Performing the community: representation, ritual and reciprocity in the Totonac Highlands of Mexico

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Citation for published version (APA):
CHAPTER 2

A VILLAGE IN TIMES OF CHANGE

Although Mexican villages have probably never been the static, isolated, inward-looking communities they were once thought to be; it is equally clear that in certain periods more rapid change takes place than in others. This is certainly the case in Nanacatlán, which during the last quarter century saw its economic, political, and cultural landscapes rapidly transformed. The 1990s in particular were a decade of salient changes that point at an increasingly diverse and outward-oriented experience in Nanacatlán. I briefly introduce the ups-and-down of village life here, to discuss them in greater detail in the following chapters.

Nanacatlán, a mountain village

Nanacatlán is situated about 750 meters above sea level in the temperate zone or tierra templada of the Sierra Norte of the state of Puebla (Durand 1986:31).\(^1\) Average annual rainfall is about 2000 mm and the average annual temperature is 21.6 degrees Celsius, with the coldest months in December, January, and February and the warmest in May and June (INEGI 1996:15-18). Below the village runs the Zempoala river, the border of village land and also the boundary between Totonac and Nahua territory. Nanacatlán is made up predominantly of Totonac people, with a few mestizo and Nahua families as well as some mixed ones through intermarriage of Totonacs with mestizos or Nahua. In the 1990s the population varied between 1,000 to 1,200 inhabitants who lived in about 250 households, some three-quarters of which were nuclear families.\(^2\) There were several extended (about 13

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1 The political system in Mexico is based on the Constitution of 1917, the outcome of the Mexican Revolution. The federal republic consists of 31 states and the Federal District (DF). Power is concentrated in the president, who dominates the Congress (Senate and Chamber of Deputies). A state – in this case Puebla – constitution mirrors the federal Constitution and is headed by a governor who is, like the president, elected by direct vote and can not be re-elected, and the Chambers of Deputies. It can make its own laws as long as they do not contradict federal ones. It should be clear from the context that ‘state’ can refer to the Mexican (federal) state, the state of Puebla, or in general to the state at its local, regional, and federal level. State intervention is often a combination of local and regional interpretations and implementations of federal plans. It is the interface of levels that is central to the production of a multiple and varied political terrain (Aitken 1999:33), resulting in locally specific developments.

2 I use the population statistics of 1995 (1120 inhabitants in 247 households) throughout the book as the basis of calculations in 1995 (such as land use, land tenure, religion, migration). The data and figures are derived from a village survey, the local government archives and local administrations of national government programmes. Following Durand (1986), to enable a comparison with his data of Nanacatlán, I use the household as the basic unit of my statistical data. Percentages in the tables do not always add up to 100 due to rounding.
percent) and one-person (10 percent) households. The extended households were a mixture of nuclear families incorporating one of the partners’ parents, single or divorced mothers and their children living with their parents, grandparents and grandchildren, couples or widowed elderly with adopted children, or others who take care of them. Quite a number of households are due to second marriages of a widower or widow, and they include children of the previous marriage. Most couples have four to six children. For most households the nuclear family is the basic unit of production and consumption (see also Harvey and Kelly 1969:667), though there are many cases in which households help each other for larger projects. Residence is virilocal (place of origin of the male), kinship is bilateral/cognatic (male and female descent are equally important) and inheritance is in principle based on ultimogeniture (inheritance by the youngest son).

Nanacatlán is predominantly an agricultural village (see map 2.1). Coffee is grown at the village level and further downhill to the river. On the slopes above the village an occasional frosty winter night makes coffee cultivation too risky and here we find the maize fields (milpa). Most of the land belongs to petty owners. There are really no large landowners in Nanacatlán, especially not in terms of coffee lands (cafetales). Two households own four hectares and about seven two hectares of cafetal. Five households own more than five hectares of milpa, and they are all mestizos from a single family. The main landowner among them (who used to own 30 hectare of first quality land, but gradually sold almost half of it) does not use the land to grow coffee but rents it out as pasture for cattle and about 10 hectares as milpa. The largest amount of milpa (12.5 hectares) is owned by a well-to-do Totonac household. There are almost 100 households (about 40 percent) without land. Most landless and smallholders rent milpa from the larger landowners. The majority of households have relatives in Mexico City and depend mainly on migration for their income. The people staying in the village are either the poor who earn their living as day-labourers (peones, often called mozos) in agriculture, or the better-off households who make a reasonable income from local coffee cultivation, regional trade, or a steady job such as teacher.

Travelling through the Sierra

There are two ways to get to Nanacatlán, from either Zacatlán or Zacapoaxtla, two towns located at the outer part of the Sierra (see map 1.2) at an altitude of 2,040 and 1,800 meters respectively. Going from there to Nanacatlán is a long way down- and uphill, crossing rivers and streams. The first time I went to Nanacatlán in July 1989, I arrived in the old bus which leaves Zacatlán every afternoon. It was a bumpy, slow, but beautiful ride through green mountains with gullies and ravines on a winding, dusty mountain road. After a few hours, I saw that the women were dressed in black skirts, embroidered blouses, and red belts; a few hours later the skirts were white, the belts much broader. I had passed the Nahua region of the Sierra to get to the Totonac region, but did not see much of it that time as I did not
arrive in daylight. The trip from Mexico City did not take the six to eight hours I was told, but four hours to Zacatlán and another seven hours to the village. The road was full of potholes, washed out by the past rainy season, and the bus could only drive very slowly. When I finally arrived the village was pitch-dark because the electricity supply had broken down, as happens every now and then. With sheer luck I sat next to one of the daughters of a local shopkeeper and at that time the largest owner of coffee land whose name I had been given, and they took me in for the night. The next day I could see that the whole village was on a mountain slope, with only a small flat part in the centre, and that as far as the eye could see there were beautiful mountains in every direction.

Later on I would mostly leave and enter the Sierra through Zacapoaxtla, a slightly more comfortable and shorter route, but a bit more expensive. The daily buses started in nearby Ixtepec (the end of the road during my first stay) and passed through Nanacatlán at five and six o’clock in the morning to Zacapoaxtla and Zacatlán respectively; they would return to the village at the end of the day ideally in the late afternoon. There were also three smaller daily buses to Zacapoaxtla, which were able to take the curves faster and were therefore quicker. But they could only drive fast and take curves at nauseating speed after the road from Zacapoaxtla to Zacatlán had been paved, as I found out during my second period of fieldwork in 1994. With the new road there were also more minibuses, and less time was lost by changing buses in Zacapoaxtla. More traffic was passing through the village, since the road had been extended beyond Ixtepec to several other villages and ultimately a few years later to Huehuetla, itself connected by road to Zacapoaxtla.

The road from Zacapoaxtla to Zacatlán passes through the small town of Zapotitlán de Mendez, situated along the Zempoala river. From there a smaller road crosses the river, and climbs up and down and eventually goes steeply uphill to Nanacatlán (see map 1.3). To go by foot from Zapotitlán to Nanacatlán takes one hour stiff walking uphill for someone not accustomed to mountains and a lot less for Serranos, whose walking is almost running. The poorest people still prefer to save the bus money, though many do so by walking downhill but returning with their shopping by bus. Villagers appreciate the new connections and the paved main road, but also have become more impatient. They complain about the bad condition of the road between Nanacatlán and Zapotitlán, which makes this part of the trip quite slow.

Compared to only two to three decades ago, things had changed immensely. There were no roads then useable for motorised vehicles. People liked to tell stories about walking long distances through the Sierra and the few people – for the most part traders – going to Zacapoaxtla by horse in five hours and by mule in twelve. Nowadays many Nanacatecos still go to nearby Zapotitlán for the weekly market, the health care centre, a private doctor or pharmacist, but travelling to Zacapoaxtla for major purchases or hospital visits is not the privilege for the happy few any more. It has now become exceptional to walk to villages such as Hueytlatlan and
Zitlala, which I visited on foot in 1989 when there were yet no roads, even though the distance through the mountain trail is much shorter than via the new road. It was even harder to find company to make the beautiful walks to Ixtepec, Tuxtla, or Zapotitlán.

The Totonac Sierra

Together with its neighbour Tuxtla, Nanacatlán is part of the municipality Zapotitlán de Mendez, one of the municipalities in the so-called Totonac Sierra, a sub-region of the Sierra Norte de Puebla located in the southern part of modern Totonacapan. People generally do not perceive the region as being Sierra Totonaca, but given the ecological and infrastructural boundaries it is clearly a world on its own (Baez 1993) in which people interact relatively frequently with inhabitants from other villages in this part of the Sierra. Notwithstanding similar land and labour conditions, facilities and infrastructures within the Sierra as a whole on a closer look show marked differences between various subregions. As altitudes vary between 160 and 1,700 meters, various microclimates exist ranging from warm-humid to moderate-humid. Such microclimatic differences result in a variety of crops and fruits grown in the Sierra. Moreover, the soil in the region is only partly suited for agriculture (mainly Zongozotla and Zapotitlán), and therefore raising cattle is important in the greater part.

More than other parts of the mountain range, the Totonac Sierra is ethnically rather homogenous: according to national statistics in the early 1990s, 86.7 percent of its total population of 64,350 inhabitants were classified as ‘indigenous’, which in practice means Totonac. The majority (84 percent) were working in agriculture, while incomes here are the lowest of the whole Sierra Norte de Puebla, and most land is owned by petty farmers; only a few villages practice the ejido system of communal land tenure.

Coffee has been the dominant cash crop since the 1980s. The Totonac Sierra – characterised by Baez (1993) as a coffee ecosystem with low technology – has become dependent on coffee, making it susceptible to market fluctuations and weather conditions as happened during the coffee crisis of 1989. Durand (1986:130, 216-227) mentions that during the first half of the twentieth century cattle raising

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3 The exception is Huitzilan de Serdan, which is mainly Nahua. The Totonac municipalities are: Amixtlán, Camocuautla, Caxhuacan, Coatepec, Hermenegildo Galeana, Huehuetla, Hueytitlan, Ignacio Allende (Concepción), Ixtepec, Olintla, Zapotitlán de Mendez, and Zongozotla (Baez 1993:40-45). See map 1.2 and 1.3.

4 A report by SEDESOL (National Solidarity Programme with Agricultural Day-labourers) of the socio-economic situation of the day-labourers in the Sierra (Baez 1993) provides us with detailed information about the population and its economic activities according to a further subdivision of the region based on micro-agroeconomic systems. I confine myself here to comparing the Totonac Sierra with the general characteristics of the Sierra Norte de Puebla.

5 The ejido system is the outcome of the land reform of the Mexican Revolution in the 1920s which brought collective land tenure and management for the landless, who could obtain a certificate of hereditary agrarian rights.
CHAPTER 2

and sugar cane were the major sources of cash income. However, agricultural production also consists of subsistence crops: maize, beans, and tropical fruits as well as some chillies (also a cash crop). These food crops are supplemented by herbs and wild vegetables collected in the surrounding fields and fish caught in one of the rivers. The extensive use of land has left little natural vegetation and the tropical forests have almost disappeared (Ellison 2004:212); only the high slopes are still covered with woods.

Economic activities outside agriculture are concentrated in the cities that play a central role for the whole Sierra (in the so-called Boca Sierra) such as Huauchinango, Zacatlan, Zacapoaxtla, and Tezuitlan. The last is the most important city of the region, with not only several factories and a quarry (to serve the iron and glass industries) but also an urban infrastructure of banks, government offices, shops, and wholesale trade. In the Totonac Sierra there are only a few small-scale industries, such as those for processing coffee in Camocuautla, Hermenegildo Galeana, Zapotitlan, and Zongozotla as well as two clandestine rum factories in Huehuetla. As employment in agriculture is limited and highly personal at that, and as regional industries only provide a few jobs, landless workers and small farmers have looked for work as agricultural labourers in the outskirts of the region such as Zacatlan and Huauchinango or in other states such as Veracruz, Tlaxcala, or even as far as Campeche and Chiapas. But more and more, those people have moved out of agriculture to work in construction, services, and industries in cities such as Puebla, Poza Rica, and Mexico City. In most municipal centres (the towns that head a municipality, called cabeceras) there is a weekly market and many people are involved in (small) trade.

The majority of roads in the region were constructed as late as the 1990s and their bad condition (because of frequent landslides in the rainy season and poor maintenance) is one of the main problems of the area. Municipal centres have basic facilities. Electricity, medical centres, and solar telephones are now found in the cabeceras and in some villages. Most villages do have a kindergarten and a primary school, and they increasingly also have a secondary school or one with long-distance televised secondary education (telesecondario). But the villages do not always have a road, a doctor, or medical centre and hardly ever a drinking water supply or drainage system. For further education people have to send their children to Caxhuacan (with a junior high school or preparatorio), Zongozotla (training centre for agriculture and livestock), and a senior high school (bachillerato) in Zongozotla, Huehuetla, Olintla, and recently in Zapotitlan. For hospital visits and higher education people have to go to Zacatlan and Zacapoaxtla.

