

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

COFFEE AND PEASANTS IN TUMBALA, MEXICO:  
A STUDY OF DEPENDENCY AND UNEQUAL EXCHANGE

by

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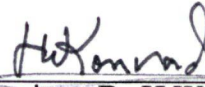
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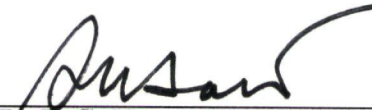
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THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY  
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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Coffee and Peasants in Tumbalá, México: A Study of Dependency and Unequal Exchange" submitted by Maria Eugenia Orozco in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



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## ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to examine the economic relations that link the small coffee producers of Tumbalá, Chiapas to the international economy. The research material was collected during fieldwork in the municipality of Tumbalá in the northern part of the State of Chiapas, México. The Tumbalá peasant households are a good example of the manner in which small isolated communities are articulated to extra-local economies. This study aimed at investigating the implications and effects of this relationship, in order to reveal the nature of the larger socioeconomic system and the processes that affect the internal organization of these households. These households divide their agricultural work between the production for subsistence and the production of coffee for the market. The performance of these activities depend on family labour.

The first part of this thesis provides a general overview of the theoretical perspectives on the role of the peasantry within contemporary capitalist societies as well as a historical background of the processes that have shaped the peasant society of Tumbalá. In the second part, the households are analyzed in terms of their productive organization and in terms of the market structure in which they participate to sell their coffee. A micro as well as a macro perspective are necessary if we want to discover the conditions that affect the functioning of these households.

The evidence presented in this research reveals that living conditions in Tumbalá households are determined to a large extent by the international market through coffee prices. The relationship of these peasants with the coffee market is mediated by a network of local, regional, and national intermediaries. The problem represented by intermediaries, and their adverse effects on rural populations, has been addressed by the Mexican government by creating the Mexican Coffee Institute. This government agency is responsible for regulating the prices of coffee in the national market and for curtailing the

network of intermediaries. However, the intervention of the government has not changed the situation of rural producers who are still subjected to relations of exploitation by local intermediaries. Small scale coffee producing has proven to be a profitable business to those who control the market.

The income of these households depend exclusively from the sale of coffee and is used to complement their subsistence, but we can argue that this is not the main factor responsible for their reproduction. These households rely on subsistence agriculture for their survival which has proven to be an insurance against the fluctuations of the coffee market, and in this way, at least they count on a stable provision of basic foodstuffs. By using nonwage labour and by producing for their own subsistence, the peasants of Tumbalá are able to produce coffee that can be paid below its real value, subsidizing in this manner the prices of coffee in the international market. The relations of unequal exchange and dependency to which they are subjected are a result of the articulation of peasant economies to capitalism.

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## INTRODUCTION

The need to understand the role of the peasantry in the development of capitalism in Latin America has generated intensive and continuous debates among researchers interested in agrarian problems (see Archetti 1981; A. Bartra 1982; R. Bartra 1974; Bennholdt-Thomsen 1980; Díaz-Polanco 1976; Feder 1977; Paré 1977; and Stavenhagen 1976). One of the characteristics of Latin American economies is the coexistence within them of capitalist and non-capitalist forms of production. It is precisely the nature of this coexistence and its effects upon the rural populations that is at the centre of the theoretical discussions on the 'agrarian or peasant question.'

The economies of Latin American countries appear as a combination of a modern sector, which is very often foreign-dominated or developed by the State or a combination of both, and a traditional agricultural sector. This phenomenon has been attributed to the dependent or underdeveloped nature of capitalism in these societies. There have been various attempts to explain the situation of underdevelopment. One of them is represented by the Dependency Theorists (Frank 1969; Amin 1976; Furtado 1971). They argue that colonialism was a major historical force in the present-day underdeveloped countries. As a result capitalism did not arise from an internal process, but was imposed by the colonial powers according to their particular needs. The looting and plundering of the colonies by the 'metropolitan' countries was the initial cause of the latter's growth and of the stagnation of the colonies. The extraction/appropriation process continues in the modern period under the new form of repatriation of profits. This causes and perpetuates the inequalities between countries. One of the shortcomings of this theory is that the extraction of surplus is analyzed in the context of countries, with little attention to the role played by classes. However, later Dependency Theorists such as Cardoso and Faletto have analyzed underdevelopment taking into account the interdependency of the elites of dependent countries with foreign powers.

The peasantry of México has been integrated to the national economy in various ways and degrees. This has created a heterogeneous rural population that cannot be defined and conceptualized using strict categories. The attempts to explain the differential course of effects and transformations on the peasantry as it is integrated to the wider economy have resulted in a variety of theoretical perspectives. These perspectives can be broadly divided into two tendencies according to the particular view of their advocates. The *campesinistas*<sup>1</sup> represented by Armando Bartra, Héctor Díaz-Polanco, Rodolfo Stavenhagen, and Arturo Warman argue that the on-going dynamics of Mexican capitalism have preserved and reproduced the peasant economy because of its important contribution to the accumulation process. On the other hand, the *descampesinistas* represented by Roger Bartra, Guillermo Foladori, and Ernest Feder argue that the general tendency of Mexican capitalism brings about the imminent and unavoidable disintegration of the peasant economy. The development of capitalist agriculture entails the transformation of the majority of the economically active population of rural México into a wage earning proletariat.

The importance of this theoretical debate lies in the fact that it brings to our attention the complexity of the rural situation in México, as well as the diversification of the economic activities carried out by the peasantry. Therefore, the concept of peasant economy is not a clear-cut one since it encompasses different groups that are considered to be part of the peasantry. For example, it can refer to small producers who get their subsistence exclusively from working the land; to small producers who get their living from working the land and from wage work; to rural day-labourers who depend exclusively on wages for their survival; to sugar cane and henequen *ejidatarios* who are financed and organized by private or state capitalists; and to the *ejidatarios* of the irrigation districts who have been forced to lease their best lands to agrarian capitalists and then hire themselves out as day-labourers.

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<sup>1</sup>Spanish words have been italicized at first mention; thereafter they appear in regular type.

Gabriela Vargas (1987) has pointed out that capitalism has created many 'anomalous' forms which not only call for further theoretical elaboration of concepts and categories but for empirical studies that would shed light on the diverse processes taking place in the Mexican countryside. By studying specific realities we not only have the opportunity of testing the validity of theoretical models by moving from the abstract to the concrete; but we can also expand and advance our knowledge of social reality as a whole. Hence, the objective of this research is to investigate the manner in which a particular peasant economy is linked not only to the national market but to the international market through the sale of a cash crop. Coffee production in a peasant context was selected to illustrate the problem posed by this study because of the importance of this cash crop for the Mexican economy and because it is a good example of the expansion of capitalism in the countryside.

I conducted research in the municipality of Tumbalá in the northern part of the state of Chiapas, México. In this area coffee production is in the hands of small producers who are organized under the ejido land system. The primary objective of this study is to comprehend the economic functioning of Tumbalá peasant households in terms of their production for subsistence and for the market and in terms of the social relations that permit their continuity. The main assumption underlying this research is that the existence of contemporary peasantries within capitalism is not accidental. The conditions that make possible this existence have to be understood with reference to the parameters of the larger socioeconomic formations through which peasant economies are constituted. The complexity and significance of this articulation is not found at the point of contact of capitalist and non-capitalist forms of production, but rather in the nature and extent of their interdependence. This relationship must be identified and analyzed in the peasants' experiential terms in order to reach a more complete understanding of their role in capitalist economies.

The relevance of this research lies in the fact that the studies on this particular group of peasants are almost non-existent. The few studies done on the Ch'ol region which

encloses five municipalities tend to be misleading due to the indiscriminate application of data collected in one or two municipalities to the entire region. In spite of the fact that most of the inhabitants of this area are peasants, this area is far from being a homogeneous entity. In Palenque and Salto de Agua (savannah) there is a large tendency towards the development of small scale ranching, while in the mountainous parts of Tila, Tumbalá, and Sabanilla, coffee production is the main activity and only a few people are engaged in cattle raising.

The material that makes up this study has been organized in two parts. In the first part I review the different theoretical approaches used by anthropologists in their studies of peasant societies. Here I make explicit the methodological and theoretical approach that guided this investigation. An ethnographic account of the municipality of Tumbalá is presented not only in terms of the local setting, but also in terms of the regional structure to which it belongs. I am providing, as well, a general overview of the history of the Tumbalá peasants, gleaned from archival records, bibliographical sources, and local oral history. The main objective in examining the historical dimension is to introduce a time perspective that help us understand historical processes that are considered relevant to the research problem. I consider the historical data complementary to the ethnographic data collected during field work. In the second part of this study I describe and analyze the internal organization of Tumbalá peasant households and the concrete manner in which they are linked to national and international economies. Then I examine three specific households to illustrate how these households' social and economic organization is affected by their articulation to the coffee market.

## CHAPTER I

### METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL PARAMETERS

The dialectical interaction between capitalism and the peasantry appears in multiple forms and in varied circumstances. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the role of the peasantry within the national socioeconomic structure of which they are a part. One of the main objectives of this study is to analyze the nature of the relationship linking the small coffee producers of Tumbalá to the national, as well as to the international, market since coffee is a cash crop that is mostly exported. The municipality of Tumbalá was selected to conduct research because it met the characteristics of the problem I wanted to investigate, and because of my contact with one of the researchers of the Centre of Mayan Studies at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) which facilitated my access to the community. My initial contacts in the area were Dr. Marco Crippa, an Italian doctor who was doing volunteer work in the Ch'ol Dispensary, a private clinic managed by a Catholic religious order, and Fr. Jorge Baron, the priest of Tumbalá. I lived in the town of Tumbalá from November of 1986 to November of 1987. Since there are no hotels there and since one of the first persons I met was the priest, I was given the option of renting a room in the church compound known as '*La Misión*.' From here I traveled to different villages, to the town of Yajalón, to San Cristobal de las Casas, and to the state capital of Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

During the first four months of my staying in Tumbalá I had to assume a passive role to give people the opportunity of getting used to my presence. However, I was able to observe and to take notes on the general functioning of the municipality. The data collected during this stage of the research was invaluable in helping me to structure the questions I was going to ask people later by means of open-ended interviews. During this period of time I traveled to approximately 30 of the 50 villages, sometimes with the doctor and the religious sisters and sometimes with the priest. I also helped Dr. Crippa with a small

project, which consisted in interviewing the patients who had tuberculosis in order to collect personal information for their clinical records. In this way, I started knowing people, their problems, their economic and social situation.

In the next six months (from March to August) data collected by direct observation were complemented by data collected during informal interviews. I had informal meetings with teachers, local authorities, elders, local merchants, administrators of the main private coffee enterprises, and administrative personnel of the Regional Office of the Mexican Coffee Institute (INMECAFE). I decided to work closely with three households located in the town since I was living there most of the time. The criteria for choosing these households were based on the fact that each one represented a different type of household in terms of size and composition.

I aimed to describe the economic activities carried out by these households in one year, their expenses and their income, in order to show how each household organized its productive activities according to the labour force available in the family. The information supplied by these households was checked with other members of the community. The data thus collected during this period enabled me to draw some generalizations about the internal functions of the Tumbalá households in terms of their productive activities, their work processes and their relation with local and regional merchants. Conversations with local merchants directed me to the town of Yajalón since most of the merchants who buy coffee in Tumbalá act in behalf of the big intermediaries of Yajalón. Data collected there provided me with a more complete picture of the relationship between producers and intermediaries, and on the options available to the peasants in the process of marketing their coffee.

In the last three months of the research (September - November) I concentrated on collecting data on the history of the people of Tumbalá. I realized that the patterns I was uncovering could be better explained in a diachronic perspective. I consulted the municipal archives of Tumbalá, the state archives of Tuxtla Gutiérrez, and the Colonial records related



to Chiapas in the General Archives of Central America. These records were microfilmed by Jan de Vos and are now in possession of the Centre of Indigenous Studies at the National Autonomous University of Chiapas in San Cristobal de las Casas. In addition, conversations with Otto Schumann of the Institute of Anthropological Research at UNAM were very helpful in tracing the pre-Colonial and Colonial history of the people of Tumbalá.

### **Theoretical Perspectives**

The study of peasant economies has been approached from different theoretical perspectives. One perspective has focused on the peasant household which is conceived of as a unit of production and consumption. This perspective was first propounded by Alexander V. Chayanov in 1912 and has had considerable influence on peasant studies (see Shanin 1976; Kerblay 1979; and Thorner 1966). Chayanov's main interest was the study of the internal organization of the peasant unit of production focusing on its key element, the labour of the family. He argued that the organization of peasant households was determined by the size and composition of the family, which meant that they had to coordinate their consumptive demands with the numbers of their working hands.

Chayanov's main contribution is the idea that the peasant evaluates subjectively the degree of intensity of his work from the goods in which this is converted. Therefore, peasants operate with their own system of economic rationality, based on the balance of family need satisfaction and the drudgery of labor. Marshall Sahlins (1972) has called this assumption "Chayanov's Rule" and has applied it to the study of 'primitive economies.' He argues that the domestic system which he calls "domestic mode of production" is characterized by a systematic underutilization of resources and manpower. That is, in the community of domestic producing groups, the greater the relative working capacity of the household the less its members work. Chayanov's theory explains the internal organization of peasant households. However, his perspective is incapable of accounting

for the system in which these households operate. Non-capitalist forms of production, which exist above all in the agricultural sector of underdeveloped countries, cannot be understood without reference to the parameters of the dominant capitalist economy.

Another major theoretical position, and possibly the most widely known approach to the study of modern peasantry is the perspective that presents the problem in terms of the articulation of different modes of production within the same socioeconomic formation. This perspective was first propounded by French authors such as Pierre-Phillipe Rey and Emmanuel Terray (see Kahn and LLobera 1981). In this model, peasant economy constitutes a simple commodity mode of production, articulated in a subordinate manner to the dominant capitalist mode of production. These authors have been criticized by mistaking a peculiar process of production for a mode of production. "If the theory of a mode of production does not contain the elements to explain its social reproduction, then we are not dealing with a theory of a mode of production." (A. Bartra 1982:71). What emerges in this line of analysis is the recognition that there are not two modes of production but capitalist and non-capitalist forms of production linked in the same social formation.

Armando Bartra (1982) analyzes the peasant economy in relation to the product market in which the peasants participate. He uses the concept of unequal exchange to explain the transference of value from the peasant economy to the capitalist economy. He claims that capital is able to appropriate the surplus labour generated by the small peasant production through an unequal exchange or an exchange of non-equivalents. This process takes place at the circulation level, but the source of this unequal relationship has to be found in the peasant process of production:

The exploitation of the peasant is accomplished in the market through the transfer of surplus, but the origins of this exploitation lie in the internal conditions of the peasant productive process. The expropriating effects of circulation originate not in the act itself of selling or buying, but in the nature of the immediate process of production and consumption in which the goods sold were produced and the goods to be consumed were bought (88).

In Marxist theory there is a clear distinction between the sphere of production, from which surplus value originates, and the sphere of exchange, in which commodities are bought and sold and finance is organized (Bottomore 1983:71). Peasants participate in the market as producers and consumers and it is precisely through these transactions that a surplus is extracted from them. Bartra's point of departure is that peasant processes of production are different from the capitalist processes of production, consequently the nature of the commodities produced under these two conditions are different. Peasant commodities enter the capitalist market as peculiar commodities whose original logic is different from the one ruling the circulation of capital.

Capitalist commodities are produced to be exchanged so they appear as the union of two different aspects: their usefulness to some agent, which is what permits the commodity to enter into exchange in the first place (use value), and their power to command certain quantities of other commodities in exchange (exchange value). It is the exchange value of commodities what regulates their circulation in a process conformed by the formula  $M - C - M'$ <sup>1</sup>. Here money is exchanged for commodities which are subsequently sold generating more money, and hence a plus value or surplus value.

Capitalist goods are a specific social form of production because they contain in themselves the capitalist relation of necessary labour - surplus labour and because the exchange is carried out not to realize value in general, but surplus value. Meanwhile, peasant commodities produced under the peasant logic of  $C - M - C$  possess an exchange value since peasants sell commodities for money and this money is used to acquire those commodities which they do not produce. This is the purpose that conditions their exchange. On the contrary, capitalists sell to obtain a profit and only under this condition accept the exchange. Peasant commodities do not contain surplus value because their value

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<sup>1</sup>M = Money, C = Commodities, M' = Increased Money

does not have the component of necessary and surplus labour. As A. Bartra (1982:84) points out:

This factor is what makes it impossible for peasant goods to automatically impose themselves on the market by their prices of production. Thus making possible the existence of a permanent unequal exchange, not in terms of values, which is the rule of capitalist circulation, but in terms of prices.

The unequal exchange that takes place between peasant production and capital is demonstrated by the fact that the peasant as buyer and seller can realize exchanges in conditions that no capitalist enterprise could tolerate. The peasant systematically sells his goods for a market price inferior to their value and their price of production. This can be explained by the fact that he can neither withdraw from the market - even if he does not get any profits - nor can he transfer his means of production to more profitable investments because they have not taken the free form of capital. The main purpose of peasant transactions are to ensure the reproduction of the peasant unit of production and consumption (87).

According to A. Bartra (1982:95), peasant units are able to subsist in conditions that would be unbearable for capitalist enterprises. This situation creates a distortion in setting up the prices in the market and makes the transfer of value possible. The small producers can absorb the descent of prices under the price of production and have no more limit than the cost of production, beyond which their reproduction at the same level is impossible. However, the downfall of prices cannot go forever and a regulating price has to be imposed, which will be fixed according to the minimum limit of the peasant unit. This minimum limit is the one beyond which the producer cannot achieve his simple reproduction and it is measured by the return that will allow him to compensate for the used up means of production and the regeneration of his labour force. While the price of capitalist goods include the cost of production plus the average profit (price of production), the price paid for peasant goods includes only the cost of production. These savings are nothing else but a transfer of value flowing from the peasant economy to capital. The

measuring unit of transferred value is the difference between the cost of production and the price of production. It is in this manner that capital appropriates the total volume of profit that the peasantry should obtain without exercising a direct control over the productive process.

The State of Chiapas has occupied a privileged place in anthropological studies. The Highland indigenous communities have been intensely studied by anthropologists working in the Chicago-Chiapas (1943-1960) and Harvard-Chiapas (1957-1970) projects. These studies have produced a large amount of information on the Tzotzil and Tzeltal groups. Among the most significant of these works are ethnographies such as Calixta Guiteras' *Perils of the Soul* (1965); Frank Cancian's *Economics and Prestige in a Maya Community* (1965); Evon Z. Vogt's *Zinacantan: A Maya Community* (1969); June Nash's *In the Eyes of the Ancestors* (1970); and Ricardo Pozas' *Chamula* (1977).

However, with the exception of the Chamulas, the Zinacantecos, and the Lacandonos, the other indigenous groups in Chiapas have been for the most part neglected. One of the reasons for this omission is that they no longer exhibit an obvious traditional culture, which is due, to a great extent, to the intense acculturation process they have gone through. Consequently, they do not present an exotic challenge to the eyes of the people interested in cultural studies. Robert Wasserstrom has correctly pointed out that most of the anthropological work that has been done in Chiapas has been carried out from a cultural perspective. The emphasis has been placed on the community as a social or moral universe, leaving aside the role played by national processes in the maintenance or disintegration of indigenous communities. These studies have ignored, for the most part, the social and economic forces that have been transforming these communities since the sixteenth century. "Historical processes can help us understand how Indian communities in Chiapas and elsewhere came to be what they are today and how the past has determined their present position in national society." (1977:5). Eric Wolf (1955) much earlier,

suggested that the internal structure of peasant communities reflects not so much their own pre-Columbian past as the course of México's capitalist development.

### **Definition of Concepts**

The definition of what a peasant is has posed a conceptual problem. The debates on this matter among the anthropological community are very extensive, going back to the mid 1950's. For the purpose of clarification I will review some of the major definitions in the field. For Alfred Kroeber, peasants are "definitely rural - yet live in relation to market towns; they form a class segment of a larger population which usually contains urban centres, sometimes metropolitan capitals. They constitute part-societies with part-cultures." (1948:284). Robert Redfield defines peasants as cultural types according to their values and attitudes. He claims that they represent a type of society "intermediate between the tribe and the modern city:" (1956:23). The interaction between the peasant and the wider society is a key factor in Redfield's definition. He claims that there is an exploitative relationship between the peasant and an urban elite which expropriates surplus production. But the form which this relationship takes is neither analyzed, nor is the peasant's surplus treated as anything but an excess over normal production. Peasant society is shown as integrated into the national society only in terms of the shared traditions of 'civilization.'

Raymond Firth (1963) places more emphasis in the interaction between the peasant economy and the national economy. He argues that the definition of peasant should be done primarily in economic terms. He describes the peasant economy as a system of small-scale, largely self-sufficient producers with simple means of production. Although Firth recognizes the weight external factors have on the orientation of peasant production, he still considers the relation between the two economies in social rather than in economic terms. He states that the price paid by the peasant is more than an economic one:

In the last resort, paying a price means orienting one's activity in a given direction . . . Part of the price may be even mental or emotional orientation . . . The peasant pays a social price by

suffering disturbance of his traditional institutions, by modifying the patterns of his social relationships, and reorienting his activities to meet the new circumstances (101-102).

Furthermore, he claims that there is a conflict of values and he speaks of a dual frame of organization in which one frame is social (peasant) and the other economic (non-peasant):

The sociability and community emphasis are most overt in the narrow peasant frame of reference, and the resources, income-producing emphasis, is most overt in the broad, 'modern' frame of reference. Up to a point also the contrast is between communal interest and individual freedom. But the essential feature is the inconsistency between values in the organization (120).

Later (1977), however, he looks at this conflict of values in its economic manifestation. He claims that although the peasant system is a rural one, it is rooted in a rural-urban contradiction and interrelationship centered upon the existence of a market. His conception of market is that of a price-fixing entity governed by supply and demand and his overall economic perspective is dominated by ideas of scarcity, needs, and choices. He argues that peasants are restricted in their choices to satisfy their increasing needs because of both their own limited resources and the demands of the market system.

He suggests that the social framework affects economic choices by: limiting the range of choices available through the influence of social and moral values; aiding the individual in making choices; predicting the outcome of choices; giving clues to the future economic actions of others; and by legitimating choices. From this argument, we can infer that peasant economic activity is validated by the social framework, thus economic relations are derived from social values. "Peasant socioeconomic groups are defined by Firth through their value orientation towards an external local market." (Ennew, Hirst and Tribe 1977:314).

Eric Wolf (1955) is the first author interested on peasant studies who made serious attempts to integrate peasants into a national and a world economy. He claimed that peasants have always existed within a larger and more complex social system. Scholars such as Redfield and Firth do not ignore the role played by the market, but this is treated as

if it were only a market-place. The market is seen as an entity external to the peasant economy, over which the peasant has no control, and which penetrates only peripherally into the production process. Wolf (1966), however, looks at the interaction of peasant and non-peasant society as an asymmetrical or exploitative relationship in which the peasant is forced to transfer surplus to a ruling class. He claims that the notion of peasant indicates a structured relationship, not based on a contradiction between the rural and urban characteristics of peasant and non-peasant values, but on a specific economic articulation (3).

He claims that peasants are "those large segments of mankind which stand midway between the primitive tribe and industrial society." (1966:vii). The one thing that drastically distinguishes the peasant from the tribal agriculturalist is the production by the peasant of a fund of rent over and above his culturally determined subsistence, which is paid to some superior power. It is the way in which this fund of rent is produced and expropriated which differentiates the peasantry. "The term peasant denotes no more than an asymmetrical structural relationship between producers of surplus and controllers."

(10). Even though Wolf's advances are somewhat significant regarding the definition and characterization of the peasantry, the categories he constructs are more descriptive than analytical, and what we can derive from them is that peasants are a group of exploited small-scale producers, who can be divided into different types according to the power relationship in which they are immersed. Wolf still treats the market as something that is external to peasant societies, instead of treating it as the principal channel through which they are despoiled.

Following Wolf's model closely, Arturo Warman (1980) defines the peasantry as a mode of production in which the family is the unit of production and consumption. Peasants' production is mainly directed to subsistence and not to the market as it is the case with agricultural capitalist enterprises. However, peasants are part of a larger social context and are subordinated to relations of exploitation through which they are deprived of all their



surplus above the socially established level of subsistence. This transference of surplus tends to perpetuate the static position of this social group in Mexican society (114).

Rodolfo Stavenhagen (1976) defines peasant economy as that form of production in which the producer and his family work the land directly, in order to satisfy their basic needs. However, due to several circumstances they are forced to sell part of their production in the market. Production is performed by small units, whose possibilities to accumulate money are limited or absent since the main purpose of their economic activity is not to get or maximize a profit, but to secure a livelihood (19). He claims that peasant economies, in their different manifestations, are linked to the dominant capitalist economy. It is through this articulation that they are expropriated of a surplus value.

