

The Indian Community of Colonial Mexico
FIFTEEN ESSAYS ON LAND TENURE, CORPORATE ORGANIZATIONS,
IDEOLOGY AND VILLAGE POLITICS

Arij Ouweneel & Simon Miller (eds.)

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Colonial Mexico**

Fifteen Essays on Land Tenure,
Corporate Organizations, Ideology
and Village Politics



A CEDLA Publication

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Foreword

THIS BOOK is the end product of a symposium we organized as part of the International Conference of Americanists, which took place in 1988 (July 6, 7 and 8) in Amsterdam. The symposium was called *Continuity and Change in Agrarian Mexico, 1640-1940* and divided into three sessions: one on Indian villages, one on haciendas and one on the Revolution. Several well-known historians, sociologists and anthropologists read papers or participated in the discussions.¹ The presentations were well attended, helping thus to spark off stimulating debates. In all, it turned out to be an exciting and rewarding experience, which led us to consider some of the papers for publication. We have planned the publication of two books: this one on Indian villages and another on haciendas, forthcoming.

In recent years historians, geographers and anthropologists have been producing an impressive number of excellent studies on the Indian community in the colonial period. However, the discussions during the sessions in July 1988 convinced us that scholars still lack a genuine understanding of the historical development of the indigenous community. Therefore, in planning the publication, two points seemed clear. First, the papers on Indian villages promised to be a welcome introduction into the field of Mexican ethnohistory, for they combined the results of primary research with a survey of secondary literature. Second, realising that research on this topic is not easily accesible to students -since it usually appears in monographs or articles in different scholarly reviews- it seemed useful to opt for the ambitious project of publishing a volume designed for undergraduates, graduates and professional researchers alike; a collection of essays that would introduce the reader to the field of Indian community studies, as well as develop the field a little further. Such an anthology also seemed an interesting venture in the light of the growing interest in Western Europe in the Latin American Indian community.

1. Papers were read by Berry Bock, Raymond Buve, Chantal Cramaussel, José Cuello, Bernardo García Martínez, Lotte de Jong, Elena Lazos Chavero, Alan Knight, Murdo J. MacLeod, Tomas Martínez, Peter van der Meer, Brigida von Mentz, Simon Miller, Cynthia Radding, Ricardo Rendón, Beatriz Scharrer, Frans Schryer, Clara Elena Suárez Argüello, Cristina Torales, Alejandro Tortolero and Stephanie Wood. See the 1988 Programme, pp. 113-114 for titles; not the *Textos y Documentos 46º Congreso Internacional de Americanistas*, Jan Lechner (comp.) (Amsterdam, 1990), p. 40, which states that only one participant had been present. Adrian Bantjes, Woodrow Borah, Robert Haskett, Rik Hoekstra, John Kicza, Herman W. Konrad, Reinhard Liehr, W. Georg Lovell, Christopher Lutz, and Manuel Plana, among others, participated in the discussions.

Despite some diversity, the essays assembled here are united by a common concern with the nature of the indigenous community of colonial Mexico. It is treasuring to note how the work of scholars operating within seemingly ostensibly separate and sometimes even hostile scholarly disciplines can fruitfully overlap. Nevertheless, as usual in this kind of anthologies, the studies are related by theme rather than by consecutive analysis. Bernardo García Martínez, Lotte de Jong, Cristina Torales Pacheco and Stephanie Wood agreed to submit their ICA-papers for publication. We invited Robert Haskett and Rik Hoekstra, present at the ICA-symposium, and David Brading, Serge Gruzinski and Asunción Lavrin to submit one of their older papers for publication in this volume. Prof. Lavrin wrote an essay especially for the volume. The essays of Danièle Dehouve, Ursula Dyckerhoff, Wayne Osborn, William B. Taylor and Eric Van Young have been published in English or Spanish. Some of these now appear in a somewhat revised version.