There are serious erosion problems in the region because of deforestation and land reclamation on mountain slopes (Velázquez 1995:40, 186; Del Angel-Pérez and Mendoza 2004:340-341). In 1999 major landslides occurred in the Sierra, wiping out villages and killing more than 500 people, especially around Tezuitlan. Zapotitlan was also heavily affected by a landslide and flooding of the river Zempoala. Many people lost their houses or (part of) their land. Nanacatlan escaped
almost unharmed but was isolated for several weeks because the road was destroyed. They were lucky the landslides did not hit the village; in the last decades land reclamation has extended to the steep stony slopes above the village, which are now virtually bare except for an occasional maize crop.

The layout of the village

The settlement pattern in Nanacatlán is comparatively dense. Looking from the mountain slope in the North-East down on the village, one sees a concentration of houses with gardens, some along the wider streets which make up a rectangular grid, some along narrow winding paths, and an open space in the middle surrounded by public buildings. The centre of Nanacatlán gravitates on the main road, connecting it to Zapotitlán to the west and Tuxtla and Ixtepec to the east. There are two steep cross and side roads, as well as two level parallel roads which divide the village in four zones (see map 2.1). In between these roads and outside the centre run numerous small trails, sometimes almost hidden between trees and bushes. Just outside the village a footpath connects the village with Hueytlalpan and Zitlala, crossing the mountain ridge. The flat part of the centre is dominated by the most important buildings: the church and churchyard, the primary school with a yard which doubles as a basketball court, the village hall, a large water basin with a tap and a small park, and lately a large water tank and a covered square (auditorio) behind the village hall, also used as a basketball court when it rains. Only one of the Protestant churches is in the village centre: just above the flat centre in view of the church is the small wooden building of the oldest Baptist church. The new Baptist church (of plastered concrete blocks with glass windows) is situated along the highest village street, the main Pentecostal church is in an existing building of natural stones along the road towards Tuxtla, and the second Pentecostal church is in a small wooden building along one of the village streets (see map 2.1).

Village houses used to be made of zacate (bamboo or cane), some of wood with a thatched roof, and a few of natural stone (sometimes plastered) with tiled roofs. Since the 1970s more spacious houses of concrete blocks have been added, some of which are or have been used as a shop. Nowadays the simple houses have walls of zacate, wood, or concrete blocks (or a combination) with corrugated iron or asbestos roofs and open windows with shutters. More expensive buildings have natural stone walls, a tile roof, and large windows with shutters or are made of plastered concrete blocks with one or two stories, a flat concrete roof, and glass windows. The best houses along the main road are owned by mestizo families or well-to-do Totonacs, with one of the front rooms serving as a shop. Smaller versions of such houses as well as wooden ones are found along the other village streets. Over the years land for housing has become scarce and lately some large and luxurious houses have been built anywhere there was still a piece of land available along the streets – thus upsetting the old pattern in which the rich and mighty live in the centre close to church and village hall along the main road.
Figure 2.1: Annual cycle Nanacatán: crops, migration, non-agricultural subsistence, domestic work, and rituals

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<th>Calendar</th>
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<td>Water</td>
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<td>Semana Santa</td>
<td>Patron Saint (25th) Weddings/Baptisms</td>
<td>Todos Santos</td>
<td>Christmas</td>
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Daily life and daily chores

The average day of a village household is not very exciting as it consists mainly of recurrent tasks that people have to perform to turn their house into a liveable place and to provide the daily meals. Given the dearth of modern amenities this tends to take up the greater part of the day, leaving little time for leisure. Of course, there are differences in the ways in which Nanacatecos spend their day; these obviously vary with income and the size and composition of the household. The annual cycle of crop growing, migration, and rituals also influences daily activities (see figure 2.1). Most Nanacatecos have only a limited amount of possessions (see annex 2), but face a heavy workload to keep the household going and, with luck, improve
their life. The *mestizo* and well-to-do Totonac households stick out with possessions such as cars, electric coffee grinding machines, complete sets of furniture and kitchen utensils, gas-stoves, refrigerators, tools, consumption goods, and piles of clothes and shoes — however scanty they may seem compared from the perspective of an urban lifestyle. Ironically enough it takes a lot of effort to maintain, repair, or replace the goods, because there are no skilled mechanics or craftsmen in the village.

When people are at home, the kitchen is the centre of the house where people are most likely to spend their time and to receive neighbours, close friends, and relatives. Women spend a large part of their day in the kitchen preparing the meals, because making fresh *tortillas* twice a day is time-consuming. This turns the kitchen into the nucleus of the house, even more so when the television set is placed there. Less well-known visitors are received in the main room in the front. It is a sign of increasing familiarity when they are asked to move into the kitchen.

Gender and generation are obvious distinctions for how a day is spent. They are to a large extent independent of socio-economic differences, be it that the poorer one is, the more manual work needs to be done. The household’s level of income is most clearly reflected in the time-allocation of children, whose help in most households is indispensable, but who hardly have to do household chores when their parents have money. There is a strict gender division of labour, as we will see further in chapter 7, with separate domains for women and men. I will therefore show the activities of women and men separately, as well as those of girls and boys.

The tasks of women are part of a daily routine, largely independent from the yearly cycle and occurring mostly within the village boundaries. Of all the household members, women spend most of their time at home taking care of daily chores. For the family, a woman’s creativity and ability to manage the household and its relations with other households are crucial. The new infrastructural provisions may have made her life easier in a way, but for most women work remains time-consuming. Obviously, the poorer a household is, the harder a woman’s tasks. Cooking, going to the maize mill, washing, fetching water, mending clothes, taking care of the children, shopping, cleaning the house and the garden, and attending to the animals around the house are recurrent daily activities. Life gets easier for a woman when her children grow up or when another woman lives in, such as a mother (in-law), an unmarried daughter, sister, or godchild. Before electricity came to the village the grinding of maize took a lot more time; before the water tank and water taps this was true for doing the laundry as well. In addition to household chores, every woman is engaged in other activities, some of which provide an income such as trade, healing, or domestic work for others. The most rewarding and pleasurable work for women is picking coffee at harvest time. But not all work is paid for: women engage in communal activities such as the village committees, cooking for
2.1 Irene preparing *tortillas*

2.2 Pablo carrying food to the *milpa*
official village guests or school celebrations⁶, while devout women take care of their church.

Women's lives are not completely confined to the village: they collect plants and herbs in the mountains, shop in the regional markets, visit relatives in neighbouring towns and villages or in the city, and if need be, go to see a doctor in Zapotitlán or the hospital in Zacapaaxtla, Puebla, or Mexico City. When a woman has small children and no help, life can be hard. Today, even having teenage children isn't much of a help, and women complain that they are spoiled and only reluctantly lend a helping hand. Moreover, work never ends, because unlike the men who can take a break from their hard lives during feasts and holidays, a woman will be busy cooking the special meals. When her husband migrates, her workload will increase as she has to manage the household and educate the children mostly on her own.

The daily activities of most men used to be determined by the yearly agricultural and ritual cycle. Now that there are many more jobs outside agriculture, men face less of a daily routine: their work alternates between cultivating their milpa and/or coffee plot, working the land of others as wage labourers, commuting to the city, and performing the community tasks⁷ they are in charge of. In the household they have a number of recurrent tasks. They are responsible for firewood supply and regularly have to go into the mountains to fetch wood, where they also collect the leaves to make tamales, and the flowers and palm leaves for decorating the church or house altar. Some men go hunting (see annex 4 for varieties of game in the region) and many occasionally go fishing in the Zempoala river. Men repair the house, fences, and henhouses and mend baskets, bags, tools, and sandals. Until recently men used to carry water from the main well downhill when the village wells would dry out in April or May, but the arrival of a water supply system has eased their lives. Harvest time still means hard work, when they have to carry heavy loads of maize and bags of coffee as well as work the fields on the steep slopes in hot weather or when they are slippery from rains.

Migrant work in Mexico City may be attractive because of the potential earnings but for many it is difficult to leave their families behind. Most work as manual labourers in construction and gardening and work long hours for six days a week. They tend to live with fellow villagers with whom they share the house rent and the household tasks. The lucky ones who have relatives in the city, live an easier life although they do have to pay for their boarding. When they or their wives prefer village life, they remain temporary workers, commuting once in a while to their families in Nanacatlán. Other men bring their families to settle permanently, in

⁶ As a further distinction I use: celebrations when the rituals performed include a festive or commemorative event; feast when such an event is a party; fiesta for the village feast; and ceremony when ritual specialists are necessary for its performance.

⁷ On these community tasks (cargos) see below.
which case their wives join them and take jobs as cleaners in offices or households. Those who came as single men and women are the most likely to continue living in the city after they get married.

Children and teenagers also have their daily work, in addition to school and homework, but obviously there is a difference between the poor majority and their well-to-do peers. Children from mestizo and richer families hardly have to do any substantial work – and certainly no physically demanding labour. Children from less well-to-do families have their share in household chores. Girls help their mothers in preparing food, learn to make tortillas, clean the house, help with the laundry, and sometimes go out to sell food or snacks. Girls from poor families do small household chores or baby-sit for others; boys from poor families help out in all kinds of jobs, from working the land, cleaning water canisters or cars, to picking coffee or building houses. Boys work with their fathers and have their share of physical labour when working the land and carrying wood, maize, coffee, or helping their mothers fetch water. When their fathers migrate, children have a busier life. Girls will take over household chores and childcare from their busy mothers. Boys have to check the fields every now and then, do small repair jobs, run errands, and collect leaves and firewood. Children however, always find time to play, roam around, join the basketball games, or visit relatives.

**Incorporating the village into the national state**

For the greater part of its history, Nanacatlán has been a remote mountain village relatively far away from the centres of power, in colonial times and in the two centuries of Mexican independence. It has never been an isolated village however, as it has at least indirectly experienced the vicissitudes of the nation’s history and in more recent times, has directly been touched by development initiatives and the political incorporation that the central government has embarked upon.

**The village in a historical context**

The villages in the wider region of Totonacapan, of which the Sierra Norte de Puebla is a part, share a similar history. Until well in the twentieth century the Sierra had all the characteristics of a remote area: a major indigenous population, a minority mestizo elite concentrated in dispersed major settlements, and a poor communications infrastructure resulting in nominal external authority (Brewster

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8 Present-day Totonacapan is a considerable reduction of its past. Part of it went to a process of Nahuatlization, due to early Mexican migration during two periods of famines in the valley of Mexico in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, and to a lesser extent to the Mexican conquest. In other parts, after the Spanish conquest Totonacs were nearly wiped out by epidemics or their land was gradually taken over by Spaniards and mestizos. See e.g. Krickeberg 1933; Kelly and Palerm 1952:14-30; García 1987:31-61; Palerm 1990:293-330.
2003:29). Totonacapan was ruled by Aztecs (or rather, Mexicans\(^9\)) when the Spanish arrived. Because the Totonacs allied themselves with Cortés, the Spanish conquest of the southern part of Totonacapan was free of the violence that characterised other parts of New Spain (Kelly and Palerm 1952:25-30). In the first half century after the conquest, agriculture continued along traditional ways and there was hardly any deforestation in Totonacapan in marked contrast to the nearby regions of Mexico and Puebla where the Spanish cut most of the woods for construction purposes (Ortiz 1995:37). The relative isolation of most of Totonacapan impeded great change, the more so as it lacked precious minerals, had few all-weather roads (the main lines of communications passed south and north of Totonacapan) and because the ecological characteristics of this mountain region hampered large-scale agriculture and cattle farming. All this made the area less attractive to commercial exploitation (Kelly and Palerm 1952:39-40) and therefore no haciendas were established here.\(^10\) In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, life in Totonacapan continued relatively independent of events in the urban centres or the large estates.\(^11\) In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries however, the development of coastal and highland Totonacapan began to diverge more and more. The lowland became heavily involved in the insurgent movement, and after Independence in 1820, Papantla became the centre of recurring rebellions. A century later Poza Rica became the centre of industrialisation after oil was discovered on the coast (Kasburg 1992:16-18; Kelly and Palerm 1952:40-46). Despite its remoteness, the Sierra nevertheless witnessed a series of changes related to large-scale political and economic transformations of Mexico. I provide a short summary here, and present local details and memories in chapter 4.

At the time of the conquest, Zapotitlán, Nanacatlan, and other neighbouring villages belonged to the altepetl (indigenous community) of Hueytlalapan,\(^12\) now-

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\(^9\) Commonly known as Aztecs, though properly speaking this is not a people. Aztec was a name used by the aristocracy of the Mexican empire, and points at the Aztec regime or state. The people continued to call themselves Mexicans (van Zantwijk 1992:23). They are presently known as Nahuas (and their language Nahuat) but are often still called Mexicanos, for instance by the Nanacatecos.

