

Barbarism or Republican Law? Guerrero's Peasants and National Politics, 1820–1846

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FROM 1842 to 1846, peasant unrest rocked southern Mexico, encompassing hundreds of villages and mobilizing as many as ten thousand individuals at a time. At the height of the violence, Nicolás Bravo, a prominent politician and general, called the rebels

miserable Indians, incapable of understanding the benefits of civilization, returned to a barbarous state worse than that of savage tribes.¹

Bravo felt that the Indian peasants' ignorance and passionate hatred of their betters disqualified them from participation in Mexican politics. Bravo was far from alone in this assessment. Mexico's political and economic elite was haunted by images of race or "caste" warfare formed first

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1. Nicolás Bravo to Minister of War, Feb. 14, 1845, reproduced in Carlos María de Bustamante, *No hay peor sordo que el que no quiere oír* (Mexico City: Imprenta de Lara, 1845), 15.

by the Haitian War of Independence and later by Hidalgo's armies in Mexico itself.

In contrast, the rebels themselves framed their goals in the same constitutional language that defined the national politics of Mexico's literate upper classes. Although one of their earliest proclamations called for the resolution of land disputes and relief from high taxes, it also demanded the "reform of the government." The rebels explicitly refuted the image of lawless peasant savagery, declaring, "we understand that our liberty lies in law, not as they say, lawlessness" and "the peoples' sovereignty asks that republican law rule, not whims."²

Comparing the statements of Bravo and the Indian peasants he was describing highlights one of the most important problems facing historians of early nineteenth-century Mexico. What was the relationship between Mexico's impoverished majorities and the turbulent national politics of the period? More specifically, what part did the frequent, large-scale peasant rebellions play in national politics, and how did elite political struggles matter to peasants?

Mexico's chaotic political scene has long been recognized as a defining feature of the country's postindependence period. Mexico experienced a bewildering succession of coups and civil wars as fragile and shifting coalitions struggled to build a stable national state in a context of severe economic decline. Recently, historians have made significant progress in outlining the political forces involved in these conflicts. Most analyses, however, focus on a restricted group of wealthy merchants and landowners, military officers, and intellectuals.³

Another group of historians has turned to a second defining feature of the period, the startling rise in rural social conflict. Both the size and the frequency of rural rebellions began to increase in 1810. Indian village peasants whose protests had rarely included more than one village now engaged in regional rebellions that often spanned dozens of villages. These rebellions frequently drew participants, and even leaders, of different class and ethnic backgrounds. Historians examining these movements have developed sophisticated perspectives informed by studies of the Mexican Revolution and rural social movements elsewhere in the world. Their work

2. "El plan con que los pueblos reclamen sus derechos," ACDEM, Expedientes, 1845, libro 142, expediente 241, folio 2.

3. See, for example, Barbara A. Tenenbaum, *The Politics of Penury: Debt and Taxes in Mexico, 1821–1856* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1986); Donald F. Stevens, *Origins of Instability in Early Republican Mexico* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1991); Josefina Z. Vázquez, "Iglesia, ejército, y centralismo," *Historia Mexicana* 153, 39:1 (Jul.–Sept. 1989), 205–34; Miguel Enrique Soto, *La conspiración monárquica en México, 1845–46* (Mexico City: EOSA, 1988); and Jaime E. Rodríguez O., "La Constitución de 1824 y la formación del estado mexicano," *Historia Mexicana* 159, 40:3 (Jan.–Mar. 1991), 507–35.

on the causes of rebellions and the motives of rebels, however, has for the most part left aside the rebellions' often explicit connections to national politics.⁴

The principal objective of this essay is to show how national political struggles and rural social conflict were intimately linked in at least one case. The state models debated on the national level had local interpretations as well as local supporters. Among the fashioners of local interpretations were peasant leaders, and perhaps even their followers. Words that seemed to describe only dry constitutional principles came to have very real meanings to at least some peasants. Those meanings did not always correspond to the thoughts of the intellectuals whose rhetoric filled constitutional congresses. Nevertheless, these local interpretations of state models helped form local and lower-class constituencies for national political groups.

This article seeks to link the actions of peasant rebels with the rhetoric and events of national politics. It will begin by briefly describing social and economic relations in the southern Mexican district of Chilapa. Next it will discuss how political and institutional innovations in the early nineteenth century changed rural politics. The centralists' subsequent success in national politics, beginning in the mid-1830s, changed the local balance of power and led to agrarian violence. Policies of the national government widened the revolt and led to peasant participation in a cross-class alliance with national goals. Finally, this essay will examine a set of rebel statements to discover how peasants developed their own interpretations of national political ideologies.

Social Structure and Agrarian Conflict in Chilapa

Any study of the connections between national politics and the concerns of poor rural people must be local in scale. National political projects were worked out and given meaning on the local and regional levels. The District of Chilapa in southern Mexico is currently part of the State of Guerrero, but from 1821 to the end of the 1840s it belonged to the State of Mexico. The rebellions of the 1840s eventually spread to most of the territory that now forms the State of Guerrero, as well as to significant

4. See Leticia Reina, *Las rebeliones campesinas en México, 1819–1906* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1980); Friedrich Katz, "Rural Rebellions After 1810," in *Riot, Rebellion, and Revolution: Rural Social Conflict in Mexico*, ed. Katz (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1988), 521–60; John Coatsworth, "Patterns of Rural Rebellion in Latin America: Mexico in Comparative Perspective," in *ibid.*, 21–62; John Tutino, *From Insurrection to Revolution in Mexico: Social Bases of Agrarian Violence, 1750–1940* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1986); Jean Meyer, *Esperando a Lozada* (Zamora: El Colegio de Michoacán, 1984).

portions of Mexico, Puebla, and Oaxaca. They began in Chilapa, however, and Chilapa became notorious as a site of peasant unrest.

Chilapa is a hilly district surrounding a town of the same name. In the early 1800s, several Indian peasant villages collectively held most of the district's agricultural, grazing, and forest resources. Yet the district also contained many white and mestizo traders, muleteers, artisans, and farmers. In the late colonial period nearly half the population was classified as Spanish, mulatto, or mestizo.⁵

Most of the non-Indians lived in the town of Chilapa, the center of an active commercial circuit. Muleteers and traders hauled sugar and beans from Chilapa to the nearby coast, where they bought raw cotton and transported it to Puebla and Mexico City. They also brought some cotton back to Chilapa, where it was spun into thread by Indian women and woven into cloth by male mestizo weavers. Muleteers gained additional income from the very infrequent but lucrative Asian trade through nearby Acapulco.⁶ Some non-Indians raised cattle, corn, and sugar on small parcels of land scattered in the surrounding hills and valleys. The wealthiest landowners owned sets of small, noncontiguous properties rather than large estates. Very small sugar mills operated on several of the largest parcels.⁷

Interspersed throughout the area were the holdings of more than 30 separate Indian peasant villages. Peasants cultivated corn, beans, and vegetables on lands granted in usufruct by their communities. They also gathered palm reed to sell to traders bound for the coast, where it was used to package cotton for shipment on muleback. Some Indian villagers worked part of the year as muleteers or as laborers for local landholders. Indian women spun cotton into thread and also wove it into coarse cloth.⁸

By the late eighteenth century, population growth was squeezing peasant agrarian resources. Boundary disputes between neighboring villages and between villages and landholders multiplied. Often villagers sued "interlopers" who, even the villagers admitted, had possessed the disputed tracts for dozens of years.⁹ Most land disputes also languished for years,

5. AGN, Historia, vol. 578b, fols. 66–80v, vol. 122; Indios, vol. 78, exp. 9.

6. AGN, Padrones, vol. 16, fols. 137, 154; Civil, vol. 502–2, exp. 1; Historia, vol. 122, exp. 3, fols. 38–44, exp. 5, fol. 165, and vol. 498, exp. 7; Industria y Comercio, vol. 2, exps. 7, 8, vol. 8, exp. 15; Vínculos, vol. 74, exp. 10, fols. 7–11v.

7. Even the largest properties in Chilapa, worth from several hundred to two thousand pesos, were tiny compared to their counterparts elsewhere in Mexico. For comparison see William B. Taylor, *Landlord and Peasant in Colonial Oaxaca* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1972), 199–220. The estates Taylor describes as small and weak changed hands for between 6,000 and 60,000 pesos. For material on the size of nonpeasant landholdings in Chilapa see AGN, Civil, vol. 502–2, exp. 1; Archivo Histórico de Hacienda, vol. 171; Vínculos, vol. 74, exp. 10.

8. AGN, Indios, vol. 78, exp. 9, fols. 189–202v; Historia, vol. 578b, fols. 66–80v.

9. AGN, Tierras, vol. 1099, exp. 1, vol. 1287, exp. 6, vol. 1406, exp. 11, vol. 1313,

occasionally resurfacing as one or another party filed a new motion. The result was an uneasy coexistence. Although land was an increasingly scarce resource, most land was under cultivation and thus difficult to shake loose from its possessors, who used vaguely worded titles open to a wide range of interpretations.

