LIVING AMONG A FIELD OF RUINS: (IN)VISIBLE RESIDUES OF VIOLENCE AND REVOLUTION IN THE NORTHERN LOWLANDS OF VERACRUZ, MEXICO.

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LIVING AMONG A FIELD OF RUINS: (IN)VISIBLE RESIDUES OF VIOLENCE AND REVOLUTION IN THE NORTHERN LOWLANDS OF VERACRUZ, MEXICO

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Scholars have examined how the initial destructive phase of the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920 gave way to a stable and relatively peaceful revolution from above given that major social and economic reforms occurred in a climate of minimal repression. In other words, the post-revolutionary process of state-formation is thought to have entailed the gradual curtailment of violence through the state's monopolization of social and civil regulation. However, anthropological insights into how subtle forms of state violence persist and how violence is reproduced and experienced compel us to reconsider common understandings of the post-revolutionary process of state formation and its legacies. I suggest that notions of violence as something separate from civil order and the ordinary conceal otherwise significant forms of violence.

My doctoral project thus focuses neither on the immediate violence of the initial phases of the Mexican revolution nor on the sporadic moments of repression exerted by the consolidated post-revolutionary state. Rather, this project is part of a growing effort to counter the reduction of violence to its manifestation in war and conflict by

designing a theoretical approach attentive to its occluded and residual forms. By examining the material traces left by post-revolutionary state interventions in the northern lowlands of Veracruz—objects as seemingly diverse as agrarian maps, decaying oil infrastructures, ethnological photographs and the debris left by the development of an archaeological site—this study reveals how the affective presence and materiality of these concrete residues of violence and revolution have shaped the everyday lives of those who live in and among them. By attending to the afterlife of these state remnants and to the ways in which people overlook, cherish, suppress, or revile them, this project contributes to debates regarding processes of rule and governance in Mexico: their violent accumulation and pervasiveness as well as their ordinary effects in people's everyday lives and imagined futures.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Monica Mariella Salas Landa received a BA in Sociocultural Anthropology from Universidad de las Américas, Puebla, Mexico in 2006. Upon obtaining a Fulbright Fellowship, she began her graduate studies at New York University where she obtained an M.A. in Museum Studies in 2008. In 2009, she began her doctoral work in Anthropology at Cornell University. Her research focuses on Mexico's post-revolutionary process of state formation and its legacies.

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The idea of examining the legacies of post-revolutionary state-formation in Mexico through the actual landscapes that these processes left behind developed through an intellectual engagement with my dissertation committee. I also benefited from Cornell's Exchange Scholar Program as it granted me the opportunity to spend, after fieldwork was completed, an academic year at Columbia University where I developed some of the core ideas at play in this dissertation. Throughout the writing process, I benefited in particular from the critical comments, advice, and support of my Chair, Marina Welker. I am thankful for her guidance as well as for the freedom

she permitted me as I crafted and re-crafted this project. Her scholarly work and research interests on corporate forms and extractive industries resonated strongly with what I encountered as I conducted fieldwork. I am extremely grateful for having had the opportunity to work with her. I also want to thank Raymond Craib for his thoughtful reading of this dissertation (and many other pieces of writing) and for his valuable suggestions and encouragement along the way. His graduate seminars on Latin American History as well as his work on cartographic routines and the forging of the Mexican modern state have deeply influenced my own work. Finally, Adam Smith's interest in the material world was key in shaping the methodology central to this dissertation as well as the theoretical lens informing it. I want to thank him for encouraging me to cultivate an archaeological sensibility and to take seriously the materiality of our political lives. Last but not least, many of the ideas in this dissertation were developed in conversations with my friends in the Anthropology and History Departments at Cornell University. Despite having to concentrate on their own work, they always found the time to read over and comment on drafts and grant proposals. I am very grateful for the time and camaraderie that they shared with me. I also want to thank my family for their support and love. My sister not only encouraged me to pursue doctoral work but also was essential to helping me complete the program. My parents taught me invaluable lessons about Mexican history—mainly during long dinner conversations—by sharing with me their experiences of the tumultuous 1960s and 1970s as well as the series of economic crises that followed. Their dedication to careers at state institutions was likewise formative in my appreciation and commitment to studying the legacy of the Mexican Revolution. I am also grateful for the modest yet carefully chosen book collection they assembled and for giving me the opportunity to explore it as I was growing up in Xalapa. My first encounter with political theory, Realismo Mágico, and with the work of key Mexican

authors—from Mariano Azuela and Juan Rulfo to Martín L. Guzmán, Daniel Cosío Villegas, and Carlos Fuentes—took place at home. I thank my parents for this gift.

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INTRODUCTION

Residues of Violence and Revolution

Early on the morning of 19 November 2014, a group of state workers restlessly dismantled the bleachers and stands that they had erected only two days before in Mexico City's iconic *zócalo* square as part of a series of preparations for the annual official parade commemorating Mexico's 1910 revolution. The anticipated parade sought to celebrate what many scholars, officials, and ordinary citizens consider the defining event in modern Mexican history[1]: the popular rebellion that ended the authoritarian regime of Porfirio Díaz as well as its

[1] The popular character of the rebellion has been a point of contention among historians. In *The Mexican Agrarian Revolution,* Frank Tannenbaum (1929), for example, depicts the revolution as unified, legitimate, and transformative insofar as it put an end to the oppressive and expansionist system of haciendas, which dominated the countryside during the *Porfiriato.* For a discussion regarding this understanding of the Porfirian past and the ways it shaped early interpretation of the Revolution, see: Knight (1991,74) and Kourí (2002). This early "populist" vision was canonical until the next generation of scholars in the late 60s challenged, first, the official interpretations of regional events while reclaiming local heroes and histories (see for instance the work of Luis Gónzalez), and second the popular character of the revolution as well as its success. Revisionist studies (Fowler Salamini 1993; Falcon 1984; Carr 1980; Bailey 1978; Womack 1989; Joseph 1991; Lomnitz 1992; Van Young 1992; Martínez Assad 1990; Meyer 1976; Brading 1980) saw "the state" as a principal actor, relegating popular participation to a subordinated, almost inconsequential role, even as rural agrarian movements became significant forces in the early stages of the revolt (Womack's 1969; 1989). Thus, from the vantage point of these scholars, the Mexican Revolution produced a centralized single party that promoted capitalist growth and authoritarianism at the expense of social welfare of the popular classes. Rather than change, the Revolution had brought continuity (Knight 1998, 25). Yet, as Vaughan (1999, 272) observes, beginning in the 1980s three intersecting processes encouraged a renewed interest in understanding popular participation in the Mexican Revolution and its immediate aftermath. First, she argues that regional histories questioned the strength of the post-revolutionary state, the homogeneity of the countryside, and the manipulability of the peasantry. Adolfo Gilly's (1971, 1980), *La revolución interrumpida*, (1969), for instance, draws attention to the vitality of popular forces during the period of armed rebellion in Mexico. See also Van Young (1992b). Other studies seeking to emphasize regional variations focused on different forms of land tenure and how these produced distinct forms of revolutionary mobilizations (Knight 1998) and (Tutino 1988). Second, Vaughan (1999) argues that historians began to apply new conceptualizations in comparative peasant studies to their examination of the Mexican countryside, especially James Scott's (1976) early work on the moral economy of the peasant and his analysis of forms and arts of popular resistance. See Joseph and Nugent (1994). Finally, anthropologists' historical ethnographies, such as those by Friedrich (1977), Alonso (1992), and Nugent (1994) offered insight into local motivations and alliances. Post-revisionist history has flourished and it has certainly complicated our understanding of revolutionary and post-revolutionary Mexico, specifically regarding peasant/state interactions.

enduring legacy, grounded in the institutional political regime that emerged out of the rebellion and whose official party, the PRI (the Institutional Revolutionary Party), rules Mexico today.[2] Later that day, the government, however, announced that celebrations would not be accompanied by the traditional festivities. This time the commemoration of November 20th would only consist of a decorations ceremony and promotions of active military personnel from the Defense Ministry and Navy. The events would be held in the *Campo Marte*, a military base.[3]

The sudden and unexpected change in official plans for commemorating the Revolution came as civil and social organizations called for a major rally to protest the recent disappearance of 43 students from a rural teachers college in the Pacific-coast state of Guerrero who were victims of an alliance among the *sicarios* (armed men) of a local drug cartel, politicians, the municipal police, and the army.[4] Shortly after their disappearance, an intense search began, which was first led by the families of the victims and the local population and then by federal authorities. As the search intensified in the mountains and hillsides of impoverished Guerrero, a numbers of clandestine graves also began to appear. None of them, however, seemed to hold the

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[2] Francisco Madero's initial call to revolution was followed a decade of violence. During this period, revolutionary factions fought against each other as well as against the military rule of Victoriano Huerta. The middle-class faction known as "constitutionalists" and led by Venustiano Carranza and Álvaro Obregón won over the agrarian "conventionalists" led by Zapata and Villa. The efforts at reform and reconstruction that followed the triumph of the constitutionalist faction led to the institutionalization of their revolutionary vision under the National Revolutionary Party (PNR), created in 1929 by leadership of Calles. By 1938, populist president Cárdenas furthered the regime's corporatist arrangements and control by transforming the PNT into the Party of the Mexican Revolution (PRM). The conclusion of this process of institutionalization was marked by the creation of the Institutional Revolutionary Party in 1946 by president Miguel Alemán. The formed PRI, as Joseph and Büchenau (2013) suggest, represented the retooling of Cárdenas PRM to better serve the interests of bureaucrats, industrialists, financers and international investors while co-opting and crushing popular dissenting sectors. The PRI continued to rule Mexico until 2000, when the conservative PAN (Partido Acción Nacional) swept it after seven decades of power. Yet, twelve years later, the PRI returned in the presidential election of 2012 with Enrique Peña Nieto.

[3] See Gomora, Doris. "Confirman cancelación del desfile del 20 de Noviembre." *El Universal, Mexico City,* 19 Nov. 2014. Web. 11 May. 2015.

[4] See Goldman, Francisco. "The Disappearance of the Forty-three." *The New Yorker,* 24 Oct. 2014. Web. 11 May 2015; Hernández, Anabel and Steve Fisher. "Iguala: La historia no oficial." *Proceso*, Mexico City, 13 Dec. 2014. Web. 11 May 2015.

students. But on 8 November, the Office of the General Attorney announced that a grave found in a municipal dump did contain the remains of the students. According to the official version, these were found in plastic trash bags but were too badly burned to permit any quick forensic confirmation. A damaged fragment of bone, however, seemed to match the genetic profile of one of the missing students. The disappearance, destruction and subsequent resurfacing of the students' remains aroused horror and indignation among many sectors of Mexican society. Twelve days later on 20 November, ten thousand people marched and gathered in the recently emptied *zócalo*. Protesters came together not only to demand justice but also to adjudicate blame: it was the state—*Fue el Estado*—they claimed.[5]

The power of the human remains cannot be underestimated. Their appearance forced many to dispel disembodied abstractions often associated with "violence" insofar as it confronted them with the most tangible and affectively charged debris of bodily destruction, specially, if we consider that, since 2006, when the Mexican government intensified a campaign against drug-trafficking organizations—a military operation that resulted not only in changes in the structure of drug-cartels themselves but also unveiled the complicity, corruption, and incompetence of state actors and institutions—death became increasingly regulated, distanced, and governed (Kaufman and Morgan, 2005; Mbembe, 2003). Human remains were quickly withdrawn from the public eye as soon as they were removed from mass graves. This act of concealment was challenged once the students' remains resurfaced. A pile of ashes and fragmented bone illuminated with unavoidable clarity how expendable and endangered the lives of poor and ordinary Mexican citizens are. But suddenly, through their forced opacity, these remains began illuminating other *forms* and *meanings* of political violence, a violence that was neither

[5] Igartúa, Santiago. "Fue el Estado, clamor por desaparecidos de Ayotzinapa." *Proceso*, Mexico City. 22 Oct. 2014. Web. 11 May 2015.

spectacular nor instantaneous but rather accretive, pervasive, and elusive insofar as it was dispersed across time yet concentrated and congealed in space. Back in Guerrero, the Raúl Isidro Burgos Ayotzinapa Teachers Collage, a decaying space that had sheltered and intellectually formed the missing students, was rendered visible. This sudden visibility points to the ways in which those who were missing and those who had survived went on living in this very ruined place.

Every year more than one hundred students arrive at the all-male *Escuela Normal* in order to receive formal training to serve the poorest rural schools in the region. Ayotzinapa sits about 20 minutes outside Guerrero's state capital, Chilpancingo. The short distance, however, is deceiving. Despite its close proximity to the center of state power, Ayotzinapa has stood as a bastion of resistance to it. At the end of a dirt road that led visitors to this *escuela normal*, a stone archway welcomes visitors. A sign over the main entrance reads "Ayotzinapa, the cradle of social consciousness." Nine buildings soon come into view: the dormitories, classrooms, and dining halls. Murals decorate the buildings, depicting not only renowned Marxist and revolutionary figures, such as Zapatista rebels or local guerrilla leaders from the 1970s, but also students who were killed by the police in 2011 during a protest demanding an increase in the school's enrollment and meal budget. Resources are indeed scant: first-year dorm rooms are windowless concrete boxes with no furniture and rotting walls. Students sleep on cardboard and blankets while showers often lack water. There is little food.[6]

These students in their late teens and early twenties tend to come from poor, indigenous *campesino* families; graduating from la *escuela normal* is seen as the best option available to them to improve their everyday lives, but it is also a way to be socially useful in their

[6] Arteaga, Roberto and Francisco Muciño. "La historia no contada de Ayotzinapa y las Normales Rurales" *Forbes*, Mexico. 25 Dic. 2014. Web. 11 May 2015; "La pequeña casa de Ayotzinapa a la que le sobran metros y le falta vida" *CNN*, Mexico. 27 Oct. 2014. Web. 11 May 2015.

impoverished communities. Like other schools of this kind, Ayotzinapa was created in the 1920s in the wake of the Mexican Revolution and it was envisioned as a center for critical thinking, social mobility and community development for peasant and indigenous youth. By the mid-1950s—a period of assumed peace and stability; a golden age of economic development and industrialization—*escuelas normales* stopped being funded and supported and instead became demonized for their radical leftist politics. These spaces that during the 20s and 30s had embodied the post-revolutionary hope for cultural engineering through education and had been designed to create a loyal citizenry turned into a threat to the stability of the same state that brought them into being. By the 1960s, in fact, they were producing its most militant forces and critics (Padilla 2014). Teachers in Guerrero were guerrilla leaders: Lucio Cabañas and Genaro Vázquez were both Ayotzinapa graduates and fought relentlessly for economic justice and electoral rights against the ruling party. These insurgent movements, after years of seeking legal pathways of redress, became subject to brutal counterinsurgencies (Aviña 2014). Unsurprisingly, by 1969 the federal government closed numerous schools. Today only fourteen remain; Ayotzinapa is one of them. The abandoned and vanishing space that remains of the *escuela normal* of Ayoztinapa, with its decaying infrastructure, broken windows, lack of resources as well as with its arresting stories, images and symbols, attests to the brutal past as well as the degraded present conditions that preceded and made possible the students' eventual annihilation. This concrete space, in short, began revealing itself as a trace of state failure, disregard, and destruction.

It is precisely spaces and objects such as these that this dissertation analyzes as concrete residues of violence and revolution. Grounded in analysis of Mexican state-formation and written as the tragic events of Ayotzinapa unfolded, this dissertation is conceived as a broad

meditation on how extreme forms of violence and terror are *inseparable* from ongoing and ordinary processes of ruination: the active forces of disruption, degradation, and disregard that reside in particular objects and spaces rarely defined as violent. By examining these ordinary remnants of violence in the northern lowlands of Veracruz—objects as seemingly diverse as agrarian maps, decaying oil infrastructures, ethnological photographs and the debris left by the development of an archaeological site—this object-oriented analysis reveals how the affective presence and materiality of these ordinary state residues have transformed people's everyday lives and imagined futures.

Violence and State Formation in Post-revolutionary Mexico: (In)Visible Remnants of a Revolution

In the aftermath of the Mexican revolution of 1910-1920, the northern lowlands of Veracruz became an area of political, social, and economic experimentation. Certainly, the last three decades of the nineteenth century had already brought social and economic change to the region. It was during this period that an accelerated process of social differentiation driven by the international vanilla economy led to a series of violent struggles over business, land-use rights, and tax increases. These violent conflicts and alliances among Totoanc Indians as well as between them and town merchants eventually paved the way for the privatization of communal land, at least in the area of Papantla (Kourí 2004). After the turn of the century, on the eve of the Mexican Revolution, a rapid concentration of landownership in the hands of immigrant merchant-capitalists took place. It was in this context that the tumultuous years of the armed phase of the revolt, colored by the local rifts between *Maderista* and *aniti-Maderista* groups and

the final *Carrancista* invasion in 1913, unfolded (Fowler-Salamini 1999).[7] Yet, this already fractured region became a fertile ground for forging a new nation. Political figures, intellectuals, and radical leaders during the subsequent period of reconstruction and radicalization (roughly from 1920-1938) believed that the implementation of post-revolutionary policies—including land re-distribution, the making of archaeological patrimony, the practice of *indigenista* policies, and the nationalization of the oil industry—could not only transform the already shaken economic structures and serve as a tool for social justice and equality but could also establish new relationships of reciprocity and dependency between the Mexican state and its rural and urban subjects.

Nevertheless, building a modern state entailed a complex and often contested process through which state experts and officials attempted to redefine local landscapes and the lives of those they encountered in the field. These state–led interventions, not unlike other modernist programs of social and reform and revolution, as James Scott observed (1999), slowly declined and failed. Today, roughly a century after the Mexican Revolution had finally prevailed in this region, people in the area are confronted with the remnants that these state-building arrangements left behind. Such remnants have different levels of visibility, efficacy, and affective force. Some are widely recognizable (as the photographs depicting the indigenous population of the area) while others are only known locally (secured agrarian maps or abandoned

[7] For a detailed discussion on the revolutionary era in Veracruz, see Heather Fowler-Salamini, *Agrarian Radicalism in Veracruz*, 1920-1938 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978); Romana Falcón, *El agrarismo en Veracruz: la etapa radical* (Mexico: El Colegio de Mexico, 1977); Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, vol. 2* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990); Karl Koth, *Waking the Dictator. Veracruz, the Struggle for Federalism, and the Mexican Revolution, 1870-1927* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2002); Antonio Santoyo Torres, *La Mano Negra. Poder regional y Estado en México. Veracruz,* 1928-1943. (Mexico: CONACULTA, 1995). Also
Bernardo García Díaz and David Skerritt Gardner, *La Revolución Mexicana en Veracruz* (Xalapa: Comisión del Estado de Veracruz para la Conmemoración de la Independencia Nacional y la Revolución Mexicana, 2009).

oil wells); some generate apprehension (air pollutants, deteriorated oil pipes), and others, despite being acknowledged are mostly disregarded (the smell of hydrogen sulfide in the oil town of Poza Rica, or the abandoned houses, which are a product of the displacement of the local population that once lived next to a monumental archaeological site). Each of these remnants also identifies different durations and moments of exposure to degradations (immediate and delayed, subcutaneous and invisible, prolonged and instant, diffuse and direct). How do ordinary residents keep drawing on these material residues to make claims on their future? What is the political and affective life of *state debris*? In what ways are these "ruins" binding ordinary residents to the Mexican state? What are the creative measures people take to disentangle themselves from them? And, more broadly, what insights might a focus on these residues offer to the study of political violence and the process of state formation in post-revolutionary Mexico?

Historians have examined how the initial destructive and repressive phase of the Mexican Revolution—what Friedrich Katz (2010, 45-61) calls "the revolution from below"—gave way to a stable and relatively peaceful revolution "from above." Given that major social and economic reforms in the 1930s under the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas occurred in a climate of minimal repression, the post-revolutionary process of Mexican state-formation entailed, according to this view, the gradual curtailment of violence through the state's eventual monopolization of social and civil regulation. In recent years, several scholars (Padilla 2008; Olcott 2010; Aviña 2014; Gillingham and Smith 2014; Pansters 2012; Rath 2013; Hernández Rodríguez 2014; Aguila and Bortz 2012) have questioned this narrative by pointing to the lack of theoretical and empirical work that critically and directly engages with issues of coercion and force during the post-revolutionary process of state-making. According to Smith and Gillingham (2014) and Pansters (2012) this lack of engagement with the dynamic of political violence—during the so-called

Mexican Miracle (1940-1970), the subsequent years of economic crisis, neoliberal rule, and political transition, as well as during the first years of the PRI's return—can be attributed to the fact that the study of state formation has been dominated by conceptual frameworks that either highlight the centralized power of the revolutionary state as well as its stability or instead privilege the discursive and cultural dimensions of state-making and political control, stressing, in turn, everyday (non-coercive) forms of negotiation among popular groups with state projects.

Illustrative of the former trend are the so-called revisionist interpretations of the Mexican Revolution that, by questioning earlier populist and celebratory accounts, placed a greater emphasis on the co-opting and repressive faculties developed by a centralized state as well as on the ways in which the regime successfully achieved the subordination of the popular classes and local powers.[8] In this view, peasants traded in their radicalism for land grants, a diverse labor movement became co-opted, and the middle classes remained under tight social control. The ruling system, in this view, centered on both a strong executive power and a single party capable of replacing the violence that characterized earlier attempts at state building. Thus, Mexico enjoyed a period of peace and stability, the so-called *Pax Príista*, through a combination of economic development, bureaucratic incorporation, stable civilian rule, and the overwhelming legitimacy of the ruling party. This depiction, however, draws heavily on what Smith and Gillingham (2014) call "mechanical metaphors" (the country was run by "the system" and "the party machine" which exercised an uncontested domination over "the people"). Metaphors that,

[8] On Revisionist studies see:. Daniel Cosío Villegas, *La Crísis de Méxic*o (Mexico City: Clio, 1997 [1947]); Jorge Vera Estañol, *La revolución Mexicana: orígenes y resultados* (Mexico City: Porrúa, 1957); Jesús Silva Herzog, *Un ensayo sobre la revolución Mexicana* (Mexico City: Cuadernos Americanos, 1946); Stanley Ross, ed., *Is the Mexican Revolution Dead?* (New York: Knopf, 1966); David C. Bailey, "Revisionism and the Recent Historiography of the Mexican Revolution," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 58, no. 1 (February 1978): 68, 70– 71; Paul Gillingham and Benjamin Smith, *Dictablanda: Politics, Work, and Culture in Mexico, 1938–1968* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

ironically, became central for both critics of the state and supporters of the post-revolutionary regime.

Since the 1990s, post-revisionist scholars have presented a far more nuanced and dynamic picture of the complex negotiation among a diverse society and the post-revolutionary state. Drawing heavily on Scott's (1985) work on popular resistance, on the one hand, and on Corrigan and Sayer's (1985) study of the formation of the English state, on the other, Joseph and Nugent (1994) argue that the power and endurance of the post-revolutionary state derived primarily from a cultural process which was embodied in the everyday forms, routines, rituals and discourses of rule. This cultural process of appropriation and negotiation, as Roseberry (1994, 361) famously concluded, ended up producing a "common material and meaningful framework for living through, talking about, and acting upon social orders characterized by domination." This influential neo-Gramscian framework of interpretation has several advantages. First, it suggests that resistance to domination exists in everyday forms and that words, images, symbols, forms, organizations, and institutions are always shaped by the process of domination itself. By subscribing to this framework, scholars of modern Mexico have unearthed multiple examples of popular inputs to state formation and corrected earlier revisionist concepts of popular passivity that "relegated popular participation to a subordinated, almost inconsequential role" (Joseph and Nugent 1994, 7). Yet, by focusing on the non-coercive ways in which the hegemonic post-revolutionary discourses was simultaneously absorbed and shaped by counter hegemonic voices, this interpretative framework downplayed the role of more repressive mechanisms that were put into use during the long process of consolidation of the post-revolutionary state (Smith and Gillingham 2014; Pansters 2012).

In contrast, a new wave of revisionist studies examine the interconnection of different dimensions, actors, and manifestation of violence, coercion, and insecurity in relation to broader processes of state-formation in Mexico (Rath 2014; Smith and Gillingham 2014; Gillingham 2012; Pensado 2014; Hernández Rodríguez 2014; Aguila and Bortz 2012; Gledhill 2012) and the broader history of Latin America during the Cold War (Aviña 2014; Pansters 2012). Repression, authoritarianism, terror, and dissent, in turn, have become central themes in recent studies of post-revolutionary Mexico while the military (Rath 2014), rural defense forces (Gillingham 2012) counterinsurgencies (Aviña 2014), organized crime (Knight 2012), as well as protesting students (Pensado 2014) and workers (Aguila Bortz) the main protagonists. If anything, this diverse body of scholarship reveals that the Mexican post-revolutionary state, despite granting concessions to the popular sectors, has relied on formal and informal violence mechanisms to control rural and urban dissent far more than is traditionally appreciated. Moreover, these studies provide some historical roots to those seemingly spontaneous expressions of violence in contemporary Mexico—from the Zapatistas rebellion in 1994 and the reappearance in 1996 of guerrilla struggles of the Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR) to the more recent mass killings of Tlatlaya and Ayotzinapa.

This dissertation, therefore, reflects a debt to this wave of neo-revisionist studies that, by bringing to the forefront *persistent* forms of coercion and force, compel us to reconsider common understandings of the post-revolutionary process of state formation as well as it violent legacies. Yet, I want to suggest, that the notion of violence (institutional, counter-institutional, or para-institutional) as something separate from civil order and the ordinary—implicit in this body of work as well as in Katz's seminal account—is limiting as it conceals otherwise significant forms and meanings of violence. As several anthropologists have argued (Coronil and Skurski 2006;

Das 2006; Gupta 2012; Hetherington 2011; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004; Taussig 1987), political violence is not only associated with either the foundation of the modern state (Weber 2004 [1919], Elias 2000 [1937]) or with acts of bodily harm that occur in conflict (Agamben 1988; Ardent 1970; Benjamin 1969; Butler 2006; Fanon 1963) but is deeply implicated in the micro-politics of everyday state making as well as in states of being that are not confined to the conventions of war. Violence, in other words, participates in the formation of institutions and subjectivities; it encompasses the routinized, bureaucratized, and banal interaction with state actors, and as I argue in this project, it is evidenced in objects and spaces appearing to be non-violent, inert, and *residual*.

Thus, unlike much of the literature on the Mexican Revolution and post-revolutionary state formation, I turn neither to the immediate violence of the initial phases of the insurrection nor to the sporadic moments of repression exerted by the consolidated post-revolutionary state. Rather, my project is part of an emerging scholarly effort to counter the reduction of state violence to its manifestations in war and conflict by designing a theoretical and methodological approach attentive to its sedimentation and ordinary material manifestations. My interest in those residual forms of violence builds in large part on recent studies (Gordillo 2014; Navaro-Yashin 2011; Stoler 2012) that use the notion of "debris" to examine the less perceptible yet severe effects of modern state interventions and their settling into the social and material ecologies in which people live and survive. In thinking about *ruination*, Stoler (2012), for instance, seeks to reposition the present—those scarred landscapes or the social ruination of people's lives—in the wider structures of vulnerability, damage, and refusal that imperial and state formations sustain. It is Walter Benjamin's (1968; 1998) writings on history, ruins, fragmentation, and decay that have served as an inspiration for this body of work attentive to the accumulated detritus of

modernity and the continuing pulse on everyday life. Not unlike Benjamin (Buck-Morss 1991, 164), these scholars see in the figure of *the ruin* not an emblem of memorialization and romanticization but rather a symptom and substance of history's destructive force (Stoler 2014; Gordillo 2014, 14, 129).

Hence, following this anthropological turn to *ruins* to attend to those traces of violence left scattered across urban and rural geographies, this dissertation considers "the material and social afterlife of structures, sensibilities, and things" (Stoler 2014) left by the post-revolutionary process of state formation as well as the lives of those who live amid these violent remains. Yet, by heeding "new materialist approaches" that complicate human-centered frameworks and ignore the effectivity of material objects in our accounts of the political (Coole and Frost 2010), I attempted to pay closer attention to the materiality (Latour 2005; Bennett 2010) and affective presence (Gregg and Seigworh 2009; Thrift 2004) of the "ruins" themselves. Through a deeper engagement with the agentive and affective qualities of residual non-human actors, the goal of this dissertation is to demonstrate, not only that violence *remains* in the concrete traces left by those mechanisms and practices that intended to either preserve order and legality or institute new visions of society but also that these traces have enabled and constrained forms of political agency and sociality.

Methodology

This dissertation is based on fourteen months of historical and ethnographic research in Mexico and the United States during the summer of 2010 as well during the academic year of 2012 and 2013. As I moved in and out of these two different "archives" my goal was twofold: first, to analyze the ways in which post-revolutionary projects of state formation worked out in

the lowlands of northern Veracruz and, second, to account for the everyday encounters that people in this region have with the "failed materials" (Benjamin 2002; Buck-Morss 1991, 164) that these state interventions have left behind. To reconstruct the post-revolutionary process of state formation, I used historical records from several institutions. At the National Archives in Mexico City, specifically in the Oil and Gas section, I examined materials concerning the development of the oil industry in the area such as geological reports, drilling concessions, and land requests to examine how oil infrastructure has been encountered and made visible in different historical moments before, during and after the nationalization. On *indigenismo*, I conducted research in the institution that sponsored ethnographic expeditions to reach the people of Tajín, namely the Smithsonian Institution's National Anthropological Archives, where I examined Isabel Kelly's collection of visual materials and the correspondence associated with it. Research also took place at the Archive of the National Institute of Anthropology and History in Mexico City as well as the National Anthropology Museum where I consulted the photographs and archaeological reports that attest to the important role that the pre-Columbian city of Tajín played in the intellectual formations and aesthetic projects that took shape in and around Mexico in the twentieth century. Finally, in order to analyze the ways in which the Agrarian Reform unfolded in the region I conducted research at the *Archivo General del Estado* in Xalapa, Veracruz. I particularly focus on records between 1916 and 1950 from the community of Agua Dulce.

Much of my research was also ethnographic in the more traditional sense. In Poza Rica, I conducted in-depth interviews with retired workers of Pemex (the national oil company that resulted from the nationalization of the oil industry), local scientists, environmental state bureaucrats, and residents. At the Pemex regional headquarters, I engaged in participant

observation. Ethnographic work was also conducted in Papantla and Tajín, specifically among workers of the ethnic theme-park *Takilhsukut* and the *Xtaxkgakget Makgkaxtlawana*, the Center for Indigenous Arts (CAI). I also conducted participant observation, collected oral histories, and carried out formal interviews with those living and working in and around the archaeological site of Tajín. My fieldwork also took me to San Antonio Ojital, a displaced community located at the margins of the tourism complex. Finally, in order to inquire into the role that agrarian documents and maps continue to play in contemporary local struggles to protect *ejido* land, I conducted fieldwork in the community of Agua Dulce where I also carried out in-depth interviews with *ejido* members who also kindly and proudly showed me their *ejido* land as they shared with me some of their current struggles.

The reader familiar with Mexican historiography will notice that, unlike most studies of the Mexican post-revolutionary process of state formation, this study weaves together multiple social reforms—each with its own temporality—into a single narrative. This methodological decision emerged primarily from my immersion in everyday life in this region, during which I witnessed how residents moved among realms often separated in Mexican historiography. When I began my fieldwork, this was not at all clear. I had decided to focus exclusively on the agrarian history and present reality in the area—an interest that led me, during my first week in the field, to the local notary archives. I did not find the documents I was expecting to find but instead encountered Eugenia—one of the main characters in one of the chapters of this dissertation. I first met her, randomly in a local bus, after we both attended a meeting on organic farming in a well-known *ejido.* Her family was not part of this *ejido*, but she attended this meeting in order to learn a few techniques that could allow her to experiment with organic *milpa* farming in the small and privately owned family plot located not very far from the well-known archaeological

site of Tajín. Next morning, during my visit at the notary, I met her, unexpectedly, again. She was there hoping the notary could help her solve the legal family disputes around the parcel she was hoping to plant. During our conversation that day, I learned she would work, as she had in the past, at the ethnic theme-park *Takilhsukut*. We, in fact, would meet there again in the following months. Due to the friendship that we developed as we worked together, Eugenia was the first one who opened doors to me in Poza Rica, the urban oil town where she currently lives. The fact that her neighborhood was located next to an oilrig made her wonder if we would have met anyway as she saw me develop an interest in oil infrastructure. Eventually, many of the people I came to meet during my stay in the lowlands made similar observations as I found myself moving, like them, among numerous domains.

Secondly, and with reference to Walter Benjamin's methodology, I believe that there is something to be gained by bringing together, in allegorical fashion, seemingly disparate components into a fabricated account—into a *montage* of sorts (Benjamin 1998; 1999). In his writings, Benjamin (1999, 310) compared this particular working method to that of the "ragpicker" a figure who collects dispersed objects that persist despite being ignored or abandoned (Buck-Morss 1991, 170). In this dissertation, I have attempted to, ethnographically, replicate Benjamin's method as I brought together disjointed and decaying traces of the post-revolution. But instead of extracting these out of their everyday context, my interest has been in the everyday effects that these objects have for those still living among them, in the ways in which they grapple with their weight, damage, and the hopes imbedded in them. My central preoccupation was to make the case for the importance of these remnants, and by extension, for the importance of accounting for residents' experience dealing with these (in)visible forms of

political violence which is often disregarded or not even considered as manifestations of political violence at all.

Structure

In keeping with the methodology that I have outlined here, each chapter of this dissertation is structured around a particular *residue*: decaying oil infrastructure, a set of replicable photographs, fragmented archaeological remnants, and enduring agrarian documents. Consequently, each chapter propels a specific theoretical framework that responds to the materiality of these artifacts—those specific sensuous and phenomenal qualities that, by being affirmed or obscured, came to matter for local actors. *Chapter One: Crude Residues* builds on theories of infrastructure and risk perception in order to examine the effects of oil infrastructure's operation and malfunctions in Poza Rica. What interests me is the ways in which oil fields, ducts, rigs, pipes and refineries produce the ambient conditions of everyday life, as well as the perceptions, subjectivities, and affective relations that diverse social actors associate with or produce in response to these conditions. The chapter thus looks at the ways in which the continuous and unpredictable presence of crude, oil spills, gas emanations, and explosions *are made* perceptible and imperceptible, knowable and unknowable, existent and non-existent, and what this fluctuating (in)visibility reveals about the ways in which people in Poza Rica endure a crude industrial landscape.

Chapter Two: Ethnic Remnants centers on a collection of photographs that ground an analysis of the enduring, troubling, and generative presence of post-revolutionary *indigenismo*—a ghostly apparition that, through photographic iterations, continues to impinge upon the present. Drawing on media theory's intertwinement of the spectral and the uncanny with different

manifestations of visuality, these image-objects, products of Isabel Kelly's state-sponsored intervention in the area, are conceived as spectral objects capable of bringing into view something that has passed away and is not usually seen and yet will not stay away. Thus, throughout this chapter I pay close attention to the role that these images and their constant reproduction has played in the construction of current corporate subjectivities and ethnic-entrepreneurial projects. However, I suggest that these contemporary processes of iteration are only possible due to that which post-revolutionary imagery conceals—namely the violence that ran parallel to their making and that continues to haunt many "ethnic" subjects in the region.

Chapter Three: Monumental Ruins focuses on the making of an archaeological site of Tajín and its current un-making by those who live in its margins. Following Rancière's conception of politics and his attention to the distribution of the sensible, monumentality is presented less as a stable, completed, and successful ideological *product* as it is often understood in scholarly discussion and more as a precarious, fragmented, and unfinished *form.* By bringing discontinuous acts of imagining, documenting, and excavating as well as everyday obstacles and conflicts that have gone into the construction and destruction of this site, I seek to reveal the fabricated and incomplete quality of monumental post-revolutionary forms as well as the problematic (in)visibilities that they have entailed in the region.

Finally, *Chapter Four: Revolutionary Documents* is a discussion of three archival documents generated in the community of Agua Dulce and animated by the Agrarian Law of 1915. Each piece, illustrating fragments of the implementation of the post-revolutionary Agrarian Reform and the *ejido* in the community, reveals how documents became central to the governance of the countryside and came to constitute an enduring material manifestation of the agrarian law itself. Yet, these distinctive papers, I suggest, through their capacity to generate

effects, also became important means of participation for those rural actors who produced them. By looking at the changing potency of agrarian documents I seek to demonstrate how, once the Agrarian Reform became officially abolished and documents lost their efficacy, the *ejido*—once the ideological, legal, and material space upon which the post-revolutionary regime built its foundations—began to be *experienced* as a leftover—a *legal residue* of sorts.

CHAPTER ONE

CRUDE RESIDUES: THE WORKINGS OF FAILING OIL INFRASTRUCTURE IN POZA RICA

Introduction

In 1948, José Rivera, head of the legal department of *Petróleos Mexicanos* (Pemex), the Mexican state–owned petroleum company created after the nationalization of the industry in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution, expressed deep concern that residents of the municipality of Coatzintla were seeking to establish a township in "Poza Rica," an area that had already been transformed by the industrial apparatus of oil.[9] In his writings to federal authorities, Rivera justified the state-owned company's right to dominate the resources in this region by referring to various legal decrees and oil regulation. He argued that, as the 1925 Petroleum Law stipulated, oil extraction and processing have priority over all other land uses. Accordingly, land ownership needed to conform to the national objectives of oil development, irrespective of the opinion of the local population.

Aside from relying on legal principles and nationalist rhetoric, Rivera cautioned against the "unstable" and "risky" qualities of oil infrastructure, which he insisted made Poza Rica unsuitable for habitation.[10] History, he noted, had not only demonstrated that deadly accidents could occur, but also that oil towns tended to vanish just like the oilfields that they depended on: once "gusher wells" dried up, what remained was a contaminated and depopulated landscape. Something similar, Rivera concluded, would happen in this area. But time would prove him

[9] Pemex is the Mexican state–owned petroleum company created after the nationalization of the industry in 1938 by President Lázaro Cárdenas. See Brown and Knight (1992), Olvera (1992), Santiago (2009).
[10] Archivo General de la Nación, Archivo del Petróleo, Quejas, 324 (09) 9. Rivera relied on article 3 of the 1938 Decree that created PEMEX, article 27 of the Mexican Constitution, and article 2 of the Oil Law of 1941.

wrong—or at least partially. On the one hand, oil well exploration and drilling activities did decline in Poza Rica. Nevertheless, people remained in the vicinity despite environmental degradation. In fact, *Lote Poza Rica*, the area under dispute, was finally allocated to local *vecinos* who by 1955 had established three different neighborhoods in this locale. Today, residents of diverse c*olonias* still live among failing and decaying oil refineries, pipelines, ducts, and wells—all industrial remnants of the post-revolutionary oil miracle in northern Veracruz.

