CHAPTER ONE

Altepeme and Pueblos de Indios

SOME COMPARATIVE THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE ANALYSIS OF THE COLONIAL INDIAN COMMUNITIES

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"I would like to restore to men of the past and especially the poor of the past, the gift of theory. Like the hero of Molière, they have been talking prose all the time. Only whereas the man in Molière did not know it himself, I think they have always known it, but we have not. And I think we ought to."

- Eric Hobsbawm, 1978 -

THE INDIAN PROBLEM

This book is composed of a series of conference papers, lectures and articles dealing with almost three centuries. All of them refer to Indian communities in New Spain, the showpiece of the Spanish empire in the Americas. It is a book of discussion, for no general consensus has been reached on topics like land tenure, village politics or cultural assimilation. We do not even know what the word 'Indian' means. Anthropologists speak about 'native people', but the Mexican historian García Martínez, in his contribution to this volume, identifies the inhabitants of several pueblos de indios in the northeastern part of the state of Puebla as being descendants from West-African immigrants. William Taylor shows that some Indian villages in the state of Jalisco were founded with black slaves, others permitted mestizos, mulatos and Spaniards to join their communities, but its residents were routinely called indios in official records. The classification of different social groups in New Spain was and remains difficult on account of the decades of racial and cultural mixing which blurred any possible image of a pure native population. Classifying colonial Indians in social and ethnic terms as a unique and distinctive part of the population, García Martínez rightly concludes, can be too simplistic and based more on the traditional usage of the concept rather than on a clear understanding of the society.
Such an opinion can be a shock to social scientists. According to anthropologist Wasserstrom no other social group in recent memory has been subject to such a sustained onslaught of anthropological study. The Indians have been studied as a specific ethnic group. Also in colloquial language the word Indian is commonly used to specify a certain group in Mexican society. Fearing its disappearance scientists, students, journalists, and travelers take up positions to defend the 'survival of Indian culture'. For many European and North-American scientists the Indian in Latin America is, in some form or another, seen as the heir of natural man, corrupted by European capitalists. Mesoamérica, e.g. Mexico and Guatemala, in particular is the lost paradise. Discussing the Maya of Guatemala in historical perspective, the Canadian geographer W. George Lovell views conquest not as a remote, historical experience but as a visible, present condition.

This cultural region is considered as the product of two societies: White and Indian, the Conquerors and the Conquered. Ethnicity and the corporate community, in which the Indians are said to have lived, have structural rather than cultural roots. We find a summary of this kind of research in Eric Wolf's Europe and the People Without History:

"Racial designations, such as 'Indian' or 'Negro', are the outcome of the subjugation of populations in the course of European mercantile expansion. The term Indian stands for the conquered populations of the New World, in disregard of any cultural or physical differences among native Americans. (...) Indians are conquered people who could be forced to labor or to pay tribute."

Most ethnologists, anthropologists, and several historians consider the 'Indian problem' in its essence as a problem of the economic structure of the capitalist system. The position of the Indian community in the colonial political economy is then considered to be quite peripheral. Sketching post-conquest developments Wolf describes this position as follows:

"Towns and mines came to be ringed about by haciendas; the haciendas were in turn surrounded by settlements of the surviving native populations. This settlement pattern was oriented toward the mines; yet it was not merely geographic or ecological. It was organized by the political economy it embodied, in which each lower level yielded surplus to the level above it. (...) Within this hierarchy, the emerging Indian communities came to occupy the lowest rung."

However, as is indicated above, this image is losing its footing. In the last thirty years historians have gradually moved away from the Leyenda Negra or Black Legend, as the tradition of anti-Hispanic criticism was called —developing in the sixteenth century and continuing to flourish until the first half of the twentieth century. Historical criticism and a growing amount of empirical research has slowly undermined its fundamentals. All authors in this compilation contribute to this revisionist tradition. Historians now view the indigenous peo-
people as actors who responded to events in ways that helped to determine large parts of their social and cultural reality. Even the concept of community itself, with its institutions and territory, and usually regarded as the typical form of social organization of the indigenous population in the Capitalist World Economy has been questioned and its existence challenged. Danièle Dehouve for example asserts that in studying the past one does not find such communities, but rather a whole variety of distinct units, bearing various names.

For historians, and anthropologists like Wasserstrom and Schryer, the answer to one simple question becomes increasingly important: what was an Indian in the colonial period? Looking at pre-Hispanic America the answer seems quite obvious: we consider everyone living at that time in America as Indian. In fact, we assume we are indeed dealing with a specific ethnic group, that came from Asia via the Bering land bridge. However, it is curious to realize that amongst those who came from Asia there may have been negroid peoples as well. Although there has been much speculation on flights of fancy involving African seafarers, negroid peoples of many kinds are to be found in Asia as well as Africa. As pointed out by archaeologist Nigel Davies, small men with negroid features were the aboriginal inhabitants of many lands facing the Indian Ocean, including India, the Malay Peninsula and the Philippines (today they are still to be found along the east side of Luzon). Also the Negroid features in Olmec art are well known. The word 'Indian' is of course a misnomer, not only because it originated in a geographical misconception on the part of the Europeans—who imagined themselves near the East Indies— but also because it did not correspond to any unity perceived by the indigenous peoples themselves. The answer to our question, then, should be qualified according to differences of region and historical period. Even the pre-Hispanic Indians numbered about a dozen main groups and hundreds of subgroups. Furthermore, pre-Hispanic Mexico was composed of a variety of peoples, languages, ecologies, economies, and social-political systems.

However, after 1521, despite all the cultural differences and the existence of hundreds of languages, the descendants of all these Indians became one group: indios, members of the so-called República de Indios, to be distinguished from the República de Españoles. The character of this group was mainly juridical: the indios were the inhabitants of a specific juridical and administrative entity, called the pueblo de indios. It seems that one knew exactly who was Indian and who was not. The colonial communities, called corporations by Bernardo García Martínez, Stephanie Wood and Ursula Dyckerhoff, enjoyed legal protection, a privilege demanded and determined by the villagers themselves. The archives in Mexico City and Seville, the main colonial archives for the history of New Spain, are littered with petitions and court cases considering land tenure, labour rights and social and political conflicts. This number is so unexpectedly high
that a North-American historian has remarked that "legal tactics mushroomed into a major strategy of Indian life." The aim of modern historical research has been to revise the version of Conquest by restoring the importance of the strength and self-sufficiency that the Indians of Mexico, which is to say the peasants in the communities, have revealed during the history of their country.

In sum, within the colonial pueblo de indios lived peasants independent of one another, together resisting Spanish pressures. As Charles Gibson concluded in his excellent overview of Indian life under Spanish rule, the village survivors supported one another in resisting change. Such conclusions can have far-reaching consequences for the theoretical interpretation of peasant societies. Before discussing these consequences, which is the same as answering the question of how to interpret the Indian community in New Spain, I would like to proceed by sketching in general terms the history of the Indian community, or corporation, as it seems to emerge from the essays in this volume. Some points to stress are the closed or open character of these communities and their corporatism, in the sense of a united body. However, this sketch is my personal interpretation; I do not pretend to have integrated all the opinions brought forward by the authors. Since it is not sufficient to simply provide empirical evidence that contradicts certain theories or models, I will try to use the evidence presented by the authors to present an alternative model of community, which can be applied in interpreting the history of the pueblos de indios of New Spain.

TRACES OF THE SURVIVAL OF THE ALTEPETL

Corporate Land Tenure

The first part of this volume discusses questions of land tenure in Indian villages (Chapters 2 through 9). And, indeed, it seems one of the most important points to discuss. Mexican anthropologist Paul Kirchhoff assumed it to be "the very core" of the interpretation of the socioeconomic structure of Mexican society around 1500. This opinion echoes the famous statement by Rousseau: "The first man who fenced in an area and said, 'This is mine' and who found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society." Of course, there were several ways in which people might be bound to each other, and any individual was likely to experience more than one. His awareness of membership of a group would depend on its function and on the nature of his need for fellows and like most people, he would identify with different groups for different purposes. But the ownership of communal land was the common interest of several peasant households living in a village. The object of the description below is to sketch only some of the salient features of Indian communal land tenure in the colonial period.
Such a description has to start in the period preceding the coming of the Spaniards. The Spanish *pueblo de indios* did not exist from scratch. But, although there can be hardly any doubt about the existence of communal landholding in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, historians, ethnologists and anthropologists are increasingly uncertain as to its existence or importance in the sixteenth century. The sources most often used agree upon several categories of land, like lands assigned to the support of temples, office holders, the army, or the rulers (in this case patrimonial lands). Most of them existed well into the seventeenth century, and the designation in Nahuatl, the indigenous *lingua franca*, can be found until the end of the eighteenth century. There is no need to go into the details of these classifications now, because they are extensively discussed by Ursula Dyckerhoff, Rik Hoekstra, and Robert Haskett in their contributions to this volume. At the most general level can be said that lands within the boundaries of a community pertained to either public or private domains.\(^\text{12}\)