In choosing a definition that would be adequate for the purpose of this study, I am relying mostly on A. Bartra's (1982) and Wolf's (1966) theoretical work. In the peasant economy of Tumbalá the unit of production and consumption is the household. The peasant and his family work the land with their own means of production. Their work is remunerated through their participation in the market. These units are not autonomous and can only be understood through the global process of production-circulation. From this point of view, peasants are regarded as sellers and buyers in the market, with the difference that these interactions result in a permanent process of unequal exchange and exploitation.

It has to be noted that in my definition the cultural or ethnic factors are not determining factors because I am approaching the problem from a socioeconomic point of view. I see the Tumbalá peasants as belonging to a complex system of relations of economic domination and of political subordination. The explanation of their present-day situation is founded in the social relations of production and not in the interethnic relations between mestizos and indigenous groups. The social relations of production determine the conditions in which peasants cultivate and sell their products. That the problem is structural can be demonstrated by the fact that peasant communities in México, both Indian

and non-Indian are all struggling for land, better conditions of production, better access to the markets, and better prices for their products.

The concept of exploitation is a central concept of Historical Materialism and it can be said that a situation of exploitation exists when a group of people produce a surplus which is appropriated by another group. The extraction of surplus value is the specific way exploitation takes place under capitalism. Capitalism differs from non-capitalist modes of production in that exploitation normally occurs without the direct intervention of non-economic forces. The surplus in the capitalist mode arises from the specific character of its production process, particularly in the way in which it is linked to the process of exchange (Bottomore 1983:157). By exploitation Marx does not mean taking more or paying less than 'is reasonable.' What is reasonable, fair, or just, is always a relative concept depending on the state of the market. However, exploitation is an objective, non-relative concept holding that one class appropriates the labour and the creations of another.

The particular mode of production of a society refers to the social process through which material goods are produced. This process is analytically divided in relations of production and forces of production. The productive forces include labour power applied to the means of production, raw materials, energy sources, and knowledge and technology employed during the production process. The social relations of production are constituted by the forms of control or economic ownership of the productive forces. "The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society - the real foundation on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness." (Marx 1913:11).

There have been different modes of production which correspond to specific historical formations of society. At the present, capitalism is the basis of the historical process whereby not only the products of human labour, but human labour itself becomes a commodity whose use value has the capacity of creating more value than it has in itself. The central feature of this mode of production is that capital in its various forms is the

principal means of production and that private ownership of capital is in the hands of a class--the capitalists--to the exclusion of the rest of the population. Under capitalism, commodities are produced for sale as values, which are measured and realized in the form of price. On average, a worker produces a certain money value, but the wage he receives is the equivalent of only a fraction of that value. Thus the worker is paid an equivalent for only part of the working day, and the value produced in the unpaid part is surplus value, which is appropriated by the capitalist class (Bottomore 1983:475-76).

According to Bottomore, capitalist economy is characterized by: (a) production for sale rather than for use; (b) a market where labour power is bought and sold for money wages; (c) the predominance of exchange by the use of money; (d) control of individual capitalist over the labour process and over the financial structure; and (e) competition between capitalists (64-65). At the same time, some of the distinctive features of capitalist agriculture are: (a) its production is mainly directed for the market; (b) the social relations of production are based on wage labour; (c) the circulation form this agriculture takes is  $M - C - M'$ ; and (d) the purpose of farming is to secure a profit from the use of land, wage labour, and equipment.

The original hypotheses that were formulated on the basis of preliminary knowledge of the peasant economy of Tumbalá and on general readings on the topic of the peasantry in México were the following:

1. Coffee, in spite of being a highly commercial crop, has not become a source of wealth and even less of capitalization for the peasants of Tumbalá. This is not because these peasants do not want to derive a gain from their activity, but because their possibility to do so is determined to a large extent by their structural position in Mexican society. Through time the peasantry of Tumbalá has been subjected to a systematic despoliation process through the action of intermediaries in the coffee market.

2. The single most important factor that allows these people to carry on with production under very unfavorable market conditions is their organization of labour based

on the family. In the last instance, they have to content themselves with remuneration of part of their work in the form of industrial commodities that are essential for their subsistence.

3. The agrarian reform has not dramatically changed the situation of the coffee producers by giving them land. As long as they continue to participate in a market where they have not gained any significant control over the commercialization process, and as long as they continue to be subjected to the action of intermediaries, we can expect their situation to deteriorate.

4. The Mexican Coffee Institute has not succeeded in curtailing the activities of intermediaries in the area, thus failing to accomplish the purpose for which it was created. The role of this organization has been beneficial to the private interests of government's officials and to the regional bourgeoisie, but not to the producers.

5. The peasants of Tumbalá are aware of the unequal situation in which they are living. However, they cannot stop growing coffee because they have come to depend completely on this cash crop to buy goods they do not produce. Conversely, if they were presented with a more profitable alternative like cattle raising they would engage in it.

## CHAPTER II

### A HISTORICAL PROFILE OF THE PEASANTS OF TUMBALA

My aim in introducing a historical dimension in this research is the conviction that societies are not static entities. Therefore, present structures can only be understood by linking them to the historical forces that have shaped them. Since the sixteenth century Indian communities have been integrated into regional, and later national and international economies. This has brought about dramatic alterations in the internal organization of these communities which can only be understood within a historical framework. Unfortunately, in the present case, there has not been any serious attempt to recreate the ethnohistory of the people of Tumbalá and the data available to the researcher is extremely incomplete and conjectural. Thus, this part of my study should be regarded as an initial effort towards a description of the probable course of events in an area where much research is needed. The information presented here was collected from archival records, bibliographical sources, and the oral tradition of the history of Chiapas.

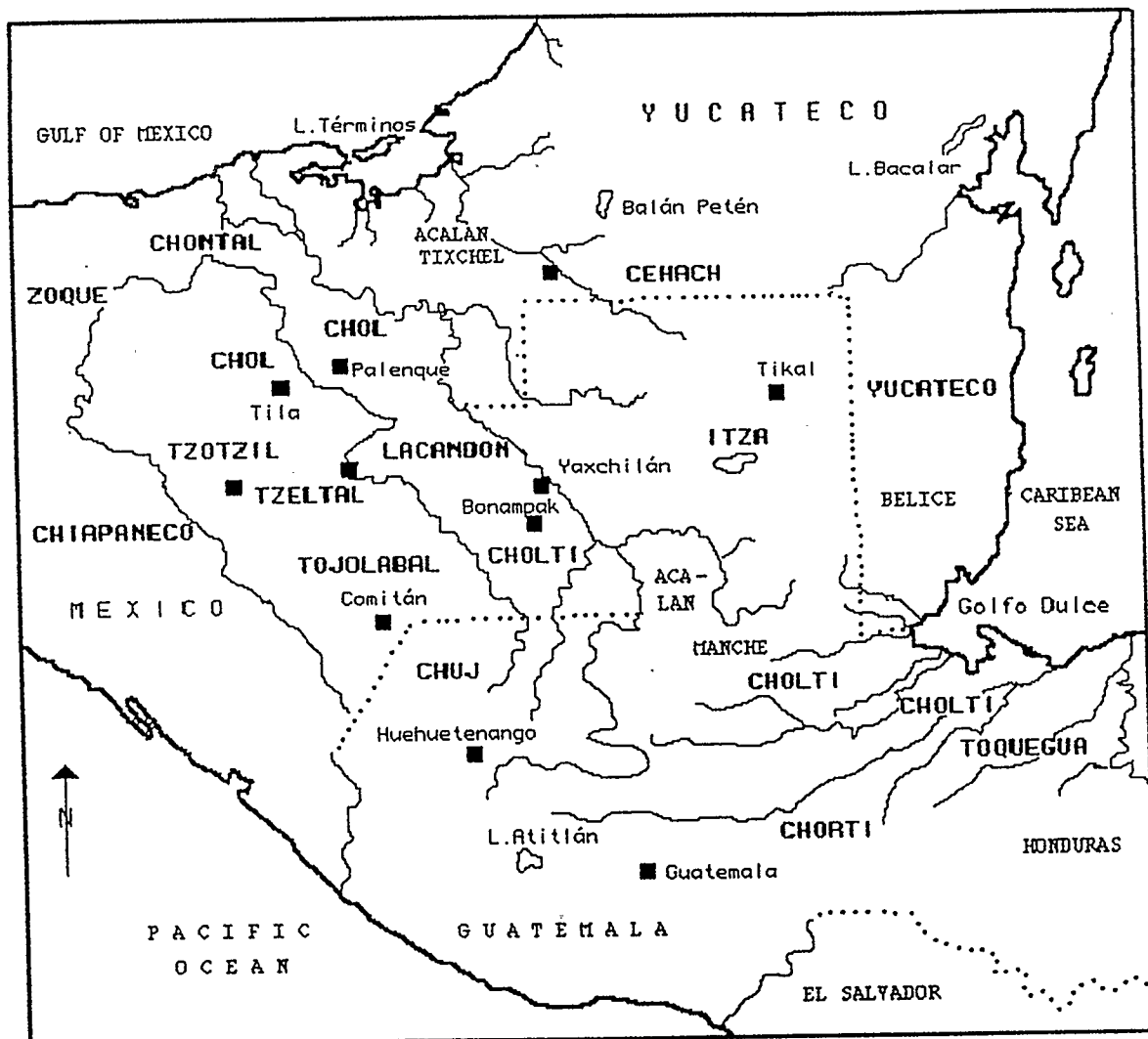
#### Precontact

The Ch'ol language spoken by the Tumbalá peasants belongs to the group called Cholano or Chontalano which is one of the many branches of the Mayan linguistic family. According to García de León (1979), the Cholano was originally one language that started to differentiate into separate languages around 700 A.D. The people who spoke these languages occupied a habitat of humid tropical forest which covered an area from the coast of Tabasco and the Laguna de Términos, in the Gulf of Mexico, to the Ulua River in Honduras. In the sixteenth century the Cholano group comprised the Chontales of Tabasco and Acalan-Tixchel in the Laguna de Términos in Campeche, the Ch'oles of northern Chiapas, the historical Lacandon Ch'oles, the Ch'oles of Acalan in the Petén, the Choltis of

the Manché, the Chortis of eastern Guatemala and the Ch'ol Toqueguas of what is now the border between Guatemala and Honduras (see Map 1). Under the impact of the Spanish conquest many of these peoples disappeared or were gradually exterminated and many others were relocated to lands of easier access. Hence, only three languages of this group have survived to the present time: the Chontal of Tabasco, the Ch'ol of northern Chiapas, and the Chorti of eastern Guatemala. It should be noted that the present-day Lacandon Indians are not the original inhabitants of the Lacandon tropical forests. They came from Yucatán in the eighteenth century escaping from Spanish rule (de Vos 1980).

According to García de León (1979), all those groups living in the tropical forests shared what has been called a 'simple pattern of Mayan culture.' This pattern did not correspond to the development reached in the ceremonial cities of Palenque, Tikal, Yaxchilan, and Bonampak during the Classic Maya civilization. Nevertheless, these groups were the social foundation of a system based on the collection of tribute by a ruling class which maintained political unity in the Mayan area. In the tenth century A.D. the Classic Maya civilization collapsed and left a number of small militaristic domains behind which moved to the Highlands of Chiapas and Guatemala, and to the north of the Yucatán peninsula. But the forests continued to be populated by groups living in dispersed settlements (260).

In the sixteenth century those groups which were organized in medium-sized political units, and were paying tribute, were easily dominated by the Spanish conquerors. They quickly became accustomed to new forms of tribute and submission. This was the case of Chontales, Yucatecan Mayas, Tzeltal-Tzotziles, Tojolabales, Chujes, Quiches, Cackchiqueles, Mames, and Chortis. Other groups which had remained in the forests were not so easily conquered. *The Historic-Descriptive Relations* edited by Scholes and Adams (1960) and the chronicle of Friar Francisco Ximénez (1971) provide a detailed description of the various attempts undertaken by the Spaniards to subjugate these peoples.



(Adapted from García de León 1979:286; De Vos 1980:259; and Schumann 1973:3)

MAP 1

LOCATION OF THE CHOLANO GROUP IN THE XVI CENTURY

### The Spanish Conquest<sup>1</sup>

The conquest of Chiapas by the Spaniards began after the conquest of Central México had been completed. Three different attempts were required to finally subdue the Indians of Chiapas. In 1524 Luis Marín led the first penetration of the Chiapas Highlands from Coatzacoalcos. In 1527 a second military campaign was organized by Pedro de Portocarrero from Guatemala. And, in 1528, Cortés commissioned Diego de Mazariegos to reconquer the area. It was this mission that finally put an end to indigenous resistance in the area, and it was then that the conquest of Chiapas was essentially completed (de Vos 1980). In the beginning the Spanish conquerors did not change the pre-Hispanic structure of the Indian settlements. However, as the colonization process continued, the concentration of Indian people into permanent towns became absolutely essential for the colonial administration. The relocation of Indian populations in Chiapas was known as *reducción*. The Dominican priests who arrived in Chiapas in 1544 were in charge of this process. They were the founders of the Indian towns or *pueblos de indios*. They chose the sites for the new towns, designed their layout and gave them Christian names.

The contemporary peasants of Tumbalá were one of those groups who were affected by the relocation policy. They arrived in Tumbalá around 1564 as a result of the religious work of Friar Pedro Laurencio de la Nada. According to the Dominican chronicler, Friar Francisco Ximénez, in 1563 Friar P. Laurencio did missionary work among those rebellious groups who were still living in isolation in the forests. Some of these groups were converted peacefully and followed the missionary who gathered them in the towns of Tumbalá, Tila, Palenque, Bachajón, and Ocosingo (1971, II:439). Apparently, this area was originally occupied by Chontales, who were either absorbed by the Ch'oles or were displaced to their present location in the state of Tabasco.

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<sup>1</sup>See Glossary for explanations of the terms in Spanish used in this discussion.



Due to the lack of information, the place of origin of the contemporary Ch'oles has not been agreed upon. Two hypotheses have been formulated in this regard. De Vos (1980) argues that the Ch'oles were living in the Lacandon forests at the time of the Spanish conquest. On the other hand, Otto Schumann (1985) sustains the view that these people were originally living in what is now the Petén in Guatemala. In their description of the pacification of the Manché and Lacandon in Guatemala, Alfonso Tovilla and Alfonso León Pinelo write about the various armed campaigns directed against the rebellious Ch'oles who were living in the mountains (Scholes and Adams 1960). The conquest of this area started in 1596, and ended in 1706 with the last relocation of Ch'ol Indians to Santa Cruz del Ch'ol. This town was located in the Urran Valley in Central Guatemala and was founded with the sole purpose of gathering all the subdued Ch'oles. However, according to Ximénez, of the forty one people captured in the last raid only four of them were still living in this town in 1710 (1971, VI:216). The end result of the 'reduction' policies was the complete disappearance of the Ch'ol people from Guatemala.

The earliest interactions between Spaniards and Indians in Chiapas, and the dominant ones throughout the centuries, have been characterized by their exploitative nature. The *encomienda* and *repartimiento* systems were the forms through which the indigenous labour force was exploited. Within the initial years of the conquest of Chiapas, Spaniards who claimed conquest merits were granted land and Indians for their service over whom they had direct control. These first *encomenderos* soon engaged in the business of slavery which was a very profitable activity at the time. From 1528 to 1549, indigenous people were forcefully exported to México, the Antilles and Perú, where they were sold as slaves. Slavery was put to an end by the application of the New Laws of 1542 and by a closer supervision by the Crown (de Vos 1980:14). From 1523 to 1553 Chiapas was under the administrative jurisdiction of the *Audiencia de la Nueva España*. From 1553 until 1821, it was part of the *Capitanía General de Guatemala*, which was the seat of the *Audiencia de los*

*Confines*. In 1577, Chiapas became an *Alcaldia Mayor*, governed by *Alcaldes Mayores* (García de León 1985, I:38).

As the practice of slavery ended two other institutions came into existence to replace it; a new form of *encomienda* and the *repartimiento*. These two institutions were to become the axis of the relations between the Indians and the colonial landowners. Contrary to Central México, Chiapas did not possess mines in its territory, but had an abundance of fertile lands and Indian labour. Therefore, the importance and persistence of the *encomienda* and *repartimiento* in Chiapas' socioeconomic structure can only be explained by its dependency throughout the centuries on agricultural products and cattle raising for export. Pre-Hispanic products such as corn, cotton, honey, cochineal, cacao, and achiote (*annatto*) were important export commodities. These were demanded from Indian tributaries under the new form of *encomienda*. These tributes were regulated by the *Alcaldes Mayores* and were collected by the *tenientes de partidos* who exerted direct control on Indian towns. This tribute was divided in three parts: one part was given to the *encomenderos*, one part was given to the Crown, and one was devoted to pay ecclesiastical taxes. Tribute was controlled by censuses which were conducted by judges who visited Indian towns regularly. All Indian men between the ages of 18 and 50, with the exception of noblemen and *alcaldes*, were required to pay tribute (60).

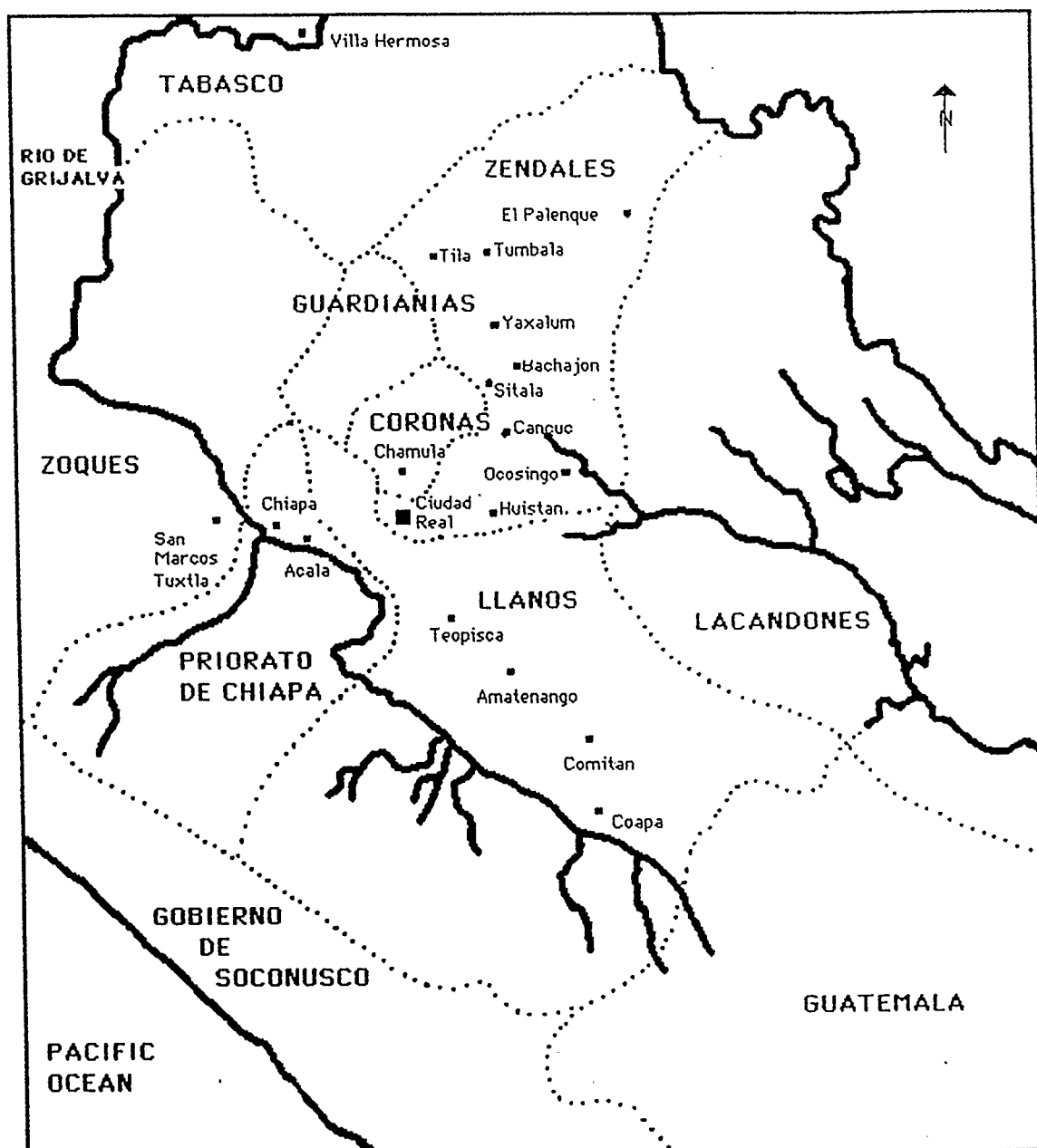
The pre-Hispanic commodities were complemented by the introduction of new products such as wheat, sugarcane, and livestock. These new enterprises were managed by Spaniards, but the labourers were Indians granted to them in *repartimiento*. The *repartimiento* of Indian labour consisted of the regular distribution of Indians to *hacendados*, who in Chiapas were and still are called *finqueros*. These *repartimientos* were regulated by the Spanish Crown which attempted to act as a go-between and as a labour contractor for both the Indian communities and the landowners. All male Indians between the ages of 16 and 70 were obliged to fulfill this service. Every week every Indian community had to provide over one-fourth of their population to the *fincas*. The judges of

repartimiento were in charge of organizing Indian labour drafts according to a list. This list specified the number of workers each community should provide to the sugar mills, cattle ranches, and textile sweatshops. In exchange for this service the finqueros had to pay the Audiencia one-half a *real* for each Indian they received (Martínez Pelaez 1982:472).

Besides the repartimiento of Indian workers, two other types of repartimiento were at work: the repartimiento of merchandise and the repartimiento of yarn. In the first one, Indians were forced to buy commodities on credit from the local deputies, which had to be repaid with agricultural products. In the repartimiento of yarn, Indian women were given cotton, wool, and thread to weave blankets and clothes. These lucrative businesses were controlled by the Alcaldes Mayores who had reserved for themselves the right to trade in commodities produced by Indian communities. Some of these public officials became influential merchants and finqueros (Wasserstrom 1983:66).

With the implementation of the Bourbon reforms in 1790, the Alcaldía system was abolished and was replaced by the *Intendencia*. While the Alcaldes Mayores had both political and economic powers, the *Intendentes* had only administrative powers, which did not allow them to control Indian production. They supervised the collection of tribute, acted as appellate judges and engaged in the routine affairs of government. These administrators left the Indian communities in a relatively unmolested state. However, these communities still had to pay tributes and ecclesiastical taxes. The elimination of the Alcaldías Mayores provided an opportunity for new social groups to form. In this process, the finqueros and the cattle ranchers gained control of local affairs and expanded their enterprises (1977:153).

During the colonial period Chiapas was divided in six administrative regions or *partidos*: Zoques, Zendaes, Guardianías, Coronas, Priorato de Chiapas, and Llanos (see Map 2). Tumbalá was under the jurisdiction of the Partido de Zendaes. In 1636 Tumbalá was granted in encomienda to Don Pedro Ortiz de Velasco y de la Torre, a relative of one of the first conquerors of Chiapas. In 1690 this encomienda passed to Don Francisco



(Adapted from García de León 1985:53; and De Vos 1985:5)

MAP 2  
COLONIAL CHIAPAS

Key

- Towns
- ..... Administrative boundaries of Chiapas' provinces

Sandoval (AGC). In 1817 the population of Tumbalá is still reported as paying tribute twice a year - on Saint John's day in June and on Christmas day. In that year Tumbalá was composed of 618 tributaries who paid 904 pesos and 4 reales in tribute (BAGCH 1956, 6:124).

According to Moreno Velasco (1976), the people of Tumbalá and Tila were involved in the cultivation of beans, corn, cacao, and achiote and used these products to pay their tribute. Women were also subjected to the repartimiento of yarn. In 1678, the priest of Yajalón, Friar Marcos de Lara, writes that women were given cotton by the Alcalde Mayor through his deputy in the region (Morales Avendaño 1985:14). It has to be noted that Tumbalá was an important rest stop on an overland trade route that linked the Gulf coast lowlands to the highlands of Chiapas (Campeche - Ciudad Real route). This route was and still is marked by a chain of sixteenth century churches founded by the Dominicans in the evangelization process of the Tzeltal, Tzotzil, and Ch'ol Indians. This trade route started in Ciudad Real and passed through the towns of Huixtan, Oxchuc, Cancuc, Guaquitepec, Sitalá, Chilón, Yajalón, Tumbalá, Palenque, El Rosario, San José, and the port of Las Animas (now Playas de Catazajá). From this port, canoes regularly went down the river Palizada to Isla del Carmen and from there to Campeche (Navarrete 1978:92).