Agrarian tensions did not lead to widespread peasant participation in Mexico's War of Independence. The insurgents held the area for several years, but the peasants of Chilapa showed little enthusiasm for the revolt.¹⁰ After the royalist armies managed to recover the major towns of the south in the late 1810s, their commander praised the loyalty of the Indians of Chilapa even as their counterparts a few miles to the east in Tlapa bled his forces in a fierce guerrilla war.¹¹

State Formation in the Mexican Countryside

Later peasant violence in Chilapa was directly related to postindependence efforts to construct a stable national state. These efforts are most visible in public debates in newspapers, pamphlets, and legislatures, as well as the enormous quantities of laws and even constitutions produced. Nevertheless, the new national state was also shaped far from capital cities and the elites who resided there. Laws and rules took shape as they were applied on the periphery, and definitions were assigned to the terms they contained.

Practically every important definition was disputed. Laws rarely employed the language and usage with which local people described their everyday reality. Legislators were often far removed from rural Mexico. Moreover, usage varied immensely, even from town to town in a region. The differences had to be reconciled in the context of specific disputes in which officials were vulnerable to pressure from interested parties.

As part of their efforts to form a stable national state, politicians found it necessary to reorganize rural local politics. Before independence, politics in rural southern Mexico was dominated by elected Indian village governments and appointed viceregal officials. Village governments managed the communal ownership of peasant agrarian resources, but royal officials limited their control. Village governments also collected taxes and settled minor civil and criminal cases.

Most of the twentieth-century literature on colonial village govern-

exps. 2, 5, vol. 1363, exp. 10, vol. 2747, exps. 5, 9, vol. 1514, exp. 6; *Indios*, vol. 76, exps. 2, 6, vol. 71, exp. 24, vol. 67, exp. 31.

10. AGN, *Historia*, vol. 105, exp. 21, fols 84–85.

11. AGN, *Operaciones de Guerra*, vol. 74, fols. 294–95.

ments, or *repúblicas de indios*, has stressed their role in protecting peasant access to land and upholding indigenous cultural traditions, particularly in confrontations with wealthy landowners or the colonial state. In recent years, however, historians have constructed a more complex and ambiguous picture of Indian communities. They have stressed economic stratification within communities and the importance of wealthy villagers in village governments. Political power was concentrated in the hands of the *pasados*, elders who had risen in the village hierarchy by serving in several village offices. Communities usually consisted of several settlements dominated by a head town, or *cabecera*. They frequently experienced violent internal disputes. Although village governments often safeguarded the interests of all peasants in the face of common threats, they could also serve the colonial political and economic order.¹²

The *repúblicas* had no official place after 1820. They were replaced by municipalities. Municipalities also took on many of the responsibilities and duties previously held by appointed royal officials. Although most states also provided for administrative officials, usually called prefects or *jefes políticos*, their number and powers were limited in comparison to those of their colonial predecessors. For example, in the area covered by this study, one prefect administered the territory previously governed by five *subdelegados*. Municipalities became the crucial agents of government in rural Mexico, actually implementing most state and federal laws and orders. They were also the best source of information about the countryside. Even for federal cabinet ministers and state governors, much of the work of governing was accomplished through correspondence with municipal officials.¹³

The actual shape of the new political institutions and their impact on peasants varied greatly. It is possible, however, to outline two typical

12. For examples see Eric Van Young, "Conflict and Solidarity in Indian Village Life: The Guadalajara Region in the Late Colonial Period," *HAHR* 64:1 (Feb. 1984), 55–79; Danièle Dehouve, "Las separaciones de pueblos en la región de Tlapa (siglo XVIII)," *Historia Mexicana* 132, 33:4 (Apr.–Jun. 1984), 379–404; Florencia E. Mallon, *Peasant and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1995); Guy P. C. Thomson, "Agrarian Conflict in the Municipality of Cuetzalán (Sierra de Puebla): The Rise and Fall of 'Pala' Agustín Dieguillo, 1861–1894," *HAHR* 71:2 (May 1991), 205–58; Michael Ducey, "From Village Riot to Regional Rebellion: Social Protest in the Huasteca, Mexico, 1760–1870" (Ph. D. diss., Univ. of Chicago, 1992); William B. Taylor, "Conflict and Balance in District Politics: Tecali and the Sierra Norte de Puebla in the Eighteenth Century," in *The Indian Community of Colonial Mexico: Fifteen Essays on Land Tenure, Corporate Organizations, Ideology, and Village Politics*, ed. Arij Ouweneel and Simon Miller (Amsterdam: CEDLA, 1990), 270–94; Raymond Th. Buve, "Political Patronage and Politics at the Village Level in Central Mexico: Continuity and Change in Patterns from the Late Colonial Period to the End of the French Intervention (1867)," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 11:1 (Jan. 1992), 5–6.

13. Rodríguez, "La Constitución de 1824," 517.

though divergent situations, one in which Indian peasants in general and village elites in particular maintained much of the power and autonomy enjoyed under the *república* system, and a second in which they lost influence to white and mestizo elites. The scenario that developed in a given location depended on the local social geography and political alliances as well as the vagaries of state and national politics.

The 1812 Spanish constitution, which first instituted municipalities, specified that royal officials could set up these local governments anywhere convenient, but must establish one wherever a settlement and its surrounding area reached one thousand inhabitants.¹⁴ In Guerrero, municipalities were established in 1820 and 1821 in many former *repúblicas* on the basis of the population of their *cabecera* and surrounding *sujetos*.¹⁵ In such cases, Indian peasants often retained local political power.

Such power was also likely to remain in villagers' hands where suffrage was broad. The electoral regulations used under the Spanish constitution specifically included Indians and mestizos among eligible voters.¹⁶ The lack of an income requirement, moreover, favored the *pasados* and wealthier peasants who had dominated *república* elections. Their experience in mobilizing Indian voters along kinship or patronage lines in what were often contested colonial elections probably gave them an edge over local whites and mestizos.¹⁷

The suspicion that at least the wealthier Indian peasants often dominated local politics cannot be definitely confirmed. Available records do not allow the identification of individual officeholders. Documents produced by the new municipalities, however, often describe municipal officials and their activities in terms associated with the *repúblicas*. For instance, colonial legal documents routinely stress the concurrence not only of officeholders but also of the *pasados* or *ancianos*. Petitioners typically claim to represent the *común*, or commons of the village; that is, the body of adult male villagers. Many municipal documents imitate this formula. An 1833 complaint was signed by seven men, "all councilmen *pasados* of the Municipality of Zitlala, in union with the *común* of *naturales*." An

14. The 1812 constitution can be found in Antonio Padilla Serra, *Constituciones y leyes fundamentales de España, 1808–1947* (Granada: Univ. de Granada, 1954), 9–58. Articles 309–23 cover local government. Note that the rule refers to inhabitants, not citizens.

15. For a list see AGN, Ayuntamientos, vol. 120, exp. 2. See also *Advertencia importante sobre las próximas elecciones de los ayuntamientos* (Mexico City: Alejandro Valdes, 1821).

16. See *Instrucción que para facilitar las elecciones parroquiales y de partido ha formado la junta preparatoria* (Mexico City: n.p., 1820); and the 1812 constitution, Articles 24 and 25.

17. The best evidence on this kind of electoral mobilization in late colonial villages is in Ducey, "From Village Riot to Regional Rebellion," chap. 2.

1828 letter comes from “the citizens *empleados pasados* of the village of Asacualoya . . . in voice and name of our citizens and brothers of the same village.”¹⁸

Actual procedures provide further evidence of continuity between *repúblicas* and municipalities. An observer noted in 1824 that in Acamiscla, town council meetings were “celebrated not with only councilmen but with the whole village attending as it did under the old system, all the elders and the rest which they call the *república*.”¹⁹ The staff that had symbolized the authority of colonial village officials was also used in some of the new municipalities.²⁰ Municipalities received revenue from the sources used previously by the *repúblicas*. They frequently spent money on the same things, including the patron saint feasts that symbolized the unity of Indian communities.²¹

The power retained by the leaders of former *repúblicas* probably did not directly benefit the majority of Indian peasants, but it did prevent gains by local landowners. This was not insignificant, for local mestizo or white elites could also use municipalities to expand their political power or to obtain access to the agrarian resources formerly held by colonial *repúblicas*.²² They gained this opportunity because the new town councils, unlike the colonial villages, represented and governed the entire population, including non-Indian landowners, tenants, and merchants. Worse yet, according to some legal interpretations, all land held by the *repúblicas* became the property of the municipalities.

Wealthy whites and mestizos could prosper politically in the new system through patronage or electoral fraud, by holding fictitious or unannounced elections, or by closing the polls early to deny the vote to Indian peasants from outlying settlements.²³ The wealthy who resided in municipal capitals could also manipulate indirect elections, forcing each village to add its votes to the municipal pool, where they would be overwhelmed by the larger number of votes representing the capital.²⁴

All these tactics were more effective where the number of municipali-

18. AHM, Epoca Independiente, vol. 149, exp. 14, fol. 1, and vol. 49, exp. 31, fol. 1. For other examples see AHM, Control Público, vol. 18, exp. 58, fols. 57–58; and AGNDF, Notary 532, Nov. 20, 1829.