A number of questions emerge from the contradiction of people living amid "critical infrastructure" (Lakoff and Collier, 2010, 244).[11] How do residents experience, perceive, and interpret its everyday failings? In other words, how is the continuous presence of oil spills, gas emanations, and explosions made perceptible and imperceptible, knowable and unknowable, existent and non-existent? What can this fluctuating (in)visibility reveal about the ways in which people in Poza Rica endure this crude industrial landscape—the toxic, affective, and material residues they "*are left with*" (Stoler, 2013, 9)?[12] What interest me, more broadly, is the ways in which these different contours of perception and imperception are negotiated by locals in order

[11] In her classic piece "Ethnography of Infrastructure," Starr (1999, 381, 382) came to define infrastructure as having the following properties: embeddedness (in social arrangements), transparency (it does not have to be reinvented each time), reach or scope (infrastructure has reach beyond a single event), learned as part of membership, links with convention of practice (infrastructure shapes and is shaped by the conventions of a community of practice), embodiment of standards (it plugs into other infrastructures), built on an installed base, fixed in modular increments not all at once or globally (changes take time and negotiation) and visible at breakdown—a property this article problematizes. Lakoff and Collier, building on the seminal work of Ulrich Beck (1999), use the notion of "critical infrastructure" to point to the risks associated with vital sociotechnical systems such as energy that were initially built to sustain human well-being but that today generate new threats. Our dependence on these vital systems is, therefore, a source of vulnerability.

[12] On the anthropology of ruins and ruination see the recent work of Stoler (2013) and Gordillo (2014). This body of work is interested, not unlike Nixon (2011), in the less spectacular yet corrosive ways in which *colonia*l and modern states "leave their mark" (Stoler 2013, page x). Thus, the attention of these scholars is on the lives of those whose sensibilities have been marked by the legacy of ruination: "the rubble" (Gordillo 2014,13, 14) that results from the production of modern spaces.

to confront what Fortun (2014) calls "late industrialism," a reality characterized by environmental degradation afflicting the bodies and minds of those living amid it.[13]

The paradoxical correlation between visibility and invisibility has been at the core of Science and Technology Studies (STS) discussions of infrastructure. As Julie Chu (2014, 352) recently observed, this body of scholarship often points to its eventfulness at two distinct moments: first, at the point of introduction, when infrastructure comes into public recognition as an iconic sign of modernity and development (Nye, 1994; Hughes, 1983) and, second, upon breakdown or disaster (Star, 1998 Graham, 2010, 7). In between these two points in its life cycle, the work of infrastructure —understood as the material structures, physical forms, networks, or "the system of substrates" designed to facilitate the flow and exchange of things, people, or ideas (Star 1998)—appears to be unnoticeable for most people as it is normally experienced as a boring background (Edwards, 2003, page 185; Bowker and Star, 1998, page 234).

This position, however, implies that the everyday status quo consists of a smoothly functioning system without disruption, which conflicts with the experience of those persons living and working most closely to it. In fact, scholarship on risk perception (Fortun 2001; Petryna 2006; Auyero and Swistun 2009; Shari 2013), demonstrates first, how the breakdown of infrastructures, rather than being a contained "event" is a temporally dispersed process as it is not only generated by a series of factors such as poverty, corporatism, bureaucracy and trade liberalization but also because the toxic and harmful effects of such breakdowns endure and

[13] In what Kim Fortun (2014, 309-311) denominates "late industrialism," the maintenance of binaries and boundaries—sustained, according to Latour (2005), by a modern ontology that, at least rhetorically, splits nature from culture, object from subject—almost inevitably collapses as environmental accidents are eminent and normal. So, she observes, "even if the industrial order has indeed never been modern," we are left with a "modernist mess." Fortun, moreover, understands industrialism as a culture with its own set of norms and assumptions that often mask the messy reality that it creates. See also Rodgers and O'Neill (2012) and Peluso and Watts (2001).

accumulate.[14] Second, these studies have persuasively demonstrated how the meanings of the effects of such long-lasting conditions are collectively produced. In other words, knowledge and ignorance about risk and contamination are the outcome of political and unequal interactions between diverse human actors—from affected residents or workers to physicians, activists, journalist, policy makers, lawyers and corporate entities.[15] Drawing on their work on petro-chemical life in an Argentinian shantytown, Auyero and Swistun (2009, 5), for instance, conclude that residents' perceptions regarding the poisoned environment that surrounds them—their confusion, mistakes, and/or blindness regarding such toxicity—are the result of power relations between residents and outside risk experts. Because Auyero and Swistun emphasize the ways in which the meanings of risk and contamination are produced through social relations among diverse non-human actors, residents' mundane encounters with the infrastructure itself (what they see, smell, touch)—although present in their narrative—remained under-examined. Yet, I believe that the ways in which residents encounter and respond to the physicality of the industrial landscape—their (in)visible technical operation and malfunction—merit closer examination. This, however, requires an approach to infrastructure that can account for the effects of its materiality—for the way these physical and technical forms produce the ambient conditions of everyday life—as well as its social character—the perceptions, subjectivities, and affective relations that diverse social actors associate with or produce in response to these conditions.

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[14]Also relevant is Nixon's (2011, 2) notion of slow violence: "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all"

[15] On the socially constructed character of risk perception also see: Stallings (1990), Clarke (1989), Caplan (2000), Heimer (1988), Beamish (2000), Clarke (1989), Vaughan (2004), Eden (2004), Erickson (1976), Edelstein (2003).

Drawing on archival research as well as on ethnographic work in and around Poza Rica, which included in-depth interviews with workers of Pemex, local scientists, environmental state bureaucrats, and residents of an impoverished *colonia*, this chapter looks at how the material and social visibility and invisibility of failing infrastructure is constantly being renegotiated and achieved by those living amid it. Rather than a given physical quality, I demonstrate how (in)visibility is the outcome of everyday corporate practices, toxic mundane encounters, air technologies as well as affective attachments that illuminate or obscure the harmful presence of oil and its infrastructure in this industrial town. I suggest that the ways in which these different contours of perceptions and imperceptions are negotiated are central to understanding how people living in and on oil endure risk, precarity, and suffering.[16]

The chapter is organized in five sections. The first two sections seek to provide the reader with the historical background of the oil district of Papantla during the second decade of the twentieth-century. I specifically focus on the ways in which *el campo Furbero*, a marginal oil well developed during Porfirian times (1876-1910), remained visible for geologists and foreign investors in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution despite having been considered an area with poor possibilities for oil investment. But contrary to what early twentieth-century geology predicted in this unfavorable area, *el campo "Poza Rica*" emerged by 1930. As the post-revolutionary regime under president Lázaro Cardenas moved toward the nationalization of the oil industry, the visibility of the oilfield increased: oil infrastructure became not only the engine of national economic growth but also the apotheosis of revolutionary nationalism. The

[16] On social suffering see Das (2007) and Auyero and Swistun (2009) who build heavily on Bourdieu (1991) and Das. For these scholars social suffering is not on an individual experience but those experiences of affliction that are "actively created and distributed by the social order itself" (Das 1995). For a different reading of suffering and affect attentive to the way it is generated out of our interactions with human and non-human actors, see Navaro-Yashin (2012). Also relevant is Latour's (2007) call to account for collectivities constituted by human actors and actants.

subsequent sections focus on the aftermath of oil nationalization, namely, the crude residues affecting everyday life in Poza Rica. In section III, I consider the practices and performances of risk avoidance and safety in Pemex regional offices: "security measures" that many residents perceive as failed attempts to conceal the actual dangers of living in this industrial town. Section IV focuses on the apparent invisibility of infrastructure in an impoverished *colonia*. There I argue that it is by disregarding their immediate surroundings that residents attenuate the impact that oil and gas can have on their bodies and senses. However, a closer look at their everyday encounters with toxic smells and underground vibrating pipes, illustrates how their efforts to render infrastructure invisible are often disrupted. In section V, I examine how the materiality of polluted air is made visible through a mobile air quality-monitoring unit, a technology that allows a local scientist to substantiate risk and suggest corporate liability by producing and mobilizing numbers, values, and graphs. Finally, in section VI, I look at how, for a group of retired oil workers, decaying oilfields emerge out of a troubled optimism. I argue that it is through this affective attachment that infrastructure's visibility is not only achieved but also deployed to endure the precarious circumstances affecting workers' bodies and minds.

El campo Furbero and the Expansion the Southern Oil Frontier

Taken in January 1917, this photograph by geologists Edwin B. Hopkins (Fig. 1.1) reveals a panoramic view of the northern highlands of Papantla: the southern frontier of the producing oil districts of northern Veracruz. To the far right of the photograph, we can discern a blue inked cross (x) indicating what Hopkins believed to be the approximate location of potential oil seepages. Over the course of a month, Hopkins visited around thirty thousand acres of scattered lands already held under option by J. Payne, one of the many British and American

capitalists who invested in the oil industry during and after the *Porfiriato* (1876-1910).[17] At the time of Hopkin's visit more than 90 percent of all oil production remained in the hands of British and American corporations.

Figure. 1.1. Pahuatatempo Property, Edwin B. Hopkins, Geological Report of the Papantla-Gutierrez Zamora District, Veracruz, Mexico, 1917. Photo 11, P. 33. Exp. 1/Caja 192. 321.1/738 Leg. 1. Archivo General de la Nación, Archivo del Petróleo, Mexico City.

While the Mexican government had attempted to erode the power of foreign oil companies through taxation and regulation, the companies insisted on the fulfillment of Porfirian concessions, rights and economic priviledges.[18] That legality, however, came into question with

[17]Although many foreigners like Payne invested in the northern highlands of Veracruz, it was the Englishmen Weetman Parsons who became the principal beneficiary of *Porfirian* legislation as he took the lead in 1903 when he bought out a British company called the Oil Fields of Mexico, which owned 390 square miles in the Papantla district. A few years later, in 1906, the Mexican government also accepted Pearson's bid to survey the vacant rainforest throughout Veracruz. He received one-third of the land surveyed in payment as colonization law permitted. A year after Parsons incorporated the Compañia de Petróleo el Águila in 1908 (a subsidiary of Royal Dutch Shell), the law reaffirmed that the owner of the surface of the earth had exclusive ownership of nature below it. The liberal administration of Porfirio Díaz (1876-1910), promoted this regime of extractivism that made petroleum available for foreign investors and corporations (Brown and Knight 1992; Olvera 1992, 65; Santiago 2009).

[18] The first steps to regulate foreign oil companies, as Santiago (2006, 156) observes were taken by president Francisco Madero in 1912. An effort seconded by Carranza and Álvaro Obregón who reasserted the legitimacy and validity of his predecessor's decrees regarding oil regulation. Yet companies responded to Obregón's regulatory initiatives by stopping production and fired half of the Mexican force. The Mexican Supreme Court, moreover, eventually overturned Carranza's decrees (Santiago 2006, 269). Yet, not unlike previous post-revolutionary governments, the administration of president Plutarco Elías Calles was committed to the principle of national ownership of the subsoil and conservation in the oil industry. During his government, the congress approved the Petroleum Law in November 1925 but foreign companies responded in retaliation with a harmful production boycott.
During this period (1924-25) oil workers' unions went through a period of revival. A wave of strikes in

the proclamation, under president Venustiano Carranza (1917-1920), of the 1917 Constitution which reversed, through Article 27, Porfirian legislation and returned to the Spanish colonial legal tradition that established the nation as the depositary of ownership over the country subsoil. By eliminating the absolute right to private property and instituting state tutelage over land use, Article 27 brought into question not only the practices of the oil industry but also the existence of the companies themselves (Santiago 2006, 261). Foreign companies fought bitterly against Article 27—just like they had fought previous taxation and regulatory initiatives from the post-revolutionary state (Meyer 1972, 107-149; Santiago 2006, 258). This past experience, however, had demonstrated that foreign oil companies had the power to overturn such regulatory measures and, thus, they continued their efforts to expand business ventures in Mexico, as the visit of Hopkins to northern Veracruz indicates.

The district of Papantla, at the time, had one producing oil pool: the Furbero Field, owned by the "The Oil Fields of Mexico Company." The company was organized in 1903 and four years later it established its first well. However, it was not until 1910, after the completion of a pipeline and railroad into Tuxpam, that the company began to market their oil. By the time Hopkins visited the Furbero field, only 10 out of the 25 wells drilled on the property were producing oil in commercial quantities and little drilling had been done outside the pool. Yet, *el campo Furbero* continued to command the attention of investors like Payne interested in

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1924-25 resulted in significant organizational advances as the first collective contracts in the history of the industry signed by the Royal Dutch Shell—contracts that a few years later would be 1920s would be nullified. Workers also raised old issues, such as the end of discrimination and the replacement of foreigners with qualified Mexicans, and made new demands regarding health and safety measures to protect them from the dangers of oil work. See Santiago 2006, 295). With the diplomatic intervention of the United States (what later became known as the Calles-Morrow agreement), the law was finally overturned by 1927 and foreign oil companies were able to exempt themselves from Article 27. See Santiago (2006, 282) for a detailed discussion on the post-revolutionary state's efforts to regulate the oil industry.

expanding the southern oil frontier. Thus, responding to Payne's entrepreneurial interests, Hopkins immersed himself in the coastal plain country. Cutting through the dense vegetation of the rainforest, navigating rural trails and roads, and relying on the knowledge and labor of Totonac men, he hoped to identify rocky formations potentially rich in oil.

Figure 1.2. Furbero Oil Field, Edwin B. Hopkins, Geological Report of the Papantla-Gutierrez Zamora District, Veracruz, Mexico, 1917. Photo 12, P. 34 and Photo 3, P. 29. Exp. 1/Caja 192. 321.1/738 Leg. 1. Archivo General de la Nación, Archivo del Petróleo, Mexico City. As early as 1868, Englishmen Norman Fuerber formed a company to exploit the seepages of oil in Furbero and explore the rest of the district. The first actual drilling for oil in this field commenced in 1895 on the Tecolutla River in the vicinity of Espinal. Between this date and 1902 some ten or twelve wells were drilled along this river valley west of the area. Because commercial quantities of oil could not be obtained, the project was abandoned. The Oil Fields of Mexico Company emerged in 1903. A few years later, *El Aguila* bought the land from the Englishman Percy Norman Furber and began drilling operations at Furbero (Olvera 1992, 64).

In their explorations, the first thing geologists hoped to find were *chapopoteras*, a visible surface feature that provided basic evidence of hydrocarbon generation. The name *chapopote,* Hopkins comments in the opening section of his report, is an Indian word meaning a kind of wax or tar used to name all seepages of oil. Pools of *chapopote* were common in the area and, according to Hopkins, they were often found in the vicinity of intrusive igneous rocks that, having penetrated the sedimentary, allowed the oil from below to seep up the surface. At that time, the majority of the proven fields were developed in or near some form of these igneous intrusions. Finding *chapopoteras*, therefore, was a good sign and Hopkins found them in the north and south of the Tecolutla River. But locating seepages was only the first step in the

survey. Geologists had to look for several other factors that could help them prospect for oil such as the existence of a source rock or mother rock, an organic-rich rock such as oil shale or coal, the localization of traps or the existence of reservoir rocks that could collect and store oil, either porous sandstone or limestone or fractured non-porous rock.

Thus, throughout his survey, Hopkins took careful notes on the location, color, composition, porosity, and thickness of the rocks, sands, clays and limestone he encountered. This allowed him to find similarities among these geological materials and to identify the main formations of the area. The generation of charts and a local classification of rocks were, in fact, strategies that Hopkins developed to make the geological landscape appear fixed and controllable. Moreover, a thorough description of each of the identified geological strata was also required as it provided the evidence, along with his visual records, to support his geological classifications. Overall, this "informational enrichment" was part of Hopkins's efforts to apprehend the natural world he encountered (Barry 2010, 95). In the process, he turned apparently mundane physical qualities of rocks, such as their porosity, color or duress, into issues of wider significance.

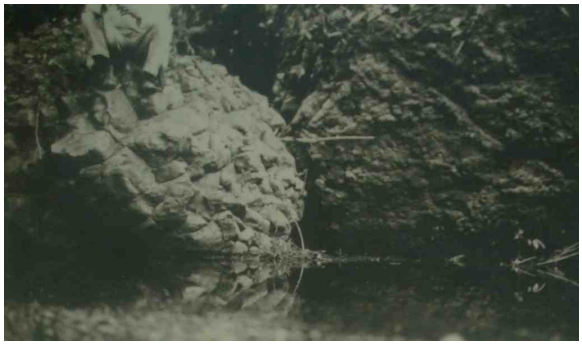


Figure 1.3. View of Pool in Hacienda el Palmar (left) Edwin B. Hopkins, Geological Report of the Papantla-Gutierrez Zamora District, Veracruz, Mexico, 1917. Photo 8, 9 P. 32. Exp. 1/Caja 192. 321.1/738 Leg. 1. Archivo General de la Nación, Archivo del Petróleo, Mexico City. In El Ojite, for example, Hopkins describes seepage of semi liquid asphalt on the bank of a small stream. In El Palmar, he encountered small globules of oil, 10 degrees to 12 degrees gravity Baume, floating on the surface an *arroyo* at the base of a lava-flow.

According to Hopkins, "the Tamasopo" was the oldest rock of the region and consisted of "hard gray pure porcelain-like limestone bedded in layers less than a foot thick." Economically, he argued, the formation was of the greatest importance as it was generally recognized as the mother rock or main reservoir of the Mexican Oil Fields. Despite being able to identify this and other encouraging geological formations in the region—such as layers of sandy limestone, shale strata, and igneous rocks—Hopkins found an enormous lava flow, covering the sedimentary formation almost entirely for hundreds of square miles. After a careful examination, Hopkins concluded that Papantla as a whole appeared to hold poor prospects for oil investment due to the presence of this lava flow and the reduced number of scattered seepages away from the mountain uplift. "Most parts may be definitely thrown out as having practically no possibilities for oil," reads the letter that on April 20th 1917, Frederick G. Clapp, managing geologists of the Petroleum Division of "The Associated Geological Engineers" wrote to W. J. Payne. "You will note that unfortunately the majority of the tracts which you wish Hopkins to examine are unfavorable for oil in sufficient commercial quantities to justify development." Hopkins's assessment was a relevant political and economic matter. Results of geological reconnaissance such as this circulated regularly among oil investors who used this "situated knowledge" to determine future oil ventures (Craib 2004, 128-151).[19]

Hopkins's report is made up of careful notes, charts, and photographs. However, these materials were not simply attempts to organize and present the collected "data." Instead, they were, in James Scott's term, the result of a practice of simplification (Scott 1998). In order to make rocks legible, geologists, like Hopkins, endowed their surveys with an objective quality that obscured not only the subjective dimensions of fieldwork (always constrained by the

[19]Edwin B. Hopkins, Geological Report of the Papantla-Gutierrez Zamora District, Veracruz, Mexico, 1917. Exp. 1/Caja 192. 321.1/738 Leg. 1. Archivo General de la Nación, Archivo del Petróleo, Mexico City.

perceptions and limitations of both scientists and the indigenous men who assisted them) but also, I argue, the mutability and indeterminacy of the material forms they encountered. Hopkins's evaluation of "un-favorability" proved to be mistaken despite its meticulous and thorough character, on the basis of which it served as evidence for legal controversies around land concessions for exploration at the time. By 1930, one of the most important oil fields in twentieth century Mexico, *el campo "Poza Rica*", would be developed in this "unfavorable area."

Figure 1.4. Edwin B. Hopkins posing in front of the San Felipe beds, Geological Report of the Papantla-Gutierrez Zamora District, Veracruz, Mexico, 1917. Photo 12, P. 34 and Photo 3, P. 29. Exp. 1/Caja 192. 321.1/738 Leg. 1. Archivo General de la Nación, Archivo del Petróleo, Mexico City.

Instead of illustrating the ways in which "official knowledge" arises from the imposition of nature's legibility, as Scott describes, Hopkins's failure to identify oil deposits demonstrates how knowledge-making is often a fragile endeavor.[20] One could certainly argue that Hopkins was limited by the technology of his time, that he made questionable observations or that his classification was simply flawed. Yet, following Latour (1993) and a growing number of additional authors (Bennett 2004; Braun and Whatmore 2004; Coole and Frost 2010), the

[20] I adopt this notion from William Connolly (2007, p.7). In the *Fragility of Things* he discusses how human are closely implicated in several nonhuman force fields. "In a world more scientifically and technically advanced," he contends, "we are not that much better equipped culturally, philosophically, politically, or spiritually to address these entanglements."

materiality of things is not reducible to what humans make or do not make of it and we must account for collectives produced not only through human intervention. Rocks, lava flows, sediments, drilling towers, or a railroad were capable of playing—as the development of the oil field in Poza Rica in the 1930s demonstrates—a role in the history of this region.

National Infrastructure

By 1937, only five years after the oil company *El Águila* opened the Poza Rica oil field, it was unofficially considered the second most important field in production in the world and also the only real long-term reserve in Mexico (Olvera 1992, 64; Olvera 2009, 471-501). The importance of Poza Rica should not be underestimated. As Santiago (2006, 284-285) points out, the unexpected opening of such a rich new field during a time of world economic crisis amid the Great Depression coincided with the expansion of Mexico's own oil consumption. The growth of railways and roads as a result of state investment and the promotion of small industry increased internal demand for petroleum products. In this regard, the crude from the tropical rainforest of the lowlands of northern Veracruz would contribute its share to the rapid urban growth and industrialization of the period. The importance of Poza Rica, moreover, is not limited to the economic realm. As Olvera (1992, 64) argues, this *campo petrolero* brought workers from different social origins together: "old hands who arrived from other fields, workers with industrial backgrounds and union experience and laborers who came directly form the countryside."[21] This social diversity would eventually give birth to one of the most militant and democratic union movements in the oil industry nurtured in anarco-syndicalist tradition and the discourse of the Mexican Revolution.

[21] For a detailed study of the expropriation of the oil industry in Veracruz see: Santiago (2009), Brown and Knight (1992), and Brown (1992).

Figure 1.5. Unionized workers in Poza Rica, Sección 2, 1934. Armando López, Fondo Poza Rica, Archivo General del Estado de Veracruz.

Figure 1.6. Drilling Oilfield #5, Poza Rica, November 1933. Armando López, private collection.

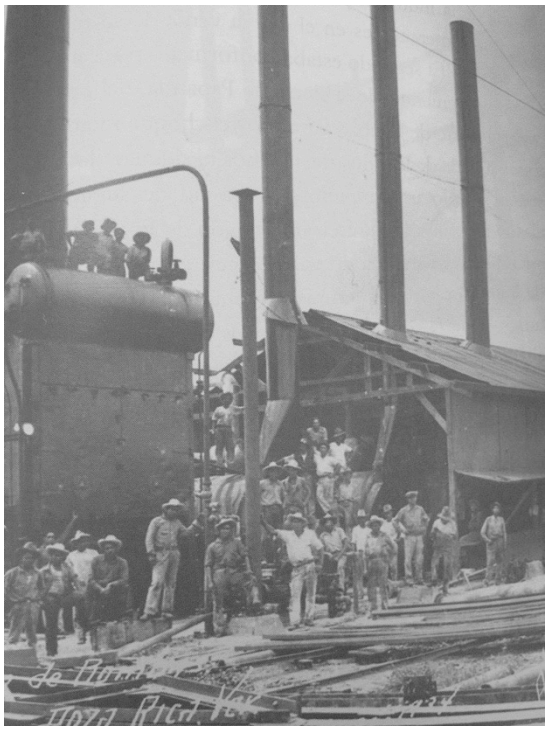


Figure 1.7. Looking for oil south of the Tuxpan River. The so-called "casa de las bombas" appears in the background, 1934, Armando López, private collection.

In fact, the national oil workers' strikes and their demands, as Olvera (1992, 2009) and Santiago (2006) suggest, were foundational for achieving the expropriation of the oil industry at the hands of President Lázaro Cárdenas in 1938.[22] The six-year plan Cárdenas made public on the campaign trail had already called for regulation in the oil industry and a more active governmental participation in the industry. By the time Cárdenas's term was finally inaugurated in January 1935, a second generation of workers had already taken over the union leadership in new production sites such as Poza Rica (Santiago 2006, 286). This radical leadership made possible the establishment of the new petroleum workers union, the *Sindicato de Trabajadores*

[22] A detailed discussion on the history of the oil workers' union efforts and strikes druing the 1920s and 1930s can be found in Santiago (2006, 291-341). See also: Joe C. Ashby, *Organized Labor and the Mexican Revolution under Lázaro Cárdenas* (Chapell Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963 and Rafael Loyola Díaz, *El ocaso del radicalism revolucionario* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1991), specially chapter 2; and Albert Michaeld, "The Crisis of Cardenismo" *Journal of Latin American Studies* 9.1(1970): 51-79.

Petrolero de la República Mexicana (STPRM), an association that grouped most of the oil workers in the industry for the first time and that put forward the demand for a collective contract, which was resisted by the companies.

The eventual founding of the STPRM at the end of 1935 also gave greater force to Poza Rica's unionized delegation which besides being part of the national STPRM struggle was also fighting a local battle with *El Águila* oil corporation over the modification of the contract already in force (Olvera 1992, 86). This local battle led to a 57 day strike that caused a national shortage of oil. Because of this, workers concluded that the best way to end the conflict was to propose the expropriation of the field and the setting up of a workers' cooperative (Olvera 1992, 71). Cárdenas first rejected the proposal as he was hoping to move toward a resolution of the national conflict between the STPRM and foreign companies. Yet, once Mexico's Supreme Court ruled against the companies and once companies defied this decision by announcing that they were unable to meet the terms, Cárdenas decided to follow workers' radical solution to the conflict. On 18 March 1938, the radio interrupted its regular evening programming for an important message from President Cárdenas. On the grounds that oil companies' defiance of court orders violated Mexican sovereignty, he announced the nationalization of the industry:

> The companies' refusal to abide by the ruling of the Supreme Court had as its inevitable consequence the total suspension of activity in the oil industry and because in those conditions it is urgent that the public administration intervene with measures that are adequate to prevent internal disturbances, the machinery, installations, buildings, pipelines, refineries, storage tanks, means of communication, tankers distribution stations, ships, and all other properties of the foreign companies were thereby expropriated.[23]

The decision proved hugely popular. In the days following the expropriation decree, according to Jospeh (2012, 132-133), more than 100,000 people participated in celebratory rallies. Ordinary

[23] Lázaro Cárdenas, *Decreto de la expropriación de la industria petrolera*, Caja 335. ILO, C41/1938-1941. Legajo C41/1938, Folder C 3303/34.

citizens wrote thousands of telegrams to the National Palace, the official workplace for the President, offering to help pay for the expropriation. Despite responses from the oil industry that included an embargo on the transport of Mexican oil, pressure on the U.S and British government to intervene on their behalf, and divestment of foreign investment, Cárdenas succeeded in carrying out the expropriation and proceeded to create a state-owned company *Petróleos Mexicanos* (Pemex) to administer the newly nationalized oil wells and refineries.

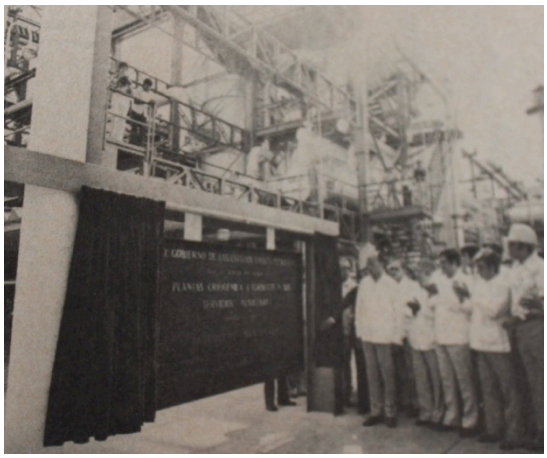
Figure 1.8 First visit of president Cárdenas to Poza Rica after the nationalization of the oil industry. Gobernor Miguel Alemán sitting next to him. June 12th 1938. Fonde Poza Rica, Archivo General del Estado de Veracruz.

Since the oil expropriation and the subsequent creation of Pemex—a nationalized, although *not* a worker-controlled company—oil became not only the engine of national economic growth and development but also the apotheosis of revolutionary nationalism. Yet, as Barbosa Cano (1992, 189-207) argues, Pemex had to face serious problems due to its internal reorganization and its international boycott. Moreover, the national oil industry had to acclimate to the emergent political economy of the 1940s: one in which *Cardenista* distributive measures gave way to the *Alemanista* private capital accumulation. During the so-called "economic

miracle" of the 1950-70s, the company supplied cheap fuel to a burgeoning industrial and urban society at the expense of the company's needed investment capital.

As the industry expanded in Poza Rica in the mid 1970s—when the petrochemical production began—oilfields, drilling sites, and refineries soon started to dominate the landscape and people's imagination. The oil economy, based on oil towns like Poza Rica, underwrote Mexico's credit, facilitating lavish foreign loans: it financed increased public expenditure and contributed to official reckless expenditure and corrupt practices (Morales 1992, 208-255). A survey of newspapers' coverage from the period, for instance, reveals the awe and hope-inspiring—and deceiving—qualities that the state sought to associate with oil infrastructure in the aftermath of the 1973 global oil crisis that affected several petroleum-producing nations including Mexico (Brown and Knight 1992; Joseph and Buchenau 2013, 172-173). An article from *Excélsior* celebrating Pemex's infrastructural developments and technological progress is a case in point: "With president Echeverría, Mexico achieves an unthinkable expansion," reads the headline. A series of full-page images of a newly developed refinery in Poza Rica complemented the article (Fig. 1.5).[24] This visual exposure, however, entailed the progressive obliteration of those whose lives revolve around these modern structures. For the post-revolutionary government, oil union struggles were perceived and portrayed as an attack on the nation itself. Meanwhile, a powerful union bureaucracy preserved lucrative jobs, perks, and peace. Within this paternalist and patrimonialist regime, there could only be cooperation between workers and the state.

[24] I consulted the Secretary of State Archive (Gobernación) at the *Archivo General de La Nación*, Cajas 1598-A, Exp. 4; 1598-B, Exp. 5 and 1598-C, Exp. 6.



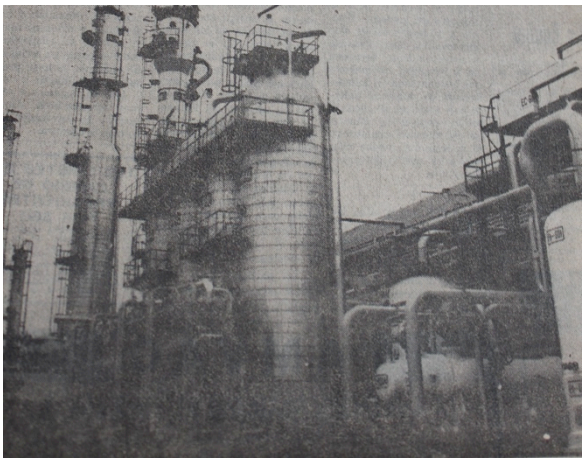


Figure 1.9. Oil infrastructure in Poza Rica. "Con Echeverría México logra una expansión sin precedente", *Excélsior*, 10 Novemeber 1976.

Infrastructure in Poza Rica has remained far from invisible since this period of rapid industrialization and the following deep economic crisis, which resulted from the populist and corrupt measures of Echevería and his successor López Portillo (Brown and Knight 1992; Joseph and Buchenau 2013, 172-173) and was aggravated by the fall in petroleum prices in 1982 and again in 1986.[25] Yet, infrastructure's emergent presence has been maintained through continuous lapses of breakdown, repair, degradation, and neglect resulting from the corruption and the demise of the Priísta revolutionary regime and its turn toward neoliberalism during the government of Miguel de la Madrid (1982-88), Carlos Salinas (1988-1994) and Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000).[26] Up to this day, as I will discuss in the following sections, the failing structures left by this dramatic period of transformation and subsequent decay are simultaneously monuments of bad deals and a patriotic union, objects of devotion, fraud, and neglect as well as carriers of toxicity and a troubled optimism.

[25] On the populism that came to define the 1970s and 1980s see: and Muñoz (2010); Schmidt (1991), Eckstein (1977). On the oil industry during the 1940-1980 see Morales (1992).
[26] On the crisis of 1982 under president de la Madrid and its aftermath see: Haber et al. (2009), Gilbert (2007),

Safety Fashion: Rendering Risks Inside Corporate Walls Invisible

Figure 1.10. Oil monuments along Poza Rica's main boulevard. Photos by the author.

As one enters the city of Poza Rica, taxi and bus passengers cover their mouths and noses to protect themselves from the heavy smell of hydrogen sulfide. Soon other imprints of the oil industry come into view as one passes the celebratory monuments that decorate the city's main boulevard, which include old valves, pipes, barrels, and even a freight car from the Cobos-Fulbero railroads or "the monument to the oil worker." Stores follow, one after the other, selling boots, tools, supplies, and colorful jumpers, some with the logo of Pemex and others with the logos of transnational companies like Waterford or Gulf (two of the main foreign companies working for Pemex in this region). One so often sees these same jumpers hanging on the clotheslines atop of rooftop decks that they inhere as a dominant feature of the city skyline. Returning one's gaze to the street, it's not so much the jumpers that one notices as the white or yellow hard hats of the laborers walking to and from work at the numerous oil wells dispersed throughout the city.

Figure 1.11. Active oil rig in the middle of a public park in Poza Rica. Photo by the author.

Figure 1.12. “The goal is zer0 incidents.” Gas Complex, Poza Rica. Photo by the author.

The otherwise curious appearance of safety equipment in everyday situations and spaces doesn’t end at the sidewalk: drilling sites are often located near or indeed in the center of public parks and *andaderos* or scenic paths. The entrances to these green spaces are marked with bright mustard-yellow Pemex posters, painted with a black skull-and-crossbones warning of PELIGRO (danger) and prohibiting “banging” or “excavating.” Although several oil wells are now abandoned, many others are active, especially since 2012 when Pemex launched a program to reactivate mature fields in order to recuperate hydrocarbon reserves. This initiative has not only led to increased numbers of drilling towers throughout the city but has also given the sky a red hue—a visible effect of the excessive burning of gas. Meanwhile, Pemex publicizes its

commitment to security. “The goal is zero incidents” reads one of the walls delimiting the area of the Gas Complex—a border visibly blurred by the gas emanating form the complex itself. The urban landscape of Poza Rica, which constantly warns of serious risk either through toxic odors or more literally with reminders that explosive contents course underfoot, contrasts sharply with the “Safety Fashion” campaign—*Moda Segura*—underway in the air-conditioned and spotless hallways of Pemex’s headquarters in Poza Rica.

Campaign posters advising female office workers to wear flat shoes instead of high heels, in order to prevent accidents in the workplace can be found on every floor of the building. The campaign, as I came to realize during my periodic visits to Pemex headquarters, did not seem to have its intended effect as most female employees, mainly the administrative assistants with whom I interacted, refused to embrace the corporate fashion code, perhaps cognizant of safety footwear’s limited utility in combatting the most visible risks of oil extraction. Despite its failure to prevent employees from wearing high-heels, the campaign does not stand out as exceptional. In general, Pemex offices in Poza Rica are constantly saturated with practices and performances of risk avoidance and safety that, like *Moda Segura*, are enacted through the body in dress and modes of walking.

An anecdote from my ethnographic work illuminates the ways in which these measurements play out in practice. It is not uncommon to see guards refusing entrance to the Pemex offices to those who did not satisfy their security dress code standards—wearing appropriate shoes, pants, or long skirts and sleeves. During one of my first visits to the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) offices—a visit I make along with several indigenous female members of a cooperative from the nearby town of Papantla—I had to lend my flats to one of the leaders of the co-op so that she can enter the building and attend a meeting with members of the

CSR office, a meeting the group has been waiting to hold for months. On our way back to Papantla, the members of the co-op joke about the incident, implying the absurdity of such safety regulations. In their view, there are far more troubling risks than those prevented by wearing flats in a corporate building. Fears of fire and explosion associated with spills and leaks dominate both their imagination as well as their everyday experience such that it becomes difficult to take risks associated with wearing high-heals seriously. The co-op members nevertheless decide to use a percentage of the cooperative funds to buy at least two pairs of flats that can be used by their representatives to fulfill Pemex security regulations during their next visit.

Recent scholarship on oil infrastructure, such as Appel's (2012) work on Equatorial Guinea, characterizes day-to-day corporate practices similar to the safety rituals I found in Pemex as an integral part of the process of "modularity." In the words of Appel (2012, 692), "these elaborately choreographed routines, shaped by the industry's mobile conceptions of risk and safety, themselves linked to shareholder value and actuarial reason," are part of the strategies that enable a corporation to remove itself from the local context within which it operates. Similarly in Papantla, the many safety rituals and campaigns—from the safety slogans visibly located outside Pemex installations to the dress codes of Pemex workers, which appear to many to result in little more than long lines waiting to enter the headquarters—intend to give visitors, workers, and residents the immediate feeling of entering into a sanitized and hermetic environment. Yet, unlike the offshore oil platforms in Appel's (2012) research, disentanglement seems much more difficult to achieve in the oilfields across the urban landscape of Poza Rica mainly because of the pervasive presence of the oil industry throughout the city—a city lacking the cleanliness and provisions that characterize Pemex regional headquarters.

In Poza Rica, Pemex cannot avoid the unpleasant task of attending to community and municipal calls for repairing gas emanations and oil spills. In other words, residents' encounters with the sudden presence of crude, broken ducts, a red sky, and gas leaks make Pemex's efforts to render infrastructure invisible quite unsuccessful. In fact, the state of disrepair of oil pipes and ducts is a constant subject in newspaper articles, a strategy used by Pascual Ortega, municipal Secretary of the Environment, to voice his demands to the "*paraestatal.*" Given Ortega's antagonistic relation to the oil industry, a mural by Pablo O'Higgins celebrating its development and the revolution that incited it surprises me each time that I meet Ortega at his office in the municipal building.[27] Inside his office, Ortega has a big map of the city with the approximate location of previous oil spills, active oil wells and ducts, as well as different Pemex offices and complexes. The way in which Ortega persistently emphasized the sudden appearance of *chapopoteras* (oil spills) out of the drainage system echoes the stories I repeatedly hear during my stay in Poza Rica. The presence of oil spills, I soon realize, affords Ortega, and many other residents, the opportunity to challenge Pemex "modular" strategies attempting to make the effects of oil infrastructure invisible:

> The appearance of *chapopoteras* is a problem that Pemex needs to fix because they control the oil, right? But the company does nothing, and it is the municipality that needs to clean the mess. Look at what happened in *colonia* Chapultepec last year. The neighbors reported that oil was coming out of the sewage. All streets were covered with this mixture of water and oil. Houses were flooded, too. The oil was coming from the subterranean ducts. We called Pemex and they told us that oil was a product of the natural *chapopoteras*. They ended up providing us with a solvent to clean as well as their cartographic evidence. They concluded that what happened was a natural accident, a product of an oil pool located underneath *Cerro del Abuelo*. Even if that was the case, PEMEX is responsible for dealing with what happened. (Interview, April 2013)

The causes of the spill became a contested issue for both Pemex and the municipality. Even after the streets were finally cleaned, the origin of this mixture of oil and water is still being debated in

[27] The mural was completed in 1958. Today, O'Higgins is considered one of Mexico's most important post-revolutionary artists.

newspapers and public declarations. With each appearance, the oil pools seem to exercise more force. They have become an important intervener, or to use Bennett's (2010, 41) terminology, an operator: "that which, "by virtue of being in the right place at the right time, makes the difference, makes things happen, becomes the decisive force which catalyzes an event." In this case, the oil pools that covered the street of Poza Rica during the fall of 2012 incite a campaign in the media that shows Pemex in a negative light. In the middle of my fieldwork the following spring, the effects of this campaign are still evident. The composite of water and oil have become an index of more systemic failures, namely the damaged relationship between Pemex and those living around it.

