

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

The concrete study of the management of resources such as water and forests in peasant communities is replete with problems and polemic. Notions of equity, ecology and sustainable efficacy confront situations and histories of created interests that operate in related but diverse scales of social power. The findings of such studies are frequently depressing, but the interest in carrying them out is obvious: The degradation and destruction of natural resources and the impact of the inequalities of their control, distribution and consumption upon peasant communities are important and urgent topics. But while most of us share feelings about such priorities, this is not the case when we ask ourselves why there exist processes (acts) of environmental degradation and, also, preservation in the management of the commons. "Why" for some is configured in theories of human nature, for others, in the analysis of margins of utility and the parameters of their calculation, and for others, in the supposition that we must understand the "how" and the "when" of degradation and also preservation during processes of managing resources in order to explain "why" there are successes and also disasters.

Wisely, the authors of the four studies that appear in the Thematic Section of this issue report on concrete cases examined in explicit frameworks for comparative analysis or by ethnographic and historical analysis of specific processes. They all, however, share a focus on institutional arrangements for the management of common resources and all privilege the institutions of local self government. They thus describe cases of "how" and "when", but from different perspectives and with different positions concerning the dimensions of historical time and social power relevant to their description and analysis.

For example, Francisco Gómez Carpinteiro examines usages and customs in the management of water in the *barrios* of Izúcar de Matamoros in the southeastern Puebla during the first two decades after the Mexican revolution. The *barrios* defend "ancestral rights" to the water of the Nexapa River. The water and its local control are part of a balance of powers between the *barrios*, government officials, professionals and merchants of the urban center of Matamoros, as well as the hacienda owners of the area. This balance has a ceremonial expression and an everyday reality. In both, water is integrated as individual property into communal organization. During the porfirian reforms and the subsequent postrevolutionary reforms, government officials treated such prop-

erty among commoners as a “local idiosyncrasy”. The usages and customs of the *barrios*, however, resisted both regional efforts to deny the legitimacy of any “ancestral right” to “federal waters” and federal initiatives to reorder the local institutional arrangements for controlling water management. But when a North American entrepreneur, W. O. Jenkins, used a strategy of collective organization (“*cordilleros*”) for the production of rice in the *barrios*, the balance of forces changed. Through the combination of patronage, projects compatible with local usages and customs, and mortal violence, Jenkins managed to organize irrigation for the production of sugar cane for his mill at Atencingo. His tactics and successes exemplify how a local convention for water management can be articulated with processes of state reform.

Aaron J. Martin’s study deals with two related cases of local self government and the management of communal resources in a strategic ecological zone, the *Reserva de la Biosfera Mariposa Monarca*. His point of departure are the ideas of Elinor Ostrom on *Governing the Commons* and her approach to the analysis of local institutions in the administration of common resources. Martin demonstrates the utility of Ostrom’s approach but also examines its limitations. Based on his findings, he develops important conclusions concerning the need to examine institutional arrangements for the management of communal resources in terms of historical and cultural configurations of social power and not exclusively in relation to administrative orderings and economic incentives promulgated in projects of sustainable development.

Ostrom’s analytical frame is also used by Claudio Garibay, who details case studies for two contiguous communities in the southern mountains of Oaxaca, one successful in taking control of the sustainable development of its forests and the other characterized by conflict and fragmentation in its efforts to achieve self government and the management of communal resources. Garibay argues that we must seek the differences between the two communities at the ethical-political plane of communal organization. He describes how one community develops a “corporative” communal organization based on an explicit principle of hierarchy. Through a sequence of institutionalized practices and responsibilities, this hierarchical organization assures that the experience of each commoner in the communal system makes possible equitable decision-making. In marked contrast, the other community suffers familial fragmentation in which elites in different settlements establish a competitive and asym-

metrical control of the natural resources. This is related to the dramatic deterioration of the forests and a climate of insecurity and violence.

Another anthropological entrance to the analysis of the self government of the commons is treated in Silvia Bofill's study. Bofill reports on the internationally renown case of a communal enterprise in a municipality of north central Michoacán. The focus is on the transformation of local government and its effects over local processes of reciprocity. In the development of a new social order in San Juan Nuevo, the processes of change revolve around the control of forest resources and their industrialization in a diversified cooperative enterprise. The context of this development is the formation of the Mexican neoliberal State. From the analytical perspective of reciprocity, the management of the forest with sustained efficacy leads to processes of centralization of local authority in which growing inequalities and political and economical exclusion are manifest.

The document presented in this issue is an interview carried out in 1982 with the missionary and translator of the New Testament to P'urhépecha, Maximo Lathrop. Invited by General Lazaro Cárdenas, Lathrop arrived at the P'urhépecha community of Puacuaro in 1936. During 50 years he worked and lived with the commoners of P'urhépecha communities in Lake Patzcuaro, the Sierra P'urhépecha, and the Cañada de los Once Pueblos. The interview of Lathrop by Agustín Jacinto and Kambe Tamiyo is focused on his experience and mission. The questions and answers are guided in part by the concerns of Jacinto, a scholar of P'urhépecha cultural traditions and the complexities of their contemporary changes.

The General Section of this issue consists of two studies concerned with Mexican colonial history. Felipe Castro Gutiérrez documents the cases of agitation and conflict in the Indian Republic of Pátzcuaro from the change of the Bishopric (Tzintzuntzan to Patzcuaro) in 1539 until the time when the conflicts and disorders ceased to be documented by the government of New Spain, around 1689. The author outlines the conflicts that most clearly characterize the Republic in this period offering a brief description of the organization of the authorities of the Republic of Indians of Pátzcuaro both in the city and in its *barrios*, subject towns and settlements, sketching the conflicts between Pátzcuaro and Cuanajo, and contrasting this Republic with those of Tzintzuntzan and Uruapan in relation to the conflicts with, and the different pressures of, the

Spanish settlers. Castro suggests that the fact of more than 150 years of agitation in the area reflects the complex reality of its regional power, in part due to the conflicts between the centralist arrangements for representation in Pátzcuaro and the “numerous subject towns with their own land and officials of the Republic”, and also due to “the division of the noble lineages of the center into rival factions. . .” He also suggests that the fact that in the eighteenth century reports of mobilizations and conflicts disappear from the historical register, results from the control that the Spaniards exercised over the Pátzcuaro government – an authority recognized in 1689 and put into practice during the eighteenth century. In support of this hypothesis, the author presents an outline of the documentation of the take over and control of Pátzcuaro’s government by the Spanish.

We close the General Section with an essay by Pedro Tomé Martín who offers different readings of a text from the sixteenth century, *Guerra de los Chichimecas*. On the basis of Michel Foucault’s reflection about authors and their role in the authority of the reception of a text, Tomé reviews the authorship of the *Guerra de los Chichimecas*. He disqualifies the authorship of Gonzalo de las Casas associated with a militaristic reading of the work and also a reading of the text as the production of the Royal Chronicler, Gil González D’Avila. In contrast, he supports the arguments of Alberto Carrillo that the text is from the pen of Fray Guillermo de Santa Ana and that its reception should be contemplated in the theological context of the evangelization and conquest of native groups in western Mexico.

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