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

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CHAPTER 3

AGRARIAN CHANGE, MIGRATION, AND NETWORKS

If we compare village life in the 1960s and 1970s (Durand 1986) with that of the late twentieth century we see a thoroughly different village. In the past two decades life in Nanacatlán particularly changed through processes that were to a large extent beyond national control. Like many countries today, Mexico went through a global phase of neo-liberalisation which made itself felt at the economic as well as the political level during the 1990s. To boost agricultural productivity – or rural development in general – private ownership was thought to be crucial, and the new agrarian law for the privatisation of ejido land was accepted in 1992.1 Following the World Bank’s Structural Adjustment Policy, the federal government decided that private land tenure and less interference by the state would contribute to economic growth and poverty reduction. The beneficial economic impact of the new agrarian reform however, has been limited at best and the high hopes of the government proved to be unrealistic. This was mainly caused by the government’s assumptions: it still conceptualised rural Mexico as a predominantly agricultural economy, while for many decades the nature of the countryside had changed fundamentally; non-agricultural income sources at present outweigh income from agriculture (Davis et al. 1999; Jones 2000). Everyday peasant life is based on a diversity of livelihood of which urban and transnational migration has a pivotal role. Changes in the structure of land tenure therefore only have a marginal impact on the rural economy (Thiesenhusen 1995; Nuyten 1998; Zoomers 2000; Zoomers and Van der Haar 2000). Agrarian life with or without the ejido system turned out to be remarkably similar and at the turn of the century the state is still one of the crucial determinants for rural development.2

In this chapter I focus on the role of state intervention and global economic processes in the development of the Sierra Norte de Puebla: on how households in Nanacatlán have been able to grasp the new opportunities that arose and what the consequences of these processes were for social differentiation and social relations. As in most of the Sierra, the ejido system was absent in Nanacatlán and all village land is privately owned. In that respect, the new agrarian law could not bring any

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1 Before 1992 an ejidatario was entitled to sell, mortgage, or lease the ejido land. Ejido land within a community is often divided in private plots and an area for collective use.

2 The ejido sector was saved from income decline and poverty through income diversification of households and cash transfers via PROCAMPO (Programme of Direct Support Payments to the Countryside), a state programme initiated in 1993 to compensate for the negative effects of trade liberalisation (Davis et al. 1999). The reform not only failed to increase agricultural income, it also failed to reduce government intervention (Jones 2000).
change. But other dimensions of rural policy, in particular the opening up to global markets, did affect local power relations, degrees of inequality, and land tenure and land use, as well as non-agricultural sources of income. As such, local developments highlight the central issues of the debate on neoliberal reform in Latin America (cf. Zoomers and van der Haar 2000; Keeling 2004). In actual practice, there were not many differences in the way the smallholders (minifundistas) in Nanacatlán and ejidatario households elsewhere had to cope with the changing socio-economic landscape of neoliberal Mexico.

‘Rural development’ in its modern sense is a relatively recent phenomenon in the Sierra. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the Sierra had remained relatively marginalized for centuries: with the exception of the Boca Sierra and some major centres at the outskirts of the area, there has been little interest in the region (Kelly and Palerm 1952; Nutini and Isaac 1989; Velázquez 1995). The Totonac majority consisted of peasants, often working the land owned by local elites. Control over land and trade (in agricultural products) was what lay behind the history of struggles between competing elites and between them and the rural population. Accumulation of capital in the Sierra had largely come from trade and as the mestizos had a virtual trade monopoly, they had become the military and political leaders in the nineteenth and the caciques in the twentieth century (Velázquez 1995:57-59). As the only intermediary traders they could set high prices for selling as well as low prices for buying which earned them the nickname of coyotes. The mestizo elite from Zapotitlán was the regional leading power in the first half of the twentieth century because of their key role in the sugarcane trade and the rum distilleries. The town lost its intermediary position in the trade network between the temperate zone of the Sierra and central Mexico to new emerging centres just outside the Sierra, after those had become easily accessible by new roads. At the same time, local traders were more and more able to bypass the Zapotitlán traders (Durand 1986:219-225). In Nanacatlán, it was not the Totonac families (of whom at best only a few could buy one or two animals), but the local mestizos who acquired their own mules and horses to travel through the Sierra, buying local produce to sell it in towns such as Zacapoaxtla, and returning with commodities to sell in the village. They became wealthy and were able to buy large tracts of land in the village. During several decades these mestizo families were able to control trade as well as agriculture in Nanacatlán, and their current houses still reflect the glory of their wealthy past.

The comfortable position of the local elite came to an end when an all-weather road was built through the Sierra, connecting the interior to Puebla, Mexico City, and Poza Rica by motorised transport that made transportation by mules and horses

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3 The 1920s are an exception, when General Barrios (who had military control of the Sierra, where he was born in the district of Tetela) became heavily involved in developing the Sierra through the construction of bridges, roads, telephone lines, and schools. They fell in disrepair in the 1930s when the Avila Camacho family controlled the Puebla government and focused development on their hometown of Tezuitlán (Brewster 2003).
redundant. The road was part of the developmentalist policy under the Echeverría presidency (1970-76) aiming at incorporating remote parts of the country into the national economy. The opening up of ‘isolated areas’ was meant to stimulate rural development and improve living conditions for the rural poor who would then not feel inclined to leave the villages and move to the already overpopulated urban centres. The 1970s and 1980s indeed brought an end to the isolation of the Sierra (Velázquez 1995:109-124) and indeed more people stayed in the village or even returned from the cities. This process of ‘repeasantisation’ (Masferrer 1988a) however, was very short-lived and a few years later people again returned to the cities. More people did begin to buy land, though this was not so much the outcome of agrarian reform but of the appearance of a new cash crop, coffee, and improved access to credit (Ruiz 1991). Moreover, the opening up of the Sierra enabled many villagers to earn an income outside agriculture through (circular) migration. As coffee was easily grown on small plots they could buy with money earned from migration and plant with cheap government credit, a number of landless villagers jumped on the bandwagon and became smallholder peasants. The new roads also enabled urban traders to come to the village – effectively ending the monopoly of the local merchants. The elimination of these local intermediary traders was one of the key objectives of the development plans for the Sierra, because by the mid 1970s it was widely recognised that their monopolistic power was an important reason for the peasants’ low incomes and low level of investment in subsistence and cash crop agriculture (Edelman 1980:37).

The economic and political consequences of the liberalisation policy during the Salinas presidency (1988-94) further accelerated the changes that had been set in motion in the 1970s.

The processes of rural change this chapter addresses in detail, can be summarised as the paradox of a local mestizo elite who own more land and produce larger yields but whose position has rapidly declined while many small peasants and agricultural labourers manage to advance through coffee production, urban migration, and advanced education. The question then is what has increased income, education, and migration meant for social organisation and social life of the village. I begin with a description of local agriculture and the way it has changed in recent years.

**Working the land**

Farmlands in Nanacatlán are much more extensive than initially meets the eye of the casual observer in the village: in total there are about 175 hectares in use for subsistence agriculture and 112 for cash crops (1995 figures). People calculate the size of a plot in almud (0.5 ha) or cuartillo (0.25 ha). When visiting the plots one becomes aware of the many different pieces of land used for cultivation and the

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4 To eliminate intermediary trade and organise agricultural commercialisation of maize and potatoes the *Plan Zacapoaxtla* and its *Technical Assistance Program* was implemented in 1974. It was meant to keep the land-poor and landless in the countryside, away from the cities (Edelman 1980).

5 *Almud* is also used as a weight (one *almud* equals 7 kilo) and dry measure (1.6 litres).
diversity of the crops grown. When asked what they grow on their fields, people usually mention coffee, and sometimes maize. Unlike in neighbouring villages where tomatoes, beans, chillies, and squash are cultivated in separate fields; in Nanacatlán these crops are grown through a pattern of intercropping with maize or coffee. All in all, villagers distinguish four categories of subsistence production: (1) several local varieties (criollos) of maize on the milpa; (2) crops grown in-between the maize such as beans and squash; (3) plants grown in between the coffee bushes such as fruit trees and bananas; and (4) vegetables and herbs cultivated in the kitchen garden around the house. The cash crops include foremost coffee, while some people also grow chillies and some sugarcane. As a rule, men work the milpa and the cafetal, while women take care of the garden. Although women participate in harvesting the coffee beans, they are explicitly excluded from harvesting maize.

Leobardo Jimenez owns 2 hectares of cafetal and 3.5 hectares of milpa, which puts him among the larger landowners. His coffee land is more or less the same size as that of many local elite families, but he owns far less milpa. One of his cafetales is on the mountain slopes above the village and therefore more easily affected by the occasional night frost. Next to it is his milpa, of which he rents out about half. He also owns two plots of coffee land further away towards Zapotitlán. He employs day-labourers (peones) to work the crops and never engages in mano vuelta. When I went to their cafetal I was surprised to see the extent of inter-cropping. Like many villagers, Leobardo had just told me that he grows coffee with some fruit trees, and milpa with beans and squash. But they also grow chayote, guava, yucca, chalahuite (a shadow tree for coffee, the fruits of which are eaten by children) and on their land further away chiltecpin (small chilli), elephant’s ear (mafafa), jenecuil (a coffee shadow tree), sponge gourd (to bath with), oranges, and sugarcane.