Figure 1.13. Unfinished construction project sponsored by Pemex. Photo by the author.

This city, Ortega tells me, has been known for a long time as the oil capital of the country. And "what's left?" he asks. "A damaged city, with damaged roads, damaged water, a damaged environment." For Ortega, oil in this region is nothing but a curse. "I have only gotten headaches…and I don't say that metaphorically"—Ortega is referring to the effects of the constant exposure to high ozone levels, also a common topic in the media. He continues:

> Here we have black smokers everyday. Consequently, the air we breathe is worse than the air in Mexico City. Why is Poza Rica one of the most polluted cities in Mexico? The answer is simple: Pemex. The company claims it is very expensive to condense the gas so

> therefore they burn it. According to them, that does not imply a risk to the population. But most of us have to deal with respiratory problems, constant headaches, and cancer. And the management is so indifferent. Look at that bridge Pemex is building…they ran out of money, they were not able to plan accordingly to minimize damage to the population. They start a project, they ran out of money, and they left everything unfinished or poorly done (Interview, April 2013).

Ortega's concurrent assessment of both the city's infrastructural operability and the performance of Pemex, demonstrates that, despite corporate efforts, infrastructure is anything but invisible. Yet, the more time I spend in Poza Rica, the more I linger in its surroundings and neighborhoods, the more I realize that the work done in the name of disentanglement is not exclusive of corporate actors. Shortly after I moved to *colonia* Morelos-Quebradora, a neighborhood located next to the gas complex, I realized that residents in this area are also deeply invested in distancing themselves from the material and sensuous particularities of this urban landscape. It is to these sensuous encounters that challenge the desired invisibility of oil infrastructure that I turn next.

(In)Tangible Toxicity: Life on the edges of an industrial facility

A flare stack and several columns of black smoke emanating from *el complejo procesador de gas* stretch against the horizon as one walks around Morelos-Quebradora. The roads of the neighborhood are unpaved and a significant amount of rubbish accumulates along their sides. Posters reminding people of the existence of underground pipes are strewn throughout the *colonia*. Along these roads, several houses—some made out of concrete but many others made out of aluminum sheets with the logos of political parties—can be found. There are few people walking around, mainly because of the intense heat felt in this area of town. Yet it is not uncommon to find people carrying wood and washing clothes in the river streams that border

the neighborhood. A junkyard, an evangelical church, and a few food stands soon come into view as the whistle—the *chiflido*—of the gas complex reverberates.

"We have gotten used to this," Ricardo Ewald tells me as we both stare at an oil well located in front of his auto-parts store located on the outskirts of *Colonia* Morelos. Mr. Ewald moved to Poza Rica when he was twelve years old. His dad, he tells me, was a German immigrant who came to the area during the oil boom in northern Veracruz. "None of this," he continues, "disturbs me anymore." I hear this same response again and again not only from people like Mr. Ewald, who came to this area of town to work, but also from residents like Edith, who simply regard the oil infrastructure as an irrelevant matter. How is this indifference generated through the everyday interactions between people and their environment?[28] The indifference that residents of *colonia* Morelos show towards the oil residues and infrastructure seemed to echo classic accounts of disavowal. For Freud (1953), disavowal involves rejecting the reality of a perception because of its potentially distressing associations. Neither unknown nor erased, the reality in question is rather obscured. Disavowal, in this regard, operates through concealment. I believe that it is by disregarding the infrastructure that surrounds them—by forming an idea of what this particular environment is or may not be in relation to them—that many residents in *colonia* Morelos attenuate the impact that oil and gas can have on their bodies and senses (Gumbrecht, 2004). However, a closer look at the life histories of residents of *Colonia* Morelos-Quebradora as well as their everyday encounters with vibrating pipes and toxic matter illustrate the fragility of residents' attempts to render infrastructure invisible despite their every effort.

[28] On the interaction of people and the built environment see: Brennan (2004), Thrift (2004), and Navaro-Yashin (2013), and Schwenkel (2013).

The story of Don Lupe is particularly worth telling in this respect. Don Lupe has been living in *colonia* Morelos for forty years. He moved in 1970 from *colonia* Laredo and like many Pozaricenses, he spent his childhood in *colonia Obrera*, in one of the duplex homes first built by Pemex for the oil workers in the 1930s and 1940s. The gas/petrochemical complex was already there, he tells me. "Well, at that time it was called differently: *Tratamiento único de gas natural, Nuevos Proyectos, Instituto Industrial* and now *Complejo procesador de gas*." He remembers the burners or *quemadores* that dominated the landscape back then, built to prevent the poisoning, the *envenenamiento*, of the people in the city. "It is true," he tells me, "psychosis and nervousness is all around us because there are pipes and oil wells everywhere. But we got used to it because people get used to everything but hunger" (interview, June 2013).

Figure 1.14. Gas Complex, view from Colonia Morelos. Photo by the author.

The more I talk to Lupe—always outside his little convenience store—his indifference towards the risks associated with living next to the gas complex became more evident. One morning, however, after he introduces me to his wife, he tells me how they once considered moving somewhere else. Because of his wife's insistence, he emphasizes. "She kept saying that the complex could explode and that the river could flood," as it has done in the past. As he's talking about his wife's former perceptions of the neighborhood, Don Lupe points to the yellow

Pemex poster outside his house and says, "ignoring that the pipes are beneath us is the way to go here and that is what you should do if you want to fall asleep at night." I come to understand that Don Lupe's indifference towards the oil infrastructure and its residues have much to do with his experience as a former worker at the oil complex. In fact, as he tells me about the salient features of *colonia*, all of which relate to the gas complex, Lupe is also telling me fragments of his own life history and, perhaps ironically, the ways in which he contributed through his work to the making of this ruined environment.

Lupe started working for the industry when he was 20 years old. His first position was with a company that worked for Pemex: *Aislamientos Térmicos de Hidalgo*, a company in charge of the thermal insulation of the pipes. Don Lupe was not able to get a *plaza*, a permanent position within the company, as the union politics of Pemex established that these could only be inherited or bought. Despite having an uncle in the union, the position was passed to Lupe's cousin, so he remained doing contract work for the next 40 years of his life. During this time, Don Lupe learned how to observe closely the behavior of the oil infrastructure in order to prevent fatalities. "I am not scared," he tells me, "because I was there inside. I learned to observe, to look for signs that could indicate problems." "Inside," he continues, "you learn a lot from the people you work with—your colleagues, and your supervisors. But you also learn a lot from the machines" (interview, June 2013).

Pemex has for years been the main employer in the city and work in and around it has scheduled and informed the life of many residents in Poza Rica, like Lupe. Pemex workers and residents of Poza Rica alike tell me again and again how a "culture of protection" regarding oil has been generated within the Pemex industrial facilities. In other words, people who work or have worked for the company feel they know what to do, whom to call, etc. in case of an

emergency. The highly ritualized risk-avoidance practices so common in the industry often saturate oil workers' workdays and allow them to distance themselves from a risky work environment and the tangible, material qualities associated with it. These daily socio-material practices have been somehow replicated in their everyday life. Perhaps due to this fact, toxic gases or pipes' vibrations are naturalized and partially denied over the years—but with a limited degree of success: "I know, it is hard to stop thinking about what could happen," Don Lupe tells me during our last conversation, "especially," he adds, "when you start smelling gas, like we are right now" (interview, June 2013).

Crude residues, such as the gas emanations present during my conversation with Lupe, produce the ambient conditions of everyday life and refuse to be ignored.[29] In fact, as I spend more time in this neighborhood, I realize that these sensuous disruptions are archetypical of living on oil and amid its critical infrastructure. Despite residents' efforts to maintain clear boundaries between themselves and toxic gases, this abject material—constitutive of this particular environment by negation—does not seem to respect any borders as the "us" and the "it" often collide (Kristeva 1982). The gas emanations that Lupe and I perceive that day illustrates, in fact, the ways in which humans and toxic residues overlap in this impoverished neighborhood as the atmosphere literally invades individuals in a physical and biological way. This overlap forces residents to come to grips with the tangibility of crude pollutants and to develop practical ways for dealing with it.

"How do you feel living right across from the oil and gas complex?" I ask Ms. Dora, a few days after I settled into her home. "We have gotten used to smelling the gas and seeing all this," she replies in an apparently relaxed manner. This indifference, however, is soon disrupted

[29] On how infrastructure creates a sense of modernity see: Scott (1988), Benjamin (1999), Ferguson (1999), Bennett (2001), Harvey (2010) and Mrázek (2002); Larkin (2008); Von Schnitzler (2008), Schwenkel (2013).

as Ms. Dora reminds me to have a bottle of water, a ripe lime, and a towel next to my bed to cover my mouth and nose in case a gas leak occurs in the middle of the night. Dora came to this neighborhood 16 years ago and has been living in the same house ever since. Her husband's family came to this area of town despite the fact that it was an area that the city considered unsuitable for habitation. Since moving here, they have been selling land lots illegally to an increasingly urban population hoping to find jobs in the oil industry. "They have tried to relocate us as things are not easy here." There are several things that cannot exist at this precise location on account of Pemex and the surrounding infrastructure: running water, a sewage system, and a paved road. Because of the ducts and pipes, she explains to me, it was really difficult to complete basic construction projects to improve the quality of life here. Ms. Dora has been fighting against cancer for a couple of years now. Monthly trips to Jalapa, the capital of Veracruz, are part of her medical routine. But when she is in Poza Rica she enjoys sitting on her porch during the afternoon, which is where we have long conversations sitting outside on plastic chairs looking at both the gas complex and one of the many Pemex posters with the typical black skull-and-crossbones figure imprinted on it:

> I remember how terrible the smell was when I first moved in. We believed Pemex was discharging residues into the river. It was such a pungent smell. I remember waking up in the middle of the night coughing and throwing up. Am I afraid? Well, I feel I am living in a time bomb (laughs). If something happens, all of us will blow up! There are so many pipelines below us. A few years ago, people form Pemex came here to do some kind of surveying. That is how I found out there were so many pipes right below where we are sitting right now. Well, I actually felt the vibrations constantly, but I did not know what exactly that was. They told me the pipes do not work anymore because they are dead. But you know? They still vibrate. And then I start thinking: what if something happens? What if there is an accident? (interview, April 2013).

Despite residents' efforts to ignore the pipes, the smoke, the oil wells, most of my neighbors, not unlike Dora, remember at least one incident in which they had to abandon their home because of the pungent smell of gas. Some remember the way the vibrations felt during past explosions or a

time when they had to deal with an oil spill. Others even admitted that, in the case of a serious accident, there was not much one could actually do but run. The question, then, was—"where? Oil, after all, is everywhere," as many residents insist. The great majority, however, remain undisturbed. They simply continue buying home remedies for nose and eye irritation, which are advertised loudly by street vendors in the main avenue downtown. Others, like Dora and myself, keep ripe limes at hand to deal with the pungent smell that suffuses the neighborhood at night. It was precisely during such moments of breakdown when the assurances of everyday life ("what makes sense" and "what can be sensed") were exceeded (Panagia 2009, 4). These moments of interruption and reconfiguration of sense-making clearly exposed the toxicity that residents, not unlike corporate actors, work so hard to prevent from becoming a focus of attention. The trouble is that, despite the consistency of the toxic eruptions, they also just as quickly disappear.

Diffuse Air/Substantive Risk: Monitoring the Failings of Oil Infrastructure

"All those molecules that circulate in the air can really provoke a catastrophe," a principal of a primary school in *Colonia* Miguel Alemán tells me as I ask about his feelings regarding the drastic changes in the color of the sky. "We know that there is something wrong going on here—those red tinted skies." He sighs, "I doubt that those who work for Pemex had studied everything carefully enough to know everything that could happen." His remarks echo the concerns of many residents who write and comment on newspaper articles discussing the air quality in Poza Rica, all of which has finally compelled the municipal authority to demand "a detailed, logical, and sustained report" regarding the red smoke produced at the *Complejo Procesador de Gas*. Air quality is likewise a common theme in the local political campaigns occurring at the time of research. Alfredo Gándara, a PRI candidate for the local congress, for

instance, declares during an interview that took place after a public meeting, "it is about time Pemex responds to the atmospheric pollution and the constant burning of hydrocarbons in Poza Rica." Similarly, a small, local group of environmentalists appear before the Federal Attorney for Environmental Protection (Profepa) in order to blame Pemex for serious contamination of the city. The *Complejo Procesador de Gas*, they argue, annually produces 204,890 tons of one of the main gases responsible for global warming, carbon dioxide. Despite the successes of this initiative to compel Pemex to reduce the intensity of the burnings, Pemex management continues to argue that the emissions do not pose a risk for the population.

As I read the newspaper and listen to campaign promises on the radio, it becomes clear that it's not enough to document one's experience of the unusual color and toxic content of the air in order to effect significant change (in terms of policy, health of the population, or general perception of the oil industry). Instead, the toxicity must be transformed into numbers and graphs. Efforts to achieve this kind of visibility are directed by Dr. Natán, a chemistry professor at the local state university. "In Poza Rica, the impact of the oil industry, specifically the area of exploration and production, has been huge," Dr. Natán explains as he shows me the mobile air quality-monitoring unit parked outside the school of Sciences of the University in Poza Rica—a building, ironically, recently renovated by Pemex. "It has transformed, first of all, the way we use the land. This was a rainforest once and everything changed once oil extraction became a priority for the state." According to him, there are approximately 150 wells in Poza Rica, each well requiring half a hectare. "Secondly," he continues, "the emissions and discharges of residues generated by both the refinery, which was established in the petrochemical complex in 1970, and the gas complex have also strongly impacted the region." "Mainly," he adds, "because

the gas emissions were not controlled until recently." "We have been in contact with dangerous residues for a long time" (interview, April 2013).

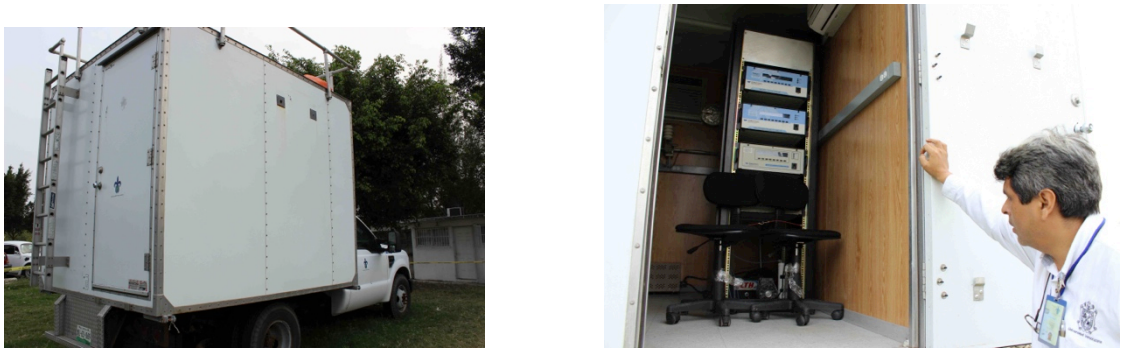


Figure 1.15. Mobile air quality-monitoring unit, Poza Rica. Photo by the author.

The mobile air quality-monitoring unit that Dr. Natán proudly shows me will help him conduct research on population health by clarifying the relation between the diseases that are common in the city and the pollutants that are emitted into the atmosphere by the industry. The white vehicle can measure pollutants in ambient air such as sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, total reduced sulfur, carbon monoxide, and fine particulate. The facility is also equipped with a data-logging computer, which is connected to a database via the Internet. "It is like a big computer that also reads the air." "In Poza Rica," he continues, "ozone is easily felt. We all have headaches, it's hard to breath, and your nose gets really dry. Why are we having high levels of cancer and asthma in the city?" he asks. "That is a red alarm for me. We know the air is polluted, but we don't have any numbers or any study of the specificities of those pollutants." This, then, became Dr. Natán's goal: to produce the evidence—numbers, values, graphs—deemed necessary to render toxic substances legible.[30]

> I started teaching a course on air here at the Faculty of Sciences and I started working with my students making preliminary studies. After 2009, the university was able to buy

[30] On the acts and practices through which air becomes meaningful and knowable, see the work of Choy (2011), Murphy (2006), and Fortun (2014).

> a unit for monitoring air. When Profepa comes, they only get the numbers Pemex gives and we did not have any data to challenge the information Pemex was giving. So the first thing we did was a small diagnosis with a micro-level scope in the downtown area. We needed to estimate an *imeca*.[31] We needed numbers, and these were revealing. In an area of just 64 km^2, we found that the values for the levels of O_3 and CO_2 and other particles were higher than what is considered normal in Mexico City. We concluded our study and decided to cover a bigger area. We analyzed the whole city and established an itinerant monitoring of ten points. And in eight out of these ten points we had high levels of pollution and we found particles that we attributed to the *quemas* (burnings) Pemex was conducting. Pemex was changing their technology but all the gas they were using to test such a technology needed to be burned. They did this for over a year and the pollution levels caused by particles were incredibly high (interview, April 2013).

Given Natán's commitment to this project and alternative sources of energy, it comes as a surprise to learn how he became interested in science, oil, and the environment. "Everything started in the oilfields," he says and immediately starts to laugh, realizing the irony involved in the statement. His father worked his entire life for Pemex as a welder. Natán still remembers how much it meant for him to see his dad wear the uniform and to join him in the oilfields to look at the machinery. "My interest in science," he said, "grew out of those visits." "For me," he adds, "oil is much more than harmful hydrocarbons" (interview, April 2013). As he shares memories of summers spent in the oilfields, Natán also reveals how easy it is to loosen infrastructure from its technical function (or malfunction) given that it also operates, in parallel, on an affective level.[32] Listening to Natán talk about his father that day leads me to wonder if anyone understands this parallel "doubling" (Larkin 2012, 223) better than those who have spent their life in the oilfields.

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[31] IMECA (Índice Metropolitano de la Calidad del Aire) is the metropolitan index of air quality and is the reference value for the levels of pollution made for the inhabitants of Mexico City. The IMECA is calculated using the measurements of the quality of the air by SIMAT (Sistema de Monitoreo Atmosférico de la Ciudad de México). The IMECA is used to show the level of pollution and the level of risk that represents to the human health in the valley of Mexico City and also the time of the measurements or the actions recommended for protection. The IMECA is calculated using the measurements of average times of the chemicals (O_3), (SO_2), (NO_2), (CO) and particles lower than 10 micrometers (PM_{10}).

[32] On how infrastructures give rise to particular affects and temporalities see Limbert (2010).

Visible Bonds and Crude Labor

A group of retired Pemex workers meet regularly at *Café Manolo's* to share their thoughts about local politics as well as their memories about the old days spent in the exploration and production of oil in the northern region. They are also members of section thirty-one of the oil workers union, a section that has worked closely with the PRI over the years. Despite the close relationship between their union section and the political party governing today at both local and national level, this group of friends, through their stories and jokes provide a potent critique of both the current leadership of Pemex and the neoliberal turn of past and present state administrations. Elements of their critique echo in the media throughout my fieldwork: a corruption scandal involving Pemex-North Region ultimately ended in the shutdown of most of the oil wells in the city. Moreover, those working for subcontracting companies started to organize demonstrations outside the regional headquarters. The construction of the city's ring road—a project sponsored by Pemex as part of their CSR policy—was also interrupted.

"Working for Pemex," Rubén Riverón explains to me, "has been a great satisfaction and a source of pride. It hurts to see what is happening now." The first thing I notice when I meet him during one of the weekly meetings is the way he proudly wears his blue-collar shirt with an embroidered Gulf Oil logo, a company that has partnered with Pemex in the area. Rubén was still a young boy when, following the steps of his father, he joined Pemex drilling as an apprentice. Wanting to receive the education that his dad never had, he attended workshops in the morning and school at night. When he finished high school, Rubén decided to move to Mexico City to complete a technical career so that he could join Pemex later on in a formal position. During this period he also joined the Pemex baseball league. It was at that point that he felt he was already part of the institution. He officially started to work for the company in 1965 in the drilling

section. But back then, he recalls, those who worked in exploration and production had to rotate through all the areas. "That is how I ended up working in the platforms of the Northern Region… in the drilling ship '*Reforma*' across the Nautla and Tecolutla Rivers." That was forty years ago.

> In the old days, in order to land in a good position you had to sweat blood. Today it is a joke—a bad joke. What we are experiencing right now [the shutdown] is a consequence of all the subcontracting and the result of having managers who haven't stepped into an oil field. Let me tell you a story. When I was working in a drilling site [Arroyo Prieto] we got new equipment, an electric Diesel #123. The team put it together. We tested the connections, tested that everything was working fine. We never imagined the oil was going to lead off with such a force. It was uncontrollable. We decided to install the equipment HT400 Halliburton to start bombing the oil, and the fire eventually stopped. It was a battle. It was during this incident when I met Manuel Ortiz, we became close friends that day because we risked our lives together—if a single connection had broken, it would have been the end for both of us. This man never lost his head when he became assistant director of Drilling, Exploration and Production (PEP) in Mexico City. You know why? Because he made himself in the field" (interview, February 2013).

During my conversations with retired workers of Pemex like Rubén, memories of the time they spent in the oilfields were often brought up—memories often associated with the oilfields' qualities: the heat produced by fires, with the noxious smell of gas, with the repetitive motion of machines, with the viscosity of the crude.[33] Yet, these memories, as the anecdote shared by Rubén illustrates, are deeply connected with particular regimes of morality and meaning that these workers mobilize during this time of crisis for Pemex: a crisis that, according to this group of drillers, was initiated in the 1990s when the neoliberal regulations put forward by president Salinas started to transform Pemex management.[34] Adolfo, who like Rubén worked as a driller for Pemex, explains further, "We started to get regional directors who came from Mexico City and who were only interested in generating profit for themselves; directors who did

[33] On the one hand, affect, as Navaro-Yashin (2012, 203) argues, has generally been theorized—in both the psychoanalytic and sociological tradition—through metaphors that invoke abstraction, imaginaries of immateriality, and conceptualizations of invisibility. Infrastructure, on the other hand, is often associated with concrete technological projects and forms (Bennett 2010; Mitchell 201; Latour 2007). Here, I am interested in highlighting the materiality of affect and the affective quality of infrastructure.

[34] On how the oil industry (and neoliberalism) is made through labor and sentiment see Shever (2012).

not know anything about oil and only encountered it when they were filling up their cars at the gas station." Adolfo looks particularly upset during that meeting at *Manolo's*. Later that day, I discover that before attending the reunion with other retired workers, Adolfo had visited his brother, an oil worker too, at a local hospital where he is being treated for cancer:

> The hospital, as usual, ran out of medicine. Yet, you see the excessive expenditure of the management, the ridiculous benefits that they have. But us, oil workers, have to beg for basic medical care. Despite all this—and this is the *irony* of the situation—now that we are facing the stoppage, I would not mind going to the drilling site and take my very last breath of air there. After all, I have already spent my life around those fields (interview, February 2013).

How can we qualify this ironic affective state, troubled yet hopeful, that Adolfo referred to and that provides him with the basis for carrying on? "Cruel optimism," in Berlant's (2010) terms, names this compromised relation of attachment to a problematic object of desire—in this case the industry that wore out these workers. What's cruel about such attachments, Berlant (2010, 94) argues, is that the subject might not well endure its loss even though its presence—its visibility—threatens his wellbeing. This cruel attachment can help explain why, despite the industry's (moral and technical) failure, workers, like Adolfo, cling to it so tenaciously. As optimism turned to despair, trust gave way to distress, and strength devolved into disease, the retired workers I met regularly at *Café Manolo's* continue finding conditions of possibility in what remained of the past. This is partly achieved by retrieving notions of justice, solidarity, duty, and camaraderie that once emanated from the oilfields.

Conclusion

On August 12th 2013, Mexico's president Enrique Peña Nieto announced his constitutional amendments to open up Pemex to the private industry. This reform would mark the first modest reopening of Mexico's oil and natural gas fields to foreign companies since the

1938 expropriation. “This reform bill,” Peña Nieto affirmed, “like the nationalization of the industry by Cárdenas, seeks to transform the energy sector to accelerate the country’s development.” A debate around the efficacy of Peña Nieto’s reforms followed. On the one hand, supporters of the energy reform argued that Mexico’s oil fields were depleting rapidly, and that Pemex lacked both the money and the technological means—the infrastructure—to tap its substantial oil and natural gas reserves in the deep-water of the Gulf of Mexico and in the shale formations that run along much of the east coast (Lajous, 2012, 29). Due to its absence, oil infrastructure, was rendered visible by reform supporters. On the other hand, Peña Nieto's opponents on the left, vowed to block what they termed the “theft” of the nation's resources. They proceeded with a long and useless discussion around “the true” meanings of the words and actions of the mythical figure of Cárdenas (Lomnitz, 2013). By grounding their critique in oil’s symbolism, oil infrastructure was turned opaque. These contrasting ways of apprehending and dismissing oil infrastructure recall the diverse set of encounters that I examined throughout this article. Yet, they also seem abstracted from the *actual ways* in which people, in places like Poza Rica, experience crude landscapes.

This chapter demonstrates how through negotiated corporate practices, toxic encounters, technologies, and affective attachments, different residents of Poza Rica are able to render visible and invisible the harmful presence of oil and its infrastructure. Rather than a given quality, as STS scholars often assumed, the (in)visibility of failing infrastructure is constantly being renegotiated and achieved by those living amid it. I discuss how, practices and performances of risk avoidance and safety in Pemex regional offices, for instance, are often perceived by many residents as comical attempts to conceal the actual dangers of living in this industrial town. The sudden presence of the effects of failing infrastructures: the appearance of

oil spills, broken ducts, a red sky, or gas leaks made Pemex's efforts to render infrastructure invisible quite unsuccessful. Yet the constant work done in the name of oil disentanglement is not exclusive of corporate actors. Several residents living next to the gas complex are also deeply invested in distancing themselves from the material and sensuous particularities of this urban landscape. It is precisely by disregarding their immediate surroundings that residents attempt to downplay the impact that oil and gas can have on their bodies and senses. However, their everyday encounters with toxic smells and underground vibrating pipes demonstrate how their efforts to render infrastructure invisible are often disrupted. But efforts to render the effects of pollution and toxics visible are also unfolding in this industrial town. Local scientists are mobilizing technology as well as producing data in order to demonstrate risk and insist on corporate liability. Ironically, interest in science for many actors was developed through their affective encounters with the oil fields. "Oil," as I was told, is for many residents "much more than harmful hydrocarbons." In fact, it is among the oil workers where I found the potency of such crude affective attachments to be particularly visible. Among a group of retired workers, decaying oilfields emerged out of a troubled optimism. It is through this affective attachment that infrastructure's visibility is not only achieved but also deployed to endure the precarious circumstances affecting workers' bodies and minds. Overall, this chapter demonstrates how, these different contours of perception and imperceptions matter in crude landscapes, as it is through them that people endure risk, precariousness, and suffering. It is through them, that people turn these ruined environments into livable, inhabitable, and claimable spaces.

CHAPTER TWO

ETHNIC REMNANTS

Introduction

Figure 2.1. *Monolith and Totonac Youth*, 1947. Photo by George Smisor. NAA Photo Lot. 80-32.

The ethnographic camera captured a young Totonac man. Victor adopted a singular pose and was wearing a white "traditional" *traje*. Upon his request, I photographed him as we entered the archaeological site of Tajín. Victor respectfully observed and joined his elders who arrived at "their ceremonial center" with candles, copal, and diverse offerings—food, alcohol, flowers, and sacrificial birds. This was the ceremony of the *Litian:* a corporate event organized by and for the employees and collaborators of the so-called theme-park *Takilhsukut* and the *Xtaxkgakget Makgkaxtlawana* or the Center for the Indigenous Arts (CAI). Since their inception in 2000 and 2006 respectively, both institutions have aimed to foster the tourism industry of the region while celebrating and revitalizing local indigenous art and heritage.

As he held a candle between his hands, Victor joined the musicians and those in charge of reciting ritual prayers as they approached the main altar located in front of the main pyramid of the archaeological site. Following the ritual experts, Victor and his coworkers were asking for the success of the fourteenth edition of *Cumbre Tajín*, an annual cultural and musical festival currently regarded as the main tourism event in the region. Despite seeking to capture the originality of this annual ceremony, the resulting images of the *Litian* generated uncanny after effects that ruptured, as Benjamin (2004) suggested, the smoothness of history separating the past from the present appearance (Cadava 1992, 84-114). The scene I captured had played out before.

It is 1947. A Totonac Indian stands barefoot against the backdrop of the monumental ruins of Tajín (fig. 2.1). The young man wearing an immaculate white *traje* looks squarely at the camera. As he rests his arm on a relief sculpture, he seems to suggest the unbroken lineage between the rural inhabitants of the northern lowlands of Veracruz and the glorious past that preceded the Spanish Conquest. This time it was Isabel T. Kelly's camera that recorded this and many other images of the rural inhabitants of Tajín. As an American anthropologist working for the Smithsonian Institution and the Mexican Ministry of Education, Kelly journeyed to Veracruz where she expected, in her own words, "to conduct a field study that could describe the ways of life of the Tajín Totonac."[35] A tension between fluidity and fixity, transparency and fabrication, traditional and modern is captured in these black and white portraits. The tension seems irresolvable and goes to the heart of both the post-revolutionary, transnational cultural movement known as *indigenismo* and the image-making technologies that, as the photograph I took of Victor reveals, keeps bringing it back. It is precisely the enduring, troubling, and generative

[35] During this period, Kelly not only conducted fieldwork among the Totonac in Veracruz, she subsequently travelled to San Marcos Eloxchitlan in Puebla (NAA, Isabel Kelly correspondence, Box 8, 1950).

presence of post-revolutionary *indigenismo* that I analyze in this chapter—a ghostly apparition that continues to impinge upon the present through photographic iterations.[36]

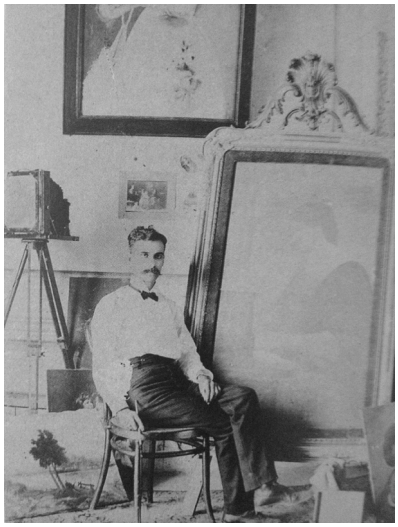

Figure 2.2. Don Donato Márquez Azuara, 1898. Col. Luis Salas García (left) and Gaspara Tremari, 1908, Col. Alicia Tremari (right).

Following the end of the Mexican revolution of 1910, intellectuals, social reformers, and state officials set out to formulate a new set of cultural ideas that could facilitate national integration. To fulfill their aspirations, they began to rewrite their own scientific construction of society that led to what historian Rick López (2010, 9-11) calls "the ethnicization of the nation" or, in other words, the inclusion of the living indigenous populations as a key component of national identity.[37] Scholars of modern Mexican aesthetics (Doremus 2001; Hershfield 2008;

[36] In this regard, my paper builds on recent interest in excavating indigenous histories within western archives and local responses to, and appropriations of, anthropological images. In *Photography, Anthropology and History: Expanding the frame*, Morton and Edwards (2009), for instance, use photographs as the methodological and analytical starting point to demonstrate the way in which both photographic practice and the nuanced experiences of the photographic encounter can be used to track shifts in the anthropological concerns with fieldwork relationships. The questions these scholars addressed are how anthropological evidence and knowledge is produced and what it has produced.

[37] The process of "ethnicization" for López (2010, 9-11) refers to the contested and fluid ways in which "intellectuals and artists seized on the revolution as a mandate to study contemporary indigenousness and make it part of the discussion on national identity." Moisés Saenz (1939) in *México Íntegro* described this movement as the Indianization of Mexico while Mary KayVaughan (1997) has called it "the browning of the nation."

Mraz 2012) often underline the visual transformations triggered by state-led *indigenismo* in the decades after the armed conflict.[38] The changes in photographic imagery were certainly remarkable.

Consider, for instance, the above photographs from the late *Porfiriato* (fig. 5.2 and 5. 3) depicting members of the local elite of Papantla, which consisted largely of families that owed their wealth to the commercialization of vanilla.[39] Comfortable, well dressed, and conforming to the formal static models established by city studios, these figures—modern, cultured, educated—stood apart from the majority of the local population who were otherwise excluded from the imagistic world of order and progress that characterized the Porfirian regime. Soon, however, those excluded ordinary faces would constitute, as *Monolith and Totonac Youth* illustrates (fig 2.1), the focal subject of post-revolutionary photography.

This "visual revolution" (Pinney 2008, 108, 165)—product of both the post-revolutionary state discourse and the visual technologies it depended on—did not entail, however, the abolition of everything that went before. Even those who idealized Indians and promoted indigenous rituals, languages, and practices still worked within racialized paradigms that ascribed inherent biological and cultural characteristics to these groups. Ethnicity did become a more acceptable term for what had previously been referred to as race but the term was mainly used to describe those indigenous populations that did not conform to the modern racial idea: the *mestizo.* Moreover, promoters of both *mestizaje* (racial mixing) and *indigenismo* (the *selective* valorization of Indian traits and culture) were fundamentally concerned with transforming

[38] An exception, according to Mraz (2012, 31) is found in the photographs of C.B. White and Winfield Scott. Despite the fact that their work intended to produce an imagery that could attract foreign investment, some of their snap shots depicted the poverty and harsh conditions in which many Mexicans lived. The unexpected presence of impoverished subjects in photographic representations of the Porfirian elite was more common as many of the images from the Cassasola collection reveal (Mraz 2012, 23, 29, 30, 31).

[39] On nineteenth-century Papantla see Kourí (2004).

Indians into modern citizens (Appelbaum et al. 2003, 211,212; Bonfil Batalla 1987; de la Cadena, 2000; Jung 2008; Knight 1990; Kourí 2008; Lomnitz 1992). In other words, 19th century notions of miscegenation and social improvement *remained*.[40]

How can we account for this troubling residual presence in the visual imagery developed by post-revolutionary *indigenismo*? Drawing on media theory's intertwinement of the spectral and the uncanny with different manifestations of visuality, I address these questions by approaching photography as a ghost-producing technology (Castle 1995). In their capacity to startle, writes Pemberton (2009, 50), ghosts resemble photographs: "Like ghosts, photographs bring into view something that has passed away and is not usually seen, something that perhaps should not longer be seen and yet will not stay away." The spectral and troubling presence in post-revolutionary photography is, as revisionist scholars argue, the ghost of 19th century racial thought. The continuities between Porfirian racial thought and the post-revolutionary *indigenismo* that these scholars have emphasized illustrate ghosts' future projections (Pemberton 2009,50). Yet, it is also true that there is a particular uncertainty regarding the form this return will take. The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to reveal, first, how old racial theories and beliefs from *el Porfiriato* were able to migrate and to become more "real" (Sontag 2003,7; Poole 1997) in post-revolutionary contexts through modern cameras (Castle 1995) and, secondly, how these notions and images have not dissipated but instead continue to return. Ghosts, not unlike photographs, are in this sense "iterable" (Derrida 1988:40) as they posses the capacity to sustain in and through violent repetition the emergence of unpredictable significance and effects (Mookherjee 2011-S1-S20; Pinney 2011).

[40] Race, as Goldberg (2002) suggests, is after all integral to the emergence, development, and transformations of the modern state. Similarly Bhabha (1990) contends that modern nations were constructed in opposition "to the uncanny terror of the space of race of the Other." Race, following his view could be conceived as a ghostly entity. See also Balibar (1991).

Photography and Repetition: The Ghost in the Machine

The figure of the ghost is useful for exploring the nature and effects of photography, on the one hand, insofar as it inhabits a liminal position between visibility and invisibility, life and death, materiality and immateriality and insofar as it has a strong association with powerful affective states, on the other. In his influential *Camera Lucida*, for instance, Barthes (2010) pays close attention to the camera's uncanny abilities. "In modern times," Barthes (2010, 92) concludes, "our technologies of repetition, remind us not only of the passing of time but also the entry of the death into the world of the living." The medium of photography for Barthes is essentially a haunted one as photographs are objects capable of revealing something that is gone or dead but that refuses to be altogether absent. Building on Barthes' classic readings of the photographic image, much scholarly work on visual technologies and modernity has explored this association—at times literal and at times conceptual—of the medium of photography with the spectral and the occult (Pemberton 2009; Gunning 1995, 2013; Castle 1995). In this project, I likewise address photographs as ghostly; however, I am guided by Derrida's rehabilitation of the figure of the specter and his attention to the role this figure plays in history making.

In addressing the specters of communism that haunt Europe, Derrida (1994, 10) emphasizes the ways in which what seems to remain as ineffective and residual retains the ability to disrupt. For Derrida, the specter—or the force of the specter(s) in the making of that which is contemporary—enters into whatever is "present," "real," and "there." They are always both *revenant* (invoking what was) and *arrivant* (announcing what will come) and thus operate on a number of temporal planes, most crucially the future and its possible interactions with the past (Brown 2001; Blanco and Peeren 2013). What interests me about Derrida's theorization is the way in which the anticipated return of the ghost challenges or deconstructs chronological

historicisms (Derrida 1994, 3). "Haunting is historical," Derrida (1994, 3) writes, "but it is not dated." If we use this hauntological approach to examine historical changes as well as continuities, then, we are better able to identify specters or, in other words, those particular objects that shape the present and future by permeating them with impressions of time past in a way that can be inconstant, unsteady, and ephemeral yet material—as in a photograph.