All authors seem to agree on the basic entity of that time: the *altepetl*, or lordship (and not a chiefdom or tribal organization). The word *altepetl* was a territorial metaphor for ‘water and mountain’. Interesting here, because of a change later on -as will be indicated below- is to refer to the Totonaco equivalent *chuchutsipi* (from *chuchut*, water, and *sipi*, mountain). This lordship consisted of several households, their leaders, and a group of hierarchical stratified nobles. The highest rank of these nobles were called *tlahquito* (*tlahtoani* in the single), the lords. These nobles rotated in and out of the position of the paramount ruler, which would have been a slow rotation for a *tlahtoani* used to rule for a life time. The ruler was assisted or watched over by a council of the leading nobles from the other dynasties in the *altepetl*. Lower levels of government were staffed by a heavily stratified network of lesser rulers, lords or nobles drawn from each household group. For the similarity with, for instance, a caliphate Garcia Martínez introduced the word *tlahtoanate*.\(^\text{13}\)

The *altepetl* is often seen as a kind of city-state. However, there is little evidence that the *altepetl* was located around a specific center, and the area belonging to it was somewhat undefined. One important deficiency in the general descriptions of land tenure in the sixteenth century, Harvey writes, is that there is rare mention of the locality or region to which a description applied. No wonder, García Martínez responds in his book on the *Sierra Norte de Puebla*, because the issue of landownership by the lords was of considerably less importance than the several kinds of tribute payments and labour services they received from their subordinates. It seems that the center of the *altepetl* changed with the elections of the *tlahquito*. The center was where the *tlahtoani* had his court, and if some *altepetl* had several families of *tlahquito* the power could change within the *altepetl* from one place to another. Hoekstra finds an analogy in the Carolingian empire, and, indeed, reading Davies’ study on the village community
in early medieval Brittany one finds striking similarities between the altepeme and the plou (or plebs, in Latin), and the tlahtoani and the machtiern. Nevertheless, the altepeme lived in a certain area and cultivated the land.

Belonging to the altepetl were the calpullis. There is considerable controversy over the exact meaning of calpulli. Some authors believe the word referred to a certain local shrine, others maintain that the traditional translation of barrio or district must be the proper one. Lockhart states the calpulli was a community, barrio, in its own right and with its own territorial dimensions. Dyckerhoff and Haskett confirm this by concluding that the calpulli was the basic holder of land. Disputing this, Hoekstra and Garcia Martinez—in his book on the Sierra Norte—argue that the calpulli may once have been a clan-like group within the altepetl, each with its own nobles, but in the period of the conquest it was a mere instrument for the collection of tributes, a kind of district including a specific number of household heads (who later became the tributarios). So collective landownership was not the unifying element; the households forming part of a calpulli only had usufruct rights to land which belonged to the nobles. Hoekstra and Garcia Martínez seem to have the better of the argument, but for the moment one should wait for more evidence.

The Spanish officials arrived in Mexico with views on an administrative system according to the Territorialverband, a system that bounded people by territorial units, and not by personal units like in a Personenverband (compare the altepetl). They confronted the encomenderos—the conquerors and their heirs—who held encomiendas, entities that were identical to one altepetl or several altepeme. As such the encomenderos were the lords of the lords, living from their tribute and labour assignments. During the first decades after conquest, these encomenderos ruled and profited primarily by turning the pre-Hispanic system to their own benefit. The native lords continued to collect tributes in goods and periodic labor services from their subordinates, and passed most of the proceeds on to their new Spanish superiors. The officials of the Crown feared colonial rule through encomiendas, because it reminded them too much to the feudal structures they were trying to abolish in Europe (remember the Dutch Revolution in the sixteenth century!). A centralizing state cannot tolerate too much independent power in their subordinates. The Crown succeeded in abolishing most encomiendas in the late sixteenth century, because the demographic catastrophe following the epidemics—the true tragedy of the contact between people from once isolated continents—had undermined the pre-Hispanic system: a lord without subjects cannot collect tributes and live from them.

During the period of growing power in the hands of the centralizing government the structures were changing rapidly. The altepetl became the pueblo—a word hardly used in Spanish until then—and their tlah­toque became the caciques (señores sounded too feudal). One innovation was the office of gobernador or chief administrative officer,
which had been created to accommodate the indigenous ruling system. Elections would be held to stimulate a more rapidly rotating system than in the pre-Hispanic period and to avoid the foundation of powerful families, but the caciques, used to rule for a lifetime, tended to monopolize this office. Another innovation was the territorial limit of the pueblos. The Spaniards were ‘enclosing’ the lordships to certain and specific lands, the altepetl was founded as pueblo in one place, the church was built there and became the center of the parish, the town government had to reside there and the hamlets became sujetos, subordinated villages or satellite settlements of the central village or municipal headtown, the cabecera. From that moment on the calpulli formed part of a village as a barrio.

Critical was the period of the Great Death when the old villages ceased to exist. The Great Death started directly after Conquest, mainly because of the introduction of germs of unknown diseases like smallpox, measles, or influenza. After half a century the population had fallen at a vertiginous rate, in some regions by more than 80 percent. It was a period of despair, of suicides and profane drunkenness, in which the paternalistic policy of regrouping the survivors caught on well in the Indian world. Especially around 1600 several pueblos were congregated into one village. The programme of congregaciones, also described by Dyckerhoff and García Martínez, is being evaluated now by historians and ethnologists and a first glimpse seems to indicate enormous regional differences, but with a generally successful Spanish policy to create, with the help of the Indians themselves, new villages out of the remnants of depopulated altepeme.

The proclaimed goal of that resettlement programme was to build a system with more effective justice under Spanish officials and supervision, and more effective christianization under the Catholic clergy, first the regular and later the secular. Following in the wake of depopulation and the reduction of scattered village lands to compact holdings, the authorities brought the vacation of large, contiguous areas into existence, which could then be granted or sold to Spanish farmers. Torales shows that this actually happened. The Great Death in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century made a Spanish provision of the growing cities inevitable. The chuchutsipi in the Totonaco area of Puebla was now called by the villagers themselves a calchikin, or ‘place where the houses stand’.

The peasants tried to secure their village land according to Spanish rules. In this quest -remember how the archives are stuffed with petitions and court cases- they eased themselves away from their lords (caciques) and came to own lands more or less independently of their lords. If we follow Dyckerhoff and Hoekstra the main turning point must have been the period of the reforms of the 1560s, when every
non-noble Indian received usufruct right to village land after paying tribute to the Crown. Even formerly landless commoners like the *mayeques* were entitled to this; Dyckerhoff mentions a plot of 0.92 ha per peasant in Huejotzingo. Menegus, describing this process, gives the impression of a kind of *land reform policy* by the Spanish Crown. The consequence of the reforms, Hoekstra argues, were disastrous. The reforms left most of the caciques—*if* we may believe Spanish lawyer Alonso de Zorita—without income: "*quedan los pobres señores más pobres que los pobres.*"\(^{23}\) [(...)] leaving the impoverished lords poorer than the poor.) Many nobles did indeed lose their rights to tribute and became impoverished as a result. Hoekstra supposes that a sense of status must have inhibited many of them from being realistic and taking up the digging stick.

For the small peasants it became important to have their names on a tribute-list. Every *tributario* was entitled to a village plot, or, as it was expressed at that time, a share in the *común repartimiento* (the distribution of land among the community members). On this plot they were supposed to build their hut and to cultivate maize, beans and other basic foodstuff. The Spanish officials were interested in the exact number of *tributarios* for reasons of tribute collection and paternalism. Everybody on such a list was an Indian, and they secured the special protection of the King. If a person moved out of his *pueblo* without moving into another *pueblo*, or *hacienda*, he lost his *Indianness*. From then on he was considered to be a *mestizo*, a *mulato*, or, in the cities, a *lépero*. Like every agrarian society, colonial Mexico was literally a mobile society; it is not mere speculation that about half of the inhabitants of any village or city was born outside its boundaries.\(^{24}\) No wonder the socio-cultural macrostructures, on which the *altepetl* once had been founded, disintegrated.

The acquisition of property rights by the *pueblos* was completed around 1700, when a series of *composiciones* recorded all land tenure in Indian Mexico. The term *composición* stood for the process of legalization of land possession, sometimes unlawful, through payment of a fee. The law called for anyone who held land without proper title to make a donation to the royal treasury to obtain a clear deed. It was not very successful, so in the seventeenth century the Crown really began to force individuals and corporations (including the church) to verify their holdings and, finally, regional programmes were proclaimed and executed, the so-called *composiciones generales*. The resulting document of confirmation was also called a *composición*. However, despite all efforts it appeared that the *pueblos de indios* rarely applied for these programmes, mainly because of exemption. They were considered to be too poor to pay for land titles, although—as we shall see—barely a generation later, in the eighteenth century, these communities in fact could spend hundreds of *pesos* in claiming land tenure rights. Torales shows in her essay that the Indians started to participate in the programmes during the 1710s and 1720s.
The late participation of the Indians to pay for composiciones was only partly, I think, a consequence of Spanish imperial policy to finance its fleet. Another reason might be found in the growing awareness of the Indian leaders, discussed by Haskett, Wood, García Martínez and Osborn in this volume, that it was essential to acquire official legal titles. Wood shows in her dissertation that the Indians did not hesitate to step forward and obtain as many confirmations as might be necessary to protect or enlarge their corporate holdings. The late seventeenth century saw impressive demographic recovery. The time of despair, suicide and profane drunkenness was not only over but long forgotten. Around 1700 the number of inhabitants in the villages started to apply pressure on available land and all land possessions of the community needed to be secured. Using the occasion by reacting positively to the measures of the Crown, around 1720 all villages, like the haciendas, had composiciones at their disposal. The documents served as the material evidence of landownership, necessary to win litigation in land tenure. Osborn shows in his classical essay, reprinted in this volume, how useful these indeed were. The Indians had completed their transformation towards the system of Territorialverband.