Having a common interest is not to suggest that the authors attempted to focus exclusively on one single aspect of their chosen community, region or period. As E. P. Thompson once remarked of such an anthological work, the individual spotlight dance away to reveal, if only partially, other problems lying off-centre on the traditional academic stage and offers glimpses of others waiting even deeper in the shadows of ignorance and unexplored archives. Individual efforts of the authors in this volume have brought some of them into focus, as, for example, the realm of values and attitudes in part two of the book. This is in line with at least two anthologies that have been welcomed recently: *The Middle Period in Latin America. Values and Attitudes in the 17th-19th Centuries*, edited by Mark D. Szuchman (Boulder and London, 1989), and *Sexuality and Marriage in Colonial Latin America*, edited by Asunción Lavrin (Lincoln and London, 1989).

We do feel the need to apologize for one important omission: these fifteen essays do not treat the economy of the Indian community in all its essence. The reader should know, however, that the book is conceived as a companion to *Empresarios, indios y estado. Perfil de la economía mexicana (Siglo XVIII)*, compiled by Arij Ouweneel and Cristina Torales Pacheco and published in this series in 1988 (CEDLA Latin America Studies, 45). That volume contains, for example, some outstanding chapters on the repartimiento-trade.

Finally, the reader will note the vitality of the controversy running through the lines of the chapters. Of course, there is the attack on Fabian orthodoxy, in which the great majority of the Indian population is seen as passive victims of the forces of the European Expansion. There is also the orthodoxy of economic historians and sociologists, which sees Indians as nothing more than a labour force. Nevertheless, the fact that the issue of the CLOSED CORPORATE INDIAN COMMUNITY, addressed implicitly or explicitly by several authors, is still alive and that the differences between the writers are still pronounced, puts the author of a sophisticated introductory essay into a position of con-

straint. Therefore, in discussing the notion of community, Ouweneel attempts to open new avenues of inquiry -writing, no doubt, against the weight of prevailing orthodoxies.

The important conclusion of most recent investigations is confirmed: the Indians were actors in the history of Latin America, not just objects.² The orthodoxies obscure the agency of the Indians, the degree to which they contributed by conscious efforts, to the making of Mexican history. There is, then, nothing definitive about this anthology, because we should see the chapters as part of a continuing process of rethinking and reevaluating a history that seems fossilized through an excess of assumptions and the neglect of archival possibilities. It is to be hoped that the ideas which the book contains will be developed and modified as a result of exposure to criticism in our graduate and post-graduate seminars over the coming years.

