Indian Communities and Ayuntamientos in the Mexican Huasteca: Sujeto Revolts, Pronunciamientos and Caste War
Author(s): Michael T. Ducey
Published by: Academy of American Franciscan History
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/1007832
Accessed: 22/09/2010 04:17

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=aafh.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Academy of American Franciscan History is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to The Americas.
INDIAN COMMUNITIES AND AYUNTAMIENTOS IN THE MEXICAN HUASTECA: SUJETO REVOLTS, PRONUNCIAMIENTOS AND CASTE WAR

Mexico’s transition from a colonial society to an independent nation was extremely difficult and civil war seemed to threaten at every turn during the first half of the nineteenth century. Independence required the creation of a new republican order to replace the colonial system of corporate identities and racial domination. The creation of a new liberal order based on individual citizenship was a contested process where competing political actors sought to preserve colonial privileges even as they used the new constitutional system to their advantage. The indigenous communities, the majority of the population at independence, posed a challenge to the new society of citizens. The objective of this paper is to explore the fate of indigenous communities under the new system and how Indians manipulated it in order to survive. The following pages discuss how independence affected villagers by first describing what the change to a new liberal order meant for local town governments. Then using case studies from the gulf region of Mexico, the paper will draw connections between indigenous village politics and the pronunciamientos that frequently destabilized the national government. Pronunciamientos in the provinces had a profound effect that over time tended to create more opportunities for discontented

1 Recent years have seen a renewed interest in this period. Some of the nation-wide studies include Timothy E. Anna, Forging Mexico, 1821-1835 (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1998); Michael P. Costeloe, The Central Republic in Mexico, 1835-1846: Hombres de bien in the Age of Santa Anna (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Donald Fithian Stevens, Origins of Instability in Early Republican Mexico (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991); Torcuato S. Di Tella, National Popular Politics in Early Independent Mexico, 1820-1847, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).

2 This is also the problem that serves as the center of Mark Thurner’s study of Andean societies in nineteenth century Peru, Mark Thurner, From Two Republics to One Divided: Contradictions of Post-colonial Nationmaking in Andean Peru (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 16-17 and passim.
villagers to enter politics. Finally, the paper will discuss how these political divisions played out in the series of rebellions of the late 1840s known as "caste war of the Huasteca."

The towns discussed in this study are located near the Gulf of Mexico, in the regions named after the principal ethnic groups inhabiting them: the Huasteca and the Totonacapan. The names are somewhat misleading since the Huasteca also included Nahuatl, Otomi and Tepehua speakers. These communities are spread over a territory that stretches from the lower ranges and piedmont of the Sierra Madre Oriental to the waters of the Gulf of Mexico. The land forms part of the semi-tropical tierra caliente of the eastern lowlands. While these are lowlands, they are not flatlands, nor were they easily traversed. The rainy season turned the coastal plains into impassable swamps and the complete lack of roads worthy of the name limited the region's ties to larger markets. Today the towns studied here are located in the states of Hidalgo and Veracruz, but before 1853, the lowland region where many of the events of the "caste war" took place was under the jurisdiction of the state of Puebla. The state of Hidalgo was carved out of the state of Mexico in 1869.

One of the legacies of the colonial period was the drastic decline in Native American population and the slow introduction of non-Indian settlers. By the end of the colonial period, the native population was recovering and a settlement pattern of large haciendas in the relatively flat coastal plains and native communities in the hills had been firmly established. Still, the leading characteristic of the region was its low population density and the subsequent shortage of laborers. Labor supply and the fact that the major markets were located on the other side of the Sierra Madre Oriental meant

3 Peter Guardino, Peasants, Politics, and the Formation of Mexico's National State: Guerrero, 1800-57 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 95-103, 159-68, has shown how political mobilizations in Guerrero often centered around local political power and attempts to restrict the creation of ayuntamientos.

4 The classic geographic study of the region is Angel Bassols Batalla, Santiago Rentería Romero, Arturo Ortiz Wadgymar, Remedios Hernández A., Carlos Bustamante Lemus and Patricia Sosa F., Las Huastecas en el desarrollo regional de México, (Mexico City: Editorial Trillas, 1977); Antonio Escobar, De la costa a la sierra: Las Huastecas 1750-1900 (Mexico City: C.I.E.S.A.S., 1995), pp. 37-93 gives an overview of the colonial land situation. The best recent work on the historical geography of the region may be seen in Odile Hoffmann and Emilia Velázquez, coordinadoras, Las llanuras costeras de Veracruz: La lenta construcción de regiones (Xalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 1994).

5 The early years of Spanish rule in the region was especially harsh, in part because the early government under Nuño de Guzmán found exporting huastecos as slaves to the Caribbean was the fastest way to get rich. As in all of the tierra caliente, European epidemic diseases had an even more dramatic impact than in the altiplano.
that commercial agriculture consisted of extensive cattle estates characterized by tenant based production and little capital investment. In the hills of the Sierra Madre Oriental (the Sierra Huasteca), there were land conflicts between indigenous communities and non-Indian estates but the villages were generally successful in defending their access to land and there were comparatively few private estates.

Observers have often described the status of Mexico's indigenous populations under the new constitutional system in the darkest terms possible.¹ One of the central challenges that the aborigines faced was the loss of the local governments that controlled the day to day administration of their lives. Throughout the colonial period, in order to gain the acquiescence of their native subjects the Spanish conceded some degree of autonomy to the Indian population allowing them to form native governments (repúblicas de indios). These were town governments consisting of officers elected by the native population and supervised by district level Spanish officials and non-Indian parish priests.² The repúblicas managed most of the internal affairs of the community collecting tribute taxes, administering justice, policing the rural population, and regulating vast economic resources of land and labor.³ In exchange for this limited autonomy, the colonial government used the repúblicas as an instrument to extract tribute and labor from the colonized population. Spanish supervisors held república officers responsible for the prompt collection of taxes and the loyalty of the inhabitants. As a result, the república de indios was Janus-faced: on the one hand, it was part of the administrative system of New Spain and, on the other, it was one of the few institutions staffed by the Indians themselves. During the colonial period vil-

---


² The crown originally conceived of the colony as consisting of Indian rural communities producing a surplus to sustain the colonial state. Spanish settlers were to live in cities where the settlers would have their own town councils while Indians kept to the rural repúblicas. As the colony evolved more non-Indians settled in the countryside and even in indigenous villages, however, the laws prohibited them from participating in elections in the government of these villages. The law also failed to keep non-Indians from seeking to influence them indirectly.

³ For a classic description of the history of the república see, Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, Formas de gobierno indígena (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1953); Rodolfo Pastor, Campesinos y reformas: La Mixteca, 1700-1856 (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1987). For a discussion of the formation of repúblicas in some of the pueblos mentioned in this text see Bernardo García Martínez, Los pueblos de la sierra: El poder y el espacio entre los indios del norte de Puebla hasta 1700 (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 1987).
lages were not the egalitarian “closed corporate communities” that historians and anthropologists had once imagined.9

Conflicts within the repúblicas often emerged over long standing geographic lines. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, conflicts between the cabeceras (or head towns: the towns where the república government had its seat) and the sujetos (towns subject to the government in the head town) constantly emerged. There was an ethnic element to this division as well since the non-Indian population tended to settle in the head towns.10 Priests and royal officials sponsored candidates and as a result “ladino” Indians (hispanicized Indians) often held key república posts. In short, the indigenous communities of the late colonial period experienced external pressures from Spanish administrators and internal divisions between the economically and politically privileged and those left out. The early Mexican Republic inherited these tensions.

