

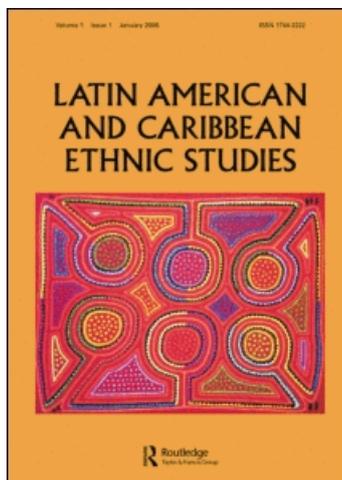
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# Ethnic Mobilization among the Maya of Yucatán

Shannan L. Mattiace

*While the literature on indigenous political mobilization in Latin America is now quite extensive, relatively little has been published on why ethnic mobilization has not occurred in some indigenous regions. In this article, I examine a case where there is very little mobilization and organization around ethnic identity: Yucatán, Mexico. I begin with a political history of Yucatán, comparing it with and contrasting it to Chiapas. I then argue that ethnic mobilization in Yucatán is significantly limited for two main reasons: first, Maya peasants had so little relative autonomy under the corporatist regime (1940s–1980s) and official peasant leagues that they were constrained in using the experience garnered in these leagues for subsequent ethnic-based organization; and second, the social organizations and networks that provide activists and potential activists with the capacity to mobilize – namely, peasant leagues and the progressive Catholic Church – have not served as vehicles for leadership training and organization in Yucatán.*

**Keywords:** Indigenous mobilization; ethnic identity; Maya; peasant activism; racism

## Introduction

The question at the center of this article is a deceptively simple one: Why have the Maya of Yucatán state not organized around indigenous identity?<sup>1</sup> Over the past several years, a number of social scientists have studied the growing Indian mobilization throughout Latin America. While many of the studies have examined the strong Indian movements of Ecuador and Bolivia, some scholars are now focusing on the relative absence of Indian ethnic mobilization in countries like Peru (Lucero & García, 2004; Van Cott, 2005, chap. 5; Yashar, 2005). In her influential book *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America* (2005), Deborah Yashar examines patterns of ethnic organization across Latin America since the 1980s, and argues that ethnic organization emerges in regions where three factors are present: motive (neo-liberal policies), open political associational space (democracy), and facilitating networks (resources). Yashar's book has been important, particularly in the field of political science, in that it is explicitly comparative, examining cases where there have

been strong movements (e.g. Bolivia and Ecuador) as well as cases where national movements are weak (e.g. Peru).<sup>2</sup> In this article, I apply Yashar's three-fold framework to the Yucatecan case and make two main arguments. The first, regarding motive, is that Maya peasants had so little relative autonomy under the corporatist regime (1940s–1980s) and official peasant leagues that they were constrained in using the experience garnered in these leagues for subsequent ethnic-based organization. The second argument, related to networks, is that the social organizations and networks that provide activists and potential activists with the capacity to mobilize – namely, peasant leagues and the progressive Catholic Church – have not served as vehicles for leadership training and organization.

While Yashar's framework is comparative and seeks to explain patterns of ethnic organization across Latin America more broadly, I begin by comparing and contrasting the southern Mexican states of Yucatán and Chiapas.<sup>3</sup> While in Chiapas, Maya peoples have organized around ethnicity; in Yucatán, they have not.<sup>4</sup> In the first section of this article, I begin with the comparison with Chiapas to show that the political histories of the two states, while obviously unique and different, converge in several interesting ways, deepening the puzzle of why ethnic organization has not prospered in Yucatán. In the second section, I review the secondary literature on ethnic identity in Yucatán. In the third section I apply and expand on Yashar's (2005) framework. While Yashar suggests that indigenous peasants throughout Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s mobilized in opposition to neo-liberal policies as a defensive mechanism protesting their loss of relative autonomy, Maya peasants in Yucatán mobilized in reaction to a loss of income and credit, not the loss of relative autonomy (which was limited, even in the apogee of Mexican corporatism). This is important, I argue, because in Yucatán the grievance (i.e. motive) around which Maya peasants mobilized, shaped the form that subsequent organization took. In the fourth section, I examine official, state policy on indigenous people, arguing that *indigenismo* has played a more important role in Yucatán than in other Mexican states given the weakness of organizational networks. In the fifth section, I sketch out what independent ethnic organizing would look like in Yucatán were conditions propitious. Lastly, in the sixth section, I examine regional identity, which has shaped the cultural context within which any future ethnic organization would take place.

### Setting the Comparative Context: Yucatán and Chiapas

Based on 2005 Mexican Census Bureau (Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geográfica e Informática [INEGI], 2005) statistics, Yucatán ranks second in the number of indigenous peoples as a percentage of total state population. In Yucatán, 33.5% of the population over the age of five spoke an indigenous language (538,355 individuals), second only to Oaxaca state (35.3%). In Chiapas, there were 957,255 indigenous language speakers, totaling 26% of the state's population.<sup>5</sup> Unlike most other Mexican states whose indigenous population consists of peoples of distinct indigenous ethnicities, in Yucatán the indigenous population is overwhelmingly Maya. Despite these demographic characteristics, the Yucatecan Maya have not

*politically* mobilized as Indians, as has occurred in other Mexican states with large indigenous populations, such as Chiapas and Oaxaca.

In both Yucatán and Chiapas (in northern and eastern Chiapas and in western and central Yucatán), large haciendas broke up ethnic communities in the latter quarter of the 19th century, forcing indigenous peoples to work as peons (or *mozos baldíos* as they were called in Chiapas), on their former lands. In the 18th and 19th centuries, indigenous peoples in both states rose up against white and criollo elites in defense of land and autonomy and against onerous tribute payments and broken promises. In Yucatán, Mayas living in the eastern part of the state were at war for most of the years between 1847 and 1901 (The Caste War), with intermittent fighting continuing until the 1930s. Losses are difficult to measure, but it is commonly asserted that between one-third and one-half of Yucatán's population of 600,000 died in the conflict (Wells & Joseph, 1996, p. 27). Reed (1964) argues that in the first four years alone approximately 35% of the population (275,000) lost their lives.<sup>6</sup>

In the wake of the Mexican Revolution in the 1920s, the national government introduced indigenist policies in both states, focused largely on education and health, with the express purpose of Mexicanizing Indians and assimilating them into the 'revolutionary family' as mestizos.<sup>7</sup> Beginning in the 1930s in both states, the PRM (Party of the Mexican Revolution) dominated political life.<sup>8</sup> Over the course of the 20th century in Chiapas, the state government protected powerful land-owners and had one of the country's most conservative and repressive state governments. State-sponsored violence (directly through police and indirectly through paramilitaries) was particularly brutal during the 1980s under Governor Absallón Castellanos. Violence also spiked during the *sexenio* of González Garrido in the early 1990s, who was removed after the uprising by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) on 1 January 1994. While the semi-authoritarian Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) also controlled Yucatán, its governing style hewed more to 'inclusionary corporatism' than to outright repression. PRI leaders in Yucatán – in particular the powerful Víctor Cervera Pacheco, who served as interim governor from 1984 to 1988 and was elected to a six-year term in 1995 – governed through patronage and 'soft' authoritarianism, mobilizing citizens in official labor and peasant unions.

In the 1970s, the Catholic Church in Chiapas (namely the Archdiocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas) supported the first attempts at indigenous organization, sponsoring a historic Indian Congress in 1974. Over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, under the leadership of Archbishop Samuel Ruíz, the Archdiocese provided a space for the emergence of a growing ethnic consciousness among Indian peoples, most notably through its indigenous diaconate and catechist program.<sup>9</sup> At the least, the Catholic Church provided literacy and leadership training for hundreds of indigenous peoples throughout the state, particularly in central and eastern Chiapas. The Archdiocese of Mérida, in contrast, was not nearly as progressive. Under the guidance of Archbishop Manuel Castro Ruíz for 26 years (1969–1995), the Church did not support ethnic consciousness-raising and had no program similar to the diaconate training one promoted by Samuel Ruíz in Chiapas. After Castro Ruíz retired in 1995, Emilio Berlie Belaunzarán continued the conservative course set by his predecessor. While a small group of progressive priests in southeast Yucatán have

drawn inspiration from Ruíz's work in Chiapas, specifically the Indian-centered theology he promoted (*teología india*), they face a hostile bishop who actively discourages the promotion of Christian base communities or anything that smacks of liberation or Indian theology.

As is well known, 1994 was a key year for indigenous mobilization and ethnic consciousness in Chiapas, with the public emergence of the EZLN on 1 January. In subsequent years, indigenous peoples in Chiapas put Indian culture and rights on the national political agenda. In an official dialogue with national governmental officials in the mid-1990s, the EZLN and governmental representatives and advisors hammered out a bill on indigenous rights and culture that President Fox sent to Congress in December 2000. In Yucatán, while the EZLN movement has had some impact on raising ethnic consciousness, a regional indigenous movement has not emerged in force. Nevertheless, the appearance of the EZLN has galvanized a small group of Yucatecan activists, particularly in the area of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) dedicated to human and Indian rights.

The constitutional reform package of 2001, which was a dramatically modified version of the bill President Fox sent to Congress in late 2000, made states responsible for defining and limiting Indian autonomy. The compromise bill, approved by both houses of Congress in the spring of 2001 and subsequently ratified by the stipulated two-thirds of states, does not sanction or protect autonomy for indigenous peoples at the national level.<sup>10</sup> Even before the national-level debate in 2001, however, several Mexican states had made changes to their constitutions and to secondary laws to protect Indian rights. The state making the most substantive changes was Oaxaca, whose 1995 constitution allowed municipal governments that registered with the state to elect local authorities based on local practices (*'usos y costumbres'*).<sup>11</sup> A second wave of constitutional modifications occurred in the wake of President Ernesto Zedillo's call in 1998 to implement state-level reforms. Changes were made to state constitutions in Veracruz, Nayarit, Michoacán, Quintana Roo, Campeche, and Chiapas (Assies *et al.*, 2006, p. 45).<sup>12</sup> A third wave of reforms occurred after the 2001 constitutional reform (e.g. San Luis Potosí).

Of southern Mexico's indigenous states, Yucatán was the last to make substantive constitutional and legislative changes in the area of Indian culture and rights. After a long process of deliberation and foot-dragging, which included several *consultas* with more or less participation of Mayas, the Yucatecan state congress finally passed a bill in April 2007. After more than a year elapsed without progress being made on a regulatory law, the state congress debated these constitutional changes in June and July of 2008 in the context of drafting such legislation.<sup>13</sup> By February of 2009, regulatory legislation had been written and began to circulate in final draft form among legislators. In general terms, this legislation is largely culturalist in that it focuses on the promotion of Maya culture and language and does not substantively address issues of land or resources.<sup>14</sup> The law calls for the creation of a new governmental agency – a state Institute for the Development of the Maya Culture – whose objective it would be to 'conserve the uses, customs, traditions, and language of the Maya culture in their communities' (p. 19).<sup>15</sup> The law sets out the *'libre determinación'* (free determination) of the Maya people; that is, the autonomy to

decide on the laws that will govern them at the local level and to elect their local leaders in accordance with internal norms and traditional practices (p. 23). It is expected that the regulatory law will be passed by the state congress in 2009.