Maize is the most important subsistence crop (as well as the main source of carbohydrates) and is mainly cultivated above and at the village level. Higher on the slope of the mountains (tierra fria) only one maize harvest a year is possible between January or February and August. On the lower grounds (tierra caliente) the growing cycle of maize is four to five instead of six to seven months, and therefore two harvests are possible: in May/June and in November, with sowing in January and July respectively. This second maize harvest coincides with the busiest time in coffee harvesting. At that time of the year labour is often scarce so people with both a cafetal and milpa on the lower grounds confine maize to one cycle: they sow in January/February/March and harvest in June-September. Although it is possible to use high-yield maize varieties to make up for the loss of one harvest, people stick to what they see as the customary village varieties called criollos. The high-yielding variety maize requires considerable investment in chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and the shorter growing cycles are difficult to combine with migrant work. People also attach high cultural value and meaning to the local maize (see chapter 5 and Govers 1992).
In general, maize cultivation is not very labour-intensive. Only a few people are needed per hectare. The maize cycle starts with clearing a plot, which takes 40 man-days for one hectare when it has lain fallow for years and is overgrown with weeds, bushes and shrubs. This is done in October/November. As there is hardly any land left fallow these days, such extensive clearing is infrequent. In December/January the milpa is weeded. If a plot has been fallow for a brief period, it only needs light weeding – and thus less working days. In the eyes of the Nanacatecos the best time to sow is the eight days before a new moon, during a waning moon (luna quarto menguante), but it is also possible after the new moon, during a waxing moon (luna crecia). The biggest seeds of the best mazorcas (dried maize cobs) from last year’s harvest are germinated by soaking them for 12 hours. The maize is then sown in transverse rows by making a hole with a pointed stick and dropping a seed. It takes eight men to sow one hectare in a day. If it does not rain in the next 15 to 20 days, the harvest will be lost. In 1989 there was such a drought and the fields looked very poor with half grown stalks and many cobs completely lost. The poor maize harvest coincided with the low coffee prices that year and people complained that they were in double trouble, as they did not have the money to buy extra maize to cover family needs.

Pedro had sown his maize in the first week of March on half a hectare of land he had rented from his compadre Elios. He usually pays a fixed amount of rent, at a rate of 10 huacal (carrier net) of maize per hectare, but fortunately his compadre settled on half the harvest (of full maize cobs) when the drought damaged the yields. Pedro harvested in early September and that year he could do the work easily on his own in two days. His eldest son helped him one day. While he had harvested 20 huacal in 1988 when he had planted only part of the land, a year later when he had sown all the land, he could harvest less than half of it. Not only did he harvest far less but about a third of the maize cobs were either very small, partly dried out, or eaten by worms. The yield was barely enough to feed the family while the year before he had been able to sell part of it to earn some extra cash.

The situation is most favourable in years with sufficient rain and warm weather, because then after only three days the first leaves wriggle out of the earth; this may take up to 20 days in cold weather. After sowing, the land has to be weeded twice: after 20 to 30 days and again after the plants have started blossoming. Sticks are put close to the growing plant for protection during the first weeding. The weeds are not removed but always left on the milpa as mulch; this is a cheap substitute for fertilizers that many people cannot afford to buy and cow dung, which is rare in this village with only a few cattle. In May/June some fresh maize cobs (elote) are

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6 In chapter 5 I pay more attention to the rituals and beliefs concerning maize.
7 Germination is uncommon in Mesoamerica (Kelly 1953).
8 If they use fertilizers, they give about a tablespoon close to each seed during sowing and again when the plant starts growing.
harvested. The large majority of the stalks are broken halfway down the stem (doblar) in May/June/July/August during the waning moon to promote drying. When they have sufficiently dried (depending on the rainfall and the altitude of the milpa this takes between three to six weeks) the cobs are harvested and stored in the house. Yields are calculated in reales (60 mazorcas), of which a hectare of land brings in about 200 with a weight in good years of up to 3800 kilos. The cobs are loaded in a carrier net called huacal (see figure 3.1), which contains four reales or 240 mazorcas (counted 48 times five when filling it) of up to 75 kilos, a heavy load to be carried back to the village. If the milpa is near the village, a peasant can bring home four to five huacal a day, otherwise only three.

Intercropping on the milpa is only possible when the slopes are not too steep, because otherwise the plants will be damaged when working the land. Beans, the Mesoamerican source of vegetal protein, are cultivated on the milpa in-between the rows of maize stalks. Some people, such as don Felix, grow large quantities of beans, but only those who live in the village the whole year through can do so as the crop needs constant attention. As with maize, sowing beans has to be done during a waning moon. There are several varieties with different growing cycles. *Frijol negro* (black beans, *T. laktustapu*) and *frijol cuerno* (cow pea, *T. lukustapu*) can only be sown in January/February and will give a harvest in April/May on land below the village, but uphill where don Felix has his land the growing cycle takes until September. He sows *frijol blanco* (*T. xuyumit*) and *frijol gordo* (runner bean, *T. klankastapu*) in the beginning of the year, but on his land these cannot be harvested until November.9

Squash and, to a lesser extent cassava and yucca, are also grown in inter-cropping on the milpa. Cassava and squash have the same growth cycle as maize; yucca takes up nearly the whole year, from January/February to October/December. Some people do not cultivate yucca anymore, because it is easily stolen, more than squash.

Although no new high-yielding maize varieties are planted in Nanacatlan, the milpas are densely cultivated to achieve the highest possible yield from the maximum number of crops. This is only possible however, if fallow periods are long enough for the land to recuperate. People are concerned because land scarcity has become an obstacle to sufficient fallowing without additional fertilizing. Intensive intercropping is thus not always possible any more. “The land becomes tired”, as people say, “it does not rest” (see also Smith 2004:418; Del Angel-Perez and Mendoza 2004:340).

Lower and at the village level, where there used to be milpas in the past, the plots are now mainly reserved for coffee. Unlike maize and beans, planting and pruning of coffee bushes is best done during a new moon (luna nueva) according

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9 Another slow growing variety, the *frijol colorado*, is also ripe in November, but can be sown as late as April. The now nearly forgotten *frijol rojo* and *amarillo* can even be sown as late as June. See annex 7 for scientific names of the identified cultivated and wild plants. T. refers to the Totonac name.
to Nanacatecos. One hectare of land generally leaves room for no more than 1000 bushes, because of the steep slopes. Planting takes 40 man-days and because after the first years of planting there is plenty of open space between the plants, it is necessary to weed every three months. In coffee cultivation smallholders use mainly family labour with an occasional wage labourer, while larger landowners employ day-labourers on a regular basis. Large landowners also work the coffee more intensively with fertilizers and pesticides, fumigation of the bushes against insects, and regular pruning. Smallholders often do not want to risk investing in fertilizers and pesticides, because a low coffee price at harvest time can mean a net loss. They tend to postpone pruning, as it saves on labour, although it diminishes the harvest over the years. Together with the occasional frost that can damage the crop severely, these differences in cultivation practices explain the huge variations in yields between landowners and between years.

Coffee is mainly harvested by wage labourers who receive a fixed price for every kilo they bring in (the price per kilo of coffee on distant plots is slightly higher). Only when the harvest is small or when the plot is very far from the village are they paid in daily wages, otherwise no one would show up to do the tiresome picking. The workers bring the beans to the owner’s house carrying their bag with a mecapal (see figure 3.2) attached to their forehead, carefully watch the weighing of their bag of coffee, and check the calculation of their payment.

The owner needs a cement floor on which to dry the coffee beans. The yield is measured in quintales for which weight differs according to the stage of drying and processing. The freshly-picked beans are called café ceresa of which 245 kilos make a quintal. After shelling, washing, and a day of sun-drying it is called café oreada (one quintal which weighs 100 kilos). After about three days (depending on the weather), the beans have become café pergamino seco (where one quintal equals 57.5 kilos). The differential weights and measures correspond with the standard that café seco weighs more or less one-quarter of café ceresa. Coffee producers who get more – or less – than a quarter quintal of dry coffee, have made an extra profit or loss.

The marketing of coffee also highlights the difference between large coffee producers and smallholders. The former can sell their coffee outside the village where they can fetch higher prices; the latter generally have to sell their yield cheaper within the village at lower prices – often to the larger landowners who thus make an additional profit. As coffee prices fluctuate according to the world market, growing coffee is a risky business that in bad years can bring net losses when market prices do not cover production and harvesting costs. Being more vulnerable to such setbacks, smallholders may decide to leave the beans to rot on the bushes; this backfires as coffee bushes deteriorate when not harvested.

Elios Bravo is one of the larger landowners, with a total of 4 hectares of cafetales and seven hectares of milpa, scattered all over the village lands. In 1989 he employed a number of wage labourers to weed, prune, and fertilise for a total of 295 days between
April and December which cost him 1,475,000 pesos (US$567), not including the harvest. In November 1988, INMECAFE still paid 650 pesos for *ceresa* coffee when it was 500 on the private market; in December the difference was 660 and 800 pesos respectively. The harvesters received 250 pesos per kilo. A year later INMECAFE no longer worked with fixed prices and had not bought anything yet in the village. The market price had dropped to 250 pesos, but in the village it was as low as 200. Elios hoped that prices in December would rise again, because otherwise he would not have a profit on that harvest. During one extreme cold day in December 1989 however, most of the coffee in Nanacatlan was lost and with it all hope for a recovery. Elios also lost his job with INMECAFE when it stopped functioning.

As on the *milpas* there is also intercropping on the *cafetales*. In between the coffee fruit trees mainly orange and lemon are planted, but also guava, tangerine, and mango. Bananas are planted whenever there is room for them. They come in several varieties that bear fruit at different intervals: *platano amarillo* (every three months), *platano blanco* and *castillo* (every six months), *platano tabasco* (every eight months), and *platano roatan* and *colorado* (every nine months). The major shadow tree for the coffee bushes is the *chalahuite*, promoted by INMECAFE at the expense of other trees (Smith 2005:125). In addition to fruit trees, we also find herbs and vegetables on the coffee land: black pepper and cinnamon bushes, chilli, tomatoes, and chayote; sometimes French beans, squash, and cassava. The fruit trees, bananas, and vegetables are closely guarded shortly before harvest time as they are the targets of thieves, especially when the plots are in a remote part of the village lands.