During the nineteenth century, the constitution of Cádiz (1812) replaced the indigenous semi-autonomous repúblicas with ethnically blind municipal governments (known as ayuntamientos in Spanish). Although the constitution of Cádiz established a rather low minimum population requirement of “one thousand souls” for town councils, in practice they sprang up where ever pueblos de indios had existed previously.11 The 1824 federal constitution that replaced the system of Cádiz left the organization of local governments up to the states which in turn increased the population requirement but permitted considerable discretion to ignore the limit.12 The colonial order


10 Pastor, Campesinos, pp. 200, 243 describes how the Spanish state had already begun the process of stripping communal goods from the repúblicas and that there were already strong tensions between the cabeceras dominated by ladino-ized Indians and sujetos in the late eighteenth century. For a discussion of the eighteenth century in this region see my article, “Viven sin ley ni rey: Rebeliones coloniales en Papantla, 1760-1790,” in Procesos rurales e historia regional (Sierra y costa tonotecas de Veracruz, Victoria Chenaut, ed. (Mexico City: C.I.E.S.A.S., 1996), pp. 15-50.

11 See article 310 of the Constitution of Cádiz, even then the new regulations stated that towns with less than a thousand could petition their provincial deputation to request one. “Bando del Virrey Venegas en que se publica la Real Orden de 8 de junio con el decreto de 23 de mayo referente a la elección de ayuntamientos,” in La Constitución de 1812 en la Nueva España, Luis González Obregón, ed., Series “Publicaciones del Archivo General de la Nación,” (Mexico City: Tip. Guerrero Hnos., 1912), p. 222.

12 The constitution of the state of Puebla did not establish a minimum number of inhabitants for an ayuntamiento, Constitución Política del Estado Libre de Puebla, articles 132 and 133. In Veracruz the
had strictly limited political rights in the repúblicas (such as voting and holding office) to “sons of the town” but the new order extended citizenship to all residents. In practice, the new ayuntamientos in the larger municipalities with significant numbers of non-Indian residents tended to come under the domination of mestizos and creoles while the smaller towns with more homogeneously indigenous populations tended to elect Indians to municipal posts. Not all municipalities came under the sway of non-indigenous politicians but after independence the exclusively indigenous membership of the local government no longer existed.

REPÚBLICAS IN THE MEXICAN REPUBLIC

One of my original motivations for studying post independence municipalities was to understand the nature of social movements in the countryside, particularly the sources of the numerous regional rebellions that involved large numbers of communities in the nineteenth century. Historians have often suggested that when independence eliminated paternalistic colonial institutions, such as the república and the Indian Tribunal, peasant communities lost an important source of protection. When pueblos de indios ceased to pay tribute, the government lost its incentive to protect them and land hungry hacendados expanded their holdings at the villagers’ expense.\(^\text{13}\) The abandonment of colonial paternalism therefore caused the rebellions of the national period. The information from the Huasteca indicates that the social and political conflicts of this period were much more complicated than previously thought. The issue of who was to control the land and labor resources of the “extinguished” repúblicas was at the center of local politics in the new republic. As the paternalist protections of the colonial state faded away, however, the control of local resources did not immediately fall into the hands of the non-Indian elite.

state constituent congress emitted a law establishing ayuntamientos even before the state constitution was finished raising the population minimum to two thousand, “Decreto número 43 de 17 de marzo de 1825 Creación de Ayuntamientos”, in Colección de Leyes y Decretos de Veracruz, 1824-1919, Carmen Blázquez Domínguez y Ricardo Corzo Ramírez, coordinadores (Xalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 1997), vol. 1, p. 248. (Hereafter CLDV. Articles 159 and 160 of the Constitución Política del Estado de México of 1827 established town councils in communities with at least four thousand inhabitants but included clauses permitting them in towns that did not meet the population requirement with the consent of the state congress.

\(^\text{13}\) One example of this formulation may be found in Brígida Von Mentz, Pueblos de indios, mulatos y mestizos: 1770-1870. Los campesinos y las transformaciones protoindustriales en el poniente de Morelos (Mexico City: C.I.E.S.A.S., 1988), p. 56. The Indian Tribunal, corte de indios, was a special court designed to enable indigenous villagers to initiate lawsuits without the difficulties associated with the normal courts.
The region studied in this paper produced a long and popular insurrection against the viceregal government during the war of independence. Insurgents recruited followers by exploiting the tensions between Spanish administrators and the repúblicas de indios and within the repúblicas themselves. Independence and the new political order that accompanied it failed to resolve the discontent within the communities and it raised new political challenges for the indigenous pueblos. The change from colonial repúblicas de indios to municipalities had several implications: on the one hand, the constitutional arrangement addressed some of the dissatisfaction within Indian communities by increasing the autonomy of local government and removing the hated local officials who intervened in república affairs. On the other hand, the new councils replaced the local traditions of political access with general rules set by state governments. The new rules permitted non-Indians to have a voice in affairs that had once been exclusively indigenous. Independence opened the political system while offering the local elite the possibility to influence native villages. This situation was indicative of the fact that the war of independence itself ended in an ambiguous way. The rural dissidents did not triumph over their local enemies, but they were able to fight them to a standstill. The agreement that ended the war, the plan de Iguala, was an attempt to include both the remaining insurgents and the troops fighting for Spain into a single governing coalition. Significantly rebels demanded their own town councils as a solution to the divisions in the countryside.15

Alicia Hernández has documented the rapid creation of municipalities in 1813-14 and 1820-21 and Antonio Escobar has outlined this process in the Huasteca.16 The works of Hernández and Escobar illustrate the divergent

---


15 On the plan de Iguala and the role of municipalities see Anna, Forging Mexico, pp. 81-83, 88-89. According to Anna, the municipal government was one of the concessions that the conservative leadership of the plan had to make to win followers in the provinces. In the region studied here, the war of independence ended in a negotiated truce that ultimately left many issues of local power undecided. Ducey, “Village, Nation,” pp. 475-81; Juan Ortiz Escamilla, Guerra y gobierno: Los pueblos y la independencia de México (Mexico City: Instituto Mora, 1997) describes how the war created a push towards autonomy in the pueblos of New Spain.

approaches inherent in the changes in local politics. While Hernández suggests that the councils offered an opportunity for greater political participation in the new constitutional framework, Escobar stresses the construction of a new system to dominate the rural population of Mexico. Over time the new municipalities tended to benefit local non-indigenous elites who came to dominate town offices. This is particularly true of the larger municipalities that already had well-established populations of non-Indians. In some cases, such as the Andrades in Huejutla or the Núñez family in Ozuluama, creole families were able to control local offices for decades at a time. Domination, however, was not complete and the new non-Indian elites were not able to establish the level of unquestioned legitimacy enjoyed by the colonial state. One key issue left undefined was who would control the resources of the colonial repúblicas.

In spite of the fact that colonial Indian institutions did not have a formal legal existence, in practice they continued to regulate communal life for much of the indigenous peasantry. Indigenous villagers remained loyal to the old repúblicas and relied on them to organize their political lives. The initial objective of integrating the old colonial identities into a single political organism did not become reality in the villages. Non-Indian governments found that the repúblicas continued to be a necessary intermediary between the state and the indigenous population. Traditional forms of government abandoned the town halls of the head towns only to re-emerge in the outlying villages and hamlets. The new order superimposed the head town versus subject village split on the new dichotomies of town council versus república de indios and Indian versus white. The control of local government became a critical issue that involved questions of race, particularly in the larger municipalities where non-Indians dominated the councils.

The Indians’ tenacious attachment to local political traditions created a dual system of authority where the ancient repúblicas de indios survived at the sub-municipal level and the representatives of the indigenous villagers still presented themselves as the spokesmen of the “común de indígenas.” The colonial titles of gobernador, viejos, pasados, and principales appear on the petitions of nineteenth century villagers. The titles of “pasado” or “governador pasado” were part of the tradition of indigenous government where

elecciones en Iberoamérica, siglo XIX: De la formación del espacio político nacional, Antonio Annino, ed. (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1995) p. 177 also sees the introduction of the constitutional ayuntamiento as a “conquest of self government” by indigenous pueblos.