Before turning to Yashar's framework of ethnic mobilization, I briefly examine the literature on Maya ethnicity and identity. I recognize that ethnic identity formation is an important dimension of social movement mobilization and organization, even while it is not my main focus in this article. Social movement scholars have long recognized the importance of identity in mobilizing and sustaining movement activity. Most scholars of ethnic social movements concur that ethnic identity cannot be assumed (i.e. it is not primordial) but is shifting and malleable. Scholars also agree that the context matters: the historical and spatial locations within which people identify themselves and are identified by others shape identity. Ethnic identity, in other words, is formed through a complex web of relationships on shifting terrains; these relationships, in part, set and define social boundaries. A discussion of how individuals define themselves and are defined by others, then, is crucial to any subsequent examination of ethnic mobilization.

### **Ethnic Identity: Maya and Mestizo in Yucatán**

Ethnicity is not as polarized in Yucatán as it is in other indigenous (and Maya) regions of Mexico, such as Chiapas, or in Guatemala. 'Maya ethnicity [in Yucatán],' according to Quetzil Castañeda, 'does not exist in a binary antithesis with another ethnic-racial group or identity' (2004, p. 52).<sup>16</sup> In fact, very few Maya-speakers in Yucatán use the term 'Maya' to refer to themselves at all. Most Maya-speakers see no connection between themselves and those who built the great pyramids that annually attract thousands of visitors to the state. Since the beginning of the Caste War (1847–1901), Maya in northwest Yucatán, many of whom fled the intense fighting in the east, assiduously avoided referring to themselves as 'Indian.' For these Maya, the only 'Indians' in the state were the rebellious Maya of eastern Yucatán (now Quintana Roo) who had taken up arms against the white/criollo government. While the long Caste War had the general effect of dampening ethnic identity everywhere else, it created a distinct ethnic identity – that of *maasewal*, or followers of the Speaking Cross – among the warring Maya of eastern Yucatán (Gabbert, 2004; Quintal Avilés, 2005).<sup>17</sup> In effect, the Caste War catalyzed a process of de-Indianization in Yucatán: Mayans effectively distanced themselves from any association with Indianness. This did not mean, however, that indigenous customs and practices disappeared. They did not. Indianness (or indigeneity), however, particularly in the northwest region of the state close to the capital city of Mérida, gave way to a more hybrid identity – that of *mestizo*. Mestizos were Maya-speakers who dressed in regional clothing (*huipil*, *fustán*, and *rebozo*) and had a Maya surname, but who also had accepted the influence of the Hispanic culture (see Barabas, 1979; Bracamonte y Sosa, 1994, pp. 152–153; Gabbert, 2004; Greene, 1995; Hervik, 2003; Quintal Avilés, 2005).

The term 'mestizo' is used widely throughout Mexico to describe an individual's social and cultural background. Mestizaje became official state ideology after the

Revolution when leaders yoked national identity to the mestizo citizen. While leaders praised the bravery and nobility of Aztec and Maya pyramid-builders, contemporary Indians would be brought into the Mexican mainstream as mestizos, under the guidance of a benevolent state/party. Education (in the Spanish language) would be the vehicle for this transformation. In Mexico, as in most of Latin America, mestizaje was less a question of skin color or biological hybridity than of class and culture. The term 'mestizo' is used in most of Mexico today to refer to a mixed-race individual who has shed evidence of indigenous ancestry and adopted western dress and the Spanish language. Being mestizo in Mexico implies distancing oneself from Indian culture (Bonfil Batalla, [1987] 1996). The term 'mestizo' is used differently in Yucatán, even while it maintains a sense of this hybrid dimension. In Yucatán, mestizo is used most often to refer to Maya women (*mestizas*) who continue to practice indigenous customs. In contrast to much of the rest of Mexico, Yucatecan Maya do not have to shed indigenous cultural practices and customs in order to become mestizos: the term 'mestizo' implies a close association, or tie, to indigenous culture. However, being mestizo seems to indicate some degree of social refinement; in Yucatán, this refinement may be expressed by shedding the traditional indigenous sandals (*alpargatas*), dancing *jarana* (regional dance), and wearing the ceremonial *terno* (embroidered dress), which combines Maya and Spanish materials and style.

In Yucatán, geographic location is a crucial factor to consider in any discussion of ethnic identification. Depending on the region studied, Maya use different ethnic terms to describe themselves. Quintal *et al.* (2003) have identified four major geographical regions in Yucatán state: the henequen zone; the agricultural south (also known as Puuc or Sierrita region); the corn-producing west; and the northern cattle region.<sup>18</sup> In the henequen zone surrounding the city of Mérida, the term 'mestizo' is widespread. In this region, *mayero* is also used to refer to anyone who speaks Maya (irrespective of race). Socio-economically, Maya in this region typically refer to themselves as peasants or poor people (Quintal *et al.*, 2003, p. 296).

In the southern region, the state's most fertile agricultural area, Maya self-identify as independent peasants or mestizos (Quintal *et al.*, 2003, p. 297). Based on his work in Oxkutzcab, a southern market town, Hervik (2003) argues that Maya-speakers do not refer to themselves as Maya, but as mestizo and *catrín*. According to Hervik, in Oxkutzcab, mestizos are those who speak Maya, wear distinct regional dress, know how to cultivate the soil (minimally at least), celebrate patron saints, dance the *jarana*, and address the guardian spirits of the cultivated plots of land (2003, p. 26). A *catrín* is a Maya speaker who wears western-style clothes: that is, a mestizo who puts on airs. Working in Pustunich, a town several miles north of Oxkutzcab, Greene observes that children and unmarried young people do not speak Maya, and no one ever referred to him/herself as 'Maya.' Greene suggests that women did not call themselves 'mestizas', because it was evident to all who they were: those who dressed in *huipil*, *fustán*, and *rebozo*. No man is referred to as 'mestizo' and only the very old people use the term *catrín*, she notes, because dressing in western-style clothing has become the norm for younger people.

Eastern Yucatán, the state's most 'traditional' region, is a corn-producing area where some *milpa* subsistence farming is still practiced.<sup>19</sup> Quintal *et al.* (2003) note

that while people recognize and acknowledge the term ‘mestizo’, most people self-identify as ‘those who work the land’ (*agricultores*). In Pisté, a town in eastern Yucatán very close to the archeological site of Chichén Itza, Quetzil Castañeda complicates this picture, arguing that indigenous locals refer to themselves as Mayas, *Mayeros*, *Yucatecos*, Mestizos, and Mexicans, depending on the context (1996, p. 13). Finally, in the northern cattle-ranching region of the state, similar to the east, the term ‘mestizo’ is not used widely. Instead, individuals in this region refer to themselves as ranchers (Quintal *et al.*, 2003, p. 297).

Looking at the peninsula as a whole, Gabbert argues that the most common self-identification among Maya-speaking peasants and non-elite inhabitants of small towns is *utsil-mako’b* (poor people) or *campesino* (2004, p. 111). Christine Kray (2005) came to a similar conclusion based on her work in Dzitnup, a small town in eastern Yucatán. Kray argues that *Dzitnupenos* divide the peninsula into two ethnic classes: commoners (i.e. *maasewal*, or poor villagers) and lords (i.e. *t’sul*, or rich townspeople). Within the lower classes, the term ‘Maya’ is used mostly to designate the Yucatecan language or to refer to the indigenous population of the distant past (see also Castañeda, 2004; Cocom Castillo, 2005). Whereas the Spanish-speaking public generally considers Maya-speaking peasants to be Indians and Maya, Gabbert argues that these labels are very often rejected by the latter (2004, p. 112).

Some Maya and non-Maya I spoke with seemed more interested in focusing on the ancients than on contemporary native peoples. In an interview with two-term state congresswoman and poet Araceli Cab Cumí, now in her 80s, I was struck by her use of mystical language to respond to a rhetorical question she posed on several occasions during our conversation: where are the Maya? She told me that if I wanted to find out I should ‘draw close to the murals on the ancient pyramids and listen to the vibrations that you will hear in the caves.’ Cab Cumí was most enthusiastic when she told me about trips that her granddaughter makes with groups of young Maya who want to learn more about Maya culture and traditions. These young people organize tours to ruin sites and participate in the types of activities she was urging me to embrace. Cab Camí waxed poetic about the Maya ‘race,’ who left behind many accomplishments: their extensive knowledge of astronomy, their belief system, and their legends.<sup>20</sup>

Overwhelmingly, social scientists working in Yucatán make the same point: that *indio* and *indígena* are not terms used by the Maya themselves and that these terms are viewed as derogatory and pejorative. In recent years, however, a small number of individuals have begun to identify as *indígena*, or more commonly as Maya. Gabbert argues that this is due in large part to recent changes in educational policies, the work of the National Indigenist Institute (INI), now the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas) (CDI), and the new trends in development programs (2004, p. 160). Quintal Avilés (2005) also notes a growing group of individuals, sons and daughters of mestizos influenced by *indigenismo* and education, who identify as ‘descendants of the Maya.’ According to Quintal Avilés, these individuals tend to focus on the grandeur of the Maya past while promoting ‘modernity’ for

contemporary Maya. She distinguishes these ‘descendants of the Maya’ from Maya who belong to formal organizations and who explicitly call themselves Maya. The latter, she argues, want to recover not just the lost greatness of the ancient Maya, but today’s traditions and customs (Quintal Avilés, 2005, pp. 365–367).<sup>21</sup>

### **Ethnic Mobilization in the Americas: Motive, Opportunity, and Facilitating Networks**

Yashar (2005) argues that mobilization around indigenous identity only became possible in Latin America when three sets of factors converged in the 1980s and 1990s: a shift from corporatist citizenship regimes to neo-liberal ones (providing a motive for organization); a shift from authoritarian political regimes to democratic ones (providing opportunity or political associational space); and the presence of networks, often drawn from peasant leagues, Catholic church organizations, and NGOs, which provided resources that ethnic activists used to create movements (providing facilitating networks). Given the importance of Yashar’s framework for scholars of indigenous and ethnic politics in the Americas, I examine the applicability of this macro-framework in explaining the lack of ethnic mobilization in one case – that of Yucatán.<sup>22</sup>

#### *Motive*

Across Latin America during the 1980s and 1990s, corporatist systems of representation were dismantled and replaced by liberal citizenship regimes. These regimes emphasized private property and market-based competition in contrast to corporatism, which tied citizens to the state/party and offered them minimum protections against the vagaries of the market in exchange for votes and political tranquility. For indigenous peasants living in the Mexican countryside, the dismantling of corporatism meant a significant reduction in agricultural subsidies, which paved the way for the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994.<sup>23</sup>

The 1980s and 1990s were devastating decades for Maya peasants in Yucatán. By the late 1970s the henequen industry was in serious decline, due largely to the production of synthetic fibers that had replaced henequen on the world market.<sup>24</sup> The gross mismanagement of state agencies that regulated the price and production-levels of henequen further weakened the industry. During the administration of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988–1994), Cordemex – the monopolistic distributor of all henequen produced in the state – was sold off and split into four separate, private companies. Despite the endemic problems of corruption and mismanagement that had been apparent from the 1920s with the creation of the first Ejidal Bank, thousands of Maya peasants relied on state subsidies to provide them with a living, however miserly, planting and processing henequen. By 1992, the era of state domination of the henequen industry – which began in the aftermath of the Revolution in the early 1920s – was confined to history.