19. ACDEM, Expedientes, 1824, lib. 15, exp. 37.

20. Ibid., exp. 53.

21. Ibid., 1846, lib. 156, exp. 300; AHM, Epoca Independiente, vol. 151, exp. 9.

22. For examples in other regions see Rodolfo Pastor, *Campesinos y reformas: la mixteca, 1700–1856* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1987), 420–22; Andrés Lira, *Comunidades indígenas frente a la Ciudad de México: Tenochtitlan y Tlatelolco, sus pueblos y barrios, 1812–1919* (Zamora: El Colegio de Michoacán, 1983), 63–227.

23. For examples see ACDEM, Expedientes, 1824, lib. 15, exp. 53; AHM, Epoca Independiente, vol. 149, exp. 14.

24. AHM, Epoca Independiente, vol. 49, exp. 31.

ties was small. Although numerous municipalities were established under the 1812 Spanish constitution, the vehement complaints of rural elites and administrative officials led most states to reduce the number of municipalities soon after receiving jurisdiction over local government in the mid-1820s. The State of Mexico, which governed Chilapa, limited municipalities to the capitals of *partidos* (administrative subdivisions roughly corresponding to the territories of colonial *subdelegados*) and to settlements with more than four thousand inhabitants. Neighboring villages needed the prefect's approval to combine their numbers to reach the cutoff point.²⁵ These rules halved the number of municipalities in Chilapa.

States frequently transferred the resources of colonial *repúblicas* to the new municipalities, and this often allowed local *rancheros* and merchants to gain direct access to these lands. The State of Mexico's 1825 law on municipal administration assigned to municipalities "the lands which the villages have possessed in common along with the other rights and shares that belong to them." The rule was grouped in the municipal code with other forms of revenue and did not call for the privatization of common lands.²⁶ It seems to have been designed to provide municipalities with funds from the *bienes de comunidad*, the lands that *repúblicas* had formerly rented out for revenue, rather than the *tierras de repartimiento*, which were already divided among peasants who "possessed" them as individuals. The law, however, was subject to interpretation. Sometimes local landowners or officials tried to include even the common lands farmed by individual peasant families.²⁷

The interpretation of the 1825 law implemented in different municipalities depended on the decisions of town councils as well as the positions taken by prefects, the state governor, and even the state congress. In many cases, town councils avoided the question by ignoring the law and allowing still-functioning *repúblicas* to administer even the *bienes de comunidad*. In other cases, town councils tried to collect rent from Indian peasants. In the District of Chilapa, town councils backed away from the most severe interpretations under pressure from the representatives of Indian villages. The town councils still claimed ownership of the affected lands, but they exempted the villagers from rent payments because villagers contributed labor for public works.²⁸

25. Estado de México, *Memoria* (1826), 12–13; *Ley dictada por el Congreso Constituyente del Estado de México para la organización de los cuerpos municipales del mismo Estado* (Mexico City: Imprenta a Cargo de Rivera, 1825), 4.

26. *Ley dictada por el Congreso Constituyente*, 29–31.

27. See the case of Tixtla in AHEM, *Epoca Independiente*, vol. 139, exp. 3.

28. See the reports from 1839 in ACDEM, *Expedientes*, 1840, lib. 102, exp. 142.

Centralism and Peasant Revolt in Chilapa

In Chilapa the introduction of municipalities in the 1820s dramatically increased tensions between the market town and the surrounding Indian villages. The dramatic shift in the institutional framework swept aside the numerous compromises and accommodations reached in past disputes. Changes in laws, institutions, and government personnel encouraged both individuals and villages to revive past disagreements in new forms. New decisions about the distribution of local political power also inevitably created dissent. The transition created not so much a new order unfavorable to any particular group as an unstable situation in which the different parties had to reestablish a balance of power using new laws, new institutions, and other weapons. Frequent and acrimonious disputes continued throughout the 1820s and early 1830s. The relevant laws and regulations were still open to interpretations that benefited at least the wealthier members of communities. Although such interpretations were not guaranteed, they remained possibilities, particularly given the competitive nature of national and state politics, as federalists and centralists controlled the state government for virtually equal amounts of time between 1828 and 1835.

The situation changed radically in the mid-1830s. The centralists obtained a much firmer grip on power and, despite some setbacks, managed to maintain control for most of the next ten years. In 1836 they drastically altered the institutional environment, replacing the federalist constitution and codifying many of the positions they had developed earlier.²⁹ They severely reduced the number of municipalities, allowing them only “in the departmental capitals, in the places where they existed in 1808, in those ports whose population is at least four thousand souls, and in the villages that in themselves without their surrounding area have eight thousand.”³⁰ This change wiped out the various rules under which many peasant communities had gained municipal status in the previous 15 years. The centralists also instituted an annual income requirement of one hundred pesos for suffrage, high enough to exclude peasants from elections.³¹

These changes eliminated any possibility that peasants could control

29. Barbara A. Tenenbaum and Josefina Z. Vázquez have recently called for more thorough study of the centralist period. See Tenenbaum, *Politics of Penury*, 42; and Vázquez, “Iglesia, ejército, y centralismo,” 205–29.

30. Mexico, Congreso Nacional, *Decreto para el arreglo interior de los departamentos* (Mexico City: Imprenta de Lara, 1837), 22.

31. The suffrage provision is found in the Siete Leyes, as reproduced in *Leyes fundamentales de México, 1808–1957*, by Felipe Tena Ramírez (Mexico City: Porrúa, 1957), 207. The local committees that regularly had estimated individual incomes for tax assessment in the previous 15 years had usually placed peasants’ income at 78 pesos annually. See AGN, *Ayuntamientos*, vol. 242, and *Gobernación*, vol. 149, exp. 12.

local government or even obtain concessions in exchange for their electoral support. They did not, however, eliminate authorities' need to collect information and implement orders in the hundreds of peasant communities that dotted the countryside. Thus, the prefects appointed by departmental governors in turn designated unsalaried local officials known as *jueces de paz*, or justices of the peace.³² Prefects often named popular or respected local residents to this office. Popular justices were more likely to be able to persuade people to respect government orders without the costly and often ineffective use of force. Some prefects even allowed communities to name their own justices, subject to confirmation. Nevertheless, prefects deviated from this pattern when they stood to gain power, and sometimes named private farmers, merchants, or even hacienda administrators as justices. In this new system villages maintained de facto autonomy only when prefects had little incentive to impose their will.

Centralists in the Department of Mexico had long been concerned by what they saw as Indian peasants' propensity for harassing "neighboring landowners by perpetually promoting lawsuits over land and water." They issued an 1838 law under which villages could litigate only through the *síndico*, the official legal representative of their municipality. In areas that had no municipalities, the law allowed the village *jueces* of a former municipality to meet and name a representative. In each case the prefect's permission was needed to spend money on legal action.³³

The centralists also drastically increased the tax burden on peasants. In the 1820s and 1830s, most of Guerrero's peasants paid an annual personal tax of 0.75 pesos for municipal expenses. An 1841 law added a graduated income tax for which peasants paid 1.5 pesos a year. In 1842 the income tax was replaced with the *capitación*, an annual head tax of 1.5 pesos. The new tax added to the earlier personal tax raised the peasant's annual tax bill to 2.25 pesos, an amount slightly higher than the colonial tribute.

Several dimensions of the centralist project directly affected Chilapa's peasantry. Reducing the number of municipalities and introducing income requirements for suffrage limited peasants' political power. In addition, peasants now needed the approval of local authorities before litigating. Combined, these measures exposed peasant resources to the local wealthy in ways the introduction of municipalities had not. Higher personal taxes also represented a significant new burden. Together these cen-

32. *Decreto para el arreglo interior*, 17, 29.

33. The quotation is from Estado de México, *Memoria* (1835), 37. This document also contains the proposal for the law of 1838, which was issued with some modifications. See ACDEM, Expedientes, 1838, lib. 94, exp. 170; 1840, lib. 101, exp. 101, lib. 103, exp. 225; 1841, lib. 113, exp. 443.

tralist innovations set the stage for the rebellions that rocked Guerrero in the early 1840s.

The leading families of the town of Chilapa had supported the centralists since the late 1820s. The codification of centralist principles after 1835 proved a generous reward. The only remaining town council in the district was that of Chilapa itself. The local merchants and private farmers quickly used the new income requirements for suffrage to strengthen their hold on the municipality, giving them effective control of the local courts. Aided by a tight web of kinship and business interests, the local elite began to “settle” longstanding land disputes in its own favor.³⁴

The most notorious and important case involved the *mayorazgo* or *cacicazgo* of Guerrero, which had originated in the seventeenth-century attempts of an Indian noble family named Guerrero to institutionalize its land and tribute rights. The family became Hispanicized and its *cacicazgo*, or chiefdom, was officially converted into a *mayorazgo*, or entailment. By the mid-eighteenth century the heirs had left the district, but they continued to receive income from Chilapa. Their holdings included scattered pieces of land rented to white and mestizo farmers, a small sugar mill, and the rights to tribute from seven villages. Apparently the origin of the *mayorazgo*'s tribute rights in pre-Hispanic custom allowed those rights to survive the abolition of the *encomienda* system, the underpinning of most private tribute payments in New Spain.³⁵

In 1838 the Guerrero family sold the *mayorazgo* to Manuel Herrera, one of the wealthiest men in Chilapa. Herrera was a merchant who had rented several area landholdings before buying the *mayorazgo*. Son of a local colonial official, he had fought for the royalists during the War of Independence and then had become a tax collector. He also filled various municipal offices in Chilapa, rising to mayor by 1841.³⁶

The *mayorazgo* was the largest landholding in the area. Its transfer from absentee owners to a politically powerful local resident was bound to increase tensions in an already confused and arcane land tenure system. The *mayorazgo* had also been subject to boundary clashes with several

34. *Ibid.*, 1840, lib. 101, exp. 101, fols. 1–4; HDP, roll 75, HD23.4957.