All commodities and passengers were carried by Indians who formed caravans of up to 300 men, who were overseen by *Ladinos*. In 1787 Tumbalá is described as an Indian town where travellers stop for one or two days. Here they renewed their Indian carriers and replenish their supplies to continue to Palenque which was at three-days walk from Tumbalá. The road to Palenque is described as a steep and mountainous path impossible to cross using carriages or beasts of burden (Hernández Pons 1984:50). In 1805, the finqueros and merchants made a petition to the Audiencia to improve the trade routes to Tabasco. They mentioned that "most of the agricultural production is transported by large caravans of Indians who under the repartimiento and as human beasts of burden cross the

high mountains of northern Chiapas in their way to Villa Hermosa and Puerto del Carmen." (García de León 1985, I:101).

In a report written in 1821 by the Sociedad Económica Amigos del País, emphasis is made on the transport situation to Tabasco. "By opening a road to Salto de Agua, Indian carriers can be substituted by mules and the Indians of the unfortunate town of Tumbalá will be freed from this arduous service." (BAGCH 1956, 7:74). In 1840, on his way to Palenque, John Stephens stopped in Tumbalá. He mentions that only two whites were living in the town, the priest and the commissary who was in charge of collecting tributes. He writes that it was customary for those who intended to cross the mountains to take hammocks or chairs. A hammock was a cushioned chair with a long pole at each end and was borne by four Indians to carry heavy men and priests. A chair was carried on the back of one Indian and was used only to carry lighter passengers (1949, I:225).

According to García de León (1985), the encomienda system was officially abolished in Chiapas in 1724. However, this system persisted under new forms, and it is very likely that the constant indigenous revolts in the area had their origins in the heavy ecclesiastical and fiscal taxes, as well as in the abuses of rural teachers in the communities. Whatever the proximate cause was, the Ch'oles joined the Tzeltales and Tzotziles in the 1712 revolt. During this rebellion government officials, priests, and landowners were either killed or expelled from the region. At that time, much discontent was directed toward the greedy and unscrupulous bishop, Alvarez de Toledo, who was visiting Yajalón and miraculously escaped death (Morales Avendaño 1985:14).

### Coffee Plantations

In 1821 Chiapas gained its independence from Spain; and unlike the other Central American countries, it joined México in 1824 and became another state of this recently formed republic. This historical event did not alter the conditions in which Chiapas' indigenous people lived. On the contrary, from 1826 on, they were not only subjected to a

long and more extensive despoliation of their communal lands, but the debt servitude which was already present in the Ladino fincas reached extreme degrees. Between 1824 and 1856, the bankrupt and disorganized Mexican government encouraged the sale of supposedly 'empty' lands to make up for the federal budget deficit (Favre 1973:55-56). The administrations of Presidents Juárez (1855-72), González (1880-84), and Díaz (1876-80 and 1884-1911) were greatly interested in developing the country by means of foreign colonization and investment.

Under the provisions of the Reform Laws, issued by Juárez, the Government nationalized and sold most of the real state owned by the Church. In Chiapas this comprised about 30 percent of the territory (63). However, these laws did not only affect Church property, but also land that had been granted to Indian communities by the Crown. This period marked the beginning of a process that was greatly intensified by the laws issued by Díaz between 1883 and 1910. Chiapas' landowners did not waste any time; they were already expanding their cattle ranches by the purchase of 'vacant' lands, which were actually owned by Indian and poor Ladino peasants. Díaz' policies were to effectively accelerate this expansion and change the agrarian structure of Mexico. It was at this time that the first large-scale project of capitalist development was implemented in Chiapas. This entailed the massive arrival of foreign investment to the area in the form of lumber and rubber companies, oil exploration companies, and coffee plantations.

The settlement of the borders between México and Guatemala in 1882, the increase of coffee prices due to the Brazilian crisis in 1888, and the incentives offered to foreign investors by the Mexican government, served to attract a large number of foreign entrepreneurs to Chiapas by the end of the 1880's (Baez Landa 1985:165). By 1895 Chiapas already had three million coffee trees, two million of these were in the Soconusco; and the rest were in the northern region (García de León 1985, I:178). Between 1880 and 1910, the foreign capital invested in the coffee industry amounted to four million pesos and by the end of this period coffee production had reached approximately 5,850 tons a year.

In 1909 coffee plantations absorbed almost 15 percent of all the capital invested in local agriculture (Wasserstrom 1977:169). From 1877 to 1910 coffee production grew from 8,161 tons to 28,014 tons (Katz 1980:25).

Although the capital invested in coffee plantations was of Mexican, British, French, American, and Spanish origin, the Germans controlled the market. They monopolized the commercialization process, the overseas transportation, and the regulation of international prices. The German total investment in México in 1900 reached 400 million Marks, of which 12 million corresponded to coffee plantations in Chiapas (García de León 1985, I:191). According to Baez Landa (1985), the German neocolonial project in Central America and southern México was basically supported by the plantation economy, especially coffee. At the end of the nineteenth century there were some 225 coffee plantations in Central America. They covered nearly 3,000 square kilometers and produced approximately 2,000 tons of coffee every year. The Germans owned 82 percent of these plantations.

The expansion of coffee production, and the exploitation of rubber, oil, chicle, and hard woods, such as mahogany, was made possible through the activities of the land and colonization companies. These enterprises, which were mostly owned by foreigners, worked under the protection of the colonization laws issued during the Díaz regime. They cleared up plots of land and sold them, and in return, they were allowed to keep one-third of the total land they surveyed. In exchange for these concessions, these companies were supposed to develop a badly needed communication and transportation infrastructure. Actually, most of the land sold by these companies was already occupied by peasants, who faced a violent plunder of their communal lands. According to Gilly (1985), the end result of the Díaz' laws was the destruction of peasant communal lands and the strengthening of large estates, which enclosed whole Indian communities in their territories. Thus, this population automatically became *peones acasillados*, or workers for the landowners.



Between 1875 and 1908, 27 percent of the total territory of Chiapas had been sold by private companies, mainly by an English company, The Mexican Land and Colonization Company. The authorities of Chiapas truly believed that the answer to economic and social development was foreign investment. More than one million hectares of supposedly 'vacant' lands were granted to lumber, rubber, and coffee enterprises. In 1930, 27 percent of the agricultural land in Chiapas belonged to private properties larger than 5,000 hectares (García de León 1985, I:175). This monopolization of land produced profound changes in the social organization of peasant communities. Wasserstrom (1977 and 1983) and Favre (1973) provide a detailed description of these changes in the Chiapas Highland Indian communities.

Around 1890, coffee production had expanded from the Soconusco region on the Pacific coast to Simojovel, Tila, and Tumbalá, since it was possible to export this product through the Gulf of Mexico to Hamburg and New York. The people of Tumbalá witnessed the arrival of enterprising finqueros. The first person who bought land in the area was a landowner from Comitán, Manuel Solorzano. This property was later on sold to Manuel Marroquin who won a litigation over it and since then it has been called '*El Triunfo*' (The Triumph). Marroquin sold *El Triunfo* to Enrique Rau, a German who built the finca's house and the coffee processing installations. Then, Rau sold everything to the German-American Coffee Company, which bought more land in the area. After these transactions, *El Triunfo* covered a large extension of land enclosing the whole area of what is now the municipality of Tumbalá, and part of the municipality of Salto de Agua. This large finca had several smaller ones attached to it. These were the fincas of: La Revancha, Machuyil, Chuctiepa, Calamar, and Mayoral, which were located in Tumbalá. Also included were Las Nubes, La Cruzada, and El Ayobe, which were located in Salto de Agua. The production of these fincas was very diversified. For example, *El Triunfo* and La Revancha produced coffee, El Ayobe and Machuyil were engaged in cattle raising, Chuctiepa produced rubber, and Calamar produced rubber and vanilla. Another important finca

located in Tumbalá was Cuncumpa, whose owner was a German named Amir Kanter. (Information provided by Don Camerino Castellanos, former worker of El Triunfo and Don Abelardo Gomez, present owner of this property).

The coffee fincas were repositories of the latest technological advances of the time. They had electricity, a post office, and telegraph and telephone lines to communicate between fincas and with the outside world. Coffee processing was all done in the fincas by steam power machines. Trails were cleared so coffee was transported by mules to the town of Salto de Agua, where ships would take it to its destination. Salto de Agua was the storage point of the coffee, rubber, and chicle production of the area. Ships with a capacity of up to 40 tons came to Salto to transport these products to Villahermosa, Frontera, Ciudad del Carmen, Campeche, and Yucatán (De la Peña 1951:183). The German-American Coffee Company even started a project to transport coffee more efficiently to Salto de Agua. They had planned the construction of a trolley car to take the product from El Triunfo to the Shumulja River and from there to the Tulija River. The tracks can still be seen in the area. The finca was also the center of all activities. It had its own church and retail stores. The town of Tumbalá was the seat of a Municipal Agency, but it did not have an economic function and it was sparsely populated. El Triunfo, as well as Cuncumpa, still possess some of the machinery used for coffee processing.

### **The Plantation Labour Conditions**

The arrival of the coffee plantations to Tumbalá, marked the insertion of this region into the national and international economies. This development was closely linked to the penetration of capitalism in the Mexican countryside. These plantations adjusted to and took advantage of the system of agrarian servitude, which had been firmly established in the fincas since the beginning of the nineteenth century. In a census published in Chiapas in 1898, there were 5,858 Ladino fincas, which had 36,512 indebted servants who owed more than three million pesos (García de León, 1985, I:166). The new fincas, or

plantations, combined the old servitude system with wage relations and thereby created a new form of servitude. "Before long the new conquerors adopted the 'economic customs of the country.' Wage labour was combined with a new version of servile relations." (183)

The peasants of Tumbalá, who had been subjected to the *encomienda* and *repartimiento* system during colonial times, thus became peons in the coffee plantations during the Porfiriato (1876-1911). Some of them lost their lands to the *fincas*, and were allowed to have a small plot of land to plant their basic diet of beans and maize. In exchange for the use of this land, these permanent peons (*peones acasillados*) had to provide free services for the *finqueros*. According to Don Camerino Castellanos, there were approximately 300 permanent peons in El Triunfo. This finca was managed by administrators who were generally German. Men were in charge of cleaning coffee plots, trimming coffee trees, planting new trees, and picking coffee at harvest time. They were organized in crews commanded by overseers. Women were required to wash coffee beans and also help in domestic chores in the finca's house. The rest of the coffee processing was done by machines. However, during the harvest time this labour force was not enough, and peons from the other smaller *fincas* owned by the German-American Coffee Company came to El Triunfo to help. The finca also hired seasonal workers, who were living in nearby communities on land owned by the State.

In 1893, the Germans complained about the school teacher of Tumbalá, who was also the Municipal Agent and who became the intermediary between the peasants and the finca. The Germans paid a daily wage of one peso and six cents to the peasant, but he only received seventy-five cents. The agent kept twenty-five cents for himself and he paid six cents to the person who gathered the workers. The Germans tried to hire workers directly, but they met with the local authorities' opposition. However, it did not take long for these versatile entrepreneurs to learn the rules of the game; they became good friends with the local political leaders and were paying three cents to the peasants for a work day that produced ten pesos (184).

The use of this extraordinarily cheap labour force by the finqueros represented important savings in the production costs and was the key element in securing enormous profits. The peons had to work at least 12 hours a day and whoever refused to work was severely punished. The workers were not paid with money, but with aluminum chips that could only be exchanged for merchandise in the finca store. They were also paid with *aguardiente* (cheap rum manufactured from distilled cane), which was also made in the finca. Everything seems to indicate that peasants in Tumbalá became attached to the fincas by the obligation imposed on them to buy everything in the finca store and by the extension of credit on goods.

### **The Agrarian Reform**

Chiapas, in 1910, was still isolated and segregated from Central México. Therefore, its population did not participate in the revolutionary movement that was affecting other parts of México. The effects of the Mexican Revolution were felt for the first time there in 1914. That year President Carranza sent Jesus Agustin Castro to implement the Workers' Law. This law prohibited any kind of servile labour relations and threatened the interests of the finqueros of the Highlands and the Grijalva Central Depression. Chiapas' landowners, under the leadership of Alberto Pineda and Tiburcio Fernández Ruiz, rebelled against Carranza's reforms and waged guerrilla warfare against the Carrancistas. They regarded the presence of Castro in Chiapas as an invasion and military occupation of their land by the 'Barbarians of the North.'

The people of Tumbalá witnessed some of the fights between these two groups, and supported the Carrancistas because they were going to make them free. They still refer to this period as the 'time of war.' However, when Obregón became President of México (1920), the rebellious landowners declared themselves Obregonistas. That same year, Obregón signed a peace agreement with them in which their property rights were guaranteed. Alberto Pineda became a General of the National Army and Tiburcio

Fernández Ruiz became a Governor of Chiapas. In this way the agrarian reform was stopped until 1934. With the ascendance of Cárdenas to the presidency (1934-40) the agrarian reform, in spite of all the landowners' opposition, was brought to Chiapas (García de León 1979; Hernández Chavez 1979).

The agrarian movement started formally in Chiapas in 1918, when the workers of the coffee fincas of the Soconusco went on strike to improve their working conditions. This labour movement set an important precedent for the organization of the peasantry, who were aiming at the redistribution of land. Cárdenas traveled throughout the state of Chiapas, as part of his presidential campaign, and was surprised by the persistence of servile labour relations and the conditions of exploitation and repression suffered by the peasants. He promised to bring to Chiapas the benefits of the Revolution. In 1934 he visited Tumbalá and promised people he would make everything possible to give them back the land that was in possession of the fincas. Indeed, Tumbalá was one of the few areas in Chiapas which went through a massive land distribution in 1936. The land reform converted the different villages into agrarian colonies. It is understandable that land redistribution was easier to carry out in Tumbalá than in other parts of Chiapas, where land was and still is the hands of local landowners. Most of what is now the Municipality of Tumbalá was owned by a foreign company and Cárdenas was determined to expropriate all foreign-owned property in the country. Cárdenas' visit to Tumbalá is still very fresh in people's memory because he has been the only president who had visited Tumbalá and because under his presidency people received land and 'became free.'

The fincas lost most of their land to the peasants. El Triunfo was allowed to keep only 397 hectares and went bankrupt; its production of coffee greatly diminished because of the scarcity of labour power. The last administrator was Stanford Morrison, who committed suicide in 1949. Then Ulises Calcanéo, from Salto de Agua, remained in charge; he represented the German-American Coffee Company. This finca was then sold to Raul Vazquez, from Yajalón, who sold it to Miguel Gómez, a merchant from Tumbalá. Don

Miguel Gómez sold part of it to his son and the rest to small proprietors. The former prominent fincas of El Triunfo and Cuncumpa are now engaged in cattle raising, which has proven to be more profitable and less risky than growing coffee. Their actual territory cover no more than 180 hectares each.

The agrarian reform was a decisive factor in the transformation of the peasants of Tumbalá into small coffee producers, organized under the *ejido* land tenure. It represents a very important turning point in that it marks the beginning of their immersion in market relations. After the Second World War there was a great demand for coffee in the international market, which resulted in a price increase from \$55 to \$155 pesos per kilo (Artis and Coello 1979:56). This fact, and the appearance of traveling merchants in the region who were interested in buying coffee, were important incentives for the involvement of these peasants in this new economic venture. The town of Tumbalá started to attract outsiders, mainly merchants, who became permanent residents of the newly-formed municipality centre. They were to dominate the commercialization of coffee until the arrival of the Mexican Coffee Institute in the area, in 1976.

The possession of land by small-scale cultivators reversed the trend towards large-scale commercial agriculture, which had started in México in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. This modification in land tenure did not stop the development of capitalism in agriculture. However, it provided a mechanism to maintain the fragile stability of social and economic forces in the Mexican countryside. Cárdenas believed in the economic feasibility of the *ejido*, and tried to promote the formation of a modern peasantry who would be able to provide a new stimulus to agricultural production. He was aware of the fact that land distribution by itself was not going to solve the problems faced by the peasantry. Thus he conceived of an economic model in which the State had to provide credit and commercialization channels. In this way, the *ejidatarios* would be protected from usurious loans and intermediaries (Gilly 1985:375). However, as I will show later, this project was never implemented in Tumbalá.

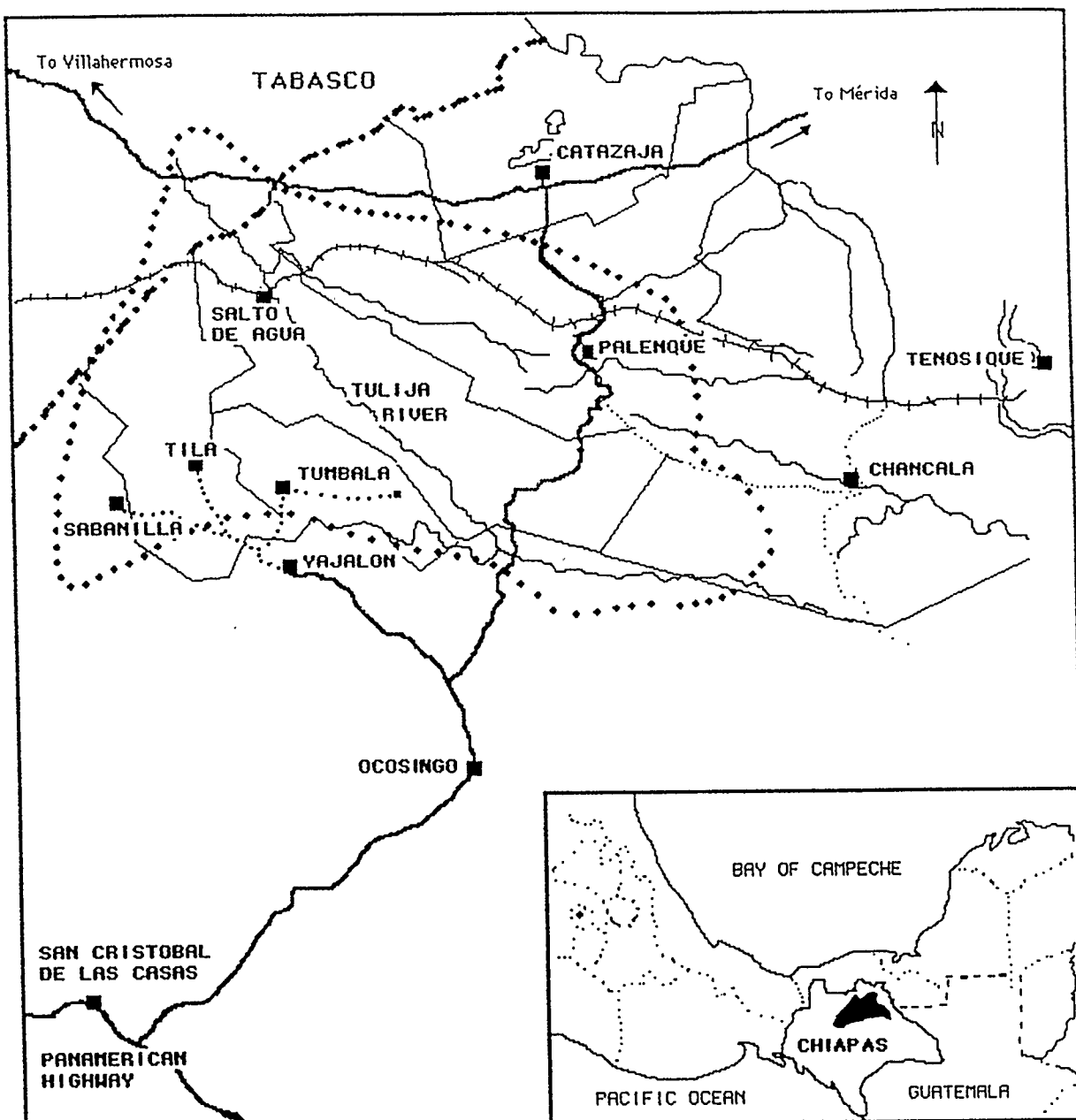
## CHAPTER III

### TUMBALA IN THE SOCIOECONOMIC CONTEXT OF CHIAPAS

The historical material presented in the previous chapter provides the basis for an understanding of the present situation of the Tumbalá peasants. In this chapter I provide a general ethnographic description of the area that was chosen for study. The municipality of Tumbalá is discussed with reference to the parameters of the regional formation in which it is inserted. This is the initial step to comprehend the interplay of the internal and external processes that affect the peasant households of this area through their articulation to the international market of agricultural products. The Tumbalá peasants form part of the Ch'ol group which occupies an area between the Chiapas Highlands and the plains of Tabasco. This area covers a territory of 8,420.6 square kilometers and comprises the municipalities of Tumbalá, Tila, Sabaniña, Salto de Agua, and Palenque (see Map 3). These peasants grow coffee, a cash crop that is the second most important generator of foreign currency in the Mexican economy. Chiapas is at the present time the state that has the highest production of coffee in Mexico. INMECAFE estimated that in the year 1987-88, Chiapas produced two and a half million *quintales* of coffee. One quintal is equal to 57.5 kilos. This activity is carried out mainly by small producers who are distributed over 68 municipalities and 912 communities.

#### The Regional Context

Chiapas is the southernmost state of México and shares its borders with the states of Tabasco, Oaxaca, Veracruz, and the country of Guatemala. This state has a territorial extension of 73,887 square kilometers, which corresponds to 3.8 percent of the national territory. According to the Census of 1980, Chiapas has a total population of 2,179,000 which results in 29.5 persons/square kilometer. Chiapas presents a variety of climatic



(Adapted from García de León 1979:288; and Schumann 1973:4)

#### Key

- Towns
- ..... Ch'ol region boundaries
- Municipal boundaries

MAP 3

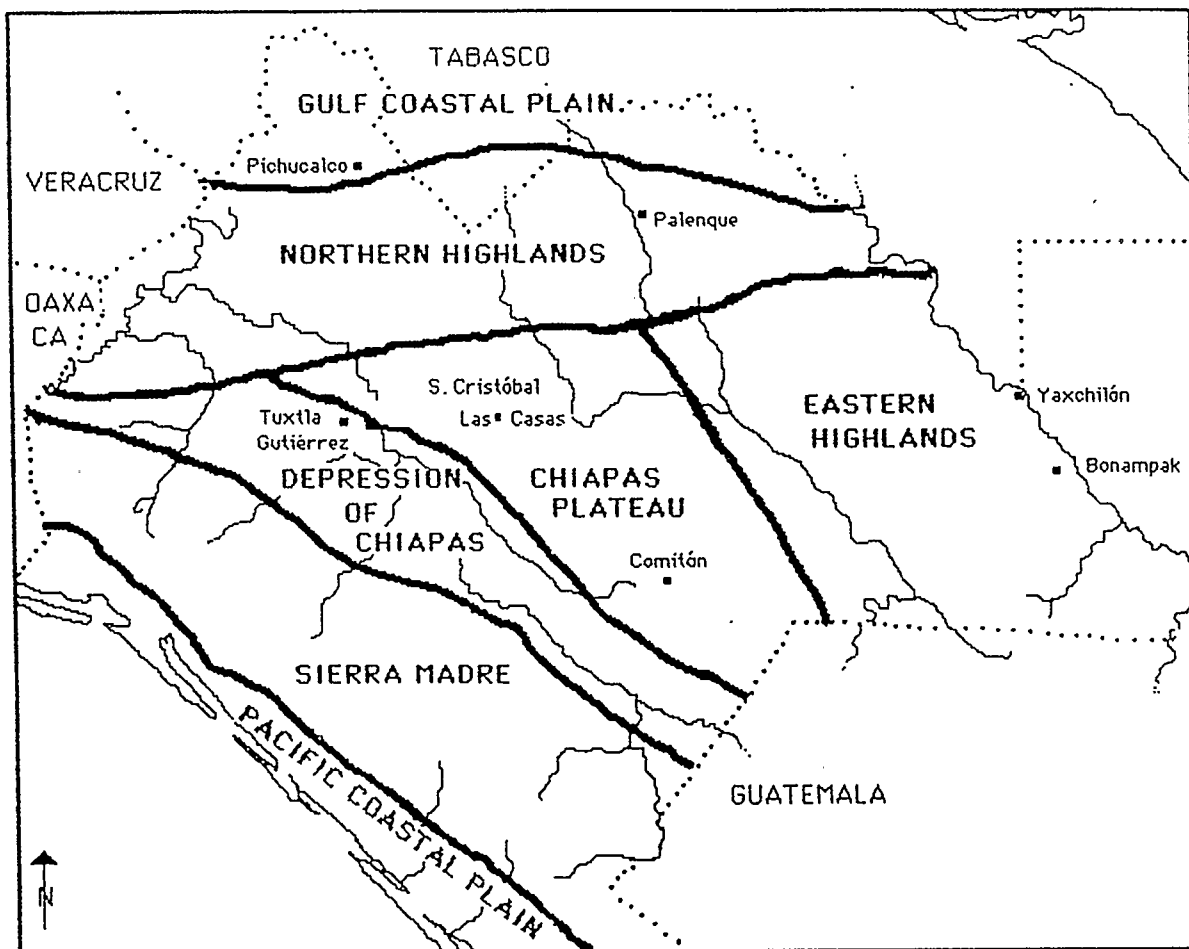
#### THE CH'OL REGION



conditions, vegetation, and topography (see Map 4). According to Vogt (1969) and Müllerried (1957) Chiapas has seven physiographic regions: (1) a coastal plain along the Pacific Ocean; (2) the Sierra Madre de Chiapas; (3) the Central Depression of Chiapas; (4) the Chiapas highlands; (5) the Eastern highlands which enclose the Lacandon tropical forest; (6) the Northern highlands or Northern Sierra; and (7) a small part of the gulf coastal plain which borders with the state of Tabasco.

