groter aantal transacties bestuderen, we ook in activiteiten die als "corrupt", "gedesorganiseerd" en "chaotisch" bestempeld worden, bepaalde patronen kunnen ontdekken. In hoofdstuk vijf werd bijvoorbeeld aangetoond dat illegale land verkopen op zo'n manier werden georganiseerd dat de mensen in de transactie zo min mogelijk risico zouden lopen als de zaak later eventueel aangekaart zou worden. Hoofdstuk zes liet een andere patroon van organisatie praktijken zien. Daar werd aangetoond dat het uitvoerend comité van de ejido (commissaris, secretaris en penningmeester) nooit tijdens vergaderingen publiekelijk verslag doet van hun activiteiten, maar dat er andere wegen zijn waarlangs de ejidatarios hun uitvoerend comité in de gaten houden en tot de orde roepen als dat nodig is. Dit gebeurt namelijk via informele kanalen van informatie verschaffing, roddel, en regionale politieke netwerken. Op deze manier hebben de ejido vergaderingen een heel andere rol gekregen en zijn verworden tot arena's van gekibbel en confrontatie. De officiële ejido structuur wordt echter weer belangrijk wanneer er zich serieuze conflicten in de ejido voordoen. Dan wordt het "formele spel gespeeld" tezamen met het gebruik van informele vormen van politieke druk.

In dit boek wordt een methodologie gebruikt die niet start vanuit de formele organisatie structuur, maar die zich concentreert op specifieke projecten, problemen, conflicten en

schaarse middelen. Het uitgangspunt is dat alle vormen van organisatie plaatsvinden in krachtenvelden. Een krachtenveld wordt gedefinieerd als een veld van macht en strijd tussen verschillende sociale actoren rond bepaalde schaarse middelen of problemen en waar omheen zich vormen van dominantie, strijd en verzet ontwikkelen, evenals bepaalde regelmatigheden en vormen van ordening. Binnen deze visie zijn de patronen die zich voordoen in het organisatie proces het resultaat van de krachten binnen het veld. Er wordt verondersteld dat de ontwikkeling van vormen van ordening in organisatie praktijken, samengaat met de uitsluiting van bepaalde sociale categorieën. Rond de strijd om schaarse middelen kunnen verschillende groepen onderscheiden worden met verschillende toegang en verschillende soorten rechten. In het geval van de *commons* in La Canoa zien we bijvoorbeeld dat door het steeds schaarser worden van dit land, ejidatarios, landloze zonen van ejidatarios en andere landloze dorpelingen zich steeds meer van elkaar gaan onderscheiden en op basis van verschillende gronden rechten op dit land gaan claimen.

Deze studie laat zien dat er vele krachtenvelden bestaan die allemaal hun eigen dynamiek ontwikkelen. Dit betekent bijvoorbeeld dat in relatie tot bepaalde middelen en problemen de ejidatarios een hoge mate van autonomie hebben kunnen ontwikkelen, terwijl ze in relatie tot andere problemen en middelen heel weinig bewegingsruimte hebben. De organisatie praktijken die zich hebben ontwikkeld rond de individuele akkerbouw percelen in de ejido, hebben bijvoorbeeld geleid tot een grote mate van autonomie voor de ejidatarios. Er heeft zich door de jaren een (illegale) interne landmarkt ontwikkeld in de ejido waar de overheid vrijwel geen greep op had. In de praktijk was dit land in sterke mate geprivatiseerd. De wet, de officiële procedures en de functionarissen waren altijd echter wel aanwezig als een “dreiging op afstand”, omdat ze zich met dit land bleven bemoeien en er verschillende procedures gevolgd werden door het Ministerie van Land Hervorming om het landgebruik in ejidos te controleren. In de *commons* daarentegen hebben de ejidatarios tezamen met de landloze dorpelingen een nog grotere autonomie ontwikkeld. Daar zien we ook een privatisering proces plaatsvinden, maar met nauwelijks enige invloed van de overheid. Met betrekking tot het “verloren land” opereren de ejidatarios echter in een krachtenveld waarin ze machteloos zijn. De ejidatarios zijn gedurende tientallen jaren in een hopeloze strijd verwickeld tegen particuliere land eigenaren. Gedurende meer dan vijftig jaar hebben ze geprobeerd dit land terug te krijgen, maar zonder enig resultaat. Deze analyse van organisatie vormen in verschillende krachtenvelden laat zien dat we dus niet op een generaliserende manier kunnen praten over de structurele positie van de ejidatarios in relatie tot de regionale elite, of over de aard van hun relatie met de Mexicaanse staat. Deze relatie hangt af van de middelen en problemen die op het spel staan.