But possessing composiciones was not enough. It is interesting to note, that villagers always requested to 'compose' lands which they called demasias, or surplus. It consisted of land owned by the village besides 2½ caballerias of land (101 hectares) around the church. These 2½ caballerias formed the equivalent of what came to be known as the fundo legal of the village, the official legal base or townsite to which the villagers were entitled. After securing the demasias by the composiciones the villagers turned to securing their townsite or fundo legal itself. The eighteenth century is the epoch of fundo legal with hundreds of villagers acquiring their corporate titles this way. Haskett shows that also all kinds of falsifications -the titulos primordiales- were produced to prove ownership of land. Although there exists extremely little research on this development, we are left with the impression that after the disintegration of the altepetl the villagers tried to obtain official titles to the land they had been using in usufruct from their lords. Excluding the lords, who were of limited value in a system of Territorialverband, they were trying to lay hold on 'their' lands.

Claiming the 2½ caballerias was obviously no problem: first the demasias had to be legally entitled to the village, and after this, the fundo legal. During the eighteenth century the sujetos, or subordinated villages, also started to obtain these titles (see the excellent essay of Dehouve). They separated from the central village -the cabecera- which had "dominated" them, to use their expression, "from time immemorial." At the same time new villages, pueblos de indios, were founded by émigrés, hacienda-fieldhands and immigrants (see Garcia Martínez' West-Africans or Taylor's blacks!). They mostly used village names and sites that were abandoned during the process of congrega-
ciones in the early seventeenth century. Founding a legal pueblo de indios had become the most important way of securing the subsistence needs by poor peasants, and if we follow the arguments of García Martínez and Taylor, it did not matter at all if these peasants had Indian, mestizo or even black backgrounds.

This development provided new prospects for the Indian elite, the caciques. The late eighteenth century saw the return of the Indian lords as political leaders. Their influence had never completely vanished, but in an epoch of demographic growth like the eighteenth century the community needed more lands to cultivate, or earn extra income by working on haciendas, or securing the capital of the confraternities. This was administered by the caciques: the pueblos de indios were sharply differentiated between the few who controlled the allocation of communal resources and the majority who depended on their decisions. The offices of corporate government, especially the post of gobernador de indios, were monopolized by a small, self-perpetuating group of the powerful in the villages. Although they were legally Indian, otherwise they were not qualified for office, they were culturally and socially denominated as mestizos. Linked by kinship within their community, they also cemented ties with caciques of neighbouring villages. By the late eighteenth century they were the most powerful political force within the República de Indios and controlled the distribution of corporate economic resources.

A decade ago Tutino published some examples of this economic power, concerning the pueblos de indios of Acolman (in the province of Teotihuacán) and Otumba (center of the province with the same name), northeast of Mexico City. According to the rule, the caciques of Acolman and Otumba rotated in community office, but they always elected one member of their small group. At Otumba in 1775 45 men selected the gobernadores and their lieutenants of a community of 2260 Indians. The caciques had come to hold an exceptionally large amount of land within the community, whether through allocation, purchase or inheritance. Each cacique family in Acolman held numerous plots, their households averaging from 4 to 10 apiece. They treated their holdings as private property and annually harvested from 40 to 80 fanegas of maize, whereas the family subsistence minimum barely exceeded 10 fanegas (460 kilogram). In Otumba the two powerful clans which shared control of the principal offices repeatedly were accused of electoral fraud, theft of community funds, and extreme favoritism in land allocation among their clientèle. After a while, late in the 1780s, a rival group challenged the caciques of Otumba and following several years of dispute, triumphed. The new caciques entrenched themselves in office, used their right of común repartimiento to strip the old leadership of their many properties and redistribute the plots to forge a new support coalition.

The unequal distribution of lands among the Indians which characterized both Acolman and Otumba, was made possible because the gobernador de indios held responsibility over the distribution or co-
mun repartimiento of village owned plots among all tributarios. Of course this unequal distribution and political strife damaged family subsistence agriculture. Combined with the growth of the Indian population it left the majority of the inhabitants in these villages unable to meet their subsistence needs with the plots they had. A sizeable minority held nothing more than their house lots, attached to by the comun repartimiento. Half the community members had additional agricultural plots, but insufficient to produce subsistence for their families. Another tiny minority enjoyed adequate subsistence holdings and the few caciques controlled extensive lands. This situation was not unique for New Spain, for in fourteenth-century Castile the villagers experienced a similar one.21

To keep up legitimation in the villages and open up new resources to provide the basic needs of the great majority of the inhabitants, the caciques tried to defend or extend communal landholding. In my own research I found, that in all cases where the legal endowment of the fundo legal was obtained, the expansion of the communal property etc. was initiated by these caciques.28 Robert Haskett, in his essay, notes the writing of the titulos primordiales by the caciques in seeking the legality and antiquity of corporate landownership. Believing that they were preserving authentic local histories, the authors of these documents were copying and probably embellishing earlier written and oral traditions. Evidence suggest that the primordial titles were composed from the late seventeenth century onwards, recognizing the communities' status as altepeme. One finds the standard criteria of pueblo status: the altepetl as a unit with a ruling dynasty, a system of government, one or more religious structures, and indicating the place were its members were living. The caciques were trying to defend and expand their land rights in colonial terms, but introducing now traditions which predated the Spanish arrival.

If the leaders failed in their prospect, people would leave the villages or proceed against their caciques. It is clear that the communal interests were synonymous with the interests of the Indian elite. These magistrates spoke perfect Spanish and knew how to operate in the Spanish Courts. The "legal tactics" that "mushroomed into a major strategy of Indian life" was invented or reinvented by the village elite to keep up their profitable position. But here interests coincide, for the poorer Indians needed their gobernadores to acquire extra land. Exploitation was accepted in exchange for subsistence plots and only rarely I have found unlimited exploitation that continued for years. The cases mentioned by Taylor in his contribution of this volume are an example of this. It brings us to the ideological aspect of Indian history.

Ideology

The old altepetl was more than an organization of corporate landholding. It required the possession of deities and religious structures de-
dicated to them, a government palace, a market, and the use of land. The members of the altepetl were united to perform religious and moral duties under the leadership of the lords. The single, most fundamental ideological principle covered by the altepetl was the belief in a human-supernatural covenant: individuals and the collectivity, and the supernatural powers that watched over them (the pantheon of gods) were bound by a *quid pro quo*, in which a large number of ritual, ceremonial, and material functions and activities were undertaken by the individuals and the collectivity in honor of the supernatural powers. But it was understood that this happened in exchange for their making the world of human existence safe and pleasant for personal and communal interaction; here the use of the word *tlahcoananatl* would be accurate. Nevertheless, the main question is whether or not the *pueblos de indios* and its caciques performed the same task in the Spanish period. During three centuries of Spanish rule each altepetl disintegrated into numerous *pueblos de indios*, which all had churches, priests and sodalities. What was their role?

The unifying element of the essays in the second part of this volume is the Catholic character of morality in Indian life. What is shown is a very strong transformation from pre-Hispanic supernatural perceptions to colonywide Catholicism. Far from being an anachronistic vestige among a small elite, the Catholic faith rooted and continues to thrive as a vital current in remote mountain villages. In the opening lines of his parish history of Guatemala, Adriaan van Oss writes:

"If we had to choose a single, irreducible idea underlying Spanish colonialism in the New World, it would undoubtedly be the propagation of the Catholic Faith."

In fact, Spain was unique in insisting upon converting the indigenous population it had conquered to its state religion. And it succeeded—Catholicism even outlived the empire itself.

Van Oss argued that the Spanish empire would have been a mirage or illusion in the countryside had it not been for a tangible Spanish influence which we still feel today. Colonialism did not rest on military strength, since an organized army practically did not exist until the late eighteenth century. There were no fortifications in the interior, and unlike European medieval towns the cities in New Spain had no walls. The civil bureaucracy was somewhat better developed, but outside the capital one single local official often held 20 to 40 villages under his supervision. The vast majority of New Spain's population participated neither in the mining nor in the plantation economy. The plantations restricted themselves to the thinly populated coastal regions, while the important mining activities took place in a few barren highland enclaves, also removed from major population centers. The seaports were few in number, poverty-stricken as a rule, and often practically uninhabited, since annual shipping between Spain and her American colonies during the late sixteenth century in general totalled perhaps 60 to 65 vessels in each direction, including warships,
and between 20 and 40 in the seventeenth century. But the street of the most isolated villages crossed one another at rights angles, according to a chessboard pattern. In the middle of every village one could find a great open square with a church on the eastern side. Every place bore the name of a Christian saint and on that saint’s name day the whole village turned out to celebrate. Among other festivities, dance-dramas were performed which took themes familiar with those of the European middle ages, such as that of the conversion of Saint Paul. Holy Week was observed in such a way that many South-European villages would pale by comparison. As early as the late sixteenth century New Spain had been transformed in the Catholic image.31

This success is peculiar if we realize that Christianity in the New World was derived from armed conquest. The native religion was suppressed by the use of force and terror. But once the repression of the early colonial period no longer bore down on the society, the repressed urges and drives of the original culture were released. In his contribution David Brading gives an overview of the process of conversion. He underlines the subtle manner in which various elements of Christianity, such as miracles or the cult of the saints, established linkages with the old perceptions of the Indian world. He agrees with Serge Gruzinski that local and regional devotions are examples of a sui generis assimilation of Christianity. But it was a late medieval hispanic Catholicism that impinged on the minds and hearts of the Indians. Notwithstanding the survival of pre-Hispanic religious practices and cosmological assumptions, during the colonial period a religious cult slowly emerged which Brading defines as native Indian Catholicism, but a cult which bore at the same time remarkable similarity to the devotions and practices of popular religion in Europe.