\(^10\) In contrast, the southern part of Totonacapan was subject to great changes. At the end of the seventeenth century the large population of Zempoala virtually disappeared: from a calculated 20 to 30 thousand heads of families only eight families survived (Kelly and Palerm 1952:8-10.38; Ortiz 1995:38-39). As many areas were officially declared vacant of indigenous population, cattle farms replaced the tropical forest, especially between the rivers Tecolutla and Nautla (Wilkerson 1990:275-76).

\(^11\) At the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth century, haciendas developed strongly in lowland Totonacapan. The haciendas differed from the encomienda in that they had fixed ownership, employed labourers (peones) instead of serfs, and introduced new economic activities. In Totonacapan this consisted of the production of sugar and small posts, grinding wheat, and making candles and soap. Most importantly, they forced the population to deliver wood, honey, wax, and especially vanilla. They were also responsible for the new economic activities of cattle raising and sugarcane cultivation, especially in the south where the rapid decline of the Indian population had made the hacenderos bring in Black slaves and Mexican workers (Kelly and Palerm 1952:37).

\(^12\) Ixtepec was a separate enclave in this region. García (1987, appendix 1 and 3) mentions population figures from various sources for the sixteenth century varying from between 5,660 and 6,880 for Hueytalapan and between 564 and 800 for Ixtepec. The idiom was Totonac, with the exception of the south of the altepetl, in Huitzilan. Hueytalapan can be identified as Teutalpa or Teotlalpan in some colonial documents. Teotlalpan is mentioned in the Códice Mendoza 53 (part of the Libro de Tributos)
adays a small inconspicuous town but then one of the most important and populated villages of the Sierra. The Spanish wanted to maintain the principle of native organization, using the native lords (caciques) as local administrators (Kelly and Palerm 1952:33-34) and transforming altepeme (plural of altepetl) into pueblos de Indios each with a specific territory; they also turned major settlements into political centres (cabecera). From 1531 a provincial Spanish official (alcalde mayor) had his seat in Hueytalpan – which became cabecera and the seat of the diocese.\textsuperscript{13} He ruled from there over a province that reached from Zacatlan to the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, until the province of Papantla came under a separate alcalde mayor in 1600. In 1620 the alcalde mayor took up residence in Zacatlan, which became the new capital until 1787, when the region became subordinated to the administration of Puebla. During the eighteenth century the Sierra went through a process of a fragmentation of the old pueblos de Indios with the establishment of many new independent villages, Nanacatlan being one of them (García 1987:291-294).

The largest problems occurred after the introduction of the repartimiento system that consisted of forced labour for the Crown, the church, or individuals. It was officially abolished in 1632, but continued for decades on an ‘informal’ basis. Within the Sierra los indios de repartimiento most probably worked in domestic service, small scale agriculture, and public works such as building bridges, prisons, or the houses of the alcalde mayor. Later, forced labour was mostly performed through encomienda (which disappeared in the eighteenth century), obligatory services of a group of Indians to a Spaniard. The workload was heavy, because apart from working for the encomendero and the church, tribute had to be paid to the indigenous lords and the Crown. Many Totonac therefore choose to escape to areas out of the reach of the Spaniards.\textsuperscript{14} Commercial repartimiento, a truck system in which the indigenous population was forced to sell its produce to local and

\textsuperscript{13} The first missionaries to arrive were Franciscans in 1523, who worked in the Sierra and southern Totonacapan, followed ten years later by Augustins, active in northern Totonacapan. The isolation, the dispersion of the population, and their decrease due to epidemics made Christianisation no easy task and in spite of early missionary activities the results were less apparent than in many other parts of New Spain. (Kelly and Palerm 1952:30-33). For a long time Spanish efforts to concentrate the population by resettlement in congregaciones were not effective in the Totonac Sierra. From about 1531-32 the well-known Franciscan friar Andrés de Olmos began visiting Hueytalpan, where he settled in 1539 and established a convent, school, and hospital. By November 1567 the Franciscans had already abandoned the Sierra, including their only establishment in the Totonac region and remained only in Zacatlan. (García: 1987:127, 131-32; Kelly and Palerm 1952:31).

\textsuperscript{14} Hueytalpan was clustered together with six neighbouring places and divided between two encomenderos, Pedro Cindo de Portillo and Hernandez de Salazar. A peculiar situation arose around 1531 when Portillo was converted into the Franciscan friar Jacinto de San Francisco. When some of his servants came under the attack of rebellious groups of Indians he went out to rescue them. In the skirmish that broke out he all but died. The scared encomendero attributed his rescue to a miracle, which made him regret all the cruelties he had committed to the Indians. He immediately disposed of his possessions and encomienda and went in search for the rescue of his soul (García 1987:83, 110-111; Gerhard 1986:401).
regional officials and to buy commodities from them, was in full swing in the seventeenth and especially the eighteenth century, when regional officials became more intensively involved (Kelly and Palerm 1952:34-38; Ortiz 1995:38-39; Hoekstra 1993:121-160). Power abuse by the alcalde mayores in commercial repartimiento was one of the main causes for the colonial rebellions in Papantla between 1760-90, next to irregularities in tax collection, communal fund usage and elections (Ducey 1996). Despite the absence of large-scale landed property there were regular land conflicts and the indigenous population of the Boca Sierra, in Zacapoaxtla and Zacatlán for example, saw their best lands expropriated by Spaniards. When they dared to protest, they often ended up in jail – as the government usually backed up the land grabbers. In the Totonac Sierra however, hardly any land was owned by Spaniards (García 1987:236), again an indication of the low commercial value of the region for the Spanish rulers.

Though the Sierra itself was often free from the social and political problems that regularly popped up elsewhere, the region was strategically important and during the nineteenth century offered asylum to political activists in the independence war, Totonac rebels of the nineteenth century revolts, and Mexican patriots during the French invasion (Kelly and Palerm 1952:40-41). Things changed after Independence in 1821, when political control over the municipalities was transferred to the district level, which in the case of Nanacatlán meant Tetela, with Tetela de Ocampo as its capital. The indigenous communities themselves were organised through the civil and religious cargos which in the nineteenth century were merged into a single system of administration (Chance and Taylor 1985). Because the clergy and conservatives in Puebla were actively trying to regain control over that state, Puebla became a spearhead of the liberal federal government which set up a locally controlled National Guard (started in 1847-48). Within a few years the Sierra Norte changed from a conservative and politically marginal region into a liberal stronghold that occupied a centre stage in politics well into the

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15 In early seventeenth century Hueytlalpan, the clerk of the alcalde mayor organized a repartimiento of cotton, which he had woven into mantles. In exchange he demanded eggs, turkeys, and other commodities. He even made the Indians pay for the election of their Indian officials (Hoekstra 1993:154-155; García 1987:251).

16 For the Totonac rebellions see e.g., Chenaut 1995:207-219, 1996; Escobar 1996; Kelly and Palerm 1952:40-44; Masferrer 1984, 1986b; Velasco 1979. The French invasion lasted from 1862 to 1867 (see also chapter 4). In Totonac villages of the Sierra of Papantla (Veracruz) churches were deteriorating and priests changed often. Priests hardly communicated with the population and mainly associated with mestizos. The Totonac population was active in religious celebrations, considered pagan by priests, but rarely the liturgical ones, except for Corpus Christi and Semana Santa (Chenaut 1995:196-198). Totonacs celebrated Semana Santa so differently from how it was intended by the church that the bishop of Puebla prohibited its celebration in 1836, which started a rebellion in Papantla led by Mariano Olarte, the son of a notorious independence fighter. It soon spread out into the Sierra of Puebla and lasted several years (Masferrer 1984).

17 The liberal reform undermined the established authority of village secretaries (generally mestizos), and especially the clergy with its central role in education and tax collection, and replaced it with the decentralised authority of the National Guard commandante, the secular school teacher and collector of taxes at district level (Thomson 1990:54).
1880s. The Sierra’s National Guard often controlled whole communities, but the Totonac region only remained lightly involved (Thomson 1990). The Sierra came under the control of General Juan Francisco Lucas, a Nahua local commander who gathered national fame after his Nahua soldiers contributed to the defeat of the French invaders in a major battle in 1862.

A close mestizo friend of Lucas, General Juan N. Méndez was the organiser of the National Guard in Tetela, and governor of the state between 1880 and 1884. His name would become added to Zapotitlán (N. de Méndez). He was a believer in the political importance of music and, just as everywhere in Central and South Mexico, civil village brass bands were formed in the district of Tetela, including one well documented example in Zapotitlán. They were also providing a ritual and ceremonial focus for the new liberal order, which had banned religious services and processions beyond the church walls. Villagers however, often continued organising illegal processions, which created tensions with the district authorities who could not believe that they organised them voluntarily and with their own funding, without any clerical intrigues. Though there was no National Guard in Zapotitlán, band members were easy to find because they enjoyed the privilege of exemption from taxes as well as labour for civil works (Thomson 1990). In 1885, Puebla’s centrally imposed new administration demobilised the National Guard and the military brass bands, whose members continued as civil bands after their return to their villages (Thomson 1994:319).

It was only in the second half of the nineteenth century that mestizos moved into the Sierra. Mestizo families from Tetela de Ocampo, home town of General Juan Lucas, settled in Zapotitlán, a key municipio in the administration of the district of Tetela. Situated on an important crossing point on the river Zempoala, it linked the temperate highlands where the National Guard was recruited with the tropical lowlands that provided much of the taxes as well as food supplies in periods of war and rebellions (Thomson 1990:53). The arrival of a mestizo population brought a drastic transformation in agriculture as maize cultivation was rapidly surpassed by sugar cane. By the turn of the century, Zapotitlán had become one of the most important trade centres within the Sierra thanks to the production of sugarcane and its distillation into refino (rum) (Durand 1986:219) which provided the fortunes of several Tetela families, including the Méndez’s (Thomson 1990:54).

After the death of Lucas in 1917, the mestizo Gabriel Barrios took over as governor followed in 1940 by his brother Demetrio who remained in office until 1961 (see Brewster 2003). For a century Lucas and the Barrios brothers were the main power holders and intermediaries between indigenous communities and mestizos. They succeeded in bringing this region of outlaws and rebels into the camp of the federal government. They had their own Serrano Brigade (Highlander Brigade) unique in the history of the Mexican federal army because its soldiers fought within their own region and accepted no orders from officers from outside the region. The Serranos were not simply or even primarily the supporters of the federal cause however, but saw in it an opportunity to settle local issues and power struggles in
the Sierra (Masferrer 1986a; Brewster 2003). A major reason for their support to the military leaders in these years was that they were able to offer them protection from the random violence that was endemic in the region during and after the Mexican Revolution. For years, communities had been at the mercy of both revolutionary forces and bandits, but Barrios had ruled them out and transformed the previously violent and lawless Sierra into a place where it was safe to use the mountain tracks, as even his enemies had to concede (Brewster 2003:65).

Unlike in other parts of Puebla where agrarian unrest had led to the agrarista movement, in the Sierra land and agrarian reform were not the central issues because most people owned land or had access to communal land; there was no immediate threat of expropriation by mestizos. Land problems mostly occurred between local communities that held competing claims to communal land (García 1987:238-241; Kelly and Palerm 1952:40) or in a village such as Nanacatlán between commoners and the local elite who illegally used parts of the communal land (Durand 1986:213-232). The Serrano movement was a popular movement at that time that differed from the agrarista movement elsewhere in Puebla in that it was an expression of popular resistance to increased political centralisation and fought to regain local autonomy (Knight 1980; Panster 1990:39). This explains why the Zapatistas (followers of Emiliano Zapato), the spearhead of the agrarista movement who dominated most of Puebla, did not gain a foothold in the Sierra. Some Zapatista troops led by two men from Tetela unsuccessfully tried to move into the Sierra, and followers of Pancho Villa (Villistas) led by someone from Cuetzalan were also active for a while (Ruiz 1991:61). But generally Lucas and later Barrios, managed to keep them at bay.

Local communities regained some of their autonomy as an outcome of the struggle and this was confirmed in the new administrative legislation: the new Constitution (1917) of the Mexican Revolution again put the municipalities (cabeceras) in control of their internal affairs.

The Revolution brought other changes as well: the new state began its ‘civilising mission’ to modernize the Sierra through education, as well as through road construction in one of the most ambitious development programmes of post-revolutionary Mexico (Brewster 1998:272). It also replaced the system of corvée labour locally called topiles (a survivor of colonial times that had been corrupted to serve the benefit of the local elites) by a voluntary labour system called faena. The state also took over ritual life by initiating ‘secular’ patriotic fiestas and national celebrations which brought a new sport, basketball, to the village (although people contin-

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18 This centralisation was especially strong under the regime of Porfirio Díaz, called Porfiriato, who ruled from 1876-1910 (except 1880-1884). Before he took power the presidency had changed hands 74 times since independence in 1821; four interim, provisional, or irregular presidents for every constitutional president (Meyer and Sherman 1991:432).