In de benadering die is ontwikkeld in dit boek, worden het reflecteren op de dingen die gebeuren en het vertellen van verhalen beschouwd als een centraal onderdeel van het organisatie proces. Deze dialogen laten een constante actieve betrokkenheid zien van de mensen met de wereld om hen heen. Bovendien is de creatie van verhalen een manier om de wereld te ordenen en strategieën te ontwikkelen. Deze studie laat zien hoe de organisatie

praktijken rond verschillende schaarse middelen in specifieke krachtenvelden samengaan met kritische reflecties, ideologie, ironie, verbeelding en interpretatie. Deze dialogen laten vormen van strijd en verzet zien in relatie tot bestaande organisatie praktijken en machtsrelaties.

In dit boek wordt ook de gecompliceerde relatie van de ejidatarios met de Mexicaanse staat geanalyseerd. Aan de ene kant was de staat hun bondgenoot in de strijd tegen de grootgrondbezitters in de periode van de land hervorming en heeft ze de mensen allerlei voorzieningen gegeven (scholen, water, elektriciteit). Maar in andere opzichten wordt de staat beschouwd als een corrupte en gewelddadige vijand die zeer gevreesd en gewantwoord wordt door de mensen. Dit geeft een beeld van de Mexicaanse staat als tegelijkertijd de beschermer en de onderdrukker. Beelden van de staat verenigen het kwade met het goede. Daarom kunnen ejidatarios op het ene moment enthousiast zijn over de Mexicaanse president, en het op het andere moment cynisch en wantrouwend over zijn speeches. Of ze kunnen lachen om het feit dat ze zich zelf lieten bedriegen door de democratische propaganda van een president die later een grote oplichter bleek te zijn. De ejidatarios kunnen trots zijn dat ze deel uitmaken van het project van de Mexicaanse natie, maar tegelijkertijd kunnen ze de machthebbers bekritisieren om hun corruptie en uitbuiting van de kleine boeren.

In dit boek wordt gesteld dat het continu theoretiseren over macht en politiek in alle lagen van de Mexicaanse bevolking te maken heeft met het gevoel van onmacht dat veel mensen voelen tegenover het ondoorzichtige staatsapparaat. Iedereen tracht aldoor te verklaren wat er aan de hand is en wie met wie aan het opereren is of wie achter bepaalde gebeurtenissen zit. Samenzwerings-theorieën tieren welig. In dit verband moet ook het opereren van de Mexicaanse bureaucratie worden geanalyseerd. In dit boek is de Mexicaanse bureaucratie getypeerd als een "hoop-genererende machine". Elke nieuwe president voert nieuwe programma's in en stopt de programma's van z'n voorganger. De corruptie in bepaalde overheidskantoren krijgt de schuld van de problemen en deze instanties worden gesloten. Nieuwe overheidsorganisaties worden met veel enthousiasme opgericht en de functionarissen gaan met veel elan aan het werk.

De bureaucratie biedt ook altijd talloze openingen als iemand iets wil doen. De bureaucratie zegt nooit nee. Dit komt duidelijk naar voren in het geval van de vele landconflicten die gedurende tientallen jaren niet zijn opgelost. Elke keer kan de bureaucratische machine van het Ministerie van Land Hervorming weer in beweging gezet worden. In het geval van het "verloren land" van La Canoa wordt keer op keer de hoop gegeven dat de zaak zal worden opgelost. Vele mensen dienen zich aan die precies weten te vertellen hoe de zaak aangepakt moet worden. In deze studie wordt echter gesteld dat de "bureaucratische machine" geen rationaliteit en coherentie produceert, maar hoop, vreugde, plezier, angst en verwachtingen. Hoewel de mensen na zoveel ervaringen in het verleden nooit naïef zijn, kunnen ze in bepaalde perioden toch geïnspireerd raken en enthousiast worden over nieuwe programma's en nieuwe mogelijkheden die hun geboden worden.