In order to examine these processes of ghostly replication and the ways in which they have affected everyday life in post-revolutionary Mexico, I focus on Isabel Kelly's collection of visual materials from Tajín and the personal correspondence associated with it. Rather than passive visual records, I conceive these image-objects as capable of generating effects in the world (Derrida, 1994; Pinney 2008,5; Strassler 2010, 252). In other words, I am interested in what Edwards (2012, 229) calls their social efficacy: the ways in which these photographs—and the desires, fears and expectations, they generate—continue to shape the experience of those who confront, in the everyday, these fragments of Mexican modernity. The haunting and haunted status that these image-objects possess is therefore open to interrogation. What can these photographs (or their absence) say to us about the history of their production, the world they depict, the lives they transformed? How can these photographs help us grasp the spectral elements lying at the basis of Mexican post-revolutionary modernity? What do these objects actually do? What do they reveal but also what do they obscure? Each section of this chapter, therefore, revolves around a particular image or set of images. The photograph entitled "Acculturation," for instance, is used in the first section to contextualize Kelly's collection of visual materials by discussing 19th century notions around *mestizaje*, miscegenation, and social improvement—ideas that, as I have mentioned, were never completely eliminated in 20th-century elite thought and rather animated popular notions such as acculturation during the post-

revolution. Having set this historical context, the next section uses a series of portraits to draw attention to the "mediality" (Kittler 1990; 1986) of *indigenista* discourse, that is, to the ways in which, through the medium of photography, the Totonac region became visible, apprehensible, and graspable—as an ethnic region—to urban and rural populations and came to exist prior to and independent of these images. The medium of photography, I suggest, allowed the *displacement* of old racial notions and rendered them *visible* in what, ironically, was considered a new discourse and a new visual aesthetic. Both of which are clearly illustrated in the portraits left by Kelly.[41] In the following sections, I examine a series of image-iterations in an effort to reveal the *generative* capacities that Kelly's photographs possess. Drawing on my ethnographic work in Papantla and Tajín, I discuss the diverse appearances of the imagery of the *volador*: a ritual dancer photographed extensively by Kelly. I suggest that this figure, as well the constant reproduction of its image, has played a central role in the construction of current corporate subjectivities and ethnic-entrepreneurial projects. Yet I also suggest that these creative re-workings have not been able to expunge the fundamental violence of *indigenismo*: its racial basis, which is a form of violence that continues to haunt many "ethnic" subjects in the region despite the fact that they appear to be external to it.

Haunted Historiography: Racism, Revolution, and Indigenismo

The ascendency of positivism during the last decades of the 19th century animated the debates around the "Indian problem" in Mexico and, more generally, consolidated the theoretical and institutional framework for the creation of stable, manageable, and useful scientific notions of society, national development, and the state (Tenorio Trillo 1999, 1162). For 19th-century Mexican intellectuals, modern positivist science became unquestionable as they had to face the

[41] I take this notion of ghostly displacement from the seminal work of Gunning (2013, 207-244).

repercussions that such evolutionary theories had for the historic interpretation of their own nation. In the words of Kourí (2010), "if the Indians of the present were an inferior race and if the mixture of races was degenerated, what were the possibilities for a nation such as Mexico?" The revaluation of *mestizaje*, understood as a historical process of biological fusion that produced a superior synthesis, turned out to be the key solution to an old problem.

Perhaps it was Andrés Molina Enríquez (1909) who best synthesized these dominant debates around nation and race in Porfirian Mexico. In *Los Grandes Problemas Nacionales*, Molina Enríquez offered a radical re-interpretation of positivist theories as he presented the mixture of two races in apparently different evolutionary states as something promising. As he discussed the historical rise of the *mestizo*, race and nationhood were equated. It was due to this racial mixing that the Indian could disappear and along with them the threat of physical degeneration as well as the cultural heterogeneity that slowed national progress. Thus, Mexican Porfirian intellectuals such as Molina Enríquez produced a particular scientific synthesis, a "pragmatic mimetism" to suit their intellectual and political ends. It was mimetic, Tenorio Trillo (1999, 1169) argues, because their essential concerns (nation, race, science) were not conceivable without translations, imitation, and dialogue with cosmopolitan ideas. It was pragmatic because it was useful in view of their political interests both as knowledge authorities and as nation builders. These figures—not unlike post-revolutionary intellectuals—were determined to catch up. The social revolution of 1910 against Porfirian rule seemed to interrupt those scientific efforts but in fact made them all the more necessary for the creation of a modern state (Tenorio Trillo 1999, 1162).

In the aftermath of the revolution, a new intellectual elite who was as preoccupied with national needs as their predecessors emerged to redefine old racial and social theories (Tenorio

Trillo 1999, 1168). In his seminal work *The Cosmic Race*, José Vasconcelos, for instance, maintained miscegenation and assimilation as the prime vehicle for social progress. Meanwhile, out of the work and ideas emanated form Porfirian institutions such as the International School of Archaeology and Ethnology that the seed of revolutionary *indigenismo* (the exaltation of what is considered indigenous) arose. The first two directors of the School, Eduard Seler and Franz Boas, were both recognized intellectual figures. Through their theoretical approach to archaeology and anthropology respectively, they provided an alternative to positivist ideologies that relegated Mexico and their indigenous people to a lower stage of social development (Kourí 2010, 424). As the founder of American Cultural Anthropology, Boas was a declared enemy of social evolutionism and argued for a cultural relativism that portrayed cultures as different yet neither superior nor inferior. Boas's cultural relativism offered Mexican revolutionary intellectuals a way to escape the conundrum that evolutionism presented to them.

Yet, as an intellectual solution, cultural relativism was only *partially* adopted by influential figures like Manuel Gamio, founder of *indigenismo* and Boas's student at Columbia University and then at the International School.[42] Gamio's 1916 book *Forjando Patria* served not only as a manifesto of a new *mestizo* and Indigenist Mexico but also as a program for incorporating indigenous people into the nation's development.[43] Key in Gamio's influential conceptualization of society was the old recognition of the process of cultural mixing (Alonso 2004, 460). Thus, for many post-revolutionary intellectuals the Indian problem was not their inferiority, just their backwardness, which could and should be improved. After all, the causes of such backwardness were primarily historic: the effects of the conquest, colonial and post-colonial policies, the isolation, bad nutrition, prejudice against the autochthonous, and a lack of

[42] On transnationalism and Mexican modernity, see Tenorio Trillo (1999, 1178) and López (2010).
[43] For a detailed discussion of Gamio's work see: Esquinas (2013)

integration. Yet, in their view, it would be impossible to achieve these goals without understanding beforehand the evolutionary state of indigenous cultures: Anthropological knowledge was therefore needed. During the 1940s and 1950s, as post-revolutionary governments began to shift to the right, efforts to integrate the Indian into mainstream society remained faithful to Manuel Gamio's vision: know the history and culture of the indigenous population in order to transform its economies and social backwardness through state intervention and to promote national unity through acculturation (Kourí 2010, 430-431; Dawson 2004). Following the Inter-American Indigenist Congress in Pátzcuaro (1938), during which president Cárdenas issued his famous call to Mexicanize the Indian, state-led *indigenismo* became a model of indigenous policy throughout Latin America (de la Peña 2014; Jung 2008, 94-95): a policy that certainly afforded indigenous populations participation in state affairs but that also sought to achieve their development and modernization. In fact, signaling *indigenismo*'s importance as an integral part of the state's economic development after *Cardenismo,* the National Indigenous Institute (INI)—founded in 1947 under president Miguel Alemán—was envisioned as an institution responsible for achieving the desired integration of the Indian population while avoiding the loss of Indianness altogether. After all, the cultural uniqueness of the indigenous population had long constituted a source of national identity, helping to distinguish the nation from the rest of the world (Tenorio Trillo 1999). What the nation required, according to Alfonso Caso, founding director of this institution, was a transformation of the negative aspects of the indigenous culture into positive ones, preserving those attributes that were already useful: their sense of community, their mutual help, their arts, and their folklore (Caso 1956, 396).

The strategies that *indigenistas* developed to assimilate and acculturate the indigenous population were based on a series of assumptions about the cultural characteristics of the inhabitants of the indigenous communities. Caso (1951), for instance, saw "the Indian" as an individual who shared the same ethnic, aesthetic, social and political ideals as that of the group. While some *indigenistas* like Caso, sought to exorcise race from their schema—insisting that it was purely a socially defined category—they saw Indians as innately different, possessing contrasting skills, virtues, and vices (de la Peña 2005, 72; Knight 1990, 88). Thus, even if post-revolutionary intellectuals embraced *indigenismo*—linking Mexico's essence to indigenous culture, or *mestizaje*, celebrating racial and cultural mixing—miscegenation and social improvement *remained* their basic goals (Alonso 2004; Appelbum et al. 2003; Brading 1988; Knight 1990; Kourí 2010; de la Peña 2005; Tenorio-Trillo 2010; Villoro 1950). Community studies conducted by anthropologists during the period, in fact, sought to equip the INI with the necessary information to integrate the indigenous population and consequently propel Mexico toward its own distinctive modernization. It is in this context that Isabel Kelly, at the time director of the work of Smithsonian's Institute of Social Anthropology in Mexico, joined the nationalist task set for anthropologists.

Kelly had studied under Alfred Kroeber and Robert Lowie—both Boas's students—in the anthropology department at the University of California, Berkeley. Before she started research in Mexico, she had worked among the northern and southern Paiute as well as among the Miwoks. She also sought archaeological field training in 1929 in the summer program at the Laboratory of Anthropology in Santa Fe, which allowed her to head off to Mexico in 1935 for the first time to conduct archaeological work in the coastal plain of Sinaloa. The following year she returned to Berkeley to conduct research with the Gila Pueblo Archaeological Foundation only to return to

Sinaloa in 1939. By that time, she had committed herself to a career and life in Mexico. In 1940, she settled in the famous ceramic-production village of San Pedro Tlaquepaque, located on the southeastern periphery of Guadalajara, Jalisco. She maintained a home there until 1945 while she continued her archaeological investigations in western Mexico.

Figure 2.3. *Acculturation*, Totonac Woman in Papantla, 1947. Photo by McDonald. NAA Photo Lot 80-32.

In 1946, she received a recommendation from social anthropologist George Foster to take over his position as ethnologist in charge of the ISA office in Mexico City. In assuming the role of senior ISA representative, Kelly soon began to teach courses at the *Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia* (ENAH) and also take students into the field for ethnographic training of the sort that she had received from Kroeber. Kelly, however, did not take students to western Mexico for field training; instead she went east to the northern lowlands of Veracruz and the *sierra* of Puebla. There she initiated a study among the Totonac Indians of Tajín and San Marcos Eloxchitlán. Like many social scientists of the period, Kelly aimed for the professionalization of her students through the institutionalization of their training and the creation of expert

knowledge (Vaughan and Lewis 2001, 10-11; Tenorio Trillo 1999, 1163).[44] She hoped that in time, her students from *La* Escuela "could carry on research independently to add to the number of community studies supported by the state through the Ministry of Education." These, she believed, "were of tremendous importance to the Mexican government in the formulation of intelligent national programs—in the resettlement of its population, in agrarian reform marketing, in education and so on."

With this mindset, Kelly journeyed to the northern lowlands of Veracruz hoping her research could contribute to the integration of the Totonac into national life. "We know little of the way of these peoples," she added, "and until we do, there is scant hope of their being assimilated" (NAA, Isabel Kelly correspondence, Box 8, 2/1/1949). During her time in Mexico, she remained hopeful of the possibility of state interventions in Mexico's indigenous regions. "It might be advisable to collaborate with Caso and the INI," Kelly reported to the Smithsonian. She firmly believed it was the only agency in a position to put "the much needed reforms and recommendations into effect" (NAA, Isabel Kelly correspondence, Box 8, 2/1/1949). In short, *indigenismo* fit well within post-revolutionary thought, especially with the Mexican state's shift to the right in the 1940s. This set of policies, after all, was animated by the belief that acculturation and social improvement could proceed in a guided, enlightened fashion such that the positive aspects of Indian culture could be preserved and the negative expunged. This type of "acculturation" is well captured and celebrated in Isabel Kelly's collection of photographs (fig.2.3).

[44] A good examination of different moments of interaction between scientific endeavors between Mexico and the US is Tenorio Triillo's (1990) "Stereophonic Scientific Modernisms: Social Science between Mexico and the United States 1880-1930s".

Spectral Portraits

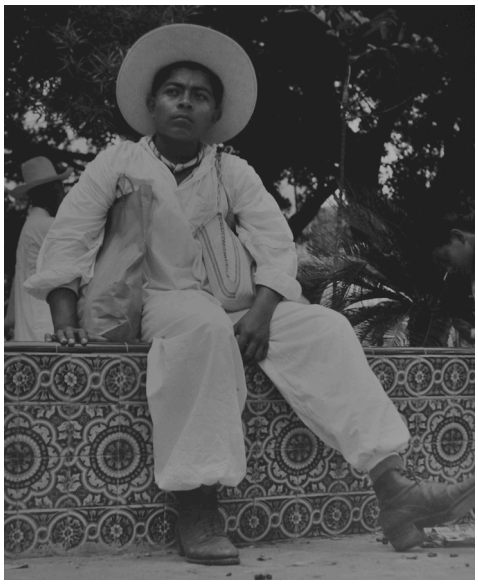

Figure 2.4. *Totonac lad in Papantla's plaza*, 1947. Photo by McDonald. NAA Photo Lot 80-32.

On 1 February 1949, almost two years after finishing her first twelve months of fieldwork in Tajín and only a month after being named the director of the work of the Institute of Social Anthropology in Mexico, Kelly wrote to George Foster to report "on recent gyrations." Kelly was referring to the visit of Haldore Hanson, a state Department representative who Kelly believed left with a favorable impression of the Smithsonian activities in Mexico. Kelly's letter to Foster narrates details of a small reception she organized at her house in Mexico City to commemorate Hanson's visit. The turnout, she wrote, was impressive: "We had anthropologists all over the lot: Margain, Dávalos, Comas, Pompa y Pompa, Eulalia Guzmán, Villa Rojas, García Granados, Marquinas, Noguera, etc. Gamio, however, reneged at the last minute." Yet, despite the presence of these important intellectual figures, it was Kelly's visual material that captured Hanson's attention. After spending a significant time looking at photographs, notes, and maps, Hanson politely asked Kelly to select from among her snapshots a portrait of a Totonac for him to hang in his office. A few weeks later, Kelly mailed Hanson the photograph he had requested.

She trusted this would make "good Washington propaganda" (NAA, Isabel Kelly correspondence, Box 8, 1949).

During her time in Veracruz, Kelly gathered a substantial collection of visual materials. In addition to several hundred pages of typed life histories, she also collected a forty-minute silent color motion picture film, more than 450 slides, and thirty-eight rolls of black-and-white-print film negatives and contact print sheets.[45] In the hands of *indigenista* anthropologists such as Kelly, image-making technologies became a suitable mechanism to bring to central focus the lives of those under study. Yet, as reproducible and movable indexical forms, these images—"ethnic" in content and modern in form—soon started to move out of the field into public spaces connecting wide-reaching scientific and social networks. The portrait Kelly mailed to the State Department exemplifies this point. But later that summer, eighty photographs from her collection, enlarged and mounted, were also exhibited at the Benjamin Franklin Library and later at the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City. The exhibition aroused so much local interest that it was also put on view in Jalapa, Monterrey, Morelia, and Oaxaca (NAA, Smithsonian Institutions, Isabel Kelly 1949). Months after this photographic exhibition and in an effort to advertise the work of the ISA, many of these images re-appeared in an article written by Kelly for the magazine *Modern Mexico* under the title "In the Shadow of el Tajín" (NAA, Smithsonian Institutions, Isabel Kelly, 1949).

As photographs from Tajín began to appear in museums, publications, and her own personal correspondence, they extended a kind of connectivity through networks (Poole 1997). This circulation is of course not surprising given that, as Salvatore (1991) observes, it is the aim

[45] Kelly's collection includes several photographs by her friends and colleagues George T. Smisor, Done Otto, Elena Guzman, Bertha B. Harris, and John McDonald who visited Kelly and her students as they conducted fieldwork in Tajín.

of most visual representations of difference.[46] Yet, a converse trajectory of privatization and individuation—of "refraction" (Strassler 2010)—could also be traced. By refraction, Karen Strassler (2010, 23) means the way in which people draw on widely circulating images often tied to the state and redirect them to more intimate registers. The process of refraction, I believe, was to be expected in Tajín and other communities where locals solicited Kelly to produce photographs *for* them. In several letters, in fact, Kelly recounts the ways in which her camera often mediated her fieldwork experience as her services as a photographer were often requested: "…it was decided that we should be allowed to photograph the *fiesta* of the patron saint," she wrote in 1950 from San Marcos during her second field season. In a different letter, she lightly complained to George Foster: "I offered this as a favor and now individuals are soliciting family photographs." "In many cases," she added, "…our best hope of getting inside private dwellings is on the basis of an invitation to take snapshots of the family. I've just returned from two house calls this morning, and there are other applicants pending" (NAA, Isabel Kelly correspondence, Box 8, 11/16/1950).

Captured in the privacy of their homes during ritual or life-changing celebrations (fig 2.6) and during everyday activities (fig. 2.7), the images Kelly *left in* Tajín and later in San Marcos, could have been displayed and reproduced, could have been made larger or smaller, could have been replicated in subsequent encounters with the camera (fig 2.7) or could have been either kept with devotion or given away. Kelly's photographs, in other words, became important objects not only because they made real the "ethnicized" interpretation of Mexicanness that post-revolutionary intellectuals developed to forge a unified nation but also because these photographs—not unlike those ethnic photographs that *today* many residents of Tajín possess,

[46] On transnational visual encounters, see Ricardo D. Salvatore's (1998) "The Enterprise of Knowledge."

cherish, and display in their homes—started to become part of a realm of personal affiliations, memories and sentiments (Edwards 2012; Strassler 2010).

Figure 2.5. *Groom and Bride*, 1947. Photo by Kelly. NAA Photo Lot 80-32.

Figure 2.6. *Totonac Group*, 1947. Photo by Otto Done. NAA Photo Lot. 80-32.

Refraction and circulation, in short, are key processes for understanding the effectivity of Kelly's images. These seemingly opposed levels of dissemination were enabled by photography's ghostly properties. That is, as *spectral objects*, Kelly's photographs were capable of occupying multiple spaces at once: they worked simultaneously at a distance by reaching a

broader audience and through more intimate registers.[47] Yet, these images were also *spectralizing* as they ended up producing a particular "other:" an ethnic subject that stood apart from the rest of society.[48]

Figure 2.7. Camera in Papantla's park. Photo by Ismael Casasola, c.a 1945. Col Fototeca INAH.

It was, in fact, during the post-revolution and through the medium of photography, that the Totonac region became visible, apprehensible, and graspable—*as an ethnic region*—to urban and rural populations.[49] From this moment onwards, the Totonac populations entered the post-

[47] Here it is important to mention that Kelly did not introduce the medium of photography to the region, but her images did enjoy an exposure that other photographs of the region did not. Most of them were actually produced by local (amateur and commercial) photographers and today are part of family private collections. See Naveda and González (1990).

[48] Deborah Poole (1997) made a similar point. In *Vision, Race, and Modernity*, she explores the role visual images and technologies have played in shaping modern understandings of race. The depictions of Andean Indians from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries, she argues, led to the modern concept of "racial difference." What is interesting about the *indigenismo* in Mexico is the ways in which racial difference became more visible yet also obscure under a discourse and a visual aesthetic that was considered a real break form the 19th century racial notions. The figure of the ghost, therefore, becomes an important theoretical figure that allows us to account for both breaks but also continuities.

[49] Prior to the 1910 revolution, Papantla—remote but connected since the late 19th century to the wider world of commerce through the vanilla—was certainly a divided region. Yet, it was divided due to the conflicts generated out of the competition for control over land-based resources. In these conflicts, as Kourí (2004) demonstrated, the dividing lines were not primarily ethnic but political and socioeconomic. Yet, as the "ethnicized" interpretation of Mexicanness gained popularity among post-revolutionary

revolutionary nation as subjects who could be redeemed, modernized, and recognized but *only* via the gate of culture and tradition—a culture and tradition that today continues to be relentlessly photographed. Thus it is through ethnic photographs that 19th-century racial thought would not only return from the past but would also permeate—even if unacknowledged—the future, arriving, as the Comaroffs (2009) suggest, from and through generative iterations.

Iterable Ghosts

Mainly because of the acrobatic aspects of the ritual and the affirming proximity of its performers to the imposing archaeological site of Tajín, the ritual ceremony of the *volador* is today Papantla's main cultural spectacle. The commodification of this practice, which started during the "golden age" of post-revolutionary prosperity in the 1950s reflected not only *indigenismo*'s gradual and selective appropriation of vernacular cultural forms but also the state's interest in consolidating a local tourism industry around such ethnic symbols (Joseph et al. 2001). By 1951, just four years after Kelly's first visit to Tajín, this state-led process of investment in the creation and promotion of a national culture reached the Totonac region.

During one of her last visits to the area—before she separated from the ISA the following year—she described these changes:

> First to Tecolutla where we were installed at the flossiest tourist hotel (charge 60 pesos a day!) Next day, back to Papantla and on to Tajín. Instead of 1.5 hours on foot, drove right to the base of the main pyramid. A new road installed recently and still not quite finished. They put on quite a show at Tajín—so many people that one literally could not see the ruins. All of Papantla turned out for the circus.

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intellectuals in the twentieth century, it is not surprising that such differences among the Totonac became visually erased while the distinct traits of "their" culture rendered visible.

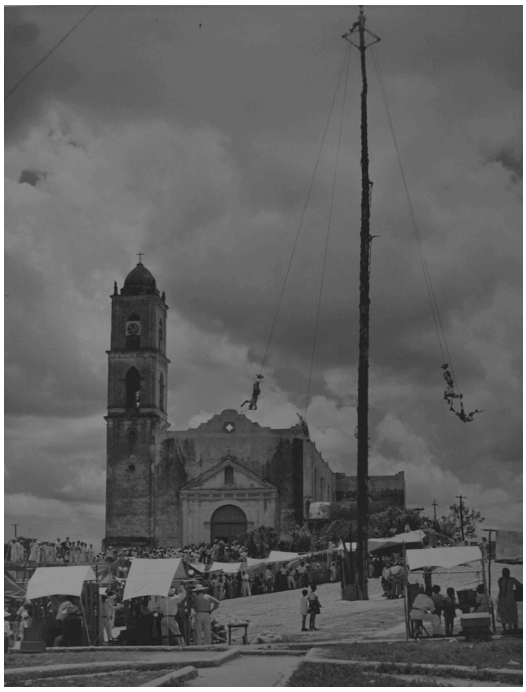

Figure 2.8. *Volador Dance*, 1947. Photo by George Smisor. NAA Photo Lot. 80-32.

A group of *voladores,* in fact, animated the event Kelly described in her letter. Today, just like in the early 1950s, it is mainly around this figure that the ethnic tourism industry is built. Similarly, just like in those early years, as exemplified by Kelly's description, anthropologists and archaeologists from the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) respond to this process of commodification with skepticism—to say the least. Regional and national INAH officers, for instance, fear the ritual's rampant banalization, especially due to the fact that the commodification of indigenous culture today is not under the control of these state agents. The ethnic industry in Papantla nevertheless allows many men to orient themselves within a context of collective identity, obligation and imagination.

Figure 2.9. *Volador Dancers* 1947. Photo by Kelly. NAA Photo Lot 80-32

Figure 2.10. Volador. Promotional image for Cumbre Tajín, 2015. http://cumbretajin.com/2015/

Perhaps because he is a ritual dancer himself, Victor enjoyed looking at those snapshots depicting *voladores* more than any of the other snapshots of Kelly's collection. Sitting at a café in downtown Papantla, Victor and I looked at my digital copies of those images. "The old times," Victor sighed as he looked at a photograph that captured four young dancers (fig 3.8). "Things have definitely changed," he said, "but the camaraderie among those who fly together remains." Victor believed that the small group of *voladores* captured by Kelly's camera was enjoying a break during the religious festivities of Corpus Christi. "Those moments resting," Victor added, "are the time when *voladores* look most relaxed; it is when some of us, just like

those *compañeros* in the photographs, like to ask the *caporal* for his flute to start playing a *son*. I see that all the time." I soon learned that images such as this—of *voladores*—become part of Victor's personal collection as they serve as inspiration for one of his favorite hobbies: watercolor drawings inspired by the ritual dance of the *volador*. "According to our tradition," Victor told me, "the elders selected a group of priests during a difficult time of drought to carry out an offering to the gods and asked them for the rain that would make our crops grow." "The ceremony," he continued, "consists of several stages":

> It started in the *monte*, where *voladores* would look for a specific kind of tree and then, with solemnity, we cut it and with solemnity we take the pole to the platform where it would be standing. Then, during the main ceremony four young men climb the pole—eighteen to forty meters high. A fifth man, the *caporal*, stands on a platform atop the pole, takes up his flute and small drum and plays songs dedicated to the sun, the four winds and each of the cardinal directions. After this invocation, the others fling themselves off the platform 'into the void.' Tied to the platform with long ropes, they hang from it as it spins, twirling to mimic the motions of flight and gradually lowering themselves to the ground.

According to Victor, by performing this ritual during baptisms, funerals, and saint festivities, the ceremony has survived. Yet this visibility has also been sustained by practices of copying, imitating, and other forms of appropriation that, like Victor's drawings, have transformed the figure of the *volador* into an iconic image (Lucaites and Hariman 2007) that has been widely replicated and prominently displayed in both public and private settings. Today the figure of the *volador* is found everywhere in Papantla: in paintings and posters, road side billboards, and local advertisements, public murals and sculptures, governmental logos, illustrations on gas trucks, tourist guides, and on the walls of restaurants, hotels, shops, and on the homes of those whose life has been marked by this ritual dance and the emerging ethnic industry it sustains. This effective reproducibility of the image reminds us that the gesture of taking up a camera and pointing the lens toward someone or something is the beginning of a process that lacks any

predictable end (Azoulay 2003, 137; Benjamin 1996). The significance of photographs, in other words, is not only determined by the past (or the context of its creation) but also by photographs' generative reproduction as I will discuss below.

In his office in Xalapa—decorated with promotional posters portraying in one way or another the distinctive figure of the *volador*—Salomón Bazbaz, general producer and director of *Cumbre Tajín*, patiently listens to my interest in participating in the approaching event. The conversation then turns to his own involvement with the indigenous people in the area. "I have been collaborating with them for more than a decade, my son was baptized by their traditional healers, my commitment with the Totonacs, at this point, is simply too big." He was not wearing the traditional Totonac scarf around his neck, his usual look when he appears in magazines and newspapers, in national television shows and interviews. These events have multiplied due to the perceived success of "the program of cultural renewal" he oversees. In 2009, the Ritual Ceremony of the *Voladores* was included in the UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List. Three years later, the model put forward by the Center of the Indigenous Arts (CAI)—the educational branch of *Proyecto Cumbre Tajín*—was included in the UNESCO list of Best Practices of Heritage Management. It is the only program in Mexico with this recognition.

Smoking cigarette after cigarette, he proceeded to tell me how he started working with "el pueblo Totonaco." *Cumbre Tajín*, the annual music and cultural festival taking place in March, is the core of what Salomón defines as an economic model that takes culture as the engine for the development of the *Totonacpan*. "That is what *Cumbre Tajin* is: a cultural event seeking to spread the worldview of Totonac people as well as their cultural expressions." The festival, however, was first envisioned and sponsored in the late 1990s by the PRI Veracruz governor Miguel Alemán Velasco, son of former president of Mexico, Miguel Alemán Valdez

(1946-1952). Miguel Aleman Velasco's approach, mimicking the means embraced by his father during his presidency in the late 1940s and early 1950s, favored tourism investment. As the governor of Veracruz, Alemán Velasco put his eye on Papantla, a region with a strong indigenous presence and an impressive monumental archeological site, which in his view had the potential to become profitable.

> Everything started during the tenure as governor of Miguel Alemán. He was aware that the archaeological site of Tajin was not well positioned in the tourism circuit and he decided to change that. What he wanted was to create a one-day event to celebrate the end of the millennium, right at the archaeological site. Having had experience producing these kinds of events in Europe, I decided to take the challenge.
>
> We started working on the project but on 6 October 1999, the Totonac region was hit by a big storm. It was a tragedy. A few days after such an incident, a group of Totonac elders contacted me and asked for a meeting. They basically told me that we were not doing things right and that the flood was the result of us working in the area without having done a ceremony to ask for permission to the gods of Tajín. Moreover, the ceremony that they believed needed to be celebrated was the coming of the spring. The end of the millennium had no significance for them (interview, January 2013).

That meeting, according to Bazbaz, changed everything. "I realized that if we wanted the project to succeed, we needed to work with local people, especially the elders, and that is what we did," he proudly told me. The key figure in this process was the *puxco* (leader) Juan Simbrón, the moral political leader of many Totonacs. A former *volador* and one of the founders of the first organization of *voladores* in 1975, Simbrón is also well known in the region for his political activism during the 1970s as well as his involvement with the implementation of *indigenista* policies of the period, namely the establishment of *Consejos Supremos*, institutions that sought to reinforce indigenous political representation.[50] By 1970, state *indigenismo* had come under

[50] During the period of Luis Echeverría (1970-1976), the response of the government to the accusations against the INI, which included bureaucratic inefficiency and corruption, was to multiply the number of so-called *Centros Coordinadores Indigennistas* (CCIs) and improvise the *Consejos Supremos* for every ethnolinguistic group (de la Peña 2014). At the time, the INI also supported through their *Centro Coordinador Indigenista Totonaco* the organization of cooperatives of artisans in this and many other

criticism as it became closely associated with an official nationalism and the cultural and political domination fomented by an increasing authoritarian state (Lomnitz 2001, 231; Warman et al. 1970; de la Peña 2014). *Mestizaje* and acculturation were for many of these critics—scholars as well as "*campesino"* and indigenous leaders—insidious myths that masked racial discrimination and inequality. It is somehow unsurprising that in many regions *Consejos Supremos* had little significance and that most of them quietly disappeared (de la Peña 2014, 291).[51] In the Totonacapan, however, this institution remains, and Juan Simbrón is still the leader. As such, he maintains a strong political influence in the area and close relationship with the state government. During the time of my fieldwork, for instance, it was well known that he had recommended one of his closest collaborators as the chief of the state office of Indigenous Affairs. Today, Simbrón remains Bazbaz's closest collaborator and source of legitimization in the region.

Because of this close relationship, especially during the first five years as director of the annual festival, it became clear for Bazbaz that the Totonac people "had reproduced their tradition" but, he added, mobilizing the rhetoric of the *indigenistas* of the 1950s, "that they were doing that in *regions of refuge*." "There was no space," he tells me, "where *maestros de la tradición* (tradition artists) could meet." He decided then to travel to New Zealand and Tibet looking for alternative models for heritage conservation. Yet, instead of replicating what he encountered abroad, he decided—with the support of Simbrón and the constant opposition of regional INAH offices—to rely on Totonac concepts to develop a traditional school. What he envisioned was a space where local experts (cooks, ceramists, healers, painters, storytellers,

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indigenous regions. La Union de Danzantes y Voladores de Papantla was the name of the first association. On the way in which *indigenista* initiatives were mediated by local communities and actors, see Dawson (2004), Faudree (2014), Jung (2008), Lopez (2010), and Vaughan and Lewis (2006).

[51] The legal status of these indigenous councils, however, was not within the official structure of government. Instead, they became part of the PRI apparatus.

dancers, musicians) could teach their art to the younger generations but on their own cultural terms. The result was The Center of the Indigenous Art, *El centro de las artes indígenas* or CAI.

Figure 2.11. Political cartoon depicting Salomón as a *volador* with thought bubble containing the text "Tajin (sobre)vive, emphasizing both the motto of the festival—*Tajín Vive*—and the fact that such initiative has managed to last for so long—Tajín *sobre*vive, Tajín survives. The cartoon was published in the online news portal *Al Calor Político.*
http://www.alcalorpolitico.com/informacion/cartones.php?autor=Abraham

The establishment of CAI was, however, not easy. After governor Miguel Alemán's tenure, the cancellation of *Cumbre Tajín* was much anticipated. For many, *Cumbre* symbolized the expenditure that ended up defining the *Alemanista* period. Perhaps, no other institution developed a harsher critique of *Cumbre* than the INAH. Surprisingly, for local archaeologists and anthropologists at the institute, many people in the area protested. *Cumbre* had become a source of modest income and, surprisingly for the INAH, the subsequent government of Fidel Herrara decided to continue sponsoring the event. Bazbaz not only stayed as the head of the organization but also was able to obtain more financial support from the state government for expanding the project. By then, he already had the idea of the CAI in mind.

The goal of this educational and cultural institution became not only to activate the regional economy through tourism—something that the *Cumbre Tajín* was already trying to do—

but to have social investment in the region as well by transmitting the tradition and art of the Totonac. The CAI is based on the Totonac notion of the *kachikin*, a traditional town or community formed by specialized houses and devoted to a particular craft: ceramics, textiles, painting, healing, music, culinary traditions, and ritual dance. Following this Totonac concept, different "houses of knowledge" needed to be created around a *kantiyan* or the main house of the elders—a "house" that eventually became the main authority of the CAI and Cumbre Tajín in general. This "traditional" structure not only served as an organizational tool, it became replicated in the architecture of a thematic park. It is here where the *Festival Cumbre Tajín* takes place during the last week of March. For the rest of the year, the space serves as an actual school where students, *maestros de la tradición*, and the education and administrative staff meet regularly.

For Salomón, *Cumbre Tajín* ended up creating "a circle of virtue": "first it was a flashy event envisioned and imposed by Alemán. Then, working together—Totonacs and *luwanes*—we turned it into a project, then into a program, and now into a model of cultural renewal." "Perhaps," Bazbaz added, "nobody exemplifies this better—how hard and how rewarding this whole experience has been—than the *voladores*. There is a new generation of ritual dancers committed with their heritage, willing to transmit their tradition and cultural practices in a holistic way, making a living with dignity." The intergenerational group of *voladores* collaborating with *Cumbre*, indeed, was the first one to develop a school within this model and today their *escuela* is the strongest one. Moreover, the groups decided to incorporate their organization, today legally recognized as the *Consejo para la Protección y Preservación de la Ceremonia Ritual de Voladores A.C.* Victor, in fact, is a junior representative within the organization and it was through him that I learned how the encompassing process of "ethnic

renewal" that Bazbaz described to me— a process that includes both economic success and spiritual formation—has created "a new generation of *voladores*." These young men, like Victor, are not simply represented in those posters that decorate Bazbaz office in Xalapa but also formed as *voladores* in and through the CAI and the Union.[52]

Figure 2.12. Victor. Portrait by Dasha Horita, official photographer during Cumbre Tajín 2013.

During *Cumbre* Victor showed up diligently in the *Kantiyan* at 5:00pm. It is in this space, decorated with a religious altar, palm stars, flowers, and food offerings where Totonac elders welcomed visitors, had meetings with elders from other indigenous groups, and received politicians and artists who came seeking their blessings. But besides these "official" activities, the *Kantiyan* also serves as a meeting point for workers who visited the space at different moments throughout the day, even before the theme-park opened its doors to the public to pray or simply to rest. Because of his leading role in both the CAI and the *Volador* Council, Victor usually visited the "back stage" of the Kantiyan—the space where I worked—to have lunch with the elders before showing up again, a few hours later, to change his clothes and put on his

[52] On a different yet relevant process of ethnic revival see Faudree (2014).

traditional ceremonial *traje* and perform during one of the festival's activities. That particular year, because of his administrative duties, Victor only had to perform during the opening of the main stage where national and international music bands would perform. Along with thirty more "traditional" musicians, he played his flute and drum.

The first time Victor participated in *Cumbre Tajín* was in 2002 during the "sound and light show" at the archaeological site of Tajín. During these early years of the project, it was a common practice for festival organizers to visit local public schools in the communities around Papantla to look for young dancers who could perform in both the theme-park and the archaeological site. In Ojital Viejo, they found Victor. "Me and my brother had no idea what *Cumbre* was," Victors tells me, "but because my grandfather, himself a ritual dancer, had taught us how to dance, we decided to give it a try and we participated for three consecutive years." Persuaded by his uncle Cruz Ramirez, who at the time was already collaborating with *Cumbre* creating a community school of *volador* dancers or *Kgosnín*, Victor also decided in 2005 to join this school. The goal of the project, Victor tells me, was not just to teach kids how to dance or play musical instruments such as the violin or flute but rather to teach them the meanings of the ritual and the language, Totonac:

> If you want to understand the ritual you need to speak Totonac. Overall, I enjoyed the time I spent in the community school yet much of the things they were teaching me, I already knew, mainly because I did not learn to dance at the public school like so many other kids around here but at home with my grandfather who is a *caporal*. It was my grandfather who taught me and my brother to see the *volador* dance not as a dance but as a sacred ritual. I still remember having to walk for thirty minutes, under a dark sky, to his house to attend practice, to see him pray, and start playing the flute. He also taught us to make our own *trajes*—to decorate them. He never got tired of reminding us that dancing was a way of establishing a conversation with our divinities. That is why there are so many restrictions…restrictions we have to follow because otherwise you put yourself and your team in danger.

For Victor it is precisely this mysticism that many dancers today have lost. "The main goal of community school for *voladores* is to bring the pieces and the fragments of the ritual back together. For such a long time people here only danced because it was a way of making money, and that, we believe, is fine, as long as the meaning and the dignity remains." For Victor, the essence of the ritual is to ask for our wellbeing. "Our elders asked for a good harvest. Today many of us ask for tourists and that is fine." "The important thing," he continues, "is to learn how to communicate with the sacred and to honor the ways in which we have done so for centuries."

After completing his ritual training, Victor joined the community school as an instructor while also completing his formal studies in pedagogy—studies he was able to complete because of a fellowship that *Cumbre Tajín* offers through the CAI to many young Totonacs in the region. After he graduated college, Victor decided to work for the CAI. He knew he wanted to bring together his experience teaching the ritual with the "western pedagogies" he learned at the university. "This," he told me, "is my gift." "According to the Totoanc cosmology," Victor explained to me, "we all have a gift. If you are able to recognize what that gift is, your life will then flourish." "I want to help Totonac kids to find their gift," Victor added, "flying was certainly mine." With time, I came to realize that Victor's understanding of his gift was a vision that has been generated through his active participation in the *Unión*. In fact, the idea that a balance between the spiritual and the economic could be attained is what, according to the *puxku* (leader) Narcisio Jimenez the president of the Council for the Protection and Preservation of the Ritual Ceremony of the *Voladores*, differentiates this association from many others that have been formed in the past. I met Narciso several times during my fieldwork, in social gatherings, during the Corpus Christi festivities—when diverse organizations of *voladores* march through

the city of Papantla—in *Cumbre*, and during a state-sponsored entrepreneurial workshop designed to assist local organizations through the process of incorporation. It was, however, in *Café La Catedral* where Narciso shared his experience as leader of the Council with me over coffee during the early part of my fieldwork.

He was late for our appointment. The workshop on museology that he attended lasted longer than expected. The workshop was, ironically, sponsored by the Smithsonian. Yet, this institution today works with the CAI and not with the INAH as it did previously during the time Kelly visited the area. "These are long sessions," Narciso apologized, "there is so much material to cover, so many different points of views." "In order to create a favorable environment for discussion, we have to go through a series of offerings." Despite having a long day, Narciso looked particularly excited to meet and talk about the recent corporatization of the Council. "It means the world to me," he said. "It feels right to led my *compañeros* through the correct path"

> What once was a *fiesta patronal* (a religious festivity involving the celebration of a Catholic saint) soon became a spectacle, an acrobatic show. It was due to this approach that agents and associations for *voladores* started to appear around the 1970s. In fact, in 1973, we had the first association of voladores, which was interested in looking for fair deals and to protect the interest of the performers. But in the following 10, 15, 20 years the leaders started to abuse their positions and commercialized the plazas…to only give the most important plazas to those closest to them.