19 The municipalities in Puebla became organised according to a state law (Ley Orgánico Municipal de 1923) that with some changes (in the Constitution of the state Puebla (1969) and new municipal laws) resembles the civil cargo system described below. Puebla has 217 municipalities with more than 4.6 million inhabitants in 1995.
ued celebrating saints’ days). School teachers were at the forefront in this process of secularising village rituals, often opposed by fervent Catholics who started the reactionary *Cristero* movement to do away with the achievements of the revolution (Pansters 1990; Vaughan 1994; Brewster 2003:121). This modernizing upsurge, or rather this initial attempt at state-directed development of the Sierra, did not last long. Though the depression of the 1930s prevented the government to invest heavily in development, after a relatively swift economic recovery it turned away from rural development projects and focused instead on urban-based industrialisation. The roads, bridges, and telephone lines that had been built during the 1920s quickly fell into disrepair. For several decades the Sierra fell back in economic terms to its marginalized position of the pre-revolutionary period. It was not until the 1960s that the federal government began to renovate and expand the old infrastructure throughout the Sierra, and introduce programmes to boost the rural economy. They were part of an overall national development effort that aimed at curbing a rural exodus to the cities by broadening the rural resource base and stimulating ‘modernization and progress’ in agriculture.

The paradoxes of rural development

Since the 1970s, the Mexican state has incisively intervened in Nanacatlán through a series of subsequent development initiatives. Many new conveniences have been introduced: electricity (1976), a dirt road (1979), a credit programme for coffee (1979), a cheap state-subsidized shop (1981), a secondary school (1982), and a kindergarten (1988). This new technological, educational, and financial infrastructure has definitely put its stamp on everyday household and village life. With electric light, people go to bed later and listen to radios more often. While in 1989 there were no more than five or six television sets, by 1996 there were already several dozen, mainly black-and-white. They mostly have the unclear reception of a small antenna that does not work well in the mountains. Only a few people can afford a satellite dish. The omnipresence of audiovisual equipment also means that there is a lot more noise in the village, in contrast to the overwhelming silence that used to characterise the Sierra villages (Marschall 1972). For women, electricity brings the advantage of five electric mills to which they can go with their maize, instead of spending hours grinding maize manually. Children particularly enjoy the few shops and houses with refrigerators because they sell ice cream, jellies, and cold drinks.

With the new road, travel facilities greatly improved, especially since the greater part has been paved by now. Those who can afford it travel more frequently to the market, the doctor, or the hospital in the nearest towns; some children are sent there to secondary schools and for higher education. A few villagers have bought their

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20 This fate did not befall Tezuitland which was comparatively well-developed due to the Avila Camacho family who favoured their home town during their successful political careers, one president and two governors (see Pansters 1990).
own pick-up trucks and commute between the village and major market centres, while many trucks from outside pass through the village to sell products; especially wood, cement, tiles, and other building material, but also clothes, blankets, furniture, and kitchen utensils. This new influx of commodities broke the monopoly of influential local merchants who until the 1980s used to bring in goods on their mules and could set high prices. The road also made (temporary) migration outside the Sierra Norte much easier.

With local schools, education has become more accessible and every village child goes through at least three or four grades. Until 1965 the local school only had the first three grades of primary education and few children would go to Zongozotla or Zacapoaxtla to continue their studies. Nowadays more and more children complete primary school. Since the establishment of a secondary school in 1982, non-mestizo villagers are also able to go there—be it still on a limited scale. Some parents work hard to finance further education of their children, especially since senior high schools (an additional three years after the three years of secondary school) opened in the nearby towns of Zapotitlán and Zongozotla. Mestizo families prefer to send their children to city schools where educational standards are higher.

Better education, television, and migration have brought a higher fluency in Spanish to the detriment of Totonac as well as a higher sensitivity of national and global affairs (from state ceremonies, national heroes, Mexican politics, the US treatment of Mexican illegals, to Rwanda killings or flooding in Bangladesh). Even my own national background was highlighted when Holland played Brazil in the 1994 World Cup and the quality of Dutch soccer was discussed on television for many days. People started realizing that my country was indeed not a US state or city.

One provision still lacking in the village is a good drinking water supply. In particular women and children complain, as it is mostly they who have to walk daily to the central water tap, the water tank in the centre of the village, or to one of the draw-wells in the vicinity. Before 1992, water was not available throughout the year in the village, and women and men had to walk long distances downhill to the only well that did not dry out in spring. Since then a water pipe has been installed and a water tank as a ‘back up’, but the planned extension of the water supply through taps in every street was delayed and only began in the lower part of the village in 1997. House-to-house delivery has yet to be planned.

In 1995 a solar-powered satellite telephone was installed in the village and though it does not always work, it greatly improved communications. It was amazing to notice the immediate normality of phone calls: within a few weeks villagers were used to make calls to their migrant relatives or friends.

Rural development thus brought a whole range of new facilities to the village, deeply affecting the lives of its inhabitants. In one important way, the outcome was diametrically opposed to the objectives of the national Mexican government that had intended to provide better living conditions in the countryside to keep the peasants in their home villages. But the improved access and communications worked
the other way around: more and more Nanacatecos moved away to either temporarily or permanently earn a living in the cities. As we see later, precisely this combination of rural and urban labour brought major improvements to the lives of many villagers.

**Making a living**

Even though there have been obvious improvements in the general socio-economic conditions of village life, making a living in Nanacatlan is not always easy, even for the small number of well-to-do families. Most households have to combine various sources of livelihood to survive in a countryside plagued with either natural disasters such as droughts, night frosts, or excessive rains; or by national and global disasters such as the devaluation of the national currency (peso), urban unemployment, or slumps in the coffee world market price. Villagers therefore have to make ends meet by diversifying their livelihood, economizing, or borrowing (depending on the circumstances and prospects) and instead of saving an unstable peso; by turning money into assets - land, housing, building materials for future housing or improvements, and higher education of their children – which might with luck provide them with a pension and social security in old age. Almost every man works the land (either his own or other’s) or hires farm hands to do so. Almost every woman trades on a small-scale or performs odd jobs for other women. Many men and young women work as temporary migrants in Mexico City. The *mestizo* and a few Totonac villagers have permanent jobs, own shops, or a trade business. Among them are the main landowner don Camilo Rodriguez, five members of the Bravo family who are also the main owners of coffee land, the main *milpa* owner don Felipe Ramos (and later his widow doña Herminia Jiménez), and don Gustavo Ramos (who owned the largest amount of coffeeland, divided among his children after his death). Typical for both poor and more well-to-do villagers is to combine two or more livelihood activities. Those households whose members join forces fare better and visibly improve their lives over the years. Unfortunately they will also rarely escape the uncertainties and regular setbacks of Mexican economics. In some years their efforts may hardly pay off. As I discuss the increased diversification of livelihood and its consequences for social differentiation in the next chapter, I limit myself here to some general characteristics. What becomes clear is that Nanacatecos have been affected differently by the modernization of the countryside, dependent on their assets (especially land), level of income and education, and the choices they made.

*Day labour and subsistence agriculture*

Many villagers spend a large amount of time in subsistence agriculture, cultivating maize (the basic ingredient of the staple food *tortillas*) and growing various vegetables, fruits, and herbs in between their maize and coffee and in the garden around
the house. Most large landowners do not want to invest the extra time and trouble that inter-cropping will take. To do so would force them to hire additional wage labourers and apply additional expensive insecticides and fertilisers. Of the 150 households with land, two-thirds use (part of) their land as milpa – generally because it is too high on the mountain slopes to be used for coffee. One-third rent land for subsistence agriculture, because the land they own is suitable for coffee.\textsuperscript{21} For the time-consuming sowing and harvesting of maize villagers often work together in a system that is called mano vuelta, which ensures them of mutual help from a few households.

The 97 landless households make up a mixed category, but most are elderly (couples as well as widowers) and newlyweds who depend on agricultural wage labour or who have a salaried job though most of them (about two-thirds) rent a small plot of land for subsistence farming. Almost 40 percent earn most of their income from a more or less steady job in the village or from temporary migration to Mexico City. Some are reasonably well-off; others hope to improve their lives in the future and even acquire land, while the very poor (about 27 percent of the landless households) have no prospects and do not even own their sitio. They mostly live in poor houses on very small plots rented from the village. They have to pay the rent in cash and lack even the space for a small garden where they can grow some vegetables. A small number rent a sitio from their parents and are likely to inherit at least part of the property.

The villagers who rely primarily on agricultural wage labour for their income – about 100 households – are among the poorest, whether they own a small piece of land or not. Their exact number is hard to assess because it varies over the years. In good times their number is small, but when the coffee price falls it increases. Generally, these wage labourers work more or less regularly for one of the larger landowners. Wages tend to be very low: during the 1990s they varied between 2.5 and 3 US dollars per day.\textsuperscript{22} The income of wage labourers only rises markedly during the time of the coffee harvest, when they can make extra money by joining the picking. The poorest among them are the ones who own no land at all, not even

\textsuperscript{21} That is why coffee producers also cultivate subsistence maize (for which they can rent the land, if necessary), but not the other way round because subsistence farmers do not grow coffee on rented land. Even if it would be available, it is too costly and risky to rent land for coffee, with its highly fluctuating prices and yields.

\textsuperscript{22} In absolute terms, daily wages in the village were the equivalent of US$2.31 (in 1989), $2.77 (in 1994), $2.42 (in 1996) and $3.44 (in 1998). These figures do not take into account the rising costs of living in that decade but in general the conclusion of EPI holds that average hourly income in Mexico decreased by 40 percent between 1991 and 1998 (Sales 2001). In 1989 daily village wage was 5,000 to 7,000 pesos and task-wage for harvesting coffee 250 to 300 pesos per kilo; in 1994 between 8 to 10 pesos a day and 0.5 peso per kilo, in 1996 between 15 to 20 pesos a day and 1 peso per kilo, in 1997/98 25 to 30 pesos a day and 1 to 1.20 pesos per kilo. A daily harvest usually varies between 25 to 45 kilos, but in favourable years can be as much as 180 kilos per person. In Mexico City weekly wages were about 100,000 pesos in 1989, 200 to 220 in 1994, 250 in 1996 and 300 in 1997/98. The exchange rate was about 2,600 pesos against 1 US$ in 1989. In 1993 the peso devaluated from 1,000 to 1, and in 1994 the exchange rate against 1 US$ was 3 to 3.5 new pesos, in 1996 7 to 7.5 new pesos and in 1997/98 8 new pesos.
a *sitio* (premises) and house, and still worse have no prospect of inheriting land. If they for one reason or another are unable to migrate or engage in small-scale trade, such landless households will continue to live on the brink of a precipice. However, most able-bodied men and women will try and find some income-earning jobs; it is only when they get sick or older that they have nothing to fall back on and become dependent on the support of their children or other relatives.

A minority (about 15 percent of the households) is not involved in agriculture at all: they neither own nor rent land. Again, these are not necessarily the poorest villagers. About half have an income from a local job or through temporary migration. An additional 17 percent of the households not involved in agriculture consist of newlyweds who are likely to improve their lives like the generations before them, and will be able to buy some land or start working outside the village in the future. Some come from very poor families, while others work the land of their parents.23 The remaining households (23 percent of those not involved in agriculture) are to a large extent dependent on others and unable to return the favours: they include an almost blind man and his wife who still have children at home, a widower, 7 elderly widows, 3 elderly couples (one without children) and an unmarried woman. All these households – about 5 percent of the total village households – live under permanent conditions of destitution.

*From coffee boom to coffee crisis*

Not coincidentally, one effect of the introduction of technological infrastructures, such as the construction of the new Sierra roads and the connections to the electricity grid, was to facilitate the commercial production of coffee on a far greater scale than before. Without electricity for husking the coffee beans and the road to transport large quantities, it would not have been lucrative for the government to promote coffee cultivation in the region. An additional financial programme persuaded many people to turn to coffee.

In 1979 the government initiated a credit scheme through INMECAFE24, which 27 local coffee producers joined. By 1981 their number had grown to 66 and by 1989 there were 110 coffee producers participating in this scheme. Around 1980, many migrants returned to the village, a process called ‘repeasantisation’ by Masferrer (1988a, following Wolf 1966). In the years that followed, a sizeable number of landless wage labourers managed to save enough to buy a small plot of land of about a quarter to a half hectare, or even up to one hectare. The credit provided by INMECAFE enabled them to buy coffee seedlings and survive the years before they could reap the first harvest. They became a new generation of landowners, and

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23 Villagers always distinguish between those who do not have land and those who do not yet have land but will have it in future. They already consider the latter as landowners.