17 Thurner, From Two Republics to One Divided, p. 18 notes for example that Peruvian power holders essentially sought to suppress Indian identities, the failure of which allowed “subalterns” to manipulate both colonial and national identities.
the elders made decisions even if they held no official post. Once a man had held a high post in the república he became a “pasado” with customary rights to represent the community and intervene in Indian government in spite of having left office. Throughout the nineteenth century, Indian officials continued to have influence as representatives in dealings with higher levels of government and in controlling certain resources.

Indian villagers organized as the común de indios hired lawyers and initiated lawsuits. Significantly the lawsuits originated in the sujeto communities. Petitions from the Huasteca Hidalguense reveal that the repúblicas de indios now controlled the indigenous hamlets in the hinterland of each municipality. Often the leaders of the indigenous repúblicas held low level posts within the municipalities as justices of the peace and sub-regidores. In 1840, the “justices of the peace, elders and other natives of the five towns of Huazalingo” began a dispute with Huazalingo’s municipal government. Other signatories of the documents included Don Martín Leonardo, past Indian governor, and Don Diego Martín, justice of the peace of Santo Tomás, the current alderman, and the “elders of the town of Chiatipan.” The actors present themselves both as officials holding “constitutional” posts and as representatives of the “extinguished” república. The repúblicas had always served as the point of contact between the indigenous world and the “superior government.” Now the república elders held the posts that served as the nexus between the hamlets and municipal governments. The shift to a constitutional order merely pushed the repúblicas out of the head towns and into the sujetos.

One should not confuse this conservatism with a general rejection of

18 Archivo Judicial de Huejutla, (AJH) 1836 Petition of Juan Argúmedo en representación del común de naturales de Santa Ursula Huitzilingo [sic].” Individuals with the titles of gobernador, pasados, or principales often signed these documents. The “jueces de paz, viejos y demás principales...” initiated a petition from the sujetos of Huazalingo in 1840, see petition April 30, 1840, BCEM 1842/91/118/1-5v, 6-8v, 10-11v. See also the petition of “los jueces de paz de las visitas y rancherías de la comprensión de esta cabecera, el gobernador de indígenas de la misma por sí y a nombre del común” February 20, 1839, BCEM 1842/103/118/4.


20 Petition of “los jueces de paz y viejos con los demás naturales,” Huazalingo,” April 30, 1840, BCEM 1842/103/118/ f. 6v. For more examples of colonial titles surviving after independence see, “Poder del común de indígenas de San Felipe,” May 20, 1835, AJH 1835 and “Poder que otorgan los indígenas y el Juez selador de San Miguel, Antonio de San Juan ... a favor de Don José María Ávila,” September 30, 1853, AJH 1853, fs. 15-16. Justices of the Peace were the representatives of town government in the sujeto villages.
change or an ignorance of the transformed political order.21 At the end of the independence war, the villagers had won a partial victory in terms of greater political rights and autonomy. They quickly grasped the utility of constitutional rights in their struggle against the old colonial taxes. In the early 1820s, landlords and officials found that, at first, they could not bend the new municipalities to their will. According to the former colonial district official, José Gómez Escalante, the new constitutional order was undermining the agricultural economy.

Constitutional mayors have imbued the Indians with the idea that since they are now citizens, they are free to decide whether or not they wish to go to the fields where they are needed even if they are paid . . . They use freedom only so that they are not made to work, or give personal services without pay, and even [with pay] they refuse [to work] causing the destruction of agriculture for the lack of laborers.22

Gómez Escalante’s comments illustrated the darker side of colonial paternalism and how the modification of the Indians’ political rights constituted a challenge to the established economic order. In spite of the new liberal order, local officials sought to retain the colonial labor draft.23 It also points to the emergence of local políticos who quickly informed the Indians of their rights.

In an even more remarkable case, the sujeto towns of Huazalingo submitted a complaint to the provincial legislature against the alcalde Ignacio Alarcón for “failing our sage and adored constitution.” The villages of Chi-atipan, Santo Tomás, San Juan, San Pedro and San Agustín pointed out that “article 338 of our wise constitution” prohibited the “old contribution” but Alarcón had continued to collect it and whipped villagers who refused to pay. The villagers, who only signed first names indicating that they were probably indigenous, also protested Alarcón’s demand of “services without paying even a half real, treating us like slaves, [and] punishing us with the

21 Powell, for example, once suggested that as late as 1856 Indian villagers were not aware of the fact that Mexico had become independent! T. G. Powell, “Los liberales, el campesinado indígena y los problemas agrarios durante la Reforma,” Historia Mexicana 24:1 (1972), p. 658.

22 Subdelegado Gómez Escalante to the diputación provincial, September 23, 1820, Biblioteca del Congreso del Estado de México, Toluca, (hereafter BCEM) 1820/19/1/1v.

23 Gómez Escalante later revealed that the Indians were willing to work, but only when paid “triple the normal wage in this region.” BCEM 1820/19/1/2v. Perhaps this also points to why the república survived: the local elite relied on them to mobilize labor for their benefit. The diputación dismissed Gómez Escalante’s request to re-establish forced labor “que por ningún pretexto obligue a los indios a trabajar contra su voluntad.” f. 3v. Guy P. C. Thomson and David G. LaFrance, Patriotism, Politics, and Popular Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Mexico: Juan Francisco Lucas and the Puebla Sierra (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources Books, 1999), pp. 11-13 describes the continued use of labor drafts in the early republican period.
lash.” The rhetoric of resistance to slavery was part of standard liberal discourse in Mexico and these complaints were a republican critique of colonial racial categories. Indigenous peasants seized on the promises of the constitution to protest traditional labor demands. In the Yucatán, for example, Terry Rugeley has noted that villagers immediately began to use their constitutional rights to refuse “Indian” burdens such as clerical taxes. The transition to the new town councils endowed Indians with rights but it also raised the question of whether the town councils could use the faculties of the old república system.

Misantla is one of the few municipalities that conserved most of its town council minutes for the early republic. Before 1856, the municipality recognized the continued existence of a “community of Indians” with elected representatives. The común de indígenas (the Indians’ commons or Indian community) continued to hire lawyers and pressed claims against the town council. One dispute that emerged demonstrates the evolving relationship between the two institutions. In 1830, the town council rented out the cattle belonging to the Virgin Mary (the town’s patroness) to a mestizo, setting the number of cattle to be paid in rent. The Indians protested the introduction of cattle close to their fields and demanded that they be removed. The council compromised by offering to impose a one-peso fine for each head of cattle that wandered into the Indians’ fields. The town council recognized the continued existence of the Indian community and sought to placate it.

Land was another area where Indian influence continued after the establishment of independence. The new municipalities did not inherit control over all of the lands formerly owned by the colonial repúblicas. While town councils controlled land that the repúblicas had used as rental properties in the colonial period, they did not gain possession of the vast holdings known as “tierras de repartimiento.” In spite of legislation giving municipalities

24 Petition against the alcalde primero of Huazalingo, November 7, 1820, BCEM 1820/60/2/7. The constitution referred to is that of Cádiz, which specified that the parliament must approve all contributions in article 338. It does not specifically prohibit any tax. Gómez Escalante suspended Alarcón from his post after the legislature investigated. The signatories included the regidores of San Juan, Tlamamala, Santo Tomás and San Pedro Huazalingo. Later the town council sent a request for guidance to the legislature concerning the powers alcaldes had over the sujetos.
26 Archivo Municipal de Misantla (henceforth AMM), “Libro de sesiones,” April 20 1833, f. 24. The town used the cattle of the virgin to pay for the virgin’s feast day celebration. Conflicts between Indian farmers and non-Indian cattlemen can be found going back to the early colonial period.
27 See for example the case of the town of Mezitlán which tried the tax communal land in the 1830s only to be frustrated by the refusal of Indian villagers to assist the land assessment. Prefect José M. de
power over the administration of communal lands, town officers proved unable to intervene in how Indians used their property. This became especially noticeable when municipalities tried to tax or privatize communal lands used by villagers.