Indigenous peasants in both Chiapas and Yucatán protested the 1992 constitutional changes to Article 27 that ended land reform and allowed peasants to sell *ejido* (collectively held) land, which had been deemed inalienable in the 1917 constitution. The severe reduction of state subsidies for agriculture in both states hit indigenous peasants hard. In Chiapas, the abolishment of the Mexican Coffee Institute (Instituto Mexicano de Café) in 1989 meant the end of price floors; the state would no longer provide subsidies to prop up the internationally-determined price of coffee (see Harvey, 1994). In Yucatán as early as the late 1970s and continuing through the de la Madrid administration (1982–1988), governmental officials mandated ‘reordering’ programs for the industry (Villanueva Mukul, 1993). These ‘reordering’ programs resulted in, among other things, the thinning of *ejidatario* ranks. In other words, they called for a reduction in the number of *ejidatarios* receiving weekly credit advances and who appeared on the official lists of those producing henequen for the state (*la nómina*). Villanueva Mukul (1993, p. 15) reports a dramatic decrease in the number of *ejidatarios* involved in henequen production from the late 1970s onward. In December 1977, for example, 81,843 *ejidatarios* produced for the state. By January 1978 that number had been reduced by more than 20,000 to 63,602 *ejidatarios*, and by 1983 reduced to 49,013. Table 1 (cited in Baños Ramírez, 1989, p. 276) provides a sense of industry decline in terms of the production of henequen fiber and corresponding hectares in production. Note that the high point of henequen production is reached in 1971, falling to one-half its volume by 1982.

Mobilizations against the dismantling of Cordemex were led by organizations such as the National Peasant Confederation (CNC) and independent organizations that vociferously opposed the privatization. Villanueva Mukul (1993, p. 100) notes that, in Yucatán after 1991, the Unión Nacional de Trabajadores Agrícolas (National Union of Agricultural Workers) emerged as the strongest organization independent of the CNC and was a site of protest for many peasants angry with the CNC.

**Table 1** Ejidal sector: fiber production and land in henequen production (1968–1982)

Year	Production of henequen fiber (metric tons)	Cultivated land in production (hectares)
1968	64,060	136,681
1969	67,126	136,845
1970	72,938	141,684
1971	73,487	142,574
1972	73,116	137,502
1973	68,701	134,112
1974	64,821	129,288
1975	58,773	ND
1976	58,532	ND
1977	50,870	100,000
1978	46,203	ND
1979	44,251	ND
1980	37,446	ND
1981	30,558	ND
1982	25,681	ND

ND = no data.

The Unión Nacional de Trabajadores Agrícolas did not emerge in a vacuum; Villanueva argues that it drew on previous independent organizing efforts, which in other regions of the state had struggled for organizational autonomy against the CNC (Villanueva Mukul, 1993, p. 125).<sup>25</sup>

Notwithstanding these important examples of independent organizing, independent peasant organization in Yucatán has been historically weaker than in Chiapas and in other regions of Mexico. According to Villanueva Mukul (1993), peasant organization independent of the CNC in Yucatán tended to be sporadic and to disappear fairly quickly after punctual demands were met. Baños Ramírez (1989) provides a possible explanation for this weakness, arguing that the level and degree of state control over Maya peasants was much greater in Yucatán than elsewhere in Mexico. Maya peasants working in the henequen industry were more tied to the state and official peasant organizations than peasants in other regions of the country, who produced less capital-intensive crops than henequen. For a Maya peasant working in the henequen industry, the cost of shifting from the CNC to an independent peasant organization was much higher than for peasants working with more traditional export crops, such as coffee, where the capital needs are considerably lower. In Chiapas by contrast, independent peasant organizations such as the Independent Central of Agricultural Workers and Peasants (CIOAC) established a solid base of support among peasants soon after its arrival to the state in 1975 (see Mattiace, 2003; Toledo, 2002).

Yashar argues that one of the consequences of the shift from corporatism to (neo)liberalism throughout Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s was that peasants lost the relative autonomy they enjoyed under corporatist regimes. Despite being tied directly to the state through official peasant organizations, Yashar argues that, ironically, governmental subsidies allowed indigenous peasants to carve out spaces of autonomy in which they planted their crops and lived largely according to their own community customs and norms. According to Yashar, '[during the corporatist period] indigenous communities managed to carve out a degree of local autonomy that remained beyond the reach of corporatist institutions' (2005, p. 63). While this argument seems to fit Chiapas quite well, it does not apply as well to Yucatán for two primary reasons. First, the western region of the state (Mérida and environs) was almost completely dominated by the henequen industry during the entire corporatist period (1930s–1980s). As noted previously, the high degree of capital required to process henequen meant that Yucatecan peasants were more dependent on the state, which provided the necessary capital for processing henequen, than their counterparts in Chiapas, who were largely growing coffee and/or subsistence crops, such as corn and beans. Second, even in areas of Yucatán not dominated by henequen, notably the south and east of the state – corn and cattle areas, respectively – the ecology of Yucatán does not allow for a great deal of autonomy from the state. Unlike Chiapas peasants, many of whom live in remote areas inaccessible to state officials, Yucatecan villages have historically been more open to outside influences.

While Maya peasants in Yucatán mobilized in opposition to neo-liberal economic policies, they were not reacting to the loss of relative autonomy as much as to the loss of income and credit. In other regions of Mexico and of Latin America, this relative

autonomy allowed indigenous peasants to practice their customs and norms, far from the long arm of the state. This was not possible to the same degree in Yucatán; while anthropologists of Maya culture note that Maya customs and traditions have not disappeared (Quintal Avilés, 2005), many of my informants suggested that they are practiced less in Yucatán than in other places in Mexico. The Yucatán case provides nuance to Yashar's macro-argument about motive and grievance. Because state control was so extensive in Yucatán, particularly in the western region of the state, the grievances peasants had during the transition to neo-liberalism focused less on land reform and protecting the *de facto* autonomy they had carved out for themselves under corporatist regimes; rather, Maya peasants' demands were concentrated around augmenting income and credit, making it less likely that mobilization and grievances would be framed as ethnic-based demands.

### *Political Opportunity*

While the end of corporatism and the relative autonomy many peasants enjoyed under these regimes provided a powerful motive to organize, the return to democracy allowed ethnic mobilization across the region to prosper. During the 1980s and 1990s a wave of democratic regimes swept the region. While these regimes were electoral democracies in that free and fair elections occurred, most citizens did not enjoy liberal guarantees, such as the widespread protection of civil liberties. Even fragile democracies, however, were an improvement on the dictatorships that prevailed in the 1960s and 1970s.

During these years of dictatorship in much of the rest of Latin America, Mexico did not come under military rule and was best described as a one-party, semi-authoritarian regime.<sup>26</sup> Under increasing pressure from opposition voices within the country, Mexico began a protracted process of democratic opening beginning in 1979, which culminated in the election of Vicente Fox, of the National Action Party (PAN) in July 2000. During these years of gradual (even if non-linear) democratic opening, a host of NGOs and civil society associations emerged in support of democracy and human rights, including the rights of women, gays, and indigenous peoples. In fact, the PRI government/state under President Salinas de Gortari attempted to head off potential indigenous mobilization in the months leading up to the quincentenary of the 'Discovery' of America in 1992, by pushing through an amendment to Article 4 of the Mexican constitution that for the first time made mention of the country's indigenous peoples and officially recognized them as the cultural foundation of the nation.<sup>27</sup>

During the 1980s and 1990s, Yucatán, like most states in Mexico, was governed by the PRI. PRI governor Víctor Cervera Pacheco dominated state politics during these years, serving as interim governor from 1984 to 1988 and being elected to a full term in 1995. Cervera Pacheco was at the helm of a far-reaching and powerful clientelistic network, which he skillfully utilized to keep his party in power.<sup>28</sup> While Yucatán state politics under Cervera were corrupt, outright coercion and violence were not common. Eisenstadt (2003, p. 45) describes him as a 'machine boss governor' and

Yucatán as an example of the institutional limits of Mexico's protracted transition.<sup>29</sup> In terms of Yashar's framework, the political regimes in place nationally and on the Yucatán state level during the 1980s and 1990s – even if not fully democratic – were not impediments to the potential development of indigenous movements. In other words, the relative absence of ethnic mobilization in Yucatán during these years was not the result of coercive state politics and a lack of political opportunities.

### *Facilitating Networks*

According to Yashar, a crucial structural factor enabling the development of national Indian movements throughout Latin America is the presence of organizational networks, emerging largely from within churches, the state, unions, and NGOs. The importance of these networks is their capacity to link communities beyond the local level (i.e. forging trans-community links); Yashar argues that while these networks may not explicitly address indigenous issues, 'they (unwittingly) provided institutional links that allowed the forging of translocal indigenous identities and movements' (2005, p. 36). Examining five country case studies – Ecuador, Guatemala, Bolivia, Mexico, and Peru – Yashar argues that Indian mobilization and politicization is strongest in states where activists had access to these networks: indigenous activists in Ecuador and in some parts of Mexico (e.g. Chiapas) utilized extensive peasant and church networks, activists in Bolivia drew on peasant, church, and NGO networks, and Guatemalan activists relied extensively on church networks. In Peru, Yashar's case of failed mobilization and politicization, peasant unions and church networks were fragmented and thus not available as potential resources for indigenous activists.

Of the five country cases Yashar studies, Mexico had the strongest national network of peasant organizations, centered on the CNC.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the CNC was a significant political actor in Yucatán from its founding in 1938 through the 1980s.<sup>31</sup> I argue, however, that the peculiar nature of the state's henequen industry was an obstacle for later indigenous organization, even when national and international conditions were more auspicious for ethnic mobilization.<sup>32</sup> In addition, unlike the Chiapan case where indigenous activists utilized the significant organizational resources made available by Archbishop Samuel Ruíz and the Diocese of San Cristóbal, the Yucatecan church was dominated by a conservative hierarchy, uninterested and – indeed – openly hostile to the formation of translocal social movements.

In addition to peasant leagues and church networks, Yashar argues that NGOs have also provided the kind of organizational networks so crucial to ethnic mobilization. Over the past 15 years in Yucatán, the number of NGOs working in the area of human rights, including Indian rights, has increased substantially. Despite this increase, ethnic identity has not been politicized in Yucatán, and ethnic mobilization and organization have been sporadic and short-lived.