24 INMECAFE was the Mexican Coffee Institute, a state corporation that promoted the commercialisation of coffee and buys, processes, and exports the crop. It ceased to exist after the 1989 coffee crisis.
in the early 1990's many people under 50 whose parents had been landless all their lives owned a piece of land.\(^{25}\)

As their living conditions improved during the 1980s, people began buying land or building materials for a house. Many could also afford to send their children to school, travel to nearby towns to see a doctor, or buy luxury consumer goods such as television sets or shoes and jeans for their older children. This boom came to an abrupt end with the 1989 global coffee crisis, when prices fell by half to their lowest level since the 1920s. INMECAFE was unable to fulfil its contractual obligation to buy the coffee at the agreed floor price or to provide any further credit. Harsh years ensued, with many men again leaving the village to look for work in Mexico City. In 1994, in the wake of a recovering world coffee market, the National Indigenous Institute (INI) started its own credit scheme for small coffee producers (and for growing maize). The few coffee producers who had not neglected their land and coffee trees in the meantime, had some good yields and thus benefited the most from the slow increase in the coffee price. Households who maintained the balance between cash crop cultivation, subsistence agriculture, and wage labour – 40 percent of the village households – suffered least from the coffee crisis and for a while were even better off than the bigger coffee producers who had relied solely on cash crop income. In general, villagers with different income sources were also better able to manage, with great effort and improvisation, during the Mexican economic decline from 1994 onwards.

Non-agricultural village jobs

There are basically two ways to earn an income outside agriculture in or close to the village: engaging in trade and commerce, or having a steady job. Only a few households, about 15 percent, can live on such income; for others it is yet another way to make ends meet. A more or less steady income comes from government jobs or self-employment such as teacher, trader, or shopkeeper. The richest villagers – descendants from the old mestizo and the new Totonac elite – are able to combine the most lucrative sources of income: large-scale coffee production, intermediate and retail trade, and a government job.

Next to these happy few with a relatively high and more or less stable income, many villagers derive a small additional income from trading or services. Among the services offered, healing stands out conspicuously. Though there are only a few all-round healers, an amazing number of people have one or another healing capacity: to cure muscle pains, lumbago, constipation, diarrhoea, menstruation pains, skin problems, or one of the so-called cultural diseases such as the evil eye \((\text{mal de ojo})\) or susto (extreme fright comparable to a shock). They either know how to massage or make herbal teas and medicinal liquids for topical application or drink-

\(^{25}\) Smith (2005:108-109) mentions how in nearby Huehuetla this success was related to food security crises of the 1960s caused by natural disasters and a slump in the prices of sugar and vanilla.
ing. Payment for these services tends to be low and the very poor are only able to pay in kind.

Almost all village women are involved in small-scale or occasional trade, either selling from their homes or by visiting regular customers. Poor women can only afford small-scale door-to-door peddling of part of their crops (vegetables or fruits) or ready-made food such as tamales or sweet squash. Besides these commercial activities, there still is the petty exchange, often through barter of small quantities of food crops. When selling at home on a regular basis, these women offer either a whole range of articles (resembling a shop), or just a few items such as sweet bread and during the coffee harvest period preferably tortillas. Other women have started visiting their own customers – mainly women and the young – with fashionable underwear and bed sheets, Avon and Fuller cosmetics, and Tupperware articles. The most successful women are the ones able to sell on credit but evidently only the more well-to-do can do so.

Migration to and from Mexico City

Since the first migrants left for Mexico City in the 1970s on a temporary or permanent basis, this became one of the two major methods to earn cash income in addition to coffee production. The large majority of temporary migrants are single or married men; since only husbands migrate on a temporary basis from married couples, any female temporary migrants are invariably young and single. The proportion of female and male migrants who have moved to the city on a permanent basis is more or less equal, but exact numbers are hard to come by. Men from all age groups now work as construction workers or gardeners; young women as domestic servants; some better-educated young men and women as bookkeepers, shopkeepers, or secretaries; while some of the Nanacatlan mestizos have even become medical doctors or engineers. For this last group, moving to Mexico City means leaving the village for good. The great majority of migrants plan to live only temporarily in Mexico City; they return frequently to the village and if they have saved some money or if they are too weak, they want to come back to live in Nanacatlan permanently. In their years as migrant workers, they tend to work long hours for relatively low wages while living in poor housing conditions. Long-term migrants gradually improve their living and working conditions, and it remains to be seen whether they will actually return to the village.

One or two of the male household members, usually including the husband, of almost 40 percent of the households work in Mexico City part of the year. Those who can manage are healthy, often not older than 50, and with enough skill to move around in an urban mestizo world. More than half of the temporary migrants own less than two hectares of coffee land and about a third are landless. Most try to

26 Higher education is the main reason for mestizos to migrate or send their children to the city, especially since the educational level in the Sierra is poor. Several teachers told me that the level of secondary school in the village is comparable to that of primary school in Zacapoaxtla.
combine working their cafetal and an (often-rented) milpa with working in the city. Even the majority of landless migrants rent land to cultivate maize. They go to Mexico City after the coffee harvest or the sowing of maize (in January or February), return for the village feast of July 25 and the subsequent maize harvest, and go back to the city from August/September to the beginning of December. Another 25 percent of village households have one or more (former) household members who work in Mexico City or places such as Puebla, Huauchinango, and Zacatlán permanently or for years at a stretch. They tend to be people with children old enough to work, most of whom are married and have children themselves. A few own land or a house in the village, and are likely to visit the village regularly. On the whole families with children rarely move between village and city: some who did have returned to the village when life in the city proved too hard or when they could not cope with being permanently away from their relatives.

**Kinship, compadrazgo, neighbourhood, and networks**

As roads, modern means of communication, and transportation have changed and migration has become a major way of living, social relations in the village have changed as well. This goes for the whole range of people with whom one is connected: kin (including ritual kin), neighbours, and friends. In the course of time, some have fared better than others and they have been able to buy land and build new and better houses. Some even become semi-urbanites in their way of living and behaving or have become urbane while others are less successful in getting their share of development. All this has had its impact on the size, composition, and roles of existing social networks.

**Kinship as a source of solidarity and of mutual help**

As in most Mesoamerican kinship systems, Totonac descent reckoning is bilateral (Harvey and Kelly 1969:666). This makes for a flexible kinship system where the inner circle of recognized relatives includes paternal and maternal consanguines but where in practice this circle is extended to affines and ritual kin across generations and distance (cf. Rothstein 1999:583). In principle, this flexibility allows for progressive selectivity: beginning with a limited degree of personal choices from among the consanguineal relatives, through the current fair degree of freedom in selecting spouses, to a considerable choice of turning non-kin into compadres and comadres.

The creation of affinal relations is only marginally restricted. Marriages are generally proscribed between close kin and ritual kin: it is taboo between siblings, first and second cousins, nieces and nephews, compadres and comadres, godparents and their godchildren, and the children of their godchildren. While it is easier today to meet future spouses from outside Nanacatlán and from outside the region,  

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27 Remarkably, marriages between children of compadres are allowed.
many young people still prefer to marry someone from the village – a tendency also found among the first-generation migrants who have moved permanently to Mexico City. The standard reason that people give is that a boy can be sure of the girl’s chastity and the girl of the boy’s unmarried status. The selection of a spouse is a matter of concern for the two families who will be allied through the marriage and therefore want proper and decent in-laws for their children.

Ritual kinship, which in Mexico means *compadrazgo*, is a domain in which people make deliberate choices of godparents for their children. As I explain later in detail, there are many reasons people choose *compadres* but because the relationship will be of great importance in everyday life, choices are made with care and deliberation. Such bonds as exist between *compadres* have high moral and emotional overtones and in everyday life are at least equated with kin ties, but in this relationship utilitarian considerations are never absent as these bonds bring strong claims on mutual support.

Though Harvey and Kelly concluded that kinship plays a restricted role in social relations among Totonacs outside the nuclear family (ibid. 1969:667), this is certainly not the case in Nanacatlán. Consanguineal, affinal, and ritual kin are supposed to have a mutual bond and readiness to help even when they live at a distance. If needed, relatives who live nearby should support and help each other; this goes for the village and for the city, where kin often live in the same neighbourhood or street. Across the rural-urban divide, kin ties also remain important and practical: villagers who look for work and lodging in the city can turn to their urban relatives, who are also the ones to approach if Nanacatecos want to enrol their children in advanced education. Conversely, city folk will stay with their relatives when they visit their home community and will send children who have run into trouble to live with relatives in the village. Some who still own land in Nanacatlán have it cultivated by their kinfolk who also benefit from such an arrangement. Elderly people who don’t have children depend on other relatives for help, or try to find someone to come and live with them in return for free housing and/or a share in the inheritance. Kin-ties therefore, are both a means to survive when people are in dire straits and a way to get ahead in life. Kinship can thus be seen as a major source of social capital.

Permanent migration affects the system as geographical distance comes into play. It negatively affects the elderly particularly – of whom there are relatively more than in the past because of better health care and the absence of younger people. When they are no longer able to work or when their partner has died, they depend on their migrated children for financial support. In many cases they can rely upon such support, but it is not always secure. When they settle in the city sons tend to loosen their relations with, and thus their financial obligations to, their parents, especially when they marry someone not from Nanacatlán. Daughters, but also daughters-in-law or granddaughters, are more reliable sources of support even when they are in strained circumstances themselves.

Despite disinterested support among kin being the moral rule, one should not
exaggerate the willingness of relatives to help each other: much depends on the nature of the personal relationships and the relative position of the persons involved. If one is well-off, it will be difficult to avoid or turn down claims for help from kin, but it does happen especially when there are competing claims from different relatives – husband and wife may disagree whether to help his or her relatives or to what extent they should help the parents. Although there are only a few cases of parents actually being abandoned by their children, quite a number of elderly in Nanacatlan complain that filial support is no longer a matter of course.

More fundamentally, when personal relations among relatives have suffered from troubles in the past, claims for support stand little chance of being honoured. In Nanacatlan such family quarrels tend to be rather frequent, particularly because of disputes over inheritance. Some rules are clear: the house is to be inherited by the youngest son, who also is supposed to take care of his parents when they grow old; the rest is to be divided between all children, though sons are more likely to inherit land than daughters. There is also the rule that whoever took care of the parents and whoever has helped pay for a plot or house is entitled to the inheritance or at least a larger share of it. Parents who made promises to one of their children but forgot to make a will – and sometimes deliberately so – are the cause of many conflicts after their death.

The new economic opportunities in Nanacatlan have put a strain on kin relations, and divided relatives who used to be more or less in the same boat. Social differentiation has progressed swiftly in past decades and people with only slightly more access to money, credit, trade, education, and urban labour (cf. Rohtstein 1999:386) – and I add a slightly stronger entrepreneurial spirit or more egalitarian gender relations within the household – have been able to considerably improve their households’ economy. This may be a happy coincidence for relatives lagging behind as they can call on their help (as in the case of urban migrants). But it may also be a source of envy and distrust, the more so if the successful relatives are not as generous as expected. People may then turn to accusations that their greedy relatives have made their wealth illicitly: through dishonesty, embezzlement, or cheating; first of all of their poor kin, of course.

That these kin relations are not always harmonious and smooth does not undermine the importance of kin ties as such. The bilateral system is flexible in that it may expand and contract according to situations: some distant relatives may become closer while close relatives may become nearly outsiders. The flexibility of

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28 This rule of ultimogeniture is widespread in Mesoamerica; see Robichaux 1997 for an overview.

29 This is comparable to ‘the image of limited good’, the idea that all desirable things in life are in short supply, which supposes that personal gain must be at the expense of others and personal progress is a threat to the community. Improvement of one family thus goes at the expense of another and can lead to envy and jealousy (Foster 1965a; 1965b). Nanacatecos nowadays live in a world of (relative) abundance and many have benefited. But for those families who could not improve their lives, or not as much, limited access (and not availability) is the keyword and their envy and distrust resembles Foster’s idea: others have appropriated what is legitimately theirs.
the kinship system is a way out of family feuds and tensions, as it enables individual preferences, choices, and strategies. The personalities in the kin network may change, but the network as such remains an important sheet-anchor; in other words there will nearly always be relatives to whom one can turn in last resort although the conditions under which this help is given may no longer be a matter of course.

The bonds of ritual kinship

As explained, kin relations are not the only bonds that make up personal networks; ritual kin – especially compadres and comadres – play a crucial role as well and therefore need special discussion here. Compadrazgo relations involve multifarious personal and moral obligations between two families and have been called even more important than kinship (Nutini and Bell 1980:10). On various occasions such as baptisms, first communions, graduations from primary and secondary school, or weddings; the parents of the child or adolescent invite another couple to act as godparents, thereby establishing a close relationship between the two couples. Especially in the case of baptism or when the same godparents are asked several times for the same child as well as for siblings, there is frequent contact between the two couples and the members of the two households. These relationships can be horizontal or vertical (between social equals or members of different social classes) and inter- or intra-ethnic (between Totonacs and mestizos). Among Totonacs compadrazgo ties rarely crossed the village boundary in the past. Mestizos were often asked to be compadre within Nanacatlan, but they themselves choose the godparents of their children outside the village, among their large regional and sometimes national mestizo network (Ichon 1973:201). Compadrazgo is absent between adherents of different religions. Protestant converts generally do not maintain their former compadrazgo obligations and certainly do not engage in new ones other than for school graduations, except Baptists who form compadrazgo relations among themselves for weddings.