In the states of Veracruz and Mexico six or eight years elapsed between the establishment of the town governments and the promulgation of regulations spelling out how they were to function. Hernández Chávez has noted that the state constitutions failed to define the municipality’s role, allowing for “usos y costumbres” to thrive. This situation added an element of ambiguity to local politics wherein the old repúblicas staffed by village elders continued to exercise authority and economic power, at the same time that the town councils were formally in charge. It also left an opening for them to claim república practices, such as labor service, for themselves. While the big men in town may have controlled the new town councils they soon realized that to tap into the resources of the old repúblicas they had to reach some sort of modus vivendi with the representatives of the indigenous communities.

An unambiguous case of the survival of the repúblicas appears in 1839 when the residents of the sujetos of Yahualica presented a petition against the local municipal half-real tax. The signatories included “the justices of the peace of the visitas and hamlets in Yahualica’s jurisdiction, the governor of Indians of the same in their own name and in the name of the commons,” who invoked the institutional memory of the indigenous community when they recalled how the tax originated:

In 1823 the town council assembled the Indian commons with the object of presenting the project to proportion a tax that would form the municipal fund (ábitro) . . . said tax would have no other use but to pay the secretary of said council, cover the expenses of the secretariat, and pay the school teachers. They cheerfully resolved to accept said tax.

The town had treated the indigenous community as a separate corporate body that needed to be consulted before they adopted the tax. The villagers now

Ahedos, Meztitlán, Oct. 21, 1837, BCEM 1842/93/118/2. The local tax administrator complained that when he confronted the municipality with the fact that they had not registered the communal land in the tax roles, the council replied “that it is not the owner of the immense and precious Vega de Meztitlán.” I discuss the legal control of the lands of the ex-repúblicas in greater detail in Ducey, “Liberal Theory,” pp. 66-73.

28 Hernández, Tradición, p. 38. Also seen in Rugeley, Yucatán’s Maya, p. 39.

29 Rugeley notes that the new town councils relied on the repúblicas to collect taxes, Yucatán’s Maya, p. 93.

30 Petition “Los jueces de paz de visitas,” Yahualica, February 20, 1839, BCEM 1842/103/118/4. The tax was similar to the real de comunidad of the colonial period. The tax was a half real head tax.
pointed out that the municipality had failed to fulfill its obligation to the visitas since it had never paid their schoolteachers. They threatened to cease providing the tax unless the town paid the teachers in their hamlets and added that any revenue left be used to support the reconstruction of their church.\textsuperscript{31} The dissidents significantly noted an important difference in the way the municipality operated in the 1820s from the 1830s. While in the 1820s taxation was imposed with the consent of the “indigenous residents,” by the late 1830s the town government no longer attended to the interests of its constituents in the remote villages. In short, the Indians sought to revoke the council’s tax or at least redirect it to those expenses they deemed valuable.

In neighboring Huazalingo, a similar protest against payment of the half-real municipal tax occurred within months of the Yahualica petition.\textsuperscript{32} Impugning the distribution of resources, the Indians complained that while they paid the tax they did not receive the services they expected. Only teachers in the head town received salaries from the tax funds while the remote schools remained vacant.\textsuperscript{33} Town officials required that sujeto village Indians serve as unpaid mail runners and imposed fines on Indian children who could not attend school. The Indians even charged that while the head town received medicine, the municipality denied aid to the visitas during a cholera epidemic: “The municipality treats the outlying villages as if we were brutes or negros bozales without humanity.”\textsuperscript{34} In subsequent petitions the villagers accused the non-Indian officials of “using municipal funds to capitalize their commerce and lend to other white residents.”\textsuperscript{35} Two local officials, Wenceslao Ugalde and Joaquín Vargas raised the ire of the community when they abused anyone who complained against the head town. The prefect\textsuperscript{*} in

\textsuperscript{31} It is interesting to note that the indigenous leaders used the recent order by the state Junta de Instrucción Pública that schools be established “wherever they are judged necessary.” BCEM 1842/103/118/4v.

\textsuperscript{32} The villagers described themselves as “indigenous justices of the peace and other principales.” They also protested the fines and imprisonment suffered by villagers who had failed to pay the tax. “Petition to the Junta departamental from los jueces de paz indígenas y demás principales de los pueblos de Huazalingo [sic] sujetos a... Yahualica” no date, the paper carries a seal dated 1840-41, BCEM 1842/91/118/1 ff. The prefect’s report on the petition is dated May 3, 1840.

\textsuperscript{33} Petition to the Junta departamental from los jueces de paz indígenas y demás principales de los pueblos de Huazalingo sujetos a... Yahualica” no date BCEM 1842/91/118/3.

\textsuperscript{34} Negros bozales was a colonial term used to refer to slaves recently brought from Africa. It also implied that they were not Christian. See petition BCEM 1842/91/118/3. The secretary of the council also slighted the indígenas because he “refused to give paper to Indians to write our children while he does give it to the gente de razón.” The term used to refer to non-Indians was the colonial term “gente de razón,” literally people with reason.

\textsuperscript{35} From the same petition cited above, BCEM 1842/91/118/7v, “hasta el día anda en rehenes algún dinero de los fondos entre unos y otros funcionarios.”

\textsuperscript{*} Prefectos and sub-prefectos were district level officials acting as representatives of the executive
Meztitlán attributed the political ferment to local non-Indian politicians who were fishing in troubled waters: Captain José Antonio Lara, a local landlord, and the parish priest of Yahualica, Don José Rosalino Del Rosal.\textsuperscript{36} These cases demonstrate several elements repeated on a grander scale during the political disorders of the 1830s, 40s, and 50s. In all of these tax conflicts the divisions that emerged were both ethnic and territorial. The petitioners originated from the village hinterlands and challenged the distribution of power between their largely Indian hamlets and the more mestizo head towns.

The cases discussed above also suggest that the decade of the 1820s witnessed an opening of the political system during which local communities explored the new system of constitutional rights, ethnic equality and town councils. The number of petitions and conflicts over tax burdens and resource distribution in the 1830s indicates disillusionment with the ethnically neutral municipality. The 1830s saw indigenous villagers entrenching themselves in traditional forms of government in the visita hamlets as they lost influence in the town councils. In the process, villagers living in the hamlets had more control and contact with the repúblicas than they had in colonial times. In other words, the repúblicas of the national period were not merely the old colonial institutions but I would speculate they were more sujeto oriented and probably even more indigenous than their antecedents.

**The Structure of Discontent: Head Towns and Hamlets**

The conflicts that emerged from within the municipalities over the imposition of tax burdens and the distribution of the benefits generated by taxes and personal service, solidified along deep divisions in rural society. As in the colonial period, there were internal differences between the head towns and the sujetos. There were new stresses as well since state governments had left the prefects' powers over the local municipalities ill defined.\textsuperscript{37} As a result

\textsuperscript{36} Letter of prefect of Meztitlán, Manuel María Carmona, January 20, 1841, Archivo Histórico del Estado de México (henceforth cited as AHEM) 075.1/149/17/ f. 20, Carmona described Del Rosal as "the only mover behind the continuous complaints of the natives of Huazalingo." However an earlier report called the petition "justified." January 8, 1841, f. 17v.

there was often tension between prefects and the municipalities. In 1835, the national government further confused the division of powers on the local scene when it raised the minimum of inhabitants required for a town to have an independent municipality, thereby abolishing dozens of town councils.