Spanish missionary work in rural New Spain was executed by the regular branch of the church, composed of various independent orders. The evangelical authority was derived from the Patronato Real, by which the Pope had delegated in 1508 radical privileges to the king of Spain. The king became the spiritual guardian as well as the political master of the new pagan subjects. He elected the mendicant orders of Franciscans, Dominicans and Augustinians—and not the secular clergy—as his agents in America. Again, as in the case of sixteenth-century land tenure, the situation in early New Spain resembled the Carolingian system. By carrying Christianity to America Spain played the role to its overseas possessions that medieval emperors in the Carolingian tradition had played to Europe: to extend the ideal of a Christian Empire espoused by a line of earlier kings like Charlemagne, Otto III, and Henry III. And the conversion should be done quickly to achieve this goal. The number of Indians baptized, often en masse, during the early years was astronomical: the Franciscan Motolinia ventured that by about 1536, 25 years after the fall of the old Aztec capital Tenochtitlán, 5 or 9 million Indians had been baptized.32
The first of the regular orders to arrive was that of Saint Francis. From 1523 onwards Franciscans were spreading rapidly over the densely populated central highlands. Three years later they were followed by the first Dominicans, and in 1533 by the Augustinians. The friars did not isolate themselves behind cloister walls but went into an area in very small groups to preach. After a while a temporary church was built, followed by temporary housing for the friars. Only later could more permanent church and monastery buildings be constructed. Each order had its own province, which would only partly overlap the provinces of the others. The first three orders expanded in different directions, as if to avoid contact with one another, while maintaining a basis in the heavily populated central region around the capital. The Franciscans established themselves in and around Mexico City, in the eastern part of the central highlands, and had set out to the west. The Dominicans chose to go southeast, in the direction of Oaxaca. The Augustinians fitted themselves in between the establishments of the other two orders, as well as to the north from the Central Valley. The Jesuits (1572), the Carmelites (1585) and the Mercedarians (1594) came too late to establish themselves in rural areas.

The spiritual conquest really looked like a conquest. The early period of extension covered great distances, leaving a few widely scattered outposts. After it an increasing number of new establishments within the existing framework were founded. So, the first friars passed along many future sites at which religious colonization would eventually take place, splashing around liters of baptismal water, but rejected these sites as a first choice in favor of sites further removed from the center. When the decade of the 1550s came to an end, the mendicants had reached the end of their road, until then avoiding severe conflicts with each other. But the orders did not enjoy good relations with one another, indeed, they often seem to have been one another's worst enemies. There were many incidents of disputes over towns, rights, practices, of accusations back and forth, and even of physical violence. Friars started to remove the baptismal font from neighboring churches, stripped off the bells, ornaments and locks, destroyed orange trees. Tensions ran very high in the decades of the 1560s and 1570s. Sometimes expeditions were even armed by friars to sack and burn down competing churches. Van Oss concluded that the colony had become too small to please everyone. At this moment the secular church began to spread out from the main cities to take the places of the mendicants in the course of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century.33

The strong evangelical tendencies of the Franciscan and Dominican reforms during the later middle ages embodied a pronounced apocalyptic strain. Medieval monks saw exile among the pagans as a path which would lead them to union with God. The final age of spiritual men had been prophesied by several visionaries during the medieval period, like the twelfth-century writer Joachim of Fiore whose prin-
ted work would circulate widely among the mendicants in America. The Franciscan order in particular cultivated the evangelical ideal in the true Joachite heritage. Their Saint Bonaventura (1221-1274) brought the fusion of Joachimism and the Franciscan ideology of preaching among the poor to its highest expression. Thereby the order's divinely inspired task to renew evangelical life in the final age of the world was strongly stressed. New Spain received the most fundamentalists among them, because the famous Twelve Apostles who initiated the conversion were already persecuted for their radicalism in Europe. The mendicants clearly envisaged themselves as Christian warriors engaged in cosmic battle against the principalities and powers of hell. Brading shows how the Spiritual Conquest, as the conversion was often termed, entailed victory over Satan with the souls of the Indians as the battleground and prize.

Behind mendicant fundamentalism lies an ideological principle, pioneered in the Western Roman Empire by Augustine of Hippo and still a strong topical subject in the seventeenth century, which stated that the incarnation of Christ had inaugurated the Sixth Age. The Sixth Age was to come to an end with Antichrist and a period of tribulation. As Sabine MacCormack shows, this vision of history was graphically depicted in the German World Chronicle of 1493, which circulated widely in the Spanish empire of Charles V. The message was a moral one, exhorting the beholder to conduct a life in such a way as to be found on the Longest Day among the saved rather than the damned. Many looked forward to this final age of spiritual men—especially the Franciscan and Dominican missionaries, who saw themselves as God's chosen instrument in the work of evangelization and the building of the New Jerusalem in the Americas. Preaching to the Indians brought their millennial hopes of an American Apocalypse closer to hand.

In their parishes the mendicants found nothing but confirmation of their Apocalyptic visions. They were impressed by the similarity of the Indian's lack of land ownership (explained in this volume by the concept of Personenverband) and of acquisitive spirit with the dictates of evangelical poverty urged on them by their founders. To cite another example, and indeed the most important one: the cult of the dead and the festivities of All Saints Day and All Souls Day, Todos Santos, on November 1 and 2. On these days the inhabitants of the villages united in a cosmological center of existence. Relationships between individuals and families were renewed by remembering their roots and paying homage to those who were not longer among the living. For a transient moment, the living and the dead even joined in the same world of existence and partook of a meal together. The Roman Missal gives Revelation (7:1-17) as the lesson for the Todos Santos celebration. The passage describes John's vision of a great multitude of nations, tribes, peoples and tongues standing before the Lamb. The vision evidently anticipates the eternal blessedness at the end of time and the great messianic banquet that will celebrate
Christ's marriage with the church on the eve of the final victory over evil. In sum, this meal of the living and the dead seemed to be the fulfillment of the Last Supper during the Longest Day, with Christ as pastor, the very essence of the Apocalyptic visionary.36 The days of the New Jerusalem seemed indeed bound to come!

The most important study of the cult of the dead is Nutini’s monograph on *Todos Santos* in Tlaxcala, marred, though, by inattention to historical bibliography and some support of the Black Legend point of view. Nutini argues that the syncretic integration of pre-Hispanic religious thought and symbols into Indian Catholicism was in general completed by 1650. After an initial phase of indifference, prompted by the vigour with which the friars smashed their idols the Indians came to hear the news of the Christian God. There was a guided syncretism, based on (1) a high degree of similarity among the religious elements and institutions in the interaction between Catholicism and pre-Hispanic religion, (2) the demand of the mendicants that the Indians convert to their religion in combination with their ability to guide and manipulate the interacting elements and institutions, and (3) the gradual conversion of the Indians, resulting in a synthesis in which the religious polity was no longer aware of the provenance of the various component elements. But, in the case of the cult of the dead a spontaneous syncretism occurred soon after conquest, unnoticed at first by the mendicants. The first friars were so much preoccupied with abolishing the main tenets of pre-Hispanic polytheism that they were not aware of the fact that, independently of what they were destroying, a more or less free amalgamation of pre-Hispanic and Catholic elements in a private culture of the dead was taking place in the villages. The background to this was the similarity of the latent polytheism of Catholicism (the pantheon of the Saints, if I may call it that way) and the manifest polytheism of the Indians.37

Challenging the notion of Spiritual Conquest as well as Nutini’s suggestion of naïve mendicants, Louise M. Burkhart describes in her book *The Slippery Earth* the difficult process of introducing Christianity in the Nahuatl world of Central Mexico through the vehicle of moral dialogue. By learning the native Nahuatl language and studying indigenous culture, the early missionaries translated catechistic texts into terms that would prove meaningful to the new converts. But because of the intrinsic differences between Nahua and Christian, attempts by the friars to introduce their precepts were often thwarted. For instance, the Christian dichotomy of good and evil was reinterpreted by the Indians to fit their dichotomy of chaos and order. In Indian eyes, these constituted not opposing but rather complementary forces. Burkhart shows that the new Christianity contained a lot of Nahua fatalism, which was a fertile field for Christian apocalypticism, so characteristic of the early missionaries. The Last Judgment was standardized as an acceptable theme for didactic art like religious dramas and text throughout the evangelization period. Burkhart concludes that there remained a relatively high degree of Nahua cultural
retention, which was eventually accepted by the friars as a less than orthodox, but strongly apocalyptic ‘Nahuatized Christianity’.\textsuperscript{38}