The garden is taken care of by women, except for the heavier work such as pruning or cutting trees and banana plants. The houses that people rent from the village rarely have a garden to speak of, but most of the other houses have enough garden space for some flowers, fruit trees, vegetables, herbs, and wild plants (brought in from the hills) as well as room for chicken, sometimes turkey, and occasionally rabbits or pigs. Relatively small gardens can yield an amazing variety of edible, decorative, and curative crops (see two examples in annex 3), but intercropping usually provides a larger quantity of vegetables and fruits.

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10 In 1989 the exchange rate was 1US$ for about 2,600 pesos. Elios did not make a profit that 1989-1990 harvest (for which I have no figures available), because the prices dropped and a major part of the harvest was lost. In a good year such as October 1995 to April 1996 he harvested about 24,000 kilos *ceresa* or 6,200 kilos *pergamino secco*. For the upkeep of the cafetal and harvesting (1 peso per kilo) he paid about 30,000 pesos (US$6,000), while he sold the harvest for about 90,000 pesos (US$12,000). The subsequent 1996-1997 harvest was 13,000 *ceresa* and 3,000 *pergamino seco* only, with costs of 17,000 pesos (US$2,125) and with a higher coffee price the income was about 65,000 pesos (US$8,125). The exchange rate in 1996 was 7.5 pesos and in 1997 8 pesos for US$1. Elios thus has a gross return on investment of US$8,000 in 1996 and of US$6,000 in 1997, without depreciation of (mechanical) equipment, transportation costs, operational costs, renewal of coffee bushes etc. factored in.
Changing land use and land tenure

In the past few decades, land tenure and land use have changed remarkably. Compared to 1970 (before the new development projects reached the village), the cultivated area in 1995 has increased notably (table 3.1). Against a total cultivated area of 152 hectares in 1970, crops cover more than double that in 1995 (309 hectares). Not only has land used for coffee cultivation tripled, as expected from a new cash crop, the acreage of maize cultivation also more than doubled (from 71 to 175 hectares).

<table>
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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maize</td>
<td>70.75</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>174.95</td>
<td>56.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coffee</td>
<td>39.85</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>111.75</td>
<td>36.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sugarcane</td>
<td>11.75</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasture</td>
<td>14.25</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/fallow</td>
<td>15.50</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>152.10</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>309.20</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This immense increase in 25 years is only partially explained by the decline of sugarcane or fallow land. What has happened is that milpas no longer have double cropping and almost all land suitable for coffee production has been turned into cafetales. Additional land was needed, and wasteland higher up the mountain or farther away from the village has been converted to agricultural land. This indicates that agriculture in general has become more attractive and lucrative in the intervening years. Demand for food crops has grown, commensurate with a 50 percent population growth from 750 to 1120 inhabitants. At that time, the new roads had created opportunities to sell part of the harvest to itinerant merchants or commercial traders in town.

While this changing land use is remarkable, shifts in the pattern of land tenure between 1970 and 1995 are also telling (see chapter 2): the percentage of landless households has actually decreased (from 52 to 39 percent), while at the same time the percentage of owners of over 2 hectares has doubled (see table 3.2). This is of course, closely connected to the spectacular increase in cultivated land, but unlike in the past, the large landowners were not the only ones who benefited. A sizeable number of landless households, through incomes earned outside agriculture were also able to buy a small piece of land that they converted to cafetal. Pedro Ramos is one of them. He wrote down his story.
Table 3.2 Land distribution, 1970 and 1995

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<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>39.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.1-0.99</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.0-1.99</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>19.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.0-2.99</td>
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<td>5.6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.0-3.99</td>
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<td>1.2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.0-4.99</td>
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<td>1.2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0-5.99</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.0+</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 1970 data: Durand (1986:123); 1995 data: Village survey and Procampo figures

Table 3.3 Land use according to socio-economic class, 1970 and 1995

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>19.25 (2.0 hect. or more)</td>
<td>56.75 (100)</td>
<td>10.00 (295)</td>
<td>71.75 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IIa</td>
<td>20.50 (1.00-1.99 hect.)</td>
<td>46.75 (100)</td>
<td>7.75 (228)</td>
<td>23.00 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IIb</td>
<td>11.75 (0.1-0.99 hect.)</td>
<td>34.25 (100)</td>
<td>7.00 (291)</td>
<td>17.00 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>15.1 (landless)</td>
<td>37.00 (100)</td>
<td>0 (245)</td>
<td>0 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>70.75 (100)</td>
<td>174.75 (247)</td>
<td>24.75 (100)</td>
<td>111.75 (452)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N.B. Figures between brackets refer to index figures (1970 = 100)

Source: 1970 data: Durand (1986:135); 1995 data: Village survey and Procampo figures

After 3 years of struggle [in 1980] I received a favour from God, because where I would normally harvest 12 huacales of maize cobs, I harvested 115 huacales. I just admired this enormous quantity of maize. Then I analysed my situation and how it would be in the future and we agreed on what to do and I started to struggle again and to look for a small piece of land. I asked several people who did not want to sell to me, but I finally found a good-hearted man who wanted to sell a plot. Then I handed over 240 almudes [1680 kilo] of maize, but that was not sufficient to pay all. It cost a total of 11,000 pesos (US$440) in maize and a 1,000 (US$40) in cash, and I still had to look for 8,000 (US$320).\(^{11}\) But also the way this man was, he gave me four months respite. Then I signed the document

\(^{11}\) In 1980 the exchange rate was US$ 1 to 25 pesos.
in January 1981, but I was unable to pay my debt because in April another child was born. When the time was there I did not have more than 1,000 pesos and I gave it to this poor mister. I had to go and look for work in Mexico [City] that year to be able to pay everything in December. I gave him the 7,000 pesos and thanked him for waiting so long. I stayed without further obligations and continued working in Mexico and what I could save I turned into coffee plants. I bought 500 plants, and each cost me 50 pesos while I earned 1,500 a week in Mexico. And only like this I managed to do what I wanted, with a lot of sacrifice, because when my next son was born I was not there with my wife, because he was born in April and not in May as expected. (Pedro Ramos 1989)

If we look closely at how the new landowners operated in comparison to the old ones, table 3.3 reveals to some degree what has happened. Though the new owners (most of whom have less than 1 hectare) bought land to grow coffee, they still concentrate on maize cultivation and less on coffee. Besides land and an investment in young coffee bushes (quite a lot in fact if we follow Pedro’s story) coffee requires capital (or an income) to bridge the five years before the first harvest. Obviously growing maize is more within reach of poorer households.

The table shows that it was particularly the well-to-do farmer households (owning 2 hectares or more) who have moved into coffee far more than the other classes of farmers: they expanded their coffee land from 10 to 70 hectares in 25 years. The others were able to jump on the bandwagon of coffee production to a far lesser degree. Only after INMECAFE set up its credit programme did they come in larger numbers. Land tenure changed in that both the richest and the poorest villagers could increase cultivation. For reasons explained above, the larger landowner households benefited more in that they now control 71 percent of all village land against 49 percent in 1970 (see table 3.4).

Most do not work their land themselves: they either hire wage labourers to do the job or completely rent out their land to small peasants and landless. In 1995 half of all milpas (87 hectares or 49.7 percent) were rented out against a fixed amount of maize, which the tenant was obliged to hand over to his landlord after the harvest. This percentage did not differ much from 1970 when, according to Durand (1986:141) 53.7 percent of the milpas were rented out.

Finally, when we look at per capita acreage of subsistence production, we notice a substantial increase (see table 3.3). In 1970, the total acreage was 70.75 hectares and the total number of households was 162; in 1995 the respective numbers were 174.75 (hectares) and 247 (households), implying that household subsistence acreage increased from 0.43 to 0.70. As I was unable to collect reliable information on yields and total agricultural production it is premature to conclude that per capita

---

12 By that time the peso had devalued several times and by the end of 1982 the exchange rate was 1US$ to 2,200 pesos. It is therefore difficult to establish costs and prices. The figures mentioned imply that 18 weeks of income are needed to buy 500 plants and this seems unlikely.

13 While rent for milpas can be paid in kind, the land for cash crops (coffee, chilli) has to be paid in cash.
Table 3.4 Land tenure according to socio-economic class, 1970 and 1995

1970

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classes</th>
<th>Land owned (in hectares)</th>
<th>Number of households</th>
<th>Average acreage per household</th>
<th>Percentage of all village households</th>
<th>Percentage of total village land owned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>74.00</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>48.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iia</td>
<td>35.25</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>23.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iib</td>
<td>16.25</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absentees</td>
<td>26.60</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>152.10</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1995

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classes</th>
<th>Land owned (in hectares)</th>
<th>Number of households</th>
<th>Average acreage per household</th>
<th>Percentage of all village households</th>
<th>Percentage of total village land owned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>219.75</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>71.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iia</td>
<td>57.75</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iib</td>
<td>21.50</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absentees</td>
<td>10.20</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 1970 data: Durand (1986:127); 1995 data: Village survey and Procampo figures

maize production has increased. It seems safe to say however, that subsistence agriculture has not substantially decreased or marginalized under the influence of coffee cultivation and out-migration.

Table 3.5 Population Nanacatlán 1970-1995

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Households</th>
<th>Inhabitants</th>
<th>Average number per household</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>4,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>762</td>
<td>5,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>988</td>
<td>5,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>1120</td>
<td>4,5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Nanacatlán, new coffee lands and their promising future lured a number of people who had migrated to Puebla and Mexico City to return to the village and try their luck there. Between 1979 and 1981 the population grew by some 30 percent
when former migrants became peasants again. This was a temporary phenomenon however, and in the 1980s migration began again after coffee production lost its attractiveness (see table 3.5).