Chiapas not only offers a varied landscape, but it is one of the richest areas of México due to its natural resources and land fertility. Chiapas has recently become an important producer of oil and gas, and has the largest hydroelectric capacity in the country due to the many river systems that run through its territory. Chiapas' hydroelectric dams generate three-quarters of the energy consumed in the industrial sector of the country. The most extensive forests of México are also located here. According to González Pacheco (1983), Chiapas possesses 56 percent of México's reserve of hard and tropical woods. This state is also a major producer of agricultural products and beef. Its main crops are: coffee, cacao, cotton, bananas, maize, and beans. Ranching by large landowners is strongly supported by the government, which provides them credit, infrastructure, technology, and land title guarantees. Cattle ranches have been expanded, to a large extent, by clearing the forest. Chiapas is the number five producer of milk in the country, 42 percent of which is controlled by the transnational company Nestle (27-32).

In spite of all its richness, Chiapas' present socioeconomic situation is characterized by a slow economic development and by a low standard of living compared to the rest of México. Chiapas' population is predominantly rural and poor. Communication and social services reach very slowly into urban and rural areas. According to the 1980 Census, Chiapas had 360,000 households, of which only 45 percent had running water and 52 percent had electricity. The population of this state registers one of the highest rates of malnutrition at the national level. Health and housing conditions are amongst the most



(Adapted from Vogt 1969:3; and Mullerried 1957:4)

MAP 4

PHYSIOGRAPHIC REGIONS OF CHIAPAS

precarious in relation to the rest of the country. The illiteracy rate reaches almost 41 percent.

The origins of Chiapas' underdevelopment and the predominance of the agricultural sector in its economy can be traced back to the colonial period. It was at that time that the region was relegated to the production of agricultural products for both the national and the international markets. The role played by Chiapas in recent national economic development has not changed much. In the 1970's this state was forced to have a larger participation in this development through the imposition of national projects, such as the building of hydroelectric dams along the Grijalva river and the exploitation of oil and gas in the northern part of the state. Since then, regional economic development has been influenced by a strong intervention of the national State (Pohlenz 1985:33-36).

For the most part, Chiapas has been left at the margins of the benefits of this development and the wealth generated by it, but not necessarily at the margins of the generation of that wealth nor of the conditions which make it possible. In November 1971, the Governor of Chiapas, Dr. Manuel Velasco Suárez, reported that while Chiapas produced 23 percent of the electricity of the country, this state only received 6.5 percent. Thus, 11, 283 towns containing two-thirds of the state population did not have access to this service (González Pacheco 1983:32).

### **The Local Setting**

The municipality of Tumbalá has a geographical extension of 705.5 square kilometers comprising less than one percent (0.94 %) of the state area. The town of Tumbalá, located at an altitude of 1,550 meters marks the highest point of the northern region, and it has functioned as the *cabecera* or administrative centre of this municipality since 1931. Tumbalá shares boundaries with Salto de Agua to the north, Tila to the west, and Chilón and Yajalón to the south. Because of the geographical configuration of the terrain the communities belonging to Tumbalá are located at altitudes that vary from 500 to 1,550

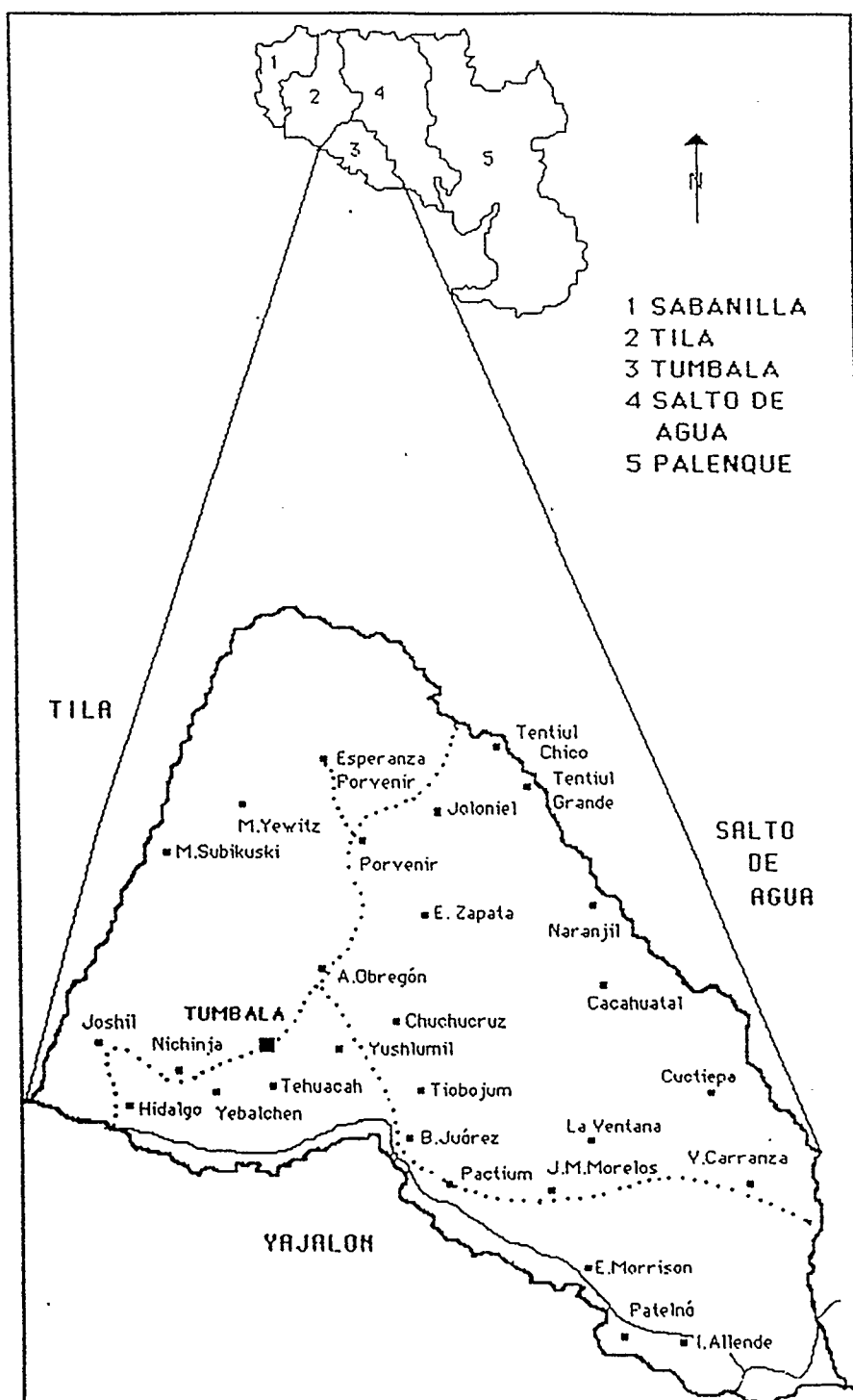
meters. Therefore, the climate changes from tropical and humid to semi-tropical and humid. The hottest months of the year are usually March and April. The rainy season starts in May and then the weather cools off. It rains most of the year. The approximate overall rainfall is 3,100 millimeters and the temperature varies from 30°C in the spring to 8°C in the winter. From November to February Tumbalá gets very cold northeast rains, known locally as *nortes*. They bring drizzles that last for several days. The landscape is characterized by a rich vegetation, by steep slopes and precipices, and by an abundance of huge limestone rocks, and by rivers. The three major rivers that run through the area are: the Hidalgo, the Ixteljá, and the Shumuljá. These rivers flow into the Tulijá, which is part of the Grijalva-Usumacinta fluvial system. The hilly and rocky terrain makes impossible the use of the plow in agriculture.

One of the main problems of Tumbalá, and of the region in general, is its isolation in terms of roads and transportation services. A good example of this is the town of Yajalón whose economic importance as a regional center is unquestionable. For a long time, the road connecting Yajalón to the outside world was a gravel road in deplorable conditions. Since 1954 the people of this town had been promised the paving of this important artery of regional life, but it was not until November of 1987 that work started. In November 1988, the road was finally paved. Tumbalá is connected to Yajalón, Salto de Agua, and Palenque by a tortuous, bumpy, winding gravel road. The construction of this road was done under the initiative and direction of the Franciscans who stayed in Tumbalá from 1968 to 1980. Before 1971 the transportation of people and goods to and from Tumbalá was done by small airplanes or by foot trails.

The first part of the road is a flat, easy to travel terrain, but as one approaches the bridge that crosses the Hidalgo river, the road starts going up until one actually reaches Tumbalá. As one ascends, one passes the community of Hidalgo, which is located only about half an hour from Yajalón, then comes Joshil located at an intermediate point between the towns of Tumbalá and Yajalón, and then Nichinjá at about 20 minutes from Tumbalá.

Map 5 shows the distribution of the main communities that constitute the municipality of Tumbalá. Along this main road we find coffee plots and cornfields. The distance between Tumbalá and Yajalón is 28 kilometers, but it takes about three hours to travel it by truck. The bus service was cancelled in July 1987 because the road became impassable, and since then the transportation of people and goods has been limited to four-wheel trucks. There are ten of these vehicles in Tumbalá. Seven of them are owned by Ladinos, some of whom also own stores; two are owned by the Ch'ol owner of one of the bars; and one was bought jointly by 31 persons through a credit given by the Bank of Rural Credit (BANCRISA). In addition, there are six vehicles owned by people from Joshil and Hidalgo which also provide this kind of service. The trucks usually leave Tumbalá between 4:00 and 5:00 a.m. and start coming back around 2:00 p.m. The different villages are widely scattered and connected to the town by steep foot trails which become muddy and slippery in the rainy season. The walking distance of these villages to Tumbalá varies from half-an-hour to eight hours. Because of their cost very few people can afford to buy mules or horses, therefore they have to carry everything on their backs with the help of tumplines.

When one enters Tumbalá from Yajalón the first large building one notices is the Presbyterian Church and the *Casa Ejidal* (a building where the organization of ejidatarios hold their meetings). Further away, on a small hill, is the grave yard, which is the highest point of the town. Across from the Casa Ejidal is the building where a tortilla factory used to be located. This enterprise was owned jointly by several Ch'ol women, but failed because of mismanagement. The Presbyterian Church marks the beginning of the main street. This is the only lighted and stone paved street and goes directly into a central park. If one crosses the park and goes down several concrete stairs, one finds the new government building which has been under construction for several years. Across this building, on the opposite side of the street, is the office and house of Doctor Raymundo. Further down is the community hall where local dances take place and around the corner one finds the Family Development Office (DIF). It is along the main street where most of



(Adapted from Anuario Estadístico de Chiapas 1985:20; and Meneses Lopez 1986:4)

MAP 5

### THE MUNICIPALITY OF TUMBALA

- Key
- Administrative centre
  - Communities
  - ..... Gravel road

the shops are located, and if one continues to the end of it one will come across the buildings occupied by the Ch'ol Dispensary and the secondary school. The layout of the central area of Tumbalá is presented in Map 6.

According to the unpublished municipal census of 1986, Tumbalá has 23,600 inhabitants, 1,500 living in the town and the rest in approximately 50 settlements. Almost 50 percent of the population of the municipality lives in settlements of less than 500 inhabitants. There are 310 households in the town, with an average composition of 4.8 members each. Ninety-eight percent of the residents are Ch'ol Indians and 2 percent are Ladinos. In the past, the residents of the town were mostly Ladinos; however, in the last 15 years they have been migrating to cities such as Palenque and Villahermosa, and Ch'oles from the communities have been increasingly moving into the town. In the most recently published official National Census of 1980, Tumbalá had 16,090 persons representing 0.77 percent of the total state population. The demographic density then was of 23 persons/square kilometers. Although it was not possible to get exact figures for the present degree of bilingualism of the population, the Census of 1970 reported that 55 percent of the residents spoke only Ch'ol. At the time of this research it was observed that a large number of people, particularly older people, still could not speak any Spanish. This was more noticeable among the female population, which can be explained by the fact that the commercial transactions and contact with the outside world is done mostly by men.

The Tumbalá peasants, compared to other indigenous groups in Chiapas, show a high degree of acculturation. Their increasing specialization in the commercial crop of coffee has brought changes, not only in their economic structure but also in their material culture and in their social and ceremonial organization. The process of cultural change was accelerated in the 1930's with the rise of coffee prices in the international market. With the increase of coffee production work became individual and many kinship relations lost their importance. The production of traditional handicrafts was drastically reduced, and the dependence on industrial goods increased. Cotton fabrics were replaced by synthetic ones.



MAP 6

THE CENTRAL AREA OF TUMBALA



The traditional male dress consisting of cotton short pants and long-sleeve shirt, hat, and leather sandals has changed to polyester trousers and shirts. The female's navy blue skirt or *enredo*, and white blouse colorfully embroidered around the neck has been substituted by brightly-colored polyester dresses. Women wear their hair tied into a pony tail or use barrettes to hold it. They like to adorn themselves with plastic necklaces and earrings. The use of plastic and rubber sandals, running shoes, rubber and leather boots is widespread. Clay pots, dishes, gourd cups, and bowls have been replaced by metal, enamel, and plastic ware. Few women still know how to make pottery, and few men still weave wicker baskets used for washing coffee beans.

The large majority of the population is Catholic, however, the influence of protestant religions, which came to Tumbalá approximately 30 years ago, is growing. In the 1980 Census, 9,409 persons were reported as being Catholic and 6,097 as being Protestant. Several new fundamentalist sects have also become very active in the region. The church of Tumbalá is part of the Diocese of San Cristobal de las Casas. The lay and religious personnel of this Diocese work along the lines of the Liberation Theology. Don Samuel Ruíz García, the Bishop, has described his ministry as an Indigenous Ministry appropriate to the needs of the people. The Catholic Church has come to play an active role in trying to improve the living conditions of the people. Under the influence of the pastoral team people have started to get involved in small-scale projects such as consumer co-ops and knitting and embroidery co-ops, where women and men learn how to knit clothing and hammocks. The most important project in which the Catholic Church has been deeply involved is the health program.

The sixteenth-century Dominican church is opened only for special occasions. The every-day masses take place in a smaller adjacent building. One of the striking characteristics of this church is not only its size, but the lack of statues or paintings. This church has survived natural disasters and human predation. In the 1920's, during the presidency of Calles and under the direction of the Governor of Tabasco, Tomás Garrido

Canabal, gangs were organized with the sole purpose of destroying church buildings in Tabasco and in the bordering towns of Chiapas. In the 1950's the smaller building, now in use, was set on fire, apparently by Protestants. The church compound locally known as 'La Misión', comprises not only the church building but also a whole complex of rooms and a two-storey house. The Franciscans (1968-80) built the modern part of this complex and managed it as a kind of monastery. At the present time these rooms have different uses. One is used by the knitting co-op and another one by a carpenters' co-op. The second floor of the house is used as a free accommodation facility for village people who for any reason have to stay overnight in town.

The traditional ceremonial organization of the Tumbalá Ch'oles has gone through dramatic modifications. The Cargo System has disappeared. What is left of it is represented by eight *tatuches* or male traditional elders and by one female elder (*chuchu*). They are the repository of Ch'ol tradition and when they die it is very possible that this tradition will vanish because the younger generations are not very interested in learning the 'old ways.' In the past the traditional elders played a more active role in the religious and civil life of the community. They shared authority with the civil government. Every time a new president was elected, a group of *tatuches* were also elected and the traditional change of batons between old and new authorities was performed.

The role of the *tatuches* is restricted to the religious sphere. They act as prayerful persons (*rezanderos*). People turn to them in emergencies such as illness, bad weather affecting the crops, property loss, and the mourning of dead relatives. The custom is to pray and to light candles at the cross in the atrium of the church and then to repeat this process inside the church. This service is not remunerated, but it is understood that people will share food and aguardiente with the *rezanderos*. People gather for this ceremony on Saturday mornings, when there are no people in the church.

In the past, traditional elders were in charge of organizing religious festivities. According to one of the elders, Don Pascual López, these fiestas always had music and

dances and some of them lasted for a whole week. At Christmas people performed the dance of the *Wacax* (young bull) to symbolize the birth of Christ, and during Carnival Week, the *Bajlum* dance (tiger dance). These dances were accompanied by traditional music played with violins, flutes, and small drums. When the first Franciscans arrived in Tumbalá, they prohibited these celebrations because of the alcohol consumption which was associated with them. The catechists were put in charge of convincing people to stop participating in these 'diabolic festivities.' They did this by using the favorite Catholic religion threat: "if people continued with these celebrations, they were going to go to hell."

In spite of these threats people still celebrate important religious festivities, such as the day of the Virgin Candelaria (February 2), Easter Week, the day of the Holy Cross (May 3), the day of San Miguel, who is the patron saint of the Ch'oles (May 8), the day of the Virgin Rosa (August 30), All Saints' Day (November 1 and 2), and the day of Virgin Guadalupe (December 12). All Saints' Day is a major fiesta and an occasion for partying and sharing food. In these days the souls of the dead return to earth for an annual visit and people go to the cemetery taking food and alcohol with them. It is a special occasion and pigs and fowl are killed. The graves are decorated with flowers. During these two days the cemetery is full of animation with music and drinking. Usually the fiestas are celebrated with a mass, a procession, rockets, and sometimes communal dinners. The traditional elders do not have any participation in the organization of these festivities, and are still afraid to participate on them. They will bring their banners and their instruments to play in the church if they are invited by the priest.

The town of Tumbalá is the seat of the municipal government represented by a president, a treasurer, a secretary, two judges, six councillors, and a policemen body. The presidents are elected every four years, and so far all of them have come from the Institutional Revolutionary Party (P.R.I.). There have been Ladino, as well as, Ch'ol presidents. Civil cases that are difficult to handle by local authorities and all serious criminal matters are transferred to the authorities in Yajalón. The government building or

*Presidencia Municipal* is a two-storey construction, painted blue and white, with three arches. It is located on the main square or park facing the large sixteenth-century Dominican church, and between one of the elementary schools and a kiosk which has no other purpose but decoration. Behind the *Presidencia* one finds the kindergarten and the government medical center.

The lack of adequate social services is obvious in the municipality. Most people do not have access to such basic services as running water and electricity. Only the town and three communities that lie along the road have electricity. According to the *Anuario Estadístico de Chiapas* (1985), of the 16,090 persons reported in the Census of 1980, only 3,918 (24%) had access to this service. The town has neither telephone nor telegraph services, but the *presidencia* and the priest have CB radios. Some people in the town have televisions and cassette recorders. In the communities most people have transistor radios and those who can afford them have cassette recorders. Television has become the main source of entertainment for people. The favorite programs are Mexican soap operas, which depict stereotypes about the life of the wealthy elite in Central México.

Tumbalá has not been a major target for government projects. The Indian Affairs Institute (INI) opened a regional office in the Ch'ol area in 1973. Its contribution has been restricted to providing food and furniture for the boarding schools, and to the implementation of very small projects mainly in the village of Yewitz. The personnel of the Family Development office teaches women how to sew, helps in the national vaccination campaigns, and sporadically distributes powdered milk. It is during the presidency of López Portillo (1976-82) through the General Coordination of the National Plan for Depressed Areas and Marginal Groups (COPLAMAR) that Tumbalá received some benefits. The town was supplied with street lights and a sewage system. Some villages were supplied with running water and new school buildings. However, when one evaluates the present-day condition of these services, one finds that the sewage system is not working because it was never finished; the supply of running water in the town is very

deficient because the pump breaks constantly; some of the villages that are supposed to have running water do not have it, either because some of the hoses broke or because the connections were never finished. Of the 2,489 households reported in the 1970 Census, only 373 had running water.

The benefits of the educational system arrived in Tumbalá for the first time in 1959 with the opening of an elementary school run by the State Government. Since then the facilities have grown. The town has now five schools run by the State and Federal Governments: a kindergarten with 50 children; two elementary schools with 672 students; a boarding school with 100 children; and a secondary school with 123 students. Because schools are a recent phenomenon in Tumbalá, it is the younger people rather than the older who know how to read and write. According to the 1980 Census, of 3,853 persons (from 6 to 14 years of age), 60.06 percent knew how to read and write (1,265 males and 1,049 females). Of the 9,455 persons over 15 years of age, 54.52 percent were reported as illiterate (2063 males and 3092 females).

Most schools in the villages only offer the first four grades. Those children wanting to advance their education have to go to one of the boarding schools. There are five of these schools in the municipality. They have bilingual teachers from Tila and Tumbalá who received a special training by the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP). The National Institute of Education for Adults (INEA) has been working in Tumbalá since 1980. Of the 147 people registered in the program in the 1986-87 academic year, 66 percent were women. The reading primers are written in two languages (Ch'ol and Spanish). According to the the 1980 Census, 54.52 percent of the population of those over the age of 15 neither read nor wrote, and 40 percent of those children between the ages of 6 and 14 years had not attended school. Only 1.51 percent of the population had secondary education.

In spite of all these facilities, the quality of education in Tumbalá is far from being adequate. First of all, children coming from Ch'ol speaking homes are taught in Spanish.

Second, the Teachers' Unions of Chiapas are constantly engaged in labour disputes with the Government which usually results in strikes, violence, and murder of teachers. Third, the system works in such a way that young Ladino teachers coming from the urban areas are sent to remote villages, which do not have the amenities they are used to. These teachers feel completely out of place among village people, and sometimes are not a very positive element in the life of the community. They leave as soon as they have a chance to do so, which creates a constant 'rotation' of teachers. Fourth, education has become very important for parents and they make great efforts to send their children to school. However, the school attendance is adversely affected during the coffee harvest, since children form an essential part of the household labour.

Health government facilities are a recent event in the life of Tumbalá peasants. COPLAMAR runs six rural clinics scattered in the municipality. These are small clinics attended by a doctor and a nurse. Their scope of action is limited, since they neither have the facilities nor the personnel to provide a service that would improve the health conditions of the population. The attention in these clinics is very irregular; sometimes they are closed for long periods of time because of the lack of doctors; at other times they do not have even the most basic medicines; and they do not have the resources to carry out any laboratory tests. The town has a medical centre run by the Secretariat of Public Health, which was closed for more than a year during this research. Doctor Raymundo, a local Ladino who studied medicine for two years, has his office on the main street. He inherited his clientele from his father who was a curer. He does not charge his patients for visits, but they have to buy the prescribed drugs from him. There have been cases where Dr. Raymundo has mistaken tuberculosis with bronchitis. It seems that people's choices for taking care of their health are very limited. However, they are fortunate enough to count on an institution which is run differently from the ones described above: the Ch'ol Dispensary.

The Ch'ol Dispensary started to function in Tumbalá in 1973, and it was originally run by four religious sisters, two of them are Ch'oles. At the end of 1984, Dr. Crippa, an

Italian doctor joined them. He has also some training in biochemistry. The main objective of this clinic and its dedicated staff is to improve the community health care. This facility is mostly funded by religious and private organizations and it has been expanding since its founding. It has a laboratory, a pharmacy, rooms for patients who need to be hospitalized and for their relatives, and an X-ray room. Minor surgery can be done in the clinic, but for major operations people are sent to Mexico City, Altamirano or Ocosingo (nearby towns). The dispensary makes the connections and sometimes provides the necessary means for people to go to these places. Visits of specialists, such as dentist and eye doctors, are regularly scheduled throughout the year. The doctor also travels to the communities to visit ill people, who cannot travel to Tumbalá, and to teach courses to midwives and to people involved in the health promoting program. There are about 38 local health promoters located in 28 communities, and 9 small clinics run by them.

We know that people's health and life expectancy are directly related to their living conditions and these to their income. In Tumbalá the estimated average life expectancy of the population is between 45 and 50 years. People suffer of chronic malnutrition, which makes them easy targets for diseases such as tuberculosis. In November 1987, 76 people were receiving free treatment through the Ch'ol Dispensary for this disease; and from 1985 to 1987, 285 persons had been cured. According to Dr. Crippa, the most common causes of local deaths are tuberculosis and stomach cancer. Other common diseases among adults are ulcers, bronchopneumonia, rheumatism, and eye infections. Deaths of children are primarily caused by lung and intestinal-related diseases. Many newborn babies die of tetanus because local midwives use machetes, razor blades, or glass to cut the umbilical cord.