The Indian cult of the dead, with all its private household and public corporate manifestations like housealtars, masses and gatherings at the cemeteries, indeed must have been known to the friars. Peter Jones gives a thorough description of the cult of the dead related to the tradition of family worship in the southern Massif Central, France, between 1750 and 1880. He even notes a similarity between rural Catholicism in Brittany, pre-famine Ireland, Bavaria, Spain and southern France. In matters of death the distinction between the sacred and the profane made very little sense for the rural communities of southern France, according to Jones, or the rural communities of Tlaxcala, according to Nutini, because their communities perceived themselves first and foremost as communities of the living and the dead. Nearly all contemporary observers, he writes, stressed that the habits of prayer and spiritual rumination began around the hearth. It was here, too, that the first notions of history and genealogy in the minds of each new generation was planted and that popular religion became heavily impregnated with ancestor worship. A cultural institution which proved particularly suited to this expression of popular religiosity was the gathering of kinsmen or neighbours for sedentary work, relaxation and edification. Religious sodalities, the confraternities in the communities, were built on this and strengthened internal community relationships.\textsuperscript{39}

The process of restructuring the communities in the decades of the Great Death gave birth to Catholic corporatism. Of course, the coming of the missionaries drastically affected local living patterns, for when the original settlements were dispersed, they saw as their first task the creation of a center of community life as a basis for conversion and assimilation; the congregaciones discussed above. But this policy succeeded only in the periods of epidemics. When the pueblos de indios were created and rooted in the Indian way of life, Catholicism appeared to be not much different from the previous religious life: spontaneous syncretism of pre-Hispanic and Catholic cults, rituals and social life expressed itself in many ways later on. Most villages were divided into barrios, with each division endowed with its own patron saint. The cult of this patron saint was sponsored by community funds, administered by the gobernador de indios. The confraternities dedicated themselves to the Holy Cross or the blessed Souls of Purgatory (the cult of the dead). As described by Brading, Gruziniski and Lavrin in this volume, the religious-social units like the calpulli or, indeed, the altepetl were now transformed into Catholic institutions. A Catholicism of which Graham Greene could have repeated his remark:\textsuperscript{40}

"It's a strange Christianity we have here, but I wonder whether the Apostles would find it as difficult to recognize as the collected works of Thomas Aquinas."
Under such conditions, the supernatural pantheon of folk Catholicism cannot be described as monotheism. The idea existed that God the Father was only 'first among equals', the religious version of the medieval *primus inter pares*, for the people, as Nutini convincingly argues, never understood or paid much attention to the theological distinction between the Christian God and the saints as his underlings. Not only were all the manifestations of the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ included in the cult of the saints, the monolatrous nature of folk Catholicism meant that the *primus inter pares* on the local level was not God the Father, nor God the Son or the Holy Spirit, but the patron saint of the community. In the eighteenth century when the *altepetl* had given way to a fabric of tiny *pueblos de indios* communal solidarity restricted itself to the community only and did not extend to the *cabecera* or former *cabecera* anymore. The essays of Dehouve and Taylor show this clearly. Van Young calls this phenomenon *campanilismo*, the tendency of villagers to see the political, cultural and social horizon as extending only as far as the view from the church tower. According to Van Young, the atomization of the peasant rebellions around 1810, was the expression of the localocentrism which laid at the heart of the Indians world view.

By that time, the earlier optimistic attitudes of the missionary had given way to a more negative view of the Indians and their culture. Churchmen came to characterize the Indians as ignorant, lazy, drunken, vicious sodomites, and naturally prone to barbarism, violence, rebellion and backsliding. This was nothing special, as Van Young correctly notes, because in Europe rural priests suffered a similar corrosive boredom and existential desperation. No wonder, relations between priests and Indian parishioners could be extremely conflictual and fraught with tensions. Taylor gives evidence of this in his chapter. Nevertheless, he concludes, the rural priests enjoyed greater loyalty and affection of villagers than did the Spanish officials, even if the villagers questioned the priests' motives or feared the consequences. Despite conflicts, the eighteenth-century rural priest cannot be understood only as a solitary figure and a civil servant who joined the Spanish line up in the countryside. While his voice was heard and respected by the inhabitants of the *pueblos de indios*, he supported and defended the communities' rights.

The focus point of socio-religious and political identity had shifted from the *altepetl* to the *cofradias* and *hermandades* in the villages. But this disintegration was not a sign of weakness. The *hermandades* represented units with a physical base and the success of the *hermandades* in the eighteenth century could in part be related to the ongoing process towards the *Territorialverband*. Finding themselves increasingly around their own church tower meant strong intravillage solidarity. All inhabitants belonged to a confraternity. The main symbolic activities executed by the *altepetl* had been collective eating and drinking and the celebration of the gods. Both activities were taken
over by the confraternities. Food and drink continued to create and maintain a relationship both with the saints and between the members of the community. The villagers had taken hold of an institution they considered to be an element of stability, continuity, cohesion and collective identity. In many pueblos, writes Gruzinski in his contribution, it is possible to equate cofradías or hermandades and community. He cites cases of confraternities which aspired to the pueblo status and to the right to elect their own officials. The leaders of the confraternities, usually called mayordomos, were elected every year, and had a role not only in the organization of the religious feasts but also in the general administration of the community incomes. Several members of cacique-families were one year cofrades or mayordomos and next year acted as gobernadores de indios.

In sum, this institution of rural life became the property of the local elite, the caciques, who administered the confraternities in the villages – dedicated to both the village patron saint as the cult of the dead and also to the strengthening of village cohesion as much as possible. For them the confraternities constituted a channel of influence, an instrument of domination, because all the caciques, principales, gobernadores, or fiscales, who administered the incomes were not directly answerable to the rest of the community or to the parish priest. The evidence gathered by Lavrin strengthens the idea of the relative administrative autonomy enjoyed by most rural confraternities, and the nonchalant attitude of religious authorities about the means used by religious corporations to raise funds. She concludes that her evidence on the economic administration of the confraternities also points to the ability of the members of the Indian elite to use all mechanisms of commercial capitalism available to them in their own economic microcosm. Their capital was even plowed back.

However, confraternal income was part of a complex net of voluntary and compulsory forms of tribute, explained by Lavrin in her essay, and its importance was correlated to the wealth of the town and the region. The degree to which mayordomos spent their own money in the ritual celebrations of their corporations was a subject of discussion and reflection among priests in the eighteenth century, and one that seems crucial in determining the caciques’ role in the town as well as in the hermandad. The cargo or expected expenses of the annual feasts and masses was regarded as an economic burden that few could afford, but which was rarely refused. The mayordomos preferred to incur debts rather than refuse to accept the expenses or cut them down. The cargos could not be used by the caciques to enrich themselves, but it rendered prestige, status and power and I think that the losses could be balanced by the income that was gained by a post as gobernador in the political part of community administration. Nevertheless, the debts increased in the late eighteenth century. Of course, economic problems in the villages because of overpopulation, bad harvests and rising prices of agricultural products lay at the origins of the problems the caciques confronted. Spanish policy in that
period was to eliminate the poorer confraternities and to strengthen those with sufficient income, with the result that in 1805 many were in good financial shape. And indeed official community budgets administered by the gobernador de indios had partly taken over the financing of feasts.

This is in line with the arguments provided by Chance and Taylor on the development of the so-called civil-religious hierarchy. Ethnographers characterize the ranked offices, called cargos, in the villages as a civil-religious hierarchy that together comprise the community's public (the gobernador de indios, for example) and religious (the mayordomos) administration. All local men were expected to ascend this ladder of achievement during their lifetimes, alternating back and forth between civil and religious posts. According to Chance and Taylor the cargos were mainly civil in the colonial period, civil-religious in the nineteenth century and mainly or only religious in our own time. The prestige enjoyed by the cargueros and their families did not come without a price, for many cargos require substantial financial outlays, like sponsorships of festivities and other ritual occasions held for the local saints. This system was, according to Eric Wolf, a levelling mechanism that prevented the emergence of significant wealth and exploitation inside the so-called closed corporate peasant communities.

Recent literature denies the levelling character of the cargos. Especially the civil-cargos of the colonial period, discussed above, and the religious-ones of contemporary Mexico were used by the caciques to accentuate class differences and even accumulate capital.