*Peasant Leagues as Social and Organizational Networks.* Many indigenous activists throughout Latin America used the experience they gained in peasant organizations

in the 1970s and 1980s as a foundation for subsequent indigenous activism in the 1990s. While peasant organizations were typically based on class identities – often eclipsing and ignoring racial and ethnic issues – demands made for land and defense of agricultural self-sufficiency were taken up by indigenous activists, even as they left official organizations to form their own, independent ones. The experience Maya peasants garnered in Yucatán's CNC, however, was more proletarian than peasant-based. According to Villanueva Mukul (1993), the large degree of state intervention in the henequen industry and the nature of the industry itself, made henequen workers organized in the CNC more proletarianized than CNC peasants in other parts of Mexico. As Villanueva Mukul notes, 'the bulk of their [henequen workers'] demands were oriented more toward proletarian issues than to peasant ones, such as higher salaries, bonuses, and credit advances' (1993, p. 16). Maya peasants did not engage in a struggle for land rights; as Baños Ramírez (1989) argues, most of their demands centered on a higher price for the henequen they produced as well as demands for more credits and higher pensions. Thus, for Baños Ramírez (1989, p. 282), henequen producers in Yucatán cannot be called 'peasants' in a strict sense of that word in that they did not enjoy even a minimal level of control over their agricultural production. Unlike indigenous peasants in other regions of Mexico who cut their organizational teeth by mobilizing around land reform, Maya peasants had little or no interest in land; their principal interest was in obtaining credit from the state.<sup>33</sup>

Yashar may well be correct in focusing on the crucial importance of networks in explaining the relative strength of ethnic-based movements across Latin America. In the Yucatán, however, it was not the mere presence or absence of peasant networks that explains the weakness of ethnic mobilization in the state, but the *kind* of agriculture that was being practiced. The high capital requirements of the industrialized henequen industry tied Maya peasants to the state in ways that made it difficult for independent peasant organizations to effectively challenge CNC rule. Even the organizations that split from the CNC and were independent of the state, such as the National Union of Agricultural Workers (Unión Nacional de Trabajadores Agrícolas) and the Democratic Peasant Union (Unión Campesina Democrática) combined industrial and peasant demands.

Rosales González and Llanez Ortiz (2003) also argue that the organizations that emerged in Yucatán in the 1980s to challenge the CNC did not constitute a state-wide peasant movement. Pointing to mobilizations of corn growers in resistance to BANRURAL (the state-run Rural Bank) in 1986–1987 and the emergence of productive organizations that formed part of UNORCA (National Union of Autonomous Regional Peasant Organizations) as examples of independent organizations active in the state in the 1980s, Rosales González and Llanez Ortiz argue that there was no movement for land in Yucatán as there was in other Mexican states: 'The mobilizations in these years [1970s and 1980s] privileged economic demands of a working class stripe, such as those advanced by the henequen *ejidatarios* in Yucatán in relation to credit or *las carteras vencidas* of corn farmers in the center and east of the state. The latter emphasized the importance of marketing products independently of the state' (2003, p. 550).<sup>34</sup>

While the state exercised hegemonic control over henequen producers located in the western region around Mérida, peasants living in eastern and southern Yucatán enjoyed more autonomy from the state. This relative autonomy, however, has not translated into ethnic-based organization. I spoke with several movement organizers and cultural promoters who have lived and worked in the southern agricultural region who asserted that Maya both in and outside the henequen zone shared what they called a 'mentality of dependency.' Feliciano Sánchez, who has worked for over 20 years as a cultural promoter at the Center for Popular Culture (a dependency of the National Council for the Arts and Culture), underscored the impact that the state's ecology has had on community solidarity and autonomy. 'Yucatán is a very flat state, a place where no one can hide,' he said. 'This has made it difficult for Maya communities to exercise de facto autonomy. . . . Our communities have been open to outside influence much more than Chiapas and Oaxaca.' While peasants' level of dependence on the CNC and the state was greatest in the henequen zone, Sánchez spoke of the penetration and influence of political parties in the countryside throughout Yucatán. He said that community organizers are fighting an uphill battle against party operators and state officials to capture Mayas' attention.

In the late 1970s, economic alternatives offered by the tourist and oil industries in the neighboring states of Quintana Roo and Campeche, respectively, also attracted Mayas' attention. With the development of Cancún as a mega-development project in the late 1970s, and extending down the Caribbean coast in the 1980s and 1990s, a steady and increasing number of Maya peasants left their villages in search of economic opportunities on the Maya Riviera. In the 1980s, the expansion of petroleum exploration and production in Campeche also attracted thousands of rural Yucatecan migrants (Baños Ramirez, 2000). Several of my informants commented on migration to the Maya Riviera and to Campeche as key factors in explaining the general weakness of Maya organization. Without the escape valve of migration to mitigate the effect of neo-liberal policies on the Yucatecan countryside in the 1980s and 1990s, there may have been more organizational activity, or 'voice' (see Hirschman, 1970). Instead, Maya exited to Cancún and to Campeche, voting with their feet.<sup>35</sup>

*Progressive Catholic Church and Social and Organizational Networks.* The Yucatecan Church is widely considered to be one of the most conservative in the country. For 26 years it was under the helm of Archbishop Castro Ruíz, who was succeeded in 1996 by the equally conservative Emilio Berlie. Both bishops actively sought to shut down the work of progressive priests, who had been markedly influenced by the 1968 bishops conference held in Medellín (where a 'preferential option for the poor' was officially promulgated) and work of liberation theologians more broadly. While in Yucatán this group of priests was never very large (averaging around 10 clergy), they have worked for decades on issues related to social justice, human rights, and, in the past 15 years, Maya cultural identity and autonomy. Today, the work of these priests is focused on an ecological agricultural school (Escuela de Agricultura

Ecológica) in the southern town of Maní, where students study organic agricultural techniques and take courses in Maya history and culture.

The priests who founded the Escuela de Agricultura Ecológica in the mid-1990s view their work and vocations through the lens of liberation theology. Padre Atilano Ceballos Loeza ('Tilo') told me that the same simple principles that guided the formation of base Christian communities throughout Latin America provided the foundation for their project, namely the idea of 'seeing, thinking, and acting' (*ver, pensar, actuar*). From the start, Padre Tilo said, the bishop opposed the project and tried to close it down. While 'the hierarchical church' did succeed in scaring away several of the priests initially involved in the project, a core group of four priests remained. Maní was chosen as a site, as it was geographically close to two of the priests involved in the project, and the land was good for farming. Funding for the project came from the German Catholic Church, which not only provided the initial start-up financing but was the principal donor for the first 10 years of operation.<sup>36</sup>

Currently, the school has approximately 17 students.<sup>37</sup> The curriculum consists of three main branches (*módulos*) of study: *Agro-forestal* (forestry); *Agro-pecuario* (farming); and *Humana-Social* (social humanism). Courses taken in the first module include instruction on diseases (*plagas*), planting, and composting. *Agro-pecuario* courses deal with animal management (*manejo de animales*), beekeeping, birds, fisheries, and animal reproduction. In the third module, *Humana-Social*, students take courses on fair trade, rural sustainable development, the Bible and land issues, Yucatecan history, and Maya culture, language, and spirituality. Bernardo Xiú, a graduate of the program who now works at the school, described the course he took on the history of Yucatán: 'I have discovered so much more about Maya culture. It is only now that we are beginning to understand our history, our Maya history, our culture.' Motivated by this course, he began a project of 'rescuing' Maya stories that were passed down to him from his parents and grandparents.

Since 2003, several of the school's graduates joined together in a cooperative network to distribute organic food to consumers in Mérida called the Tojil Yambil Peninsular Peasant Network of Equal Exchange (the Red de Comercio Justo Tojil Yambil).<sup>38</sup> As of July 2008, 12 farms (and the Escuela de Agricultura Ecológica) are involved; all are run by graduates of the Ecological School in Maní.<sup>39</sup> In addition to providing self-sustenance and income to the farmers and their families, participating members told me that the network also served as an alternative to migration for young people in the region. Marcelo León, who runs Granja Caxan Cuxtal, told me that young men who do not have access to land are the most likely to migrate to Cancún or to the United States in search of work. Graduate Bernardo Xiú told me that, in addition to economic consequences, migration has significant social and cultural ones as well. According to Xiú, after spending time in Mérida, Cancún, and the United States, young men begin to put a great deal of value on material possessions. For Xiú, ambition and money begin to corrupt the migrants and the wives they leave behind.<sup>40</sup> Mauricio Macossay, a sociology professor who teaches a course on sustainable rural development at the school, says that both the school and the organic produce network seek to provide Maya farmers with a degree of economic autonomy, but just as important, in his view, is the notion of mental

autonomy (*autonomía de mente*) – understanding oneself as a free agent capable of acting independently.

One of the challenges facing the Red de Comercio Justo Tojil Yambil is furthering its contact with national and international fair-trade networks. In an article reflecting on the first two years of its operation, Macossay Vallado (2005) notes that not much progress was made on this front. Returning to Yashar's argument about the importance of organizational networks to ethnic mobilization and politicization, this network may be too regional to facilitate the kind of trans-community links so essential to ethnic mobilization. In other words, there may be a threshold of organizational density that the network has not reached. Recall that Yashar's argument rests not on the content of the demands advanced by these networks (i.e. the networks typically do not work explicitly for Indian rights) but on activists' use of the resources these networks offer. The Red de Comercio Justo Tojil Yambil simply cannot offer sufficient resources to potential activists.<sup>41</sup>

*Non-governmental Organizations as Social and Organizational Networks.* In addition to national peasant leagues and churches, NGOs have provided resources for the creation of trans-community networks. Across Latin America, indigenous activists have utilized human-rights NGOs for this purpose. In her study, Yashar flags Bolivia as the place where indigenous activists have most relied on NGO support for the creation of organizational networks.<sup>42</sup> Yucatán has a number of NGOs working in the area of human rights, the most visible of which is Grupo Indignación, based in Chablekal, north of Mérida.<sup>43</sup> Several of those working for Grupo Indignación are clergy or were heavily influenced by liberation theology and the progressive Catholic Church. Father Raúl Lugo, for example, is the director of Indignación, and he is also involved in the Ecological School at Maní. My visit to Grupo Indignación and interview with José Euán Romero suggest that while the NGO is not officially linked to the Catholic Church, the language used to talk about its work comes very much from the progressive Catholic tradition.