The regional structure is the first link in the chain that ties the Tumbalá peasants to the national and international economies. Therefore, by addressing the regional situation in which they participate, the proximate forces that affect their lifestyle, decision-making, family structure, and expectations are elucidated. Although Chiapas has been left at the

margins of national development projects, its contributions to the country's overall development have been significant. Chiapas has been assigned the role of producing agricultural commodities for export. This factor has decisively shaped the regional economy which is characterized by the following elements: a) a predominance of primary productive activities based largely on peasant production, b) a vulnerability to the fluctuations of international prices, c) a slow growth of the urban sector, d) a large peasant population, e) a continuity of servile labour relations, and f) a low organic composition of capital due to the lack of industries.

Chiapas' socioeconomic structure reflects the dependent nature of Mexico's development which is characterized by the existence of extreme differences between urban and rural areas in terms of the distribution of wealth and resources and the provision of social services. The rural population of Chiapas, which in this particular case is the majority, shows a low standard of living and does not have access to such basic services as health care, running water, sewer systems, electricity, roads, and adequate housing facilities. The life expectancy is low and people show symptoms of chronic malnutrition. There is a high incidence of diseases such as tuberculosis. The peasants in México do not have access to the kind of social medicine that is provided to the working class and they have to rely on the Secretariat of Public Health for this service. This institution's medical service only reaches a small percentage of the rural population due to financial restraints.

The Mexican Revolution did not change the relations of domination, exploitation, and oppression which have existed in Chiapas since the colonial period. On the contrary, the national government allied with and supported a regional bourgeoisie composed of large landowners and merchants. This class continues to dominate and control Chiapas' social life and to benefit from the existence of a large peasant population whose situation of exploitation has not changed much. This population whose production and work have supported Chiapas' economy, is located in the lowest rank of this society and has not gained any significant economic or political power.



## CHAPTER IV

### TUMBALA PEASANT HOUSEHOLDS AND THE MARKET

The peasant households of Tumbalá are tied together through the ejido land tenure and their internal conditions are determined to a large extent by their integration to the market economy through the production of coffee. Coffee production provides a good example of how small isolated peasant communities are structurally linked to regional, national, and international economies and how they are affected by these external forces. Most peasants in Tumbalá subsist from their work on the land, which is performed by the members of the family unit. Their economy is based on the cultivation of corn and beans for self-consumption, and coffee for the market. The first, as Wolf (1955:464) observes, provides a minimum but reliable supply of food, while the latter provides cash to buy goods not produced in the household. The maintenance of subsistence production represents an insurance against the risks involved in cash crops. In effect, the peasants of Tumbalá try to keep a balance between the cultivation of these two crops. They have learned from experience that coffee is highly susceptible to price fluctuations.

#### Land Tenure

The land tenure in Tumbalá is divided between *ejido* and private holdings as shown in Table 1. Most peasants, however, are organized in ejidos. This form of land holding was created by the implementation of the agrarian reform program in 1936. The ejido is a communal tenure to which members have usufruct rights, usually in the form of an individual plot of land. Each ejido has a local land reform committee known as *Comisariado Ejidal*, which is composed of a president, a secretary and a treasurer. This committee is elected every three years by the assembly of *ejidatarios*. Its main functions consist of solving conflicts among ejidatarios and of dealing with government agencies.

Through the ejido structure the Mexican State has organized the peasantry according to its political and economic needs. The agrarian committee forms a basic unit of the hierarchical structure of the National Peasant Confederation (CNC). It is precisely through this apparatus that the State exerts a direct political and ideological control on the peasantry.

TABLE 1  
Land Tenure in Tumbalá

| Form of Land Holding         | No.Hectares | Beneficiaries<br>(Heads of<br>Households) |
|------------------------------|-------------|---|
| Ejidos                       | 27240       | 2141                                      |
| Properties held<br>in common | 1316        | 244                                       |
| Small private<br>properties  | 1350        | 135                                       |
| Ranches                      | 1242        | 9   |

At the time of this research there were 13 ejidos and 21 annexes or *rancherías* (small villages attached to some of the major ejidos for administration purposes). However, some of those villages, that were placed together in one ejido during land distribution, have started the procedures to become ejidos in their own right. Thus, some communities are going through a whole reorganization of land. For a detailed description of the ejido land organization see Table 2. Some of these ejidos have continued to expand their territory by purchasing nearby private property with loans granted by the Department of the Agrarian Reform. Each ejidatario has an average of 10 to 12 hectares of agricultural land divided into coffee, maize, and bean plots. These plots are scattered in different locations, at one to three hours walking distances of the population centres.

TABLE 2  
The Organization of Ejido Land in Tumbalá

| Ejidos   | No. Hectares | Beneficiaries<br>(Ejidatarios) |
|--|--------------|--------------------------------|
| Hidalgo Joshil   | 513          | 194                            |
| Tumbalá (1)  | 4993         | 394                            |
| Chuchucruz (2)   | 3440         | 223                            |
| Emiliano Zapata (3)  | 4072         | 393                            |
| Ignacio Allende (4)  | 2528         | 157                            |
| M. Subikuski (5)   | 3310         | 180                            |
| Cuctiepa   | 976          | 60                             |
| Venustiano Carranza  | 1200         | 74                             |
| Benito Juárez  | 2305         | 144                            |
| M. Yewitz  | 620          | 60                             |
| Esperanza Porvenir   | 913          | 67                             |
| Esperanza Morrison   | 870          | 72                             |
| Cueva Morelos  | 1500         | 123                            |
| TOTALS:  | 27240        | 2141                           |
| Annexes:   |              |                                |
| (1) Joljamil, Kololil, Chuculuntiel, Tehuacan, La Sombra, Petzentium, Porvenir, Yebalchen, Campamento, Panchen, La Alianza, and Alvaro Obregón |              |                                |
| (2) Yaxlumil and La Ventana  |              |                                |
| (3) Joloniél, Naranjil, Cacahuatal, Tentiul Chico, and Tentiul Grande  |              |                                |
| (4) Patelna  |              |                                |
| (5) Nuevo Benito Juárez  |              |                                |

The land privately owned is divided as follows: 2 properties held in common by peasant families, 9 small private properties owned by peasants, 8 cattle ranches owned by Ladinos from Yajalón and Tumbalá, and one ranch that still grows coffee (see Table 3). The properties held in common and the small private properties were bought directly by the peasants from the owners. The land where these properties are located was owned by local Ladinos and was not affected by the agrarian reform, as was the case with the land owned by the German-American Coffee Company. The owners of Cuncumpa and El Triunfo live in Yajalón. The owner of La Revancha is a Ladino who lives in Alvaro Obregón, a village

located at one hour walking distance from the town. He inherited this ranch from her mother and it is the only ranch in the municipality which still has peones acasillados. There are ten tenant families living in this ranch who have been granted the use of small plots in exchange for the performance of free duties for the owner.

TABLE 3  
Distribution of Private Holdings in Tumbalá

| Form of Land Holding  | No. Hectares | Owners/<br>Families     |
|---|--------------|-------------------------|
| Properties Held in Common:  |              |                         |
| Joshil  | 460          | 179                     |
| Pactiun/Tiobojun  | 856          | 65                      |
| Small Private Properties or Rancherías:   |              |                         |
| Progreso Agua Azul,<br>Cielo, Esperanza Joyetá,<br>Embarcadero Joyetá, Tierra,<br>San Francisco, Buenavista,<br>Prado, and Nichinja | 1350         | 15 families each        |
| Cattle Ranches:   |              |                         |
| Cuncumpa  | 250          | Gustavo Mar             |
| El Triunfo  | 172          | Abelardo Gómez          |
| El Carmen   | 150          | Ladino from<br>Yajalón  |
| La Primavera  | 120          | Ladino from<br>Yajalón  |
| Four ranches  | 100 each     | Ladinos from<br>Tumbalá |
| Coffee ranch La Revancha  | 150          | Camerino<br>Castellanos |

### Social Organization

The general pattern of family organization in Tumbalá is nuclear and the residence type is neolocal. The household is usually formed by a married couple and their children and in

some cases unmarried relatives of either spouse. Most of the time, when the youngest son of the family gets married, he stays with his parents. Normally a newly-wed couple stays with the husband's family until they build their own house. People get married young; women usually marry when they are 16-17 years old, and men when they are 18-20 years old. A young man selects the girl he wishes to marry and he asks his parents to make a formal petition to the girl's parents. This petition usually involves the presentation of gifts such as aguardiente, sweet rolls, sugar, and cookies. Once the girl's parents accept the proposal, the date for marriage is set. Nowadays, the custom is to have both a civil ceremony and a church ceremony. As the interaction between singles of opposite sex is not approved, there is no obvious courtship in the modern Western sense. In the same token, caresses, either in word or act, between husband and wife are not observed. A woman usually bears her first child within a year or two after marriage. Children are commonly nursed for about two years or until lactation is interrupted by the next pregnancy.

### House Compounds

The basic dwelling unit consist of two rooms: a larger rectangular room that serves as a bedroom and storage place, and a smaller room built across the bedroom, which serves as a kitchen. Bedrooms are usually made of wooden plank walls and corrugated metal roofs. Home-made wooden beds, hammocks, one or two small tables, and wooden benches make up the furniture of this room. People hang their clothes on a wire in one corner of the bedroom or keep them in wooden boxes. The domestic altars are also built in this room. The most common images are the Virgin of Guadalupe and San Miguel. Most bedrooms have only one door, but some have two on opposite sides of the room. Kitchens are built of wooden planks or of wattle and daub walls and have thatched roofs. Kitchens, as well as, bedrooms have earth floors.

The hearth is usually located in the centre of the kitchen on a platform made of mud and wood. It is always made of three stones to support the *comal* or griddle. The rest of

the kitchen's furniture consists of a small wooden table for the metal corn grinder, a few low chairs, two or three nets suspended from the ceiling strings, and shelves made of boards suspended by rope from the ceiling joints, and steadied by their contact with the walls. These shelves are used as storage space for kitchen utensils. Women keep the *pozol* dough and gourds holding fresh tortillas in the nets. Wood is used as cooking fuel. In those houses that have no electricity oil lamps are used at night. Flashlights are also an important component of Ch'ol households. When people travel, they usually take with them a flashlight, some *pozol*, a plastic bowl, and a piece of plastic to protect themselves from the rain.

Each household occupies an area of approximately 100 square meters. Rows of shrubs are used as fences to separate house compounds. The backyards or *patios* are enclosed by fences and contain chayote vines, *tapexcós* (tables made of wooden poles and henequen sacks) to dry coffee beans, wash boards, and latrines. In the town some houses have toilets while others have latrines. But in the villages most people still defecate in their backyards. Houses in the town are either built of wood, corrugated metal sheets, or masonry. It was noticed that in those communities located closer to Yajalón there was an increasing tendency to build masonry houses.

### Diet

The basic diet of the peasants of Tumbalá is based on maize and beans. Miscellaneous items can be added according to seasonal availability and the economic resources of the households. A vast amount of tortillas is usually consumed with every meal. An adult male ordinarily eats about six to ten tortillas at each meal. Breakfast usually consists of coffee (mildly sweetened with white sugar), beans, and tortillas. The midday meal in the fields consists of *pozol* and some tortillas, and beans. In the late afternoon when people come back from work, they will eat more beans, accompanied with greens, when they are available, and tortillas.

The domesticated animals one finds in Tumbalá households are dogs, poultry, and sometimes pigs. Most families maintain a flock of 10 to 15 chickens, 2-3 ducks and 2-3 turkeys. These animals are owned and tended by women. Some families keep chickens inside the house, but most chickens roost in trees in the house compounds. Very few families own pigs. The number of animals a household has is limited to the amount of maize available. Chickens are fed small quantities of corn, while pigs roam freely on the streets and eat just about anything. Fowl, pork, and beef meat is consumed mostly on special occasions. These meats are boiled with chayotes, green onions, and potatoes and may be seasoned with red chiles. Eggs may be eaten but are also sold to complement the family's cash income. People living in the town or nearby villages can buy eggs and beef from time to time, but village people do not have these type of facilities. It is during the coffee harvest that people have money and they are able to buy meat and canned fish more often, maybe once a month. Few peasants in Tumbalá own cattle, but for major celebrations people get together and purchase bulls from Ladinos to provide beef.

Tumbalá has a wide variety of fruits, especially citrus fruits such as limes, lemons, grapefruits, mandarins, and oranges; also pineapples, guavas, bananas, plantains, and mangos. However, this fruit is not sold because of the low prices offered by the buyers and the problems encountered to carry it to the market. People do not seem to give any particular attention to fruit trees. Vegetable production is seasonal and rather poor. With the exception of chayotes, peasants do not cultivate any vegetables in their yards. One does not find here anything like the *canches* (platform gardens) of the Yucatán peasant households. Squashes, zucchinis, chile peppers, chives, and mandioc are planted at the edges of the maize fields. People also eat some greens that grow wild in the corn and coffee plots. Vegetables such as cabbage, tomatos, onions, and potatoes are bought in the stores. Wildlife has been drastically reduced in the area, and its contribution to the diet is minimal. In the past people also depended in river snails, but nowadays they are very scarce.

### Production Processes

The peasant economy of Tumbalá is based on the production of corn, beans, and coffee. Corn and beans are planted once a year, in May, using the traditional cultivation system of slash-and-burn. Yellow as well as white corn is planted. Most people leave their land fallow for three years to regain its fertility, but those who have more land can leave it for five years. The lands left fallow are called *acahuales*. People usually devote one to one-and-a-half hectares of their land to corn, half a hectare to beans, and from one to three hectares to coffee. Corn and bean seeds are commonly kept from last year's harvest. To plant one and a half hectares with maize people use approximately 30 kilos of seeds and to plant half a hectare with beans, five kilos of seeds are used. The yields of corn and beans depend on the use of fertilizer and the care given to the plots. If people use fertilizer they can get approximately 2,000 kilos of maize, and about 350 kilos of beans a year. Some people produce enough for their yearly consumption, but most people have to buy maize during the months of May, June, and July. Beans grow very well in Tumbalá and people usually get enough for their yearly consumption. Coffee production is in the order of 10 to 15 quintales per hectare.

Some ejidatarios have bought small properties that have allowed them to expand their coffee plots. For example, in the community of Hidalgo, there are few peasants who own 10 hectares of coffee and at harvest time have to hire Tzeltal labourers from Oxchuc, Cancuc, and Tenejapa. Local labour is very limited and outside labour is cheaper. In November of 1987 the outside labourers were being paid \$2,500.00 pesos a day, with room and board provided by the employer. The local workers were charging \$1,000.00 pesos for every bucket of coffee beans they picked, and a good worker can fill from four to six buckets a day.

The labour force is the key element of any process of production. In the case of peasant economies, the organization of labour based on the family is the single most important factor that allows them to carry on production under very unfavorable conditions.



The nature of the family is one of the main factors affecting the organization of a peasant economic unit and its levels of production. As Chayanov (1985) observed, each family constitutes a distinct working system according to its size, the age of its members, the consumer-worker ratio, and its consumer demands. As the members of the production unit grow, so does its working capacity.

In Tumbalá we observed that the availability of economic resources is very limited for most peasants. However, some families composed largely by adults, were able to put more time and effort into their crops and were able to get better yields of corn and coffee. Also, in most cases where the number of working members was small, the participation of women and children in the productive process was more intensive. The importance of women's and children's work is unquestionable. Women's work is divided between agricultural and domestic activities, which are both very labour-intensive and very time-consuming. In peasant households, due to their low level of technology, the production of food and the execution of domestic chores require more effort and time than that required from families in other sectors of society. The everyday preparation of tortillas is just one example of one of these time-consuming activities carried out by peasant women.

Women help in weeding and fertilizing the corn fields and during harvest women and children fetch the ripened corn from the fields to the houses. They are also in charge of drying and washing coffee. Every two days the firewood stock of the household must be replenished. Women walk to the fields for considerable distances to fetch wood. Girls learn to take care of their younger siblings, help with housework, and with the washing and drying of coffee. Ch'ol parents very rarely beat their children. Young boys have a fair amount of freedom and play freely on the streets, however, at the early age of 6-7 years, they are encouraged to accompany their fathers to the *milpas* and coffee plots. In this way they start learning the agricultural tasks. They also help with domestic chores such as fetching firewood and water. By the age of 13-14 years boys can perform any agricultural activity and girls can do the same regarding domestic chores. When the working capacity

in the household is limited, women undertake activities that are usually performed by males. If they have small children they will leave them with relatives and help with the weeding and the picking of coffee. The interviews with patients who had tuberculosis showed that even though they were ill, they could not stop working because they did not have anybody to help them. It is very hard to get help, especially during the coffee harvest since beans mature at the same time.

According to the Regional Office of INMECAFE, the cultivation of coffee covers an area of 3,462.5 hectares in Tumbalá, and there are 1,763 small producers engaged in this activity. The average annual production is 24,575 quintales. Most people have from one to three hectares planted with coffee. The coffee tree is very sensitive to frost and it usually grows in temperate zones. The area of Tumbalá with an altitude between 500 and 1,550 meters and its tropical and subtropical climate is a perfect place to grow this crop. The coffee that grows here is called "*café de altura*" or highland coffee, which is considered amongst the finest coffee. The yield depends to a great extent on the care and work invested in the coffee plots and the use of fertilizer and pesticide. The coffee tree, as well as other trees that bear beans have biannual cycles. An excellent production is followed by a poor one. Arabica Tipica (criollo comun) is the variety grown in this area. This particular variety starts to bear fruit when the tree is 3-4 years old and continues to do so until the tree is 30-40 years old. Coffee trees grow from two to three meters in the shade of taller trees, such as the cocsan (bits') and banana trees. In a hectare people usually plant 1,000 coffee trees and 100 shade trees. This variety is highly productive, but at the same time, is very susceptible to the pest known as roya.

The chores involved in coffee production will be discussed in the next chapter, but it must be noted that the harvest time is the season of the year that requires the greatest utilization of labour power. Coffee beans mature earlier in the communities located at a lower altitude so the harvest starts there at the end of October, while in communities located at higher altitude the harvest starts at the end of November, and goes on until March, with

peak periods in January and February. The coffee beans do not mature all at once, so the picking is divided in four stages. Once the beans have matured they have to be picked up as soon as possible to avoid bad weather and drizzles that would make them fall to the ground. Once the beans have been picked, they have to be processed within the next 24 hours or the natural fermentation destroys the quality of the bean.

The processing of coffee beans entails a series of steps which start precisely in the peasant households. The peasants initiate the first process, called humid processing (*beneficio humedo*). First of all, the mature red beans go through a pulp-removing machine which removes the shell. The technology available to peasants is very basic. They possess a manual wooden machine to carry out the process described above. These machines are hand made in small carpentry shops in Yajalón. At the time of this research, they cost \$250,000.00 pesos, and they last approximately 10 years. Once the shell has been removed from the beans, they are placed in a wooden box for 24 hours. Here, a natural fermentation removes the mucous membrane. Then, the beans are washed and placed to dry on a tapexco, or on straw mats on the floor. Few people have cement yards, which would shorten the drying time in about half. If the sun is constant and does not rain, it takes about 6 days for the beans to dry, but if it is cloudy or rainy it takes 10 to 12 days. Women take the coffee beans out every morning and take them in in the evening. Once the coffee has dried out, it is ready to be sold as '*pergamino*' because the bean still has a membranous layer covering it. Coffee is transported to the buying centers on the backs of the peasant and his family.

Applying modern machinery and technology for the humid processing would require thousands of dollars and would involve the following equipment: (1) an automatic pulp-removing machine; (2) cement fermentation tanks; (3) washing machines; (4) drying machines that would reduce the drying process to 24 hours, independently of weather conditions; and (5) mules to transport the final product to the market (see Figure 1). The final processing or dry processing (*beneficio seco*), is done by the exporters using

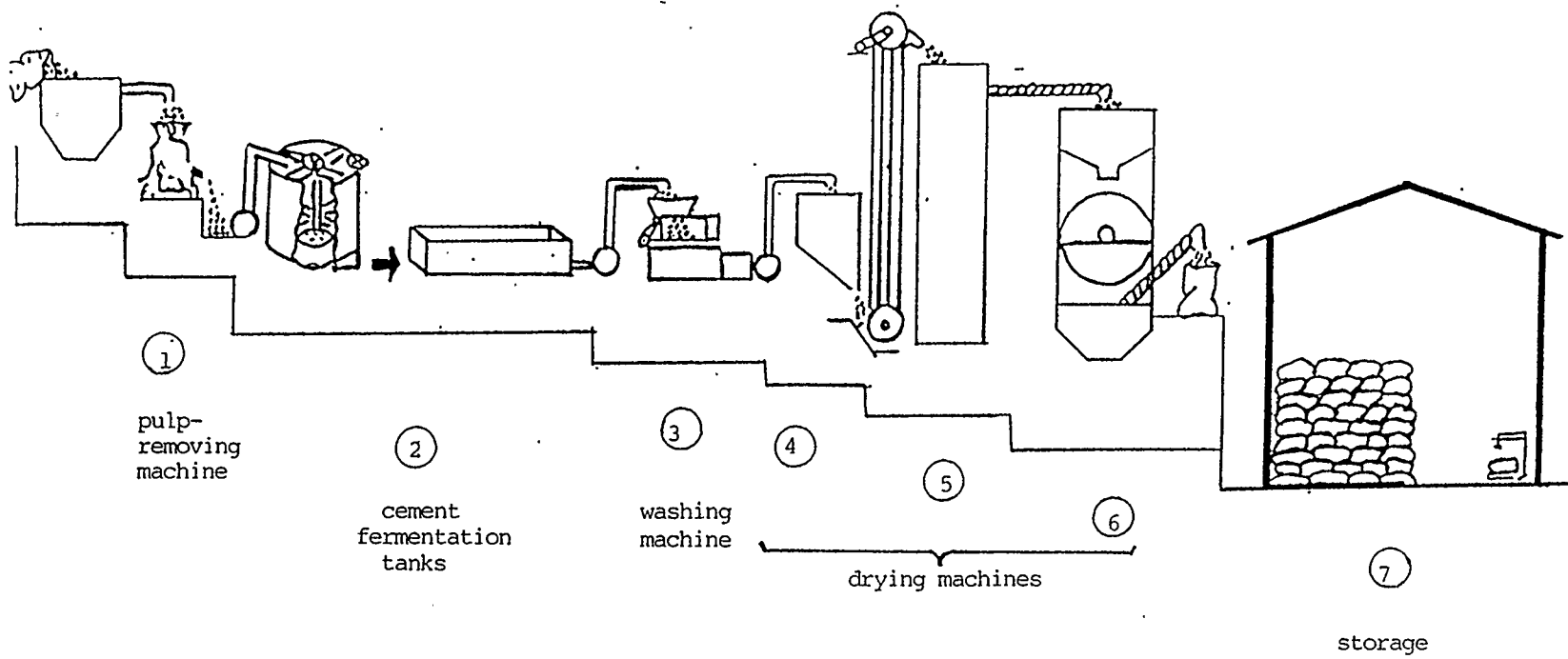


FIGURE 1. HUMID PROCESSING OF COFFEE

industrial machinery to convert the "pergamino" to "oro" coffee. This process involves the following steps: (1) coffee beans are deposited in silos; (2) a cleaning machine removes dirt and impurities; (3) another machine removes the membranous layer from the beans; (4) after this, they go through a polishing machine; (5) another machine removes the dust; (6) a vibrating machine separates the beans that have defects; (7) another vibrating machine selects even more carefully the different types of damaged beans; (8) the beans go through an electronic machine that selects them according to color; (9) from here, they go to a hopper which puts them in sacks of 100 pounds; and (10) after the sacks are weighed, they are ready to be shipped to local or foreign markets according to the demand (see Figure 2).

### Market Processes

The commodities in Tumbalá have two origins. The ones that are produced by the peasantry and which circulate to the national and international market; and the ones that come mostly from industrial production and are consumed in the locality. The peasants' transactions in the market are mediated by commercial capital. This sector of the economy plays a determinant role in the Mexican countryside, and is represented not only by large merchants, but also by small ones who many times act in their behalf. These coffee buyers are locally known as 'coyotes'. According to Stavenhagen (1985:46), the rural bourgeoisie's power derives not so much from the ownership of land but from the monopolistic control of trade.