Nanacatecos always clearly preferred inviting a well-to-do couple in the village to be godparents, since such a relation is seen as mutually beneficial for all compadres and comadres (Masferrer 1983; Masferrer et al. 1984). To ask one’s employer and his wife to be padrino (godfather) and madrina (godmother) for one’s child can strengthen labour relationships because most patrons will prefer a compadre to work for them. Employers in turn are assured of a trustworthy labourer. Such patron-client bonds not only cover economic but also political affairs: the political elite is assured of political support and villagers in turn have a direct relation with a local power holder who can act as broker to outside authorities or do them an occasional favour. One should bear in mind that from a national perspective, the Nanacateco elite are small fries compared to other parts of Mexico, and calling Nanacateco local strongmen caciques (Aitken 1999:33-38) would stretch their role further than their relatively limited economic and political power warrants. Since
villagers have become more involved in the world outside Nanacatlán, they have begun looking for other brokers besides the local elite. Teachers who are potential brokers to authorities, employers, or medical care outside the Sierra are in demand, although usually not as the crucial godparents in baptism and marriage. Since villagers move permanently or temporarily to cities, compadrazgo networks increasingly include and reinforce urban-rural relations, with migrants acting as godparents for Nanacateco children and villagers for the city children. Unlike in the past, when they were chosen outside the circle of close kin (Masferrer 1983:28) such relations nowadays are often also established between siblings. And whereas in the past there was a tendency to ask the same influential compadres repeatedly, there is a tendency nowadays to spread compadrazgo to include as many people as possible from outside and inside the village.

*Neighbours and friends*

Whatever the importance of kinship and compadrazgo in establishing a solid personal and household network, for their daily lives people rely as much or perhaps more on neighbours and friends. This is not surprising given the growing number of relatives and godparents who live far away. But there is more. Compadrazgo within the village is often hierarchical and kinship relations can be stressful, or at least have to be managed carefully. Neighbours may be ritually less important but as a result relations with them are also less strained. On the other hand, neighbours live close enough to make disagreements hard to live with and tend to know more about the intimate details of daily life than relatives. They are also easy to call upon when a problem arises. Good neighbourly relations therefore are more than handy. Neighbours often work together, help each other out, and exchange ritual food and daily meals. However, people keep a clear line between kin and ritual kin on the one hand, and neighbours on the other. Neighbours are rarely asked to become godparents, because there would be no additional benefit in doing so.

A final category of ‘relevant others’ consists of friends. Friendship suggests a tie that can surpass kinship and compadrazgo, because it is based on free choice and ideally has no strategic objectives. Bonds of friendship are highly valued; they are often between people from the same generation and from more or less the same background. Compadres and comadres who really like each other and become close will also become friends; or the other way around: friends will be asked to become godparent of one of the children. Friendship between men means visiting or consulting each other, going out together for a drink or talk, working together, doing each other favours. Friendship between women means intimate talks, visits, helping each other and borrowing, exchanging produce or food, doing each other favours. In many cases friends are often the first people to turn to when one is in trouble and they are supposed to provide support to the best of their ability. If friends fail to do so, or if they withhold their loyalty (as happened in several cases during the political rivalries in the early 1990s), people feel betrayed and resentful.
Personal networks are thus a combination of friends, neighbours, compadres, and kin who can act as social, economic, and political supporters or brokers. With people from each category the personal relation can range from a deep emotional bond to a more instrumental or distant tie.

Networks, morality and decency

Social relations are guided by rules about what should be done or avoided and are above all controlled by public surveillance and gossip. Especially behaviour between girls and boys or women and men is strictly watched. To avoid gossip, women and girls take care not to walk alone or to be visited by a man when they are home alone, but only when accompanied by a chaperon. As a sign of respect a man will take care to avoid being alone with a woman, even an in-law or comadre, by having one of his children with him. Boys and girls regularly meet nowadays but are only supposed to get to know each other better when they are engaged to be married. Their meetings are also chaperoned. Such avoidance behaviour is not required within the household, between godparents and their godchildren, or in trusted relations between in-laws and compadres and comadres. Only when she knows a woman well and trusts her completely, will a wife leave her alone with her husband when she needs to go out.

Sexuality is not talked about directly and openly, not even between husband and wife or parents and children, but it is the subject of endless jokes, gossip, and rumours. Extramarital affairs, pregnancy of unmarried girls or women, unchaperoned women and girls, obscenities by drunken men, but also prospective engagements are heartily discussed and joked about. Even frequent mutual visits of affines and compadres are a cause for suspicion and innuendos, though the potential danger of intimacy between a compadre and comadre is a more comical subject. Several funny stories tell about scandalous sexual behaviour between a compadre and comadre (considered to be incestuous), and by priests. There are no stories about incest between close relatives, which is equally improper but perhaps too sensitive for entertainment. Movements in the village are so carefully watched that one wonders how people manage to meet secretly at all. The most likely places for clandestine meetings between men and women are in the fields (between the coffee trees), at home when nobody else is around, or outside the village. Some men and women have a reputation for adultery and nobody likes to see their child or partner in their vicinity. The few men who are known to harass or even rape women are avoided as much as possible. Notwithstanding the strict public surveillance and social control, the number of single mothers and the even greater number of illegitimate children prove that also in Nanacatlán sexuality is hard to contain.
Political organisation and control

**Mestizo political control**

Villages belonging to a municipality – such as that from Nanacatlán to Zapotitlán de Mendez – are called *municipios auxiliares* and have an administrative structure that mirrors the municipal one. The *cabecera* receives state funds and has to distribute them to the individual villages according to a budget approved by the governor. This system has brought competition for funds between the villages and the municipality, and villagers in Nanacatlán complain that their financial situation has deteriorated since the introduction of the system in 1986. Before, the district administration of Tetela de Ocampo would collect taxes and receive government funds, which according to the villagers were allocated more equally.

Villages have their own mayor elected in a village ballot every three years. Unlike a municipal mayor, a village mayor does not have separate powers but is a member of the village council (*Junta auxiliar*). The elections for local mayor are held in public: officially to avoid fraud, but according to critics to control the outcome. Voters have to tick the name of one of the candidates on a blackboard. This effectively prevents common people from not voting for a powerful candidate on whom they depend, and has also effectively reduced interest in participating in local elections.\(^{30}\) Politics follow the typical Mexican personalistic networking linked into the seemingly eternally ruling Mexican Institutionalised Revolutionary Party (PRI), the only party in Nanacatlán until the 1990s. If one wants a political career in Nanacatlán, one needs to be part of the PRI-network; this was true even in the late 1990s. This is less a matter of ideological convictions (although Miguel Ramos, the oldest man in the village, and his son don Gustavo have been ardent supporters of the PRI since it came into power) than of political expediency as the PRI provides the only reliable access to political power, government funds and subsidies, and the supralocal network of influential politicians and authorities. But a small number of people have the resources or take the trouble to engage in party politics. Most villagers remain aloof from such politicking. This does not mean they are not concerned with maintaining and improving village life, because they do actively participate in the system of *cargos civiles* or civic duties that cover a variety of activities for the benefit of the community. But a tension exists between the communal character of the civil cargo organisation on the one hand and the political control of its main functions by a few PRI related power holders on the other. Many men who started opposing the PRI during the 1990s demanded payment in cash or kind for communal work and refused to do the work when the authorities – whom they accused of embezzlement of village funds – could not do so.

\(^{30}\) Villagers can cast a secret ballot for federal, state, and municipal elections. Before the 1990s, not many people bothered to vote. That did not pose a big problem for the acting mayors of Zapotitlán and Nanacatlán, as they apparently would make up for the low turnout by filling up the ballot papers (including those of deceased people) themselves.
The organisation of cargos civiles

The civil cargo system in Nanacatlan comprises nearly the whole public domain – with the exception of religious activities, arranged by a separate organisation of cargos religiosos. The civil functions range from the local administration to village committees for arranging health care and the local schools as well as development projects, to everyday duties in guarding village security. All men are obliged to serve in the civil cargo system, albeit that generally mestizo and well-to-do Totonacs hire others to act as guards and do the manual jobs. The highest offices such as those of mayor, public agent, and to a lesser extent village councillor, are in the hands of people closely associated with the ruling PRI. The office of mayor tends to be controlled by a very small number of mestizo families and a few well-to-do Totonacs. Of the twenty mayors since 1942, half have been members of either the Bravo or Rodriguez families. Ordinary villagers rarely make it to positions of influence and have to be content with becoming a substitute of one of the higher offices at most.

The village council consists of five men: the mayor and four regidores or councillors (for finances, public work, education, and internal affairs—the last also heading the local police). There are also five substitutes. The mayor is a very busy man because many people want to consult him; moreover he is asked to make decisions, has to call for meetings, give orders, check upon the progress of village works and committees (especially when problems arise and that means almost constantly), and welcome visitors. He in turn has to go to meetings or put forward village problems and requests at the municipality, state organisations, or even the governor’s office in Puebla. The councillors or their substitutes come to the village hall every evening to listen to villagers who need help or have complaints and to draw up the necessary reports; to consult with committee members; to pass on messages, money, or material from the municipality or a state organisation to the appropriate committee members; to settle or discuss problems and new plans for the village; or to have their own meetings. Messages to all villagers are announced through the sound system connected to a loudspeaker on top of the village hall.

In addition to the councillors, every three years a justice of the peace (Juez de Paz), his substitute, and a Census Inspector who registers population statistics are appointed by the council. While the justice of the peace is a villager in charge of minor legal matters and quarrels in the village, there is also a more formal way of settling conflicts and of administering justice through the Agente Subalterno del Ministerio Publico (assistant attorney), who can impose charges and fines. He and his substitute are not appointed locally but by the Attorney General of the state (in this case Puebla) and do not change office every election. Miguel Gaona, who was mayor once in the 1960s, remained assistant attorney for thirteen years until the beginning of the 1990s. Men usually begin their career in the cargo system as village guard and continue in one of the committees for the organisation and implementation of specific village tasks. The local police consist of five persons appointed by the mayor for one year to organise the guarding of the village. Every village
man is obliged to be on duty as guard once a month during 24 hours, which means they hang around outside the town hall, unless they are called by someone or receive orders from the head of police or the mayor. When there is trouble or when they want to take somebody into custody, they consult the head of police.

The village committees have very practical goals and the members spend much of their time doing manual labour. They are chaired by more experienced cargo holders. Committees start by making a work plan, including the budget of necessary materials, to be sent to the appropriate authorities. The chair has to organise the meetings and work-days and secure the resources by making formal written requests or visits to the local or municipal authorities or the offices of the related state organisations (mostly in Zacapoaxtla or Cuetzalan). There are permanent committees for the schools and for health care, and a range of temporary ones which take care of current projects and government campaigns. The committee for each school (kindergarten, primary, and secondary) is run by parents. The school committees come together at regular meetings, to repair, improve, and enlarge the school buildings and help teachers with school activities and celebrations. The Health Committee is concerned with the vaccination programmes, the pharmacy, and national health campaigns. The National Institute for Adult Education (INEA) started an adult literacy programme in Spanish and Totonac. A group of locals took courses to become INEA teachers. Other committees during the 1990s included a Solidarity Committee, a Solidarity Committee for a Decent School (toilets for primary school, extra rooms and televisions for secondary school, and school grants to the poor), a Committee for Drinking Water Supply, and a Drainage Committee.

Women have (so far) never been cargo holders, but they increasingly participate in school committees and programmes of INI and INEA. Women’s participation started when INI initiated a health programme with local women as promotores de salud that included running the pharmacy, inoculating villagers, and providing information on hygiene and vaccinations. INI also set up meetings and regional courses for local healers and midwives, sewing and cooking courses, and facilitated the building of cooking places and outdoor toilets. Women also run the DIF (National System for the Integral Development of the Family) committee – the new Pronasol food programme – to sell cheap milk and flour to poor villagers. Though it has become normal for many women to participate in state programmes and move around the village on their own, they complain that they face gossip and accusations such as “You only go there to hang around with the men”. The feminisation of public life is not undisputed.