According to Narciso, when *Cumbre Tajín* started in the year 2000, there was a lot of antagonism among *voladores*. A new organization, closely affiliated with *Cumbre*, was born but suffered from the same problems of the past. "Again in 2005 we got together and decided to change things. The first thing we wanted to achieve was to have an organization with legal personhood that could seek the economic benefit of everyone but also our spiritual regeneration." It is precisely this attention to both realms as well as its legal recognition that, for Narciso, makes this new project different from previous corporate forms:

> The point is to offer an integral ceremony. We want to inculcate the younger generation of Totonac dancers in what getting into the woods, *el monte*, means. We wanted to revitalize certain aspects of the ritual that were almost lost such as the cutting of the tree. Now we even started a project of reforestation because the particular kind of tree we use for our ritual was almost extinct. The next thing is to reinvigorate the syncretic and spiritual elements of the ritual dance. That is why we decided to put our energy into our community schools: a place where we not only teach the choreography and how to descend from the heights but also the ritual's meaning and symbolism. We started the school in 2004 and by 2005 we had the first generation of kids. Now, with the support from *Cumbre* and CAI, we have 5 schools in the Totonacapan.

The group of ritual dancers that Narciso today represents has worked closely with *Cumbre Tajín.* Their relation, however, strengthened in 2008 when Narciso and many other *voladres* decided to compete for a UNESCO nomination for intangible heritage with their support. "We started to craft the file. We had periodic meetings among the representatives from all the organizations of voladres—at the time there were five of them." "These meetings," Narciso told me, "help them define what the ritual was—its meanings, elements, symbolism, and so on." They decided to select 8 representatives and among them Narciso was chosen to be the leader of the *Consejo*. In 2009, they received the notification and started to develop a plan to safeguard the ritual. "Our intention, after all," Narciso told me, "is to transmit knowledge." Recently, he and Cruz Ramirez, the director of the community schools, attended a seminar with business experts from *El Tecnológico de Monterrey*, one of Mexico's leading private universities. The municipal government of Papantla established an agreement with these group of consultants in 2013 that helped to develop entrepreneurial projects through their workshops in the region by giving legal, marketing, and financial advice. Narciso attends these meetings on Saturdays at a local restaurant, *Naku*, which uses *voladres* as part of their marketing campaign. According to Narciso, "it is only by instilling a spiritual education and by achieving economic success that the council could be able to reestablish the fragile equilibrium that was lost when people who got

together exclusively to achieve personal benefit lost their ties to a community and therefore lost the meaning of the ritual."

Reaching a balance between these two interrelated goals—spiritual integrity and economic success—has been difficult to achieve for all the participants of the project *Cumbre Tajín*, including the group of *voladores*. During the time I conducted fieldwork inside the theme park *Takulsukut* an unexpected fire destroyed some of the infrastructure: the community museum and the *Casa de la Alfererría*, a space devoted to female potters. I soon realized that the fire had not only caused significant material losses but had also generated doubt among workers as many questioned the causes for such an unfortunate event. The morning after the fire the usual routine at the *Kantiyan* had changed. Unlike previous days when only the elders and a few workers came in and out of the space at different moments to pay their respects to the saint figures, the *Kantiyan* was crowded. There were more candles lit, and a strong smell of copal was in the air. Administrative staff as well as local workers, all of them deeply affected, assembled in this space. Salomón gave a comforting speech promising to rebuild the lost spaces now in ashes and to compensate those who lost their work or familial objects exhibited in the museum—although he admitted that the loss they just experienced was not only economic. "The incident" he concluded, "will only make this family stronger," he said. The elders of the *Kantiyan* agreed with Salomón but also believed that this was a message that needed to be interpreted. "We haven't been doing things right," I heard repeatedly. It was clear for them as well as for several workers with whom I spoke after the meeting that this was not simply an accident. The biggest challenge of *Cumbre Tajín* and the theme park *Takilhsukut*, many told me, is becoming economically successful and spiritually strong. "The administration does not always understand that we not only need to make an offering…the things that need to be offered—alcohol, animals, etc.—but

that these offerings need to come from specific sources—even if that elevates costs. "How do you explain that to the accountants?" they said. Others believe that the fire had demonstrated that sacred regulations had not been properly followed. Regardless, both workers and elders seemed to agree that more work needed to be done in the spiritual realm. Despite the perceived flaws, the incident revealed how attached participants of *Cumbre* were to the project, to the actual space, and to what they produced within it. It is not an exaggeration to suggest that for many participants, such as Victor and Narciso, everyday life as well a sense of themselves revolved around the theme park *Takilhsukut* and the CAI. It was precisely this affective (and certainly economic) attachment that engendered such an intense emotional reaction and discussion around the fire.[53]

However, I want to suggest that the presence and force of this entrepreneurial and cultural project, itself conceived in this analysis as a product of the iterations of post-revolutionary ethnic visual imagery, was only possible due to what Kelly's photographs, and *indigenismo* more broadly, kept out of the visual frame: the violence that ran parallel to their making and that continues to haunt the many "ethnic" subjects in the region.

Ghostly Absence

I first met Victor by accident during the screening of a silent black and white film by Isabel Kelly and George Smisor at the community of Tajín. Along with a few of his co-workers from the CAI, Victor set the screen, proofed the microphone, and arranged the white plastic chairs, which soon started to be occupied by a few men, close friends of the local authority, as well as local women and children. Before the screening, Roberto Pérez, the *municipal agente*,

[53] On the intertwined configuration of personhood, kinship, and labor in neoliberal contexts see: Shever (2012).

gave a brief speech intended to underline the importance of celebrating and preserving Tajín's indigenous heritage. He recounted his own immersion in the world of ritual dance and asked adults to value their past and traditions and support the preservation of their culture. "It was important," he believed, "to establish a connection with their own past, a past that no one was better able to capture than Isabel Kelly." The film we were about to watch, according to Roberto, could attest to her sensibility and the appreciation she had for *el pueblo* Totonaco.

The film depicted a group of local dancers from the community performing *The Negrito Dance* in an informal setting as Victor immediately pointed out to me. "They are at the house of *el caporal*. It is curious they are wearing their ritual garments…we don't usually do that, you never rehearse wearing your *traje."* It was obvious for Victor that the session had been staged. Regardless, he seemed to enjoy looking at those images and explaining to me, scene after scene, minor details: the symbolisms of the actions performed, of the *trajes* being worn, or the differences he perceived. From time to time, he also shared family anecdotes with me. I learned that day that he "came from a family of ritual dancers." *The Dance of the Negritos* was the first ritual dance he learned from his grandfather when he was 9 years old. Several months after I attended the screening of Kelly's ethnographic film I reencountered these moving images as I read Kelly's personal correspondence: "Last week we ran off the cone which Smisor took of the *Negritos*. The color is absolutely breath taking. There are some bad lacunae, when film had to be changed at a crucial moment, but, on the whole, the picture is very successful" (NAA, 1950). Yet, as I continued reading letter after letter, I realized that those moving images, appearing whimsical at first glance, masked a dark obverse: the loss experienced by those who posed for them.

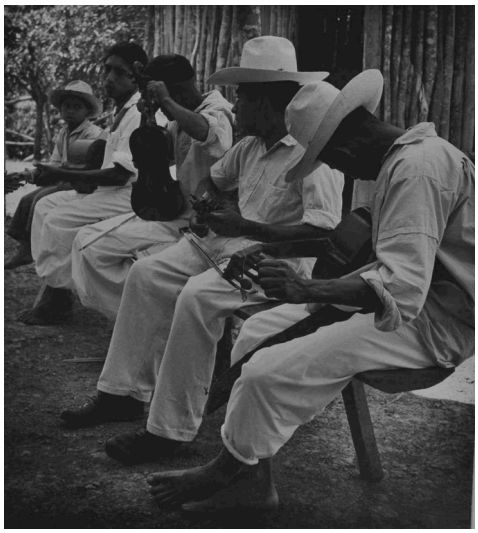

Figure 2.13. *Musicians, Negirto Dance*. 1947. Photo by Isabel Kelly. NAA Photo Lot 80-32.

In a letter to George Foster from October 1950, Kelly recounted a series of "unexpected events." She mentioned how once money became available she hoped to request authorization for spending a couple of hundred *pesos* to bring to Mexico City two of the *Negrito* musicians captured on film. "The written music is so unique on the score of symbols and time that two professionals we have consulted can't make sense out of it, and I hoped for a real recording." Kelly, in fact, wrote to see if Agapito Perez, the head musician of her *Negrito* group and chief informant, would be interested in coming to the city for a few days. The reply, she wrote Foster, had come: he was murdered on the Papantla trail a few days before Kelly's message arrived in Tajín. "A significant percent of the entire male population, including infants," she wrote, "has been polished off by homicide in the course of a year and a half." Kelly hoped to go back to Papantla to see if she could determine what happened. The idea of returning, however, seemed somber. "Last time we went to Tajín" she explained to Foster, "we had literally to scramble over the corpse of one of our friends, which was lying on the trail." Kelly and her students were the first to reach the *rancho* with the news of this murder. "Everyone was so completely terrorized,"

she added, "that we could not get anyone to express any sort of opinion." The situation, Kelly believed, became more acute since this murder, as the death of Pérez demonstrated. Many families, she claimed, were in fact trying to move west to the *monte alto*. She ends her letter abruptly: "We have really recorded the culture of a community on the brink of extermination."

Except from this single letter to Foster there is no other record in Kelly's archive that could attest to these crimes. A brief mention of the violence around vanilla production during the time she conducted fieldwork does appear in her monograph, yet the images illustrating this fact appear sanitized. They *failed* to represent that which had been described:

> Theft is endemic to the vanilla business though most Totonac feel that it has been on the increase during the past few years. As the cutting season approaches, theoretically, one should be on guard day and night…however, many make no effort to watch the field, for harrowing tales are told of planters who have tried to protect their holdings and who have been murdered for their pains" (Kelly and Palerm 1950, 126).

Unwittingly, Kelly's letter reminds us that the images she captured were not simply a transparency of something *that happened*. As a ghostly technology, photography not only brings images into view but can also make them disappear. Kelly's photographs, in fact, continuously move between these two modes—between what is depicted on the photographic paper and the violent traces excluded from her lens (Azulay 2003, 190; Sontag 2003). How can we make sense of the visual materials documenting the cultural particularities of the Totonac people and the absence of a single photograph that could convey the violence experienced by those she studied?

This, as Sontag (2001, 20) reminds us, is not a minor event: the awareness of the violence that *accumulates* in particular places is something constructed, principally, in the form that is registered by cameras. "To catch a death actually happening and embalm it for all time," Sontag (2003, 59) writes, "is something only cameras can do." This is why for her (Sontag 2003, 2—3, 24) picture taking acquired a certain authority greater that any verbal account in conveying the

horror of mass-produced death. This helps us explain why the atrocities Kelly documented but failed to photograph seem today remote: "these are memories that few care to claim because to remember, is more and more, not to recall a story but to be able to call up a picture" (Sontag 2003, 89). As the ethnic industry flourishes in the Totonac region, there is little recognition or acknowledgement of the violence that has affected those "ethnic" subjects inhabiting it. The *erasure* is evident in the sanitized imaginary that *indigenismo* produced and today continues to replicate itself.

Figure 2.14. *Vanilla*, 1947. Photo by Isabel Kelly. NAA Photo Lot 80-32.

Overall, Kelly's refusal to *make visible* through photography the terror and devastation that affected the Totonacs, which she encountered in the field, forces us, first, to ask *"what pictures and whose deaths are not being shown"* (Sontag 2003, 14) and second, to confront those intentionally constructed absences and the generative quality of such omissions. Kelly's concealment of violence, the manner is which she sanitized the field of vision, has been, after all, key for the development of the ethnic tourism industry in the region. The inexhaustibility of her collection of photographs—the ways in which the reproduction of the imagery she created has enabled and inspired new forms of ethno-commerce and ethno-entrepreneurism—points to the

novel configurations that can emerge around ruptures associated with silenced, though not necessarily imperceptible, forms of violence.

It was Gregorio, an old *vanillero* member of the *Kantiyan,* who brought this violence back during our informal conversations taking place not only at the theme park but also in the town of Papantla where we often met. He was one of the few elders from the *Kantiyan* who was willing to talk about "the evils" of vanilla and it was through him that I realized how the effects of past acts of violence associated with this product, namely the painful and troubling absence of family members and friends, keeps having an important bearing on his social and emotional life. "It was very sad to lose so many people," was the answer I got from him after asking about the old days of vanilla production. "Those who were murdered, were murdered not because they were bandits or bad people but simply because they were hard workers." No one seemed to care about these deaths as little was done to prevent them, he asserted. Gregorio remembers how back in the 1950s when vanilla growers like him were ready to sell their product and obtained cash money and a bottle of sherry for it, merchants assigned their armed *peones* to hide in the trails. "Their job," Gregorio added, "was to wait for us and kill us." According to Gregorio, this was a well-known fact—*un secreto a voces*—but the authorities did nothing to prevent it:

> …once a *vanillero* was murdered, his mourning wife was forced to sell land to merchants. So if you took the same trail back home you were not going to make it and your family would lose everything. I walked so many trails when I was a young man under those conditions always trying to find new paths, secure paths, to return home alive. Things remained like that until arms were lifted under the government of Ruiz Cortines (1952-1958) but by then I had already lost many loved ones—*muchos seres queridos*. Those merchants today are all dead, and I am happy they are.

Despite the fact that he was unable to prevent the deaths of family members and friends, Gregorio decided to do something in order to eradicate what he considered the source of the problem. What he saw and went through during his early years as a *vanillero,* he told me,

changed the way he saw life, and that is what explains why he decided to teach his descendants how immoral and malevolent greed could be. To this day, Gregorio regularly leaves cash on the dinner table at home hoping his sons and grandchildren will not take it, hoping they had learned to be satisfied with what they have.

Living "as" and "among" Ghosts

Despite the fact that we were assigned to work in different sections of the theme-park *Takilhsukut*, Eugenia and I became close friends with time. She worked in the "Vanilla House" where her job consisted of immersing tourists in the sensorial qualities of this "traditional" product grown in the area. The space was decorated with a series of black-and white photographs of the orchids—photos almost identical to those Kelly captured in the 1950s. Eugenia started to work in *Cumbre Tajín* 10 years ago. She began assisting one of her neighbors from Nuevo Ojital. Being the wife of a leader of a traditional music band already working at the theme-park, Eugenia's neighbor was able to get a job as a cook and invited those she knew from her community to help her out. With time, Eugenia became quite familiar with the diverse activities organized for the festival, and soon was asked to manage one of the *casas*. But her work at *Cumbre* is temporary, often starting in January and ending a few weeks after the closing of the festival. The rest of the year Eugenia devotes most of her time to producing "traditional crafts." The little sets of *volador* figurines she produces are either sold to tourists during the weekends in Tecolutla or at different tourist destinations within Mexico.

During a trip she took to Morelia, invited by her brother-in-law who is a *volador*, Eugenia took a picture of herself with her cellphone: all dressed-up like a *volador*. She often does that in order to look like part of the group and increase her chances for selling her figurines.

A few days after the performance of the group, she sent me the image. Despite the grainy character of the photograph that I received, I noticed the quality of the embroidered *traje* she was wearing. After a few months of fieldwork in Papantla I had come to recognize what my friend Victor calls a ritual garment: "the *traje* that *voladores* wear during an important event, the *traje* you design and make yourself, the *traje* that has been blessed." I assumed she had borrowed *the traje* from her brother-in-law. I soon, however, learned that the *traje* Eugenia was wearing belonged to her brother: it was a ritual piece rarely worn during the time that her brother was alive. I also learned that Eugenia's father had been a *volador*—"a very good one," she told me, "he was a *caporal.*" Her brother, in fact, learned the art of flying from him. My curiosity about Eugenia's ritual *traje*, inadvertently, also rendered visible the absence of both her father and brother and the circumstances around their death. The *traje*, I realized, binds Eugenia to these *voladres* across temporal distance preserving their material presence—a presence that impinges on Eugenia's life.

I learned that Eugenia's father died when she was still young—he was found murdered in Papantla, although the details about his death were never known. She only knows the body was found along one of the communal trails connecting Papantla to Reforma Escolín. Eugenia still remembers how she accompanied her mother and sisters to the hospital in Papantla a day after her dad went missing. The indifference that she and her family encountered from the hospital's staff during their regular visits is what she remembers the most. After visiting the hospital repeatedly, they came to believe that her dad was not there. It was not until the janitor of the hospital, a middle aged woman who approached them and asked them a few questions regarding the clothes her dad was wearing that they discovered he indeed was there. This woman took Eugenia and her family to the morgue. "My dad had been there for a week and nobody took the

time to tell us. It was so painful and I felt so angry." A few years later, Eugenia told me that she also lost her brother in a similar situation.

She ignores the exact circumstances that led to his death. With time I learned that, like many other young men in Papantla, Eugenia's brother stopped performing as a *volador* and instead, decided to join the army. Like many other young indigenous men, he saw in the Military not only a stable source of income but also a way to obtain formal and technical education that could eventually help him to get a more stable job. Shortly after being recruited he was deployed to Chiapas and unlike others, he did not take his family with him but he was hopeful he might marry someone he could meet in the towns around his assigned military base. Soon thereafter Eugenia's brother had to confront the Zapatista revolt, a war that, Eugenia reminded me, was fought between "*Indians"* in both sites. Unlike many, Eugenia's brother came back after he deserted the army a few years after the conflict started. He could not stay in Chiapas, Eugenia told me, but it was equally hard for him to return home.

According to Eugenia, once he returned from Chiapas her brother was never the same, "he acted as ghost," she said. [54] He never talked to her about what he saw or did during his time in the army. But he did tell her he was not going to work as a *volador* anymore. He explained to his family he felt something could happen if he flew again. He told them he lacked virtue. Eugenia's brother moved to Mexico City and started to make art crafts out of vanilla beans to be sold in different tourist destinations. His last trip, according to Eugenia, was to Chiapas where he was found dead. She and her sisters, however, were able to bring the corpse back home. There is a little altar for Eugenia's brother at her sister's house in Poza Rica, where Eugenia currently

[54] On how vast populations are subjected to conditions of life that confer upon them the status on living dead (ghosts) see: Mbembe (2003) and Butler (2006).

lives. Facing it, she told me she was committed to follow her brother's steps: she is not only learning how to fly but also dreams of joining the state police and, perhaps, the army one day.

Conclusion: The future belongs to ghosts

Shortly after I left Papantla, several groups of *voladores* led a protest against the administration of *Novotel*, a small hotel in Poza Rica. The staff had placed a sign in the hotel's main entrance prohibiting the entrance to both street vendors and *voladres* (see fig. 2.15). Shortly after this incident, the hotel apologized and assured costumers that the administration of the hotel "was proud of local cultural traditions." The petty incident, however, served as a strong reminder that despite post-revolutionary efforts to celebrate the "indigenous heritage" and sustain an emerging ethnic tourism industry, the violent disregard towards those considered *indios* persists—a fact that residents like Eugenia know very well.

Figure 2.15. "Entrance prohibited to rural vendors and voladores de Papantla." The image was published in the online news portal *El Universal,* http://www.eluniversalveracruz.com.mx/veracruzanos-personajes/2014/por-redaccion-negaron-entrada-a-voladores-de-papantla-hotel-se-disculpa-21020.html

During the post-revolutionary period, the Mexican intelligentsia began to rewrite its own scientific construction of society in an effort to facilitate national integration. In order to fulfill

this mission, they re-articulated old notions such as *mestizaje* and developed new ones like *indigenismo*, which exalted Mexico's great indigenous past and present and recognized their artistic and social achievements. Post-revolutionary intellectuals attributed a significant degree of novelty to this political project. Regardless of whether the intelligentsia embraced the new ideologies of *indigenismo*, linking Mexico's essence to indigenous culture, or *mestizaje*, celebrating racial and cultural mixing, the issue is that miscegenation and social improvement remained the basic goals of the Mexican post-revolutionary intellectual elite. Reformers did not abandon the evolutionary language and goals that define the 19th century and the political regime that the revolution sought to overthrow. There was, in fact, much continuity, much repetition. Thus, it is not surprising then that revisionist scholars question the originality and "revolutionary character" often attributed to the *indigenista* ideology and the imagery it generated. The aim of this chapter has been to reveal, through the lens of Derrida's hauntology, the ways in which "phantoms of the past" (Gotkowitz 2011, 38) namely nineteenth-century ideas around *mestizaje*, miscegenation, and social improvement, made it—through *indigenistas*'s cameras—into what, at the time, was considered a new discourse and a new visual aesthetic (Guning 2013, 207-244). The medium of photography, I suggest, allowed the *displacement* of old racial notions and rendered them *visible* in what was considered a new discourse and a new visual aesthetic. Moreover, in this chapter I examined a series of image-iterations in an effort to examine the *generative* capacities that Kelly's photographs possess. Drawing on my ethnographic work in Papantla and Tajín, I examined the role that the image of the *volador*—a figure photographed extensively during the post-revolution—has played in the construction of corporate subjectivities and an ethnic-entrepreneurial project. My attention to these iterations, seem to align with Derrida's unconditional appreciation of the figure of ghost. Yet, I believe that

his suggestion that ghosts should remain and be lived with in an opening and welcoming relationality rather than being expelled requires qualification—especially if we acknowledge, as I have tried to do in this chapter, the important role that violence plays in enabling both the presence and return of a ghost. Perhaps the solution, as Abraham and Torok (1994) suggest, is unveiling the violence in order to exorcize it by rendering it visible. We should engage in this undertaking, writes Rand (1994, 167), not because we may want to prevent ghosts from coming back, but because if violence remains unsuspected, it will continue to lead a devastating effect on many—especially those who were once considered racially inferior and who continue to be disregarded today despite being culturally valued.

CHAPTER THREE

MODERNIST RUINS, FRAGMENTED DEBRIS: THE MAKING AND UNMAKING OF MONUMENTALITY IN TAJÍN

Introduction

Figure 3.1. *Desmonte* or the clearing of great mounds of their cover of natural vegetation. Archivo Técnico del Instituto Nacional de Antropológia e Historia (INAH), Dirección de Monumentos, Ignacio Marquina, "Informe de los trabajos de conservación de la Pirámide del Tajín, en Papantla, Ver." Mexico, D.F., a 22 de junio de 1934.

Figure 3.2. *Desmonte* or the clearing of great mounds of their cover of natural vegetation. Archivo Técnico del Instituto Nacional de Antropológia e Historia (INAH), Dirección de Monumentos, Ignacio Marquina, "Informe de los trabajos de conservación de la Pirámide del Tajín, en Papantla, Ver." Mexico, D.F., a 22 de junio de 1934.

In March 1929, topographer Agustín García Vega visited the warm and humid terrain of the lowland basin of the Tecolutla River. He was commissioned by Ignacio Marquina, head of

the *Dirección de Monumentos Prehispánicos* (Office of Pre-Hispanic Monuments), to begin reconstruction of a pre-Hispanic monument located in the lands of what was once Lot 19 of the ex-cantón of Papantla, only a few miles away from the recently created settlement of Tajín.[55] It was Diego Ruíz who first identified this pre-Hispanic building back in 1785 while crossing the area looking for illegal tobacco plantations.[56] Since then, and all through the nineteenth and early twentieth-century, this four-sided structure with its distinctive seven tiers, rows of niches, and its broad staircase on the east façade had become an iconic feature of Mexico's cultural landscape.[57] Yet, what García Vega found in the field differed greatly from those intact, and solitary spaces reproduced in the words and images of well-known foreign and Mexican geographers, explorers, and scholars. Scattered through the tropical forest covering the structure, García Vega encountered Totonac *milpas* and vanilla plantations in the *acahuales*—an indication that the indigenous population inhabiting the area since the colonial period still owned and worked in the land surrounding the pyramid. They were, according to García-Vega's own account, "the legitimate land owners."[58]

Despite initial hostility and suspicion on the part of locals toward García Vega's presence—a feeling probably animated, on the one hand, by the violent land disentailment process that had affected the region in the late 19th century and, on the other, by the recent

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[55] The *fundo legal*, following Kelly and Palerm (1950, 58), was set aside during the 1876 land survey. Nevertheless, the actual settlement of the *solares* was not general until 1928.

[56] Diego Ruíz reported his discovery in the *Gazeta de Mexico*, 12 July 1785; the account was later reprinted in *Diccionario Universal de Historia y Geografia*, Mexico, 1P53-56, vol. X, pp. 12G121.

[57] Several scholars have suggested that this preoccupation with "ruins" and their preservation is a recent product of modernity closely associated with the nationalist projects of the 19th century. See Lowenthal 1985, Nora 1996, and Gordillo 2009. For a critique of this process, see Benjamin 1999, Stoler 2014, and Gordillo 2014. Scholars that have analyzed the role of antiquity and pre-Hispanic history in the making of the Mexican nation, especially in the 19th century, include Villoro 1950; Brading 2001,1985; Tenenbaum 1994; Widdifield 1996; Tenorio Trillo 1996; Florescano 2005; Earle 2008; Bueno 2004, 2010; Rutsch 2007; López Caballero 2008; De León 2008; and Kennedy 2011.

[58] Archivo Técnico del Instituto Nacional de Antropológia e Historia (INAH), Dirección de Monumentos, Ignacio Marquina, "Informe de los trabajos de conservación de la Pirámide del Tajín, en Papantla, Ver." Mexico, D.F., a 22 de junio de 1934.

arrival of oil entrepreneurs in the area—many locals collaborated with him during the daunting task of clear-cutting the rainforest.[59] Nevertheless, García Vega complained that Totonacs seemed more interested in obtaining the cut wood for their personal use than in securing the physical integrity of the pre-Hispanic structure—an attitude that García Vega found perplexing. In fact, this banal incident, which took place early during his fieldwork, would make him reflect on the need to expropriate at least thirty-two hectares following the Law of Monuments of 1897.[60] It was imperative, he wrote, to *protect* the pyramid, which was already in a state of abandonment and decay, from potential damage caused by those living near it.[61]

Figure 3.3. Expedition to the ruins undertaken by members of the elite in Papantla, 1926. Photo by Israel Tellez, Private collection of Manuel Buil Güemes.

[59] By 1927, a number of companies owned by American Roscoe B Guither (Papantla Oil company, Texas Oil Company, and La Tototnaca S.A Compañía Mexicana de Petróleo el Tajín) had arrived in the area and began to contribute to the active land market in the region. By 1929, there were 102 *actas of compra-venta*. See Kourí 2004, 282-283 and Brizuela 1994.

[60] In 1868, President Benito Juárez codified the cultural heritage of the nation in the Ley General de Bienes Nacionales, which included castles, forts, historic cities, weapons storehouses, and other buildings that through sale, donation, or some other manner became national property. This was broadened during the *Porfiriato* by the law of 11 May 1897, which for the first time declared national custodianship over all immovable heritage properties (muebles inmuebles) or monuments. For a broader discussion on this legislative genealogy, see Bueno 2004; Breglia 2006; Lombardo de la Ruiz and Solís Vicarte 1988.

[61] The site is today believed to have been developed between AD 800 and 1200 following classic Mesoamerican chronology, which was characterized by the development of urban centers.

Judging by the photographs that García Vega conserved (Fig. 3.4, 3.5), the pyramid's recessed niches had crumbled, the balustrades on each side of the stairway were uneven or incomplete, its outward-projecting cornices were severely damaged.[62] He describes how several "cracks and deep wholes" caused "by the curiosity of sporadic visitors," had fractured the temple. Likewise, he reported how "nearby residents had removed several stones of considerable size either to build their roads or decorate their buildings."[63] "Luckily," García Vega added, "the governments of the last couple of years, conscious of their duty, have started to look after *our* ancient monuments, and little by little, we will *attend* and *care* for each of our great pre-Hispanic oeuvres" (my emphasis added).[64]

At the most fundamental level, restoring an ancient monument like the pyramid of Tajín meant "recuperating" the pyramid's "original aspect." But in order to do so, García Vega had to deal, first, not only with the lack of infrastructure, which made the transportation of materials and debris almost impossible, but also with the shortage of potable water and the continuous winter rains.[65] Likewise, finding a "competent workforce" turned out to be difficult. His crew of

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[62] These images are attached to his report. Archivo Técnico del Instituto Nacional de Antropológia e Historia (INAH), Dirección de Monumentos, Ignacio Marquina, "Informe de los trabajos de conservación de la Pirámide del Tajín, en Papantla, Ver." Mexico, D.F., a 22 de junio de 1934.

[63] Archivo Técnico del Instituto Nacional de Antropológia e Historia (INAH), Dirección de Monumentos, Ignacio Marquina, "Informe de los trabajos de conservación de la Pirámide del Tajín, en Papantla, Ver." Mexico, D.F., a 22 de junio de 1934.

[64] Archivo Técnico del Instituto Nacional de Antropológia e Historia (INAH), Dirección de Monumentos, Ignacio Marquina, "Informe de los trabajos de conservación de la Pirámide del Tajín, en Papantla, Ver." Mexico, D.F., a 22 de junio de 1934. On the incorporation of the pre-Hispanic past as the foundation of national history, a subject to which this article now turns, see Brading 1984; 2001.

[65] García Vega's team also found relief sculptures in each side of the main stairway. It was Enrique Palacios who drew the sculpted figures in order to find their meaning (1934). During subsequent seasons, Wilfrido Du Solier and Dr. Mateo Saldaña, from the National Museum, continued with the documentation of the sculptures and conducted the first stratigraphic study of the site. Throughout the long period of intense reconstruction that did not officially concluded until 2000, archaeologists have intervened in the decay of several buildings besides the main pyramid. Yet it has been the pyramid that has required the most work due to its fragile condition as well as the amount of destruction that, ironically, its reconstruction has generated.

thirty men did not fulfill his expectations: “I was not expecting locals to have the experience and knowledge that is required to perform archaeological work,” he wrote in his report, “but the Indians do not even master their own crafts.” García Vega characterized their work as “inadequate and unprofessional.” Nevertheless, “with patience and good will,” he added, he was able to point them in the right direction.”

Figure 3.4. Depicting the pyramid’s condition before restoration work. April 2nd 1934. Archivo Técnico del Instituto Nacional de Antropológia e Historia (INAH), Dirección de Monumentos, Ignacio Marquina, Informe de los trabajos de conservación de la Pirámide del Tajín, en Papantla, Ver.

Figure 3.5. The pyramid’s condition after restoration work. Photo by García Vega added to his report. Archivo Técnico del Instituto Nacional de Antropológia e Historia (INAH), Dirección de Monumentos, Ignacio Marquina, Informe de los trabajos de conservación de la Pirámide del Tajín, en Papantla, Ver.

García Vega and his crew began reversing the process of decay by removing the accumulated rubble resulting from the collapse of the upper niches of the structure with the help

of a rustic and improvised crane and by reassembling, straightening, and leveling those still remaining decorative elements. It was through this process that García Vega attempted to create a space not only cordoned off from the flow of time but whose effects on the present and envisioned future could be carefully controlled through the handling of its main architectonic and social components. Ironically, the broken pieces that allowed for this possibility also seemed to resist it: the more García Vega rebuilt, the more damage he found and created. The project proved to be more ambitious than he imagined. After four fruitless field seasons, García Vega submitted his last report in 1938 amid a brief revival of social revolution under populist Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) and waited for his replacement. The *making of* monumentality proved to be anything but the quick and easy triumph of state ideology and scientific practice over material forms and those living around them.

The excavation and reconstruction of the archaeological sites and monuments of the pre-Hispanic past, in fact, constituted key features in the cultural repertoire of Mexican nationalism during the reconstruction period first under the government of Carranza (1917-1920) and then under Obregón (1920-1924) and Calles (1924-1928). Building a new state after all involved not only a series of economic and political reforms but also the fostering of a set of cultural values and an official version of history.[66] By 1917, Manuel Gamio, one of the prominent intellectual figures who led this campaign, had not only provided the ideological basis for the constitution of a new nation through the publication of *Forjando Patria* but through his archaeological work in

[66] Despite Gamio's revolutionary rhetoric, the *Porfiriato*, as Bueno has demonstrated (2009) brought concerted efforts to gather, preserve, and display the remains of the pre-Hispanic past. In fact Earle's study of the use of the pre-Hispanic past by members of the national elite from 1810 to 1910 reveals how much post-revolutionary notions about the indigenous past relied on previous nationalist projects. Yet as many scholars have pointed out, not all peoples and their remains were considered worthy of celebration, collection, or study. Non-sedentary peoples were often ignored or perceived as threats (Craib 2004). Moreover, an Aztec-center vision surfaced as Bueno (2009) and Tenorio-Trillo (1999) argue in written accounts as well as on collection, excavation and exhibition practices. These elements that characterized the elite view of the past during the *Porfiriato*, were still discernable in the post-revolutionary period.

the Central Valleys (Teotihuacán) had initiated what for historian D. Brading (2001, 526) "was to become a distinctive branch of national industry, the reconstruction of ancient monuments and their sites." The concreteness, endurance, and alleged monumentality of ancient objects and buildings, had long been favored by nationalist Mexican elites during the 19th century and this valorization continued during the post-revolutionary period as it could help the political class achieve one of the key aims of the revolution: "to forge," as Manuel Gamio famously put it, a "powerful country and coherent and defined nationality" (Gamio 1960 [1916], 183). García Vega's presence in the lowlands of Veracruz is part of this nationalist effort to reconstruct the past and, as president Calles (1924-1928) put it, to "uproot prejudices, and form the new national soul."[67]

Scholars of Mexican post-revolutionary nationalism have considered the heightened *ideological* importance that antiquity and its remains acquired for the elites in the aftermath of the Mexican revolution (Villoro, Brading 2001, Lomnitz 2001; Florescano 2005, Caballero 2008, Earle 2006). In particular, they have emphasized the role that the emerging discipline of archaeology played in substantiating elite notions of nationhood and territoriality by creating *the fact* of a modern nation with prestigious and ancient roots (Earle 2006; Bueno 2010) through the emergence of historical landscapes (such as Tajín). Less attention, however, has been paid to archaeological practice (and its unintended residues) despite the fact that, as García Vega's reports demonstrate, the *making* of monumentality took place *on the ground* through contested, troublesome, and lengthy social, technical and legal interventions.[68]

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[67] Quoted in Lorenzo Meyer, Rafael Segovia, and Alejandra Lajous, *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, 1928-1934 Los inicios de la institucionalización* (Mexico City: El Colegio de Mexico, 1978), 178.

[68] This cannot be said about the making of monumentality and *patrimonio* during the *Porfiriato*. The work of Bueno (2010a; 2010b) is a good example of an approach that focuses on the making of nationalism through archaeological practice. See also Rutsch 2007; Kennedy 2011; and the classic work of Tenorio Trillo 1996. For the post-revolutionary period the work of Rozental (2012; 2014) is also

Monumentality, I argue, when viewed less as a stable, completed, and successful ideological *product* and more as a precarious, fragmented, and unfinished *form,* reveals not only the veiled fragility sustaining the state's enduring efforts to transform both rural landscapes and societies under the tutelage of experts but also the traces of the destruction that the post-revolutionary state has enabled in this region through a long series of archaeological interventions. Accordingly, in this chapter I consider *monumentality*, following Rancière (2004, 9), as a distinctive social and material (re)arrangement that has produced a regime of perceptibility by privileging totality, unity, containment and wholeness. The central question for Rancière (2004, 82)—a question that also animates this chapter—concerns the ways in which the making and unmaking of such hierarchical arrangements achieves a political effect by rendering particular thoughts, voices, things, and actions visible while rendering others invisible. As the critical tradition of deconstruction has firmly pointed out, forms that seek to achieve unity and wholeness depend for their own coherence on violent acts of expulsion and abjections. Yet these efforts to dominate the plurality and heterogeneity of social and material arrangements are often contested such that we must refocus our attention on the relation between, on the one hand, what is rendered visible—that which properly belongs or could be accommodated in enclosed wholes—and, on the other, what remains invisible—or located externally or in fragmented form.

In what follows, then, I approach the making and unmaking of monumentality not by presenting it as a totalizing and seamless form. Instead, I seek to evoke a counter image: that of monumentality as a disjointed project of fragment-accumulation. My focus is on the broken

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relevant in this regard. She focuses on the making of *patrimonio* through an analysis of the relocation and later iterations of Tlaloc, a monumental stone monolith extracted form the town of Coatlinchan in 1964 in order to be relocated in Mexico's City's National Anthropology Museum. Her work in this regard is different form other studies of Mexican *patrimonio* (or heritage) that, despite pointing to monumentality's ambivalence (ex Breglia 2006), seem to take monumentality as a given, a fact, a finished product. My work, not unlike Rozental's, is part of an effort to question such notions and approaches to monumentality and study it, instead, through its constitutive fragments.

traces, inherent silences, and exclusions accumulated in several written sources as well as in the actual lived space. By bringing these seemingly discontinuous acts of imagining, documenting, and excavating as well as everyday obstacles and conflicts that have gone into the construction and destruction of Tajín, I seek to reveal the fabricated and incomplete quality of monumental post-revolutionary forms as well as the problematic (in)visibilities that they have entailed in the region. Thus, the first two sections seek to set the stage for the post-revolutionary ruin-making project in Tajín by discussing how the pyramid was represented in the 19th century. In the first section, I look at the way in which García Cubas, one of Mexico's most prominent geographers and cartographers of the period, mobilized a fabricated image of the old pyramid of Papantla in his celebrated *carta general*. I emphasize the ways in which he intentionally obscured the ruins' fragmentation and fragility in order to communicate a sense of stability, historical precedent, and grandeur in the aftermath of war. This particular cartographic representation of the pyramid deserves particular attention insofar as it turned into a *model of* monumentality that subsequent intellectual figures would attempt to document and reconstruct. The following section looks at a photograph of the pyramid of Papantla, which was a product of an expedition to northern Veracruz lead by Francisco del Paso y Troncoso, an important Porfirian scholar of Mexican antiquity. I discuss how the image also served Porfirians's appeal to national unity and solidity. Yet a closer look to the social context of the image production allows us to question these "ideal views" of the nation as local society, just like the fragments composing the pyramid was anything but unified at this time. Next, I look at the fragility sustaining the post-revolutionary period of ruin reconstruction initiated during *Cardenismo* in order to discuss how the prevalence of decay in the site was not the only source of instability in Tajín. As the preservation project of The National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) unfolded in Tajín, a transformation

in land use and tenure was imposed in the region. Thus the next section bring into view the visible care that state archaeologists exhibited towards the ruins in the following decades with the obscured disregard towards the population residing in the area. I do that by juxtaposing the most successful strategies to stabilize the main pyramid of Tajín along with the somatometric studies conducted among the site's workers as well as with the state's decision to expand the site's borders despite its negative effects for locals. I conclude that the state project of conservation has entailed the intrusion into the physical and personal space of those inhabiting this region. Finally, the last two sections of this chapter attempt to take the reader through the current geography of despair that the ruin-making has left in this area—an "ecology of remains" (Rao 2014, 316) that continues to play an active role in the politics of the present and the expectation of the future. I look at current conflicts among residents of Tajín and the INAH over the control of a plot of land located at the borders of the archaeological site. I illustrate how these residents, by pointing to the existence of broken fragments—not ruins—have questioned the alleged positivity of the site by rendering visible the destruction that its *making* has created. A destruction that has unsettled not only the materiality of the space but also the relations of sociality it articulates. Finally, in the last section, I focus on how, through an eco-tourism project attempting to render that which lies beyond the ruins of Tajín visible, the residents of San Antonio Ojital seek to recreate wholeness and meaning in the aftermath of displacement. I also discuss how, for the members of San Antonio, their future expectations for change and success—for achieving visibility—seemed often frustrated and conditioned by the same disregard that contributed to their relocation.