The town of Tumbalá does not have a marketplace, but the 35 shops that now exist provide people with this service. These shops function as commercial entities, and are the communication network through which the exchange of news and gossip take place. The shops generally occupy the front room of the owner's house and are separated from the living area by a wall. All shops have counters that separate the customers from the vendors. Merchandise is displayed on shelves behind the counter. According to their stock, these shops are classified as follows: 23 general merchandise stores, 1 plastic

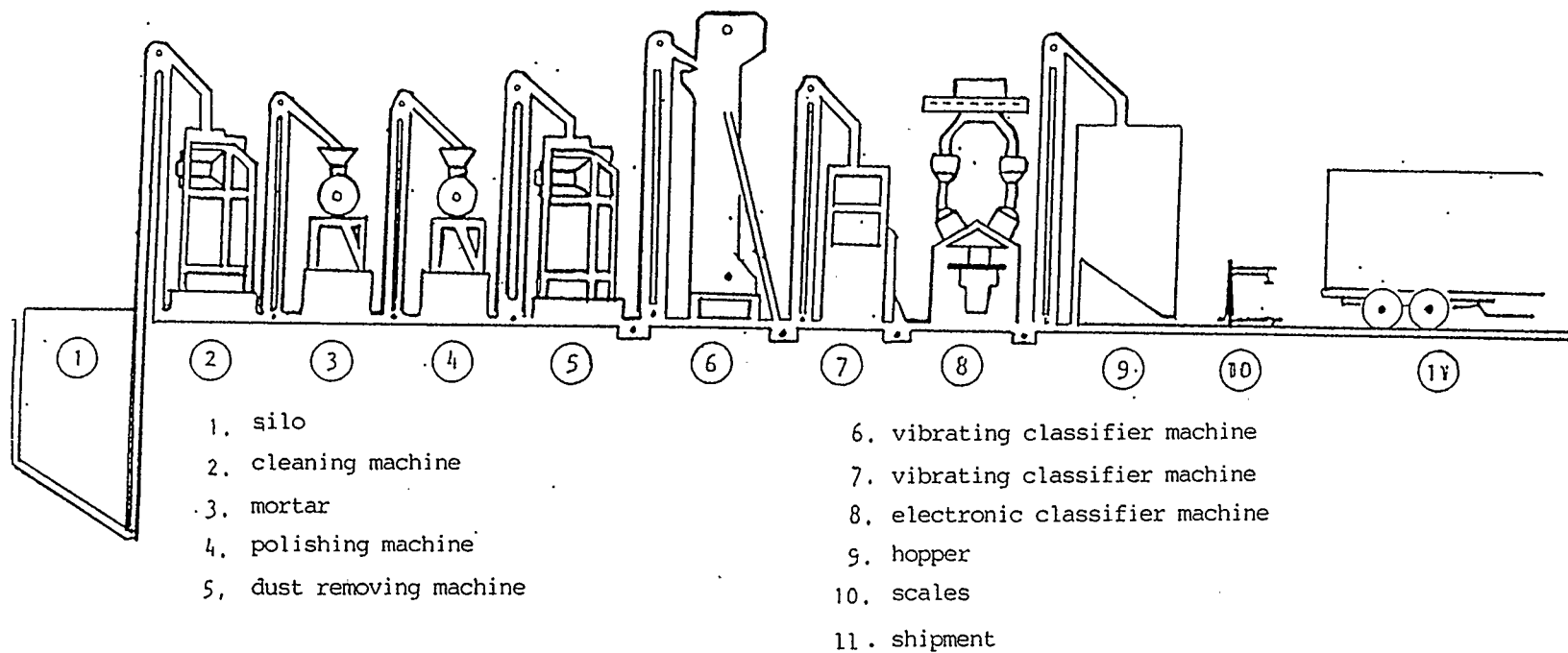


FIGURE 2. DRY PROCESSING OF COFFEE

kitchenware shop, 3 vegetable and fruit stalls, 2 shoe and clothing stores, 3 fabric stores, and 3 pharmacies. Half of these stores are owned by Ladinos and half by Ch'oles. One of these shops is a consumer co-op run by 20 members.

The general merchandise shops usually carry the same products: oil, rice, sugar, white flour, canned fish and vegetables, powder milk, instant coffee, salt, soap, eggs, candy, cookies, soft drinks, potato chips, pastas, batteries, candles, cigarettes, matches, fuel oil, lime, and toilet paper. Some of these shops sell work tools, such as machetes and files, and two of them sell beer and industrially produced sugar cane aguardiente. Four of the local ladino store owners buy coffee and maize from the peasants. The stores usually open around 7:00 a.m. and close at 7:00 p.m. The owners of the pharmacies usually prescribe medicines according to the customer's description of his/her illness. The most popular form of drug administration is by injection. The town has three carpenters, four tailors, a seamstress and a butcher who sells beef and sometimes pork once a week. The animals are slaughtered by the butcher in the yard of his house. Meat sells early in the morning and by 9:00 a.m. everything is gone.

A government store (CONASUPO) has been functioning in Tumbalá since 1979. It occupies a small building located about two blocks from the park. Its inventory consists of basic dietary items such as corn, beans, sugar, rice, soap, wheat flour, oil, and salt, at a cost subsidized by the Federal Government. CONASUPO items usually undersell commercial retail outlets. During the coffee harvest INMECAFE and some private buyers open small warehouses where peasants can sell their coffee. Tumbalá has two bars, one owned and operated by a Ch'ol, and the other by a Ladino. The most common drink consumed by Ch'ol men is aguardiente, while Ladinos drink beer, brandy and rum. The presence of Guatemalan itinerant vendors is very common in the region. They sell watches, transistor radios, tape recorders, and vitamins. About two or three times a year, with the occasion of major fiestas, a large number of vendors arrive in Tumbalá. They display all kinds of goods on the main street. Even in these occasions, the sale of

processed food-stuffs is not very common. Sunday is the busiest day of the week. People from nearby communities come to town to attend Catholic mass and to buy groceries.

The stores replenish their stocks in Yajalón. This town is the administrative and legal district of the region. Its jurisdiction extends to the municipalities of Sabanilla, Tila, Petalcingo, Tumbalá, Tzajalá, and Chilón. Yajalón functions as a supply depot in the movement of goods, as well as, a storage place for the coffee produced in the area. The regional office and warehouse of INMECAFE, and other privately owned warehouses, are located here. Yajalón provides people with some services, such as a telephone and telegraph office, a gas station, a bank, a small market-place, a movie theater, a few restaurants, and small hotels. Villagers usually make their purchases in Tumbalá, but if for any reason they travel to Yajalón, they take time to look around and buy groceries there.

During this research the options available to people to sell their coffee in Tumbalá were limited to seven buyers: INMECAFE, Sociedad Cooperativa Industrial Cafés Yajalón, Asociación Rural de Interés Colectivo (ARIC), Cooperativa de Productores de Café Tzeltal Ch'ol, Unión de Ejidos Ch'ol, Unión de Campesinos Independientes de la Región del Istmo (UCIRI), and the local merchants. The peasants' choice of buyer usually depends on such factors as price, form of payment, transportation facilities, and a pressing need for cash. Local and regional intermediaries used to freely operate in the area until 1973 when INMECAFE opened a regional office in Yajalón.

INMECAFE is one of those enterprises set up by the Mexican government to provide commercialization channels and to fix guaranteed prices for agricultural products. Originally, INMECAFE's main objective was to curtail the participation of private intermediaries in the coffee market. It was during Echeverría's presidency that this organization was given a great impetus by increasing its operational budget from 115 million pesos (in 1972) to 500 million pesos (in 1976). Its acquisition capacity increased, from 200,000 quintales a year in 1970, to 2 million quintales in 1974 (Early 1982:106). However, the good times are gone and the Institute's budget has been drastically reduced



as a result of the severe economic crisis that has affected the country in the last few years. On top of this, the Institute's effectiveness has suffered from excessive bureaucracy and corruption. For example, the former Director of INMECAFE, Fausto Cantu Peña, was accused of fraud and found guilty. But, although he was jailed, nothing was done to improve the internal organization of this agency.

Coffee is a commodity that is mostly exported and consequently, its commercialization is highly subjected to the economic forces playing in the international market. México is the world's fifth largest exporter of coffee after Brazil, Colombia, Indonesia, and Ivory Coast. The supply of coffee in the international market is dominated by Brazil which is the largest producer of this commodity. In the last few years, however, Brazilian production has been severely affected by periodic frosts and droughts. These unpredictable changes in climatic conditions cause panic among world buyers and subsequent fluctuations in coffee prices. The International Coffee Organization (OIC), which is composed of 55 coffee producer countries and 25 consumer countries, was created by the need to stabilize the market.

This organization regulates the supply of coffee in the international market by assigning annual export quotas to producers. However, and in spite of this agency's intervention, coffee prices are basically fixed according to the law of supply and demand. For instance, in 1986, the quota system was cancelled as a result of the severe drought that affected Brazil at the end of 1985. This caused widespread panic among buyers who immediately started buying large quantities of coffee, causing prices to rise from \$3.50 to \$5.50 U.S. dollars/kilo. Soon the market was flooded and the supply was much greater than the demand. Hence, the price dropped to its lowest point in the last six years to \$2.00 U.S. dollars/kilo. In 1987, the quota system was reestablished and the price was fixed between \$2.50 and \$3.00/kilo (El Observador 1987:1).

México sells most of its coffee to countries that belong to the OIC, called traditional buyers (United States, Canada, and Western Europe). It also sells small quantities to the

non-traditional buyers (Socialist and Arab countries) at a cheaper price than the one fixed by the OIC. In the year 1986-87, México had exported more than 3 million quintales to OIC members and around 500,000 quintales to non-traditional buyers. México's estimated total production for that year was 5 million quintales. (La Jornada 1987,1055:21). It was not possible to know how much money this production represented, but in the year 1985-86, México exported approximately 4 million quintales amounting to 861 million dollars (Revista Integración 1987, 1:3).

So far I have described how coffee prices are determined in the international market. However, these are the prices paid to intermediaries and not to those who actually grow this commodity - the peasants. Who, then, is in charge of fixing the prices that should be paid to the coffee producers in the national market? A government Commercialization Committee has been granted the authority to determine the coffee prices. This committee is formed by representatives of the Departments of Commerce, Agriculture, Finance, the Mexican Coffee Institute, the National Peasant Organization (CNC), and private intermediaries. The CNC supposedly represents and defends the interests of the small producers.

It is precisely the Department of Commerce which grants the export permits. The process to get one of these permits is a long, complicated, and expensive one. As any other bureaucratic transaction, it involves a great deal of 'red tape.' Anyone interested in exporting coffee needs at least five official permits issued by the Departments of the Agrarian Reform, Finance, Foreign Trade, INMECAFE, and the Nation's General Controller. The permit granted by the Agrarian Reform does not have an expiry date. However, the other ones have to be used within a year from the date they are issued or they are void. It is extremely difficult, almost impossible, to get a new set of permits. Anyone applying for an export permit has to have a warehouse and the appropriate equipment for the final treatment of coffee beans or 'dry processing.' As we can see, this procedure not only involves a fair amount of time, but also a considerable amount of money.

The intermediaries in Tumbalá have diverse origins. Some are private enterprises and some are organized under government's protection. ARIC is one of those organizations formed as a peasant co-op, whose purpose is to export coffee directly and to offer better prices to peasants for their product. However, this organization belongs to the CNC and it works in a very irregular manner. In some regions ARIC has been accused of not giving peasants the residual payments (*remanentes*)<sup>1</sup> they were entitled to. During this research, those peasants who had sold to ARIC in Tumbalá had to wait from five to six months to receive the first or advance payment for their product.

Unión de Ejidos Ch'ol is a fairly recently formed co-op in Tumbalá (four years). They claim they do not belong to the CNC or to ARIC, but they have been forced to export through ARIC since they have not been able to get the export permits. They were expecting to receive these permits sometime in 1988 and then they would be able to export directly. The President of this co-op in Tumbalá is a peasant from Yewitz. People in six communities organized themselves to sell all their production to this organization.

Soc. Cooperativa Industrial Cafés Yajalón is a fake co-op since the real owners are eight of the wealthiest men of Yajalón. These men are not only engaged in commercial activities, but they own cattle ranches in the region. They keep a main warehouse in Yajalón, but at harvest time they open small warehouses in the different municipalities. This enterprise usually maintains its prices a little bit higher than the INMECAFE, with the difference that it does not give any residual payments. Some years ago, this business was the only significant competitor the Institute had to confront in the region.

UCIRI is a peasant organization coordinated by a catholic priest in Tehuantepec, Oaxaca. They export coffee directly to European buyers. This was the first year they

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<sup>1</sup>The INMECAFE's payment policy is to give the producers an advance payment when they sell their coffee, and at the end of the year adjustments are made according to the coffee prices prevailing in the market at that moment. The peasants then receive the difference between the initial price they were paid and the final one. This is call a residual payment.

started operating in Tumbalá through a religious organization based in Palenque. There were only 60 people of four communities located closer to Palenque who got involved in this project. However, it is expected that the membership will grow larger in the future.

There are four local store owners who also buy coffee in Tumbalá. These merchants serve as intermediaries for the big merchants of Yajalón. While the other buyers open their warehouses in December, these local merchants start buying coffee at the moment the harvest starts. Hence, they benefit from those peasants who are in great need of cash and who cannot wait until the other businesses open. These merchants pay cash and usually pay a little more than the Institute to attract sellers, but this price is a final price with no residual payment at the end of the year.

Private intermediaries usually keep their prices close to the one offer by INMECAFE. In the year 1986-87 the Institute's initial price was set at \$992.00 pesos/kilo and the final price was \$1,275.20 pesos/kilo. However, in that year, for the first time since this institution has been operating in the area, private buyers were paying more (see Table 4). The Institute's staff blamed the administration for this unusual situation, since they argue that INMECAFE exported most of its coffee when the prices were at their lowest.

As we can see in Table 4, the price paid by INMECAFE was the lowest one. The administration argued that they actually lost money because of the drastic fall of coffee prices in the international market from \$4.00 dollars/kilo to the lowest of \$2.00/kilo in April 1987. It was then that the Institute sold almost half of its stock because they thought prices were going to slide even more. According to INMECAFE, they sold 134,764 quintales at \$2.30/kilo in March; 296,067 quintales at \$2.00/kilo in April, and 145,864 quintales at \$2.05/kilo in May. However some of the other intermediaries sold their coffee at an average price of \$2.50/kilo while the Institute sold at an average price of \$2.12/kilo.

The Institute's administration argued that instead of making any profits, they actually lost money and therefore, the peasants were not going to get any residual payments at the end of the year. The year 1986-87 was a very conflictive and difficult one for the small

coffee producers. There was widespread discontent among them which resulted in open protests in various parts of México. INMECAFE executives's answer was that this agency was not going to make any price adjustments and that if the peasants had any complaints they should let INMECAFE know through their representative, the CNC.

TABLE 4  
Coffee Prices Paid in the Year 1986-87

| Buyer                      | Price*<br>(U.S. dollars/kilo) |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| INMECAFE                   | \$0.54 (final price)          |
| Soc.Coop.Ind.Cafes Yajalón | 0.60 (final price)            |
| Union de Ejidos Ch'ol      | 0.60 (plus residual payment)  |
| ARIC                       | 0.60 (plus residual payment)  |
| Cooperativa Tzeltal Ch'ol  | 0.70 (final price)            |
| UCIRI                      | 0.63 (final price)            |
| Local merchants            | 0.50 - 0.62 (final price)     |

\* The exchange rate used for these calculations was the one prevailing at the time of this study of \$2,450.00 pesos to one U.S. dollar.

The main reasons why peasants sell coffee to the INMECAFE are the following: the producer receives a residual payment (remanente) at the end of the year; and the members of the Commercialization and Production Economic Units (UEPC's) can apply for loans and for fertilizer on credit. These loans have to be paid with coffee in the following harvest. The process to obtain loans from INMECAFE takes between three and four months and has to start in March so people receive their loans during the 'critical' months

of July, August, September, and October when there is a great need of cash on part of the producers. In the 1985-86 year the maximum amount a peasant could borrow was \$5,500.00 pesos for each quintal of coffee he committed to sell to the Institute. In the year 1986-87 this amount was raised to \$10,500.00 pesos. However, this money was still not enough to cover people's living expenses and they had asked the Institute repeatedly to increase the amount of these loans.

Besides buying coffee and supplying credit, INMECAFE is in charge of providing technical assistance to the coffee producers who have been organized in Commercialization and Production Economic Units (UEPC's). Every UEPC has a delegate and a treasurer. The delegate is responsible for conducting such transactions as applications for small coffee trees, for fertilizer on credit, and for loans. At the time of this research, there were 14 UEPC's in 9 communities with a total of 688 members. The Institute had two special programs as part of its technical assistance to improve coffee production in the area. The participants in the program had free access to fertilizer and pesticide to control the roya, and they were also paid for every activity involved in the program. The last program of this kind ended in April 1987. There were 74 producers participating in it.

In the period of 1987-88 the Institute was offering only one program which was designed to replace old trees by new ones. The requirements to participate in this program were: to have a whole hectare planted with coffee trees and that these trees were 25 to 30 years old. The participants would receive free fertilizer, pesticide, and money for doing the different tasks. In this program the coffee plot supposed to be divided in three parts. Each year one part would be replaced by new trees and at the end of the third year the old trees would have been completely replaced by new ones. In this way, the peasant would not suffer a drastic drop in his production. However, in Tumbalá nobody was participating in this program because people felt that coffee production would be adversely affected and they did not want to take any chances. Hence, the role of INMECAFE was limited to buying coffee and lending fertilizer and money to the producers.

One of the main problems faced by the coffee producers is the monopolistic control of the market by a chain of intermediaries whose sphere of influence extends from the local to the national and international arena. According to Gutelman (1985:251), these individuals manipulate to their own advantage the supply to the demand and organize and control the commercialization channels. They are an important factor in the price formation of industrial as well as agricultural commodities. The purchase of coffee from the peasants and subsequent resale in the market, has proven to be a highly profitable activity in Tumbalá. The peasant households in this area are basically despoiled and exploited through their participation in the market. The cheap agricultural commodities produced in these households make it possible for those who have control over the market to obtain fantastic profits. In this manner, the relation of the peasantry with the capitalist economy, as A. Bartra (1982) points out is not only restricted to the circulation sphere (market), but it also affects the production sphere. As a seller in the market, the peasant is expropriated of a surplus value and he is also subjected to a relation of exploitation as a producer because part of his work is being appropriated in these transactions.

The participation of the Mexican government in the coffee economy through INMECAFE has not changed significantly the situation of the small producers. This institution was created to protect these producers from the speculative transactions of intermediaries. However, the latter has not found a serious obstacle in INMECAFE to carry on with their predatory activities in the area. We can argue that the intervention of the government in the coffee market has had as an ultimate goal to take away some of the coffee profits from private hands.

The Institute has regulated the coffee prices in the national market, however, it is not clear how these prices are fixed. One thing is obvious, the guaranteed prices of this product are relatively low if compared with the prices prevailing in the international market. Not only that, but the initial prices set by this institution are extremely low and are followed closely by private intermediaries. For example, in the 1985-86 year, the initial price was

set at \$369.00 pesos/kilo and by the end of the year, when peasants were given residual payments, this price had come up to \$966.00 pesos/kilo. Meanwhile local intermediaries had paid \$400.00 pesos/kilo, but we have to remember that these are permanent prices with no residual payments at the end of the year. Therefore, those peasants who had sold to these intermediaries lost a significant amount of money. To prevent this situation from happening again, in the 1986-87 period the initial price started at \$992.00 pesos/kilo, a significantly higher price than the initial prices in former years.

Coffee prices are a great concern for the peasants of Tumbalá, especially because they have no control over them. They are aware of their exploitation by local and regional intermediaries. However, they have to sell their coffee to them because they cannot sell it anywhere else and because of the pressing need to pay debts acquired before the coffee harvest. As Arturo Warman (1976) observes, the peasantry live eternally indebted because they are unable to accumulate any capital.



## CHAPTER V

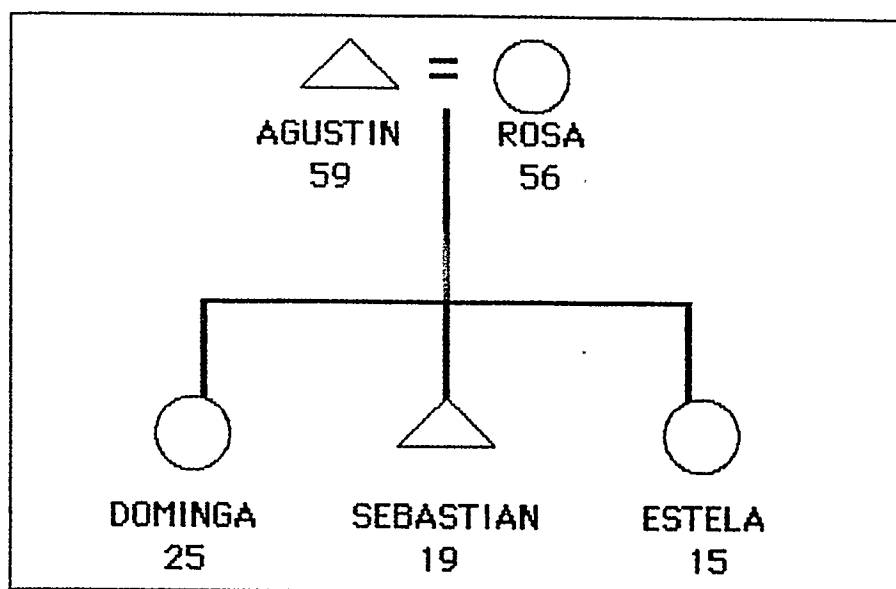
### PEASANT HOUSEHOLDS: THREE CASE STUDIES

In this chapter, the economic and social organization of three Tumbalá peasant households is examined. One of the fundamental concerns of this study is to analyze the particular manner in which these households are integrated into the dominant capitalist system and the effects of this articulation on the internal organization of these households. By looking at specific examples of Tumbalá family units we can gain insight into the internal and external processes that affect their functioning. In this chapter, important elements that affect the economic organization of these units are considered, such as the organization of production according to their internal availability of labour and resources and their participation in the international capitalist market of agricultural products. These households were chosen according to the following criteria. First of all, they represent three different types of households in terms of their size and composition, but their internal characteristics are shared by most households in Tumbalá. Second, the friendship links developed with some members of these families allowed me to participate and gather data on the internal structure of these households. They were willing to spend time with me and provide me with detailed information. And third, some members of these families spoke good Spanish, making it easier for me to better communicate with them.

#### Case No. 1 - Agustín Lopez Arcos

Don Agustín, 59 years of age, was born in the town of Tumbalá. At 18 years of age he married Rosa Peñate Velasco, who was then 16 years old. She was also born in Tumbalá. Don Agustín and Doña Rosa are tall and slender, and she is the only member of the family who still wears the traditional dress. They had 12 children, 5 girls and 7 boys. Seven of them are married, one of them lives in Villahermosa, two in Salto de Agua, and

another one in Tuxtla Gutiérrez. The three married daughters live in Tumbalá. At the time of this field research, only three children were living at home: Dominga, 25 years old, Sebastián, 19, and Estela, 15 (see Figure 3). Agustín, 23, was studying in Tuxtla Gutiérrez and Pascual, 17, was working in Comitán. Dominga and Sebastián finished elementary school and Estela was in her second year in the secondary school in town.



**FIGURE 3. HOUSEHOLD OF AGUSTIN LOPEZ ARCOS**

|         |         |            |
|---------|---------|------------|
| Legend: | ○       | female     |
|         | △       | male       |
|         | =       | affinity   |
|         | ┆       | filiation  |
|         | ┌┐      | laterality |
|         | □       | household  |
|         | 59      | age        |
|         | AGUSTIN | First name |

Don Agustín and his children speak good Spanish. The women wear their hair long, either loose or tied into a ponytail. Dominga was part of the women's group who owned

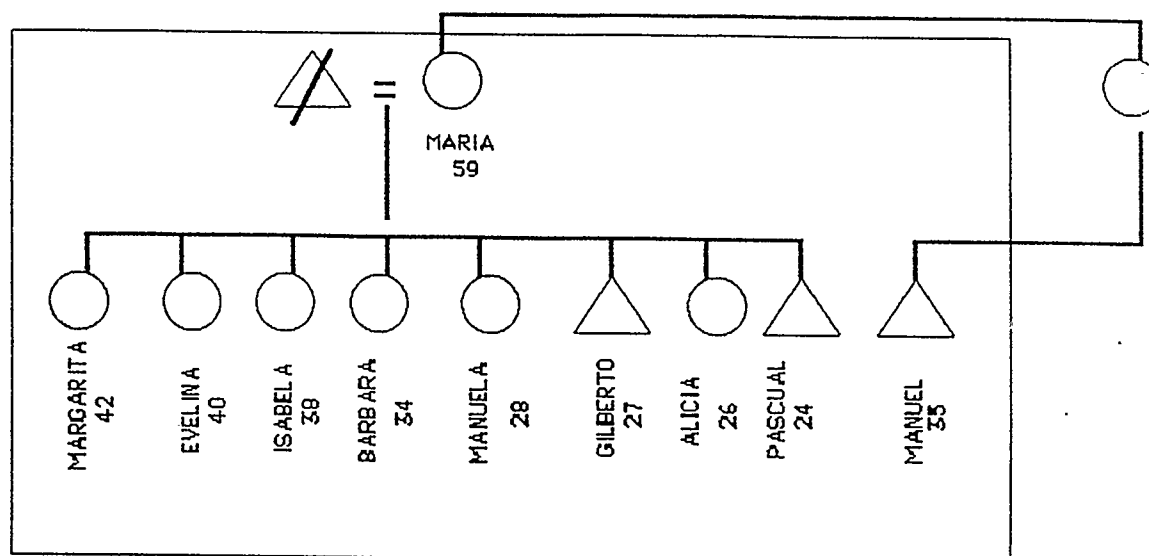
the tortilla factory. Don Agustín was a councillor in the former municipal government. His house is located in the vicinity of the Ejidal House and it has four rooms: a kitchen, two bedrooms, and a bathroom with a latrine and bathing space. These rooms are built with wooden planks and have corrugated metal roofs. All of them, with the exception of the kitchen have cement floors. Don Agustín's house has electricity and this family owns a television set which is located in one of the bedrooms. The house has only one tap in the backyard by the washboard. In the backyard, this family also has some chayote vines and 20 chickens and 2 turkeys. Don Agustín is an ejidatario. He owns 12 hectares of land in Tehuacan, which is a village located at about half an hour's walk from the town.