Challenges to the old colonial head towns sometimes accompanied the establishment of the municipalities. In 1822, the town of Huazalingo experienced several disorders when a sujeto town, San Francisco, refused to recognize the municipal government because of a new tax levied to fund salaries for the new municipal officers. The council wrote the provincial legislature requesting guidance on whether the “six towns where there is only a regidor should recognize this municipality or govern themselves.” In a fine example of the ambiguities of the constitutional transition, the legislature approved the taxes imposed by the town but postponed any decision on the relation between the new town council and the six sujeto towns pending the state’s constitutional convention. Sujeto towns frequently challenged the authority of municipalities to impose taxes, demand labor and dispose of community resources. The decade of the twenties was a period when municipalities sought to define their powers over subject towns and the Indian population, while the villagers disputed the privileges claimed by district and head town officials.

Political divisions at the district level help explain how villagers mobilized. In Huazalingo, villagers complained about the treatment they received at the hands of the district officials in Yahualica and requested a change of jurisdiction to Huejutla, pointing out that the former town was farther away and much less prosperous than Huejutla. The officials in the district seat dismissed the pleas, stating that Francisco Ugalde, a landowner and justice of the peace in Huazalingo, manipulated the Indians into initiating the petition because he wanted to increase the influence of Huejutla by having the seat of the regional court changed. “The Indians are just machines mobilized by any upstart’s desire,” complained the authorities in district head town. In spite of this view of Indians as mere political cattle led from one cause to the next, when Yahualica officials assembled the villagers they

38 “Consulta del Ayuntamiento de Huazalingo a la diputación” BCEM 1822/66/8/2. San Francisco was also one of the leading centers of dissidents in the colonial period. The disorders of 1822 were said to have had their origin in 1819 when San Franciscanos participated in a tumult against the head town.

39 Letter of Trinidad Rodríguez to the sub-prefect of Huejutla, February 21, 1838, Yahualica, BCEM/1838/74/89/1-23. The prefecture seat was also often a bone of contention between competing towns.

40 The Ugalde family later married into the Andrades, who held the post of prefect of Huejutla for much of the period.
refused to withdraw their petition. In a second petition, the sujeto town persisted in their request and added complaints that the town council was taking actions against the people promoting the change.41

Huejutla also experienced internal divisions when, in 1843, the Indian hamlets of Vinasco, Xuchil, Tetlama, and Santa Cruz petitioned the state government for tax relief because they did not receive any benefits from the municipal taxes they paid. Town officials diverted funds for their own use and they did not send teachers to their communities.42 In this case, the cabecera council responded to the charges by presenting the state government with accounts of their expenditures indicating that, while they may not have diverted the funds to their own pockets, the town council dedicated almost all its funds to serve the municipal seat. The local government spent its money on cabecera schools and paving their streets.43 That the municipality found funds for paving stones but not for hiring teachers in the sujeto hamlets reveals much about the town council’s priorities. In their defense, the officials pointed out that the municipality paid scholarships so that fifteen sujeto children could study in the head town. The sub-prefect, Agustín Viniegra, complained that the petitions sent to the state government were merely the result of the agitation of the third justice of the peace, Antonio Núñez, in the visitas of the town.44 Judge Núñez reportedly used the threat of a possible rebellion to give emphasis to his complaints.45 Viniegra

41 Petition “Los jueces de paz y viejos con los demás naturales de los cinco pueblos de Huazalingo...” April 30, 1840, BCEM 1842/91/118/ f. 6-6v.
42 Agustín Viniegra, sub-prefect of Huejutla, November 7, 1843, BCEM 1843/255/128/f. 5.
43 “Aviso al público” July 5, 1843, BCEM 1843/191/127/f. 17-18v. The subprefect observing the ire of the protesters towards the paving projects indicated that they were “enemies of the comfort and beautification of the town.” Agustín Viniegra Sub-Prefect of Huejutla, July 10, 1843, BCEM 1843/191/127/3v: There is another famous case of rural protest against sidewalks in 1914 when Zapata met Villa at Xochimilco. Zapata commented, “The men who work hardest are those who enjoy sidewalks the least. Only sidewalks. And speaking for myself, when I walk on one of those sidewalks, I start to fall down.” While historians have sometimes interpreted this as an example of the “rustic” character of these rebels and their inability to handle modern society, Zapata’s comment is also a criticism of how modern urban states allocate resources to projects that peasants see as irrational. The text of the Xochimilco conference may be found in Manuel González Ramírez, ed., Fuentes para la historia de la revolución mexicana, (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1954), vol. 1, p. 115. For some of the standard interpreters of this text see Héctor Aguilar Camín and Lorenzo Meyer, In the Shadow of the Mexican Revolution: Contemporary Mexican History, Luis Alberto Fierro, trans. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), p. 56, and Enrique Krauze, Mexico: Biography of Power, Hank Heifetz, trans. (New York: Harper Perennial, 1997), pp. 294-95
44 “As a gift to peace the Juez de Paz of this municipal seat and that of Santa Cruz should be suspended, given that, far from fulfilling their duties, they abuse the authorities and disrupt the harmony that has always reigned.” Agustín Viniegra, sub-prefect of Huejutla, July 10, 1843, BCEM 1843/191/127/6.
45 Francisco Sánchez, Huejutla July 6, 1843, BCEM 1843/191/127/19. The first justice of the peace of Huejutla denied that “public tranquility had been disturbed . . . in spite of the efforts of said gentle men.” Agustín Viniegra wrote that judge Núñez “is himself the one who is disrupting the peace with his
reminded his superiors that the insubordination was not only a local affair since the tax protest affected all revenue collection and that income from the national “direct contribution” declined along with the municipal taxes.

Another burden demanded by the head towns was personal labor service, a tax imposed exclusively on Indian villagers. The municipalities of the thirties and fourties extensively used this prerogative, formerly belonging to Indian repúblicas, to make their municipal budgets go further. In Huejutla, for example, the council rebuilt the parish church in 1843 at almost no expense because “the Indians of the town seat did the work for free.” As noted in the 1839 petition in Huazalingo, one of the sources of indigenous anger was the use of runners to deliver letters without paying them. The labor draft was also an indication of how the non-Indian dominated councils sought to keep certain elements of the old colonial order intact for their own benefit.

Efforts to limit the power and independence of local government accompanied the attempt to establish centralist rule. In 1835, the centralists replaced elected state governments with “departments” ruled by governors appointed from Mexico City. Centralist policy raised the minimum population required for the formation of municipalities with elected councils and thus reducing the number of local governments. Effectively the new administration eliminated all councils save those in the district seats where the prefects resided. The new regime saw the municipalities as threatening the concentration of authority in Mexico City precisely because local councils served as the building blocks of pronunciamientos and rebellions. Centralists hoped that by eliminating town councils they could limit the ability of dissidents to organize. The leading conservative intellectual and advocate of centralism, Lucas Alamán, charged that demagogues easily exploited municipalities to gain support of the common people.

advice to the residents of Santa Cruz, Nexpan, Tetlarna and Vinazco that they not pay the municipal tax.” Agustín Viniegra Sub-Prefect of Huejutla, July 10, 1843, BCEM 1843/191/127/2v. Viniegra claimed to have seen letters the judge had sent to the other visita towns asking for support in the lawsuit.

46 Schryer, Ethnicity and Class, pp. 85-86. Notes the extensive use of labor demands during the nineteenth century. Thomson and LaFrance, Patriotism, Politics and Popular Liberalism, pp. 12-13 also notes that demands against labor service mobilized Indian militants in the 1850s and 60s.

47 Francisco Sánchez, Huejutla July 6, 1843, BCEM 1843/191/127/18v.

48 Thomson and LaFrance, Patriotism, Politics and Popular Liberalism, notes that when the radical liberal Nahuat leader, Juan Francisco Lucas, served as Jefe Politico, the de razón residents in the town of Zautla protested bitterly when he made them pay a tax that formerly only Indians had supplied, p. 229.