Invisible Fragments: García Cubas and his Carta General

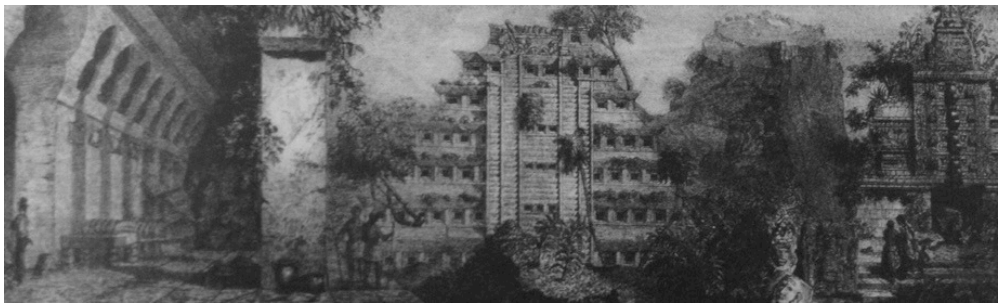

Figure 3.6. The Pyramid of Papantla. Detail from Garcia Cubas, *Carta general de la República Mexicana*. Photographed by Carmen Piña. Image reproduced in Craib's *Historical Geographies* (2011, 154).

In the aftermath of the Mexican American War of 1848, national mapping projects acquired a heightened importance for the members of the *Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística* (SMGE), geographers and cartographers deeply invested in reconstructing the nation through a coherent visual projection (Craib 2004, 20; Carrera 2011, 51). By 1858, Antonio García Cubas had become one of Mexico's most respected figures involved in creating a faithful cartographic representation of the territory of the young republic (Craib 2004, 31).[69] The piece that earned him national recognition among the members of the Liberal government was his *Carta General* of 1857, a modified version of which appeared in his *Atlas geográfico, estadístico, e histórico de la República, Mexicana* the following year. Its success depended in large part on context: it was published during a tumultuous time when major political reforms were promulgated by liberals and there was much civil strife in Mexico as a result of the *Reforma* movement. In the introduction, García Cubas succinctly describes the main goal of his Atlas, which clearly illustrates the patriotic quality of his endeavor:

> The principal objective with which I have structured this present Atlas is to give recognition to this beautiful country so rich in natural products. The lack of maps and geographical information has been one of the obstacles for the realization of great projects. Well- known country, the projects of colonization, those of [building] roads,

[69] On the life and work of García Cubas, see Carrera (2011).

> those of rich and abundant mines that we possess, those of agriculture and many others, will give the result of prosperity which the vows of all Mexicans ought to aspire to (Passage cited in Carrera 2011, 149).

The map's favorable reception responded, then, in part to the fact that maps were conceived as important technical solutions to the regulatory needs of the emerging state. Without a national map, the government could hardly begin to carry out the desired political reorganization of the territory, enforce the project of colonization, buttress capitalist development, or begin the process of land disentailment (Craib 2004, 22; 2011, 54). Maps in other words, were not only needed to represent the reality but to transform it.

Yet, as Craib (2004, 31) persuasively argues, the power and impact of García Cubas' *carta general* can only partially be explained with reference to its role as a pivotal tool of statecraft. Beyond its instrumental value, this national map exemplified a "new nationalist sensibility" (Craib 2004, 23) insofar as it not only offered a vision of Mexico's new geography with its shrunken territorial dimensions but also of its *history*.[70] Through its elaborated lithographic images, García Cuba's *carta general* "connected the cartographic and abstract space of the grid to a place that could be visualized or imagined" (Craib 2004, 35). On the top border of the map sheet, the viewer encounters *what had become* Mexico's iconic natural and cultural landscapes (Craib 2011, 154). On the left side, one finds a series of geographical locales from the central corridor between the port of Veracruz to the central valleys, "a foundational route" in Mexican national history since most visitors, beginning with Cortés, passed through it (Craib 2011, 154). This includes the Organos de Actopan, Iztaccíhuatl volcano, Cofre de Perote, Popocatépetl volcano, Montañas de Jacal, Orizaba, and Cascada de Regla. On the other hand, the

[70] As Carrera (2011) argues, García Cubas' maps projects ahave complex origins and are highly interconnected to other nineteenth-century texts and images. Similarly, his work responded to both mapping practices of earlier centuries and nineteenth-century technologies and processes of visual reproduction (lithography, daguerreotype, photography) as well as methods of display (albums, museums, exhibitions, world fairs).

image of the right side, which is what concerns me here, illustrates the pre-Hispanic ruins of Palenque, Mitla, Uxmal, and in the center, the pyramid of Papantla.

This ruined landscape decorating García Cubas' *carta* reveals the increasing reliance upon the pre-Columbian past to improve Mexico's national image and fuel patriotic sentiment. In fact, the pre-conquest period was a latent element of nationalist history by midcentury.[71] Even if often conceived as an ancient preamble to the colonial and independent eras, the pre-conquest past was generally presented in historical writings as a time of culture and civilization, a time that gave the nation a deep history comparable to that possessed by Europe.[72] But here it is important to mention that in order to elevate Mexico's cultural status, pre-Hispanic ruined landscapes needed to be depicted in specific ways, namely, as credible yet awe-inspiring places. This was a visual effect that García Cubas achieved through his particular cartographic routine. Not unlike his territorial delineations, the images he produced were the outcome of a comparative analysis of existing and reliable sources rather than field surveys (Craib 2004, 32,33; Carrera 2011, 156). This meant the consolidation and fusion of disparate lithographic images and published words of travelers from earlier centuries into an emerging visual representation of Mexico's past and present.

In the case of the pyramid of Papantla, this consolidation would have entailed an examination of Diego Ruíz's report of his discovery of the monument in the *Gazeta de Mexico* back in 1785, which also became the basis of Pedro Marquez's essay *Due antichi monumenti* published in Rome1804. Similarly, García Cubas had to have examined Alexander Von Humboldt's *Essai politique sur le royaume de la Nouvelle-Espagne*, published six years later, in Paris as well as Karl Nebel's series of drawings included in his *Voyage pittoresque et*

[71] See Earle (2006, 100-132).
[72] For a detailed discussion of the place that the pre-Columbian era occupied in the patriotic histories of Spanish America, see Earle (2006, 100-132). See also Craib (2004, 36); Villoro (1950).

archéologique dans la partie la plus intéressante du Mexique, also published in Paris but not until 1836. Finally, an important and familiar source that García Cubas may have consulted—even as it was in preparation—was Bausa'a *Bosquejo geográfico y estadístico de Papantla*, which appeared in 1857 in the SGME's *Boletín*.[73] The fabricated views of the ruins of Papantla, therefore, would have resulted from the *unification* of different written and visual elements into a single and stable whole that resolved any deviation or fragmentation. Yet, unification was not only achieved by collapsing different sources into a single frame but by giving the ruins a solidity and integrity that they certainly lacked in material terms but that nevertheless was attributed to them in order to communicate a sense of stability, historical precedent, and grandeur.[74]

The pyramid of Papantla is in fact depicted in a remarkable condition with all its constitutive parts and decorative elements (see fig. 3.4).[75] Each of the pyramid's seven levels, for instance, is symmetrically placed, its characteristic niches, are perfectly aligned and an imposing main stairway exhibits all its constitutive blocks. This strategy was not an innocent aesthetic

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[73] Diego Ruíz reported his discovery in the *Gazeta de Mexico*, 12 July 1785; the account was later reprinted in *Diccionario Universal de Historia y Geografia*, Mexico, 1P53-56, vol. X, pp. 12G121. and became the basis of Pedro Marquez's essay *Due antichi monumenti*, Rome, 1804. In 1811, Alexander Von Humboldt in his *Essai politique sur le royaume de la Nouvelle-Espagne*, Paris, 1811, vol. 11, pp. 345-343, says that Guillermo Dupaix visited the ruin and published an essay describing the site. In 1836, Karl Nebel's published a series of drawings in *Voyage pittoresque et archeologique dans la partie la plus interessante du Mexique*, Paris. A report made in 1845 by J. M. Bausa, subsequently appeared in *Bosquejo geografico y estadistico del Partido de Papantla*, SOC.Mex. Geog., Boletin vol. V, 1857, pp. 374-426. Between 1891 and 1892, Francisco del Paso y Troncoso led an expedition and under his leadership Romero and Castillo produced the first maps. They were not published until 1912 as *Las Ruinas de Cempoala y del Templo del Tajín.* Teobert Maler. J. W. Fewkes visited the pyramid and published a photograph in 1907 in *Certain Antiquities of Eastern Mexico*, BAE-B 25, Washington. Sculptures from the main pyramid can also be found in Edward Seler's *Eine Steinfigur aus der Sierra von Zacatlán*, Boas Anniversary Volume, New York, 1906, pp. 299-305.

[74] On the use of the pre-hispanic material culture in the making of the Mexican nation during this period, see Villoro 1996; Earle 2006, López Caballero 2008; Brading 1985; Florescano 2005.

[75] Here, my reading of this image differs slightly from the one offered by Craib (2011, 155; 2004, 38) who argues that the ruins, as "crumbling structures," evoked fragility. In my reading, it is their *imagined* stability and pristine condition that García Cubas sought to emphasize.

choice but a conscious effort to create a nationalist visual narrative for a rising yet struggling sovereign nation. We must take into account that through his life García Cubas witnessed a series of nation-building efforts that failed: the United States' invasion and occupation of Mexico and the subsequent loss of territory under the dictatorship of Santa Anna as well as the rise of Benito Júarez and the ensuing war (18858-60) that challenged his proposed social and economic reforms.[76] Monumentality in this context became an important component of the "emerging scopic regime" (Carrera 2011, 17-18) that García Cubas fabricated—a regime that sought to present a coherent and rooted entity ultimately called Mexico by articulating a set of crumbling stones and making them speak in the recognizable modern idiom of ruination.

Figure 3.7. Karl Nebel's "La pirámide de Papantla" published in *Voyage pittoresque et archeologique dans la partie la plus interessante du Mexique*, The British Library Board, Paris, 1836.

The understanding of Mexico's official history that emerged during the *Porfiriato* (1876-1911) hence relied more firmly upon pre-Hispanic monumentality. On the one hand, the cartographic *images* produced by figures like García Cubas—images that "hung in the halls of

[76] In the following years, García Cubas would witness the French occupation under Maximilian and its defeat (1863–67), the return of Benito Juárez and the subsequent authoritarian government of Porfirio Díaz (1876–
1911).

power in Mexico City as well as on the walls of classrooms," images that "illustrated the pages of national histories" and that were also "exported to foreign countries"—retained their powerful effect as they turned into *models of* the monumentality that topographers and archaeologists would need to fabricate in the following decades (Craib 2004, 28). The nationalist effort to display pre-Columbian artifacts and monuments in order to ground, differentiate, and glorify the nation, thus, would no longer be completed entirely on the tables of cartographers but rather very much too in the field. During this period, the intellectual and political elite would continue to consolidate, by rendering fragmentation between the nation and its imagined past invisible.[77]

Documenting the Ruins: La Comisión Científica

Shortly after becoming the director of the National Museum in 1889, Francisco del Paso y Troncoso, a prominent scholar of Mexican antiquity during the Porfiriato, received an invitation from the Spanish Court to participate in the Historical-American Exhibition to be held in Madrid in October 1892, an event intended to commemorate the fourth centennial of the discovery of America.[78] Mexico's participation in the exhibition was far from extraordinary. As with the rest of the Spanish-American republics, Mexico commonly participated in international world fairs. For elites, these events were, after all, important venues for attracting commercial investment and immigration as well as sites to display national identity and history (Tenorio Trillo 1996; Earle 2006, 147).[79] Like many other Porfirian intellectuals, del Paso y Troncoso

[77] History and memory as many scholars have argued do not exist only in texts. See Nora 1989; Gastón Gordillo 2014; Benjamin 1968; Trouillot 1995; Connerton, 1989; Halbwachs, 1992. On the making of Mexican *patrimonio* see: Earle 2006; López Caballero 2008; Tenorio Trillo 1998, 1996; Bueno 2010; Rozental 2014.
[78] On Francisco del Paso y Troncoso, see De la Torre Villar 2003.
[79] The celebration of the pre-Hispanic past during the *Porfiriato* was illustrated by the publication of important historical writings such as Vicente Riva Palacios's *México a través de los siglos*, a five volume work that forged a single history out of different phases in the Mexican past, beginning with antiquity as

believed in the importance of recanting the reigning European image of Mexico as a land of permanent disorder and backwardness. Instead, the intellectual elite sought to illustrate the culture and history of a modern nation in ways that could anchor the *Porfirian* regime and that could testify to its success and economic potential (Tenorio Trillo 1996).

It was partly in response to this need to assert the nation that Pre-Columbian antiquity became, during the Porfiriato, an inherent part of Mexico's official history and therefore a constitutive element of national identity. As historian Cristina Bueno (2010) has demonstrated, the Porfirian regime embarked on a mission to gather, preserve, and display the most impressive and monumental remains of the pre-Hispanic past (Bueno 2010, 217). The government "placed guards at ruins, strengthened federal legislation over artifacts and sites, established the first agency exclusively for protecting ancient monuments (*Inspección General de Monumentos Arqueológicos de la República*) and gave unprecedented support to Mexico City's National Museum" (Bueno 2010a, 213). But taking charge of the past, Bueno (2010b, 57) adds, presented the nation with additional benefits as it provided it with "a coveted patina of being scientific and modern." Not unlike other "civilized" countries, Mexico began to devote resources to the conservation and study of antiquity. Archaeology, in this context, became the national science—the only discipline, according to Justo Sierra, that could give Mexico "personality in the scientific world" (cited in Bueno 2010b, 57). Due to the importance that the study of antiquity had acquired, it is unsurprising that del Paso y Troncoso was designated the president of the Mexican Commission for the Historical –American Exhibition and he turned to the National

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well by the government's concerted effort to make tangible such a historic vision through concrete spaces and specific objects (Bueno 2009). It was Alfredo Chavero who wrote the first volume on he Indian past. On *México a través de los siglos*, see Tenorio-Trillo 1996; Florescano 2005, 205-10. On the "*indigenismo* of the Porfiriato" see: Bueno 2009; Earle 2008; 2010; Rutsch 2007; López Caballero 2008; De León 2008; Kennedy 2011; Tenorio Trillo 1996; Brading 2001,1985; Tenenbaum 1994; Widdifield 1996; 6; Florescano 2005; Villoro 1996.

Museum's collection to look for those objects that could better represent the "ideal views of the nations" (Tenorio Trillo 1996, 75).

Del Paso y Troncoso selected a series of manuscripts or codices—objects he knew best—as well as several photographs of the National Museum's acclaimed "Monolith Gallery" (Casanova 2008 55-92). Additionally, he requested that state governors contribute to the exhibition with photographs of "ruins" and "indigenous types" of their own territories (Casanova 2008 55-92). The collected visual material, however, did not suffice. Consequently, President Díaz ordered del Paso y Troncoso to constitute a *Comisión Exploradora* in August 1890, which, in turn, appointed four sub-commissions to travel across different geographical regions in order to produce maps, drawings, and photographs that could showcase the variety of "the indigenous nationalities." By focusing on diversity, the initiative departed from the Aztec-centered vision that had characterized the recent extravagant Paris World Fair Exposition of 1889 (Tenorio Trillo 1998; De León 2008; Bueno 2010) and, more generally, the elite view of the past. Attempting to portray a more comprehensive vision of the nation's past, the *Comisión Exploradora* visited the north of the country during a period of eight months to explore the land of the Tarahumaras; a different team travelled to the southern states of Chiapas and Tabasco; a third unit explored the region of San Luis Potosi to obtain information about the Pame people; finally, a team led by del Paso y Troncoso himself departed to the coast of Veracruz, del Paso y Troncoso's native state (Galindo y Villa 1911; Casanova 2008 55-92). Along with Del Paso y Troncoso came the photographer Rafael García, as well as several military men: Captain Pedro Pablo Romero, Lieutenant Fernando Castillo, and eight *zapadores or* soldiers. Four more *zapadores* as well as Captain Julián Pacheco would join the original team shortly after they sailed from the port of Veracruz in the *cañonero Independenci*a to the ancient city of Cempoala. Selecting this

destination was not random choice: "the first indigenous city to have welcomed the fortunate leader of the Conquest, Cempoala, del Paso y Troncoso believed, would awaken deep historical memories" (Galindo y Villa 1911, XCVII). The team, however, ended by covering a broader area of the coast that allowed them to photograph and map the location of notable sites and ruins. Among the vestiges they visited was the pyramid located in Lot 19, Ojital y Potrero, in Papantla.[80]

Figure 3.8. Pirámide de los Nichos, Rafael García, *Comisión Científica Exploradora*, Papantla, Veracruz, March 1891. Inv. 418873, SINAFO-INAH.

Taken by Garcías's large format camera, this photograph of the pyramid of Papantla is telling for what it reveals as much as for what it obscures. First, we are confronted with the imposing dimensions of the structure, an effect enhanced by the inclusion of several human figures whose role went beyond that of posing and included the clearance of the dense rainforest that covered the monument. The simple removal of the overgrown land—a task that needed to be

[80] In this regard, del Paso y Troncoso's approach differed only slightly from the more extractive practices of other intellectual and scientific figures working in the field. Perhaps the most important figure of the time was Leopoldo Batres who, as director of the *Inspección y Conservacíon de Monumentos Arqueológicos de la República Méxicana,* led the transfer of pre-Hispanic objects from rural communities to the National Museum (Bueno 2010). Unlike Batres, del Paso y Troncoso seemed to be more concerned with the practice of documenting rather than collecting, which also explains his reliance on the medium photography. On Batres and his work as director of the *Inspección General de Monumentos Arqueológicos de la República*, see Bueno 2010.

undertaken in order to render the ruins visible—points to the fabricated quality of García's shot. The constructed nature of the image is also illustrated by the careful selection of that which was photographed. García carefully selected the west façade of the monument because it exhibited a better condition than the eastern one, which was adorned at the time by a decaying and crumbling stairway that little resembled that depicted in García Cubas' *carta general*. The western façade, in short, despite its eroding surface, better represented a standing and complete structure suitable for casting ancient history in the best possible shape and light. This was the representation that better served Porfirians's appeal to national unity and solidity—an image that was necessary to uphold the integrity of the nation against its impending fragmentation. Ironically, a closer look at the social conflicts unraveling in the immediate area surrounding the pyramid exhibit the illusory nature of such aspirations. Not unlike the fragments composing the pyramid, the local population was anything but unified at the time.

As del Paso y Troncoso's team photographed and mapped the ancient ruins of Papantla, local indigenous Totonac farmers, foreign merchants, and local bureaucrats were bound in a violent struggle. These rebellions were not the result of a straightforward local resistance to the Porfirian process of economic and social transformation but the outcome of its deep implication in it. Prior to the ascendancy of the local vanilla economy in the 1870s, Papantla was an isolated corner of Porfirian Mexico with weak commercial activity and a scant competition for land (Kourí 2004). Yet, as production and business competition intensified due to vanilla's growing international demand so did conflicts over land among Totonacs as well as between them and town merchants. In fact, during the 1870s and 1880s the basin's communal land was transformed into *condueñazgos*, private associations of share-holding landowners intended to boost

production. This process of semi-privatization was completed in Lot 19, Ojital y Potrero, in 1885—only a few years before del Paso y Troncoso's visit.

Ojital y Potrero was divided into 205 shares of approximately thirty hectares each. Two half shares were reserved for a *fundo legal* and a school. Additionally, one hectare, where the ruins were located, remained exempt from division. This process of land division, though peaceful and legal, was flawed.[81] In the case of Lot 19, the list of *condueños,* for instance, reveals significant differences in the number of shares appointed to each of the *condueños*.[82] These flaws in the process—a process originally conceived to improve production—ended up raising taxes, increasing the intervention of merchants in matters concerning land use and agriculture, and privileging a select few: Totonac bosses and foreign merchants who formed a new inter-ethnic class of landowners. This situation generated conflicts and tensions between factions, as some initiated a series of violent attempts to undo *condueñazgos* while others, those who had benefited from this arrangement, pushed for total privatization.[83] These violent conflicts were in play as del Paso y Troncoso photographed the pyramid of Papantla in 1891 and continued after "*la commission exploradora*" left the area.

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[81] In 1876, Eduardo Perez, Simon Tiburcio, Anotonio Jimenez, and Pablo Hernandez, indigenous commissioners, as well as the Antonio Pascoli, *ingeniero,* got together in Ojital to divide the land of Lot 19, an area with two sites with cattle. Two months later, Pedro Tremari, *alcalde municipal*, Angel Lucido, jefe político del cantón and representatives of Lot 19 such as Beningno Rivera, Juan Espinosa, Pablo Hernandez and Lino Castaño met to sign an *acta de conformidad* (Brizuela 1994).

[82] In the list, several *condueños* appear to have more than one share: Natividad Camara, for instance, had 9 shares with a total of 280 ha, Adolfo de La Sierra had seven shares with 210 ha, Pedro Tremari and Jose García with 5 shares each with a total of 155 ha, Melquiades Patiño with 4 shares and a total of 124 ha. Fifteen *condueños* had two shares each, three with three shares each, with a total of 69 shares between 23 condueños, 8 shares were unoccupided, and 1 share was allocated for a *fundo legal*, and 126 *condueños* each had one share.

[83] Two uprisings shook Papantla in the course of 1880s. These revolts attempted to undo the recent changes in land tenure and attempted to "reconstitute the past" (Kourí 2004, 175). The first rebellion broke out around 1885 and was led by Anotonio Díaz Manfort. Many Totonacs were killed and arrested. A few years later, in 1887, a second revolt, which was ultimately prevented, took shape in and around ex-communal *rancherias* of Chote y Mesillas. The leaders were Antonio Vázquez and Miguel Herrera (Kourí 2004, 175). Tensions, however persisted, and violence did not abate in the area.

The photographic material collected during the Cempoala expedition was exhibited with great success in Madrid (Casanova 2008 55-92). This might explain why in 1895, just a few years after the event, a new selection of 100 photographs taken by *the comisión exploradora* was exhibited at the *Museo Nacional* as part of the activities of the XI *Congreso de Americanistas*. The exhibition was curated by one of the commission members, Jesús Galindo y Villa, as Del Paso y Troncoso had remained in Europe after the Madrid exhibition. Yet he collaborated from afar by selecting the photographic material. Once the selection was finalized, President Díaz himself ordered the development of the photographic films to the Minister of War's *taller fotográfico*, a striking gesture considering that military commanders were sent around that same time to Papantla in order to contain the violent revolts and to assist with the process of land disentailment, which was rapidly and fraudulently coming to an end.

On 2 January 1896 not far from where the pyramid of Papantla lies in "El Potrero," an assembly was installed to finalize the repartition of Lot 19. One hundred and twenty seven *condueños* met at the house of Antonio Bautista, the *jefe politico*, to craft the map signaling the private properties of each of the attendants. Only three days later, Benigno Rivera, a former *condueño* and participant in the recent meeting, received a copy of the map as well the official list of future landowners or *propietarios*. Rivera protested, just as many other *condueños* did throughout the region, due to the deceitful use of the census, the sudden addition of property owners, and the reduction of vacant lands. Bloody conflicts exploded throughout Papantla. Nevertheless, a regime of individual private property was finally implanted by 1900. This resulted in the appearance of important *latifundios*, large estates that in the coming years would

be sold to oil entrepreneurs (Kelly and Palerm 1950, 45; Kourí 2004, 282,283).[84] Some *condueños* managed to hold on to their properties, but a good number of them did not. Many *condueños* lost their land titles during the process of privatization due to deceit, indebtedness, or simply because of their inability to pay taxes (Kourí 2004, 282).[85] Losing title to the land, however, did not entail losing access to it. These ex-owners turned into tenants or continued working ex-communal lands as *jornaleros*. The ancient slash-and burn, the routines of *milpa* cultivation, and the two crops of maize that the winter rains in this region make possible remained the foundations of daily existence for most Totonacs. In this context, where land remained valuable for what it produced, it should not be surprising that the forest soon reabsorbed the pyramid of Papantla. Yet a series of state-sponsored archaeological interventions would render the pyramid visible again given the nationalist fervor that accompanied the triumph of the Mexican Revolution of 1910.

Niches and Debris

By 1963, the old city of Tajín was still covered with the debris left by almost forty years of continuous exploration, clearance, and reconstruction. Fragments resulting from the collapse of niches, columns, and relief sculptures were still being uncovered and carefully reassembled by several *cuadrillas* of Totonac men, most of whom lived in the surrounding areas. What they deemed useless was piled up. The noise of the trucks taking these *escombros* to the main entrance of the site echoed throughout their workdays. Nearly 2,888 m^3 of rubble had

[84] Two immigrant merchant capitalists, Papantla's Pedro Tremari and Tezuitlan's Manuel Zorilla, became the main beneficiaries of this process. They built on the previous land plunder of Simón Tiburcio, an important Totonac boss who played a key role in the development of *condueñazgos* (Kourí 2004).
[85] According to Kourí (2004), the huge increase in vanilla cultivation during the first decade of the twentieth century was for the most part financed through cash advances to farmers, plus they still had many taxes to pay. The ones who found themselves unable to meet these fiscal and commercial obligations were forced to sell or hand over their property, thus favoring the accumulation of land.

accumulated in the area since 1939 according to archaeologist José García Payón, which was the year that he started working in the site under auspices of the recently created National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH).[86]

Figure 3.9. "Rebuilding the Niches." Letter/Report of the development of archaeological work in Tajín by Arq. José García Payón. October 15th 1963. Jalapa, Veracruz. Archivo Técnico del Instituto Nacional de Antropológia e Historia (INAH), Mexico City.

Figure 3.10. "Rebuilding the Niches." Letter/Report of the development of archaeological work in Tajín by Arq. José García Payón. October 15th 1963. Jalapa, Veracruz. Archivo Técnico del Instituto Nacional de Antropológia e Historia (INAH), Mexico City.

[86] Report of the development of archaeological logical work the site of Tajín. Jalapa, Veracruz 1963. Arq. José García Payón. Archivo Técnico del INAH.

The INAH was created as a subsection of the Ministry of Education shortly after the approval in 1938 of a comprehensive body of legislation attempting to govern archaeological heritage.[87] This legislative instrument as well as the establishment of a new bureaucratic institution during the last years of the government of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) certainly constituted "a capstone to the evolution of an organizational structure for the government-sanctioned presentation of Mexican history and culture" (Saragoza 2001). Yet these developments also encapsulated the vision that *Cardenistas* had regarding the proper use, administration, and conservation of national possessions. As Boyer and Wakild (2012, 74) point out, Cárdenas did not regard the environment as a mere repository of natural or cultural resources that he could place at the disposal of rural communities. The social program of *Cardenismo,* in turn, sought to conserve "the sources of national wealth" by transforming the way that the popular classes made use of them.[88] This transformation—justified by the laws of *patrimonio nacional*, which stipulated that land and water as well as subsoil resources including land, oil, mineral ores, and archaeological materials are the sole inalienable property of the Mexican State—involved the creation of *ejidos*, workers cooperatives, national parks, oil productive zones and also, I want to suggest, archaeological sites.[89] It was through these state-driven processes,

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[87] As Breglia (2004) observes, during the 1930s, the social and legislative discourse regarding "heritage" shifted away from threating archaeological and historic monument as discrete objects toward treating them as spaces or "zones."

[88] See also Wakild (2011)

[89] *Patrimonio* laws are mostly contained in Article 27 of the 1917 Constitution considered the backbone of the state translation of its ideological premises—namely, the re-inscription of collective forms of ownership—into laws governing property and citizenship (Hale 1968; Kourí n.d; Molina Enriquez 1909). It is, therefore, unsurprising that a rich literature exists around this socio-legal concept. On how it has reproduced the nation's collective personhood, see Breglia (2006, 2013) and Ferry (2005). On how *patrimonio* became a binding metaphor that produces the mestizo nation by creating horizontal kinship ties among diverse citizens through collective forms of property made by national ancestors in pre-Hispanic times, see Castañeda (1996), Lomnitz (2001), López Caballero (2008), and Tenorio Trillo (2009). On the ways in which this legal regime endures as a meaningful social category through mobility as well as practices of repetition and replication, see Rozental (2014).

what Boyer and Wakild (2012) call *social landscaping*, that Cárdenas and his followers sought to rationalize the use of patrimonial resources in accordance to social reform.[90]

Cardenista initiatives of social landscaping, in turn, had conceptual, operational and didactic elements (Boyer and Waklid 2012, 76). In the case of the development of archaeological sites, the conceptual framework rested with the Ministry of Education through the INAH—the institution responsible for providing the economic resources and appointing an expert—often an archaeologist but also topographers—to a particular site to conduct the designated operations. Invested with the authority of the state, these trained experts, most of whom were highly influenced by Manuel Gamio's work, embarked on long-term excavation and restoration projects and doused them in a nationalist discourse of civic responsibility and revolutionary duty. Yet it is important to acknowledge that, unlike other projects of social landscaping—initiatives that

[90] The literature on *Cardenismo* is vast due to the relevance of the period. Fundamental works include Alicia Hernández Chávez, *La mecánica cardenista* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1979); Arnoldo Córdova, *La política de masas del cardenismo* (Mexico City: Era, 1974); Luis González y González, *Los artífices del cardenismo*, vol. 14 of *Historia de la revolución mexicana* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1979); Arturo Anguiano, *El Estado y la política obrera del cardenismo* (Mexico City: Era, 1975); Nora Hamilton, *The Limits of State Autonomy: Post- Revolutionary Mexico* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1982); Mary Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930–1940* (Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Press, 1997); Christopher R. Boyer, *Becoming Campesinos: Politics, Identity, and Agrarian Struggle in Postrevolutionary Michoacán, 1920–1935* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2003); Adrian A. Bantjes, *As If Jesus Walked on Earth: Cardenismo, Sonora, and the Mexican Revolution* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1998); Alexander S. Dawson, *Indian and Nation in Revolutionary Mexico* (Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Press, 2004); Jocelyn Olcott, *Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2005); and a series of articles by Alan Knight, including "Cardenismo: Juggernaut or Jalopy?" *Journal of Latin American Studies* 23, no. 1 (1994), and "Revolutionary Project, Recalcitrant People," in *The Revolutionary Process in Mexico: Essays on Political and Social Change, 1880–1940*, ed. Jaime E. Rodríguez O. (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1990). For a critical perspective on the Cardenista project of collective agriculture on *ejidal* lands see: John Gledhill, *Casi Nada: A Study of Agrarian Reform in the Homeland of Cardenismo* (Albany: Institute for Mesoamerican Studies, Univ. at Albany, State Univ. of New York, 1991); Iván Restrepo and Salomón Eckstein, *La agricultura colectiva en México: La experiencia de La Laguna* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1971); and Raymond Wilkie, *San Miguel: A Mexican Collective Ejido* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1971). Ben Fallaw, *Cárdenas Compromised: The Failure of Reform in Postrevolutionary Yucatán* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2001); and José Luis Sierra Villarreal and José Antonio Paoli Bolio, *Cárdenas y el repartimiento de los henequenales* (Mérida: Gobierno del Estado de Yucatán, 1986).

intended to give rural communities greater access to resources despite placing them under the tutelage of experts—the development of archaeological sites *restricted* locals' access to them. For one, these spaces involved the expropriation of the land that contained ancient remains. In areas like Papantla where a system of private property dominated, social landscaping thus entailed a significant change in land tenure and use.

The amount of land expropriated depended on the field surveys of archaeologists and topographers. Additionally, the INAH, not the local communities, was responsible for the custodianship, study, and conservation of these sites. In the eyes of *Cardenista* reformers and INAH's experts, these arrangements responded to the state responsibility to, on the one hand, *care for* these monuments and safeguard this material legacy for future generations and, on the other, to control their proper use to ensure social and economic development, which in this case was intended to be achieved through tourism. But before achieving these revolutionary goals, monumental ruins had to be made and this was a process that could not be completed within Cárdenas's Six-Year Program framework. As the social aspect of this project of social landscaping became diluted during the less radical governments that followed Cárdenas's administration, what remained was simply the accumulation of stone fragments and debris.

The governments of Manuel Ávila Camacho (1940-1946), Miguel Alemán Valdés (1946-1952), Ruíz Cortines (1952-1958), López Mateos (1958-1964), and Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (1964-1970)—clinging to the state's reliance on monumental forms—continued to back Payón's effort to reassemble the ruins of Tajín as they, ironically, worked to increase the state's capacity to demobilize and defang radical initiatives of works, peasants, and students. But decay was still visible in Tajín during the 1960s despite the continuous support of the state. It is thus somehow unsurprising that this ruined landscape attracted those critical voices of the period, namely

Mexican poet Efraín Huerta who, after visiting the site, mobilized its "broken pieces" and "demolished stones" to come to terms in his poem *Tajín* (1963) with "the death", "coffins", and "pain" that had accumulated there since the 1940s.[91] It was as if the accumulated rubble at the site transmitted the despair of a generation that saw the promises of a social revolution being broken and ruined:

> To walk in this direction is to walk blindly,
> To walk without motion in motionless air,
> To take steps of sand, ardent grass.
> To walk on water, on nothing,
> —the water which doesn't exist, the nothingness
> of a splinter—to walk over the dead,
> over ground made of ashen skulls
>
> To walk in this way is not to walk
> But to remain deaf, to be an exhausted wing
> or tasteless fruit;
> Because this walk is slow and lifeless,
> Because nothing is alive
> In this lonely place of tepid coffins.
> We're dead, dead
> In an instant, in the dog day's hour
> When a bird is defeated
> And a sweet snake comes crashing down
>
> Not even a fleeting breeze lives in this merciless place.
> Nobody here, nobody in any shadow
> Nothing on the dry trail, nothing up above.
> Everything has been held blindly back,
> Like a fierce sacrificial dagger.
> A sea of petrified blood
> Appears
> On the verge of its cresting.
> Blood of a thousand wounds, muddy blood,
> Blood and ashes in the motionless air.

[91] On the work and context of Efraín Huerta, see Mata (2014) and Huerta (2000). On 2 October 1968, the deep disaffection that animated Huerta's poem as well as the actions of many sectors of civil society culminated in a mass demonstration in the nation's capital. Protesters were violently dispersed with tanks, many students and civilians were tortured and arrested, and several hundred were killed. Huerta, once more, found himself facing ruins: walking among bloodstains and corpses in Tlatelolco Square, he searched for his son and daughter.

Everything walks blindly in the weary silence
Where nothing is born now and nothing is alive
And now the dead have been given life
To the dead and the living
Bury the living.
And then a sword falls from this metallic sky
And the landscape shines and hardens
Or better yet softens like honey
beneath a sun thick with butterflies.

There's no origin. Only the wide carved eyes
And the broken columns and the deathly feathers.
Everything here has a murmuring sound of imprisoned air,
a bit of murder within the boundaries of total silence.
Everything here has the skin
Of silent ones, the wet solitude
Of a preserved time; everything is pain.
There's no empire, there's no king.
Only the traveler over his own shadow,
Over the corpse of himself, in a time when time is suspended
And an orchestra of fire and wounded air
Invades this house of the dead—
And a solitary bird and a dagger rise from the dead.

Then the others, my son and my friend, climb up the hill as if in search
Of thunder and lightning
I rest at the edge of the abyss,
At the foot of the whirling sea,
Choked by a huge river of ferns in pain.
I can sleep in endless sorrow,
Invent an endless love, a divine sadness;
Meanwhile they, on the smooth hillside,
They alone will find
The sleeping root of a broken column
And the echo of a lighting flash.

O Tajín, o tempest,
Demolished shipwreck,
Stone upon stone;
When nobody is anything and everything
Remains dismembered, when nothing really is now and only you remain, impure desolate temple,
When the serpent-country is all ruins and dust,
The little pyramid will be able to close its eyes
Forever, suffocated,
Dead among all the dead,

Blind among all the living.
Under the universal silence
And all abysms.

Tajín: thunder, myth, and sacrifice.
And afterwards, nothing.

Despite Huerta's metaphorical and powerful use of the fragments and debris that covered the site, the *escombros* were evidence of the several obstacles that Payón had to confront as he attempted to transform the once abandoned ruins of Tajín into a national archaeological site. In the first place, human and economic resources turned out to be insufficient. Second, he encountered a suspicious local population that had been obliged by law to sell their privately owned small *lotes* to the property-owning collectivity that nation-state now claimed to be.[92] Finally, Payón had to contend with the harsh humid environment and the fragility of stone. What follows is a brief discussion of how this ruined landscape, mobilized for critique, was made.

As soon he reached the lowlands of Veracruz in the late 1930s, Payón conducted an evaluation of the site. He was shocked by the poor state of the main pyramid, which he believed was still "in danger of collapsing."[93] With an average of twenty workers, he began removing the rubble that had accumulated in the structure while "injecting" a mixture of concrete that could stabilize the structure. He then proceeded to disassemble and reassemble its main decorative components, adding missing fragments from the rubble that had been removed. But the sudden lack of "usable" original fragments forced Payón to develop "a new technique." He started fabricating "artificial stones" using iron as the body of each of these pieces that were subsequently covered with modeled cement—a material providing the desired stability and a raw

[92] On how the state dominance over cultural heritage or "*patrimonio*" has been contested, see Castañeda (1996), Breglia (2004), Ferry (2005) Bueno (2010) and Rozental (2014).
[93] Report of the development of archaeological logical work the site of Tajín. Jalapa, Veracruz 1938-1940. Arq. José García Payón. Archivo Técnico del INAH.

look to the pyramid's decorative surface. This approach was first used in 1944 when he laced twenty-two of these pieces in the second level of the southeastern façade. He defined his method as "simple and practical" and so it was used during the following seasons, during which, he worked mainly on the repair of the three first levels of each of the pyramid's sides as well as most of the main stairway.[94]

Figure 3.11. Second field season in Tajín. Arq. José García Payón. 1940. Jalapa, Veracruz. Archivo Técnico del Instituto Nacional de Antropológia e Historia (INAH), Mexico City.

Figure 3.12. Second field season in Tajín. Arq. José García Payón. 1940. Jalapa, Veracruz. Archivo Técnico del Instituto Nacional de Antropológia e Historia (INAH), Mexico City.

[94] Report of the development of archaeological logical work the site of Tajín. Jalapa, Veracruz 1946. Arq. José García Payón. Archivo Técnico del INAH.