### **Case No. 2 - María Díaz López**

Doña María, 59 years old, was born in La Alianza, which is one of the annexes of the ejido of Tumbalá. La Alianza is located at the north side of the town, on the road to Salto de Agua and Palenque. There is practically no division between this village and the town. The only thing that differentiates one from the other is that the former does not have electricity. Doña Maria married when she was 15 years old to Don Pascual Arcos, who died in 1983. They had 10 children, but two died when they were babies. Of those who are alive, 6 are females and 2 males. All of them are still single and living at home. Margarita, 42 years old, Evelina, 40, Isabela, 38, Barbara, 34, Manuela, 28, Gilberto, 27, Alicia, 26, and Pascual, 24. Manuel, a 35 years old man, is the son of one of Doña Maria's sisters. He was living with this family as well (see Figure 4). Manuel was born in Tumbalá but he moved temporarily to Villahermosa some time ago and lost his right to ejidal land.

This family owns three houses: a house in La Alianza which has two rooms made of corrugated metal sheets; a small store located in a house on the main street of Tumbalá. This house is built with wooden planks and has a corrugated metal roof; and another house in the outskirts of the town. They bought this latter house in 1985. The two houses in

town have electricity. They opened the store in 1984, but were renting the outlet from a man who lives in Yewitz. However, in 1987 they had some savings from the sale of coffee and were able to buy this house. Isabela is in charge of the shop, and Gilberto goes every two weeks to Yajalón to buy goods to replenish this shop's small stock.

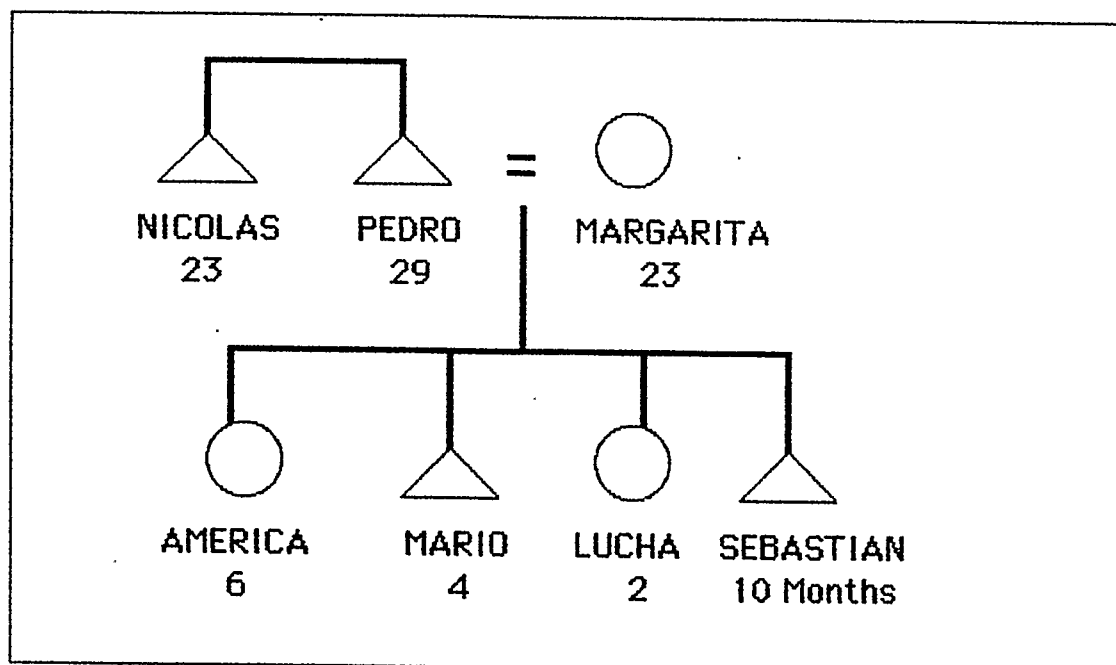


**FIGURE 4. HOUSEHOLD OF MARIA DIAZ LOPEZ**

Doña María and her oldest daughter Margarita still wear the traditional dress. The rest of the family wear Western clothes. Women wear their hair long, tied into a ponytail. Gilberto, Alicia, and Pascual finished elementary school and speak Spanish fluently. This is a fair skin family and the boys are tall compared to the average height of Ch'ol men. This household owns 25 chickens and 5 turkeys that were kept in the backyard of the house at La Alianza. They had more chickens but they were killed by the fowl cholera. Doña María's husband was an ejidatario. When he died, she and her children inherited this land. They have 12 hectares located about one hour's walk from La Alianza on the trail to Yewitz.

### Case No. 3 - Pedro Arcos Moreno

Pedro, 29 years old, was born in Benito Juárez, a village located in the southeast part of the municipality, at two hours walking distance from the town. He married seven years ago, with Margarita López Sánchez, who was 16 at that time. She is from the same village. They have four children, América, 6 years old, Mario, 4, Lucha, 2, and Sebastián, 10 months. His single brother, Nicolás, 23 years old, was living in the same household (see Figure 5). They have a two-room house. The bedroom is made of wooden planks and has a corrugated metal roof and the kitchen is made of wattle and daub walls and has a thatched roof. The two rooms have earth floors. They have no electricity and no running water. Water from a nearby spring is brought to a central cement tank by means of a hose. People get water for their everyday needs from a tap located close to this tank.



**FIGURE 5. HOUSEHOLD OF PEDRO ARCOS MORENO**

Pedro had tuberculosis. He received free treatment for one year through the Ch'ol Dispensary and he recovered in 1986. During the time he was ill he could not work very hard. Nicolás did most of the hard work. Pedro believes that the fact he did not work hard in the fields was important in his recovery. Pedro and Nicolás work together and own 20 hectares of land, ten hectares each, located about one hour from the population center. They have only three years of elementary school, enough to know some basic arithmetic, as well as basic reading and writing. Margarita does not have any schooling and does not speak Spanish very well. This family had 15 chickens, but most of them were killed by the fowl cholera. They had just bought 10 chicks for \$300.00 pesos each.

### The Agricultural Cycle

The agricultural cycle in Tumbalá is divided into two consecutive phases. From October to March people work in their coffee plots. From the end of March until the end of September people work in the subsistence crops. The agricultural activities are divided among the members of the family unit according to sex and age. Some of these activities are men's and some women's and children's. However, some tasks require the participation of all able members of the household. The tasks involved in planting corn and beans begin in March with the clearing of plots that will be used for this purpose. Trees and vegetation cover are cut down from a piece of reforested land (process known as *rozadura*). This is an extremely exhausting activity performed by men with the help of machetes. Small growth is cut at the roots; while larger trees are cut about one meter above ground. A firebreak of two to three meters wide must be cleared at the boundaries of the milpa, to stop the fire from burning into adjacent fields. All trees and large shrubs are used as cooking fuel. The rest is burned approximately 20 days after cutting, once the undergrowth has dried out. This is done at the end of April, and early in the morning to avoid the wind. As the milpas are burned, the sky becomes red and smoke fills the

atmosphere. The terrain where the cornfields are located is hilly and stony, and consequently all activities related to growing corn have to be done by hand.

People start planting corn and beans at the end of April and beginning of May when the first rains of the year come. Men plant corn using a digging stick. A small bag swung over the shoulder is used to carry the corn seeds which are usually kept from last year's harvest. The best way to perform this task is to organize teams of four to five men who can plant corn faster, so it grows evenly. These men gather on top of the hill and go down on a line planting six seeds in small holes spaced at one meter intervals. Women plant beans in a separate plot using a digging stick. Six seeds are dropped into holes that are about half a meter apart. The variety of beans planted is *frijol de suelo*, which literally means beans that grow close to the ground. The seeds used are the ones that are kept from last year's harvest.

Once the corn and bean plants start to grow they need to be fertilized. This is done in early June. Because of the quality of the soil, Tumbalá peasants have come to depend more and more in the use of fertilizer to improve the yields of the subsistence crops. Women, men, and children participate in this labour-intensive activity since the small plants have to be fertilized one by one. The kind of fertilizer used is the chemical one that has to be applied every year. Manure is not available in Tumbalá, since there are no animals that can provide it. Men as ejidatario holders can buy fertilizer on credit through the rural bank (BANCRISA) at \$10,500.00 pesos a bag of 50 kilos. Fertilizer is purchased in March and have to be paid for in February of the following year. Another way to obtain fertilizer on credit is through being a member of one of the societies organized by INMECAFE. This institution sells fertilizer at \$6,175.00 pesos a bag, which has to be paid back with coffee in the next year's harvest. People usually use this fertilizer in corn and beans instead of using it in their coffee plots.

In July the corn and bean plots are weeded. Women, men, and children participate in this strenuous task since weeds tend to grow freely everywhere. In September when the

corn ears have matured, men bend down the top half of the stalks and the full ears are left to harden on the stalk. This process cuts off the food supply so that the maize begins to dry and the mature ears are prevented from rotting under the rain.. The corn harvest starts in September and corn on the cob starts to be eaten in August. This early corn is known as *maíz nuevo* or 'new corn.' The ears are taken from the stalks with the husks and are stored in this form. Corn can be fetched all at once on several consecutive days, or little by little over a period of several months. Women, men, and children carry this produce in burlap sacks from the fields into the houses. The time involved in this activity is directly related to the location of the fields. The ripened beans, on the other hand, have to be harvested in a short period, otherwise the grains would fall off from the plant and would be wasted. Women pull off the bean pods from the plants by hand and carry them to the houses where they are placed on tapexcos to dry. Once they are dry, they are threshed by hand.

All the processes involved in the preparation of food in Tumbalá households are women's responsibility. They are in charge of converting maize and beans into the different foods consumed by the family. Women remove the kernels from the corn ears using an iron corn sheller. These kernels are boiled in water with lime until they become soft. They are removed from the fire and left to cool off overnight. The lime is purchased in the local shops. In the morning, the grains are washed and ground in a hand-operated grinder to make *nixtamal*, a dough good for making tortillas and *pozol*. Tortillas are made by hand and cooked on a griddle. They are placed in a gourd container to keep them warm until served, or to store them for meals later in the day. To make dough for pozol the grains have to be ground finer than for tortillas. Pozol is a ball of dough that people take with them when they go to the fields or on trips. A small piece of this dough is mixed with water in a bowl to produce a refreshing drink.

Don Agustín, his son Sebastián, and two male relatives formed a team to carry out the first activities involved in planting corn and beans. First of all, they cleared Don Agustín's



two hectares in ten days and a firebreak in two days. Then they worked on his relatives' plots, spending about the same number of days. They separated all the wood that was going to be used as cooking fuel and burned the rest in two days. They planted one hectare and a half with corn using the 18 kilos of seeds they had saved from last year's. They spent three days in this activity on Don Agustín's property, and another three days on his relatives'.

Estela and Doña Rosa planted half a hectare with beans, using ten kilos of bean seeds they had kept from last year's harvest. It took them three days to do this. It took Don Agustín, Doña Rosa, Sebastián, and Dominga five days to apply fertilizer to the corn and bean plants. The four of them spent eight days removing the weeds. Don Agustín and Sebastián bent over the corn stalks in four days. It took Doña Rosa and Dominga four days to fetch the ripe beans. They dried them in the sun and shelled them. The corn was fetched over a period of two months by Don Agustín, Sebastián, and either Doña Rosa or Dominga. This family obtained 300 kilos of beans and approximately 1800 kilos of corn. This production was devoted to family's consumption in bean soup, tortillas, pozol, and for feeding the chickens. Don Agustín bought 250 kilos of fertilizer through BANCRIISA. Doña Rosa and Dominga got up at four every morning to grind corn and to make tortillas so that Don Agustín and Sebastián had breakfast before they left for the fields. This activity took about three hours every day. Estela went to school, but she also helped with the preparation of food, especially when the women had to go to the fields.

In Doña María's family, Doña María and one of her daughters stayed home to do the domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning the house, and washing clothes. Doña María stayed home most of the time, but during slack periods in the agricultural cycle, her daughters took turns to help her in the house; Isabela was in charge of the shop; and Gilberto, Pascual, Manuel, Margarita, Evelina, Barbara, Manuela, and Alicia worked in the fields. Gilberto, Manuel, and Pascual cleared two hectares and a half of land in 15 days and a firebreak in three days. They separated the firewood and burned the rest in two days.

They planted 20 kilos of corn seeds in two hectares in four days, while Evelina, Barbara, Manuela, and Alicia planted ten kilos of bean seeds in half a hectare of land in two days. These seeds were kept from last years' harvest. Manuel, Pascual, Gilberto, Margarita, Evelina, Barbara, Alicia, and Manuela fertilized the corn and bean plants in three days, and they all performed the weeding in six days. The three men bent down the corn stalks in three days. Together, the three men and the five women fetched the ripe beans and corn in approximately 15 days. The corn was stored with the husks on and women shelled it according to the domestic needs. Doña María and one of her daughters got up at four in the morning to prepare the nixtamal and to make tortillas. They spent about five hours every day in this task. This family harvested 2000 kilos of corn and 350 kilos of beans. This was not enough for their yearly consumption and they had to buy 1500 kilos of corn and 150 kilos of beans. They purchased 300 kilos of fertilizer through BANCRIISA.

Pedro and his brother cleared one hectare and a half in 20 days and a firebreak in four days. They separated the wood to be used in the house and burned the rest in two days. They planted one hectare with corn using ten kilos of seeds that were kept from last year's harvest in five days. Then they had to plant half a hectare with beans in two days. They used ten kilos of bean seeds that were kept from last year's. Pedro and Nicolás applied fertilizer in ten days and performed the weeding in 12 days. Margarita did not go to the fields very often because her children were still very young. However, she fetched water and gathered firewood. Pedro bought 250 kilos of fertilizer on credit from INMECAFE and he harvested approximately 1200 kilos of corn and 250 kilos of beans. It took Pedro and Nicolás five days to harvest the ripe beans. Margarita dried them in the sun and then shelled them. The corn was left on the field and was fetched little by little.

In Tumbalá, just as the peasants are finishing with the tasks involved in growing the subsistence crops they start preparing for the coffee harvest. In the 1986-87 year the production of coffee was remarkably good. The average yield for the villages located closer to the town was of 10 to 15 quintales per hectare. In villages such as Hidalgo,

Joshil, Juárez, and M. Yewitz, located at lower altitudes, it ranged from 20 to 25 quintales. However, as it was mentioned earlier, the coffee tree has biannual cycles. This means that generally a good yield is followed by a poor one. During my fieldwork the small producers were already worried about the 1987-88 harvest because they knew it was going to be a bad one. In order to produce under optimum conditions a coffee plot requires the following chores:

- 1) Shade regulation,
- 2) annual trimming of trees,
- 3) pruning of older trees (20 years old) (when a tree is pruned it usually takes about two years for it to start bearing fruit again),
- 4) uprooting old trees (30-40 years old),
- 5) digging of holes to plant new trees,
- 6) planting new trees,
- 7) weeding (three times a year),
- 8) fertilizing each tree (twice a year),
- 9) fumigation of trees to control roya (twice a year).

These chores are distributed throughout the year as follows:

January to April:

First weeding, trimming, shade regulation, pruning, and uprooting.

May to August:

First application of fertilizer, planting new trees, first fumigation, and second weeding.

September to December:

Second application of fertilizer, second fumigation, and third weeding.

The conditions described above are the ideal conditions of production for any coffee plot. However, most Tumbalá peasants can perform only the most essential of these tasks. That is, they trim the trees, they do one or two weeding, they do not apply fertilizer, and

they do not fumigate. They prune some of the older trees when they realize that these trees are not producing much coffee, but they are very reluctant to get rid of them by planting new ones. The reason for not applying fertilizer and pesticide to the coffee plots is that most peasants do not have the monetary resources required to purchase these products.

Some of the tasks involved in growing coffee overlap with the ones involved in the subsistence crops, and this factor explains why it is so difficult to carry out all the activities involved in both crops. The trimming and weeding is usually done by the men. During the harvest women participate in the picking, washing, and drying of the coffee beans. If they have small children, women do not go to the coffee plots. However, they perform coffee processing activities that take place at home, such as shelling, washing, and drying the beans. The last two activities are definitely woman's jobs. She has to make sure that the coffee bean is clean, with no shell particles attached to it. There have been cases in which men have left their wives, arguing that they did not know how to wash coffee properly. The coffee harvest takes place at four different times, according to the maturation of beans. In Tumbalá the trees bear fruit from October to February, the peak periods being in December and January. Once the beans mature, they have to be picked up immediately, or else Tumbalá's constant bad weather would knock them down from the trees.

Don Agustín has planted one hectare with coffee. He does not fertilize or fumigate this plot. He and Sebastián spent ten days trimming the trees and about eight days weeding the plot. He obtained ten quintales of coffee in the 1986-87 harvest. The work involved in producing one quintal of coffee was calculated as follows:<sup>1</sup> Don Agustín, Sebastián, Doña Rosa, and Dominga picked coffee for one day and a half. Don Agustín and Sebastián spent two hours removing the shell using a hand-operated machine. Doña Rosa, Dominga, and Estela spent five hours washing the beans, and it took about six days for these beans to

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<sup>1</sup>Due to the kind of information provided, it was easier to calculate the work involved in producing one quintal of coffee and then multiply it by the total number of quintales produced by the household.

dry. Women have to watch carefully for weather changes so that the beans do not get wet and they also have to turn them around so they dry evenly. Once they have dried completely, they are stored in burlap sacks to subsequently be taken to the market. The approximate time invested by this family in producing ten quintales of coffee was 40 days, including the time spent in carrying the beans in and outside the house during the drying process.

Doña Rosa's family planted two and a half hectares with coffee. They obtained 30 quintales in the 1986-87 harvest. Gilberto, Pascual, and Manuel trimmed the trees in six days, and the weeding was done by the three of them plus six hired workers. These nine men completed this task in two days. Each worker was paid \$4,000.00 pesos a day. The time invested in producing a quintal of coffee was calculated as follows: Gilberto, Pascual, Manuel, Margarita, Evelina, Barbara, Manuela, and Alicia spent one day picking coffee. It took Gilberto, Pascual, and Manuel two hours to shell the coffee beans. The five women mentioned above spent three hours washing these beans and it took about six days for this coffee to dry. Therefore, the total amount of time spent by the members of this family in the production of 30 quintales of coffee was 58 days.

Pedro and Nicolás devoted one and a half hectares to coffee. They do not fertilize or fumigate their coffee plot. They spent 15 days trimming the trees and about ten days weeding the plot. Their production of coffee in the period 1986-87 was in the order of 15 quintales. The work involved in getting one quintal was calculated as follows: Pedro and Nicolás picked coffee for four days, then they spent four hours shelling these beans in a hand-operated machine, Margarita spent 15 hours washing the beans, and it took about six days for these beans to dry. Margarita has the inconvenience of not having running water in the house. Two days were calculated for the taking in and out of the coffee during the drying process. The total amount of time spent in producing 15 quintales of coffee, therefore was 90 days.

### Income and Expenses

In order to understand the economic situation of the three households I am dealing with in this chapter, it is necessary to look at their income in relation to their production and living expenses. The figures listed below correspond to the year 1986-87 which was the time when this research was conducted.<sup>2</sup> The expenses listed for these households do not include the costs of the subsistence production and of the family labour. There is no question about the importance of these two factors in the production and reproduction of the labour force in these households. However, my intention in presenting these data is to examine the conditions in which peasant production is performed rather than analyzing the cost of the reproduction of the labour force in these households.

Don Agustín sold his coffee to Sociedad Cooperativa de Cafés Yajalón, at \$1,450.00 pesos/kilo. He sold 10 quintales (575 kilos), receiving a total income of \$833,750.00 pesos. He sold his coffee to this enterprise because payment was made in cash and at the moment of the transaction.

#### Don Agustín's Production Expenses:

|   |              |
|---|--------------|
| Payment of 5 sacks of fertilizer to BANCRIISA<br>at \$10,500. each sack                                     | \$ 52,500.00 |
| 1 machete   | 4,000.00     |
| 2 files at \$3,500.00 each  | 7,000.00     |
| 6 henequen sacks at \$3,500.00 each   | 21,000.00    |
| Ten percent depreciation of the pulp-removing<br>machine that was purchased 2 years ago for<br>\$200,000.00 | 20,000.00    |

#### Living Expenses:

|                                   |            |
|-----------------------------------|------------|
| Groceries purchased at the stores | 300,000.00 |
| Household utensils                | 50,000.00  |

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<sup>2</sup>The figures are provided in Mexican pesos. At the moment of this research, one U.S. dollar was equal to \$2,450.00 pesos.

|   |                     |
|---|---------------------|
| Clothing  | 200,000.00          |
| Other expenses (electricity, transportation, medicine, entertainment) | 100,000.00          |
| <b>TOTAL:</b>   | <b>\$754,500.00</b> |

As it was mentioned earlier, in the calculation of these expenses the subsistence production was not considered. However, if Don Agustín had to buy the corn and beans that were produced in his household, he would have spent \$144,000.00 pesos if he had bought beans from the CONASUPO at \$480.00/kilo and \$441,000.00 pesos in corn whose price at the time was \$245.00/kilo.

Doña María and her family sold their coffee to ARIC. This enterprise was paying \$1,450.00/kilo. They sold 30 quintales (1,725 kilos), getting \$2,500,250.00 pesos. However, they did not get this money at the moment when they sold their coffee. Peasants who sold their coffee to this organization were paid in June without any valid justification on part of ARIC for this delay. This organization, as it was mentioned earlier, works in a very irregular manner and its administrative personnel have been accused of frauds in other regions of Chiapas.

#### Doña Maria's Production Expenses:

|  |              |
|--|--------------|
| Payment of 6 sacks of fertilizer to BANCRIISA at \$10,500 00 each sack | \$ 63,000.00 |
| 2 machetes at \$4,000.00 each  | 8,000.00     |
| 3 files at \$3,500.00 each   | 10,500.00    |
| 5 henequen sacks at \$3,500.00 each                                    | 17,500.00    |
| Purchase of a new pulp-removing machine                                | 250,000.00   |
| Wages paid to 6 workers at \$4,000.00 each for 2 days                  | 48,000.00    |

#### Living Expenses:

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| Groceries purchased from the stores              | 500,000.00 |
| Purchase of 1500 kilos of corn at \$245.00 /kilo | 367,500.00 |
| Purchase of 150 kilos of beans at \$480.00/kilo  | 57,000.00  |

|  |                       |
|--|-----------------------|
| General household utensils                               | 50,000.00             |
| Clothing   | 500,000.00            |
| Other expenses (medicine, transportation, entertainment) | 150,000.00            |
| <b>TOTAL:</b>  | <b>\$2,021,500.00</b> |

If Doña María's household had to buy the corn and beans they produced, they would have spent \$643,000.00, \$490,000.00 in purchasing corn and \$153,000.00 in purchasing beans.

Pedro sold his coffee to INMECAFE, at \$1,275.20/kilo. He sold 15 quintales (862.5 kilos), receiving \$1,099,860.00. He preferred the Institute because of the price offered, in terms of the remnant or residual payment at the end of the year, and because he could borrow money and fertilizer from this institution.

Pedro's Production Expenses:

|  |              |
|--|--------------|
| Payment of 5 sacks of fertilizer to INMECAFE at \$6,175.00 each                                    | \$ 38,875.00 |
| 1 machete  | 4,000.00     |
| 2 files at \$3,500.00 each   | 7,000.00     |
| 4 henequen sacks at \$3,500.00 each  | 14,000.00    |
| Ten percent depreciation of the pulp-removing machine that was bought 5 years ago for \$145,000.00 | 14,500.00    |

Living Expenses:

|   |                     |
|---|---------------------|
| Payment of a loan to INMECAFE             | 55,000.00           |
| Groceries purchased from the stores       | 200,000.00          |
| Household utensils                        | 50,000.00           |
| Clothing                                  | 150,000.00          |
| Other Expenses (medicine, transportation) | 150,000.00          |
| <b>TOTAL:</b>                             | <b>\$683,375.00</b> |



By looking at the internal conditions of Tumbalá peasant households we are able to discern the factors that intervene in their organization. The evidence presented by these three households shows that their productive organization is affected by both internal (differential size and composition) and external factors (articulation to the market). The annual agricultural cycle is divided between the subsistence and commercial crops which require a continuous and intensive participation of family labour. In the case of Doña María's family, the household is composed of adult members which enables this family to produce more efficiently and in this way to sell more coffee in the market and to save some money to be invested in small-scale operations. This household shows more flexibility in the utilization of its labour force. Doña María and one of her daughters can stay home while Isabela can work full time in the shop. In Don Agustín's household there is a marked increase in the utilization of the labour force. Women have to divide their time between the domestic and agricultural tasks. Moreover, this family could not pick all the coffee beans during the harvest and in this way lost some of their production. Pedro's household is composed of young members who cannot participate in agricultural production and his wife's participation is also restricted by this factor. Therefore, Pedro and his brother Nicolás have to work harder and longer in agricultural production. Pedro mentioned that it was not possible for them to keep up with the coffee harvest and a considerable amount of coffee beans were wasted.