35. The evolution of the Guerrero family is traced in Guillermo Fernández de Recas, *Mayorazgos de la Nueva España* (Mexico City: Univ. Nacional Autónoma de México, 1965), 51–65. The *cacicazgo* itself is more thoroughly detailed in Moisés Santos Carrera and Jesús Alvarez Hernández, *Historia de la cuestión agraria mexicana: Estado de Guerrero, épocas prehispánica y colonial* (Chilpancingo: Univ. Autónoma de Guerrero, 1988), 93–97. Details on the eighteenth century are found in AGN, Vínculos, vol. 74, exp. 10, vol. 75, exp. 6.

36. For the father, Ignacio Herrera, see AGN, Archivo Histórico de Hacienda, vol. 466, exp. 10. For Manuel Herrera see *ibid.*, vol. 171, vol. 172, exp. 10, *Historia*, vol. 293, fol. 148, *Civil*, vol. 639, exp. 2; AGNDF, Notary. 289, Sept. 28, 1836; Juan Alvarez, *El General Juan Alvarez a sus conciudadanos* (Mexico City: Imprenta de Ignacio Cumplido, 1841), 9–10.

Indian communities as well as with other landowners. More dramatically, the bill of sale specified that along with the measured and assessed lands of the mayorazgo the sale included “all the lands on which are found the villages of Jocutla, Nancintla, Tioxintla, and Colotepec, which all belong to the cacicazgo.”³⁷

Behind this simple phrase lay a startling claim. Herrera and the Guerrero family were asserting that these villages’ tribute payments to the cacicazgo indicated that they were settled on land belonging to the cacicazgo. Several factors made this a particularly incendiary claim. First, the mayorazgo’s own records specify that the sums paid during the colonial period represented tribute, not rent.³⁸ Second, the mayorazgo had never before claimed these lands. Third, even the tribute the villages had paid was abolished at independence, along with colonial tribute paid to the state. Fourth, the wording of the bill of sale makes clear that the claim was not limited to woods and pasture or even *bienes de comunidad* already rented out for revenue. Much of the land at stake was composed of *tierras de repartimiento*, the lands each family cultivated for its own needs.

Manuel Herrera clearly bought the mayorazgo with the intent of using his local political power to revive and strengthen neglected rights and claims. His move to stretch those claims to include the ownership of four entire villages emphasizes how strong his position seemed to be. The centralist reform of local government had left Chilapa’s elite in clear control of local political power. They could even legally deny villages the right to litigate. These men also fully expected the support of their political allies in the departmental government. In addition to backing Herrera, Chilapa’s leading families colluded in devising their own “solutions” to several long-standing land disputes. They controlled not only the town council but also other local offices. For example, Pedro Domínguez Esquivel, prefect from the mid-1830s through the end of 1840, was also an interested party in the disputes.³⁹

The elite’s confidence only increased in light of the political situation. Nationally, federalism was in retreat, thrown into disrepute by the political instability of the late 1820s and early 1830s. Regionally, Juan Alvarez, leader of the federalists, had retired to private life in 1835 after a last-ditch attempt to stop the centralist reaction. Locally, the centralists did not expect that the area’s peasants could unite, especially because the land claims affected only a few villages, and those villages had a long and acrimonious history of boundary conflicts with each other.

37. AGNDF, Notary 169, Sept. 6, 1838.

38. AGN, Vínculos, vol. 74, exp. 10, vol. 75, exp. 6.

39. ACDEM, Expedientes, 1840, lib. 101, exp. 101, fol. 4.

The local wealthy, including Herrera, were not interested in dispossessing Indian peasants to plant cash crops, as the area was remote and Mexico's economy was still relatively weak.⁴⁰ Instead, Chilapa's notables began demanding that villagers pay rent on lands they had long cultivated as their own. The communities immediately began collecting funds for legal action, but the town council, led by Herrera and the prefect, Domínguez Esquivel, blocked them. The council invoked the centralist law that required villages to be represented by the town council's own lawyer and any lawsuit to be approved by the prefect.⁴¹

In August 1840, Chilapa's authorities ordered Miguel Francisco, *juez de paz* of Xocutla, one of the villages Herrera claimed, to round up the village elders to pay their rent. He refused and was imprisoned in Chilapa. Francisco escaped and demanded his reinstatement as justice because, as he put it, "the village saw fit to name me." In response, Joaquín de Mier, Chilapa's *juez*, insisted that the land belonged to Herrera and that the Indians of Xocutla were "enemies of order."⁴²

The villagers solicited the intervention of Juan Alvarez, leader of coastal Guerrero's federalists. During fierce conflicts between federalists and centralists in the early 1830s, Alvarez had sought allies in the villages by supporting them in struggles over elections and municipal boundaries.⁴³ Despite his official retirement from politics, in 1840 Alvarez recommended lawyers and lent the villages money for legal fees. He also appealed to the departmental governor on their behalf.⁴⁴

In January 1841 the new prefect of Chilapa, José Vicente Villada, asked Alvarez to send his secretary, Manuel Primo Tapia, to meet with the Indians. Primo Tapia, himself a former prefect of Chilapa who spoke some Nahuatl, was so popular with village leaders that a delegation of elders from 13 villages also requested his intervention.⁴⁵ Primo Tapia began intensive negotiations. He persuaded those villagers who had fled the authorities to

40. For an alternative interpretation of the land disputes see John M. Hart, "The 1840s Southwestern Mexico Peasants' War: Conflict in a Transitional Society," in Katz, *Riot, Rebellion, and Revolution*, 239–68. Hart attributes the conflicts to an aggressive expansion of large estates fueled by commercial export agriculture. This region had no export agriculture, however, and private landholdings were fragmented and economically weak. See also n. 7.

41. ACDEM, Expedientes, 1838, lib. 94, exp. 170, 1840, lib. 101, exp. 101, lib. 103, exp. 225, 1841, lib. 113, exp. 443; AGNDF, Notary 417, Feb. 22, Apr. 7, and May 2, 1840.

42. ACDEM, Expedientes, 1840, lib. 104, exp. 272, fols. 2–6.

43. AHM, Epoca Independiente, vol. 38, exp. 19, vol. 149, exp. 14, vol. 49, exp. 31, vol. 155, exp. 10, vol. 164, exp. 9, vol. 173, exp. 1, vol. 173, exp. 2, vol. 180, exp. 2; Control Público, vol. 18, exp. 56; AGN, Gobernación, vol. 158, exp. 16; AGNDF, Notary 532, Nov. 20, 1829.

44. Alvarez to Governor, Department of Mexico, Apr. 5, 1841, in Alvarez, *El General Juan Alvarez a sus conciudadanos*, 43–44.

45. *Ibid.*, 6–7, 19–20, 25.

return. He also persuaded the town council and *juez* of Chilapa to let the villages choose their own legal representative. They chose a young lawyer named Miguel Salgado.⁴⁶

Unfortunately, the local notables were less eager to rely on the legal system. They forged a letter from a fictitious Indian leader they called Juan Antonio Pizotzin to the leaders of villages in central Guerrero. The letter proposed an alliance to recover by force the Indian lands usurped by Cortés. It insulted Nicolás Bravo, the most important regional politician, and specifically threatened his property. The fraudulent letter, obviously intended to keep the disputes out of the courts, was also notably inconsistent in language and style with later letters produced by village leaders.⁴⁷

Chilapa's authorities used the letter as a pretext for repression. They arrested Salgado, the Indians' legal representative, and sent the town militia to search the villages for "Juan Antonio Pizotzin" and other alleged plotters. Large numbers of villagers hid in the woods. Many village elders sought protection 90 kilometers away on Juan Alvarez' hacienda, where they slept in the open and received regular rations of *totopo*, or dried tortilla, from the women of their villages.⁴⁸

Alvarez' complaints to the departmental governor received a lukewarm response. In April 1841 the governor ordered the authorities to stop persecuting the Indian peasants but reiterated the policy that legal action must be pursued through the *síndicos* where town councils existed, and through representatives chosen by the *jueces de paz* in other cases.⁴⁹ The governor's ruling was open to interpretation, since it was unclear whether Chilapa's town council had jurisdiction over the district's villages. Nevertheless, both the landowners and the villagers took the governor's ruling as an excuse to back down. The peasants nominated a new representative, Ignacio Rayon, and continued to prepare their lawsuit.