Fig. 3.13. Artificial stones. Arq. José García Payón. Report of Activities 1942-1944. Jalapa, Veracruz. Archivo Técnico del Instituto Nacional de Antropológia e Historia (INAH), Mexico City.

The most important work on the pyramid, however, was the opening of an "exploration tunnel" in the west side of the structure. Payón wanted to document the building system and the possible existence of a substructure or perhaps an imposing tomb. In order to penetrate the pyramid, destruction was necessary yet he decided to proceed. The creation of the tunnel caused an interior collapse that destabilized the structure and endangered the lives of workers who could have easily been buried.[95] Critiques flooded the press. "It was not rare," writes Payón, "to read commentaries about the poor state of the pyramid…of how under my supervision, the destruction has been accentuated."[96] For the following ten years Payón attempted to control the damage that his intervention had generated. Unfortunately for him, by 1957 matters became worse as an earthquake in the area only exacerbated the fragility of the structure—cracks, landslides, and collapsing niches, again, dominated the landscape.[97]

[95] Report of the development of archaeological logical work the site of Tajín. Jalapa, Veracruz 1938-40. Arq. José García Payón. Archivo Técnico del INAH.
[96] Report of the development of archaeological logical work the site of Tajín. Jalapa, Veracruz 1938-40. Arq. José García Payón. Archivo Técnico del INAH.
[97] Report of the development of archaeological logical work the site of Tajín. Jalapa, Veracruz 1957. Arq. José García Payón. Archivo Técnico del INAH.

The collapse of stone fragments, however, was not the only source of instability in Tajín. "Conflicts around land tenure," writes Payón, had been common in the area since the late 1940s as local landowners continued either to pay taxes on or sell the land that had already been expropriated in favor of the development of the archaeological site in the hands of the INAH.[98] Payón, for instance, recounted in his reports how "a capitalist from Papantla" having bought land from a Totonac Indian came to his camp demanding either his permission to start an orange farm on the site or a monetary compensation for his investment in land now under control of the INAH. Payón encouraged this local entrepreneur to contact the Ministry of Education to get a better sense of the legal framework within which the INAH operates while he showed him the boundaries of the archaeological site, pointing him to the area where he could potentially start his business ventures in the future.[99] As he narrates this incident, however, Payón admitted that outside the legal boundaries of the site, ancient vestiges could be found. Yet it was also clear to him that expanding the site's boundaries would bring further dislocation into the area as at least thirty small landowners with plots of 25 to 35 hectares would be affected. A second round of land expropriation, he believed, would incite conflicts with an already aggravated local population. Workers of the site, according to Payón, started to demand better salaries. Their protests, in fact, were legitimate as it is documented that they were receiving less than the legally established minimum wage in the region. Workers received only 4 pesos for their work when they should had been paid 6.[100] They repeatedly complained that even vanilla farmers paid more

[98] Report of the development of archaeological logical work the site of Tajín. Jalapa, Veracruz 1948. Arq. José García Payón. Archivo Técnico del INAH.
[99] Report of the development of archaeological logical work the site of Tajín. Jalapa, Veracruz 1938-40. Arq. José García Payón. Archivo Técnico del INAH.
[100] Report of the development of archaeological logical work the site of Tajín. Jalapa, Veracruz 1948. Arq. José García Payón. Archivo Técnico del INAH.

than what Payón did or could ($4.50 *pesos* plus meals).[101] Salaries were raised but they still remained below what was legally stipulated.

Nonconformity, however, was not only limited to the demand for better salaries. Disaffection also manifested in banal yet telling ways: local residents often deliberately destroyed the road signs intended to guide potential visitors to the site. "It is the fourth time this has happened," Payón complained in his report.[102] After several failed attempts to keep the signs standing, he ordered the use of cement pillars for a new set of signs, hoping this change in material would prevent the sign's future destruction. This was important for Payón: as the completion of the interstate road connecting Tajín to the central and northern part of the country became a reality, such signs would be needed to guide the many tourists that he believed would soon visit Tajín—a site that was still quite obviously *in the making*.

Payón's intermittent program of consolidation and restoration ended up stretching out for almost twenty more years until his death in 1977.[103] During the last stage of his work, which coincided with the repressive regime of Luis Echeverría (1970-1976) and the darkest years of his dirty war against the radical left, Payón mostly focused on containing the imminent decay. The main pyramid, after decades of intervention, was anything but stable—not unlike Mexico itself.[104]

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[101] Report of the development of archaeological logical work the site of Tajín. Jalapa, Veracruz 1948. Arq. José García Payón. Archivo Técnico del INAH.
[102] Report of the development of archaeological logical work the site of Tajín. Jalapa, Veracruz 1948. Arq. José García Payón. Archivo Técnico del INAH.
[103] Report of the development of archaeological logical work the site of Tajín. Jalapa, Veracruz 1963, 1967, 1970. Arq. José García Payón. Archivo Técnico del INAH.
[104] Report of the development of archaeological logical work the site of Tajín. Jalapa, Veracruz 1970. Arq. José García Payón. Archivo Técnico del INAH.

Firm Residues

In 1985, archaeologists Rene Ortega and Alfonso García began to carry on the restoration of the main pyramid of Tajín under the project's new director Jürgen K Bruggemman. They found the pyramid in a precarious condition and attributed this state of decay to the monument's lack of stability, particularly in the upper levels of the eastern, northern, and southern façades.[105] The constant rains and humidity of the region had dissolved the pyramid's mortar aggravating in turn the visible structural damage. Moreover, the building presented a troubling sinking which became their main concern. To address this pressing issue, the team decided, first, to commission a geological study in order to assess the characteristics of the subsoil clay deposits. This study revealed the semi-permeable and impermeable quality of these deposits—a characteristic that made the absorption of water difficult. Thus, in order to improve the absorption of water, a drainage system had to be reinstalled. Only after the effluence of water was under control could the reconstruction of the actual building proceed.[106] Once a drainage system was successfully implemented, workers began, as in the previous seasons, removing the accumulated rubble on each of the seven levels and selecting those fragments that could be reused. They would then proceed to "carefully determine the best way of placing each fragment, they focused on finding the right inclination and alignment."[107] Ortega and García also ordered the use of gravel to flatten the floor of each level in order to facilitate the filtration of water. Once some stability was achieved, they directed their team to begin sealing the tunnels dug by Payón and to repair the

[105]Conservación y REstauración de la Pirámide de los Nichos, Jalapa, Veracruz 1985. Arq. Rene Ortega Guevara y Alfonso García García. Archivo Técnico del INAH.
[106]Conservación y REstauración de la Pirámide de los Nichos, Jalapa, Veracruz 1985. Arq. Rene Ortega Guevara y Alfonso García García. Archivo Técnico del INAH.
[107] Conservación y REstauración de la Pirámide de los Nichos, Jalapa, Veracruz 1985. Arq. Rene Ortega Guevara y Alfonso García García. Archivo Técnico del INAH.

fractures these tunnels had caused. Workers also introduced a series of ducts to prevent the further accumulation of water in the interior of the building.

This renewed interest in reconstructing the main pyramid of Tajín was the outcome of an agreement established in 1983 between the state government of Veracruz, Agustín Acosta, and the federal government of Miguel de la Madrid, an agreement that would mark a more direct involvement of the state government in the management and use of the site. The state university of Veracruz (UV) as well as the INAH began working together in order finally to complete the restoration of the site—facilitating, in turn, the development of tourism in the area. "The current tendency of nations and international organisms," wrote Brüggemann, "is to implement a more efficient protection and conservation of natural and cultural patrimony not only for cultural reasons but also for very valid economic ones."[108] The state and federal governments, in fact, injected a significant amount of resources in order to consolidate the site as a touristic landmark. It was through this intense program of restoration conducted by a robust team of archaeologists working simultaneously on thirty-six buildings that the image of the pyramid and the site as a whole were radically transformed.

"An army of workers" was involved in the process as one might expect. Labor at the time had become easier to secure not only because more resources were allocated to the Tajín project but also because other sources of employment were no longer available due to the crisis faced by both the oil and the already diminished vanilla industry. The country as a whole, in fact, was attempting to deal with the economic collapse left by the corrupt administration of José López Portillo (1976-1982). It is unsurprising that under these conditions work in the archaeological site turned into a reliable source of employment for many locals. For instance, by

[108] Informe Tajín, Tomo 1. Jalapa, Veracruz 1984. Arq. Jürgen K. Brüggemann. Archivo Técnico del INAH.

1999—16 years after Brüggeman took control of the project and shortly before finalizing it—300 workers were assigned exclusively to the main pyramid.[109] These young men, mostly in their early 30s, belonged to poor families earning their livelihood through subsistence agriculture. They lived in houses made out of wood and palm with no running water or septic tanks.[110]

Besides supplying labor for the construction of the site, these workers also became ideal subjects of study as they "could help scholars understanding the biology of the *mestizo* population in the area."[111] The noses, skulls, and chests of "a random sample" of workers were measured, analyzed, and correlated. Their bodies were also photographed. These images, serving as illustrations in Jaime Ortega's somatometric study, depict frontal and profile views of erect figures with their feet remaining parallel to each other, the palms of their hands touching their thighs, their heads kept straight.[112] These images as well as a seemingly neutral language of statistics, deviations, and indexes allowed Ortega to conclude that the "the average individual in this region presented poor-weight gain, result of heavy physical activity, a low-calorie diet and questionable sanitary practices."[113] In his report, Ortega also mentioned that he had not originally considered studying the living local population. Yet, having finished the analysis of the recovered bone fragments early, he sought to make good use of his time in Tajín. He thus turned his attention to the available workers of the site.

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[109] Informe de Trabajo, Proyecto Tajín. Jalapa, Veracruz 1999. Arq. Jürgen K. Brüggemann. Archivo Técnico del INAH.
[110] Tajín Project, Report of the activities. Physical Anthropologist Jaime Ortega. Tajín, Veracruz, June 1990. Archivo Técnico del INAH, Mexico City.
[111] Tajín Project, Report of the activities. Physical Anthropologist Jaime Ortega. Tajín, Veracruz, June 1990. Archivo Técnico del INAH, Mexico City.
[112] Tajín Project, Report of the activities. Physical Anthropologist Jaime Ortega. Tajín, Veracruz, June 1990. Archivo Técnico del INAH, Mexico City.
[113] Tajín Project, Report of the activities. Physical Anthropologist Jaime Ortega. Tajín, Veracruz, June 1990. Archivo Técnico del INAH, Mexico City.

Although these images may seem at first glance simply to be disjointed elements in a history about archaeological preservation, I want to suggest that these visual records should also be perceived as concrete traces of the modern process of ruin-making in Tajín. These photographs illustrate, perhaps more forcefully than the rest of the archaeological records that remain, the ways in which the project entailed an *intrusion* into the physical and personal space of those inhabiting this region. However, for those in charge of the restoration project, such physical and personal interventions fulfilled "a social labor."[114] The restoration project, after all, "offered employment to a reasonable percentage of the community population."[115] But the benefits for the locals were ambiguous at best as the subjection of their bodies to the camera lens or to a poor diet reveals. Moreover, as the resurrection of the ruins of Tajín culminated—during the regime of president Carlos Salinas (1988-1994)—with a UNESCO's World Heritage Site nomination in 1992, a new sense of vulnerability among locals emerged.[116] In 2001, President Vicente Fox (2000-2006), the first opposition candidate to win the presidency, approved the INAH's request to *extend* the boundaries of the archaeological site. Today, the archaeological site is delimited by a polygonal of 1200 hectares. With state governor Miguel Alemán's blessing, many Totonacs were displaced while others, especially from the community of Tajín, were unable to benefit from the land they legally owed. Once the project was completed, locals seemed no longer to have a use or purpose. Their presence became redundant and their removal and exclusion was of little consequence. But many residents of the area had to deal with what the projects had left them with: what Rao (2014, 316) calls an "ecology of remains"—a geography

[114] Tajín Project, Report of the activities. Physical Anthropologist Jaime Ortega. Tajín, Veracruz, June 1990. Archivo Técnico del INAH, Mexico City.
[115] Tajín Project, Report of the activities. Physical Anthropologist Jaime Ortega. Tajín, Veracruz, June 1990. Archivo Técnico del INAH, Mexico City.
[116] UNESCO has built on national languages of patrimony. The INAH, in fact, provide local logistical support for UNESCO.

of despair that, as I will discuss in the following two sections, continues to play an active role in the politics of the present and the expectations for the future. The making of "ruins," in short, entailed a *ruination* of sorts: an "indelible smack of degraded personhoods, occupied spaces, and limited possibilities that are the hardest to erase" (Stoler 2014, 7).

Fragmented Debris

Figure 3.14. The pyramid today. Photo by the author. January 2013, Tajín, Veracruz.

In 2011, Benjamín Blaisot, left his cubicle at the office of conservation of cultural heritage in Mexico City, to start the restoration of building 11, a monumental structure located in the archaeological site of Tajín. He had recently moved to Mexico from France shortly after finishing his studies on conservation. The project appeared challenging to him, he explained to me, because of his insufficient experience working with local materials like limestone. "But it also fascinated me," he said. Benjamín could spend hours describing and talking about rocks. It was not uncommon to see him walking around the site, socializing with his working team—composed of locals—and coming back to the office around five after working long hours under the sun and humidity that characterized the spring season in Tajín. I was impressed by his commitment and love for his job. Because of his passion for it, it was not hard to learn about his

project, which involved the removal of salt residues, the reintegration of the mural painting, and the consolidation of the structure. Yet, "reconstruction," he emphasized, "is not the goal." "In Mexico," he added, "there has been too much of that and it came with a cost." Benjamin was referring to the destruction generated by the excessive use of modern materials such as concrete in the rebuilding of ancient buildings. "On the contrary," he said, "I sought to intervene into the buildings as little as possible. Each stone, after all, has its own history…told by its own destruction. I wanted to let them tell that story with their marks and fractures, with their cracks." Yet, shortly after his arrival, Benjamin realized that he would have to deal with fractures and cracks of a different kind.

Conflicts with several members of the community of Tajín who also worked in the site as guards or *custodios* soon emerged. To exemplify the difficulties he had to face as he attempted to restore building 11, Benjamin told me how his work was often sabotaged. The clay bricks he had manufactured in order to stabilize the structure were destroyed. Apparently, something similar happened with the rest of his materials. Slaked lime containers, for instance, were emptied or started to disappear. Stone fragments placed in the building were removed. "It was too much," Benjamin concluded, expressing his frustration. It was clear he had not found a way to stabilize the broken social relations with those inhabiting the area surrounding the monuments that he was trained to safeguard. And the reason is that behind those petty incidents was a bigger conflict between the INAH and the community of Tajín: a conflict that arose shortly after the site's boundaries were extended and the *Plan de Manejo*—a new regulation regarding land tenure and use—was implemented. Fourteen years after the development of this new set of rules, conflicts around the use of the land are hardly resolved.

"The need for regulating land use and tenure in this area has been important for the INAH since it claimed control of the site in the 1930s," Adolfo Vergara, director of the archaeological zone at the time of my fieldwork, explained. He admitted, however, that this set of regulations was intended to prevent cattle ranchers who owned most of the land in the region from selling their properties during the tourism boom the area is currently experiencing. Yet the regulations ended up also affecting those small property owners who, unlike the cattle ranchers, *inhabit* the area. Conflicts between the INAH and local residents increased, therefore, significantly since 2001. "The new regulation, however, is important," Adolfo insisted. "It is our job to protect archaeological evidence, even the remnants of those structures that have not been excavated yet."[117] But for small property owners, the regulation attempting to protect such remnants was developed without considering their needs. "It is an injustice," they told me repeatedly, "it prevents us from solving our housing needs." Today one hundred and seventy families, from the community of Tajín owning land in what is locally known as lot 126 are fighting for the right to live on the land they actually own. "For more than a decade we have been waiting for the regularization of 28 hectares," the representative of this group of *vecinos* told me. As it turned out, many residents of Tajín along with other members of affected communities formed "The Front for the Defense of the Territory" as soon as the new land use regulations were put forward. *Vecinos* also forged a stronger alliance with the *Cocyp*, a radical peasant organization with a strong presence in Veracruz.

Throughout these years of protests and political activism, residents have made two main points. On the one had, they revealed the "hypocrisy" of the INAH as it has allowed the construction of gas stations or "ethnic theme-parks" in the protected area while imposing strict

[117] The INAH in fact, under the direction of Patricia Castillo has devoted resources—which came through Pemex—to map the archaeological evidence still underground in Tajín, using using LiDAR technology.

construction regulations on locals who "have neither the money to bribe nor the political connections to obtain benefits." Secondly, residents claim that the imposition of harsh land use regulations attempting to safeguard "archaeological material" had no basis, especially they told me, "because there are no monuments or pyramids underneath our land—only broken pieces remain." Residents were referring to the ceramic shreds and *piedras* (stone fragments) found during a recent excavation of lot 126, which was arranged by the INAH in order to end the conflict. For the archaeologists working in Tajín, conducting the excavation and securing the evidence was important because they assumed that having residents see the fragments would make them understand "the historical value" of their land and the need to preserve it intact. But the excavation ended up having the opposite effect as it proved, according to residents, the lack of "evidence" as well as INAH's fixation with controlling land use in the area.

Before the completion of the excavation, residents who had been watching it unfold claimed that "they had already seen enough" implying that nothing of value had been unearthed. Tensions emerged and the excavation could not be finished. A second attempt to finalize it took place as I conducted fieldwork in the area. I was invited to participate in the excavation insofar as state archaeologists needed someone "who could document the potential damage that residents, in their effort to deny the existence of pre-Hispanic remnants, could cause to the evidence." The excavation did not end up taking place during my stay in Tajín due to lack of state funding, growing tension with residents around the term of the excavation agreement, and bureaucratic paperwork. Yet conversations about the shortcoming of the excavation of "lot 126" were common, reflecting the gap between academic and local views of ruins. For state actors, locals' perceptions only confirmed their point: that "ordinary people ignore or can't appreciate the historical value of archaeological materials and work."

Yet, we could also argue, that these local notions submitted the ruins of Tajín—and their monumentality—to what Gordillo (2014, 27), following Adorno (1966), calls "a logic of disintegration." An approach that, by questioning the alleged positivity of modern spatial forms, highlights the disregarded destruction that their *making* has created—a destruction that has unsettled not only the materiality of the space but also the relations of sociality that it articulates. Residents and state actors have made one point clear: if there was any evidence to be found in this space, it was the bits and pieces, the *fragmentation* itself.

Ruined Futures

It was through Jesús Trejo—a young anthropologist working for the INAH at the archaeological site of Tajín—that I started to pay attention to several features of the landscape that had escaped my eye during my previous visits to the site. We only needed to remove a few weeds and plants and climb a little mound to find the remnants of a decaying and oxidized oil well as well as the stone walls and floors of what we believed was an oil camp. After this brief stop, we continued to walk through a path full of orange and banana trees. The vegetation was dense but the roof of an abandoned house was discernible.

Figure 3.15. Ruins. Photo by the author, Zona de Monumentos Arqueológicos de Tajín, April 2013.

According to Jesús, a famous *caporal* (ritual dancer) used to live there; the structure of the house remained. As we followed the path we began walking with difficulty through the rainforest and started hiking uphill. Little light came through the dense vegetation—"this ought to have been a suitable space for growing *acahuales,*" I thought. That drastic change in light, similar to the residues of the oil industry or the ruins of the house once inhabited by a Totonac resident, were reminders of the ways in which this particular space, only currently valued on the basis of its pre-Hispanic monumental structures, has been reconfigured. The *sendero* was made out of a fragmented pattern in which each component had shaped each other as well as the lives of those who have inhabited this space. Perhaps, it was because of the way in which these *varied* histories were sedimented in the landscape that the archaeological monuments began to seem more distant than they actually were—we were only a mile away from them.

Figure 3.16. *Sendero* (left) and members of the cooperative *Langkasipi* and Jesús Trejo during a meeting (right). Photo by the author (left) and photo provided by Jesús Trejo (right), Zona de Monumentos Arqueológicos de Tajín, April 2013.

In a way, this perception animates the project of the cooperative *Langkasipi*—a group constituted by men and woman from San Antonio Ojital, seeking to open their communal path to tourism. Despite the fact that cooperative members often return to familiar tropes to exalt their indigeneity as they promote the project—members, for instance, only wear "indigenous" clothes

when attending events at the archaeological site or meetings with the municipality or other state authority—their eco-tourism plan is a concrete attempt to look beyond the celebrated monumentality of the site. Our goal, as one of the leaders told me during an informal chat, is "to remind people to look behind the ruins."

San Antonio is a community of recent creation despite the fact that its residents have inhabited the region for decades. After the completion of the pyramid restoration in the 2000s, residents were forced to relocate once the government bought the land of eleven small property owners of the community, each owning between 5 and 10 hectares. The land that once belonged to San Antonio and that sustained the livelihoods of approximately 800 residents was then donated to the INAH in order to guarantee the preservation of the archaeological monuments. Many residents decided to migrate to other localities such as Escolin, Tajín, and Poza Rica. Many others refused to do so or were unable to relocate. After tense negotiations, municipal authorities agreed to obtain a new *predio* for establishing a new *fundo legal*.

"Displacement was trivialized by the local authority," Jesus explained to me. "The government made it sound like it was not much of a deal—they are small property owners, after all—yet, relocation affected peoples' ways of living—which were already far from being ideal." Jesús was referring to the fact that, once residents moved they were unable to continue practicing agriculture and raising animals—"there was simply no space for those kinds of activities," Jesús explained to me. Accordingly, locals had to rely exclusively on what they could earn working as *jornaleros* in the surrounding orange farms while some others started renting land to cattle ranchers or began working in nearby urban centers like Papantla or Poza Rica. As I spent time in the area, I heard several stories about how life was before relocation. They remember their *patios* with mango and avocado trees, coffee plantations and *milpas*. "We had everything from plums

and *chalahuites* to chili, bananas, and chickens". Residents, in short, mourned losing their capacity to provide for themselves some of the products they regularly consume. But the change in their settlement pattern also brought "good things" as they told me.[118] Women of the community felt that they were now able to better assist each other. Electricity also came with relocation: "no more candles or batteries." Yet potable water was still lacking and obtaining it out of their wells, as is commonly done in the area, was more difficult than before due to the fact that the community was now located uphill.

Jesus has been collaborating with the community since 2010 although he officially works for the INAH. Back then, Jesús recalls, the INAH was interested in developing a land use plan or *Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial* that would be more inclusive and attentive to the interests of nearby communities. The plan was necessary because of the significant increase in the number of street vendors at the main entrance of the archaeological zone, most of them residents of the community of Tajín. At this time, most of Jesús's colleagues were trying to negotiate their relocation as they were giving a "*mala imagen*" to visitors. But no one, Jesús emphasized, paid attention to a group of women who started to sell fruit amid the ruins. It was not until clashes between them and the *custodios* that their presence became visible. *Custodios*, it turned out, were not allowing women of San Antonio to sell at the main entrance of the site—a space restricted for members of the community of Tajín—or inside. Despite the constant harassment by *custodios*, women from San Antonio did not stop coming down. In fact, they became more organized and it was during this period of conflict that they met Jesús.

[118] This is based on my interviews and regular informal conversation with cooperatives members such as Aurora Juarez, Maria Maldonado, Riarda Gonzalez, Alicia Juarez, Rosenda Bautista, and Zoila Medina as well as informal conversation with Maribel, Celia, Aurelia, Martha, and Maricarmen. The conversations occurred during the period of February and May of 2013 as I conducted fieldwork in San Antonio Ojital.

Meanwhile Jesús still remembers how disturbing it was for him to see the women from San Antonio standing in the middle of the monuments all day with no shade during the spring and summer months. So the administration of the INAH decided to build them a *palapa*. However, this little rustic construction, Jesús told me, was cordoned off with a road to prevent this group of *señoras* from walking around the ruins. "It was disrespectful to treat local people like that," Jesús added. It was clear that he felt their presence was a problem for those administrating the site but he also acknowledged that the INAH was doing little to improve the lives of people in San Antonio—lives that have not benefited from the development of the archaeological site. In time, Jesús started to get to know these women: He started to visit the community and learn about the needs of its residents and also the resources they had available and "finally, we decided to do something," he said.

> That was not even part of my job at the time. I was assisting the main researchers doing their evaluations as part of the *Plan de Manejo*. It was after months of talking to them, primarily the women, that the idea of creating a cooperative that could offer walking tours through the *sendero* as well as traditional food to tourists emerged. Because of my involvement wit the INAH, I knew that if I wanted to have the institutional support that I needed I would somehow have to make the project fit INAH's broader mission: cultural preservation. I had to "sell the project" as a heritage project—not a project of social improvement or economic development because that is not the mission of the institute. That became the first big challenge but I knew that I could help. As we fought to obtain INAH's support we also began to look for institutions that could provide the funding for materializing the idea. The woman had envisioned the construction of a rustic restaurant where they could offer traditional food and we needed money for that. Pemex became our best bet: they had the financial resources and the responsibility to improve the social conditions of the areas in which they work—and San Antonio falls into one of those areas.

The first time that Jesús visited the community he was mostly impressed by the contrasting landscape he encountered. On the one hand, he faced a vulnerable community that had built their new life by intertwining bits and pieces of old homes with new materials such as zinc sheets that had been provided by the municipality to "facilitate" the relocation of residents.

On the other hand, he looked to the profitable land surrounding this new settlement—land used for farming and cattle ranching. From the community you could also get a privileged view of the archaeological site. “It was beautiful,” Jesús told me, “but somehow also disturbed.”

Figure 3.17. View from San Antonio Ojital. Photo by Jesús Trejo, Zona de Monumentos Arqueológicos de Tajín, April 2013.

His mixed feelings were understandable. After all, he was not only aware of the forced relocation of the community but also knew, perhaps better than any other member of the INAH, how hard these residents have worked to find new ways to adjust to new conditions and to improve their lives. Jesus shared his memories as we hiked the *cerro* to visit the community of San Antonio. That day, he also had to attend a meeting with the cooperative members and asked me to join him—and to memorize the path so I could start visiting the community by myself. “I am sure we could use some extra help,” he said.

After sacrificing their homes, livelihoods, and privately owned land for the sake of national (and now world) patrimony, the expectations that many residents of San Antonio had for a stable and secure future were attached to the success of the cooperative, or “*el proyecto*” as they often refer to their entrepreneurial initiative. People affected by disruption, Gordillo (2014, 264) writes, usually begin to rebuild their lives immediately thereafter. According to his view,

the point of analyzing such processes of ruination "is not simply to outline the spatiality of geographic forms of devastation, but also to explore the positive reconfiguration that follows." The cooperative, in fact, was a creative attempt to recreate wholeness and meaning in the aftermath of fragmentation. Yet, for its own members, this was an attempt that was often frustrated and seemed always conditioned by the same disregard that had contributed in the first place to their current precarious situation. Disregard during my fieldwork among residents of San Antonio was experienced as a *waiting* time.

"I won't believe it," Aurelia tells me as we lingered in the shade offered by a robust *ceiba* tree. We had a small gathering at the home of one of the cooperative members who also happened to be Aurelia's neighbor. As we enjoyed a glass of coke and some crackers, Aurelia began telling me what motivated her to invest energy in a project that was unlikely to materialize in her view:

> Elders say that the ruins of Tajín once belonged to the people of San Antonio, but they were unable to fight for it. I used to live right where the museum lies today. As you can see, we were even closer to the pyramids than the people from the community of Tajín, but because we were unable to defend it, people from Tajín have, in a way, appropriated it. They are the only ones who can sell to tourists at the main entrance. We only have the little *palapa*, and we constantly have to deal with the harassment of *custodios*. But with the cooperative and with the closer relationship with the INAH that, thanks to Jesús, we have been able to develop things could eventually change. It would be a good source of extra income for us and for our children. We want them to be able to stay in the community, to have a future here.

Despite her optimism, Aurelia consistently expressed her skepticism: "we have worked very hard for this, but until the restaurant is built and operating we won't believe it." Aside from being one of the members of the cooperative, Aurelia was also the local authority of the community or *agente municipal* at the time of my research and everyone recognized her as one of the leaders of the project. Due to her position, she knew better than anyone the difficulties that the group had to go through in order to move the project forward.

> We have been dealing with all sorts of papers since we began the project five years ago. No one wanted to be part of a cooperative committee because no one wanted to be traveling all the way to Papantla or Poza Rica to get a paper signed or to initiate the kind of bureaucratic procedures—*los trámites*—that, we soon found out, were necessary. But if we wanted the project to succeed we had to start the pilgrimage. Many of our friends and neighbors had quit though. I don't blame them. They got tired of waiting. To a certain extent, we are all tired of waiting.

Aurelia and several members of the cooperative spent hours telling me details of the bureaucratic procedures they have initiated—from requesting permission from the INAH to obtaining funds from the PEMEX to obtaining legal personhood or opening a bank account. Because all cooperative members had actively participated in the process through groups or *comisiones*, each member has his or her own story about waiting. Martha and Ponciano are active members in the cooperative, and their anecdotes are relevant not only because they illustrate both the process through which the cooperative was conformed but also the frustrations that accompanied them every step in the way.

"When we began with all this," Martha told me, "I knew it was not going to be easy, but I did not imagine how many obstacles we were going to find—first with the INAH and then with Pemex." Martha explained how the INAH rejected the project several times mainly because bettering the conditions of the people was not their mission. "We couldn't believe it," she said. But there was no way of establishing a legal business without INAH support. In her view, it was only with assistance from the INAH and with the support of "the law" that they could compete with their neighbors from the community of Tajín who had "appropriated the site" and refused to allow anyone else to sell products there. But obtaining institutional support was not easy:

> The INAH rejected our project several times. They argued that the mission of the institution was not social development. But Jesús was persistent and really helped us with the letters and documents. We even stopped dealing with the regional office in Veracruz and instead went directly to Mexico City. He waited for two years to obtain a positive response. He just waited for Jesus to hike up the hill and let us know if there was something in the mail for us. We sent paperwork and then they asked for something else

> or for a different study. Finally, we obtained permission but the really tough part was about to begin.

According to Ponciano, the first challenge was obtaining an *acta constitutiva*, a legal document certifying the legal personhood of the cooperative. "It was election time," he said, "so nobody wanted to provide his or her official id cards (*credenciales para votar*) because many thought someone could commit fraud in the upcoming elections." The first task for Ponciano was to convince his neighbors that their id cards would only be shared with the notary. Obtaining the *acta*, a process that could be completed within a week, took them 3 months because they did not have the funds to complete the legal transaction. They began showing up at the municipal office in Papantla and waited for hours in order to talk to "someone." After months of meeting several bureaucrats, they were able to meet the municipal president and explain their needs to him. He sent the cooperative members to a notary in Papantla who would then take care of the legal paperwork. The legal personhood was finally obtained. By then, the cooperative had already been sending *comisiones* to Pemex's offices in Poza Rica in order to present the project to members of the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) team so they knew that once their partnership was legally recognized and registered their project could be considered for funding. They submitted the project to the CSR office in 2012. After months of waiting, news finally came in 2013. The project was accepted but before funds could be released the cooperative had to provide evidence of owning the land where they wanted their rustic restaurant to be located. Ponciano and Jesús then decided to walk through the area in search of a half hectare of land—a *terreno.* "We talked to two owners," Ponciano remembers, "but they did not want to sell." They continued their search, Ponciano told me, without much luck as the only land available for sale was simply too expensive to even consider it as an option:

> We kept looking and finally we found what we thought was a usable piece of land. So we called the construction company and they came to evaluate our potential "*terreno*" but they told us it was not suitable because it would raise the construction cost. Pemex asked us to find a new plot. We only had fifteen days in order to submit the complete file to Pemex. I remember walking all over looking for a better plot of land. It was so hot, I remember telling Jesús that the project was simply not happening. Finally, the husband of one of the cooperative members, of Martha, decided to sell us a plot he had inherited. That, however, initiated a series of conflicts among Martha's political family. We felt terribly sorry, but we got the cooperative a plot of land.

The cooperative then, needed to obtain funds to buy the land. The municipality had agreed to help with the initial payment of the plot yet they requested that the cooperative provide an invoice so that the funds could be released. This meant beginning a new series of fiscal procedures to obtain the federal taxpayer registration for the cooperative. "We had no idea how to do that," Ponciano said. "That week I felt like I turned into a fundraiser, a lawyer, an accountant… it was simply terrible." He continued,

> To obtain the taxpayer registration, Martha and I left by 8am to Poza Rica. We wanted to be there as soon as the office opened. We simply brought with us all the documents we possessed, every single one, because we did not know what they would need. He waited in line for half a day. After waiting for 4 hours, our turn came. We realized we could not obtain the register for the cooperative—a moral person—without having registered first as a physical person. So we registered Martha first. Just in the middle of the procedure, lunchtime arrived and the administrative staff left. We waited for another three hours in the office as we only got funds from the cooperative for bus fare not for lunch. We waited there, for another three hours, the person who was taking care of our documents never came back. Finally, at 6, some other person approached us and simply gave us our documents. Apparently, our papers had already been there—in the printer—but nobody had cared to give it to us.

Martha, Ponciano recalls, had a terrible headache by then, and complained all the way back home about all that they just went through in order to obtain the paperwork. But the next day, with all the necessary documents, they travelled to Papantla to finally obtain the money from the municipality—the money that would allow them to buy their *terreno*. Funds, however, needed to be transferred to a bank account, which the cooperative did not posses. In order to open one, they needed at least 1,000 pesos. Ponciano remembers calling Jesús, so that they could tell the

cooperative members that they needed to collect the money in order to open their account. They did and were able to obtain the funds. Finally, members paid a visit to the notary—the one who had helped them before—to obtain their property titles. They could only collect $300 pesos out of the 8,000 pesos the notary asked them for. At the time of my fieldwork, they still owed him 7,500 pesos. Their property titles along with all the documents they have accumulated since the project began are carefully kept in a black folder secured in a black plastic bag. Ponciano is responsible for keeping them and he proudly showed them to me.

Almost a year after all these events took place, the cooperative members were still waiting for the "engineers" to show up in the community to start the construction of the restaurant. They had, after all, completed all the requirements Pemex demanded. With time we learned that Pemex had assigned the project to Waterford, one of the subcontracting companies working in the area. But once Waterford's contract ended so did its responsibility with the cooperative, which was why no one had shown up in San Antonio after all that time. A new file apparently needed to be submitted. When I left Veracruz, people in San Antonio remained hopeful yet they were understandably frustrated and impatient for something to happen.

The *act of waiting*, following Auyero (2012, 7-6) is a temporal process in and through which political subordination is reproduced. In his view, it is through these seemingly banal yet recursive interactions between the poor and bureaucrats, that the state teaches a political lesson to the popular classes. What these acts of waiting produce "are subjects who know, and act accordingly, that when dealing with state bureaucracies they have to patiently comply with the seemingly, ambiguous, and always changing state requirements" (Auyero 2012, 9). In San Antonio, cooperative members knew that if they wanted to succeed in their project, they needed to remain temporarily neglected and unattended, as meetings, promises, funding, and visits kept

being postponed. The act of waiting, then, worked by rendering only *limited visibility* to people. The distressing effects of waiting, moreover, were intensified as this constant exposure to long delays molded the way residents came to encounter the landscape. The experience of waiting, I came to realize, partially illuminated that which was absent: their association had obtained legal personhood but they did not possess a restaurant; they had documents proving the legality of their enterprise, but there were no extra sources of income yet; they had been recognized by the INAH, yet there were still no tourists visiting their community. Everything was incomplete—just like the ruins that surrounded them—and this incompleteness or partial visibility held over local imaginaries contributed to suffering and resentment.

I remember, for instance, a casual conversation I had with Ponciano after I had spent the morning cooking with the cooperative members. Ponaciano joined us for lunch and I though it was a good time to ask him about his experience with the cooperative—despite the fact that I had already listened to his experience during the interviews with the local press that Jesús often arranged to promote the project. But the conversation we had that day was less formal and it had more to do with his memories about growing up in the area, migrating to California, and then returning (after being deported) to the same place where he grew up—a place he admitted hating as a child. "When I was a kid, I remember standing firmly in the middle of the *milpa,* staring at the pyramids and the *cerro*. I was so mad that I started screaming, '*I am going to take this Indian blood out of my veins'*". Ponciano started laughing hysterically, his wife Vicky sitting next to him started laughing as well. Vicky had asked him to tell me the story—a story she first heard from her mother-in-law a few years ago:

> We used to live by *la Gran Greca* [the structure archaeologists today call the *Great Xicalcoliuhqui*] and I had to walk from the site all the way up the hill to attend primary school. As soon I as came back home, my duty was to carry water—that was my job. I was seven years old. I hated it so much! Carrying water all day was hard work. That was

> the kind of life that was given to me. Isn't it ironic that fifteen years later, I am living in that same *cerro*, working with my aunts and neighbors and with Jesús to make this cooperative work, a *Totonac* cooperative. Isn't that ironic?

Ponciano firmly believed that if they made the project work they could better their community. He, in fact, often complained about the decaying condition of their primary school—the school he attended—and how after all these years there has not been a single improvement in the infrastructure. This was what Ponciano feared the most, that if the project did not materialize, if it failed, things would most likely *remain* the same. "What do you mean by *the same*?" I asked—quickly realizing the absurdity of my own question. After all, I was pretty aware of how precarious life in the area was. Both Ponciano and Vicky made a living mostly out of their *nixtamal* mill, selling corn dough to their neighbors. Yet Ponciano came with a response that made no explicit reference to his difficult economic situation. He looked at me and calmly responded—as if he had been thinking about his response in advance: "When we were trying to register the cooperative with the Taxpayer Administration Service, we were almost unable to complete the transaction." "Do you know why?" he asked and quickly explained the answer to his own question. "Because the community does not even appear in the state records. We had to register *our* cooperative in a different community. We are so close to the pyramids and still *it is as if we were invisible, as if we did not exist*." After this conversation, it was evident to me that those feelings of skepticism, openly voiced by members of the co-op were embedded within a frayed everyday not capable of erasing the frustrations of the past or of providing the means of repairing the painful sense of constant betrayal.

Conclusion

Scholars of post-revolutionary Mexican nationalism (Villoro, Brading 2001, Lomnitz 2001; Florescano 2005, Caballero 2008, Earle 2006; Breglia 2006) have emphasized the role that the discipline of archaeology played in substantiating the elite's selective views of the past. Less attention, however, has been placed on archaeological *practice* despite the fact that the *making* of monumentality took place *on the ground*. By examining the modern *ruin-making* process in Tajín through an analysis of its *fragments*, my aim has been to portray monumentality less as a solid, stable, and successful ideological *product* and more as fractured, damaged, and material *form*: a distinctive political arrangement constraining what has been possible to perceive. An analysis of form, according to Rancière, is always an analysis of politics because within any specific social or material arrangement there are words, images, things, or operations that are in constant deviation and whose proper order is a perpetual source of disagreement. Attention to form, therefore, allows us to account for endurance and fragmentation, visibilities and invisibilities, stability and precariousness.