With this conclusion we have touched upon a more fundamental question of interpretation. Both in the discussion of corporate land tenure and the prevailing ideology in the Indian villages of colonial Mexico we find a relationship with the auxilium et consilium of the moral economy. The concept of moral economy, developed about 20 years ago by the British historian E. P. Thompson and discussed by De Jong and partly by Van Young in this volume, places importance on the relationship between material concerns and culture. As is shown by Stavig, it is a helpful concept in understanding the efforts by Indians to preserve their way of life. It emphasizes the importance of custom and tradition, which were -as can be seen in the essays of this volume- in a continuing process of change. The relations between groups and individuals, such as those between the colonial state and the Indians, rooted in unwritten but understood norms of conduct and reciprocity, gave cultural meaning to the more formal agreements that required the native people to render service and tribute to the colonial state and to accept the guidance and leadership of their caciques in exchange for access to rights and resources that allowed them to maintain their way of life and to subsistence. The position of the caciques, the development of corporate land tenure and the behaviour of the villagers invites a more thorough theoretical discussion of the concept of community.
The concept of community requires careful investigation. According to classical anthropological theory the Indian peasants had united themselves in *closed corporate peasant communities*, which formed the corporate basis of their *peasant-economy*. The concept of the *peasant-economy* is hotly debated between orthodox and unorthodox Marxist writers and recently by non-Marxists as well, but there seems to be some general agreement about one aspect: it is guided by a non-capitalist logic.\(^4^6\) This is usually contrasted with other types of peasant communities, including the more open *mestizo* villages, which mostly work along capitalist lines of production. To Wolf and others, the Indian communities possessed all the hallmarks of the *closed corporate peasant communities* such as restricted membership, communal jurisdiction over land, a religious system of notable endurance, and the levelling mechanism which ensured the equal redistribution of surplus wealth, and maintained barriers against the entry of goods and ideas from outside. The members of these communities were socially and culturally isolated from the larger society in which they existed. Although the model of the *closed corporate peasant community* has become widely accepted, Eric Wolf, after reading the most recent historical studies of colonial Mexico, has stated,\(^4^7\) in a recent review of his own work, that his original idea "now seems overly schematic and not a little naive."

And indeed, several characteristics of the model of the *closed corporate peasant communities* can not be properly defended anymore. As has been shown, communal land tenure did exist in the end, but it was administered by the village elite and not equally distributed. At the same time, all essays in this volume show that the members of the Indian communities were not socially and culturally isolated from the larger society in which they existed. Besides this, I would stress as one of the most significant features to have surfaced as a result of recent historical investigations the extent of spatial movement within and, above all, between the Indian communities. As argued above, on the basis of several of these studies I estimated that during the eighteenth century perhaps one third to one half of the inhabitants of the *pueblos de indios* were immigrants. Indians from elsewhere, but also *mestizos* or Spaniards, were easily integrated in the communities and received all the rights belonging to them like a plot of the *común repartimiento*. There is evidence that some *pueblos de indios* housed several groups; the *pueblo* of Atzcapotzalco, for example, had a *gobernador de indios* for the Nahuatl-speaking families and one for the Tepanecol-speaking families. The rival group that challenged the *caciques* of Otumba in the late 1780s, a case mentioned above, came from outside the village. In fact, the colonial Indian villages all resembled Wolf's model of the *open corporate communities*. 
The notion of closed corporate peasant communities has been seriously undermined by anthropologists as well. Recent researchers like Robert Wasserstrom, Marie-Noelle Chamoux and Frans J. Schryer have challenged the idea of the egalitarian ethos of the villagers, the emphasis on conformity, and the levelling mechanism of the civil-religious hierarchy. As indicated earlier in this essay, these authors argue that the old model is incompatible with a process of internal differentiation into economic classes, that was the result from the greater integration of the villagers into the market economy. Lavrin has shown that as early as the colonial period the administration of the confraternities operated along capitalist principles. Others explained that the system of the repartimiento de comercios, mentioned by Taylor, operated as an important element of economic integration at the local level. Dehouve and Pietschman illustrated in essays published in another volume how the institutions of tribute, repartimiento, confraternities, and ecclesiastical dues were used to integrate a series of pueblos de indios into the broader colonial economy. The Indians participated fully as producers as well as consumers and traded in their own right. They were agriculturalists, artisans, raisers of livestock, muleteers, operators of flour or sugar mills, and so on. Credit, through the repartimiento de comercios, linked them to the main urban markets and the wider colonial economy. A considerable degree of monetarization could be seen in the villages. 48

Nevertheless, even authors like Wasserstrom, Chamoux and Schryer are somewhat hesitant to leave the concept of the corporate community completely behind. Indeed, such a bold step would mark a breakingpoint in historical, sociological and anthropological thinking. Although historians of European villages hardly speak of closed corporate peasant communities or peasant economy they also use the term community frequently and in the same manner. The anthropologist and historian Alan Macfarlan, who feels suspicious of the arguments used in the peasant debate in general, stresses the romantic background of this. 49

"The belief that stable and tightly-knit communities have existed in the past and still survive in distant lands is an important myth for industrial and highly mobile societies. It's therefore no coincidence that it was in the turmoil of late nineteenth-century industrialization that the idea of 'community' as opposed to modern 'society' was developed extensively, ( ... ). It was felt that society was changing, values were being undermined, an older closeness was being lost. This powerful myth both influenced, and seemed to find support in, the work of historians and anthropologists during the first half of the twentieth century."

In short, the term community may be considered a relic of the simplistic thinking of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century writers seeking in history or anthropology an emotionally satisfying alternative to their own socially mobile age. Many researchers were disappointed to find so much exploitation in past or in Third World
societies: European capitalism had robbed the peasants of their innocence. Macfarlane concludes that the peasants will only be truly emancipated in historical and anthropological research when historians and anthropologists have overcome their romantic visions. As is suggested above, this process is now underway.

The term community can be used in several ways. First there are these phrases like 'rural community' as indicated above, which smack of ethnocentrism and conceal the true nature of the historical process in the countryside. These phrases deny the role of individualism, proletarianisation and class conflict altogether. The closed corporate peasant communities falls into this category. Second, the rural community can be defined as a unit of agricultural production. Common land provided a ready basis for the sentiment of community. This kind of usage is not much different from the closed corporate peasant community. I have asserted earlier, that the common ownership of land was not a prerequisite of an integrated corporate society: a small group of caciques exploited the mass of the poor. In Europe the situation was not much different, for the commons were all too often neither close, compact, nor collectively owned. Gross inequalities of provision, as between sections, and of access, as between individuals, ensured that common usage of land remained a source of perennial conflict rather than consensus. Third, and most important, the word community is used as a simple juxtaposition with such terms as 'village' or 'rural settlement'. This stresses the physical context of the community, and, indeed, many historians and anthropologists would argue that the sense of community can only develop in conditions of geographical proximity. The temporal and spiritual authorities merely consecrated this identification by turning the village into a unit of fiscal and parochial administration. As could be seen above, the pueblos de indios of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries fall into this category.60 And, in any case, I have frequently used the word community this way.

The historian Peter Jones introduced a major point of criticism that can not easily be neglected. If the rural community is viewed primarily as a by-product of an agglomerated settlement pattern, he writes, its existence in thinly inhabited regions which lacked a well-ordered landscape must be questioned. We can compare the Mexican pueblo de indios, which was almost certainly based in densely populated areas, with the Peruvian equivalent, which was settled in much more thinly populated areas. Although the Peruvian case will not be discussed here, the point is made: the Peruvian ayllus seemed to have been coherent communities. Like the pre–Hispanic and sixteenth-century altepeme in Mexico these were kinship groups whose members claimed descent from a common ancestor and married within the group. A Peruvian village community typically consisted of several ayllus. Communities in Europe were not much different. Jones found similar traces of kinship in the surviving communities of southern France.
According to him a simple solution to the problem of community in the countryside would be to assert the primacy of the household unit. The members of communities were linked together by bonds of biological and psychological cousinhood. The same argument can be found in Peter Laslett's *The World We Have Lost*, but here it is combined with the argument of physical settlement of the community:51

"The village community was (...) the group of households at the centre of a particular area of cultivated land. (...) To the facts of geography, being together in the one place, were added all the bonds which are forged between human beings when they are permanently alongside each other; bonds of intermarriage and of kinship, of common ancestry and common experience and of friendship and cooperation in matters of common concern."

We can make the circle round again by asserting that behind the formation of kinship bonds was a temporal or spiritual juridical organization, like parishes and neighbourhoods, or one might find seigneurial units like manors, households, marks, *communautés*, etc.

In my view Laslett's remarks on the common ancestry and common experience and of friendship and cooperation in matters of common concern of households, living within a certain unit, might be the most useful definition of communities. It is not necessary to pronounce either upon the open or closed nature of the community, or upon its corporate character. It deals with the question of migration, because also in rural England, the subject of Laslett's remarks, the number of immigrants in the villages and hamlets was high. It deals with the question of class formation and internal exploitation, because European communities knew also a kind of *cacique*. And it deals with one of the most fundamental characteristics of communities: the relationship with people and institutions outside its borders. There is an outsider and an insider view of communal development, and much of what has been discussed above and what will follow in the essays of this volume is an attempt to analyze the notions from the inside. The rural community, Jones writes, evinced a Janus-like character: explored from within it resembled nothing so much as a nest of vipers, but as soon as an external threat loomed over the horizon internecine strife ceased and ranks closed behind the broad shoulders of the village dignitaries. This inside/outside dichotomy is different from the one enclosed in the model of the *closed corporate peasant communities*.52

The crucial element, then, lies in the answer on the question of what was at the root of friendship and cooperation. What were matters of common concern? Ties of kinship were only in part important. Cousinhood or not, people would emigrate to the otherside of the world if they thought matters were better there. The historian David Sabean argues that what was common in community was the fact that members of a community were engaged in the same argument, the same *raisonnement*, *Rede* or discourse, in which alternative strategies, misunderstandings, conflicting goals and values were threshed out. In
so far as the individuals in a community might all have been caught up in different webs of connection to the outside, no one was bounded in his relations by the community and besides this particular boundedness people would simply pass each other by. This means that community relationships were formed every time a problem of common interest occurred, mostly from outside the fabric of household relationships. This might originate in climatic changes: a bad harvest was a strong incentive to join hands. But most often, as is shown by the essays in this volume, it would originate from struggle with elites, landlords, merchants or church and state officials.