Furthermore conservatives believed that the municipalities were too “popular” in nature noting that the social origins of the council members made them untrustworthy. They complained that many alcaldes did not speak Spanish and were illiterate. For example, in 1849 the state of Mexico reported a lack of qualified citizens to serve on councils in remote towns. Commenting on this situation, the governor declared that he “would willingly limit municipalities only to district head towns [the seats of prefectures], if it were not for article 159 of the constitution.” Com plaints about the “popular” characteristics of local officials were a coded way of speaking about ethnicity. Conservatives sought to restore ethnic boundaries that characterized colonial government, where Indian society would be semi-autonomous but clearly subordinate to white administrators.

A final characteristic of the above cases is the frequent appearance of political intermediaries. Local officials generally believed that these figures were the masterminds, “móviles,” behind Indian political action. Parish priests, landowners, and sometimes dissident municipal officials sought to give voice to peasant discontent for their own objectives. The villagers now had new routes to express their discontent and one way for politicians on the outs to “get in” was to give voice to village anger. It built upon a colonial tradition of political activity where the powerless searched for potential allies in the elite to press their causes in exchange for their loyalty. What was new in the post independence period was the large number of potential allies that the fractured political system produced who courted dissident Indians.

New intermediaries introduced the village to the politics of pronunciamiento and regional rebellions as the nineteenth century wore on. There is an emerging consensus that pronunciamientos were more than mere military revolts, that they involved a political process that incorporated municipalities as political actors. Organizers of these movements sent their political plans to municipal councils throughout the Republic searching for support from

50 Lic. Pascual González Fuentes, Memoria de los secretarios de relaciones y guerra, justicia, negocios eclesiásticos e instrucción pública del gobierno del Estado de México leída a la Honorable Legislatura en las sesiones de los días 1 y 2 de Mayo de 1849 (Toluca: Imprenta de J. Quijano, 1849), p. 2. By 1849, the original state constitution of 1827 had been restored after the centralist interlude.

51 See for example Thomson and LaFrance, Patriotism, Politics and Popular Liberalism, pp. 45-46.

“public opinion.” In these communiqués, organizers asked local politicians to “second” their political objectives. Indeed, one observer in the 1860s wrote to the French Marshall Bazaine that the cause of the frequent pronunciamientos of independent Mexico was the ability of military rebels “to encourage the illusions and simplicity of one or another municipality promising unrealizable rewards.” 53 Military rebels offered to promote the projects of the local townspeople in return for support. For example, in an 1832 pronunciamiento the military rebels of Tampico sent letters inviting towns throughout the region to join their rebellion. To attract the neighboring coastal town of Pueblo Viejo they offered to open it to international trade, a project the town’s merchants had long desired. Town councils and sujeto communities became sources of support for rebellions as politicians offered to address the demands of the local elite and villagers by establishing new political jurisdictions, tax relief and increased autonomy. These revolts were not peasant movements but they had an impact on villagers for several reasons. They revealed the internal divisions within the local landed and commercial interests who dominated local offices. Increasingly local politicians turned to small town Indians for support, supplies and even armed men, giving them an education in how to play politics. Villagers learned that they could topple local officials with relative ease using armed intimidation and making the right alliances with regional and national political factions.

Locally pronunciamientos were not merely attempts to get on the bandwagon of national political events. As they evolved, politicians used the revolts to challenge local political arrangements. Pronunciamientos ignited competition between towns and local politicians that lasted into the 1840s. “Seconding” declarations supported by advocates of pronunciamientos included articles concerning strictly local issues that individual councils added to advance their own interests. Some communities participated in the revolts with the hope of changing district capitals to allow local authorities more control and autonomy for their own followers. In other cases, towns challenged prefects with the aim of placing their own favored sons in the post. This appears to be part of the motivation behind the 1833 and 1834 movements in which José Gregorio Morales was able to mobilize the villagers of Zacualtipán to back his bid to win the post of sub-prefect. 54 The


54 I discuss these pronunciamientos, and others, at length in Ducey, “Village Riot,” 230-245. In the 1833 rebellion, the pronunciados overturned town councils and replaced them with the council that had been voted out the previous year. Andrade, August 11, 1833, Huejutla, AHEM 091 and 091.2/172/4/17-18.
pronunciamiento of 1834 was also remarkable because its level of violence. The movement also sought to carry out a cultural counter-revolution, ordering the councils to begin each meeting with a mass and that the schools teach the Catholic catechism in each town they occupied.55

The political competition that erupted during these movements within the local elite also exacerbated tensions between sujetos and municipal seats as in the attempts by Huazalingo to become independent of the district seat in 1838 via a pronunciamiento under the direction of Wenceslao Ugalde. Another example comes from Meztitlán where the town of Chapulhuacan revolted in favor of General Santa Anna after the district capital declared its loyalty to the government of Bustamante in 1832. The prefect begged for assistance to put down the revolt since the Chapulhuacan Indians, “people without civilization or politics,” would destroy Meztitlán otherwise.56

Pronunciamientos sought the support of municipal governments in their search for political legitimacy. Town councils became the unofficial organs of “public opinion” from the earliest days of the war of independence. Hispanic legal tradition saw town councils as the original organs of popular sovereignty, so it was quite natural for politicians to appeal to the councils when they sought to re-write the social contract.57 The 1830s saw the popularization of “public opinion.” Indigenous villagers found that they too could express their desires in the context of national political movements by influencing municipal institutions they knew intimately.

Caste War and Local Politics

In 1848–49 a serious insurrection swept through the Huasteca and the northern part of the state of Veracruz which contemporaries characterized as a “Caste War,” a racially motivated, incoherent, and vengeful outburst.58 In

55 Trinidad Ballato, juez de paz de Huautla, informe de February 22, 1838. On the events associated with the “plan de Cuernavaca of 1834 see AHEM 091.2/178/4/5-162 which contains extensive reports from the different municipalities of the region.

56 Simultaneously there were supporting declarations from Xilitla and Tamazunchale Indian towns that bordered on Huejutla. Included in a letter of Mariano Reyna, Tula, April 26, 1832, AHEM 091.6/183/3/39, 40-41.

57 For a discussion of the role ayuntamientos in Mexican political thought see, Luis Villoro, El proceso ideológico de la revolución de independencia (Mexico City: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1953).

58 The uprising in the Yucatán also colored the perceptions of the Huasteca events: “the events in the Yucatán on a large scale and those of the Huasteca on a small scale, reveal the class of barbarities that occur in an uprising of Indians.” “Guerra de Castas,” El Siglo XIX, July 8, 1848, p. 4. The minister of relations accused the Huasteca rebels of aspiring to the “extermination of the white race,” May 26, 1848, AGN Gobernación, vol. 225, exp. 20, f. 60. The rebels made an interesting formal denial of this accusation see “Impreso Suelto” Tampico 1 de enero de 1850 found in AGN Gobernación Sin sección, vol. 383 exp. 13, f. 3.
the next few pages I would like to present some observations concerning the connections between this social rebellion of the mid-nineteenth century and the politics of town government. The observations focus on the Huasteca rebellion of 1848-49 that involved a wide range of pueblos stretching from the District of Huejutla and Yahualica to the Gulf of Mexico.

While the so-called caste war originated in 1845 as an agrarian protest against hacendadas in the Sierra de Tantima, it soon became clear that the rebels perceived the structure of local government as the source of their problems. While at first glance this rebellion might seem to conform to the agrarian model suggested by John Tutino, the rebellion did not remain within the coastal lowlands where the tenants on the private estates demanded land. Even in the lowlands, the movement was centered in the sujeto communities. The revolt exhibited a strong current of rivalry between visitas and head towns. The movement shifted from attempting to influence the courts on land issues to demanding the right to control the appointment of local officials. Rebels then set out to punish officials they accused of accumulating wealth at the expense of the sujetos. The movement tapped into local intra-elite divisions and attracted more allies from a broad range of towns and social classes as the political possibilities of the rebellion became evident. As a result, the revolt spread beyond the area of agrarian discontent, becoming a region-wide revolt with threatening implications for the national government.