In dit boek wordt het "idee van de staat" gedefinieerd als het geloof in het bestaan van

een centrum van controle. Dit betekent dat mensen de neiging hebben een coherentie en logica te zoeken die vaak niet bestaat. In deze context van een “hoop-genererende machine”, zonder een duidelijk centrum en coherentie, dienen zich veel *brokers* aan die zeggen over de juiste connecties te beschikken om de zaak aan het rollen te krijgen. Door te suggereren dat zij de “goede connectie” hebben dragen de *brokers* bij aan dit “idee van de staat”. Op dezelfde manier, investeren de *ejidatarios* in het “idee van de staat” wanneer ze zoeken naar de “goede connectie” die hun kan helpen de problemen op te lossen. Op deze manier spelen *brokers* vaak niet zozeer een rol in het effectief verbinden van *ejidatarios* met “de staat” of met “hogere niveaus” maar wel in de “verbeelding van de macht van de staat”.

In deze context van een ondoorzichtig bureaucratisch apparaat krijgen bepaalde objecten zoals kaarten, stempels, certificaten en officiële documenten vaak speciale krachten toebedeeld. Het zijn elementen waar mensen hun strijd op kunnen concentreren. In dit complex van verlangen en fantasie, wordt inscriptie heel belangrijk. Mensen ontwikkelen een fetisjisme rond bepaald documenten zelfs wanneer ze deze niet kunnen “lezen” volgens de administratieve standaard. Hetzelfde proces doet zich voor bij de ambtenaren die het belang benadrukken van het volgen van de regels en procedures terwijl ze tegelijkertijd vertellen dat in serieuze land conflicten de officiële procedures geen rol spelen. Overheidstechnieken krijgen symbolische betekenissen buiten hun administratieve functie om.





## Curriculum vitae

Monique Nuijten was born in 1961 in Bergen op Zoom, the Netherlands, on April 13, 1961. She studied rural development sociology at the Agricultural University Wageningen. During her study she conducted research for the University of Leiden on the socio-economic changes of sheepherding (transhumance) in the Pyrenees, Spain. In 1987 she participated in the research project "Contrasting patterns of irrigation organization, peasant strategies and planned intervention: comparative studies in western Mexico" directed by Norman Long in which she carried out research for her Masters degree. In 1988 she accompanied her husband to Costa Rica where her daughters were born. In that same year she received her M.Sc. degree with distinction majoring in animal husbandry, cooperatives and credit, development economics, and rural development sociology. On her return to Holland she worked at the Department of Rural Development Sociology as research assistant for the Benin project of the university. In collaboration with the Free University in Amsterdam she organized a seminar on "Organization and Development" in which academics and people from the development world participated.

In 1991 she began her Ph.D. on organizing practices in a Mexican ejido, with financial support from the Department of Rural Development Sociology and receiving, in 1992, a grant from WOTRO. She was asked to participate in the Ejido Research Reform project of the U.S.-Mexican Center of the University of California in San Diego. In this research project regular seminars were organized to discuss the consequences of the reform of the Mexican agrarian law in 1992. In 1994 and 1995 she worked as a lecturer at the anthropology department of El Colegio de Michoacán. At the end of 1995 she returned to the Netherlands. In the summer of 1996 she was invited to teach a course on legal anthropology at El Colegio de Michoacán. That same year she also taught a course on problem-oriented research at the department in Wageningen. She has given many guest lectures at different institutions and numerous presentations at conferences. She has published on themes of organization, history and story-telling about the past, land reform and legal questions, and the recent changes in the Mexican agrarian law.