Realizing that community was mainly a matter of mediations and reciprocities, it cannot be analyzed apart from the changing relationships of dominance and power, or Herrschaft:

"The issue is (...) in what way a collectivity such as a village or a neighborhood is bound together through mediated relationships involving aid, conflict, aggression, and sharing. In the way that we confront the reality of village life, we see that community was not something 'pre-modern', unchanging, structural, but was constructed, changed with time, and can only be grasped as historical process because those elements through which relations were constructed, whether 'real' or symbolic resources, were constantly in movement."

What made community possible, writes Sabean, was the fact that it involved a series of mediated relationships that changed over time. One form of mediation, and, as expressed earlier, a central one, was provided by property: the access to resources, the apportionment of rights and claims, and the acceptance of obligations and duties. As such it belonged to the bonds of the Territorialverband. Another form of mediation could be found within the spheres of production and exchange. A third form would be found in the sphere of social value and religion. These forms included both sharing and conflict. Community existed where not just love but also frustration and anger existed, a psychological outlet to vent feelings. Villagers grasped community most centrally within the terms 'envy' and 'hate'.

Since we know that villagers were constantly altering their structural relations as the nature of state and church institutions changed, it is clear that there were as many communities as there were mediated relations. One item stood out, however. In colonial Mexico, like everywhere else, two groups were involved in community discourse: the ones that had easy access to the means of production and the ones that had no access, or hardly any. Here different communities were formed. In the case of usufruct of land, for example, Mexican villagers were in negotiation with their caciques to share in the común repartimiento. They formed clientelistic coalitions against other groups inside the village. If we understand 'corporation' as a united body of persons, the Indian community numbered several 'communities'. But at the same time caciques joined hands with all villagers against the Spanish state to extend the amount of land under communal control.
The same can be said for the mediation between the supernatural powers and the villagers. Taylor, Gruzinski and Lavrin present examples of such a position of the village priests. In many ways the *caciques* and the priests were both the main expression of community as the main target. Expressed in a, somewhat crude, Wolfian manner, what had been defined the *closed corporate peasant community* was not ‘closed’, not ‘corporate’, and perhaps not even a ‘community’.

*Dominance, Legitimization and Resistance*

The maintenance of church and royal state officials of New Spain, and not to forget the village *caciques* as well, depended in the end upon their successful dominance of the Indian peasants. However, the authority of these lords, if I may call them such, should not be confused with the coercive power of a modern bureaucratic state. Domination—Sabean uses the Weberian word *Herrschaft*—had less to do with government in the modern sense of the word than it did with the officials’ and the lords’ personal or patrimonial domination of their subordinates. In eighteenth-century Mexico this dominance flowed principally from control over land. The legitimate exercise of these authorities was sanctioned more by the sacredness of custom and religious principle than by consciously created systems of rational laws. This is not to say that lords and officials had absolute power to bend the subjects to do their will—indeed, the local *alcaldes mayores* were systematically neglected by the Indians, who travelled to the *Audiencias* in Mexico City or Guadalajara to claim their rights. In practice, as is also shown in this volume by De Jong, Taylor, Osborne, Haskett and Wood, power to impose order depended far less upon the state’s or lord’s claims to abstract legal rights over their subjects than it did upon the exercise of authority in concrete situations. The dominance any individual exercised over peasants was tempered both by a weak administrative hierarchy and by the observance of customary restraints on the legitimate use of authority.\(^5\)

The concept of *Herrschaft* or dominance discussed by Sabean, Robisheaux, Blickle and others express the institutional relationships of authority, such as the domain of rights and jurisdiction adhering to the exercise of juridical authority, the relationship of a lord, *cacique*, to the collectivity of his direct subordinates, and, the ownership and control of land, with various obligations paid to the lord, like tributes. The relationship was seen as a personal one, above all because an individual could in theory and often in practice be under the domination of one lord as member of his clientèle, of another as tax payer, and yet another as juridical subject. These forms of dominance more or less clearly expressed surplus extraction. The *caciques*, the priests and the *alcaldes mayores* had specific rights to tributes and duties. Indeed, it seems that dominance could be put into the categories of property, maintaining that the relationship was one of ownership over things or persons, with officials and lords were taking what they
owned with all due regard for the reproduction of the human material necessary to continue the possibility.

But the other half of Herrschaft, writes Sabean, was just as central to the institution: the offering of protection in the form of clientage, justice, general tranquility, order, or military protection. The sum total of all forms of Herrschaft was seen together as offering protection and guaranteeing the reproduction and survival of the rural household units, making it unnecessary to question any one form. But, precisely because of the changing relationships through time, noted above, most forms of Herrschaft appeared very unbalanced. Subjects sometimes put one or other forms of Herrschaft into question because it did not offer any correlative service. The specific factor of time resulted in a vision upon Herrschaft as always in part arbitrary, not always correctly balanced by an adequate return, too costly, and sometimes maintained by a degree of violence. This necessitated a continuing process of legitimization (so characteristic for the Personenverband as well).

When one examines the daily practice of dominance, it becomes clear that legitimization was integral to it. Villagers demanded a just treatment from colonial, religious or local magistrates. It was accepted at the outset that the exercise of power and the accumulation of wealth by magistrates and elite members was to some extent arbitrary and that its arbitrariness had either to be justified or masked: Herrschaft as the evocation of obedience, the satisfaction of mutual interests, and the fulfillment of needs. According to Sabean’s conclusion, the arbitrariness and legitimizing of wealth and power should be considered one of the central mechanisms for the continual forming and reforming of historical consciousness; new ‘needs’ were continually generated and old ‘needs’ denied. Needs as defined by the officials and lords were uninterruptedly at conflict with needs felt by subjects, so that the costs of Herrschaft were not just to be found in the payment schedule of tributes and rents, but also in the continual round of redefinition of needs or their suppression.55

The Spanish colonial system, while imposing its laws and obligations, had left the Indian communities largely self-governing. They were allowed and expected to resolve most of their internal difficulties. Reliance on the legitimacy of the power of the caciques could help preserve the integrity and solidarity of internal community relations. At the same time, however, the changing relationship with the state and the social and economic development in the pueblos de indios could become a force for disintegration and disunity as well. While most caciques performed their work with community interests in mind, by the late eighteenth century the number of cases increased in which the relationship between caciques and their communities had weakened. Especially in the late eighteenth century population pressure inspired many Indians to leave their villages. It caused problems to the legitimization of the caciques’ role.56 This seems to support the case for dealing with the lord/subject relationship with a simple two-
part model of the system. The elites confront the rest of the population. The studies in this volume examine how people at different levels of society were implicated in the apparatus of domination. There were important advantages in the everyday exercise of power, which attracted Indians, and not only elite members, to accept cargos in the religious hierarchy of the pueblos de indios and wait for opportunities to be elected as gobernador de indios. But the exercise of power could also have its costs of isolation, risk, fear, dishonor, and ridicule. This is clearly expressed by the many examples and episodes cited by Sa- bean from village life in Southwest Germany between 1580 and 1800. It is not difficult to extract similar examples from Indian life in New Spain in the essays in this volume.

The ideological background in which the needs were defined and redefined was the subsistence ethic of the moral economy of provision, also referred to as the moral economy of the poor. It was introduced in analyses of food riots and focussed on elements of collective bargaining by riot. But as De Jong correctly argues, E. P. Thompson and James Scott tried to indicate the presence of an ideology of rights of survival and subsistence not only in general popular thinking, rooted in unwritten but understood norms of conduct and reciprocity, but in the thinking of the political and economic elite as well.58

"While this moral economy cannot be described as 'political' in any advanced sense, nevertheless it cannot be described as unpolitical either, since it supposed definite, and passionately held, notions of the common weal –notions which, indeed, found some support in the paternalist tradition of the authorities; notions which the people reechoed so loudly in their turn that the authorities were in some measure the prisoners of the people. Hence this moral economy impinged very generally upon (...) government and thought, and did not only intrude at moments of disturbance."

Thomas Robisheaux convincingly stresses the Christian contribution to these norms. Expressions of the moral economy can almost certainly be related to modernization or centralization of the power structures and above all to the penetrations of the forces of the market economy and capitalist relationships into the countryside. The coming of the political economy was considered the Unchristian Economy. Not only in Europe such voices could be heard, for historians like Phelan, McFarlane, Larson, Langer, Stavig, and Tutino were able to hear them in mainly colonial Latin America as well.

At the same time one should note the appearance of an important difference in economic thinking. Already in the eighteenth century, the elites, merchants and landlords were using the new science of political economy to administer their enterprises. Their knowledge was based on positive economics, the knowledge of how the economy in an objective manner functioned. Their normative economics, the conviction of how the economy should function was increasingly and
strongly inspired by the knowledge of positive economics. The peasants, however, looked at the economy from a moral point of view. Their normative economics were based on the subsistence ethic, born out of fear of food shortages and subsistence crises. This ethic arose from the central economic dilemma of most peasant households. The French historian Muchembled speaks of a culture de survivre. A subsistence crisis would mean short rations, and the sale of land or livestock. Scott correctly argues that the peasant family's problem was to produce enough food to feed the household, buy necessities such as salt and cloth, and meet the irreducible claims from outsiders. This production was partly in the hands of fate, and partly the result of local tradition to harvest the most stable and reliable yield possible (seed varieties, planting techniques and timing). Besides these technical arrangements there were the many social arrangements, like patterns of reciprocity between neighbours, forced generosity, the control and distribution of land, and worksharing.