Tensions continued, however, and in early 1842 violence finally erupted. The spark issued from a dispute between the village of Quechultenango and a neighboring landowner, Rafael Gutiérrez. Gutiérrez not only demanded that peasants pay rent on lands they cultivated, he diverted the spring that fed the settlement. The situation was exacerbated by the role of Gutiérrez' foreman, Gabriel de la Torre, who was also *juez de paz* of Quechultenango. When several villagers refused to pay rent, Gutiérrez sent de la Torre and other employees to remove their corn and burn their huts. Four villagers ambushed the landowner's men and

46. *Ibid.*, 19–25.

47. A copy of the letter is in *ibid.*, 42.

48. *Ibid.*, 26, 44–45.

49. *Ibid.*, 46.

drove them off. Two days later, Gutiérrez beat a peasant boy caught collecting firewood on the disputed land. That night, villagers attacked the landowner and his men, killing Gutiérrez, de la Torre, and de la Torre's brother.⁵⁰

The other villages of the district rapidly joined the rebellion, and rebels ambushed militia troops in the surrounding hills. In April and May they sacked several farms and approached the outskirts of Chilapa itself. Alvarez persuaded the rebels to return to their homes but could not induce them to give up their weapons. The fragile peace was shaken when a landowner wounded a peasant after an argument about the causes of the rebellion, and other landowners taunted the peasants, saying that regular army troops were coming to exterminate the villagers.⁵¹ The renewal of hostilities seemed imminent.

Until early 1843, peasant political unrest was confined to the villages of Chilapa. The villagers outnumbered the townspeople but were too poorly armed to take any point defended by the town's militia. The peasants had a powerful local ally in Alvarez, but the centralists in departmental and national offices disliked and distrusted him. Although Alvarez had no great love or respect for those in power, he was unwilling to use armed force against them without a serious chance of success. Under these circumstances the Indian peasants of Chilapa seemed doomed to fail.

Centralism, Taxes, and Peasant Alliances

The circumstances that favored the landowners, however, did not last. The first break came when the government of Antonio López de Santa Anna began an aggressive effort to collect the new *capitación*. The new tax was unpopular everywhere, but in Guerrero it vastly expanded the scope of peasant resistance. Taxation surpassed land as the issue that peasant demands most often stressed. Localized resistance to landowners grew into a regional effort to change a national government policy. The number of rebels multiplied, and the government itself became the object of

50. Juan Alvarez, *Manifiesto que dirige a la nación el General Juan Alvarez con motivos de la representación calumniosa que unos emigrados de la Villa de Chilapa hicieron al la augusta Cámara de Diputados en febrero último* (Mexico City: Ignacio Cumplido, 1845), reproduced in *El General don Juan Alvarez. Ensayo biográfico seguido de una selección de documentos*, by Daniel Muñoz y Pérez (Mexico City: Academia Literaria, 1959), 283–85; Carlos María de Bustamante, *Apuntes para la historia del gobierno del General don Antonio López de Santa Anna* (Mexico City: Imprenta Lara, 1845), 58–59; RPP, roll 78, docs. 1267, 1272.

51. RPP, roll 78, docs. 1289, 1297, 1300, 1306, 1313, 1328; Miguel Domínguez, *La erección del Estado de Guerrero: antecedentes históricos* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1949), 43; Alvarez, *Manifiesto*, 287; HDP, roll 75, HD23.4957.

their ire. At first, peasant activity was directed toward removing the tax. Nevertheless, the tax was closely associated with the centralists, and it reinforced already unpopular centralist measures that concentrated rural political power. Eventually, the peasant rebels joined national coalitions against the centralists.

In February 1843, Chilapa's peasant rebels directed a letter to the *jueces de paz* of villages in neighboring districts, inviting them to join Chilapa's peasants in armed resistance to the *capitación*.⁵² Villages rebelled in the District of Tlapa to the east and in Tierra Caliente to the west. In both areas, rebels collected arms and ammunition and refused to acknowledge official orders. In Tierra Caliente they killed tax collectors. In Tlapa the *jueces de paz* refused to collect the *capitación*, and peasants attacked the district capital.⁵³

The rebellion's spread vastly increased the pressure on local authorities. On May 31, 1843, they signed a treaty with the Chilapa rebels, represented by Diego Alvarez, Juan's son. The treaty conceded amnesty to the rebels and set up a panel to settle the land disputes, with one member nominated by the peasants, one by the landowners, and one by the first two arbitrators. One month later the rebels and the militia exchanged prisoners.⁵⁴ The treaty did not even mention the *capitación* and did not cover the peasants of other districts. Sporadic fighting continued in Tlapa and the Tierra Caliente, and in both areas many villages refused to accept government orders.

Even in Chilapa, the peace established by the treaty was uneasy. Both sides named their arbitrators, and the two agreed on a third in early 1844. The crucial third arbitrator, however, resigned over his pay. Lacking another candidate, the first two postponed the project. Worse yet, the townspeople harassed villagers who entered the town on business. In return, the villagers refused to send their *jueces* to Chilapa for the prefect's approval.⁵⁵

In April 1844 Juan Alvarez met with the judges and elders of the various villages and counseled them to avoid any confrontation that would derail the arbitration. His efforts were in vain. The landowners continued to ha-

52. The letter, dated Feb. 22, is reproduced in "Colección de documentos y apuntes para la historia del Estado de Guerrero," ed. Miguel Ortega (Unpublished ms., Mexico City, 1948), 7:313–14.

53. AGN, Gobernación, vol. 269, exp. 10, vol. 269, exp. 12, fols. 15, 23–24; Reina, *Las rebeliones campesinas*, 100–101.

54. BN, Fondo Alvarez, carp. 2, doc. 125, carp. 1, docs. 72, 87; RPP, roll 78, doc. 1399. The treaty is found in AGN, Gobernación, vol. 269, exp. 12, fols. 28–30, and published in Reina, *Las rebeliones campesinas*, 103–4.

55. Alvarez, *Manifiesto*, 288–91; ACDEM, Expedientes, 1843, lib. 129, exp. 295, fols. 1–3; BN, Fondo Alvarez, carp. 1, doc. 66; Ortega, "Colección de documentos," 7:374.

rass the villagers, and peasant leaders from neighboring Tlapa pressured their counterparts in Chilapa to join them in resisting the *capitación*. In August Santa Anna renewed orders to collect the tax.⁵⁶

On September 22, Miguel Casarrubias, a mestizo ranchero from a previously uninvolved village, issued a call to oppose the *capitación*. His emissaries quickly obtained support from peasants in Tlapa, Chilapa, and Tierra Caliente. Casarrubias, claiming to lead ten thousand rebels, invited Alvarez to join him, but Alvarez instead asked him to end the rebellion before events got out of hand. Casarrubias and three thousand peasants besieged and captured the town of Chilapa in October. The terrified landowners fled to exile in Mexico City.⁵⁷

The authorities could not regain control of the region, but Casarrubias was assassinated in November. One week later, several important local peasant leaders publicly adopted the Plan de Jalisco, a national initiative that criticized Santa Anna for, among other things, excessive taxation. The Jalisco movement led to a coup that drove Santa Anna from Mexico City. Nevertheless, Santa Anna kept a force under arms, and for several weeks it seemed likely that he would try to regain power.⁵⁸

Juan Alvarez also backed the movement against Santa Anna; he may even have made clandestine overtures to the peasants in November. In any event, his later, more public dealings suggest the context in which the rebels officially joined the anti-Santa Anna coalition. On December 24 Alvarez addressed a group of peasant leaders from Chilapa, and on December 25 he sent a lengthy proclamation to their villages. Alvarez agreed that the *capitación* was unjust and congratulated the rebels for seconding the Jalisco movement against the “tyrant” Santa Anna. He argued that the success of the movement would reduce their suffering. Alvarez then organized a thousand of the rebels to join a force he was taking to defend Mexico City against Santa Anna.⁵⁹

The expected hostilities between the ousted Santa Anna and the newly installed government never materialized, and the local troops soon returned home. The new national government commissioned Alvarez to

56. Alvarez, *Manifiesto*, 52–53.

57. Casarrubias’ proclamation is found in Ortega, “Colección de documentos,” 7:393–94. For his correspondence with Alvarez see Reina, *Rebeliones campesinas*, 111–12. See also AGN, Gobernación, vol. 285, exp. 2, fols 1–54; ACDEM, Expedientes, 1844, lib. 135, exp. 135, fol. 2; BN, Fondo Alvarez, carp. 1, doc. 90, carp. 2, doc. 122.

58. On Casarrubias’ death see the report in Alvarez, *Manifiesto*, 428–29. The Jalisco plan is found in *The Political Plans of Mexico*, comp. Thomas B. Davis and Amado Ricón Virulegio (Lanham: Univ. Press of America, 1987), 417–18. For national events see Michael P. Costeloe, *The Central Republic in Mexico, 1835–1846: “Hombres de Bien” in the Age of Santa Anna* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993), 249–60.