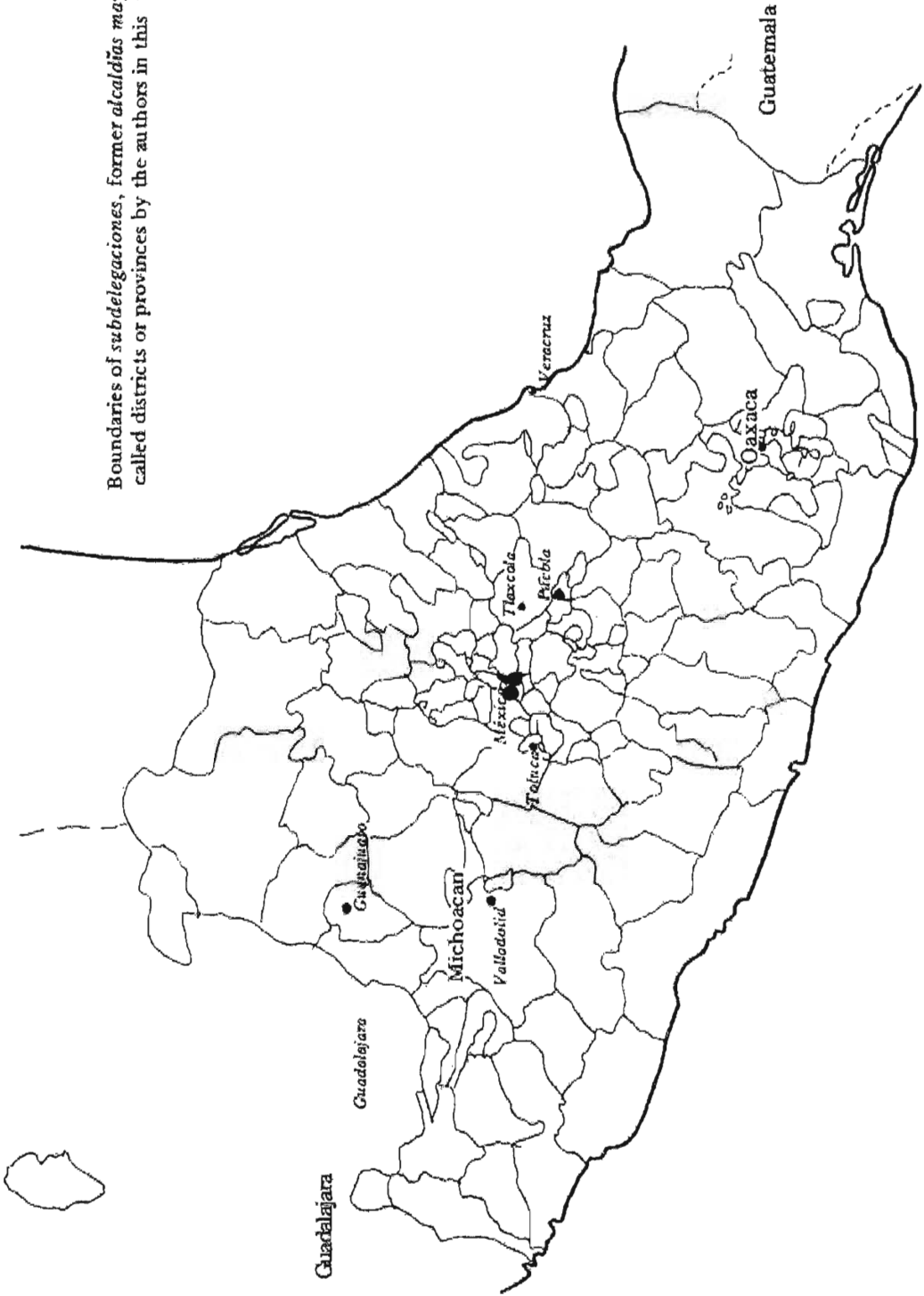
The volume was made possible thanks to the generous assistance of CEDLA, which sponsored the wordprocessing and final publication. We especially wish to express our appreciation to Jefa Jolanda v.d. Boom and Doña Vera Kos for their patience and cooperation in preparing the manuscript.