In January 2006, Subcomandante Marcos of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) came to Yucatán with several indigenous delegates as part of his presidential non-campaign (*la otra campaña*). The EZLN asked Grupo Indignación to organize the three-day visit, which involved meetings with several indigenous organizations, a visit (unanticipated) to Chichén Itza, and a final public march and demonstration in the center of Mérida. For those at Grupo Indignación working on Indian rights and culture, the EZLN's visit was an opportunity to further their work in this area with the hopes of sparking awareness and activism among the Maya. Another organization stimulated by the EZLN's visit was the Maya Peninsular Forum (Foro Maya Peninsular), which was formed in the wake of the uprising and which represents the Yucatán peninsula within the National Indian Congress (Congreso Nacional Indígena), an organization closely tied to the EZLN. In 1999, members of the Foro Maya Peninsular received the Zapatista delegates who came to promote the EZLN's *consulta* and were intensely involved in national-level discussions on the 2001 Indian rights legislation. While members of the Foro have coordinated with

Grupo Indignación on specific legal and political initiatives regarding changes in the state constitution with respect to Indian rights, the Foro is a more explicitly political association whose main goal is the implementation of the San Andrés Accords. One of the Foro's founding members and current leaders, Guillermo May Correa, told me the organization had assumed the San Andrés Accords as its own and that it would continue to fight until these Accords become law.<sup>44</sup>

Another NGO that has established a visible public presence since its founding in 1990 is Mayaón (Somos Maya). Today, Mayaón is one of the longest-standing and most visible Maya organizations on the peninsula. The organization was founded in 1990 through a convergence of Maya leaders in two areas: bilingual teachers from in and around Valladolid and peasants from the southern region of the state. The organization's goals center around deepening understanding of Maya culture, language, and values and fighting against all forms of discrimination (Quintal Avilés, 2005, p. 357). In the words of Bartolomé Alonso Caamal (1993), one of the founding members and a bilingual teacher from Valladolid, it is imperative that Maya people understand and embrace the rich history they share as Maya. According to Caamal, Maya continue to live under a neo-colonial form of subordination in that Maya do not know their own history (Caamal, 1993). One of Mayaón's principal demands is to promote the use of the Maya language. The organization does not typically organize public protests and marches, but attempts to reach its goals through participation in public forums – organized both by the government and by non-governmental organizations – and making their voice heard through the press (Quintal Avilés, 2005, p. 360). Since its founding, the organization has lobbied state officials heavily to make Maya an official language in government offices and to push for more and better bilingual education.

Today, Mayaón has about 50 members who are organized into regional organizations, meeting once a year in a plenary session (Quintal Avilés, 2005; Rosales González & Llanez Ortiz, 2003). Unlike many organizations in Yucatán that focus strictly on Maya rituals, culture, and customs, Mayaón did not emerge from state and federal indigenist institutions and maintains a certain degree of autonomy from these officialist organizations. Its focus on Maya history also sets it apart from indigenism, which, as I discuss below, tends to focus on culture – understood largely as folklore. While Mayaón is not a large organization and has not allied with other organizations to increase its potential influence, its leaders are visible in public spaces, such as newspapers, on the radio, and in public forums. Today, Alonso Caamal continues to be active in the organization, making declarations in the press and acting as a spokesperson for the organization in public forums and meetings, as is Amadeo Cool May, radio announcer for the XPET, indigenist radio station in Peto, Yucatán (Quintal Avilés, 2005, p. 358).

To sum up, the networks and organizations that in other regions of Latin America have provided resources for ethnic-based organization – peasant leagues, the progressive Catholic Church, and NGOs – have not served as vehicles for ethnic-based leadership and organization in Yucatán. First, the experience that Maya garnered in peasant leagues, namely the Yucatán state branch of the CNC and its affiliates, was focused more on proletarian issues such as income and credit and less

on land reform. In other regions, including Chiapas, peasants parlayed experience gained in fighting for land reform to mobilizing for demands *as Indians*. I argue that demands for salary increases and provision of credit transfer less well to ethnic-based organization than experience gained in fighting for land reform. The heavy hand of the CNC in Yucatán, given the high capital requirements of the henequen industry, made independent organization less likely, and when it did emerge it tended to be short-lived. Second, the progressive Catholic Church has been weak in Yucatán, due largely to decades of conservative leadership at the top of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Bishops have frowned on anything that smacks of liberation theology and have actively discouraged priests from engaging in social issues. While a small group of progressive priests have been active in the state for years and have focused their energies on cultural revitalization and leadership training, these initiatives have operated on a small scale and have not served to effectively link Maya communities trans-locally. Third, while NGOs based on human and indigenous rights exist in Yucatán, they also tend to be small-scale operations. One of the most visible and long-standing NGOs, Mayaón, focuses on revitalizing Maya memory and pride in Maya history – issues that do not lend themselves to making punctual political and social demands.

### Indigenismo and Culturalism in Yucatán

Because grassroots-based activism and ethnic leadership is weak, the role of official indigenist agencies is relatively more influential in Yucatán than in other states, such as Chiapas. In my interviews with officials at the Yucatán branch of the CDI (until 2002 the INI) as well as at the state indigenist agency, the Institute for the Development of Maya Culture of the State of Yucatán (Instituto para el Desarrollo de la Cultura Maya del Estado de Yucatán) (INDEMAYA, 2009), I found that, in terms of policy and programming, indigenismo in Yucatán is not notably different from indigenism elsewhere in Mexico. Structurally, Mexican indigenist institutions are headed up by the federal agency, the CDI. Most states with large indigenous populations have their own state-level agency. Yucatán's state agency is fairly new, created at the start of the 2000–2007 administration of PAN governor Patricio Patrón. In this section, I present a brief history of the CDI's activities in Yucatán and the formation of INDEMAYA in 2000. I argue that while the culturalist line has been and continues to be dominant in indigenist organizations throughout Mexico, it appears to be especially dominant in Yucatán relative to alternative voices.

Similar to initiatives taking place in other Mexican states, in the 1980s, the INI in Yucatán supported the formation of several new centers and events dedicated to the promotion of Maya culture through Maya-speaking *promotores*.<sup>45</sup> Between 1983 and 1987 the INI sponsored annual Maya Cultural Forums (Encuentros de Cultura Maya) held in different Maya localities. In those same years, the Institute ran a program for Maya writers (Rosales González & Llanez Ortiz, 2003, p. 551). These programs boosted Maya cultural and literary production throughout the peninsula. During the 1980s and 1990s, several new publications and texts in the Maya language were published, sparking the formation of writer associations, some of which later

joined the National Association of Writers in Indigenous Languages (Asociación Nacional de Escritores en Lengua Indígena) (Rosales González & Llanez Ortiz, 2003, p. 551).<sup>46</sup>

Immediately before Patricio Patrón assumed office in 2001, a new state agency was formed to deal with 'Maya issues,' or what would be called the 'Indian question' in other parts of Mexico.<sup>47</sup> The new agency was INDEMAYA, and its mission is:

To promote the creation of development policies based on full respect for the cultural values of the Maya people. To guarantee the appropriate channeling and utilization of human, material, and financial resources to the ethnic group for the purposes of development through appropriate coordination among governmental institutions. To stimulate the widest possible access to public sector services and to diffuse and consolidate the Maya language (INDEMAYA, 2009).

As its mission statement implies, INDEMAYA does not dispense monies directly to communities or organizations, but coordinates with and channels Maya demands to other appropriate state agencies.<sup>48</sup> According to Eduardo López Salcido, sub-director at INDEMAYA in 2007, the institute's Maya employees spend time in Maya communities talking to people about their needs – in the areas of healthcare, agriculture, and education, for example – so as to take these demands to the corresponding state agencies. INDEMAYA also promotes its own program initiatives, many of which are of a cultural bent. For example, the Institute sponsors Maya language and dance competitions to encourage Maya to continue to speak and to pass on the language. INDEMAYA also works to train interpreters who serve as translators in legal cases and has initiated a program on migration and migrant communities. According to then director Diana Canto Moreno, one of INDEMAYA's most successful initiatives has been the campaign '*Aquí estamos*' ('Here we are'). Focused on Maya culture, this program seeks to raise Maya '*auto-estima*' ('self-esteem') through television spots highlighting the accomplishments of Maya across the state. Canto also told me that the agency works with state officials 'to sensitize them to Maya issues.' The agency, for example, has worked with the Health Ministry on initiatives that combine traditional and western medicine. Compared with the CDI, which has almost 50 years' experience in Yucatán, INDEMAYA is just beginning to establish itself as a presence in the state. So far, with a few exceptions, its programming and initiatives seem to be largely culturalist – focused on language and cultural expression.<sup>49</sup>

My research suggests that the work of the federal indigenist agency (CDI) in Yucatán is not dissimilar from that of other Mexican states, such as Chiapas. Its programming and project initiatives are formed at the national level, and state-level directors often have experience in working with indigenous communities in more than one state. It is not uncommon for directors to be trained as anthropologists from the National School of Anthropology and History (ENAH) in Mexico City, which provides them with a national network of colleagues. This was the case of Patricia Guarneros, long-time Yucatán state delegate of the CDI.<sup>50</sup> In states like Chiapas where indigenous peoples have used CDI programs for training in education and leadership, other factors are present that foment ethnic

organization and mobilization: training alone is not sufficient. On the state level, the vision and programming of INDEMAYA reflect the mores and values of the state government: namely, that there is less racial discrimination in Yucatán than in other Mexican states and that the Maya are generally a peaceable people, in contrast to the *indios* in other parts of Mexico, such as Chiapas. State officials in Yucatán are loathe to use the term ‘peoples’ or ‘indigenous’ to describe the Maya, preferring terms such as ‘native peoples’ (*pueblos originarios*) or simply ‘Maya.’<sup>51</sup>

### Future Ethnic Organizing in Yucatán: What Would it Look Like?

The types of organizations Yashar (2005) discusses in her examination of networks are formal organizations that offer resources used by activists to forge trans-community links. Less formally organized groups simply cannot offer these resources; informal, or *de facto*, organizations also tend to be local, or, at best, regional in their scope and activity, rendering them less useful for trans-community organizing. Nevertheless, several of the people I interviewed spoke about the practice of local justice in Maya communities throughout Yucatán. While these practices do not, in themselves, lead to ethnic identity formation and consciousness, they are available for future activists for use as cultural capital. Below I describe a small community north of Mérida, Chablekal, where local justice is administered through a syncretic mix of Maya and non-Maya customs.