By examining the income and expenses of these households in the year 1986-87, we observe that these families did not work with noticeable deficits. However, we must remember that that year was an exceptional year in terms of coffee production, and that many times coffee production is reduced to half of what the peasants harvested that year. The expenditures of these households are minimal because the production process does not require great investments of capital due to the low level of technology. These peasants utilize a limited number of tools and the seeds used in the subsistence crops are usually kept from the last year's harvest. The only significant expenditure in this regard was fertilizer,

which was purchased on credit. People have come to depend more and more in this product to increase their yields of corn and beans, securing in this way the basic items of their diet.

The possibilities of capitalization of these units are limited and largely conditioned by the situation of the market. The monopolistic control of the market by a network of intermediaries is the concrete form in which the transference of value and the exploitation of the Tumbalá peasant households is accomplished. Through the transference of value to commercial capital most peasants in Tumbalá fail to embark upon a process of accumulation. The local and regional intermediaries are able to pay peasants prices which are below the real value of their products and sell them commodities at prices above their value because they control the market. In this way, peasants are subjected to an unequal exchange as sellers and buyers. We have also to take into account the deterioration in terms of exchange suffered by peasants and workers in México. Generally, salaries and prices of agricultural products do not keep up with the prices of industrial goods. Mexican's economy has an inflationary rate of more than 100 percent.

The low cost of production and reproduction of the labour force in the peasant economy of Tumbalá makes this sector an efficient producer of cheap agricultural products. This is possible because these households operate with little profit or none at all. In this way, capitalism only permits the simple reproduction of these households, or in other words, their reproduction on a small scale because they cannot accumulate capital that would increase their existing scale of reproduction. We can argue that peasant production is actually subsidizing the price of coffee in the market.

## CHAPTER VI

### DEPENDENCY AND UNEQUAL EXCHANGE IN TUMBALA

The problem addressed by this study is placed within the theoretical discussions that have taken place among economic anthropologists to understand and explain the conditions of existence of contemporary peasantries within capitalism. One of the assumptions that guided this research was that non-capitalist forms of production are invariably found to be subordinated to dominant capitalist economies. Therefore, any empirical study that focuses on the articulation of different forms of production within a social formation has to identify the mechanisms by which these forms are linked together. Favre (1973) suggests that peasant communities do not constitute independent social groups. They are articulated to regional formations with which they form an structured entity, and they form part of national institutions in which they participate in political and economic power relations. The fact that these communities are inserted into a larger system explains how and why they change through time and acquire new characteristics.

One of the main mechanisms through which peasant economies are integrated to capitalist economies in dependent countries, such as México, is by the production of agricultural commodities for the market. I argue that this is one of the two basic forms in which the labour force is exploited in these countries. The working class is exploited in the process of production by the creation of products that are sold for more money than what the worker receives in wages. In this way, he or she is creating a surplus-labour that is appropriated by the owner of the means of production. In the case of peasant production, this appropriation is not immediately apparent because it occurs under exchange relations which do not adopt the wage form. However, as Vergopoulos (1975) mentions, peasant production is subordinated to capital, and capitalist relations of production prevail, even if the main condition of production and exploitation is not the relation between wages and

capital but rather between peasant production and capital. In this regard, A. Bartra (1982) points out that because it is not labour but products which are sold, the amount of labour which is realized as surplus is neither directly controlled nor fixed by capital in the production process itself, but only afterwards in the market. However, the origins of this expropriation are found in the peasant process of production which is based on the labour available in the household.

The extraction of surplus-labour from peasant production is accomplished through an unequal exchange in the market which is explained by the confrontation of commodities that have been produced under two different processes of production. The commodities produced by peasant households do not contain surplus-value, as it is the case with capitalist commodities, because they do not contain the capitalist relation of necessary labour-time - surplus-labour. The different nature of peasant production is what makes it impossible for peasant commodities to automatically impose themselves in the market by their prices of production. These commodities have to compete in the market with commodities produced under capitalist conditions with a higher productivity of labour due to the development of the productive forces. The effect of this competition is the devaluation of household labour-time and, hence, of the value of the commodities produced.

The law of value states in general that the value of a commodity is determined by the average socially necessary labour-time required for its production. The operation of the law of value is mediated through the relations between different forms and branches of production and between different productivities of labour in the circuit of capital as a whole. (85)

This means that the value of a given commodity is established by the conditions of its production in branches with the highest productivity of labour. It is because of the low development of the productive forces in peasant agriculture that the values of peasant commodities cannot be measured simply in terms of the labour-time required for their production but are subject to all the determinants of value which converge and are regulated

at the level of the market. In this way, peasants systematically sell their commodities for a market price inferior to their value, thus making possible the existence of a permanent unequal exchange, not in terms of values, which is the rule of capitalist circulation, but in terms of prices. The small producers can tolerate the descent of prices under the price of production and have no more limit than the cost of production beyond which their reproduction at the same scale becomes impossible. While the price of capitalist commodities include the cost of production plus the price of production (average profit), the selling prices of peasant commodities include only the cost of production. In this manner capital appropriates the profits that peasants should obtain without exercising a direct control over the productive process.

The peasant households of Tumbalá produce for both their direct consumption and for the market. The unit of production and reproduction is the household and, therefore, the organization of the productive process is based on the labour of the family. The main difference found among these households is the cycle of generational reproduction. The differential size and composition of the households in terms of productive members gives them relative advantages in the conditions of production. However, their possibilities to accumulate capital do not lie in these internal factors, but in the market structure in which these households participate. All other conditions seem to be uniform among peasant households in Tumbalá. I argue that the use of family labour and the consequent absence of any consideration of expenditure of labour power in terms of purchase and sale conceals the exploitation of this work. I would like to advance the hypothesis that only part of the work performed by these households is remunerated through the prices of coffee in the market and the rest is unpaid work which, in turn, is the exact definition of surplus labour. The use of family labour represents considerable savings in the use of wage work which would result in higher production costs and consequently in higher prices of coffee. Therefore, there are obvious advantages in allowing these peasant households to continue

operating in the same scale as long as the extraction of profits can continue through the organization of family labour.

The prices paid to peasants for their coffee only allow for part of the reproduction of the household which has to be complemented by subsistence agriculture. Subsistence crops are without question an important part in the survival of these households. The evidence presented in this study shows that Tumbalá households can only reproduce themselves on a limited scale because they are unable to accumulate any capital that could allow them to engage in an extended reproduction. We observe that the low capitalization of these households is reflected in the precarious material and technical basis of production. The technology employed to perform agricultural activities is very basic and the use of agricultural inputs is restricted to chemical fertilizer for corn and beans. Even this fertilizer has to be purchased on credit. The limited economic resources of these households do not allow them to purchase improved means of production and agricultural inputs such as insecticide and fertilizer for their coffee plots. The small producers of Tumbalá are in charge of reproducing their own labour and that of their families. Capital does not assume any responsibility for it. I have shown that the government expenditures in terms of social services are very limited in the area. These peasants, and for that matter, the rest of the peasantry in México have not benefited from services such as medical care, welfare, unemployment insurance, and other basic social services.

The Tumbalá peasants are dependent on exchange relations without being able to determine the laws that govern that exchange. It is in the market that prices for peasant products are decided. Therefore, peasants' income is always dependent on the conditions of the market, and these conditions are outside their control and are unfavorable to them. The peculiar organization of these households enable them to continue functioning even if they do not make any profits, although this does not mean they do not want to obtain profits, however these are conditioned by their participation in the coffee market. The

prices of coffee are extremely unstable and are subject to constant fluctuations which are related to the supply and the demand of coffee in the international market.

The importance of the production performed by these small producers is unquestionable. They are able to produce cheap coffee which makes it possible for Mexico to be competitive in the international market. However, as I have demonstrated, the prices paid to these producers are significantly lower than those paid to the exporters in the international market. Therefore, we can say that through the regional market structure the small coffee producers of Tumbalá transfer value and are exploited. The market is dominated by merchants who act as intermediaries between the local peasant production and the national and international economies. These intermediaries profit from the purchase of cheap coffee and its subsequent resale in the market. It is the existence of a network of intermediaries in a position of monopolistic control what makes it impossible for peasants to influence prices. Therefore, I argue that the peasantry of Tumbalá is exploited by the intermediaries with whom they must deal in order to sell their coffee. They pay prices which are below the real value of coffee and sell commodities at prices above their value. These intermediaries are in such a position that they can influence the conditions of the market, and it is precisely through their action that peasants fail to embark in an accumulation process that would permit them to get involved in a process of extended reproduction. The intermediaries' activities in the area are encouraged by little competition and by geographic isolation.

### **The Government's Intervention in the Coffee Market**

The adverse effects of intermediation on small rural producers has been acknowledged by the Mexican government who has tried to solve the problem by establishing commercialization channels controlled by the State. This was the objective behind the opening of a regional office of INMECAFE in Yajalón. However, this institution has not curtailed the network of intermediaries that have been functioning in the region since the

1940's when the redistribution of land converted peasants into coffee producers. We can argue that INMECAFE's policies, especially the ones that affect the coffee prices have tended to enhance the position of the intermediaries in the area. In order for government policies to have a true impact, the establishment of commercialization channels have to be complemented by a system of credit, by technical assistance, and by providing agricultural inputs and consumer goods at reasonable prices.

The performance of this institution in the area has been characterized by an excess of red tape and bureaucratism. The peasants of Tumbalá are facing serious problems such as the increasing spread of the roya in the region. According to the personnel of the Institute, 45 percent of the coffee trees in Chiapas are affected by this pest. During my research it was observed that many trees were already affected in Tumbalá. The peasants know their trees have roya, but they think it is not a serious problem because the trees are still bearing fruit. However, this pest only affects the leaves of the tree, which can continue bearing fruit for three years after it was infected, but in the fourth year the tree dies. In theory, this pest has been controlled through the Institute's programs. However, the reality is different because the majority of the peasants cannot participate in the special programs implemented by INMECAFE. Technical assistance is limited to those people participating in these kind of programs, and due to budgetary problems only a small percentage of the population can benefit from them.

The Institute does not have enough personnel to provide a sound and effective technical assistance. There are only two agricultural technicians who have been assigned to 50 villages. When they go to some of these villages they do it quickly and most of the time the visits are scheduled in days when people are busy. Some of the technicians did not have the slightest idea about coffee production when they started working for the Institute. Therefore, it is not surprising to hear complaints about the negligence of some technicians who have committed serious mistakes which have badly affected coffee plots. People in one of the villages were deceived by one of the former employees. He made them sign or



put their fingerprints for certain amount of money, of which people only received half. In two other villages people gave this employee money to pay the credit they had with the Institute. He took the money and did not give people any receipts. According to the Institute these people still owe money.

The performance of the Institute has been paternalistic in the sense that it has not created an awareness among the producers on the importance of giving adequate care to their coffee plots. Its personnel has not tried to explain to the producers in a clear-cut way the objectives of the programs, and most people participate in them because they can get fertilizer, pesticide, and some money. Most peasants do not fertilize their coffee plots because they say the tree gets used to it and once they start using fertilizer they have to continue doing it every year. Due to the chronic lack of economic resources they are never sure if they will have money to buy fertilizer. I was present in one of the communities when the INMECAFE's personnel arrived to pay the members of a special project for the performance of various tasks. I noticed that nobody received money for the application of fertilizer and pesticide because people only got to the pruning of trees, but nobody uprooted the old trees. This same thing happens in other communities. People are really afraid to get rid of old trees because of the consequent drop in production and in their income until the new trees start bearing fruit.

The Institute has been gradually losing control over the commercialization process in the area. For instance, in the 1986-87 period the total coffee production of the Yajalón region (seven municipalities) was in the order of 138 000 quintales. The regional warehouse of INMECAFE only purchased 41,500 quintales, not even one third of the total production. The average annual production of Tumbalá is 24,575 quintales, and if we look at the amount of coffee the Institute has bought in the last three years, we realize that it keeps diminishing.

In 1984-85 INMECAFE bought 9,685 quintales (good yield)

In 1985-86 INMECAFE only bought 4,700 quintales (low yield)

In 1986-87 INMECAFE bought 5,500 quintales (good yield)

The causes for distrust on part of the producers towards INMECAFE are explained in the manner in which this institution has been operating in the area. This has been marked by corruption, mismanagement and top-heavy administration. I would like to cite only some examples. In the year 1986-87 private buyers and co-ops were paying more than the Institute. Not only did the Institute pay lower prices, but it claimed that it did not make any profits so the peasants did not receive any residual payments. Many times the producers are not paid at the moment of selling their coffee because of the shortage of cash in the local warehouses. They have to make special trips to Yajalón to receive their payments. The local warehouses open in December, when the harvest has already started in the area. Sometimes, the local warehouses do not buy coffee because they are full. The Institute does not own its own vehicles to empty warehouses regularly. At other times, warehouses do not buy coffee because they do not have burlap sacks. Therefore, peasants have to sell their coffee to other buyers because they cannot take it back to their communities.

So far, INMECAFE's intervention in the coffee market has been limited to regulating the prices of coffee in the regional market. Before this agency started operating in Tumbalá, these prices were fixed by the private merchants. However, this guaranteed price is low if compared to the prices paid to the exporters in the international market. The production that INMECAFE has been able to purchase is extremely low when compared to the production that goes to the private sector. Besides, the Institute has neither been able to establish a sound credit program nor an adequate technical assistance.

It has been acknowledged that peasants have a difficult time before the harvest of coffee starts. The earnings from coffee are not enough to supply the household's needs over the course of the year and therefore peasants must borrow in that 'critical' period. INMECAFE established a kind of a relief fund in the form of credit to help peasants, however, as it was shown by the data collected during research, the credit given to them is insignificant when compared to the expenses they have to face. The inflation rate is

extremely high and the prices of consumer goods, medicines, and agricultural tools go up from one day to the other in México. The price of coffee does not increase at the same rate manufactured goods and other consumer goods do. Besides, in the rural areas the situation is even worse because the merchants fix prices according to their own will. The peasants of Tumbalá are marginal to the official banking system. They are entitled to official credit only if they form credit societies composed of ejidatarios who are collectively responsible for the credit they receive. This is the case of ejidatarios who obtain fertilizer on credit from the rural bank BANCRISA or receive credit to buy vehicles. Peasants do not have access to private bank credit because their land cannot be pledged as collateral. Thus the peasants of Tumbalá many times are victims of local usurers. The three families presented in this study were not involved in this type of credit at the time of research. However, talking to other people, they mentioned that many times they have to get credit in the form of merchandise from local stores which has to be paid back with coffee. This merchandise is charged at higher prices.

I have presented the general conclusions of this study and now we can turn back to the original hypotheses stated in Chapter I:

1. Coffee, in spite of being a highly commercial crop, has not become a source of wealth and even less of capitalization for the peasants of Tumbalá. This is not because these peasants do not want to derive a gain from their activity, but because their possibility to do is determined to a large extent by their structural position in Mexican society. Through time the peasantry of Tumbalá has been subjected to a systematic despoliation process through the action of intermediaries in the coffee market.

The evidence presented in this study supports the argument that the situation of the Tumbalá peasants is explained by structural factors. The conditions of existence of peasant households are decided to a large extent in the market through the mechanism of prices. The peasants of Tumbalá are not only involved in a cash crop that is highly susceptible to price fluctuations, but have to deal with a chain of intermediaries to sell their product. Coffee is an export commodity and its marketing is in the hands of INMECAFE and private

merchants who regulate the relations of the small producers with the international economy. Thus, while the despoliation process is accomplished at the local level, we can trace its origins to the international market dominated by the big buyers.

The prices paid to peasants are not even one third of the coffee prices in the international market. Coffee earnings are not responsible for the reproduction of Tumbalá peasants, who are also involved in subsistence agriculture. It is the latter activity that makes a significant contribution to the survival of these peasants and which represents important savings in terms of expenditures. The income from coffee is used to complement the subsistence economy. It was observed that prices of agricultural products do not increase as much as manufactured goods do, therefore, the peasant is forced to restrict his consumption expenses to the minimum, trying to keep a precarious balance between his income and his expenditures.

The lack of capitalization of Tumbala households cannot be attributed to the maintenance of a ceremonial fund. According to Wolf (1966), this fund functions as a redistribution system in peasant societies and inhibits capital accumulation. This system has been studied by Favre (1973); Cancian (1965); and Vogt (1969) in the Chiapas highland communities. In contrast to these groups, the expenditures in ceremonies and fiestas are minimal among Tumbala peasants. The cargo system disappeared some time ago and fiestas are celebrated in a very modest manner, so we cannot claim that these peasants channel their excess of cash into these ceremonies.

2. The single most important factor that allows these people to carry on with production under very unfavorable market conditions is their organization of labour based on the family. In the last instance, they have to content themselves with remuneration of part of their work in the form of manufactured commodities that are essential for their subsistence.

The Tumbalá peasants' economy is based exclusively on agricultural production. They do not obtain any income from other sources. The production of handicrafts is non-

existent and people do not seek employment outside the community. The availability of land and the use of family labour enable these peasants to carry on with a production in which they can distribute their labour throughout the year. It is the reliance on family labour that allows these peasants to produce coffee that can be paid below its real value, since considerations in terms of labour expenditure are absent. Tumbalá presents a clear example of how the exploitation of peasant households is possible. It is also invisible because the work of women and children is considered nonproductive by capitalist standards. The production of these households would be impossible without the participation of the whole family in agricultural activities. Once the earnings from coffee are distributed among all the members who participated in its production, the exploitation of this labour force becomes apparent. Per capita earnings, even in a good season, are minimal.

3. The agrarian reform has not dramatically changed the situation of the coffee producers by giving them land. As long as they continue to participate in a market where they have not gained any significant control over the commercialization process, and as long as they continue to be subjected to the action of intermediaries, we can expect their situation to deteriorate.

Through the agrarian reform the households of Tumbalá were further incorporated into market relations and linked to the international market of agricultural products. They were given land and were encouraged by the government to engage in coffee producing, but they were not provided with the necessary infrastructure to escape exploitation and unequal exchange. The private merchants acted freely in the region, until 1973 when INMECAFE opened a regional office in Yajalón. The creation of this government agency has not changed the relations of production or the conditions of the market. The peasants still face unfavourable terms of exchange imposed by State and private merchants. They do not participate in the Commercialization Committee that fixes coffee prices.

4. The Mexican Coffee Institute has not succeeded in curtailing the activities of intermediaries in the area. Thus, failing to accomplish the purpose for which it was created. The role of this organization

has been beneficial to the private interests of government's officials and to the regional bourgeoisie, but not to the producers.

The intervention of the Mexican government in the coffee market has not greatly changed the local market structure. INMECAFE has not been a real impediment to the activities of intermediaries. This is one of the major problems faced by small producers because they cannot influence the conditions of the market. In Tumbalá the activities of intermediaries have been favoured by the geographical isolation which restricts competition. INMECAFE's intervention has regulated prices which were fixed before by the private merchants. However, I have demonstrated that by fixing low guaranteed prices INMECAFE has provided a means whereby the private buyers obtain fantastic profits. A clear point in case is the year 1985-86. INMECAFE's policies in terms of prices, payments, loans, technical assistance is very inefficient. We can argue that the main purpose of the government, in participating in the coffee economy, is to claim some of the profits otherwise going into private hands.

5. The peasants of Tumbalá are aware of the unequal situation in which they are living. However, they cannot stop growing coffee because they have come to depend completely on this cash crop to buy goods they do not produce. Conversely, if they were presented with a more profitable alternative such as cattle raising they would engage in it.

The peasants are aware that it is through the market that they are being exploited. They know that the 'bottle neck' in coffee production is found in the commercialization process. They do not passively accept their situation and they try to find alternatives to improve the terms of exchange. Social and political unrest, over the past century, and institutional distrust of all outside government agencies, in the present, reflect the non-passive attitudes of the Tumbalá peasants. They actively seek alternatives, but those available are limited. In order to export coffee they need the government and the infrastructure required for the final processing of coffee. This involves a high degree of organization as well as a

considerable monetary investment. But it is precisely the chronic lack of monetary resources that characterize peasant economies, including Tumbalá.

### **Limitations of this Study and Implications for Future Research**

The value of this study lies in the fact that it is the first attempt to address the socioeconomic situation of the Tumbalá peasants and to examine their relation with the larger socioeconomic formation of which they are part. Tumbalá has not attracted the attention of anthropologists which can be explained by its geographic isolation and transportation problems. Since this study only focuses on one aspect of the social reality of the peasants of Tumbalá, the possibilities for future research are unlimited. For example, the ethnohistory of these people was only superficially addressed, as a first intent to try to reconstruct events that have not been systematically recorded, because there are no existing studies about Tumbalá. There are some studies done in the Ch'ol region (see Artis and Coello 1979; Tejera Gaona 1982; García de León 1979; and Schumann 1973), however, they focus on the municipality of Tila whose population also produce coffee. However, the social processes that have taken place there have created a different situation. For example, in the political arena, there is a big difference between Tumbalá and Tila. The latter is ruled by caciques whose different factions create divisions and conflicts among the people, and which have resulted in serious problems requiring the constant intervention of the army. Tila is also a ceremonial centre that attracts large numbers of people, especially from Tabasco, who come during Corpus Christi to venerate the miraculous Black Christ. This town also has more facilities in terms of social services, which can be partially explained by its religious importance.

Another problem requiring investigation is the future of the peasant households of Tumbalá, if they continue reproducing their labour force at the same scale they have been doing it to the present time. I would like to advance the hypothesis that future generations are going to be faced with the possibility of looking for alternatives, such as emigration to

another areas, as a result of the shortage of land. Recent growth was possible because of a sufficient land base.

Political dimensions were not examined in this study. This field would be an exciting topic for research due to the political changes taking place in Chiapas. These processes are reflected in the municipalities by collective or individual acts of violence against government representatives. At the time of this study, there was a number of protests taking place in different municipalities, and which affected Tumbalá, where the peasants invaded the municipal hall and forced the municipal president to resign. These are only a small number of issues that would be worthwhile investigating.



## GLOSSARY

***Alcalde.*** Highest ranking member of a cabildo (town council).

***Alcalde mayor.*** Provincial governor before 1790, and appellate judge in the colonial legal system.

***Alcaldía mayor.*** A province governed by an alcalde mayor.

***Audiencia de la Nueva España.*** The royal court established in 1528 in México City. The audiencias were the highest administrative bodies and highest courts of appeal in the colonies in Spanish América. They were only subordinated to the Council of the Indies in Spain and functioned until 1821.

***Audiencia de los Confines.*** The royal court established in 1542 in Guatemala. It had jurisdiction over the gobernaciones of Chiapas, Soconusco, Guatemala (including El Salvador), Nicaragua, Honduras, and Costa Rica.

***Ejidatario.*** A peasant who received land under the agrarian reform law, member of an ejido community.

***Ejido.*** A grant of land made under the agrarian reform laws.

***Encomendero.*** Holder of a royal grant to collect tribute from designated Indian towns.

***Encomienda.*** Royal grant of right to collect tribute from designated Indian towns.

***Finca.*** In colonial times, any rural estate; since the nineteenth century this term has come to refer more specifically to cattle ranches and coffee plantations in Chiapas.

***Finquero.*** Owner of a rural estate in Chiapas. This can be a cattle ranch, a farm, or a coffee plantation.

***Hacendado.*** Owner of a rural estate in México.

***Intendencia.*** Spanish provincial government, headed by an official called intendente.

***Intendente.*** From 1790 to 1811, the royal governor of a province; replaced the alcaldes mayores during the last years of colonial rule.

***Ladino.*** Term used in Chiapas and Guatemala to refer to any non-Indian individual.

***Peones acasillados.*** Permanent peons in rural estates in Chiapas who were required to provide labour without remuneration for landowners in exchange for the grant of a plot of land to cultivate corns and beans.

***Quintal.*** A unit of weight equal to 57.5 kilos.

***Reales.*** Spanish coins valued eight to a peso, "pieces of eight."

***Reducción.*** Relocation of Indian populations in Chiapas during the sixteenth century.

***Repartimiento.*** A grant of Indian labour made to Spanish settlers.

***Teniente de partido.*** Assistant to the alcalde mayor, generally responsible for administering his economic affairs in a given district.

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