59. Alvarez, *Manifiesto*, 345–47, 429–30; RPP, roll 78, doc. 1534.

pacify the villages still under arms in Tlapa and the Oaxacan Mixteca. Alvarez toured the area, calling the *jueces* and elders of the villages to meetings at which they swore allegiance to the new government and Alvarez exempted them from the *capitación*. Alvarez stressed the difference between the new supreme government and the one that had imposed the tax, adding that the villagers were not the only ones who had suffered that particular “calamity.” The “entire Nation” had, and for that reason those afflicted had overthrown the “tyrant.”⁶⁰

The villages of Chilapa and the neighboring areas were relatively quiet through most of 1845. The *capitación* issue had been settled to the villagers’ satisfaction. Chilapa’s landowners had emigrated to Mexico City after the rebels’ 1844 victory, leaving the peasants in possession of the disputed resources. From their exile the landowners complained bitterly, but the government of José Joaquín Herrera was not interested.⁶¹ Herrera, a moderate federalist, welcomed the support of Alvarez and perhaps even that of the area’s peasants.⁶²

Mariano Paredes overthrew Herrera at the end of 1845. Paredes, a conservative centralist, toyed with the possibility of reviving a monarchy.⁶³ The Paredes regime was quickly opposed in Guerrero. A number of villages in Tlapa revolted in late January 1846 against what they called a “tyranny more detestable than that of Santa Anna.” They explicitly demanded the return of federalism.⁶⁴ Their counterparts in Chilapa soon joined them. In April, Alvarez himself renounced the government. In May the garrison of distant Guadalajara also rebelled. In August the Mexico City garrison joined the anti-Paredes forces, and an interim regime began preparing for the restoration of the 1824 federalist constitution.⁶⁵

Peasant Federalism?

By 1846, Guerrero’s peasant rebels clearly had taken a position in national politics. They now sought national political change as a means of achieving

60. The quotations are from fol. 54v of Alvarez’ report, AGN, Gobernación, leg. 208(1), exp. 1(7) 52–59.

61. On the state of the land conflict see RPP, roll 78, docs. 1583, 1606; roll 79, doc. 1783. For the landowners’ lobbying see their “representation” in Ortega, “Colección de documentos,” 2:136–46; and Bustamante, *No hay peor sordo*. Alvarez’ *Manifiesto* is his lengthy reply.

62. An excellent account of the Herrera administration is Costeloe, *Central Republic*, 262–82.

63. The best account of the monarchist effort and Paredes’ flirtations with it is found in Soto, *La conspiración monárquica*, esp. 49–53 and 126–28.

64. *Diario oficial* (Mexico City), May 4 and 5, 1846.

65. Costeloe, *Central Republic*, 292–97; Soto, *La conspiración monárquica*, 126, 193; AGN, Gobernación, leg. 208(1), exp. 4.

their immediate goals of land and tax relief. The rebels repudiated the conservative Paredes regime and issued one of the first calls for its overthrow. They fought alone for several months before even Alvarez joined them. What drove these impoverished country people to exert themselves to change the regime in distant Mexico City? The clues are limited, but something about their motives can be inferred from two types of sources. The first is the peasant rebel actions themselves. The second consists of the documents the rebel leaders produced to communicate demands both to other villages and to nonpeasants. Combined, the evidence suggests that the rebels' attachment to federalism was based on more than the paternalistic efforts of federalist leaders to solve peasant problems. Peasants seem to have developed a popular version of federalism that emphasized local political autonomy to protect their resources.

The rebels' actions demonstrate their concern with local government. When they finally succeeded in taking the town of Chilapa in October 1844, they removed the local justice, Joaquín de Mier, notorious for his bias toward the landowners. They replaced him with Juan Prisciliano Castro, a former *juez de paz* of Mochitlán whom several villages had earlier nominated as their legal representative. The rebels imprisoned and humiliated Pedro Domínguez Esquivel, the longtime prefect of Chilapa, forcing him to beg the town's poor for food.⁶⁶ More important, the rebel villages continually chose their own *jueces de paz*. Thus, although technically representatives of the central government on the village level, the *jueces* became, in effect, elected village leaders. Vast numbers of rebel documents passed to and from the *jueces*.⁶⁷ The right to choose their own judges was dear to many villages. In January 1846, for instance, the villagers of Tlacoapa rioted and killed their parish priest during a heated discussion of village elections.⁶⁸

The local wealthy often accused the rebels of usurping government authority. The rebels issued orders to various villages, drafting men and arms, and the peasants forced members of the local elite to contribute manual labor for public works, a duty long performed by Indian peasants under the elite-dominated town governments. Throughout Mexico the inconvenience of providing labor for public works was one of the most common themes in disputes between head towns and outlying villages. The peasants' delight at that turnabout can only be imagined. The testi-

66. ACDEM, Expedientes, lib. 139, exp. 138; Ortega, "Colección de documentos," 7:376, 485–88.

67. Ortega, "Colección de documentos," 2:138; AGN, Gobernación, vol. 269, exp. 12, fol. 48, vol. 285, exp. 2, fols. 29–29v, 60–60v, 86, 89–90, vol. 323, exp. 3, vol. 324, exp. 4, fols. 151–151v, exp. 5.

68. AGN, Gobernación, vol. 323, exp. 3; RPP, roll 79, docs. 1784, 1910.

mony left by the local elite regarding the fall of Chilapa paints an especially vivid picture of a world reversed, where the “respectable” folk were subject to ridicule as well as loss of wealth. The elites’ loss of honor extended to their daughters, some of whom were raped, apparently in revenge for numerous rapes that government troops had committed in a rebel village a few days earlier.⁶⁹

As suggestive as these descriptions are, they do not provide direct evidence of how peasant concerns with local power came to be tied to national politics. Fortunately, the peasant rebels also produced dozens of documents, and dozens more were addressed to the rebels by regional politicians. While the relationship between the content of the documents and the motivations of rank-and-file rebels cannot be taken for granted, the documents clearly indicate that village leaders, at least, came to associate federalism with large numbers of municipalities, based on Indian villages; wide suffrage, allowing peasants to control those town councils; and low taxes.

In the early 1840s, peasant rebels produced numerous “plans,” or proclamations, each setting forth peasant complaints and ending with a call to arms. These proclamations, directed at potential allies, were disseminated widely. Often the intended audience included social groups and individuals outside the peasantry. Yet the plans also were usually passed from village to village, which suggests that they were used to form and strengthen alliances among villages. Often a single copy was addressed to as many as 30 different villages. In each village it was reproduced by hand before being sent on to its next destination. These remarkable documents show that by the 1840s, the peasants of Guerrero had adapted for their own purposes one of the most common forms of elite political expression in postindependence Mexico.⁷⁰ Most of the coups and civil wars that characterized national politics began with the publication of exactly this kind of document, in which the politicians and generals who led a movement set forth its aims to attract potential allies.

The peasants’ use of plans to justify resistance and gather support is very instructive. Mexico’s Indian peasants produced nothing similar during the colonial period; instead, their written political expression was confined to legal complaints. Indian peasants did not produce proclamations

69. The elite’s complaint, published in Mexico City, is found in Ortega, “Colección de documentos,” 2:136–46. See also HDP, roll 75, HD23.4957; AGN, Gobernación, vol. 285, exp. 2, fols. 54, 95v; Muñoz y Pérez, *El General don Juan Alvarez*, 40; Alvarez, *Manifiesto*, 339: 424–27.

70. See Barbara A. Tenenbaum, “‘They Went Thataway’: The Evolution of the *Pro-nunciamento*, 1821–1856,” in *Patterns of Contention in Mexican History*, ed. Jaime E. Rodríguez O. (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1992), esp. 191.

or plans during the War of Independence, either. The insurgency was promoted by village priests and urban intellectuals who joined the rebels in the provinces. In the 1820s and 1830s, Guerrero's politicians directed numerous plans to the villages; but even when participating in regional civil wars, villagers did not produce their own propaganda. Peasants did not begin to use this kind of tool until 1843, 20 years after it had become common in Mexico.

The key to both the authorship and the readership of these documents is that not all villagers were illiterate. The region had a long tradition of village schools. In 1840, schools existed in 24 Indian villages as well as the 3 largest towns. Each of the small villages had an average of 22 pupils. The relatively small numbers of students imply that literacy was not widespread. Yet the evidence suggests that education was not without proponents in the villages. Instruction continued even as villages violently opposed the government, and the rebels named schoolteachers to replace those who had fled the fighting. It seems likely that village schools were supported by the wealthier villagers, who were better able to forgo their children's labor. Village elites were also more likely to see schooling as economically useful. Wealthier males often traveled widely as traders and muleteers during the agricultural slack season, and this image coincides with the subjects taught in school. Judging from school inventories and book orders, village curricula were dominated by reading, writing, catechism, and "commercial arithmetic."⁷¹

The hypothesis that the proclamations were written by and for village elites is consistent both with what little is known about village politics and with the documents themselves. Although little specific information exists for Guerrero, in general Mexican villages were economically stratified, and wealthier villagers dominated village politics. The documents are written in Spanish, a language that was probably intelligible only to wealthier and more traveled peasants. Most villages in the Chilapa district spoke Nahuatl, but in next-door Tlapa speakers of Mixtec, Tlapanec, or Amuzgo dominated many villages. Often the spelling and grammar of the documents suggest that Spanish was not the primary language of their authors, and usually the script itself would not win the author a clerk's post in Mexico City.⁷²

71. ACDEM, Expedientes, 1840, lib. 102, exp. 142, fols. 3–6, 25, lib. 104, exp. 279, fol. 6, lib. 106, exp. 288, fol. 7, 1841, lib. 115, exp. 600, fol. 1, 1844, lib. 132, exp. 124, fol. 3; AGN, Gobernación, vol. 285, exp. 2, fol. 95. Frans J. Schryer has found that in late nineteenth-century Hidalgo, wealthier peasants attended such schools. Schryer, *Ethnicity and Class Conflict in Rural Mexico* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1990), 96.