One of the principal objectives of the peasant rebels was to change the balance of power within municipalities and districts to favor sujeto communities. The rebels set forth various complaints in terms of municipal politics. They overthrew town councils, carried out reprisals against municipal seats, and appointed a new district prefect in Tantoyuca. Lucas Valdéz, the rebel appointee, later claimed that he accepted the post only because he sought to moderate rebel actions. Valdéz saw the cause of the uprising in “the hatred that the inhabitants of San Nicolás and the hamlets have for those of Tantima [the municipal seat].”

Realizing that the abuses of the municipal authorities were the roots of this dangerous situation, the government military commander gave direct orders to the Tantima mayor to accommodate the rebel demands and “stop extorting the local citizens.”

As the rebellion spread beyond its “agrarian” center in Veracruz to the

59 Manuel B. Trens, Historia de Veracruz. (Mexico City: Editorial La Impresora, 1950), 4:561. Valdéz was “a colored dude” according to 4:559.
60 Trens, Historia, 4: 559.
Huasteca Hidalguense and the Sierra Madre Oriental, the organizing principle followed the pattern of sujetos against head towns. The key organizers were often the ever-present justices of the peace and subregidores from the sujeto towns. Rebels consistently “deposed the legitimate authorities in each pueblo they occupied” and replaced them with individuals to their liking. When the movement spread to the Huasteca Potosina it followed the same pattern. The revolts coincided with the disorders of the Pronunciamiento de la Ciudadela (1847) in Mexico City and the American war enabling the insurgents to use anti-American sentiments to justify their actions against local officials. The rebels accused the councils of Tancanhuitz and Tamazunchale of not defending the country. A crowd of “500 Indians” reportedly executed two Spaniards and attempted to kill members of the district offices. Presumably there were no Americans present and the crowd had to settle for the traditional patriotic act of persecuting some local Spaniards. Ponciano Arriaga, serving as prefect, persuaded the communities to return to order but only after acceding to their demands for new elections and replacing the sub prefect.

Arriaga soon advocated that the State of Mexico establish “procuradores de pobres” to serve as advocates for the underclass who would hopefully direct peasant energies into the courts rather than armed rebellion.

The fact that internal municipal tensions emerged as an important aspect of the rebellion should not surprise us. Rebel activity largely came from the dependent towns and hamlets of the district. The rebels burned the munici-

61 Andrade to the Ministro de relaciones interiores y exteriores, February 11, 1848, AGN Gobernación vol. 225(1) exp. 20, f. 1v.
62 Governor Manuel G. Othón to Ministro de relaciones interiores y exteriores, September 26, 1846, AGN Gobernación vol. 324, exp. 1, f. 1-3. The Ciudadela affair was a revolt in Mexico City led by conservative military officers against the Vice President Vicente Gómez Farías’s attempt to seize Church property in order to pay for the war against the United States. The rebels in the Huasteca potosina declared themselves in favor of Gómez Farías in the affair.
63 Ponciano Arriaga, prefecto de Tancanhuitz to Juan José Ferrasas, Francisco Peña y Pedro Ferrasas of Tamazunchale, Sept. 14, 1846, AGN Gobernación Sin Sección 324/1/1-6. Arriaga called on the rebels to return to order stating that rebellion was justified only “in times when desposts rule.” Arriaga later warned against the return of the ousted officials on the grounds that it would cause disturbances. f. 8. Alan Knight has noted the strong xenophobic tendency of Mexican nationalism in the popular classes in the nineteenth century, “Peasants into Patriots: Thoughts on the Making of the Mexican Nation,” Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos 10:1 (1994), p. 141.
pal seats of Tantima and Ozuluama while the army took its reprisals on small communities like San Nicolás, Rancho Abajo, and Tlacolula. The army officers also recognized the role of sujetos in the rebellion by placing their garrisons in the hamlets of Rancho Abajo, San Lorenzo, and San Gerónimo. More evidence of the sujeto-head town division emerges from the town council of Huejutla and from Andrade’s proposal to reward the people who had remained loyal during the moment of crisis by requesting a tax holiday. The town asked the national government for tax relief for Huejutla, but only for the municipal seat. “We do not ask that the government extend this favor to all the inhabitants of the municipality, because although everyone cooperated in the re-establishment of order . . . none have done as much as those residents of the head town.” The petition recognized that the municipal government seats were the center of loyalty to the state and the local elite during the mass uprising of 1848-49.

Rebel documents refer to the head town of Tantima as the “pueblo enemigo.” The perception that local officials thrived by the exploitation of the hamlets inspired rebel actions. Hilario Galván, one of the leaders in Veracruz, trumpeted his accomplishments to his followers: “the destruction . . . of the rural and urban properties of the most cruel and bloody enemy you had in the area of Tamiahua whose wealth he obtained from the sweat of your brow, the administration of justice, and other public offices.” The lawyer hired by the rebel communities in Veracruz, Luciano Velázquez, also promised to topple the influential landowners from their powerful positions. “I swear,” he wrote to his clients in Tancoco, “that Mr. [Ignacio] Franco, with all his power, will not continue in the future to dispose of the destiny of the pueblos at his whim.” Thus the rebels designed their activities against local officials to readjust the structure of power in their favor.

65 For the case of Tlacolula, Manuel Francisco Herrera to Juan Múgica y Osorio, Huachinango, May 15, 1848, AGN Gobernanía Sin Sección, vol. 357, f. 170; for Rancho Abajo see Andrade to Ministro de relaciones interiores y exteriores, June 12, 1848, f. 156; San Lorenzo and San Nicolás see the letters of rebel leaders, ff. 126-30.
66 Juan Manuel Maldonado, Tantoyuca, to the jefe político de Tampico, July 24, 1848, AGN Gobernanía Sin Sección vol. 357, f. 129
67 BCEM 1849/405/181/6. This document also illustrates how the ayuntamientos of the larger towns often acted with the cabecera’s interest in mind. Andrade also noted that the “vecindario de esta cabecera” bore the brunt of the operations against the U.S. and the “indígenas insurrectos.” f. 1.
69 AGN Gobernanía Sin Sección, vol. 357, f. 127. Galván probably refers to the alcalde of Tamiahua who was also one of the landlords involved in a rent dispute with his tenants.
70 AGN Gobernanía, vol. 342, exp. 7, f. 87v. Ignacio Franco owned a considerable amount of land. Besides the properties in the Tamiahua region involved in the dispute, he also owned the Hacienda del Capadero in Chiconamel (it later became an independent municipality in 1869). AJH, libro de 1852,
When one observes the participants in the rebellion, the political nature of peasant discontent becomes clearer. The leadership behind both the land suits brought by the villagers against the estates and the rebellion itself came from the sujeto communities. Municipal officials at the lowest level served as the organizers of the movement. Towards the end of the rebellion, troops captured correspondence of the rebels indicating that the aldermen and justices of the peace coordinated the activities of the rebels. They used their positions to call on the sujetos to raise money for Velázquez’s legal activities or to raise troops to storm the towns.\textsuperscript{71} The commander of one of the government expeditionary forces pressing the revolt, Colonel Juan Manuel Maldonado, identified all the hamlet alcaldes as “the tyrants who, with their consent or by force, pledged their subjects to take up arms.”\textsuperscript{72} Colonel Maldonado replaced the local sub-regidores and justices of the peace in the sujeto communities of Pastoría, Naranjal, Puerta Vieja, San Gerónimo, Carbajal, La Pitala, Rancho Abajo and San Lorenzo in an effort to restore order.\textsuperscript{73} Before the rebellion the prefect of Tampico de Veracruz blamed the increasing disorders in the region on an excess of municipal democracy. In the 1846 election the Indians had won control of the posts of regidores and síndicos who then spent their energies on supporting Velázquez’s lawsuits.\textsuperscript{74}

These small town functionaries had gained experience previously as the local leadership for national political movements and pronunciamientos. Herrera, one of the leaders from Chicontepec, was well connected to federalist circles and had participated in a rebellion organized by the radical federalist, José Antonio Mejía, in 1842.\textsuperscript{75} Pedro Hernández the “principal motor of the insurrection in Huautla,” was no stranger to politics, having held the post of treasurer for the municiplality and later he participated in the 1853 movement in favor of forming a new state of the Huasteca.\textsuperscript{76} According to

f. 5-9 records the sale of the land for 17,000 pesos to a group of twenty three residents. The estate was further divided into smaller lots in subsequent years, see AJH libro de 1869, fs. 75, 78-9. The authorities blamed Velázquez as a “picapleitos” (lawsuit chaser) whose hand was behind every action of the rebels.