31 The National Solidarity Programme (Pronasol) is a populist programme launched by president Salinas to distribute federal resources (in cooperation with the state governments) on the basis of co-participation of the recipients. At the local level Solidaridad committees are established to sponsor food-aid programmes, production projects, social-services programmes, and infrastructure projects. It has been criticized for its political purposes by channelling resources to municipalities held by the PRD in an attempt to divide the opposition’s bid for support. These are thus not necessarily areas of the greatest need and seem to have resulted in a lot of votes for the PRI (Barry 1992:99-102; Buve 1992:300-302).
Apart from the cargos civiles, village authorities have the right to summon the men to do communal labour, called faena. All men are obliged to participate, except those actively serving in the cargo system. Faena includes repairing and weeding the road, trails, and wells when necessary; and cleaning the village before important local rituals or official visits. Women have their own communal work (although it is not called faena) by providing tortillas and preparing meals for official visits and meetings, mainly with representatives from state or federal organisations and once even with the governor of Puebla who chose Nanacatlán as a regional meeting place.

Political opposition enters the village

When I first arrived in Nanacatlán in 1989, people in the Sierra were just about to recover from the violence and the tensions which had prevailed over the region. Especially during the 1970s and 1980s in the neighbouring village of Huitzilan people had been killing each other for several years because of severe land problems between large landlords and villagers which had become more violent when it turned into a clash between right- and left-wing peasant organisations. The presence of the army and other armed groups had its impact in the whole area. There had also been cases of robbery and some murders close to Nanacatlán, but without the clear-cut inequalities between large landowners and landless common in other villages, the village itself was less likely to be drawn into violent conflicts. The general atmosphere of fear in the Sierra during the first half of the 1980s and the difficulties people faced in moving around freely was still fresh in people’s memory. In hindsight, these tensions may explain why people wanted to convey the image of Nanacatlán as a village of peace and harmony to me. Every time I asked about political conflicts, people downplayed contradictions or referred them to a distant past and stressed their image of Nanacatlán as a safe haven of peace and security.

When I returned to Nanacatlán in 1994, I felt like I was in a different village than the one I had left five years before. The tranquillity of a more or less unitary village had turned into its very opposite: the village was now split down the middle between followers of the PRI and a new opposition party called the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). At the national level, the early 1990s were the first period since the PRI took control of Mexico in the 1920s that serious opposition had proved feasible. In Nanacatlán this changing power balance apparently had opened up new opportunities to challenge the local authorities. The village was abuzz with gossip, and supporters of the two parties accused each other of corruption, incompetence, and unreliability. In the wake of this, a string of old feuds and conflicts (especially concerning land issues) were resurfacing. They ranged from accusations that the rich families had grabbed communal or church land in the past.

32 The PRD was founded in 1989 as a follow-up to the National Democratic Front, a coalition of several left-wing parties and PRI dissidents. The presidential candidate, Cuauhtemoc Cárdenas, was the son of one of the most popular Mexican presidents (Lázaro Cárdenas, 1934-1940).
that they should at least have paid for, to complaining about the ways in which some relatives had cheated others out of their lawful inheritance. Everyone was touchy.

Because the long autocratic PRI rule (since 1929) had effectively prevented an open political climate, and therefore a repertoire of debate and competition was lacking, opponents eagerly engaged in clashes that created a lively political arena. Clearly it was not just national politics being fought at the local level but also – or mainly – it was a fight between local competitors, building upon and reviving a long line of earlier conflicts. In Nanacatlán there had been serious frictions during the election campaigns of the municipal mayor in 1992 and the village mayor in 1993, when the winning candidates were accused of corruption. However, as there was no way of channelling this critique into effective action, the local PRI leadership was again able to maintain its control. In 1994 the presidential elections fuelled the political disagreements.

The presence of two competing national parties provided a format to take up factional fights. Fierce criticism and accusations of corruption directed at the village authorities and especially the new mayor (all members of the PRI) came from people who now spoke on behalf of the PRD. Initially its main mouthpiece was the then (1990-1993) local mayor’s second cousin Genaro Bravo, who himself had been (PRI) mayor in the preceding term and who had been unable to secure his appointment as treasurer in Zapotitlán in the new municipal mayor’s administration. Disappointed, he withdrew from the PRI to establish the local PRD branch.

Notwithstanding the highly vocal PRD support (particularly when its presidential candidate Cárdenas visited Zapotitlán), the opposition was unable to radically change the local arena as the PRI in Nanacatlán again managed to win the majority of the local votes for the presidential election, with 150 to 100 for the PRD. Disappointed by this outcome, many Nanacatecos withdrew again from active politics. Only a few activists, Genaro Bravo among them, tried a different angle to attack the PRI, and established a local branch of the leftist PT (Labour Party). It provided them with a platform to voice their discontent but to little effect. Only after the turn of the century would there be a new opposition, when in the 2000 elections the conservative National Action Party (PAN) provided the first non-PRI president of Mexico since the 1920s. In chapter 5 I give a more detailed account of the rise and fall of PRI opposition, but whatever the specific details, what is crucial is that the PRI monopoly of local politics ended in 1992. Critical voices or disagreeing factions could not be reduced to complete silence anymore.

A household census in 1994 showed in greater detail that political cleavages divided the villagers: 55 percent supported PRI, 33 percent PRD, while another 12 percent supported other parties or none at all. Remarkably, this division holds nearly independent of social class and migration status. Thus, 47 percent of the large landowners (over 2 hectares) and 61 percent of the landless supported the PRI. The voting of temporary migrants didn’t differ much from those who remained in the village in their support for PRI (53 percent) or PRD (32 percent). Religion though, was a major indicator as most Protestants, and among them all Baptists, supported the PRI.
Crime, violence and the local justice system

People often also tried to convince me that outside politics present-day Nanacatlán is a quiet place compared to the past when rural Mexico as a whole was notorious for alcoholism and murder, to which the Totonacs were no exception (Viqueira and Palerm 1954). Indeed, nowadays one usually only encounters a few drunken people in the street or around a local shop, and murder and manslaughter are nearly completely absent from the village. The 1980s saw some cases of homicide in neighbouring villages, but during the 1990s there was only one case of manslaughter in Nanacatlán.

The relative absence of violent death does not mean that Nanacatlán is all peace and quiet. Burglary is apparently more frequent and not many people leave their house unguarded if they can avoid it – but then, nowadays people own more items of value such as radios, cassette players, and television sets. Vegetables or fruit are also often stolen from remote fields. When such things happen, people link them to outsiders, in this case including villagers not born in Nanacatlán – and are shocked when those acts come from ‘real Nanacatecos’.

Misdemeanours such as petty theft, alcohol abuse, fighting, and violence against women and children, as well as marital problems, are handled by the local justice of the peace – when a settlement can be reached – or the assistant attorney. The local justice of the peace will be involved in the settling of minor, but sometimes also complicated cases out of court. Alcoholism is one such problem – particularly among a distinctive group of men, and particularly during village and family feasts. Excessive alcohol consumption often leads to fights between men or the beating up of women and (step)children. Although everybody knows about domestic violence, relatives or neighbours usually only ask the local police to interfere when such abuse becomes very violent or frequent – otherwise they are reluctant to ‘meddle’. The most obvious cases are brought to the justice of the peace who tries for reconciliation of the parties. If he is successful, the settlement is formally recorded and signed by all parties involved. The assistant attorney acts in civil and penal cases and is the only one allowed to impose a fine. People who repeatedly commit petty thefts and violence are handed over to the municipal authorities in Zapotitlán (Ministerio Publico del Municipio), and those guilty of major crimes such as murder, robbery, or large-scale burglary to the district authorities in Tetela. The assistant district attorney is independent of local authorities, who should not interfere with his legal responsibilities.

Such a local justice system based on settlement, negotiation, and consent can do remarkably well under normal conditions. But lacking the strong arm of a reliable police force, it can do little when its authority is undermined and criminals and offenders feel free to act as they like. This explains why nobody wanted to be involved in handling conflicts in Nanacatlán during the politically tense 1990s. For many years during this period there was no assistant attorney and no justice of the peace. Men who refused to do communal labour could therefore not easily be called
to order or punished. The village council either had to turn a blind eye to criminal
behaviour or immediately bring in outside authorities.

The growth of religious pluriformity

It is hard to overlook the grand old church, which dominates the centre of the vil­
lage and is the pride of the overwhelming majority of Catholic villagers. With its
two towers (one with a bell) and enormously high ceiling, it is remarkably big for
such a small village. On many occasions the church bell can be heard everywhere.
For Protestants (as all the old and new religious minorities together are called) such
grandeur merely serves to prove that the Roman Catholic Church has always been
far too rich for its own good but not the people’s. Though hardly any Catholic
attends mass on a regular basis, many are involved in the rituals related to Catholi­
cism or participate in the religious cargo system. With their exuberant rituals,
Catholics dominate public religious life. Protestants largely confine their religious
ceremonies and meetings to their own churches. Catholic rituals are far more
expensive and time-consuming, especially for the cargo holders.

The system of the cargos religiosos

In contrast to the civil cargos dominated by the mestizo elite, the religious cargos
(cargos religiosos) – centering on the Catholic church – are the Totonac domain par
excellence. The religious cargo holders are responsible for the maintenance of the
local church and the organisation and supervision of local church affairs and rituals.
They change office after the local elections for mayor when both new religious and
civil cargo holders are installed. Unlike in the civil cargos, it is possible for any
active Catholic man to become one of the principal cargo holders and the two cargo
systems are therefore widely different in composition and social outlook. They con­
stitute two separate worlds that occasionally can turn into antagonistic domains.
Although ‘real’ political power is in the hands of the civil cargos, during the political
tensions in the 1990s the religious cargos became the counterpoint to the PRI-
dominated civil cargo hierarchy. Almost every religious cargo holder during three
subsequent periods of office in the 1990s supported the new opposition party PRD.

Religious cargo holders are generally poor or lower-middle class Totonacs, with
little or no land. The cargo holders have to work together with the priest. Nana-
catlán does not have a resident priest; instead the priest from Zapotitlán passes by
on religious ceremonies and every other Sunday to say mass or to perform other
duties. As he has to say mass in several other villages as well, his visit on Sunday
lasts hardly more than half an hour. He also takes care of weekly meetings for cate-
chists young villagers interested in teachings about the church, though he does not
always attend the meetings himself.

There are five main cargo holders or fiscales (president, second president, sac-
ristan, treasurer, and fiscal) as well as five members who are also substitutes. They
are present outside the church every evening to attend to whomever needs them—such as asking for a mass—and to uphold the religious calendar by doing the necessary rituals such as seeing to the daily evening prayers (done by a female reciter), organising the room for the catechists, making preparations for the priest, decorating the altar, moving a statue to its special place, or performing a procession on more important occasions. Most of their time goes into the preparation and performance of the main religious holidays, when they are busy for 7 to 10 days.

Catholic men are obliged to start their cargo religioso by doing odd jobs during the main celebrations (cleaning, decorating, carrying the statues during processions), as collectores, collecting money and preparing decorations for a specific celebration, and may move up to become comisiones, helpers organising the village feast and San Miguel. They are free from these duties when they perform in one of the dances. Older women perform various daily tasks in the church and assist in the processions. They pray, sing, and carry candles and the statues of the Virgin Mary. Only men can make a career of becoming cargo holder, as most active Catholics will do, while only some of them will make it as far as president. More well-to-do Totonacs may be asked to become the chief sponsor or steward (mayordomo) of a public ritual. The mayordomos of the village patron Santiago and of San Miguel (the patron of agricultural fertility, thunder, and rain) change every year. They keep a small wooden case with glass windows and a picture of the saint (nicho) on a specially erected altar in their house the whole year round. During the feast of the saint, his nicho is brought to the church, to be later carried to the house of the new mayordomo. There is also a third mayordomo in Nanacatlán for the celebration of Christmas, who stays in office for four or five years. To become such a mayordomo, one has to be married in church and have a daughter of about four to five years old. During the year, they have a nicho with the infant Jesus, Mary, and Joseph on an altar at home. Their daughter is called the madrina and will carry the infant Jesus in several processions.

Next to the rotating cargos, there are ritual specialists who stay on longer, often for life: the dancers and especially their master and captain, as well as healers. Local celebrations are not complete without dances (see annex 6). The same dancers and captains often perform in a dance troupe for decades. The three most important village dances are battle dances of fights between good and evil: the dance of the Santiagueros (Santiago against Pilatus), that of the Migueles (San Miguel against the devil), and the Negritos dance (a group of peones against a snake). They have been preserved during the years of ritual decline of the 1970s and 1980s. For many years don Felix was the captain and later master of the last two dances but has now been succeeded by two of his sons. Don Pedro Francisco, the master of the Santiagueros, the dance devoted to the village patron, has an important ritual function as keeper of the wooden horse of Santiago in his house on a special altar. He will likely be succeeded by his son, who has already been religious cargo holder and captain of the dance for several years.