The growth of non-agricultural activities

During the 1980s agricultural production increased with the introduction of coffee cultivation and more people than ever before were tilling their own land (from 76 households in 1970 and 150 households in 1995). Non-agricultural employment also grew rapidly as the village became closer incorporated into the regional and national economy through the opening up of the Sierra, and as more government and commercial jobs were created in the village. By 1998 there were thirteen teachers (mainly working in neighbouring villages), two policemen (working in Zacapoaxtla), eight shopkeepers and one CONASUPO\textsuperscript{14} shopkeeper, four traders, four maize millers, two butchers (apart from the occasional sellers of meat), two carpenters, two bricklayers, two hairdressers, two midwives (there used to be four), two instructors and the coordinator (with a regional office in Ixtepec) of INEA, and one school superintendent (working in Tuxtla). Most do not earn enough to sustain a nuclear family, but a regular cash flow is an important asset in a village where cash is always in short supply.

Next to these steady jobs, other non-agricultural sources of income have given a new impetus to the village economy and the livelihood of individual households: small-scale trade and migration. These new sources of employment and income have also changed the local income distribution, which has become less skewed – both because poor villagers could earn more and because the old elite lost much of its former monopoly on agriculture and trade.

Trade and commerce

Many villagers still vividly remember the few mestizo families of merchants and carriers who travelled through the Sierra with their mule trains. They had a near monopoly on trade inside the village as well as with the outside markets. They operated along an elaborate network of routes, one of which passed through Nanacatlán from Zapotitlán through the Sierra of Papantla to the coast of Veracruz. A few locals such as don Miguel (the father of don Gustavo) were itinerant traders who spent sometimes weeks outside the village on their business routes. Don Miguel was a butcher and often took small cattle along. The Nanacatecos were entirely dependent upon these local merchants and the markets in Zapotitlán and Ixtepec if they needed commodities such as soap, clothes, and flour or wanted to sell their agricultural products such as coffee or chilli. In the early 1970s, there

\textsuperscript{14} CONASUPO (National Company for Popular Sustenance) is a state sponsored programme for providing basic food at guaranteed prices, set up in cooperation with COMPLAMAR (General Coordination of the National Plan for Economically Depressed Zones).
were only three shops in the village: one founded in 1940, another around 1960, and a third one dating from 1970 (Durand 1986:177-78). Two shops were owned by mestizos, who were at the same time the large landowners and the major coffee farmers. The mestizos also monopolised the coffee trade. These families had a major share in all economic domains making them not only wealthy but immune to temporary setbacks in one of these domains.

The new road and the state sponsored development programmes dealt a severe blow to this monopoly of local merchants. Coffee production and marketing became regulated by the state agency INMECAFE, which made local intermediaries redundant. Having high hopes for the new coffee cultivation in the village, but fearing that this might lead to a serious decline in subsistence agriculture, the government through a joint CONASUPO/COMPLAMAR programme set up a village store that provided basic foodstuffs at low prices. In this way, it out-competed local merchants who had been able to ask high prices for their merchandise. The local merchants found some compensation because the growing demand for land for cultivating maize enabled them to rent out land unsuitable for coffee growing. By the mid-1980s the combined outcome of the new cash crop and the supply of cheap foodstuffs was that

... several processes took place more or less simultaneously: bankruptcy or weakening of local merchants, renting of lands on the part of mestizo monopolists, strengthening of poor and middle strata merchants, and population growth (Masferrer 1988a:72).

The local merchants were never able to recover. With the new all-weather road the Sierra had become easily accessible and merchants and coffee traders who came with trucks from Zacatlán or Zacapoaxtla took the place of the local merchants and their mules. The now readily available public transport and the rising cash incomes allow the villagers to make the trip to the cheaper markets and shops of these towns themselves, while migrants buy more expensive commodities in Mexico City before returning to the village. Commerce has also increased in the village itself: several small shops sometimes doubling as local bars, sell everyday items such as soap, shampoo, candles, matches, toilet paper, some canned food (beans, tuna fish, tomatoes), sweets, and refreshments. Some households deal in a few products such as chicken and eggs, vegetables, building material and kerosene; some women in luxury commodities; while several women sell crops and food, but they have been joined by regular female peddlers from Ixtepec and Tuxtla. The more well-to-do families also participate in small trade.

Elios and Lupe not only earn their income from coffee and renting out maize land. She makes a regular income as one of the village primary school teachers. He has irregular

15 The first shop dates from 1920 and was established by the father of don Gualo. In 1970 it did not exist anymore (Durand 1986:177). The shop that opened in 1970 was from one of the first well-to-do Totonacs.
jobs, and after his contract with INMECAFE had ended, he worked for one of the state electoral committees before and during the 1994 elections, and as secretary in various municipalities. He also hires out a maize mill and coffee-shelling machine and repairs most of the electric equipment in the village. Elios is involved in a number of trading activities, apart from buying coffee from villagers. He sells small building materials, kerosene, sugar and the like from his house, which as a pick-up owner he is able to buy directly from regional merchants. At the time of the coffee crisis in 1989 their income slumped. As a sideline to teaching Lupe then started trading in women’s underwear, sheets, blankets, and later in Tupperware utensils and Avon cosmetics. She finds many customers because she is able to sell on credit. For the poorer village households, income diversification is also crucial to make a living.

Combining urban and rural work

Migration is not something new in the village. Decades ago men would walk for hours to nearby Huehuetla or the lowlands of Veracruz to work as seasonal labourers in agriculture. Walking at high speed, almost running, it took them almost three hours to Huehuetla, nine to Chumatlán, eleven to Entabladero, and fifteen to Papantla (see map 1.1 and 1.2). The walk back home could be very strenuous when payment had been in maize cobs instead of money. In later years, some families moved permanently to towns outside the Sierra, to Puebla or Mexico City. The first migrants to Mexico City went with Pedro Aschmann, the Baptist linguist from the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL/ILV) who during the 1960s had been working on a Totonac dictionary in Nanacatlán and later in Zapotitlán (see chapter 2). The institute was situated in the suburb of Tlalpan and even today most Nanacatecos live close to each other in this part of Mexico City.

The labour market in Nanacatlán and the market outside the village (first of all in Mexico City) seem like communicating vessels: when coffee production was promising in the beginning of the 1980s many migrants returned to the village only to leave again in great numbers when coffee prices dropped at the end of the 1980s. Migration also fluctuates with employment opportunities in the cities that were booming until the early 1990s; when the economic decline of 1994 set in, many migrants were forced to come back to the village because there were fewer jobs in the sectors they had access to. The same argument I had heard before from people leaving the village (“there are only tortillas with salsa to eat here”) was now used to motivate their coming back (“at least there is always tortillas and salsa to eat here, and water and housing are free”). With money from a new rural support programme begun because of the economic crisis, the returning migrants were able to cultivate their land again, either their own – two-thirds of the households with temporary migrants own land – or land they had rented from others. Some could find work as wage labourers tilling other people’s land or in the few new jobs in

\[\text{PROCAMPO (Programme of Direct Support Payments to the Countryside), see note 2.}\]
trade and transport that the new road had created. For many this was just a temporary resettlement because when the Mexican economy firmed up, they returned to the cities.

It seems unproductive that men would come back to the village to cultivate maize and coffee, while they could make relatively high cash income from their urban jobs. The household would not need to abandon agriculture altogether, women could take over their husband’s work. Unlike many other places experiencing a continuous out-migration of men however, Nanacatlán did not witness such a ‘feminisation’ of agriculture (Govers 1997). For one, women are not particularly eager to add a new burden to their already busy lives. There are also ‘traditional’ rules proscribing women working the land, because land is considered to be female and should thus be worked by men; this especially concerns sowing and harvesting maize (see chapter 6). But these reasons are not sufficient to explain the present situation. There are several cases where women do supposedly ‘male’ work because there is no man around. Women with small children for instance, fetch firewood and check upon the fields until their sons are big enough to do so; whether or not there are men at home, every able woman or girl harvests coffee to have an income of her own. In other cases it was apparently possible to bend the rules and interpret cosmology in a more pragmatic way e.g., when villagers began to exploit the forest even though it broke the rules of respect people owe the (Patron of) trees. Why do migrant men then come back regularly to work their fields?

Nugent (1994) suggests looking at the issue the other way around, and to regard urban work as a condition for farming. He points at the continued existence of the peasantry, instead of trying to categorise them as either agriculturists (campesinos) or labourers (proletaristas). Knowing that it is impossible to exclusively work the land, peasants work as urban labourers to be able to continue peasant production. Selling their labour power is thus

... not just a matter of the ‘peasant economy’ subsidising the ‘capitalist economy’. At the same time, implicated in the same process is the sale by agriculturalists of their labor power to capitalists in order to subsidize their livelihood in the countryside, to sustain their identity as agriculturers, which is to say as independent agricultural direct producers (ibid. 303).

Much as I agree to accept the continuity of the peasantry and the identity as peasant as a starting point, it is not just a matter of urban wage labour subsidising peasant life. Urban income has been used as an investment in land, cash crop production, education, trade, and housing and has led to visible income improvement. It is a strategy of risk reduction through livelihood diversification, not just by combining agriculture and wage labour but also by investing urban income and thus increasing rural income.

Combining agriculture with urban jobs is a sensible and feasible thing to do. The peak season in maize and coffee cultivation coincides with major village feasts
when migrants would come home anyway. The village patron *fiesta* is in late July, exactly when the maize can be harvested, and the coffee can be picked and the *milpa* weeded and sown around Christmas and New Year. The jobs they have in the city allow them to ask permission to leave several times a year as the men usually do not have long-term contracts. As transport to and from Mexico City has become regular and faster it is easier to come back for a short period. But as transportation costs, though comparatively cheaper, are still high compared to the income of a migrant, they tend to restrict their returns to a few longer periods.