Amsterdam, May 1990

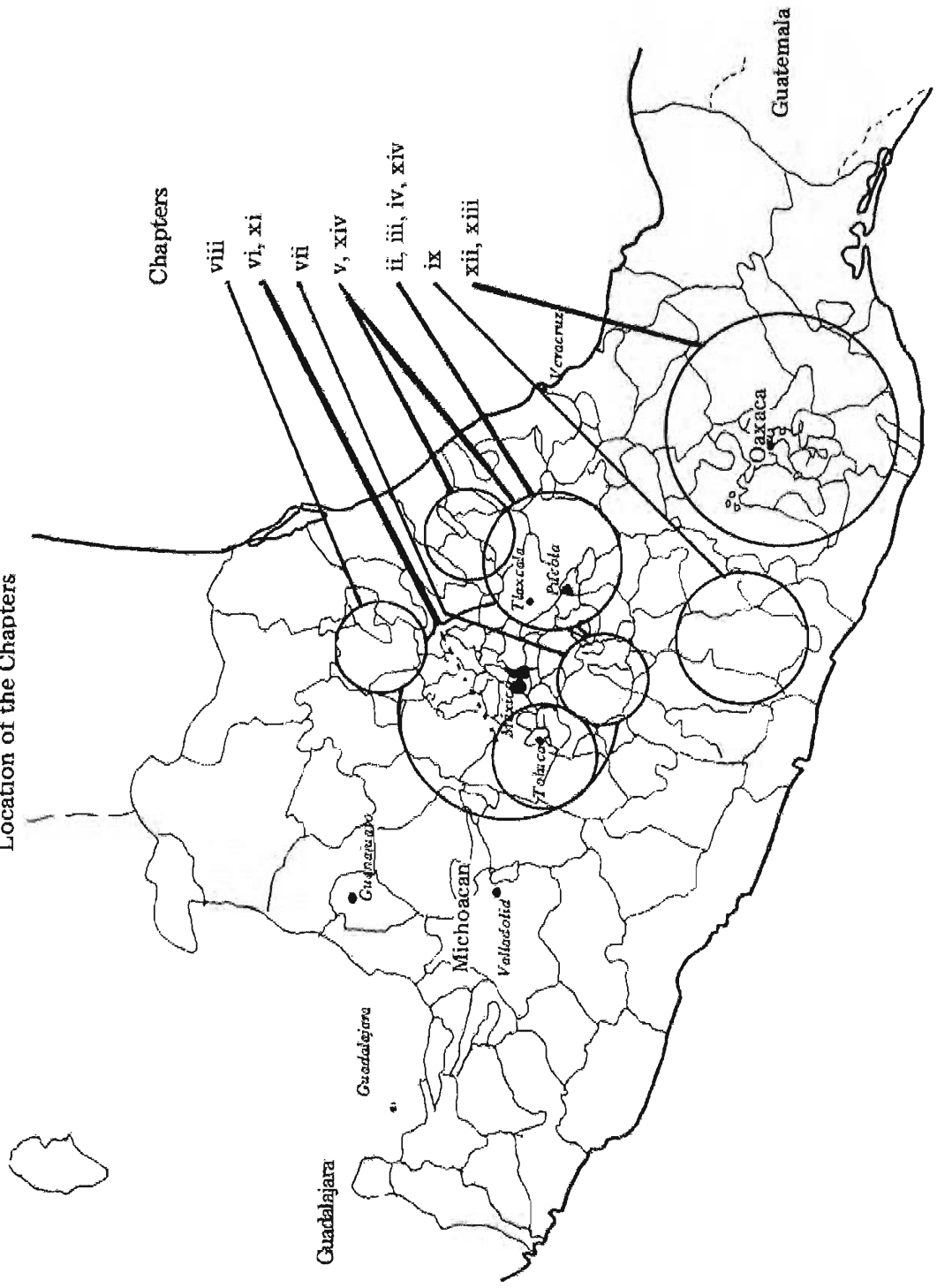
2. See Magnus Mörner, "Indians as Objects and Actors in the History of Latin America," in Magnus Mörner, B. H. Slicher van Bath and H. Hoetink, *Approaches to Latin American History* (Leiden, 1990), 1-10; the abbreviated and revised version of an article published in *Natives and Neighbours in South America. Anthropological Essays*, edited by Harald O. Skar and Frank Salomon (Gothenburg, 1987), 50-85.

The Gobierno of New Spain

Boundaries of *subdelegaciones*, former *alcaldías mayores*, called districts or provinces by the authors in this volume.



Location of the Chapters



"Mexico is always, disorganized and gone to the devil, the only thing that it retains is the immense beauty of the land and of the Indians."

- Frida Kahlo, 1931 -

"The people here in New Spain, the people of old, said: 'These [rivers] come -they flow- there from Tlalocan; they are the property of, they issue from the goddess named Chalchiuhtli icue.'

And they said that the mountains were only magic places, with earth, with rock on the surface; that they were like *ollas* or like houses; that they were filled with the water which was there. If sometime it were necessary, the mountains would dissolve; the whole world would flood. And hence the people called their settlements *altepetl*."

- Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, -