In Chablekal, local Maya authorities have exercised *de facto* autonomy for years.<sup>52</sup> While Chablekal is administratively dependent on the municipality of Mérida, several local authorities serve the community, including a municipal and *ejidal* representative (*comisariado municipal y ejidal*) and a justice of the peace (*juez de paz*). Because Chablekal is not a municipality, the law stipulates that the mayor of Mérida has the authority to name local authorities. In practice, however, these authorities are chosen by the community and are later sanctioned by the municipal government.<sup>53</sup> Both the *comisariado municipal* and the *juez de paz* administer justice on the local level.<sup>54</sup> While these officials are legally charged to exercise ‘western’ norms as laid out in the state constitution, José Euán Romero, a former judge from Chablekal, told me that – after they are sworn in an official ceremony at the state legislative building in Mérida – they ‘set aside’ the code of justice to practice community norms. He also noted that local authorities tend not use the Ministerio Público (Public Ministry), but rather Maya ‘normative systems of indigenous justice.’<sup>55</sup>

Speaking more broadly about community justice norms throughout the state, Baltazar Xool, who works at the State Human Rights Commission (Comisión de Derechos Humanos del Estado de Yucatán) and specializes in community law, told me that local justices of the peace receive training in positive law, but exercise community norms in the villages.<sup>56</sup> In his work on local elections in dozens of municipalities across Yucatán, Professor of Anthropology Efraín Poot also observed the ‘large presence of older forms of organization on the community level.’ According to Poot, these structures are so quotidian that they seem to be part of the

‘subsoil’ (*substrato*), and are not explicitly flagged as Maya or Indian, much less used as a basis for ethnic organization and mobilization.<sup>57</sup>

While today in Yucatán demands for local autonomy have not emerged from Maya grassroots organizations, a discussion of local autonomy in Maya communities figured prominently in debates on the floor of the state congress on the Indian law and culture bill. The 2009 regulatory legislation empowers the work of local *jueces de paz* (referred to in the bill as ‘*jueces de paz y de Conciliación Maya*’) and emphasizes oral hearings of cases. The law states that ‘the cases before the *Jueces de Paz y de Conciliación Maya* will be predominantly oral, without formalistic rigor and with the intention of resolving the case in a single hearing with all involved parties present’ (p. 35).<sup>58</sup>

One issue around which Maya could potentially organize in the future is control over the burgeoning eco-tourist industry. In an interview with Feliciano Sánchez of the Center for Popular Culture, Sánchez spoke of future challenges facing the Maya of Yucatán. He noted that eco-tourism was an area of growth within the larger subset of tourism in Yucatán. Tourists are looking for an ‘authentic’ experience, a connection to the land and to nature, as well as contact with native peoples. Since Maya continue to live in the state’s rural areas and have a strong connection to the land, even though that connection has weakened over the years, Sánchez believes that Maya could work to re-connect with local spaces in order to capitalize on this industry. He admits, however, that today’s Maya underestimate the importance of land and their connection to it. ‘The Maya people,’ he says, ‘have to defend their territory. We have to recover our relationship with the land.’ It is not at all clear, however, that Maya are poised to take advantage of this potential opportunity. Sánchez noted that today’s Maya are not organized to take advantages of these spaces opening up for eco-tourism. Without organization, he noted, larger companies will take control of the industry.

Supposing that ethnic organization did emerge in Yucatán, the resistance of the non-Maya community presents yet another obstacle to overcome. Similar to the ‘common sense’ circulating among state officials, the dominant view within mainstream Yucatecan society is that the Maya are *tranquilos* (tranquil), uninterested in stirring up ‘trouble.’ Social movement scholars have argued that cultural context matters in terms of the resonance of social movement frames to potential audiences. For Benford and Snow (2000), cultural context, which they define as ‘the extant stock of meanings, beliefs, ideologies, practices, values, myths, and narratives’ of a society, can constrain or facilitate the growth and relative strength of a social movement. In the final section of this article, I turn to a brief description of the Yucatecan cultural context within which any ethnic organizing would take place.

### Regional Identity

Unlike many other Mexican states where it is rare to find a non-Indian who speaks an indigenous language, in Yucatán it is not uncommon to encounter non-Mayas speaking Maya. Most non-Maya speakers know a few words of Maya, as they are liberally sprinkled in the language of quotidian ‘Yucatecan’ (on full display in the comedic shows described below). Across the state, language use is not synonymous

with ethnic identity. Both Gabbert (2004, p. 111) and Quintal *et al.* (2003) note that speakers of Maya are referred to as 'Mayeros', irrespective of whether they are ethnically Maya.

In addition to language, Maya cultural markers such as folk dances and dress have been widely appropriated by local and regional elites. Perhaps the most striking example of this appropriation is the regional parade, held each year on the Monday of *Carnaval*. The state's most elaborate spectacle is held in Mérida. On this night, hundreds of Yucatecans dress up as mestizos and mestizas.<sup>59</sup> The women wear the *terno* (ceremonial *huipil*) and gold jewelry, pulling their hair back from their faces in severe buns.<sup>60</sup> The men wear a white cotton tunic-like top with an apron, covering traditional white cotton pants, wooden sandals and a sombrero. Groups of mestizos, typically organized into *gremios* (guilds) that have been practicing for months in preparation for the event, parade together down the route, some playing musical instruments and many dancing *jarana* accompanied by folk music. On this night, mestizo/mestiza and Yucateco/Yucateca identity are fused into one single regional identity. It is certainly true that, during *Carnaval*, identities and roles are famously subverted; normal time is suspended and roles reversed. Yet, in my observation of Mérida's regional parade, dressing up as mestizos/mestizas was not something foreign and strange for the participants – that is, they were not assuming an identity unimaginable in 'normal' times – but, rather, it was an opportunity to display Yucatecan pride and distinctiveness. Many people asked my husband and me whether we had seen the parade (our apartment was on the parade route so we did not miss a moment!), and I sensed in their questions a real pride in Yucatán's 'traditions,' which seemed to belong to all Yucatecans. As the parade ended on Monday night, regional comedians were brought in to entertain the crowd with jokes and short plays that poked fun at the Yucatecan accent (strongly inflected by Maya), the supposed gullibility and innocence of country folk, and the misunderstandings that can occur among Yucatecans of different social classes.

The conversion of mestizo traditions into regional, Yucatecan ones has accelerated as Yucatán's tourism industry has grown. Today in Mérida, folklore dances are held twice weekly at downtown venues, mostly for the benefit of tourists. The state tourism ministry's official slogan is '¡Yucatán es diferente!' ('Yucatán is different!'). That difference, it seems, rests almost entirely on its mestizo identity. In other Mexican states, also trying desperately to find a niche within the increasingly competitive tourist industry, indigenous peoples are also highlighted as a primary reason for tourists to visit. Yet, the indigenous peoples and communities highlighted in these tourist brochures are portrayed as separate and isolated from mainstream mestizo culture, living in small villages where they practice ancient handicrafts, such as weaving and woodcutting. In Yucatán, in contrast, the state identity itself is mestizo, and the Maya (and non-Maya) wearing the *terno* and dancing in the photographs are shown as living not only in the countryside and in small towns but in cities like Mérida. This porousness between Maya and non-Maya identity constrains Maya ethnic activism in two ways. First, it makes it more difficult for Maya to draw boundaries between 'us' and 'them,' which, as Barth pointed out years ago in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1969), is essential to movement-organizing.

Second, this porousness makes non-Maya less receptive and, indeed, resentful, of any discussion of racism or racial discrimination raised by Maya peoples. Accompanying this 'common sense' of regional identity is the idea that there is very little racism in Yucatán and that all peoples live together in harmony. Many Maya share this view of racial harmony. Indeed, the Italian philosopher and political activist Antonio Gramsci argues that 'common sense' understandings are shared by the dominating and dominated alike. While it may seem strange to hear poor Maya people insist that there is little racial discrimination in Yucatán, adopting such a view may be quite advantageous for Maya. Resisting 'common sense' ideas about race is enervating on a personal level. Organizing around racial discrimination in a society that largely insists that there is none, requires tremendous personal and group resources, both monetary and emotional. In sum, this prevailing set of cultural beliefs and attitudes provide a barrier and constraint for would-be ethnic entrepreneurs and leaders.

### **Conclusion**

When dealing with a question as broad as the one I set out to examine in this article – why there is no ethnic-based organization in Yucatán – the potential explanations are many and may be drawn from the fields of history, anthropology, sociology, political science, and environmental studies (ecology). In narrowing the scope of these potential explanations, I limited my study to an examination of Yashar's three-fold framework of motive, opportunity, and capacity. Regarding motive, Yashar argues that shift from corporatist to neo-liberal citizenship regimes in the 1980s and 1990s across Latin America stripped indigenous peasants of the relative autonomy they enjoyed under the corporatist regimes. While the dismantling of the state-subsidized henequen industry in the early 1990s in Yucatán was a clear example of this regime-shift, Maya peasants, I argue, had so little relative autonomy under the corporatist regime and its peasant leagues that they were constrained in using the experience garnered in these leagues for subsequent ethnic-based organization, as occurred in other states such as Chiapas. Even independent peasant organizations that emerged during the 1970s and 1980s to challenge the CNC in Yucatán were weak and often dissipated after their demands were met.

Regarding opportunity, the second dimension of the framework, Yashar argues that the wave of democratic regimes that swept the region in the 1980s and 1990s provided indigenous peasants the space within which to organize and to express their opposition to neo-liberal policies. Despite the longevity of a semi-authoritarian government in Mexico on the federal and Yucatán state level during these years, widespread and outright repression of Maya peasants was not common. In short, Maya peasants were not significantly constrained by a lack of political associational space. Finally, I argue that the social organizations and networks that, according to Yashar, provide activists and potential activists with the capacity to mobilize – namely, peasant leagues and the progressive Catholic Church – have not served as vehicles for leadership training and organization as occurred in Chiapas (and to a lesser extent in Oaxaca). While peasant leagues were strong in Yucatán, they did not serve as networks for Maya activism, I argue, because of the industrialized

nature of the henequen industry: Maya workers in the industry resembled proletarian factory workers more than peasants. The Catholic Church, while strong in Yucatán, has been led by conservative bishops for decades and is openly hostile to social activism, including ethnic organization. While a small group of progressive priests, human rights organizations, indigenist officials, and sympathetic intellectuals have actively worked to strengthen cultural and social Maya organizations, as well as Maya identity formation, the progress has been slow and the organizations incipient. Only time will tell if Yucatán will continue to be an outlier state on the question of ethnic-based organization or if the forces of globalization that have led thousands of Maya to migrate will narrow the differences that have – up to now – made Yucatán different from neighboring states with large Maya populations like Chiapas.

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### Notes

- [1] Two clarifications are in order: first, this article examines ethnic organization in Yucatán state, not the peninsula (Campeche became independent of Yucatán in 1857; Quintana Roo became a territory in 1902). Second, the term 'Maya' is used throughout the article to refer to the indigenous people of Yucatán. This is not a term that individuals would necessarily use to describe themselves, and the use of this term does not imply a social or political consciousness of indigeneity or Indianness. I am referring in general terms to people whose parents or grandparents spoke Maya, who have a Maya surname, who may or may not speak Maya themselves, and who may or may not participate in some Maya cultural or ritual practices. I understand ethnic identity to be contextually situated and malleable. Context matters in that ethnic self-identification and definition by others differs depending on context. Ethnic identity is malleable in that it is, like all social identities, in flux. In terms of this article, there is no essential set of characteristics or attributes that define 'Maya' identity. On the other hand, I am aware of the limitations of this assertion and note two such caveats here: that there are constraints on the limits of ethnicity's malleability in any context due to historical and social circumstances; and that, while ethnicity is largely social and cultural, phenotype continues to be important as an emic concept (see Gabbert, 2004, p. 116).
- [2] Yashar's book has been cited extensively by experts and non-experts alike and has been well received within the sub-field of comparative political science. While some scholars have critiqued her findings in particular country cases, her macro-arguments have not been subject to much debate.