Peasants do not like to give up farming because it has proved its use as a source of income and a safety net, but this is not the only reason migrant men continue to work their land in the village. Because of their part-time presence in the village and their part-time presence in the city, migrant men run the risk of becoming marginal in both worlds. A man might opt for the standard role of a migrant worker who at local feasts and ceremonies comes home to visit his family and relatives, hands over the money he has saved, and enjoys his stay as a pleasant break with the hard work in the city. But such behaviour would classify him in the eyes of others as the outsider to village life who is on his way to become a stranger. In the city, the migrants are also outsiders: as a country bumpkin, a poor *Indio*, or just one of the mass of manual workers who have come to flood the city’s outskirts. The way to avoid such double marginality is identifying oneself as the person one has been namely, as a peasant who has his firm roots – and his land – in his village of origin. Tilling the land, planting coffee and harvesting maize are thus not just additional economic activities that provide subsistence or an extra-income to the household, but they also turn a migrant worker into a peasant and this distinguishes him from the huge army of cheap labour in the city. Men are more likely to dedicate themselves to agriculture when their wives prefer village life as well.

Irene prefers to stay on the land where she is born. Her relatives are around and the air is so clean, unlike the large and polluted cities that make your eyes sting and hurt your throat. Even Puebla, where she went to accompany her sick mother-in-law, is crowded and dirty; though less than Mexico. Another reason for preferring the village is that in the city she would probably only find cleaning jobs. “I would only be a servant there”.

Identifying oneself with a peasant household also shows that one has a continued interest in the village and village life, and is unlikely to move out of the village in the near future. This makes men and women (nearly) full-fledged members of the community who are entitled to participate in communal activities, rituals, and cargos; and who remain part of the local social network and exchanges; in short, it enables a couple to unquestionably belong to the village. Thus by a migrating man continuing his work on the land (and a woman preparing and exchanging food, see chapter 7), he can ensure that his household can keep its ‘natural’ place in the village – entitled to social support in times of need, when husband and wife get old, or both, and a right of say on village affairs.
Gender relations and cash income

Modernity has also affected local gender relations. Whereas in the past the women spent most of their day in household tasks, there was now room for other activities, particular money-earning. However, not all women took the new opportunities. Some did not want (or were not allowed by their husbands) to take jobs or participate in community activities. Since the 1980s many girls and younger women have opted for a different life when they began to earn an income themselves, as their social status in the community rose and as they became better educated. Coffee cultivation enabled women to earn their own money by participating in the harvest for the first time. This money she can spend as she likes and although she mainly uses it to feed and clothe her family and to buy household necessities, it has given her a greater say in household expenditures. Migration and the long-term absence of men created at least temporarily, a large number of female-headed households, and these women represent the household at official meetings. A small but increasing number of women has found a regular or temporary job (as teacher or assistant in one the government programmes for adult literacy, health promotion and public information, or courses on hygiene, food, sewing etc.) for which they now qualify because they are better educated. Others have lived, studied, or worked in the city and have eagerly copied urban attitudes and opinions on gender relations. Women have gained in confidence and become increasingly involved in village committees and communal activities.

In 1998 Irene, Pedro, their children, and her grandmother partly lived in a new brick house and partly in their old wooden and cane house along one of the village streets. When their new house is finished soon, they will tear down the old one and build a separate kitchen. They have had five children, but the oldest died as a baby. Irene is usually very busy, though cooking, cleaning, childcare, and attending the garden around the house are just a few of her activities. Her grandmother does the lighter household chores and the laundry. Irene's father is almost blind and she helps him with food and small gifts whenever she can. Pedro's mother died three years ago and since then his father comes to eat with them most of the time. Irene occasionally sells maize, (cooked) squash or other vegetables, and picks coffee. In 1989 she bought a sewing machine, took an INI course, and started making clothes for other people. In a couple of years she also began working for INI, when it initiated a health programme in the village in the spring of 1989. She earns a few pesos by giving injections to people who have a medical prescription. For several years she was a bilingual teacher and later the village co-ordinator for INEA. When her children went to senior high school, she began to sell bread that she buys three to four times a week in Zapotitlán, and to cook for one of the village teachers. She started looking around for a steady and better paid job she could commute to, and found one in Tuxtla, taking care of the school for five days a week. She earlier had refused an offer to work as housemaid for her comadre Lupe. Pedro earns most of his income in Mexico City (as a construction worker) and an additional income in Nanacat-
Ian by working for his *compadre* Elios as day-labourer and since the mid-1980s by cultivating coffee.

Through the combination of several income-earning activities, the family could buy a *cafétal*, improve its standard of living, but most importantly, invest heavily in their children’s education. Irene and Pedro are used to discussing major decisions in life, which boils down to how to spend their money and how to earn a bit more. They consider their efforts and struggles worth taking, because they both want to give their children a better future and an easier life than they themselves have had; and of course they hope that their children will take care of them when they grow old. They agree that a combination of teaching them how to work the land and sending them to junior and senior high school is the best way to raise their children. In 1998 their eldest son Silvino finished his training as a mechanic in Huachinango (see map 1.1), where he had stayed with one of Irene’s brothers. Pablo is going to the new senior high school in Zapotitlán. Alex still attends secondary school in the village, but will continue his study in Zacatlán. The youngest daughter Lupita will finish primary school and is also expected to continue studying.

There are also counter-pressures however: new problems have arisen with migration as the women carry the burden of keeping the household while their husbands are away. They depend on the goodwill of their men to send sufficient money to cover daily expenses if they do not earn enough themselves, but women have no control over money spent in the city. Because wage labour for women in the village is scarce and not enough to maintain a family, this may bring poverty rather than improvement to the household.

Paola and her husband Martin are one of the landless households; they rent a cheap house without a garden from the village. Their economic situation and living conditions have not changed much over the years. He regularly works in Mexico City and works his *milpa* when he returns to the village, participates in the religious cargos, and is active in the *Santiagueños*, one of the dancing troupes. Unlike many other migrants he does not regular work as *peon* during his stay in the village. Martin spends much of his urban income on consumption goods and when he returns to the city often has no money to leave behind for his wife and children. Paola spends little time on her own household. She earns some money by preparing *tortillas*, doing the laundry, fetching water, and cleaning tripes after pigs or cattle have been slaughtered. With only one year of primary school she is unable to find other work. She uses her income to feed and clothe the family but is constantly short of money. Their children have little hope for a better life because they are often kept home from school to help out. The money the children earn by running errands and doing all kinds of chores is used for the household. Only during the coffee harvest period, when the whole family picks coffee, does the household fare a bit better.
Social differentiation in the 1990s

Half a century ago, it was easy to differentiate between villagers who had people working for them and those who had to work for others. This largely coincided with the distinction between the local mestizo elite and the majority of poor households. Almost every male Totonac was (also) working the land as day-labourer within the village and in other parts of the Sierra or the lowland of Veracruz and cultivating a (rented) milpa. Few owned land and even fewer had an additional income from trade. Every woman was a housewife, spending the larger part of the day on her own chores and if poor, also on the chores of the better-off village women. Poverty was common and the wealth of the mestizo elite was all the more striking; they had everything the others lacked. Comparatively, they owned most of the land, had horses and mules, lived in big houses along the main road, had enough to eat, were literate, had easy contacts with municipal and district authorities, could afford to go to a doctor, had a large network of relatives and compadres throughout the Sierra, and even had boots or shoes to wear. The common villagers lived mostly in zacate or wooden houses, worked long hours, hardly spoke let alone wrote Spanish, wore traditional Totonac clothes and home-made huaraches (sandals with a piece of rubber tire as sole and leather straps on top), and were very much dependent on the local elite for work, money-lending, and other favours. They had however, a domain of their own within the village; they were their own masters in ritual and religious life that they could live without the interference from mestizos. In this domain, not all Totonac villagers were equal because some people had much more influence or even more income than others.

In the 1980s the stereotypical mestizo patron/Totonac client divide had already become much more complicated. Masferrer (1988a) distinguishes between five social categories: 1) a mestizo and (new) Totonac elite with money from coffee, trade or cattle; 2) Totonacs with land and some cattle or small stock; 3) Totonac smallholders; 4) Totonac subsistence peasants and day-labourers; and 5) Totonacs without land. People had migrated to the cities from all these groups. In the 1990s this distinction – and especially its implicated hierarchy from richer to poorer – no longer applied. The complexity of income diversification, urban migration, and higher education uprooted classifications according to land ownership and local income. Some migrants managed to get well-paid jobs and just like mestizo children, those from smallholders are also better educated nowadays. The landless are not automatically the poorest villagers as many have regular jobs, such as teacher or trader. An income from migration, however poorly paid, may be better than one from coffee cultivation, with its often-erratic market prices.

Old criteria of social stratification are not valid anymore. In the late twentieth century, it is no longer ownership as such but access to the urban world which has become the basis of social distinctions. Some of the Nanacatecos are still predominantly standing with their feet in the village, while others have more or less severed their ties with the rural economy. Many villagers however, have one foot in the
village and one foot in the city. Therefore, a contemporary classification of Nanacatecos reflecting changes, boils down to the following six categories. Two categories of people are primarily village oriented: (1) agricultural workers (smallholders as well as day-labourers) and (2) men and women with a permanent village-based job. There are two categories that move in two worlds: (3) urban migrants with a foot in village agriculture, and (4) landowners who combine agriculture with commerce or state jobs. Finally, there are first-generation permanent migrants, who have opted for a life in the city but regularly visit the village: they consist of (5) households who some time ago moved to the city and abandoned their livelihood in Nanacatlán and (6) young people who went to work or study and because of their urban background will probably continue to live in the city.

Focusing on the village

The people whose lives focus on the village consist of the poor peasants (smallholders and day-labourers) who work the land, as well as the reasonably well-educated that hold a permanent job or have a local trade or business. The first group are often poorly educated; the others have a better education, generally from regional schools, but not enough to qualify them for a job in the city. Teachers are prominent in this latter group. In their behaviour and attire they differ conspicuously from the local peasants. Nevertheless, several are committed to Nanacatlán and active in organising local feasts and keeping up ‘tradition’, while most are active in one of the political parties. The peasants on the other hand are clearly singled out as campesinos in both clothes and body language. Their children may go to school now, and some of them make it up to the village secundario, but that doesn’t provide them with sufficient education to find a decent job; most end up as temporary or permanent migrants. Although the two categories of ‘locals’ both work and live in the village, their lives are at times a great distance apart.