The most influential ritual specialist and informal leader of Nanacatlán is don
Felix; he and his sons and followers are most influential in religious and ritual affairs, and often in political matters as well. He is a devout Catholic and a PRD supporter, deriving his informal power from a combination of ritual specialties: as a knowledgeable healer with a regional reputation, a carpenter/sculptor of all the wooden statues of saints and ritual attributes in the whole region, and through involvement in dances. Though he has no official say in the religious cargos or village affairs, people often consult him. As someone brave enough to stand up against the authorities, he and his family have supported (if not outright instigated) protests, criticisms, and activities against local authorities. Though the cargo holders are in charge of church affairs, they are only temporarily in office and therefore religious specialists and healers with their life-time position can often exert more influence if not downright power. This, however, also brings them more easily in conflict with the priest.

Who owns the Catholic church?

Catholicism has been absorbed to such a degree that it is impossible to neatly distinguish between Totonac and Catholic aspects of life in general and of the local religious rituals and feasts in particular. However, sometimes the two religious strains collide with each other when villagers and the Catholic priest disagree about ritual performances. Some priests more than others are keen to follow official church rules and regulations. When they try to force this upon the villagers, tension arises between them and their parish members, who see the church predominantly as their own. In the early 1990s, the priest objected strongly to couples who were not officially married in church; he refused to accept them as compadres or to baptise their children. As a consequence, various people did not go to church when the priest was present but instead lighted a candle or prayed at their own convenience. But most of the time, parishioners organise their own church rituals performed without the priest and these ceremonies are at times as crowded or even more so than the ones he celebrates with a mass.

A new priest, even more formal and strict, arrived in the mid-1990s and insisted that the religious customs be in agreement with official Catholic doctrine. In preparations for and during Semana Santa of 1996 he tried to bring the Holy Week ceremonies in line with Catholic orthodoxy. He wanted a total refurbishment, to the despair of the fiscals, who were trying very hard to remember and understand the new rules. The chairman don Beto repeatedly complained that it gave him a headache and although he gradually accepted several changes he blatantly refused others. The tension or power struggle between priest and parishioners underlines that the religious cargos are, in contrast to the civil ones, the Totonac domain par excellence. The current cargo holders as well as the informal leader and his followers, and the captains of dances have a final say here and they are not about to yield to the priest and give up their position: Totonacs have their own local church and can do without interference by the outsider-priest.
The rise of Protestantism

The religious landscape changed significantly when Catholicism lost its denominational monopoly. Compared to the rest of the region, the recent conversion to Protestantism in Nanacatlán is not exceptional. Of a total of 247 households in 1995, 74 percent are Catholic, 19 percent Protestant, 2 percent mixed Pentecostal-Catholic, and 5 percent with no (known) religion. In 1989 there were four protestant churches: one Baptist, two Pentecostal, and one make-shift temple of the Jehovah Witnesses; but by 1996 Pentecostal influence had almost ceased to exist, the Jehovah Witnesses had attached themselves to a group in Zapotitlán, and there were now two Baptist churches. The 19 percent of Protestants in 1995 are subdivided in about 9 percent in the new and 3.5 percent in the old Baptist church, 3 percent Pentecostal or Evangelical, and about 2.5 percent Jehovah Witness.

The rapid expansion of Protestantism in Latin America is explained as a form of religious protest to either the dominant position of the Catholic churches or the state, for its closeness to indigenous spiritual healing, as a way in which the new entrepreneurial middle classes could disengage themselves from community obligations strongly embedded in Catholic calendrical rituals (Dow 2005b), or the opposite; as a reaction to more successful villagers (Sandstrom 1991:362-363). It is difficult to assess what structural factors have been at work in Nanacatlán pushing people out of their traditional denomination, though not to Pentacostalism anymore while that denomination has the highest growth in Mexico (Garma and Leatham 2004). There is no strong correlation between religious affiliation and landownership or involvement in cash crop production and migration, and only a weak correlation between elite status and Protestantism. Other factors must have been at work that can be found in the idiosyncrasies of the village’s history, the growing tensions of local politics, and the religious cargos as counterpoint.

The presence of Protestantism in the Totonac Sierra began in the late 1940s mainly because of efforts from US missionary societies who were able to intensify their proselytising work through the Texas-based Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL). The first churches were either Methodist or Baptist. In Nanacatlán, Zapotitlán and nearby Ixtepec, Protestant influence grew very slowly. The first converts had a hard time because they were often attacked by Catholics, since they no longer wanted to perform their religious cargos and those tasks of communal labour related to the Catholic church. Pentecostal influence did not appear until the late 1970s, through missionaries from the city of Puebla and later from Chihuautzingo. These

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34 Carlos Garma mentions 4 percent Protestants in the municipalities of Xochitlan de Vicente Juarez and Zapotitlán de Mendez, 13 percent in Huitzilan de Serdan and Ixtepec and 43 percent in Zongozotla (personal communication).
35 Percentages do not add up due to rounding.
36 Only one out of the 10 elite households is Protestant while there are five Protestant households among the 16 households that belong to the village sub-elite. In chapter 4 I discuss the composition of the elite and sub-elite in greater detail.
missionaries not only visited the Sierra, but also Veracruz and Oaxaca. When for as yet unclear reasons they ceased their work in the area around Nanacatlán, most of their followers turned to one of the Baptist churches.

In the early 1950s SIL appointed the American Herman P. Aschmann (or Pedro Aschmann as he became known in Mexico) to prepare a Totonac dictionary and to translate the Bible into Totonac. Aschmann chose Nanacatlán as his residence and approached a number of villagers to be his informants and assistants. Some of them were among his early converts to Protestantism. Even the Catholics still talk with great respect about him and especially his wife, a nurse who cured many people without asking money at a time when there were no doctors around. After several years he moved to Zapotitlán where he stayed for five years. Aschmann’s role was taken over in the 1980s by a Baptist preacher from Texas, who used to come with his trailer to visit various parts of Mexico during the summer. After he left for Romania, Baptists from a branch of Latin American Indian Ministries (LAIM)\(^{37}\) in La Unión (a small town to the west of the Sierra, see map 1.2) began visiting the village in recent years. Their hospital in La Unión attracts volunteer surgeons, doctors, and nurses from the US in the summer. Occasionally they travel around the Sierra in a trailer. When they stayed in Ixtepec for a few days many villagers went there for a consult. In 2000 a villager who had been educated as preacher in a bible school and the Biblical Seminary in Puebla returned to Nanacatlán as LAIM coordinator to set up Totonac missionaries. According to his own account\(^{38}\) he is based in Nanacatlán but also active in surrounding villages.

**Protestant celebrations**

Central to the various Protestant churches are the services. In the 1980’s there were weekly services in the main Pentecostal church on Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday led by a local attendant. A preacher from Zongozotla would lead the service once a week, at times organizing Bible readings and discussing problems. He arrived every Saturday afternoon, to leave on Sunday morning after the 10 o’clock service. In many places there are youth choirs, but not in Nanacatlán. Singing and clapping are an indispensable part of the service and therefore cassettes were played in church from the preacher’s own music group. Generally about ten people attended. A minister from Chihuautzingo visited the village several times a year to lead a service, staying overnight to continue his journey to Huitzilán and Zongozotla, and would come upon special requests such as weddings. During his stay in August 1989 twelve women and sixteen men attended the service, which consisted of long sermons and loud semi-rhetorical questions from the minister (translated

\(^{37}\) According to their own website (www.laim.org) LAIM was initiated by an assistant of Pedro Aschmann at the Totonac Bible Centre (Centro Cultural Pro-Totonaco) in La Unión. It gradually expanded its activities to other indigenous groups. The aim of LAIM is to provide a networking service for indigenous evangelising initiatives. LAIM is based in Pasadena, California (USA).

\(^{38}\) [www.geocities.com/misiontonac]

into Totonac by the preacher from Zongozotla), with increasingly trancelike answers, praying, singing and clapping from the believers. He had brought a microphone, an organ, and two large loudspeakers. The sermons and songs could be heard throughout the village. After the service a videotape of services elsewhere was shown outside, which attracted more people. Once a year, a music group from Cardenas (Hidalgo) came to perform. Active village members would attend meetings, bible readings, and campaigns elsewhere; in Zongozotla, Cardenas, or Ixtapa­paluca. After several Pentecostal families migrated, the number of followers declined but the church ceased to exist when the minister stopped visiting the Sierra and the local attendant was convicted of a crime and went to jail. The second church always had been small, with five to six people during services. It started out of rivalry when the founder was not elected attendant in the main church, but did not survive for long.

The Baptists were united until their new temple was ready in 1994. In the old building the followers would attend the weekly services during which some boys played the guitar. Everybody worked hard to build the new church, named Iglesia Evangelica, Jesus Christo, Niño de la verdadera Dios viviendo, which was registered officially in Mexico City. Shortly after it had been inaugurated however, church members started to disagree about what ‘proper behaviour’ meant. After the church had been registered, the people had to live by strict moral codes for dressing, playing music, playing in the street, and receiving visitors. When some people considered these rules to be too much of an invasion of their privacy and did not want to force their sons to stay indoors, stop playing guitar and hanging out on the street, and their daughters to dress in long skirts, they opted out of the church. As before, they set up their own place of worship in association with a missionary centre in La Unión. They use the old Baptist building and are therefore considered to be the oldest, even though they split off. The Pentecostals who had split from their congregation joined them. The independent Baptists (in the new building) became the main Protestant group (over 9 percent of the village households in 1995), after many former Pentecostals joined them. Most followers of both churches attend the weekly services with local preachers on a regular basis.

The Jehovah Witnesses tried to start their own services in the village, but with only six families there were not enough people. They joined the church in Zapotitlán, but because of the distance the followers do not go there every week. They are the most sober in their celebrations and in general do not want to feast or dance and thus object not only to Catholicism but also to other Protestants. Unlike Catholics and Baptists, they hardly have to pay for maintaining the church and the priests or ministers. They dress very formally (the men in shirt and tie) when going to church.
Conclusions

To picture Nanacatlán as I have done thus far captures the community at a specific moment in fast-moving times. It is easy to overlook the impact and depth of local change, because ‘modernity’ is not just about outward appearances through fashionable commodities and urban lifestyles.

Indeed, the most visible changes are the economic and infrastructural transformations that have enabled Nanacateco households to broaden their livelihood: they could replace their nearly complete dependence on subsistence agriculture and agricultural wage-labour with a combination of income from urban migration and rural coffee cultivation. At the same time, new roads and new incomes meant that more children and adolescents gained access to education in the village or, possibly, elsewhere. Everyday life is also different now; daily chores have become lighter due to electricity, piped water supply, and modern commodities, although on women’s work has become more burdensome in households with an absent husband, and men face the burden of combining urban wage labour and rural agriculture. Of course, not all villagers benefited equally from the newly created opportunities. Elderly couples as well as the sick and weak cannot join the stream of urban migrants and for them life has definitely become more strenuous. What is a dream or challenge for some can be a nightmare or envy for others who feel left behind by progress.

I also discussed the growing pluriformity in the village, both in economic, social, religious, and political sense (I return to this in more detail in the following chapters). Today people have more choice both within and outside the village than ever before and how to live life is much less a matter of course. These widening choices have made people less dependent upon the mestizo elite who used to hold a monopoly on employment, trade, and politics. People have now found alternatives to urban jobs by owning their own coffee land, through regional traders, and in political opposition parties. New religious denominations have entered the village and open up another domain in which people can make a choice.

Although there is some correlation between religious affiliation and political allegiances (the Protestants generally in favour of the PRI, and the active Catholics of the religious cargos siding with the oppositional PRD during the 1990s) the village social and cultural landscape has become kaleidoscopic rather than dichotomic. Unlike other parts of Mexico, of which Chiapas with the Zapatista movement and the large-scale expulsion of Protestants is the most outspoken example, there is no clear divide between ‘modernised’ villagers turning to Protestantism and ‘traditional’ Catholics who stick to their customs or between ‘urbanised’ Indians who engage in political opposition and ‘rural’ Indians who cling to agriculture and their mestizo patrons of the PRI. One may say that village life has become fragmented and that the dichotomic hierarchy of the past has been replaced by a highly differentiated and blurred present.

The encounter with new influences and activities gave villagers a different
awareness of what they want, who they are or want to be, and with whom they want to connect. Perhaps most of all, it gave villagers an awareness of difference. The question that now poses itself to anthropologists is how it is possible that despite these potentially centrifugal tendencies Nanacatecos still feel themselves as part of a community, even when their life is no longer limited to the village and many do not live in the village at all.

The next chapter tackles this question for the new diversification of livelihood and the concomitant socio-economic transformation of village life. It will become clear how different categories of Nanacatecos have coped with these changes and whether they have managed to improve their lives. An obvious point to begin such an analysis is by looking at the economic differentiation that originated from the opening up of the urban labour market and cash crop production. To understand what this meant for the community implies that we are looking further than just to the local economy and its relation to national and global processes, but including changes in social networks as well: what has happened to old patterns of *compadrazgo* relations in these fast moving times?