\textsuperscript{71} See several letters from juez primero de San Nicolás, Juan Antonio Francisco, to teniente de justicia de Rancho Abajo, May 28, 1848 and June 26, 1847, AGN Gobernación Sin Sección, vol. 357, f.126-126v. See also Ramón Núñez’s report that the juez de paz of Ixcatepec and Pedro del Angel were communicating with Luciano Velázquez in 1846. AGN Gobernación, vol. 342, exp. 7, f. 70.

\textsuperscript{72} Juan Manuel Maldonado, July 24, 1848, AGN Gobernación Sin Sección, vol. 357, f. 129v.

\textsuperscript{73} Juan Manuel Maldonado, July 24, 1848, AGN Gobernación Sin Sección, vol. 357, f. 130.

\textsuperscript{74} AGN Gobernación Sin Sección 342/7/71.

\textsuperscript{75} Joaquín Meade, \textit{La Huasteca veracruzana} (Mexico City: Editorial Citláltépetl, 1966). 2:51. During the rebellion, Juan Meriotegui, still serving as sub prefect, was killed. This was the same Mejía who involved Mariano Olarte in the conspiracy to seize Tampico for the federalist cause in 1835.

\textsuperscript{76} AGN Gobernación Sin Sección 357/164 Andrade, May 29, 1848; \textit{Siglo XIX}, July 25, 1869, men-
prefect Andrade, Hernández also aspired to win the post of prefect. In one of the stranger events of the rebellion, Hernández went to Mexico City in May 1848 to recruit a number of followers to invade the Huasteca. He supposedly had backing from the merchants in Zacualtipán, particularly one Saturnino Ruíz, to recruit soldiers for their cause in Mexico City.77

The justices of the peace, tenientes de justicia and regidores who appear as organizers were often Indian, such as Hernández, De la Cruz, and Juan Antonio Francisco. In some cases, the rebel leaders represented the visible tip of the colonial república de indios that continued to function within the municipalities, as in Tamazunchale where rebels who negotiated with the government in 1847 used titles from the colonial república.78 The dichotomy between municipalities in the head towns and Indian-dominated authorities in the sujetos served as the organizing principle of the regional insurrection. The villagers merely stretched their ties to incorporate neighboring villagers into a popular region wide initiative to re-configure how state power existed at its most basic level.

Finally the rebellion became a serious political challenge to the national state because members of the local elite divided over the uprising. Juan Nepomuceno Llorente, a member of one of the wealthiest land owning families of Tanтоyuca, supported the rebellion in its early stages. To Llorente went the honor of writing the most radical political plan, in which he called for the distribution of all private lands to indigenous communities. Ironically while the indigenous villagers placed their demands in terms of municipal reform, granting more rights to sujeto hamlets, their elite ally placed it in terms of Indian land rights.79 Antonio Escobar has demonstrated that

77 AGN Gobernación Sin Sección 357/166. According to a letter from a resident in Mexico City, Hernández was promising his recruits that the parish priest of Molango had 50,000 pesos which the rebels would take to pay them. While the first reports stated that Hernández had recruited 200 men in Mexico, later documents placed the number at 80. AGN Gobernación sin sección, 357/147.

78 AGN Gobernación 324/1/13-15v, mentions the presence of Indian officials during negotiations and the continued existence of república de indios posts. Velázquez addressed his communique to the indios principales, f. 87v.

79 For a detailed description of the role of Juan Nepomuceno Llorente see “Hijos del pueblo y ciudadanos: Identidades políticas entre los rebeldes indios del siglo XIX,” chapter in Construcción de la legitimidad política en México: sujetos, discurso y conducta política en el siglo XIX. Brian Connnaughton, Carlos Illades, and Sonia Pérez Toledo, eds. (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma Metro-
Llorente’s real interest in the rebellion was to increase his own influence in the region by controlling the appointment of local officials. Llorente ultimately abandoned the rebels and later assisted the government but in the early stages he stymied the state’s response to the uprising, enabling the rebels to expand their sphere of influence.

The popular press of the period interpreted the caste war of the Huasteca in terms of racial revenge while modern historians, Jean Meyer and Leticia Reina, have attributed it to agrarian discontent. Finally Escobar, noting the behavior of Llorente, has put it into the context of elite political ambitions. However if we take the point of view of the participants into account we must conclude that local structures of politics and their connections to state and national government were foremost in their considerations. The “caste warriors” of the Huasteca saw themselves as political participants who sought to reorganize local politics in order to survive and prosper. Indeed the rebels issued a printed proclamation from Tampico denouncing the effort of the press to brand their movement as one aimed at race revenge.

CONCLUSIONS

The indigenous responses to political change under the Mexican republic were diverse. While villagers retained the old repúblicas de indios as a means of resistance they also learned new ways of playing the political game. This feature reveals an important fact about the new municipality. Non-Indian elite men may have dominated the town councils but to create a system of effective rule in the hinterland of each head town, they had to allow for indigenous traditions and a certain amount of autonomy. One of the continuities between the colonial period and the national period seems to have been that the power of the state was always a negotiated product, a result of village resistance and state accommodation to local tradition.

The republican period also opened new fields of action for disenfranchised villagers. New political actors served as potential allies for villagers. Prefects often complained that the villagers were easy “prey” for unscrupulous lawyers “picapleitos” and agitators who stirred up villagers for their

politana, El Colegio de México and El Colegio de Michoacán, 2000) and Leticia Reina, Las rebeliones campesinas en México (1819-1906) (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1980), which includes a full text of Llorente’s plan.

81 "Impreso Suelto” Tampico, 1 de enero de 1850, I encountered this broadsheet in AGN Gobernación Sin sección, vol. 383 exp. 13, f. 3. See also the letter of the prefect of Tuxpan, Anastacio María Llorente, April 18, 1848, Temapache, AGN Gobernación Sin Sección, vol. 357, f. 118.
own ends, but this was also a two way street in which villagers used the ambitions of these political middlemen to make their demands heard.

The changes that came with independence exacerbated tensions already existing within the pueblos. Municipal seat-sujeto conflicts had been one of the constants of eighteenth century New Spain. Ironically the constitution resolved an old dispute: the sujetos now definitively controlled the república de indios but the república’s power was now strictly customary. The new system added more pressures to the system by adding even stronger ethnic dimensions to the already existing cabecera sujeto split.

The abstract idea that the difficult years of independent Mexico were due to the conflict between “colonial traditions” and modern state building is a truism that becomes understandable once we consider village society. República versus municipality became a synonym for the difficult transition to a modern or liberal definition of the nation. Ultimately the constitutional rules that sought to erase the colonial traditions failed to do so. In the process indigenous villagers at least forced the local elite to make some concessions to the local traditions of village life.

University of Colorado at Denver
Michael T. Ducey
Denver, Colorado