(1) Agricultural workers

Though their number has declined in both absolute and relative terms, about a quarter of the village men make their living as agricultural labourers and smallholders. They spend their days on the fields working their patron’s land, their rented milpa, or their own cafetal. They are among the village poor unless they can rely on their children for additional income or support. When their sons also work the land, they are just able to make ends meet. The older peones – with or without land – wear traditional Totonac clothes, live a simple life, behave submissively in front of their patron, and look worn out and older than their age. A few decades ago, this was the common way of life for the majority of Nanacatecos, but nowadays it is a sign of impoverishment amidst the growing number of co-villagers who are gradually improving their life. Their strength and status is their continuing presence in the village, which makes them the backbone of the cargo system. Though this means they often have to replace absent villagers who work elsewhere, this adds to
their reputation as the pillars of the village community. They take pride in being active in the community and in cultivating their own maize.

Don Beto is one of the traditionally dressed villagers, who earn their living as a day-labourer. He most often works for his compadre Elios and even continued to do so after he himself turned into a PRD supporter while Elios was mayor under the ruling PRI. He kept his political opinions to himself and did not join other PRD followers in attacking his patron. He owns half a hectare of coffee land and rents half a hectare of milpa, and with three children this means that he has a hard time making ends meet. Throughout the years he has been active for the church and became president of the religious cargos in 1993.

Don Beto’s son Esteban had hopes for a better life when he finished secondary school in the village. Such a diploma used to be sufficient to become a bilingual teacher, but by the time he graduated in 1988, a new rule required an additional three years of preparatory school for the job. To his dismay he is still a day-labourer like his father, though occasionally he also goes to work in Mexico City. After he married Anita (a granddaughter of don Miguel) and had two children, he came to live in his father’s house while his parents moved to an adjoining smaller one. He was politically active with the PRD and later the PT, but also likes to assist his father with the religious cargos.

If sons or daughters work in the city and support their parents by sending money or building a house, day-labourers and smallholders can have a slightly better living, some modern amenities in their houses, or a new house altogether. With their marginal income, they always lived from hand to mouth and were unable to save for old age. Although they complain that nowadays there is not always enough work, during the peak seasons they are very much in demand. With so many men working outside the village, there is a regular scarcity of labour – unfortunately often offset by a shortage of money among potential employers. This brings the paradoxical situation that workers from neighbouring villages are brought in because they ask lower wages or because there simply are not enough local peones available.

(2) (Self-) employed in village or region

In the past a village such as Nanacatlán would have had a small number of people not involved in agriculture but working as artisans or craftsmen though few would have been able to live on such work alone. Nowadays, their number has rapidly increased but most still need the extra income from agriculture. With the new house-building activities, extra labourers are needed but usually on a temporary basis. The few bricklayers and carpenters therefore employ casual workers from among the younger peones, who like the variation and the extra money.

Most local or regional salaried jobs are not sufficient to warrant a decent lifestyle and certainly not to provide the children with good education. Most people in this category are teachers in one of the local and regional schools. Teaching com-
bines prestige and the advantage of a regular income, and allows one to continue living in the village. Moreover, it is within relatively easy reach as teacher-training colleges are nearby. While teaching used to be a mestizo employment, now only three are mestizo: Lupe, Genaro Bravo, and his wife Eufemia. The others are mostly from a Totonac background, from the slightly better-off families. Teaching is also often a husband-and-wife job: in addition to Genaro and Eufemia, two other couples are teaching. One family in particular stands out: the Jiménez family. They were among the first in the village to start a career in education: Alibert, two of his sisters, and his cousin Abraham have all done so. Alibert used to be active in the village but moved to a teaching job near Zacatlán a few years ago. Most of the teachers are only qualified to teach at state schools; as the school in Nanacatlan is a federal school under supervision from the central government, they cannot work in the village and commute daily or weekly to Hueytlalpan, Ixtepec, Tuxtla, or Zitlala.¹⁷

The other permanent government employees are the two police officers who live in the village but commute weekly to work in Zacapoaxtla. One belongs to a local Totonac elite family, his father Daniel Juarez is a former village mayor; the other is the son of a small landowner.

There are several other temporary jobs related to the state linked to specific projects. Unlike the permanent state-employees, they usually have limited or no access to government welfare programmes and fringe benefits. State-employees who do benefit from such favourable terms of employment are sometimes the envy of ordinary Nanacatecos who feel neglected, as Pedro said: “We peasants, we are not supported by the government, or only a little, but those who work for the government they have a life insurance and all that. And what does a peasant get?”

*Living in-between two worlds*

The temporary migrants who still work their fields when they are in the village and the well-to-do villagers who are landowners-cum-traders or landowners-cum-professionals, constantly move between two worlds; as such they have a fundamentally different outlook from the ‘locals’. Both groups definitely belong to the village where they live and work at least part of the year and they all are part of the local compadrazgo network of patrons and clients. At the same time they have crossed the village boundaries and pitched their tents elsewhere. The landed elite of course, have long since moved into the world beyond the village and the mestizos have become part of a wide regional network of relatives. Labour migrants have only recently become part of the supra-village world but their exposure to urban life has made a clear imprint on their worldview: now that they have become financially

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¹⁷ Education in Mexico is centralised and controlled by the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP: Secretaría de Educación Pública). Since 1993 the organisation of education is a state affair (except for universities) and school programmes have been decentralised, but SEP remains responsible for national policies and assists schools in poorer areas. Public schools are predominantly federalised.
independent from their village patrons, they are more self-confident and have abandoned their submissive attitude towards the village elite.

(3) Migrants-cum-cultivators
The men who move between village and city have a lot in common. In Mexico City they work long hours, live in poor conditions, have to take care of their city housekeeping themselves, and miss their relatives and village. Whenever possible, urban Nanacatecos meet after work, play or watch basketball together, or pay visits to relatives on Sunday. They rarely move outside Tlalpan or the neighbourhoods where they live in the city and are easily recognized as \textit{campesino} (rural) by their behaviour and dress. When they are back in the village, migrants are continuously busy, because they have to deal with repair work and agricultural chores as well as their village and cargo responsibilities during their stay. On the whole, temporary migrants feel more streetwise and urbane than those villagers who rarely leave the village. Many started improving their Spanish, move around more freely in the region, communicate more at ease with outsiders, and incorporate urban attitudes and habits more easily. They were among the first poor villagers who could afford to come home with modern commodities and clothes.

The main difference within the group of villagers who combine urban labour with agriculture is between those who own land and those who don’t. This implies a difference in income and responsibilities as well as in status. Migrants who own land definitely rank higher than and feel superior to the landless migrants. Among the landowners, the coffee producers will make more money in good years but will also worry more in bad ones. They will have to stay in the village longer to take care of their \textit{cafetal} and cannot choose to abandon their fields for a year, as maize cultivators sometimes do. Their children are more likely to advance in life than those of villagers who do not cultivate coffee. Investing in land – as many have done in the 1970s and 1980s – may not have brought the income they had hoped for to live comfortably in the village. But the combination of cash crop and subsistence agriculture with seasonal migration was not such a bad strategy as it now secures their livelihood.

(4) Landowners-cum-traders
\textit{Mestizos} proudly remember when their ancestors came from outside the Sierra, how they gradually settled in various places, and how the younger generations moved out again to the cities. A long history of inter-marriages among the regional \textit{mestizo} families has strengthened the bonds between them and created a wide social network. Their close ties proved to be useful social capital allowing local \textit{mestizo} families to control the regional and village economy and to monopolize regional trade. Only when the village opened up and the \textit{mestizos} lost their position as gatekeepers, did a Totonac elite come to the fore and enter the commercial arena. Some were already large landowners, but land alone was never sufficient to make a difference. What they lacked was control over trade in agricultural products and
other commerce, over the *peones* as cheap and trustworthy labour, and direct access to politicians and administrators at state level. The *mestizos* had those assets and therefore had a hold on the village and could secure their interests. Such total control has disappeared now, and the new village elite, whether Totonac or *mestizo*, never compares to the *mestizo* elite of the past. The *mestizos* still have the advantage of their political network which gives them easy access to state authorities – at least as long as the PRI is still in power – and as former lords of the land they still enjoy a higher social status and prestige than the Totonac elite.

The elite households (ten in Nanacatlán) combine relatively large land holdings of more than six hectares with commerce and state-related incomes. They may not necessarily be the richest villagers anymore, but they are recognized as economically powerful and thus of a high position. Of the seven pick-up trucks in the village in 1998, four belong to the elite. They are also the ones who employ the most workers and rent out the most land. Not surprisingly, five of these households are Bravos and one a Rodriguez, the two prominent *mestizo* families. In the Bravo family, don Gualo and his brother don Poncho have become too old to do anything besides renting out land and having *peones* cultivate their two hectares of coffee. Elios and Genaro are the new generation who own more coffee land (four hectares each) and are actively engaged in intermediate trade for which they both employ a pick-up. Don Camilo Rodriguez owns a pick-up, but his position is going downhill: for a number of years he was forced to sell his cattle and land bit-by-bit to make ends meet. He lives more on a past than a present status. The other four elite households are Totonac with two hectares of coffee land each. The remaining elite household of don Gustavo, made good money with his seven hectares of coffee but after his death the shop was closed and the land was divided among his children. This fate threatens most other elite families: their children have left or will leave the village, first to go to city schools and subsequently to engage in well-paid urban jobs. They are not interested in agriculture and a life in the countryside, especially when they marry partners with a similar urban lifestyle and education. When their parents die, they may keep their inherited land, employ a supervisor for their *cafetal* and rent out land to other villagers or, if they do not bother, sell it off – severing ties with Nanacatlán. They may also continue the traditional pattern of inheritance – as Elios and Gustavo junior (the son of don Gustavo) did – where the youngest son returns to live in the family house to continue rural life, ideally also supervising his sibling’s possessions.\(^{18}\)

A second category of landowners-cum-traders may be called the sub-elite in the village, consisting of twelve households who own 2-3 hectares of *cafetal* and four households who own less than 1.5 hectares. Most of them are active as traders and/or shopkeepers. This sub-elite or local commercial middle class to whom the

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\(^{18}\) As of now, there is only one exception to the scattering of elite land and property: Pablo, the only son of doña Marina Jiménez (widow of don Felipe Ramos) will inherit extensive land (two hectares of *cafetal* and over 12 hectares of *milpa*), a well-selling shop, a tight trade network, some cattle, and a pick-up.
father of Alibert and his brother Leobardo also belong (and Alibert before he left the village), share many characteristics in attitude and lifestyle with the local elite.