72. The comments of James Lockhart on this phenomenon are tantalizing. See Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central*

The hypothesis that the documents were often missives from village elites to the wealthy of other villages is also consistent with the timing of their appearance. Letters from the *jueces* of specific villages to those of other specific villages appeared before the first proclamations and continued to be common thereafter.⁷³ These letters, however, were usually directed to villages quite near their point of origin, villages that were direct neighbors or that may have been the sites of frequent visits for *tianguis*, or regional markets. The first proclamations appeared in 1843, precisely when the rebels of Chilapa, motivated by land disputes, were joined by rebels in Tlapa and other districts incensed by the *capitación*. The broadening of the movement required communication with faceless numbers of people who did not necessarily even speak the same native language. This in turn required a kind of communication directed to all potential allies, a form readily available in the “plans” that were already a staple of elite political discourse.

The documents show a definite change over time. Villages directed early documents to authorities, but soon one village was sending documents detailing specific grievances to potential allies in nearby villages. These limited attempts to change government policy were gradually replaced by calls to overthrow the government. This more ambitious project required the help of allies beyond the peasantry; and the most natural allies were the federalists, who had been excluded from national power for almost ten years. Eventually a specific federalist vocabulary crept into the “plans” of the villages. The whole process was virtually complete by April 1846, even as elite federalists issued their own calls to overthrow the government.

The process was accelerated by constant contact between the peasant rebels and the regional federalists led by Juan Alvarez. Alvarez had first intervened in political disputes between Chilapa’s elite and the villages in the early 1830s. In the early 1840s he had made a sustained effort to mediate the land conflict, and in late 1844 he had served as a contact between the villagers and the national alliance against Santa Anna. By early 1846 Alvarez was willing to issue a call for national political action based initially on an already existing peasant rebellion. Throughout, Alvarez kept in constant contact with village leaders, providing advice and legal support, presenting their complaints to the national government and national press, and eventually serving as an intermediary between the peasant rebels and nationally prominent federalists.

Mexico, Sixteenth Through Eighteenth Centuries (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1992), 321–23.

73. For an example see AGN, Gobernación, vol. 285, exp. 2, fol. 15.

The nature of the argument in these documents also evolved. Indian peasants had written to authorities for years, often with the help of legal representatives. These documents usually emphasized peasant obedience to authorities, although some contained veiled threats of disorder. As the Chilapa conflict developed in the late 1830s, the first peasant documents rather respectfully sought government intervention. The tone changed after authorities showed themselves firmly allied with the landowners. In May 1842, Juan de Nava, the village leader of Mochitlán, sent a letter to the subprefect alleging to have five hundred men under arms “to defend our rights.”⁷⁴

In February 1843 de Nava issued the first general “plan,” addressed to the judges of several unspecified villages. It asked them to join a military effort to eliminate the taxes that were “ruining all the villages.”⁷⁵ In July another plan, the “Directory of Afflictions,” was distributed among the villages of Tlapa. Significantly, it referred to three villages without official municipal status as “municipalities” and called for the establishment of a “municipal corps or a squad of volunteer soldiers of these municipalities and inhabitants.” It urged villages to refuse to pay taxes and demanded that the courts resolve all land disputes. This document invoked the Virgin of Guadalupe and, for the first time, referred to Indian peasants as “Mexicans.”⁷⁶ Earlier documents had used “sons of these villages” or “sons” to refer to the Indian peasants. It is probably no coincidence that the nationalist symbol and language surfaced first in Tlapa. Tlapa had supported much more guerrilla insurgent activity during the War of Independence.

In October 1843 a similar plan, titled “The plan with which the villages demand their rights,” was issued in Xonacatlán, a village in Tlapa. It asked for both the moderation of taxes and the recognition of Indian peasant land. Yet this plan is particularly notable for its frequent use of federalist rhetoric and its emphasis on political issues. It invokes “Ydalgo, Ayendes, Morelos, Galiana, and Guerrero” [*sic*] as the “first heroes of the *patria*.” It demands the expulsion of foreigners, an effort to appeal to regional federalists for whom the expulsion had been an important issue in the 1820s and 1830s. The plan emphasizes the sacrifices made by “our republic” in fighting for independence, and it associates the current government with that of Fernando VII. It ends with “Death to the despot General Santa Anna and his miserable slaves,” using epithets of despotism and slavery that had been used prominently both by insurgents during the War of Independence and federalists in the preceding two decades.

The October 1843 plan also contains some very thought-provoking lan-

74. Ortega, “Colección de documentos,” 7:284–85.

75. *Ibid.*, 7:313–14.

76. *Ibid.*, 7:356.

guage on government and politics. It calls for “reform of the government,” adding, “the sovereignty of the *pueblos* asks that republican law rule, not whims.”⁷⁷ The spelling and grammar of this document and those of February and July suggest that their authors were peasants, and probably bilingual peasants at that. To relatively wealthy and well-educated people in the Mexico of the 1840s, the word *pueblos* usually meant peoples, as in “national peoples,” and *republican* meant pertaining to a government in which a body of equal citizens exercised its sovereignty through elected representatives. Yet these words may have had very different meanings for Indian peasants. Peasants were familiar with both words from common colonial legal usage, but in that usage *república* and *pueblo* both referred to villages. *República* was also used to refer to the notion of a *república de indios*, a portion of society with a set of rights and duties separate from those of the *república de españoles*. Under those circumstances the phrase *republican law* may very well have meant both the law of the Mexican republic and the “law of the villages,” or even Indian law. In a similar way, the *sovereignty of the pueblos* may well have meant both popular sovereignty and the sovereignty of the villages. The very ambiguity of these phrases undoubtedly facilitated the efforts of village leaders and perhaps even their followers to imagine an alliance both with other peasants and with people of other social groups. Significantly, José de Abarca, a peasant leader imprisoned for his part in the 1843 rebellion, presented the 1843 document in 1845 after the fall of Santa Anna as proof that he had been imprisoned “for desiring the system now established.”⁷⁸

In September 1844, when Miguel Casarrubias, the mestizo *ranchero* and militia officer, organized his alliance of villages against the *capitación*, his proclamations concentrated on the tax and avoided comment on either local or national government. Generally, their tone is markedly softer than that of earlier documents. Casarrubias was not an Indian peasant, and he wanted to minimize confrontation with the government. There is even a significant difference between the proclamation Casarrubias sent to Indian villages and the one he addressed to the authorities. The former contains the phrase *Death to the Government*, which is very close to language often used in colonial village riots.⁷⁹

The peasant rebels of Chilapa pronounced for the elite Plan de Jalisco in November 1844. The plan calls for the repeal of extraordinary taxes imposed by Santa Anna, but in other ways it seems remote from peasant concerns. It does not use any of the symbols and phrases of regional or even

77. See n. 2.

78. ACDEM, Expedientes, 1845, lib. 142, exp. 241, fol. 1.

79. Ortega, “Colección de documentos,” 7:393–94; AGN, Gobernación, vol. 285, exp. 2, fol. 37; Alvarez, *Manifiesto*, 339, 430–31.

national federalist discourse.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, as Juan Alvarez organized Indian peasants to support the new government, he stressed precisely those symbols and terms, associating the fallen Santa Anna regime and its unjust taxes with “tyranny” and the desire to “enslave the fatherland.”⁸¹ Soon the rebels in Tlapa were reportedly carrying a banner depicting the Virgin of Guadalupe.⁸²

All of these threads intertwined in the 1846 rebellions against the centralist Paredes regime. In January, a document called the “Plan of the Villages” appeared in the Tlapa district. It accused the Paredes government of bringing “a tyranny more detestable than that of Santa Anna” and ended with “Long Live the *patria* and Death Forever to Despotism.” The officer who captured this document claimed that it had been written by Juan Alvarez’ son, Diego. Even if this were true, a February letter from the peasant leader Domingo Santiago to the judges of a Tlapa village used nearly identical rhetoric, urging them to “shake off the tyrannical yoke of the government” and ending with “God and Federation.” A similar letter in March began with the slogan “Federation or Death—Long Live America and Death Forever to Tyranny.” Its author explicitly denied the charge that the rebellion was a caste war and called for the moderation of taxes. Ominously, it ended with the admonishment, “The day has arrived in which we Indians will punish whoever opposes our law.”⁸³

All these documents appeared before Alvarez made a more general call to revolt in April 1846. His proclamation condemned the Paredes regime for conspiring to establish a foreign monarchy. It demanded that a new constitutional congress be elected under the rules that had resulted in the federalist constitution of 1824. Alvarez tied the Paredes regime to tyranny and Spanish colonialism.⁸⁴ The language and imagery clearly replicate that of the less polished peasant documents that had circulated in previous weeks. The similarity may be due to the activities of Alvarez’ agents, who were accused of writing the earlier documents. Nevertheless, even after Alvarez began his revolt, documents addressed to peasants and those produced by known peasant leaders continued to use the same images.⁸⁵ More directly, a government spy reported that peasants referred to government

80. Ortega, “Colección de documentos,” 7:468–70; Davis and Ricón Virulegio, *Political Plans of Mexico*, 417–18; Mexico, Cámara de Diputados, *Planes en la nación mexicana* (Mexico City: Cámara de Diputados, 1987), 4:222–24.