- [3] Between 1995 and 2000 I did 18 months of field work in Chiapas, the results of which I published in two books: *To See With Two Eyes: Peasant Activism and Indian Autonomy in Chiapas* (Mattiace, 2003) and the edited volume *Mayan Lives, Mayan Utopias: the Indigenous Peoples of Chiapas and the Zapatista Rebellion* with J. Rus and R. A. Hernández (Rus *et al.*, 2003). I did the fieldwork for this article in 2007 and 2008 when I conducted over a dozen interviews with elected governmental officials, human rights workers, Catholic clergy, intellectuals, and governmental employees working in indigenist institutions in and around Mérida (see Appendix 1).
- [4] In his examination of indigenous protest based on press reports from 1976 to 2000, Guillermo Trejo notes that the lowest level of indigenous protest in Mexico during this period was among the Maya of Yucatán state, making Yucatán ‘the most extreme case of a region in Mexico in which almost no contentious action was reported by the national press’ (Trejo Osorio, 2004, p. 73). The largest number of protests was registered in Chiapas, making it an ‘epicenter’ of protest (Trejo Osorio, 2004, p. 70).
- [5] According to estimates from the INI (now the Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas) (CDI) published in 2002, Yucatán had the largest indigenous population in the country at 981,064, totaling 59.2% of the state’s population. This figure is significantly larger than that reported by the INEGI in 2005 (<http://www.inegi.gob.mx/est/contenidos/espanol/sistemas/conteo2005>). The CDI’s larger number is an estimate based on household data, which are then added to the numbers of indigenous language speakers. The INEGI numbers are based solely on indigenous language speakers. The INI’s estimate for number of indigenous peoples in Chiapas is 1,117,597, or 28.5% of the population (INI, 2002).
- [6] While some authors view this conflict as primarily racial in nature (see Bricker, 1981; Sullivan, 2004), others argue that the Caste War was not racially-based (Gabbert, 2004; Reed, 1964; Rugeley, 1996). The latter argue that race was important in the Caste War not because the rebels shared an ethnic consciousness, but because race was used by elites to mobilize non-Indians and to justify the abuses committed.
- [7] The brief gubernatorial administration of Felipe Carrillo Puerto in Yucatán (1921–1923) was an exception to this overall trend of Hispanicization through education. Carrillo Puerto was a native Yucateco, spoke fluent Maya and encouraged the use of Maya in the classroom, not only to facilitate the learning of Spanish but because he believed that social progress and cultural revitalization were linked goals (Fallaw, 1997).
- [8] Yucatán had one of the most progressive state socialist parties in the immediate post-revolutionary period under Governors Alvarado and Carrillo Puerto, while in Chiapas the Liberal and the Conservative parties dominated the political landscape before the 1930s. The party that in 1942 became the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) was a successor to the PRM and the PNR (National Revolutionary Party). These name changes did not signal a significant shift in leadership or party ideology.
- [9] Beginning in the 1970s, the diocese began ordaining lay men as deacons to deal with the severe shortage of priests. Deacons – who total about 400 and outnumber priests five to one in the diocese – regularly perform baptisms and weddings and hold religious services in their communities. (They do not, however, consecrate Communion or hear confession.) Unlike deacons, catechists are not ordained and do not administer the sacraments; they typically function as lay leaders in their communities, leading Bible studies and prayer sessions. In the early 2000s, there were about 8000 catechists in the Diocese (Thompson, 2002).
- [10] In 2001, 19 states voted in favor of the constitutional amendment to establish indigenous rights and nine states voted against the amendment (among them, Chiapas). No vote was held in two states (Tamaulipas and Yucatán). (Morelos did not vote on the changes.) (López Bárcenas *et al.*, 2001, pp. 128–131).
- [11] See Anaya Muñoz (2005) on the political forces that led to legislative passage in Oaxaca.
- [12] Assies *et al.* (2006) argue that the constitutional changes made in Quintana Roo, Chiapas, and Campeche were largely culturalist and stress the preservation of customs and traditions. While all three constitutions allow local indigenous authorities, or judges, to have

- jurisdiction over minor civil, family, and penal affairs, the authors argue that state legislatures did not stray too far from the parameters set by existing federal legislation. That is, legislators in Quintana Roo, Chiapas, and Campeche closely followed the guidelines of the Zedillo administration (Assies *et al.*, 2006, p. 58). See González Oropeza (2004) for a more optimistic assessment of these constitutional changes.
- [13] Before 2007, several minor changes were made to the state constitution. For example, Article 30 was amended, which stated that Mayas had the right to be consulted in the event that new municipalities were created, and Article 85 obliged the state to promote the integral development of the ‘Maya ethnic group.’
- [14] There is a two-and-a-half page section entitled, ‘On Territory, Land, and Natural Resources,’ which grants Maya access to natural resources on their lands and territories consistent with Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution, Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization (ILO), and existing legal norms (pp. 45–48). Compared to the attention given to Maya culture, this section is quite short (‘Iniciativa de Ley Regulamentaria’).
- [15] It is noteworthy that the Maya are referred to in this section of the document as ‘*cultura maya*’ (Maya culture). In other places, the phrases ‘*indígena maya de Yucatán*’ (indigenous Maya of Yucatán), ‘*comunidad maya*’ (Maya community), and ‘*pueblo maya*’ (Maya people) are used.
- [16] Gabbert suggests that the term ‘ethnic differentiation’ may be more useful to describe ethnic relations in Yucatán than ‘ethnic boundary.’ He cautions, however, that while the notion of ‘ethnic differentiation’ may be applied to Yucatán, ‘the association with one of the types [the Maya-speaking lower class and the Spanish-speaking upper class] . . . is not necessarily permanent’ (2004, pp. 154–155).
- [17] Contemporary Maya living in the center of Quintana Roo in the so-called ‘zona maya’ who call themselves *maasewales* are the descendents of the rebels who fought against the criollo leaders of Yucatán and Campeche during the Caste War (see Gabbert, 2004; Quintal Avilés, 2005).
- [18] A word about the ecological context of Yucatán bears mention here. The Yucatán peninsula consists of a large block of limestone covered by a very thin layer of topsoil. Unlike Chiapas, with its mountains and valleys, Yucatán’s default vegetation is low-lying tropical forest. Yucatán’s flatness has historically made it more difficult for rebel groups to hide – with the exception of the far eastern region of the state – and villages are more accessible to outside influences than in Chiapas.
- [19] The *milpa* is a small plot of land typically planted with staple crops for domestic consumption, such as corn, beans, chilies, and squash.
- [20] For a book-length treatment of Cab Cumí’s life and work, see Kathleen Rock Martín’s *Discarded Pages: Araceli Cab Cumí, Maya Poet and Politician* (2007).
- [21] Ricardo López Santillán has done fascinating work on another sub-category of Maya: Maya professionals. These are individuals who identify explicitly as Maya but who are not formally organized around Maya identity (see López Santillán, 2006, 2007).
- [22] During the course of the last third of the 20th century, indigenous peoples have explicitly used ethnic identity as a banner around which to organize. While ethnic-based organization is not new in the Americas, the scale and scope of contemporary mobilization is different. There is no single explanation for why ethnicity has become a focal point for mobilization and organization, although Yashar (2005, p. 5) notes the importance of two factors: the decline in peasant-based organizations as states have downsized; and the growing attention paid to indigenous and ethnic issues among international organizations.
- [23] The Carnegie Endowment published an excellent comprehensive report on the results of North American Free Trade Agreement after 10 years (see Papademetriou *et al.*, 2003).
- [24] Barabas notes that, in 1970, more than one-half of Yucatán’s municipalities and almost two-thirds of the population were involved in henequen production. This production took place on 90,000 hectares (the overwhelming majority on *ejidal* lands) – three times as much land as was in corn production (Barabas, 1979, p. 121).

- [25] Villanueva Mukul is referring to the experience of several regional organizations: the Unión de Ejidos Agropecuarios 'Luis Echeverría Álvarez' of Tizimín in the eastern part of the state, the Unión de Ejidos Maiceros 'Nachi Cocom' in Sotuta and the Unión de Ejidos Agropecuarios 'Víctor Mena Palomo' in Buctzoz in the center of the state (Villanueva Mukul, 1993, p. 125).
- [26] Violence against the opposition, particularly in rural regions, however, was widespread, reaching its apogee in the 1970s when Mexico experienced its own 'dirty war' (see Doyle, 2003).
- [27] By supporting this amendment, Salinas hoped in part to advance his cause as potential head of the World Trade Organization. By the late 1980s, support for indigenous rights was *en vogue* at the international level. As further evidence of this, Mexico was the second country in the world to ratify the International Labor Organization's Convention 169 in 1991, which was the most progressive international legislation on indigenous rights at the time.
- [28] In an article on authoritarian enclaves within Mexico's democratic transition, Chappell Lawson (2000, p. 278) flags Yucatán (under Cervera Pacheco) as one of three states notorious for vote-buying during the 2000 electoral campaigns (the other two were Tabasco and Puebla) (see also Cornelius *et al.*, 1999; Turner, 2002).
- [29] Eisenstadt is referring specifically to Cervera Pacheco's defiance of Mexico's formal electoral institutions when he directly challenged President Fox and the Federal Electoral Tribunal in the months leading up to the 2000 gubernatorial election. Cervera Pacheco stacked the state electoral commission with his own people and ignored federal demands that the commission members be re-selected. He relented only after a Supreme Court ruling backed the Federal Electoral Tribunal weeks before the election was held (Eisenstadt, 2003, pp. 44–45).
- [30] Even in its heyday in the 1940s and 1950s, there were notable examples of open resistance to the CNC from within and without. From within, competing peasant organizations emerged, such as the Central Campesina Independiente (Independent Peasant Central) formed in 1961, and the Unión General de Obreros y Campesinos Mexicanos (General Union of Mexican Workers and Peasants) that was organized as early as 1949 (Mattiace, 2003, p. 31).
- [31] By the mid-to-late 1970s, CNC legitimacy had diminished markedly (see Fox & Gordillo, 1989). In Yucatán, the strongest affiliate of the CNC was the League of Agrarian Communities and Unions (Liga de Comunidades Agrarias y Sindicatos), formed in 1938 (Baños Ramírez, 1989, p. 267). Villanueva Mukul (1993, p. 19) notes that by 1982 the CNC was incapable of containing the protests that had occurred with increasing frequency since 1978; after 1982, he argues, the CNC and its affiliates followed, rather than led, the peasant movement.
- [32] The auspicious conditions include support for Indian rights in the United Nations and the 1981 International Labor Organization's Convention 169, which, among other things, committed signatories to consult with indigenous peoples on issues affecting them (Brysk, 2000).
- [33] Baños Ramírez (1989) departs a bit from Villanueva Mukul in arguing that Mayas' focus on credit and better working conditions did not make them proletarians either, since they had not severed their connection to the land and most continued to work their small *milpa* (plots of land where subsistence crops for domestic consumption are grown). Baños Ramírez (1989) argues that Maya henequen producers are best described as *ejidatarios*. According to Baños Ramírez, even while there was no organized struggle for land reform among the Maya henequen producers – it made little sense within the structural context – henequen, ironically, became a subsistence crop of sorts. Unlike other subsistence crops, however, it was only viable with heavy state intervention (Baños Ramírez, 1989, p. 311).
- [34] Interestingly, Rosales González and Llanez Ortiz (2003) suggest that, despite the proletarian nature of these movements, they did have a cultural, or ethnic, dimension in that Maya peasants charged state agents, such as BANRURAL, with unjust use of land and resources. They also suggest that peasants were treated with discrimination in these encounters with