Living in the city

Finally a category we might call the ‘Totonac diaspora’ is still part of village life because they hold on to their Nanacateco background. They return regularly for family meetings and village festivals, and some still own (or will own) property there. Like the group of temporary migrants, this diaspora consists of two clearly distinguished categories: the relatives and descendants of the village elite and those of small peasants and peones. The cleft between them runs much deeper than that between resident villagers, and their worlds are literally miles apart. This is due to the fact that the elite children that moved to the city to take up higher education a few decades ago came from mestizo families who at that time were still the masters keeping their distance to common villagers. When various Rodriguezes and Bravos earned their university degrees, other Nanacatecos from a much humbler background and status had just arrived in the cities, worked in badly-paid menial service, and lived in poor conditions. The gap between the two could not have been wider or deeper. This distinction also applies to some extent within and between urban elite and sub-elite members. The sub-elite and Totonac elite is too recent to be comparable in education and income levels to the older generation of mestizo elite members, but among the younger generation these distinctions are becoming less clear-cut. Mestizo elite members however, can rely on much more and longer urban oriented social capital, which is not easily equalled.

(5) Nuclear families in the city

The continuous migration to Mexico City and other urban centres has kept the population figure of Nanacatlán relatively stable during the past decades. Statistics are hard to find, but a fair estimate is that about 150 households moved to the city to become first-generation migrants and whose parents or siblings still live in the village. This estimate does not include women who left upon marriage to a non-Nanacateco. Part of the migrants left when they were still single and later started their own household in the city, many preferring to marry someone from their home village. Others who moved from Nanacatlán were already married, often had children, and left as a household. When someone migrates, relatives (especially siblings) are likely to follow. Some may return after a few years or even months, when they cannot get used to the city. Others, who planned to go away only temporarily to make some extra money, stay on. Migrants may want to return after many years to spend their old age in their native village. It is particularly older men who like to return, but usually their wives would object to it. They know that in the village they'll have to work harder, and that it is difficult to earn a proper income there. But their main motivation to stay in the city is that they want to live near their children
and grandchildren. The second-generation migrants, (children of first generation migrants born in the city) as well as those who were very young when they left, are unlikely to ever move to Nanacatlán.

Migrants visiting the village stand out among the residents – deliberately or not. When they are (or thought to be) too keen to distinguish themselves, the residents criticize them for their arrogance. They wear fashionable clothes and jewellery; some of the women stumble through the village paths on extremely unpractical city shoes, and some men get drunk and show off by buying drinks for everyone. What people especially resent is when migrants refuse to eat village food, which they consider too greasy, do not walk to the fields anymore, and/or have gained a lot of weight. Village attire has also gradually changed and globalized, above all among the young; young migrants do not attract attention anymore among the local boys and girls who wear the same jeans, sneakers, miniskirts, or shorts when they can possibly afford to do so.

First generation migrants maintain the closest links to the village. Often their children will continue to visit their relatives or compadres in Nanacatlán, as relatives in the village are still favoured as godparents among migrant families. This also goes the other way around: Nanacatecos maintain and sometimes strengthen their ties with their urban relatives. For several years they have also asked their migrant siblings to become godparents for their children; killing two birds with one stone: it reinforces the kin network and makes it easier to find accommodation for their children when they go to school or work in the city.

Migrants keep in touch with local relatives, and some even become quite prominent in village life. Several men such as don Gustavo’s and don Felix’s sons wanted to do something for their native village and have extended the cargo system to include urban migrants. They have become active in the organisation of rituals in Nanacatlán and set up a committee to help Nanacatlán or Nanacatecos. As in the village, the committee members change every three years after the local elections for mayor. The committee regularly collects money from migrants and sets meetings to discuss how the money should be spent. Some of it is used as prize money for the basketball competition of the village feast, and part is set aside in a fund to lend to people with financial problems.

(6) Young migrants and new urbanites
Few Nanacatecos could afford to send their children to the city for higher education. It used to be normal for the mestizo families; all the siblings of Elios Bravo

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19 In an overview of urban compadrazgo studies in Mexico, Kemper (1982) mentions that several quantitative studies conclude that a shift of compadre choices takes place from relatives to friends among urban migrants, though other case studies suggest that often relatives are chosen. Kemper concludes that whether city-dwellers have a greater tendency toward kin-related compadrazgo ties than Mexican villagers depends on their social status, their native or migrant origins, and their occupational-residential situation. In Nanacatlán compadrazgo relations with relatives occurred after urban migration, because it is primarily used to strengthen urban-rural ties.

20 I return to the role of migrants in ritual life in chapter 6.
and don Camilo Rodriguez have left the village, as will most of their children. After finishing primary school they often live with relatives elsewhere or go to a boarding school to continue high school and higher education. By now they seem to have easily merged with the Mexican urban middle class with its modern lifestyle, well-paid jobs, and commodious housing. They would not dream of returning to Nanacatlán and live like their siblings who in their eyes have a tough and poor life, even though they belong to the rural elite. They ask their Nanacateco siblings to take care of their land – if they have not already sold their inheritance – and in return take in their village nephews and nieces when they come to the city for their study. They come to the village regularly, at least while their parents are still alive, but most continue to see their ‘home village’ and relatives every now and then. For a long time, urban education was the privilege for the *mestizo* elite but in recent years well-to-do Totonac families have also managed to send their children – sometimes only the younger ones – to schools in the city. Susana, the daughter of don Gustavo, was among them.

Susana was excited to start a three-year course for bilingual secretary at a private school in Mexico City in September 1989. With English so much in demand, she expected to find a good job. The school uniform alone cost 200,000 pesos (80US$) and the school fee amounted to 150,000 pesos (US$60) a month so her parents had to invest a lot of money. She found proper accommodation, because she could share a one-room house with her sister, next-door to one of her brothers and his family in a new housing estate in Tlalpan. Though they had no running water or sewage the first few years, she lived much better than most migrant villagers. She finished her study and found a job as secretary in a company. A few years later she married someone from Mexico City. They moved in with his parents before buying their own house after they had children, while she earned a decent salary from her secretarial jobs and he as bookkeeper.

Before Mexico City came within reach, well-to-do Totonac families used to send their children to schools in or close to the Sierra, as most common villagers still do nowadays. Others would send their children to live with relatives in the city where they can combine work and school when they can afford to pay all the costs themselves. A few take up the challenge on their own, as Feliciano did:

Feliciano started out like many village youth, but has an exceptional career. He attended primary school, supported his godfather – for whom his father worked – with many chores, and when he was old enough found a job in Mexico City. But he wanted more out of life. After a while he became an attendant in a shop where he was increasingly trusted and liked by his boss. Feliciano’s dream is to study, and he slowly started taking courses encouraged by his boss. Such studies are costly, so he could hardly send any money home. His parents bitterly complained about the lack of support but he felt less guilty when yet another sibling was born, number six in the family. He preferred supporting his studies rather than his parents “who only make babies”. In 2002, when he was 28 years
old, he finished high school (preparatoria). He wanted to go to university but could not manage and thus started studying law in evening classes. As this is difficult as well as time- and money-consuming, he does not know whether he will be able to finish.

The young Nanacatecos who left to work have a very different life compared to the educated migrants. In the old days youngsters would follow the established routes to Zacapoaxtla, Zacatlán, or Puebla, but today almost everyone works in Mexico City: the boys as gardeners or in construction, living with relatives or co-villagers; the girls as live-in domestic servants. Their move is part of a migration network in that they find jobs through Nanacatecos who already live in the city. Some girls started working for mestizo Nanacatecos who moved to the city.

The sister of Feliciano, Lourdes, worked a few hours a day for her godmother Lupe doing the laundry, grinding maize, fetching water, and carrying the new baby. She dreamed however, of going to Mexico City to work for Lupe’s sister-in-law. Lourdes’ mother Tomasa warned her about the hard work that she could expect there; her other daughter had gone to Mexico City some years before, and had told Tomasa of the long hours she had to make in housekeeping. But Tomasa also knew that there is no way to earn money in the village. Lourdes was not to be dissuaded and started to work as a domestic with the family of a teacher in Zacapoaxtla. She had already accepted the job when she got a better offer in Mexico City. Her mother however, forced her to stick to her agreement with the Zacapoaxtla teacher. She is grossly underpaid with a monthly wage of 150 pesos, which in 1996 should have been at least double that amount, but Lourdes is glad that she was able to leave Nanacatlán and become part of city life.

Old and new brokers as compadres

Until the mid-twentieth century, life in Nanacatlán was relatively transparent: most Totonacs focused on the village, while the mestizo elite controlled the local economy and the political arena and were the links to the outside world. They travelled all the way to Zacapoaxtla to deal with merchants, to Zapotitlán and Tetela to arrange their affairs with the municipal and district authorities, and if need be, they would go and visit the state governor’s office to settle important political business. In the meantime, they would see their kin-folk and in-laws all over the Sierra who would have a similar status in their villages and towns as the Nanacatlán mestizos had in theirs.