81. Alvarez, *Manifiesto*, 339, 429–30; AGN, Gobernación, leg. 208(1), exp. 1(7), fol. 54v.

82. AGN, Gobernación, vol. 285, exp. 2, fols. 76–82v.

83. *Diario oficial*, May 4, 5, and 6, 1846; AGN, Gobernación leg. 208(1), exp. 4, fol. 559.

84. AGN, Gobernación, vol. 324, exp. 5, fols. 46–51v; *Diario oficial*, May 10, 1846; AHM, Epoca Independiente, vol. 169, exp. 11, fols. 38, 40–43v.

85. See AHM, Epoca Independiente, vol. 169, exp. 11, fol. 109; AGN, Gobernación, vol. 324, exp. 4, fols. 34–36v, exp. 5, fols. 70–70v, 145–45v, 151–51v.

troops as *gachupines*, a pejorative for Spaniards that was also used in the proclamations. In nearby Tierra Caliente, rebellious peasants killed a local Spaniard in July 1846. All of this suggests that by 1846 no sharp distinction remained between the political language and imagery of regional federalist politicians and that of peasants, or at least the village elites.⁸⁶

The peasant version of federalism that evolved was characterized by its insistence on local political autonomy through large numbers of municipalities and elected *jueces de paz*. The achievement of local political autonomy implied wide suffrage to prevent elite manipulation of elections. The peasant version also stressed low taxes. It picked up on several features of regional federalism, including the glorification of the independence struggle of 1810 to 1821 and the attribution of local problems to foreign or specifically Spanish domination.

Many Mexican federalists did not share this vision, and were no doubt horrified by the deeds the Indian peasants of Guerrero committed in the name of federalism. A few, however, were quite receptive to the peasants' interpretation. The most important was Juan Alvarez, who had been involved with the peasants since the early 1830s. Many of the choices Alvarez made were products of a strong instinct for political survival and a continuing search for solutions to Mexico's national crisis. Nevertheless, Alvarez consistently and very publicly expressed concern for peasant problems. He shared the peasants' desire for local political autonomy under locally elected officials, which he felt would cement the peasants' allegiance to republicanism in general.⁸⁷

Conclusions

Alvarez had used his alliance with the peasants to help bring federalism back into power on the national level. Yet the peasants had also used Alvarez and the federalists. By 1847 they had achieved the demands articulated during the rebellions that began in 1842. The exodus of Chilapa's elite left the local peasants in control of the disputed tracts of land.⁸⁸ Authorities

86. AHM, *Epoca Independiente*, vol. 169, exp. 11, fol. 110; Ortega, "Colección de documentos," 8:239–43.

87. For Alvarez' positions see Alvarez, *El General Juan Alvarez a sus conciudadanos*, 43; idem, *Manifiesto*, 302–3; AGN, Gobernación, leg. 208(1), exp. 1(7), 52–59; BN, Fondo Alvarez, carp. 1, doc. 18; Ortega, "Colección de documentos," 8:13–17, 186–88; RPP, roll 79, docs. 1328, 1333, 1624, 1655, 1668, 1783; ACDEM, Expedientes, 1845, lib. 138, exp. 77.

88. They seem to have retained these lands at least through the 1880s. AGN, Gobernación, leg. 208(1), exp. 2(20), fols. 239v, 246–48; Ortega, "Colección de documentos," 8:56, 95–98; *Diario oficial*, May 14, 1846; AGN, Bienes Nacionalizados, 211/101/21, fol. 30. See also ASRA, Municipio Chilapa, Poblado Lamatzintla, 23:10228, Municipio Quechultenango, Poblados Nanzintla y Jocutla Bienes Comunales, 276.1/35, and Municipio Quechultenango, Poblado Teozintla Bienes Comunales, 276.1/2086.

bowed to the custom under which villages named their own judges.⁸⁹ Municipal jurisdictions were reorganized, and the number of municipalities was increased. Three of the 13 villages involved in the original struggle against the town of Chilapa became municipal head towns between 1847 and 1851.⁹⁰ Universal manhood suffrage was implemented immediately, and institutionalized after the region became part of the new State of Guerrero in 1849.⁹¹ Tax collection was temporarily suspended in the area. The new state government later reduced taxes on the peasantry to the levels in place before the establishment of the central republic.⁹²

The political allegiances developed by Guerrero's peasants exerted an appreciable influence on Mexican national politics. From 1842 to 1846, the peasants' militancy was a thorn in the side of both the Santa Anna and Paredes administrations. The centralists of the 1835–46 period failed to stabilize Mexican politics through exclusion and centralization. While their failure certainly owed much to the massive external threat posed by the territorial ambitions of the United States and some of its citizens, internal opposition to taxation and centralization played a large role, and the poor rural people of Guerrero had an important hand in bringing the centralist decade to an end in 1846.⁹³

When Santa Anna and Lucas Alamán revived centralism in an even more extreme form in 1853–54, the peasants of Guerrero reprised their role. They formed the initial constituency for the Revolution of Ayutla, which began under Alvarez' guidance just a few miles from Chilapa. In Guerrero, the issues, leaders, rhetoric, and geography of the revolt corresponded almost exactly to those of the 1840s rebellions. Peasants fought to preserve the gains they had made in the previous decade.⁹⁴ Although the movement to topple Santa Anna eventually extended much farther, its roots in Guerrero allowed it to survive and spread.

Much of the federalist effort to spread the Ayutla movement beyond Guerrero utilized the expertise Alvarez had developed during the 1840s as he sought to connect the federalist national project to peasant concerns.

89. ACDEM, Expedientes, 1845, lib. 142, exp. 241, fol. 3; AGN, Gobernación, leg. 208(1), exp. 2(20), fol. 239v, and vol. 285, exp. 2, fol. 92v.

90. ACDEM, Expedientes, 1846, lib. 155, exp. 264, fols. 2–4; AHEM, Epoca Independiente, vol. 133, exp. 21, fols. 2–3; ACEG, Decretos, vol. 1, fol. 148–49.

91. *Leyes a las que ha de arreglarse la elecciones de los supremos poderes ejecutivo y legislativo de la unión* (Mexico City: Manuel Payno (hijo), 1848), 13; ACEG, Decretos, vol. 1, fol. 131; ACEG, Actas, vol. 1, fols. 357–64; vol. 2, fols. 6–9, 39–41.

92. ACDEM, Expedientes, 1845, lib. 144, exp. 319, fol. 1; ACEG, Decretos, vol. 1, fol. 145, Actas, vol. 3, fol. 258; ACEG, Archivo Histórico, caja 1, exp. 9.

93. See Costeloe, *Central Republic*, 292–306. See also John Lynch, *Caudillos in Spanish America, 1800–1850* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 345.

94. Peter Guardino, *Peasants, Politics, and the Formation of the Mexican State: Guerrero, 1800–1857* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, forthcoming), chap. 6.

The pattern was repeated, often explicitly, in subsequent efforts to form a social base for the liberal project in the 1850s, 1860s, and 1870s.⁹⁵ Recent research has shown that these echoes of popular liberalism reverberated well into the twentieth century, forming a Mexican political tradition that remains relevant today.⁹⁶ Not only did national politics come to have meaning for at least some peasants, but the way this happened had important consequences for Mexico's political history.

95. See two works by Florencia E. Mallon: "Peasants and State Formation in Nineteenth-Century Mexico: Morelos, 1848–1858," *Political Power and Social Theory* 7 (1988), 1–54; and *Peasant and Nation*. See also essays by Guy P. C. Thomson: "Bulwarks of Patriotic Liberalism: The National Guard, Philharmonic Corps, and Patriotic Juntas in Mexico, 1847–88," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 22:1 (Feb. 1990), 31–68; "Movilización conservadora, insurrección liberal, y rebeliones indígenas, 1854–1876," in *América Latina: dallo stato coloniale allo stato nazione*, ed. Antonio Annino et al. (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1987), 592–614; "Agrarian Conflict in the Municipality of Cuetzalán"; and "Popular Aspects of Liberalism in Mexico, 1848–1888," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 10:3 (1991), 265–92.

96. Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986) 1:6, 309, 311; idem, "El liberalismo mexicano desde la Reforma hasta la Revolución (una interpretación)," *Historia Mexicana* 137, 35:1 (July–Sept. 1985), 59–91, esp. 69–70, 73; Paul Garner, "Federalism and Caudillismo in the Mexican Revolution: The Genesis of the Oaxaca Sovereignty Movement (1915–20)," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 17:1 (May 1985), 111–33; Charles A. Hale, *The Transformation of Liberalism in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexico* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1989), 12.