- state officials. Yet, they argue, with few exceptions, this did not translate into indigenous organizing.
- [35] Migration of indigenous peoples throughout Mexico to urban areas in Mexico and in the United States is now widespread. Migration of Maya *chiapanecos*, however, began later than in Yucatán. Tuxtla Gutiérrez, the state capital of Chiapas, is a medium-sized city and never absorbed a large number of internal migrants. Beginning in the mid-1990s, migration of Maya from Chiapas to Quintana Roo, to the northern Mexican border and to the United States became a steady stream, emptying many villages of their male inhabitants. Interestingly, Maya from Chiapas are today displacing Maya Yucatecans in the Maya Riviera region of Quintana Roo; Maya Yucatecans are now migrating to the United States in greater numbers (see Cornelius *et al.*, 2007).
- [36] As of 2007 the School began looking for a new funding source as the Germans decided to fund other development projects.
- [37] Telephone conversation with Padre Tilo, 3 July 2007.
- [38] The full name of the cooperative is Granjas Agro-Ecológicas Integrales Red Campesina Peninsular de Comercio Justo Tojil Yambil.
- [39] The 12 participating farms are: Granja Tumben Lu'um Tierra Nueva de Yobaín (Cecilia Uh Jiménez and brother Lorenzo); Granja Tumben Zazta Nuevo Amanecer de Maxcanú (Miguel Canul); Granja Caxan Cuxtal Buscando la Vida de Dzemucut, (Marcelo León); Granja Yax Col Primera Milpa de Sahcabá (Fabián Balam); Aj lakiloob de San José de Montecristo, Tizimín (Moisés Dzul), Granja Santa Cruz de Hocabá (Lilio Canché); Huechembalam; Progresito; Xohuayan; Abala; Dzemul; and Xanabá (personal communication, Mauricio Macossay, 24 July 2008) (<http://geocities.com/redcacom>). Three additional organizations also participate in the network and sell their products primarily at a vegetarian restaurant in downtown Mérida: Sociedad de Solidaridad Social Nal Xoy in Peto (Bernadino Canul Xix); Grupo Las Mestizas de Maní (Concepción Pérez); and Sociedad Cooperativa 'Naranjeros de Dzan' de Dzan (Alfredo Serralta Interian). The network receives substantial support from the Escuela Ecológica in Maní, as well as from a group of professors at Centro Regional de la Peninsula de Yucatán and the University of Chapingo in Yucatán, namely Professor Macossay Vallado, who administers the Internet portal and runs monthly organizational meetings. The state government has also provided funds for some infrastructural development (see Macossay Vallado, 2006, p. 7).
- [40] Xiú traces the beginning of corruption to the Green Revolution and its arrival to his village, Mama (a small community just north of Maní). In Mama, the only ones who worked the *milpa* were the parents: the young people all went to the city, to Oxkutzcab. In Xiú's narrative, it was here that young people got the idea that money rules all. In his view, this idea weakened the countryside and Maya culture. Padre Tilo, listening to Xiú tell me this story during a visit to the school in Maní, added to it by saying that it was understandable why many young people do not want to work the land and prefer other opportunities. Padre Tilo is not naïve about the risks involved for young people who dedicate themselves to small-scale agriculture. He says that while most do not want to assume the commitment some do: 'We understand that we are rowing against the tide.' Tilo then told a story of his own about a college graduate who came to the school in search of 'returning to the land.' He commented on the irony of the fact that those who do not come from a peasant background appreciate peasant life more than those who do.
- [41] The yearly income of these farms offers only a small profit to its members. In a detailed study of one of them, Caxan Cuxtal, Macossay reports that its total income in 2005 was about US\$10,460 and its expenses about US\$9430, leaving a profit of US\$1025 to be divided among seven families (13 adults: six women and seven men) (Macossay Vallado, 2006).
- [42] NGO activity in the Andean region has historically been much more intense than in Mexico. One of the reasons for this is the relative weakness of Andean nation-states.
- [43] Grupo Indignación publishes 10 annual issues of the magazine *El Varejon*, available online [[www.indignacion.org](http://www.indignacion.org)].

- [44] Interview with author.
- [45] *Promotores* are local indigenous peoples employed by INI to carry out its programs in rural areas. Beginning with President López Portillo's administration (1976–1982), the INI sought to move away from assimilation and acculturation of indigenous peoples toward a more participatory model of ethnic interaction (see Mattiace, 2003, pp. 65–69).
- [46] The creation of the radio station XEPET – Voice of the Mayas – at INI's Coordinating Center in Peto in 1982 has also served to promote Maya language programs and cultural 'traditions.' Mayas throughout the peninsula listen to its programs, which have created a virtual community across three states. Quintal suggests XEPET has been instrumental in making Peto the area in Yucatán where more people assume an explicit Maya identity (Quintal Avilés, 2005, p. 343).
- [47] High-ranking officials of INDEMAYA told me in 2007 that the incoming PAN administration created the agency in 2001 in order to take advantage of federal monies dispersed in the wake of the 2001 national constitutional changes on Indian culture and rights.
- [48] This information came from my interviews with Diana Canto Moreno and Eduardo López Salcido, then director and sub-director of INDEMAYA, respectively.
- [49] INDEMAYA has spearheaded several *consultas* among the Maya in an attempt to take their pulse on different topics, including Indian rights. In 2004, in fact, the agency presented a legislative proposal on Indian rights to state congressional officials. Although I did not see a copy of INDEMAYA's proposal, several officials, including the two INDEMAYA officials I interviewed, told me that autonomy was not included in the proposal.
- [50] With the change in state government in 2007, Guarneros was replaced by Diana Canto, former head of INDEMAYA.
- [51] Tellingly, the congressional sub-committee charged with dealing with Indian affairs, including legislative changes regarding Indian rights and culture, is called the Commission of Ethnic Issues (Comisión de Asuntos Etnicos).
- [52] According to 1995 INEGI statistics, 42% of the population in Chablekal over five years of age spoke an indigenous language (cited in Capetillo Pasos, 2001, p. 149). Administratively, Chablekal is a commissariat (*comisería*) of the municipality of Mérida. I use it as a case study here, mostly because I was able to talk with a former justice of the peace from Chablekal, and because several anthropologists have written about its political and legal organization (see Capetillo Pasos, 2001; Muñoz Menéndez, 1997).
- [53] This practice was corroborated by Baltazar Xool and José Euán Romero (interviews with author). See also Capetillo Pasos (2001).
- [54] According to Muñoz Menéndez (1997, p. 56), while the justice of the peace is charged with the administration of justice, in practice his faculties are limited to the writing up of *actas* (official documents or deeds). Muñoz Menéndez suggests that it is the *comisariado municipal* who exercises real juridical power.
- [55] Interview with author. In Mexico, the Ministerio Público is a governmental agency that operates at the federal and at local levels. It is charged with investigating and persecuting crimes, both civil and criminal. Once an initial investigation has been completed within the Public Ministry, the judicial police are called in to investigate further. Many indigenous community officials with whom I have spoken – both in Chiapas and in Yucatán – have told me that they do not use the Public Ministry because of its perceived ineptness and corruption.
- [56] Interview with author.
- [57] Interview with author.
- [58] The constitutions of Campeche, Chiapas and Quintana Roo include similar mechanisms for recognizing the work of local justices.
- [59] According to Quintal Avilés (2005, p. 325), beginning in the 1880s mestizos organized themselves into clubs and societies and participated fully in the Carnaval.
- [60] The *terno* is the most striking and beautiful piece of mestiza traditional attire. *Ternos* are elaborate *huipiles* consisting of two layers: the top layer has extensive embroidered work

along the collar and sleeves, and the slip has an intricate hem that hangs slightly below the knee. It is not uncommon for non-Maya women to wear *ternos* on special occasions, such as weddings and family celebrations. High-quality *ternos* are expensive and can cost up to US\$2000. According to Quintal, the *terno* was converted from a mestiza dress into a regional costume during the gubernatorial administration of Carrillo Puerto (1921–1923) (Quintal Avilés, 2005, p. 326).

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## Appendix 1. List of Interviewees

- Patricia Guarneros Marcué, director (delegada) of CDI in Yucatán; 12 January 2007 (left post in 2007).
- Eduardo López Salcido, sub-director INDEMAYA; Mérida; 15 January 2007 (left post in 2007).
- Members of Granjas Agroagrícolas Integrales Red Campesina Peninsular de Comercio Justo Tojil Yambil: Marcelo León Blanco; Fabian Balam Dzib; Lorenzo de J. Uh Jiménez; Mérida; January and February 2007.
- José Anastasio 'Pepe' Euán Romero, Grupo Indignación, Chablekal; 23 January 2007.
- Diputado Juan Manuel Valencia (PAN), Yucatán state congress and member of Comisión Permanente de Asuntos Etnicos; Mérida; 24 January 2007 (term ended in 2007).
- Rev. Atilano Ceballos Loeza ('Tilo'); co-founder of Escuela de Agricultura Ecológica; Mérida and Maní; January and February 2007.
- Baltazar Xool May; Comisión de Derechos Humanos del Estado de Yucatán; Mérida; 1 February 2007.
- Guillermo May; activist and leader of Foro Maya Peninsular; Mérida; 31 January 2007.
- Diana Canto Moreno, Director of INDEMAYA; Mérida; 7 February 2007 (left post in 2007; now head [delegada] of CDI in Yucatán).
- Mauricio Macossay Vallado; sociologist and professor at Escuela de Agricultura Ecológica and collaborator in Granjas Agroagrícolas; Mérida; 9 February 2007.
- Efraín Poot Capetillo, anthropologist at the Autonomous University of Yucatán; Mérida; 13 February 2007.
- Bernardo Xiú, administrator and graduate of Escuela de Agricultura Ecológica; Maní; 15 February 2007.
- Margarita Rosales, anthropologist at National Institute of Anthropology and History; Mérida; 20 February 2007.
- Esteban Krotz, anthropologist at Autonomous University of Yucatán; Mérida; 22 February 2007.
- Othón Baños Ramírez, sociologist at Autonomous University of Yucatán; Mérida; 30 June 2008.
- Araceli Cab Cumí, former PRI (1970s) and PT (1990s) Yucatán state congresswoman; poet and writer; Mérida; 30 June 2008.
- Feliciano Sánchez, cultural promoter at the Center of Popular Culture; Mérida; 1 July 2008.

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