Common villagers would travel as well, though this meant walking long hours barefoot or on their huaraches to go and work on the fields in the Sierra or the lowland of Veracruz. Quite a difference from the way mestizos would travel all over the region and to the towns on horseback wearing leather boots and carrying a gun or rifle. Moreover, the travelling peones did not find relatives or acquaintances on their track – only the supervisors who hired them. For them, familiarity with the outside world was strictly confined to their work.
Though the mestizos were the elite in a rather inconspicuous village, they were well established in the regional network of powerful mestizo families and could appeal to their relations for support and advice. The extensive networks of which they were part provided them with an opportunity to settle their own affairs. They also turned them into indispensable brokers to whom common villagers had to turn when they needed mediation with supra-local authorities. Such links were a major source of their local power, probably more important than their economic capital and political control. The close links with powerful mestizos in the region enabled them to help villagers who had problems with taxation, education, land transactions or conflicts over inheritance — and even when they were involved in petty crime. Therefore it was wise to have good relations with the mestizo elite: they were the obvious patrons and employers, and they also could provide support and protection more generally. One way to do so was by inviting them to become godparents to one’s children and thus establish a relation of ritual kinship and friendship with compadres — which would grow even stronger if they would be willing to become godparents for each subsequent child that was born in the family. Needless to say, that this was a completely one-sided affair, as no mestizo would ask a Totonac to be godfather of his or her children.

That closed world in which ‘people knew their place’ rapidly disintegrated in the last quarter of the twentieth century. The divide between mestizo landowners and Totonac smallholders and peones was gradually blurred. Several Totonac people begin to climb socially through new economic initiatives such as the introduction of coffee cultivation, education and increased access to the urban labour market. For them, this meant that they were able to weave their own networks and links into the outside world without going through mestizo brokers. This mobility materialised in changing compadrazgo strategies, and nowadays Totonacs look for compadres among colleagues, civil servants, teachers and relatives who have settled firmly in the cities. Of course, the local peasants and peones continue the old practice of compadrazgo with the village elite, but now they can also ask well-to-do and influential Totonacs to become compadres. This implies that the mestizo elite not only lost its grip on the economy and, as we will see in chapter 4, local politics but also is gradually loosing its role of community-nation mediators.

This change is most visible among the urban migrants. They need things the village elite cannot provide: employment, education for their children, and a place for themselves or their children to live. The early migrants who followed the Baptist missionary Pedro Aschmann to Tlalpan have become the new brokers, initially for their relatives from Nanacatlan but over time for nearly all prospective migrants from the village. The children of don Gustavo were among the first to leave the village and one of his sons, Herman, has made a job out of networking.

When Nanacateco men and women need a job they often go to Herman. When they come to the city for the first time, after a long absence, or when they are unable to find a job though their own relatives, he is the one to go to. After finding work through him they
try to find another job as soon as possible, because they have to pay him a weekly fee. Herman started as janitor in a hospital, and always knew where someone was needed to do the gardening or clean at the hospital or other institutes. He spent more and more of his time mediating for his co-villagers and became an important recruiter. He is doing well and owns a car and a three-storey house.

Villagers have found their way to the city and decided to stay there. They have become the mediators for newcomers as well as favoured compadres because they can provide their compadres and godchildren access to a job and accommodation. But unlike the old mestizo-Totonac compadrazgo, which was most successful if a patron was godfather to all of one’s children, such accumulation is rare now. People need different support from different people and therefore spread compadrazgo over a wider variety of people. In this way they expand their network and unlike in the past, they prefer weak ties with many over strong ties with a few people as that proves to be more effective in getting things done (cf. Granovetter 1973, 1983). Over time, urban migrants start choosing compadres among neighbours, relatives, fellow migrants, colleagues, and employers; which in general means a shift from relatives to friends (Kemper 1982). People look for urban and regional compadrazgo relations among their own relatives but continue to include local elite members as well, as these categories of godparents can be useful in divergent situations.21

Urban settlers may also find it useful to establish compadrazgo ties with Nanacatecos, those living in the city as obvious sources of support in everyday life, and those that live in the village as a foothold in Nanacatlán. Thus they will have trusted people to take care of their interests (land, house, or inheritance), to accommodate them when they come and visit the village, or to send their children to when they cause problems or have run into trouble. The urban-rural compadrazgo network ties the urban diaspora securely to their home village.

There is one group of people in and from Nanacatlán who have had differently composed networks for a long time. Protestants do not engage in compadrazgo relations, but have their own networks. As we have seen, migration in Nanacatlán began with a Baptist missionary-cum-linguist and from early on Protestants could thus easily connect to Mexico City. The only two young village men who ever visited the United States were Baptists who went with the Texan preacher to work for him; though they were disappointed by the low wages and the long working days. Typical for the networking among Protestants is that it involves far less long-

21 Villagers thus had to increase their social capital to be able to make it in the city. Bourdieu unfortunately has a narrow conceptualisation of social capital as a resource of the privileged. Putnam (1993:167) on the other hand, sees social capital as a feature of social organisation such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions. Putnam has a conceptualisation that is useful for relating social networks to people in everyday life but his definition has the disadvantage of assuming social capital to be good, and unlike Bourdieu disregards issues of power (see Field 2003:4-5, 42).
term and local obligations than compadrazgo. We have seen that half of the new sub-elite dissociated themselves from Catholicism (though not always by turning Protestant) and it may well be that for them compadrazgo is more of a burden than a source of prestige. Because they have only recently come into wealth and lack the old elite’s political power and networks, they run the risk as compadres to less well-to-do villagers of being overburdened by requests for help. And as compadrazgo ties only work when there is a mutual benefit, they may have decided to withdraw totally from such obligations.

When trying to establish how the changes in social networks have affected compadrazgo relations, Hannerz (1980:250) has a useful classification of networks that clarifies the type of interaction between people. Social networks can be (a combination of) segregated (consisting of several distinct clusters of people who remain separate), integrated (where different clusters exist but people meet across clusters), encapsulated (close-knit and small, with frequent contact between people), or isolated (small in extent and low in density). In a small face-to-face village, social networks will generally be encapsulated and integrated. People who increasingly move into wider circles – such as urban migrants – will enlarge their networks but also transform them to include people who never meet outside their cluster (segmented) and perhaps small clusters of people who hardly meet (isolated).

Conclusions

Although land redistribution had not been the objective of the introduction of coffee cultivation in the village, it turned out to be one of the main results. This redistribution did not equally benefit all villagers: although more people who were formerly landless gained access to coffee plots, overall land tenure became more skewed with 20 percent of the households owning almost three quarters of the cultivated land. It did change local conditions in that a number of Totonac families benefited this time in addition to mestizo.

The new infrastructures introduced in the Sierra more directly incorporated the region into the global economy and opened up new opportunities that many villagers were ready to take advantage of. The formerly landless and small peasants were now able to diversify their income by migration, coffee production, and maize cultivation and no longer depended largely on village patrons for work. Many left the village on a permanent basis. Although land is still a vital resource within the village, it is no longer possible to analyse socio-economic status by looking at the distribution of land and village income alone. In the past, control over agricultural products was crucial for an elite and landownership and trade were thus a convenient indicator for identifying an elite. Nowadays such control over the major income sources of villagers is no longer feasible. This has led to a downward mobility of the elite while migration, cash crop production, and education have resulted in upward mobility of many poor. State programmes accelerating the socio-economic transformation in the countryside in the 1970s and again in the 1990s turned out to
be a crucial condition for rural development. But improving living conditions was not only due to state support; villagers’ ability to cope with changing circumstances and new opportunities was also vital. Although villagers have become more affected by economic crises in cash crop production and the urban labour market, the urban-rural connection has turned out to be a feasible alternative to improve their lives. The downside is that such new alternatives were the least available to the very poor with hardly any assets or education to begin with.

The elite have managed to control more land in the 1990s than in the 1970s, but yet are still confronted with less power and influence and less income. This paradox is largely due to decreased economic control by the elite and increased access to economic resources for many villagers both inside and outside the village. Elite members are forced to either stay in the village by their large landholdings, or leave altogether as they cannot afford to become part-time farmers like many of the migrants.

As villagers can now secure access to urban jobs through their own personal network of compadres, relatives, and friends; and as they can now supplement their income from agriculture as part-time coffee cultivators, they are less dependent of the intermediary capabilities of the elite. This does not mean that the elite members have lost their role as compadres; they are still often invited to become godparents to the children of villagers but they are not the only ones. Villagers nowadays have a more extensive and diversified compadrazgo network which includes many relevant others (well-to-do Totonacs, temporary migrants, permanently migrated villagers and new contacts outside the village). The mestizo or Totonac patron may now share ritual kinship towards the same family with a teacher from a nearby town, a city sibling of his land labourer, or a migrant peasant from the village. It is not so very lonely at the top anymore. This also means that brokerage has shifted from an exclusive preference for patrons (people with resources as well as social capital) to include people who live outside the village and are brokers in the classical sense: intermediaries who have the expertise to be of help within social networks.

The diversification of livelihood has enabled villagers to loosen their ties with the village elite and start expanding their social network outside the village. This is certainly true for the upwardly mobile Totonacs who found their economic foothold outside the village boundaries. But even they still appreciate ties with people from the village – both members of the mestizo elite and those villagers who haven’t moved out of Nanacatlán and whose webs of compadrazgo and friends are still predominantly local. The village is still the centre of gravity for all concerned even though its community has spread over a far greater area. The new network composition provides the grammar of social life in a globalising local world.

Nanacatlán is more than just a post-modern network community. Despite their geographical dispersion, Nanacatecos cherish a common past and origin embedded in memories and the ecology of the mountain village. In the next chapter I present
the central though by no means uncontested issues in the memories of Nanacatecos. These often focus on local events and people, relate to particular localities, and as such are eminently suited to shape and feed a local belonging that distinguishes itself vis-à-vis the outside world while simultaneously recalling recurrent disputes that are part and parcel of the recent past and the present.
3.1 *Mano vuelta* to sow maize

3.2 Pedro sowing maize