The wider society was expected to support the peasant's struggle for survival. Especially in times of trouble the village elites, the landlord and the state and church officials had to offer direct relief. In exchange these 'magistrates' demanded, to put it starkly, status differences, wealth and power, which, according to Mann, "(...) derive from their ability to mobilize the resources of that collectivity." The subsistence ethic dictated the norms to judge the behavior of the elite: what was or was not considered rude exploitation. It could happen that in certain circumstances the conditions of peasant life deteriorated but that the relationship between 'lord' and 'peasant' improved, because the 'lord' distributed food, clothing, or land, or impeded food prices from being 'unjustly' increased. But, precisely because mutual needs were constantly being redefined, the concept of 'just' and 'unjust' was changing all the time.

One of the major elements that would change the balance of power between the patricians and the plebeians was the increase or decrease of relative overpopulation. Demographic growth brought always danger to the balance of subsistence in peasant society. Within a certain region the rural poor had a strong bargaining power in periods of low population density. The local magistrates had to listen seriously to their wishes. The process of redefinition of the needs and the changing balance of bargaining power as results of demographic development in which the stronger position is taken by the elites and officials can be expressed in the formula:

\[ DD^\uparrow = bpL \Rightarrow bpP > bpP > bpL, \]

in which \( DD \) symbolizes demographic development (\( \uparrow = \) increasing relative overpopulation; \( \downarrow = \) decreasing relative overpopulation), \( bp \) 'bargaining power of', \( L \) 'the landlords, elite members, state and church officials' and \( P \) 'peasants'; the sign \( \Rightarrow \) indicates the better position of bargaining power of one group over the other. In this
case the power of the elites over the rural poor had more weight than the influence of the rural poor upon the behavior of the wealthy and political powerholders. The rural poor had to lower their demands. The case was different in periods of decreasing population density:

\[ DD\downarrow = bpL \Rightarrow bpP < bpP \Rightarrow bpL. \]

These formula's are useful in interpreting labour relations as well. The landlord, or hacendado, could 'exploit' his fieldhands more in periods of high population density.

If we try to apply these formula's in the interpretation of the development of the Indian community in New Spain, I suggest to use the first variant (a.) both for the period of relative overpopulation in the era of Conquest and encomenderos, as well as for the era of the late eighteenth century which saw the increasing power of the caciques in matters of village life. The exploitation of the rural poor was at its highest then. The rapid changes during the last decades of the eighteenth century caused in the poorer parts of New Spain the outbreak of a general peasant rebellion against modernization and prolonged commercialization. The second variant (b.) might be applied to interpret the century after the Great Death, roughly between 1630 and 1750. This was a period of relative tranquility, which saw the general foundation of popular Catholicism and of the Territorialverband, although this foundation was introduced in the preceding era. Of course, the formulas cannot be applied in explaining the Great Death itself, nor the outcome of the reconstruction that took place in that period. Interesting to note, and this follows from many of the arguments brought forward in this volume, is that the position of the relatively strong pueblos de indios was backed by the Spanish state, especially by the judges of the Audiencias, as well as by most priests.

**Future Research**

In this somewhat speculative survey I intended to make clear that our knowledge about the Indian community in New Spain is now considerably more extensive than it was twenty or thirty years ago. However it is still strikingly uneven, both in chronological and thematic terms. Land tenure in the eighteenth century is far better known than land tenure in the rest of the colonial period. Also we know considerably more about the church and rural confraternities of the eighteenth century than of the preceding centuries. And the position of the caciques seems to have been clarified. I have tried not only to summarize this knowledge but also to present a way of understanding it.

But of course, we are only on the threshold of knowing what the Indian community was like. More studies are necessary, not only studies of a regional nature, but especially of a more indepth local nature. European socio-economic history is flourishing because the his-
torians are prepared to limit themselves to only one tiny parish or village. Analysts of popular culture usually take not more than one or two examples from the archives. I think we must leave the path of writing the "history of the valley of Mexico," the "history of the valley of Oaxaca," or the "history of the hinterland of Guadalajara." This has been done. We should use these studies to go into the wealthy mines of community studies. And as is shown by European historiography, this would not mean wandering away from the important discussion of the relationship between the particular case and general conditions. Sabean's study of the village of Neckarhausen, for example, brought considerable insight in the mentalité of rural people in general.

One theme in particular must be touched upon soon: the economy of the pueblos de indios. We know by now that the Indian villages were more integrated in the colonial economy than had been stated by Wolf thirty years ago. The dualistic interpretation enclosed in his model of the closed corporate peasant communities cannot be endorsed by archival evidence. On the contrary. But the exact economic development of the Indian village is a history that remains to be written. The market aspect and the non-rural activities of the villagers cannot be left out. More light must be thrown over the background and functioning of the repartimiento de comercios. Pietschmann's excellent essays must be considered as only the beginning of a new sequence of research. To understand the role and development of the pueblos de indios, it seems important to place them in an ecological context and to determine the cartographical dimensions through time. Available sources permit a demographic construction and they would hopefully allow for an approximation of the historical trend of land values, agricultural production, rural prices and trade. The history of the weekly markets, the so-called tianguiz, started by Hassig, can easily be extended to the eighteenth century. And, last but not least, Tutino's attempt to write the history of economic power inside the villages must be continued. The archives are full of litigation related to the use of the común repartimiento.

To conclude, the question of theoretical interpretation must be integrated in this kind of research. The memory of the Mexican Indian is one in which cultural continuity and resistance prevail. We have to accept, concludes Wachtel in his contribution to the first volume of The Cambridge History of Latin America, that after the initial shock of conquest the history of colonial society, both in New Spain and Peru, was that of a long process of economic, social, political, and ideological reintegration. Nevertheless, the Mexican Indian has lived in complex, but small-scale agrarian societies, like most of the world's population. Because of the relative isolation in which groups of pueblos de indios have developed there tended to be great cultural and ecological variation among them. This has been shared by all agricultural peoples, and small village research put in a strong comparative context has therefore a great potential for generalisation, especially
when all regional and local differences can be known. And above all the origins of these differences. If Pierre Bourdieu may use his fieldwork in one Algerian village to outline a 'theory of practice', historians could join hands in outlining a new theory of communities. The integration of European and Latin American research will be the keypoint to this. In sum, the grand encounter between the Old and the New might well be interpreted as an ongoing battle -as is done by Wachtel-, but examined more closely at the village level the meeting of Indian and Spanish cultures might appear less of a titanic clash and more of a mating dance.64

ENDNOTES

4. Eric Wolf, Europe and the People Without History (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1982), 380. This vision echoes his Sons of the Shaking Earth (Chicago, 1959).
5. Wolf, Europe, 145.
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ton, 1984); in Guatemala, W. George Lovell, Conquest and Survival in Colonial Guatemala: A Historical Geography of the Ouchumatán Highlands, 1500-1821 (Kingston, 1985).


16. Personenverband and Territorialverband, also discussed by Hoekstra in this volume, were introduced in Latin American historiography by Bernard Slicher van Bath, see his "Spanje en de Peruaanse Andes na de conquista: Een botsing tussen twee sociale en economische systemen," in his Indianen en Spanjaarden. Een ontmoeting tussen twee werelden, Latijns Amerika 1500-1800 (Amsterdam, 1989), 117-137, esp. 125.


18. García Martínez, Pueblos de la Sierra, 78, note 23.


20. See also the documentation published by Hilda J. Aguirre Beltrán, La congregación de Tlacotepec (1604-1666). Pueblo de indios de Tepeaca, Puebla (Mexico City, 1984).


22. García Martínez, Pueblos de la Sierra, 305.

23. Margarita Menegus, "La parcela de indios," in La sociedad indigena en el Centro y Occidente de México, Pedro Carrasco, ed. (Zamora, 1986), 103-128; quote from Zorita on p. 128.

28. Ouweneel, Onderbroken groei in Anáhuac, 149-179, 184-191. On litigation and land conflicts one could easily compare the procedures of the colonial period with modern ones. Take the region of Oaxaca: the similarity between the colonial practice described by William B. Taylor, Landlord and Peasant in Colonial Oaxaca (Stanford, 1972); and Ronald Spores, The Mixtecs in Ancient and Colonial Times (Norman, 1984); and the contemporary practice described by Philip A. Dennis, Intervillage Conflict in Oaxaca (New Brunswick and London, 1987); or Philip C. Parnell, Escalating Disputes. Social Participation and Change in the Oaxacan Highlands (Tucson, 1988), is striking.
34. Van Oss, Catholic Colonialism, passim.
37. Nutini, Todos Santos in Rural Tlaxcala, passim.
41. See the essays in Indian-Religious Relations in Colonial Spanish America, Susan E. Ramírez, ed. (Syracuse, 1989), esp. Van Young's conclusion, pp. 87-102.
42. See also Farriss, Maya Society under Colonial Rule, 265-266.


60. Mann, Sources of Social Power, 51-55.