Thus, in this chapter, following Rancière (2004, 9), I have approached the making and unmaking of monumentality not by presenting it as a totalizing and seamless form. Instead, I sought to evoke a counter image: that of monumentality as a disjointed project of fragment-accumulation. My focus has been on the broken traces, inherent silences, and exclusions accumulated in several written sources as well as in the actual lived space. By bringing these seemingly discontinuous acts of imagining, documenting, and excavating as well as everyday obstacles and conflicts that have gone into the construction and destruction of Tajín, I have revealed the fabricated and incomplete quality of monumental post-revolutionary forms as well as the problematic (in)visibilities that they have entailed in the region. I argue that

monumentality, despite being a *form* that privileges wholeness, is an arrangement that can only function on the basis of obscuring fragmentation and precariousness.

CHAPTER FOUR

SPECTRAL LAW AND THE (IN) EFFICACY OF PAPERS

Introduction

On 6 January 2013, President Enrique Peña celebrated the anniversary of the promulgation of the post-revolutionary Agrarian Law in Veracruz.[119] It was in this emblematic city-port that in 1915 Venustiano Carranza, self-proclaimed First Chief of the Constitutionalist Army, reversed the liberal model of private landholding and restored pueblos' juridical standing and identity by allowing communities to hold land collectively in the form of *ejidos*.[120] As the primary legal mechanism for either returning or distributing land to rural communities during the post-revolution, the *ejido* became the main spatio-legal category upon which the state attempted to build its foundation and legitimacy.[121] During the 20th century, rural actors throughout

[119] This law, authored by Luis Cabrera and Andrés Molina Enríquez, stipulated that lands illegally usurped from communities be returned to them. Those communities without land or unable to show prior possession could ask for a land grant known as *ejido*. In order to implement this agrarian reform, post-revolutionary governments expropriated millions of hectares of land from Mexican and foreign owned estates. In a modified version of this decree incorporated into Mexico's Constitution of 1917, the executive branch of the government acquired total control on the process of agrarian redistribution.
[120] *Ejido* land grants (*dotaciones* and *restituciones*) were a product of Mexico's 20th-century agrarian reform and should not be confused with those lands designated for the communal use of Indian pueblos—often also called *ejidos*. See Mikael Wolfe, 'The Sociolegal Redesignation of Ejido Land Use, 1856-1912', in Escobar Ohmstede and Matthew Butler (eds.), *México y sus transiciones,* pp. 291-316. Moreover, as legal categories, the meanings attached to these forms of land tenure, cannot be reduced to those given by jurists. Local villagers changed the use and meaning of communal and *ejido* land over time as the emerging literature on 19th-century *reparto* and on 20th-century processes of state formation, respectively, demonstrate. See Antonio Escobar Ohmstede and Matthew Butler (eds.), *México y sus transiciones*; Joseph, Gilbert and Daniel Nugent (eds.), *Everyday forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994).
[121] As Nikolas Rose argues in *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), power operates, in large part, through the creation of governable spaces. See also James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998). Post-revolutionary *ejidos*, however, were the latest of a series of efforts of the modern Mexican state during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to achieve economic development and facilitate the political control of the countryside. See Craib, *Cartographic Mexico;* Antonio Escobar Ohmstede and Matthew Butler (eds.), *México y sus transiciones:*

Mexico appropriated this new legal rhetoric and its categories in order to claim rights to land. Thus, Carranza's Agrarian Reform was, from a juridical point of view, "a revolutionary watershed" despite its political nature (Ohmstede and Butler 2013). Almost a century after its promulgation, it was President Peña Nieto's turn in 2013 to commemorate what for many had been the most enduring legacy of social justice that emerged with the post-revolutionary state.

Joined by hundreds of nation-wide representatives of peasant delegations from the *Confederación Nacional Campesina* (CNC), the national leader of his party, and a selected group of *priísta* governors, Peña Nieto took the stage in the main convention center in the port of Veracruz and proceeded to read the celebratory speech he had prepared for the occasion. After briefly acknowledging the transformative potential that Agrarian Reform *had* in the past, Peña continued to discuss the changes to the agrarian bureaucratic structure, which he had recently implemented, namely, the dismantling of the National Agrarian Registry, the *Secretaria de la Reforma Agraria* (SAR). [122]

Once the central bureaucratic institution in charge of overseeing the established agrarian policies during previous *sexenios*, the SAR was replaced by the *Secretaria de Desarrollo Agrario Territorial y Urbano* (SEDATU), an institution that "with a more integral approach toward the development of both rural and urban areas, would make the most of the nation's territory." Peña concluded his speech summoning the audience "to look toward the future and not to the past." "The best way of celebrating Carranza's revolutionary vision," he added, "is to adjust the agrarian law and bureaucratic structures to the new realities of the countryside." A burst of applause followed. Yet, in the aftermath of the event several *ejidatarios* took the streets

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reconsdieraciones sobre la historia agraria mexicana, siglos XIX y XX (Mexico City: CIESAS, 2013) pp. 33-76.

[122] This institution was created in 1974 and replaced the *Departamento de Asuntos Agrarios y Colonización*.

to manifest their skepticism towards Peña's recent changes to the agrarian bureaucratic structure. These changes, in their view, would simply facilitate the expropriation of the land of those remaining *ejidos* favoring in turn "urban and industrial development."[123] "The agrarian problems of the 21st century," they stated, "remain the same as those experienced in the 19th." "The only difference," they added, "is that land is not being taken away by *hacendados* (landowners) but by corporations and by the state itself." With this disappearance of the SAR, *ejidatarios* explained, a positive resolution to their ongoing conflict over land now seemed impossible.

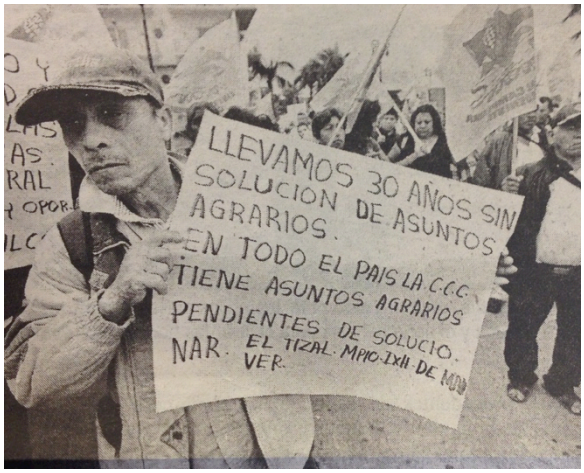

Figure 4.1. Protests during the commemoration of the Agrarian Law in 1915. Carvajal, Ignacio "Temen campesinos del país al despojo de sus tierras por la desaparición de la SRA." *Política* [Xalapa] January 2013: 3. Print.

Peña's changes to the agrarian bureaucracy should be seen as part of a long series of state-led maneuvers to counteract the effects of decades of land redistribution. Perhaps, the most significant of such reforms were president Carlos Salinas's (1988-1994) constitutional amendments, which brought Mexico's long experiment with state-led reform to an end. In 1992,

[123] "Temen campesinos del país al despojo de sus tierras por la desaparición de la SRA" *Política* [Xalapa] January 2013: 3. Print.

Salinas' reforms of Article 27 prevented any future expansion of communal land and allowed *ejidatarios* to change the collective tenure regime to private property (*dominio pleno*) through the Program for Certification of Ejidal Rights (PROCEDE). The assumption that gave ground to these amendments to the Agrarian Law was that rural productivity was incompatible with communally held lands. By this logic, the division of *ejido* lands into individual and standardized plots, promised—once more—to "fix" (Craib 2004) the rural landscape facilitating, in turn, capitalist development. Considering the hardships faced by many *ejidos*, the expectation was that the changes in the legal agrarian framework would result in a rush towards privatization thereby causing the demise—the disappearance—of these post-revolutionary spaces. In fact, when these reforms were put in motion, the Mexican state had already withdrawn from the countryside affecting the productivity and sustainability of these corporate productive entities. By the late 1970s, for instance, most of the infrastructure and technical and financial support once created to support the *ejido* had been dismantled.

Due to these conditions, it is unsurprising that in certain regions several communities welcomed the reforms, because they simply formalized many of the informal practices such as the leasing of communal plots, which had been taking place as a way of making the most out of the land (Nuijten 2003). Yet research on the counter-reforms has demonstrated that the new agrarian legislation was either readapted or simply rejected, which enabled many *ejidos* to persist (Barnes 2009; Haenn 2006; Bouquet 2009; Perramond 2008). In 2009, it was estimated that the number of *ejidos* that had either converted to *dominio pleno* or developed a relationship with a commercial company only approached 10% of the total number of *ejidos* in the country (Barnes 2008). Regionally speaking, the southern region—where Veracruz is located—was even below this national figure (3.7%).

The persistence of *ejido* tenure in the aftermath of drastic legal changes allows us to challenge the state's rhetoric and practices that presuppose the *ejido*'s disappearance. Yet it also confronts us with a "spectral presence" (Das 2007, 168) that results when a legally defined space "lingers on" after having been officially abolished (von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann 2006). The *ejido* in this regard emerges and is *experienced* as a leftover—a *legal residue* of sorts. How can we account for this troubling *endurance*—the lingering—of particular kinds of legal spaces as well as their effects on those who operate within their framework? This, I argue, requires closer attention to the unstable vitality of "the law" and the spaces it creates, that is, to the temporality of legal space.

Space, Temporality, and the Law

Over the past decades, the field of critical legal geography has made considerable progress in understanding the ways in which legal institutions, rights and obligations are in a fundamental way "spatialized" and, conversely, how space is always normatively constructed.[124] This framework unfolded largely as scholars in both fields undertook internal critiques of the core principles of their respective disciplines. Rather than objective categories that operate prior to social life, both "law" and "space" started to be understood as relational, acquiring meaning through social action.[125] On the one hand, critical geographers rejected the tendency to perceive space as a neutral setting, that is, as either the material world outside law or as the surface upon which legal meaning is inscribed. As something produced and reproduced through human intention, space, they argued, was not only constituted by and constitutive of social life but was

[124] A literature review of critical legal geography can be found in Nicholas Blomley, 'From What? To So What? Law and Geography in Retrospect', in Jane Holder and Carolyn Harrison (eds.), *Law and Geography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 17-33; and in Nicholas Blomley, *Law, Space, and the Geographies of Power* (New York: Guilford Press, 1994), pp. 11, 45-6, 51.
[125] Nicholas Blomley, "From What? To So What? Law and Geography in Retrospect," p. 22.

also saturated with power relations.[126] At the other end of the spectrum, socio-legal scholars began to question the positivist approach that portrayed legal doctrine as a mere given and its application as the unproblematic outcome of external forces. While recognizing the instrumental and normative nature of legal discourse, these scholars began to conceptualize "the law" as a social arena within which divergent social visions were being articulated.[127]

Bringing together these critical approaches to both "space" and "the law," Nicholas Blomley has forcefully challenged the assumed uniformity of legal norms and the a-spatiality of legal knowledge by paying close attention to the complexities of legal interpretation and the localized settings of social and political life. The law, he argues, cannot be detached from the particular places in which it acquires meaning and saliency.[128] Although his work enables us to account for the necessary mobilizations and everyday doings that the implementation or refusal of spatio-legal arrangements require, the constant permanence of "the law" is assumed.[129] Nevertheless, legal spaces—not unlike other spatial formations—partake in a complex temporal existence. They are, as Harvey (1996. 261) argued, "contingent on the processes that create, sustain and dissolve them." Building on Harvey's early work, (1996) von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann (2006, 46-47) look at the legal regulation of space through a temporal lens and reveal how "the law" is never simply there: "it begins and ends, comes and goes, is anticipated and lingers on." Responding to these authors call to examine the temporality of legal spaces, this chapter considers the gradual emergence, decline, and finally fall of the Mexican *ejido*—the material, ideological and legal, space—upon which the post-revolutionary era built its

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[126] Henri Lefevbre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 46; See also Edward Soja, *Postmoderm Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989).
[127] Nicholas Blomley, "From What? To So What? Law and Geography in Retrospect," p. 23.
[128] Ibid.
[129] On "the analytic marginalization of temporality" in the study of law and geography see Malverde (2013)

foundation. In order to grasp the way in which this process was and is experienced by the rural inhabitants of northern lowlands of Veracruz, I look at the circulation (or lack thereof) of paper artifacts among rural dwellers, agrarian bureaucrats, and politicians as well as their repercussions or inconsequence. I show how, as concrete legal mediators, a close look at the perceived effectivity of documents can allow us to grasp how residents experience the temporal dimension of the law.

The Inefficacy of Papers

I sit in the small office of the *agencia municipal* waiting for Victorino Rocha Mendez, the local *agente* of the community of Agua Dulce at the time of my research. Victorino had left his office early that morning to conduct his regular surveys to identify potential damages in local water sources, *cultivos*, and roads resulting from the workings of Pemex in the community. Don Victorino, I was told by the secretary, was taking longer than usual but I decided to wait nevertheless. I kept myself entertained by observing a framed map that decorated the office: it was hand-made and of recent creation. Rough lines clearly delimited the borders the community. The stream of Tlahuanapa and the Tecolutla River were easily recognizable and so was the community's own source of water or *ojo de agua*. Several paths running throughout the space were also visible as well as a sharp demarcation of the different qualities of the terrain. This graphic representation hanging in the wall of the *agencia* was a vernacular representation of their *ejido.* In the following days, thanks to Don Victorino, I was able to traverse most of the land depicted in the map looking at the recent changes in the landscape produced by Schlumberger, Halliburton, and Waterford among other oil companies operating in the area—changes that trouble Don Victorino as well as many other *ejidatarios*.

"This is the biggest *ejido* in the state of Veracruz," Don Victorino told me as I accompanied him on one of his inspections. "It is hard to forget that it took blood and fire to obtain this land." Don Victorino believes that this historical awareness explains why, after a long series of meetings, heated discussions, and much conflict among *ejidatarios*, the assembly decided not to pursue the complete parceling of their land grant. Today each *ejidatario* works their individual parcel while the grazing area is used communally. In practice, the *ejido* of Agua Dulce works more as a semi-private enterprise yet they decided to retain *ejido* land tenure. Several members, I learned, were tempted. Don Victorino, admitted it was quite a divisive and contentious issue among them:

> But now that we see how other communities are suffering, we realized that we did the right thing even it hasn't been easy staying afloat. These are tough times for *campesinos*. At least we can still provide for the community and keep doing business out of the land. Today, even those who pushed really hard to dissolve the *ejido* now seemed to agree with those who, like me, pushed for keeping it. It was a brave decision I think. But that also meant that when Pemex approached us—offering us a lot of cash for letting them work in the area—many, including myself, let them in. Yet I also tried to remind the rest of the ejidatarios that Pemex was going to enter—*por la buena o por la mala*—so there was no point, really, to feel guilty for what we did. That, however, does not mean we are not going to put up a fight in order to make them accountable for whatever catastrophe might occur.

During my informal conversations with several *ejidatarios*, these damages had already been noted: broken roads, floods, spills of toxics and the illegal use of their source of water. It was in 2009 when representatives of Pemex approached the *ejidatarios* whose parcels were of interest. Once an offer was made, they decided whether they would take Pemex's offer or not. According to Don Victorino and several other beneficiaries of the ejido, it was agreed during an assembly that the rest of the *ejidatarios* would support the decision of each of the members. They also agreed to give them access to the *camino real* only if Pemex agreed to pave the road and to bring

electricity to the areas where they intended to work. Eventually, seventeen extracting sites opened throughout the *ejido*.

Yet, the relation that exists today between the *ejidatarios* and Pemex is far from being cordial. "I am surprised I am still here," Victorino told me once as he showed me his *parcela*. "They have threatened (*los federales*) to put me in prison—but if I have to go to prison to defend my rights and our patrimony, so be it." Victorino is well known in the area as he had organized several demonstrations and blockages to the extracting sites as a way to demand compensation every time a member of the community is affected. His plot was indeed flooded, ruining his citrus harvest. "Pemex," he told me, "eventually paid me, but they also told me to stay calm." "How could I stay calm," Victorino continued—now notably upset—"if a few months later, they spilled a toxic substance, and later we caught them draining water from the local spring."

Despite their belligerent attitude towards the oil industry, I came to realize in time that *ejidatarios* felt somehow alone in what seemed to be an enduring fight. This became evident to me as I listened to them complain about the many "*oficios*" (documents) they had mailed not only to the municipal authority but also to the officials of the SAR and finally to the Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT)—the ministry charged with the mission of protecting, restoring, and conserving natural resources. *Ejidatarios* believed that these state agencies could help them monitor the effects of the oil industry and exercise pressure on the oil industry in general. But the papers, according to Don Victorino, "have not been of much help." This present condition of bureaucratic uncertainty—which echoes most scholarly studies of bureaucracy and documents—was, however, often contrasted with the "old days" when documents *made* things happened.[130] Specifically, *ejidatarios*—mostly men in their 60s and 70s—were referring to the *campesinos* that once were able to put forward claims to legality and

[130] See: Gupta (2012) Hull (2012), Navaro-Yashin (2012), Hetherington (2012).

legitimacy by deploying a vast array of papers—petitions, denunciation letters, requests. Today, these traces remain secured in the state archive attesting not only to the strategies of state control but also to the engagements with the people and places that the post-revolutionary state sought to govern. What follows, then, is a discussion of three archival documents generated in the community of Agua Dulce that were clearly animated by the Agrarian Law of 1915. Each piece, illustrating fragments of the implementation of the post-revolutionary Agrarian Reform, reveals how documents became central to the governance of the countryside and came to constitute an enduring material manifestation of the agrarian law itself. Yet, it would become clear that these distinctive papers, through their capacity to generate effects, also became important means of participation for those rural actors who produced them. The efficacy of graphic artifacts, as Hull (2012, 24) rightfully argues, comes as much from how documents circulate as from what they say. In this particular case, the flow of agrarian documents depended to a greater extent on the vitality, liveliness, and endurance—the temporality—of the "the law" itself. Ultimately, the continuance of the law was the result of the changing goals and competing constituencies of the Mexican state.

The Emerging Reform 1916-1918

On 1 March 1916, *colonos arrendatarios* of Agua Dulce, following the recently promulgated Agrarian Law of 1915, wrote the state governor of Veracruz to solicit "*un lote de tierra,*" a piece of land where they could erect their houses "without fearing to be evicted by the Spaniards"—owners of the hacienda "El Carmen" and "Agua Dulce"—as they had in the past. A year before writing this letter *vecinos* had in fact been forced to relocate after they refused to sell, Agustin Collado, the owner of the *finca* Agua Dulce, their tobacco harvest at what they

considered to be an unfair prize. After this incident, local authorities of Papantla informed several *arrendatarios* that they had six months to abandon the area. In response, they started a trial against landowners and eventually they were allowed to continue occupying land in the area. Yet, in order not only to "prevent future inhumane actions" but also to "obtain their future liberty," these *vecinos* now requested "a small fraction of land to inhabit in peace."[131]

In order to provide evidence of the space controlled by the landowners Agustin Collado, Florentino López, and Manuel de la Sierra, land solicitants, at the time *arrendatarios*, attached a series of photographs depicting their congregation and included a census of its inhabitants so their situation could be solved with justice. Previous authorities used prosecution to discourage them from protesting against the actions of those capitalists. In line with the socialist revolution and following a constitutional mandate, rural dwellers of Agua Dulce came together to request one hundred hectares along the *camino nacional*. "Obtaining this land," they argued, "was right," but they were nevertheless willing to pay a fair price for it—a request, which should not surprise us if we consider that the revolution broke out at the time when rural dwellers in the region were parceling their communal land as either a strategy to protect themselves against outsiders (Baitenmann 2011, 9) or as part of their own entrepreneurial projects (Kourí 2006). Despite the evident legacy of the liberal disentailment laws, villagers in Agua Dulce were quite successful in embracing revolutionary legal rhetoric. The closing of their letter is revealing: "We trust that the progressive constitutionalist government could solve their precarious situation by making a reality the promises of the social revolution."[132] The signatures of the elected representatives

[131] Comisión Agrarian Mixta, exp. 71, 1917. Municipio de Papantla, poblado Agua Dulce, Dotacion de Ejidos. Foja 003.
[132] Comisión Agrarian Mixta, exp. 71, 1917. Municipio de Papantla, poblado Agua Dulce, Dotacion de Ejidos. Foja 003.
Comisión Agrarian Mixta, exp. 71, 1917. Municipio de Papantla, poblado Agua Dulce, Dotacion de Ejidos. Foja 003.

Gabriel Escobar and Macario Toledano as well as those of seventy more residents of the congregation appear right below their revolutionary statement.[133]

The content and circulation of this land petition illustrates how during this initial phase of the agrarian reform villagers used their organizational and legal experience in dealing with agrarian matters pragmatically by employing legal categories, rhetoric, and procedures in their struggles for land.[134] Yet, as would become clear, at the time of their request both the scope of the reform and its implementation process were subject to broad interpretation by the personnel of the agrarian bureaucracy, members of both the local (CLA) and the national agrarian commission (CAN).[135]

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[133] Comisión Agrarian Mixta, exp. 71, 1917. Municipio de Papantla, poblado Agua Dulce, Dotacion de Ejidos. Foja 003. On the historical circumstances in which the "Mexican campesino" was constructed as a social and political entity see: María Rosa Guidiño and Guillermo Palacios, 'Peticiones de tierras y estrategias discursivas campesinas: procesos, contenidos y problemas metodológicos,' in Antonio Escobar Ohmstede, Jaqueline Gordillo, and María Rosa Guidiño (eds.), *Estudios campesinos en el Archivo General Agrario* (Mexico City: CIESAS-RAN, 1998); Christopher R. Boyer, *Becoming Campesinos: Politics, Identity, and Agrarian Struggle in Postrevolutionary Michoacán* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 19-20; Catherine Nolan-Ferrell, 'Agrarian Reform and Revolutionary Justice in Soconusco, Chiapas: Campesinos and the Mexican State' *Journal of Latin American Studies* 42: 3 (2011), pp. 551-85; and Raymond B. Craib, 'The Archive in the Field: Document, Discourse, and Space in Mexico's Agrarian Reform' *Journal of Historical Geography* 36: 4 (2010), pp. 411-20.

[134] Recent research on Mexican agrarian history alludes to the ways in which peasant communities successfully negotiated (liberal and post-revolutionary) legal reforms. See Helga Baitenmann, 'Popular Participation in State Formation: Land Reform in Revolutionary Mexico', *Journal of Latin American Studies,* 43: 1 (2011), pp. 1-31; Catherine Nolan-Ferrell, 'Agrarian Reform and Revolutionary Justice in Soconusco, Chiapas: Campesinos and the Mexican State', *Journal of Latin American Studies* 42: 3 (2011), pp. 551-85; Ethelia Ruiz Medrano, *Mexico's Indigenous Communities: Their Lands and Histories* (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2010). Romana Falcón (ed.), *Culturas de pobreza y Resistencia: estudios de marginados, proscritos, y descontentos. México, 1804-1910* (Querétaro: Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro, 2005); Antonio Escobar Ohmstede and Matthew Butler (eds.), *México y sus transiciones*, pp. 33-76. Also see: Gilbert Joseph and Daniel Nugent (eds.), *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994).

[135]Marte M. Gómez, *Historia de la Comisión Nacional Agraria (*Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones Agrarias, 1975) and Raymond B. Craib, *Cartographic Mexico: A History of State Fixations and Fugitive Landscapes*
(Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004),

The land solicitation from Agua Dulce was indeed interpreted by the local agrarian bureaucracy *not* as request for *ejido* land but as request for *fundo* legal—a country estate, a land category widely petitioned on the eve of the revolution (Baitenmann 2011, 4). The petition was promptly dismissed. Yet their original letter was reconsidered on 20 November 1917 when the CLA received a second letter from Agua Dulce inquiring about the status of their land grant request—now framed explicitly as an *ejido* request. Shortly thereafter their petition for *ejido* land was approved. By then, Gonzalo Vázquez Vela, a member of the local congress and the *gestor jurídico* (legal representative) for the community, had also written a letter to the state authorities, supporting the land request of this congregation. "Agua Dulce," he wrote, "was desperately hungry for land." "They were eager," he added, "to know if their community had or not the right to enjoy the benefits of the revolution." Vázquez Vela also attached a report he had conducted, certainly with the help of local residents, describing the agrarian situation of the whole municipality, especially as pertained the exploitation and harsh local working conditions that rural dwellers had experienced in the region.[136] Vázquez Vela's report and letter were added as evidence supporting Agua Dulce's claims.

Despite the lack of required information resulting from the surveyor's *visita de inspección*, which consisted of cadastral records, property archives, and tax offices, as well as interviews with local inhabitants, the CLA in Veracruz had approved the *ejido* land request from Agua Dulce by 5 January 1918 and had proceeded to notify local landowners of this solicitation. According to these agrarian bureaucrats, the assembled documentation, even if incomplete, justified that residents of this congregation had an urgent need for arable land. "Our close examination of the documentary evidence reveals the existence of 107 *ejidatarios* who would

[136] Comisión Agrarian Mixta, exp. 71, 1917. Municipio de Papantla, poblado Agua Dulce, Dotación de Ejidos. Foja 033.

need approximately 600 hectares to satisfy their need for land." This "evidence" also served as a basis for creating a provisional map of the *ejido*.[137] As stipulated by the agrarian regulation of the time, the respective file was passed to the state governor Cándido Aguilar (1917-1920) for confirmation and subsequently to the National Agrarian Commission for final review.

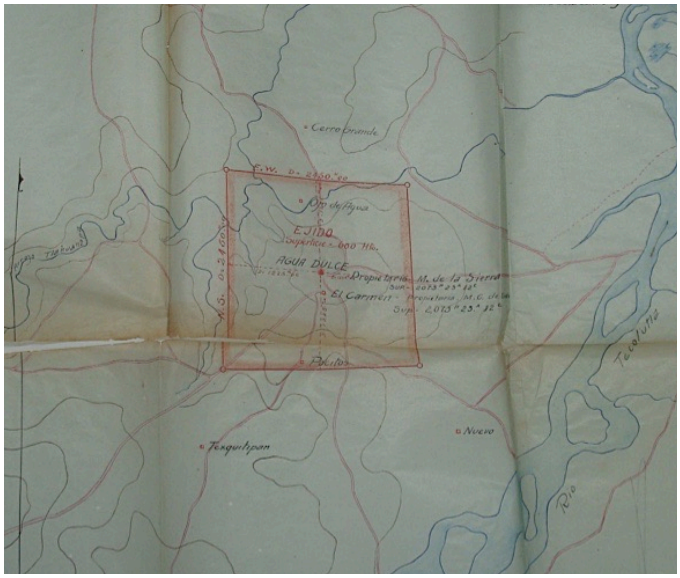


Figure 4.2. "Proyecto de Dotación de Ejidos a la Congregación de Agua Dulce." Comisión Agrarian Mixta, exp. 71, 1917. Municipio de Papantla, poblado Agua Dulce, Dotación de Ejidos. Foja 088.

Due to its technical "shortcomings" the *ejido* land grant for Agua Dulce was rejected and sent back to the Local Agrarian Commission on 6 March 1918 for review.[138] Missing from the file were the reports of field surveyors. The CLA addressed the issue promptly and on 3 May 1918 Luis Salas was commissioned to visit the area in order to complete an agrarian census. Having concluding it, new surveyors, Engr. Campos and his field assistant Manuel Huerta, visited the community in order to asses landholdings in the immediate vicinity and to eventually

[137] Comisión Agrarian Mixta, exp. 71, 1920. Municipio de Papantla, poblado Agua Dulce, Dotación de Ejidos. Foja.89
[138] Comisión Agrarian Mixta, exp. 71, 1920. Municipio de Papantla, poblado Agua Dulce, Dotación de Ejidos. Foja. 92, 305.

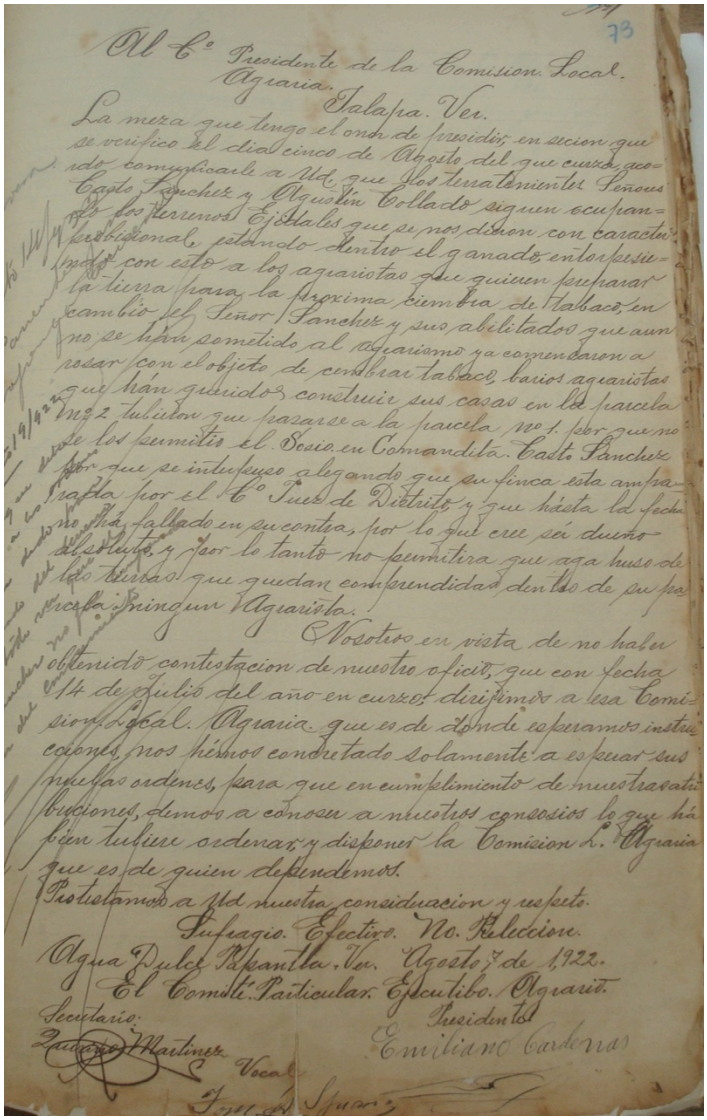
produce a "definitive" map, which was not completed until the summer of 1920. [139] Two years later on 31 January 1922, the complete file, which originated out of the letter written in 1916 by *vecinos* of Agua Dulce, was passed to the state governor, the *agrarista* Adalberto Tejeda, for confirmation. *Ejidatarios* from Agua Dulce had in a relatively short amount of time obtained provisional possession of their land. Despite their legal victory, documents continued to circulate among villagers, the agrarian bureaucracy, and government officials insofar as local landowners had begun to engage in violent opposition against *agrarismo*. The risk of handing out lands to these potential *ejidatarios* exacerbated their concerns. The land reform—and the *ejidos* it attempted to establish in the countryside—represented after all a new legal order that ran against their economic and political ambitions.

Agrarian Radicalism 1922-1924

A few months after obtaining the provisional possession of the *ejido*, on October 1922, Emiliano Cárdenas, president of the Agrarian Committee of Agua Dulce, wrote a letter to the president of the CNA to inform them about the recent conflicts that had unfolded in the area between *ejidatarios* and landowners.[140] Through a detailed narrative, he recounted how Agustin Collado had not only invaded the land of *ejidatarios* with cattle, which made it impossible to use the land for agricultural purposes but had also threatened to "disappear" the members of the Agrarian Comitte to prevent final possession of the land. "We feared for our lives," Cárdenas wrote.[141] "Landowners in this area," he added, "are not used to following orders and law." "It is

[139] Comisión Agrarian Mixta, expediente 71, 1917, Municipio de Papantla, poblado Agua Dulce, Dotación de Ejidos. Foja 309.
[140] Comisión Agrarian Mixta, expediente 71, 1917, Municipio de Papantla, poblado Agua Dulce, Dotación de Ejidos. Foja 109.
[141] Comision Agrarian Mixta, expediente 71, 1917, Municipio de Papantla, poblado Agua Dulce, Dotación de Ejidos. Foja 109.

well known," he added, "that this Spaniard" had ordered the murder of several villagers during Porfirian times. As a result of his influence in local politics, Cárdenas added, three members of their congregation had been shot while many others were taken, hands tied, to jail far from Papantla.



Al C.º Presidente de la Comision Local.
Agraria.
Jalapa. Ver.

La mesa que tengo el onor de presidir en sesion que se verifico el dia cinco de Agosto del que cursa, acordo comunicarle a Ud. que los terratenientes Señores Casto Sanchez y Agustin Collado siguen ocupando los terrenos Ejidales que se nos dieron con caracter provisional, estando dentro el ganado entre perjudicando con esto a los agraristas que quieren sembrar la tierra para la proxima cumbia de tabaco en cambio del Señor Sanchez y sus abilitados que aun no se han sometido al agrarismo ya comenzaron a rasar con el objeto de sembrar tabaco, varios agraristas que han querido construir sus casas en la parcela No. 2 tubieron que pasarse a la parcela No. 1. por que no se los permite el Sosia en Comandita Casto Sanchez por que se influyeso alegando que su finca esta amparada por el C.º Juez de Distrito y que hasta la fecha no ha fallado en su contra, por lo que cree sé dueño absoluto, y por lo tanto no permitira que aga uso de los terrenos que quedan comprendidos dentro de su parcela ningun Agrarista.

Nosotros en vista de no haber obtenido contestacion de nuestro oficio, que con fecha 14 de Julio del año en curso dirijimos a esa Comision Local Agraria que es de donde esperamos instrucciones, nos hemos concretado solamente a esperar sus nuevas ordenes, para que en cumplimiento de nuestra atribuciones, demos a conocer a nuestros conocidos lo que hay bien tubiere ordenar, y disponer la Comision L.º Agraria que es de quien dependemos.

Protestamos a Ud. nuestra consideracion y respeto.

Sufragio Efectivo. No Reeleccion.

Agua Dulce Papantla. Ver. Agosto 7 de 1922.

El Comité Particular Ejecutivo Agrario.

Secretario: Zacarias Martinez

Vocal

Presidente: Emiliano Cardenas

Figure 4.3. Letter written by Emiliano Cárdenas on August 1922. Comisión Agraria Mixta, expediente 71, 1920, Municipio de Papantla, poblado Agua Dulce, Dotación de Ejidos. Foja 73.

Cárdenas continued his account by denouncing "the sudden presence of military who started to induce fear among *ejido* members."[142] This, however, was not the only problem that Aguadulceños faced shortly after being granted provisional possession of *ejido* land. Local judges, working in close collaboration with landowners, had begun inundating *ejidatarios* with orders to appear before a jury after having been charged for causing damage to Collado's property.[143] Cárdenas ends his letter stating he believed that the CLA had the power to prevent a fatal attack and to intervene in order to solve the difficulties they are facing.[144] The letter, indeed, proved to be effective, in part, as a result of the agrarian radicalism implemented by governor Tejeda.

When Adalberto Tejeda became governor in 1920, Veracruz experienced dramatic changes.[145] Like many radical agrarian leaders of the period, Tejeda believed that the decree of 1915 and the new Article 27 could transform economic structures and serve as a tool of social justice and equality for the disenfranchised rural inhabitants. Tejeda's commitment to land reform was clearly reflected in his use of existing state legislation to favour land redistribution**.** During the second period of his governorship over 20% of total legislative activity—more than

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[142] Comisión Agrarian Mixta, expediente 71, 1920, Municipaio de Papantla, poblado Agua Dulce, Dotación de Ejidos. Foja 109.
Comisión Agrarian Mixta, exp. 71, 1920. Municipio de Papantla, poblado Agua Dulce, Dotación de Ejidos
[143] Comision Agrarian Mixta, expediente 71, 1920, Municipaio de Papantla, poblado Agua Dulce, Dotación de Ejidos. Foja 109.
[144] Comisión Agraria Mixta, expediente 71, 1920, Municipaio de Papantla, poblado Agua Dulce, Dotación de Ejidos. Foja 109.
[145] Under Tejeda's leadership (1920-1924 and 1928-1932), rural folk in Veracruz benefited from a rapid land distribution despite the strong opposition from the national government. On Tejeda's *agrarismo* see Heather Fowler-Salamini, *Agrarian Radicalism in Veracruz* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1971); Romana Falcón, *El agrarismo en Veracruz* (Mexico City: El Colegio de Mexico, 1977); Baitenmann, *Rural Agency and State Formation in Post-revolutionary Veracruz;* and Eitan Ginzberg, 'State Agrarism versus Democratic Agrarism: Adalberto Tejeda's Experiment in Veracruz 1928-1932', *Journal of Latin American Studies* 30: 2 (1998), pp. 341-372.

200 laws and ordinances—concerned agrarian matters.[146] Moreover, in order to implement the *ejido* system, Tejeda augmented the power and status of the League of Agrarian Communities of Veracruz, appointed civil administration boards and municipal candidates, doubled the membership and budget of the Local Agrarian Commission (CLA), and organised an agrarian militia dispatched throughout the state, both to stimulate interest in communal landholding and to protect its supporters from anxious landowners who feared the expropriation of their haciendas and ranchos.[147] In this context, it is unsurprising that on 15 November, shortly after receiving Cárdenas' letter, the president of the CAN wrote to the attorney of the CNA as well as to the authorities of the municipality in order to bring attention to the irregularities taking place in Agua Dulce.[148] In the numerous *oficios* that followed Cárdenas letters—documents sent to judges, officials of the municipality, and landowners' lawyers—the president of the CNA insisted that the actions of *ejidatarios* were grounded in the law and demanded full respect for the individual guarantees of *ejidatarios* and surveyors who by then had already complained about the intimidation tactics of local landowners.[149] The president of the CNA also seemed to have responded to one of Cárdenas' main requests: accelerating the termination of the process of dotación *ejidal*.

The file moved quickly through the review process conducted by the personnel of the CAN and was forwarded to the president. A year later, on 31 November 1923, president Obregón granted final possession. "Two thousand and three hundred and fifty hectares of land is given to the congregation of Agua Dulce." On 1 January 1924, the resolution was published in the *Diario*

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[146] Ginzberg, 'State Agrarism versus Democratic Agrarism', pp. 352-366.
[147] Fowler-Salamini, *Agrarian Radicalism in Veracruz*, p. 72; Falcón, *El agrarismo en Veracruz*, p. 63.
[148] Comision Agrarian Mixta, expediente 71, 1917, Municipaio de Papantla, poblado Agua Dulce, Dotación de Ejidos. Foja 109.
[149] Comision Agrarian Mixta, expediente 71, 1917, Municipaio de Papantla, poblado Agua Dulce, Dotación de Ejidos. Foja 109.

Official de la Federación.[150] This was far from being a minor legal achievement, despite governor Tejeda's commitment to Land Reform, the lack of qualified agrarian bureaucrats had begun to slow the pace of land redistribution. The "drip irrigation," a metaphor that one CAN member at the time used to describe the process of land reform, did not leave Agua Dulce "out to dry," as was the case with many communities (Craib 2004, 236).[151]

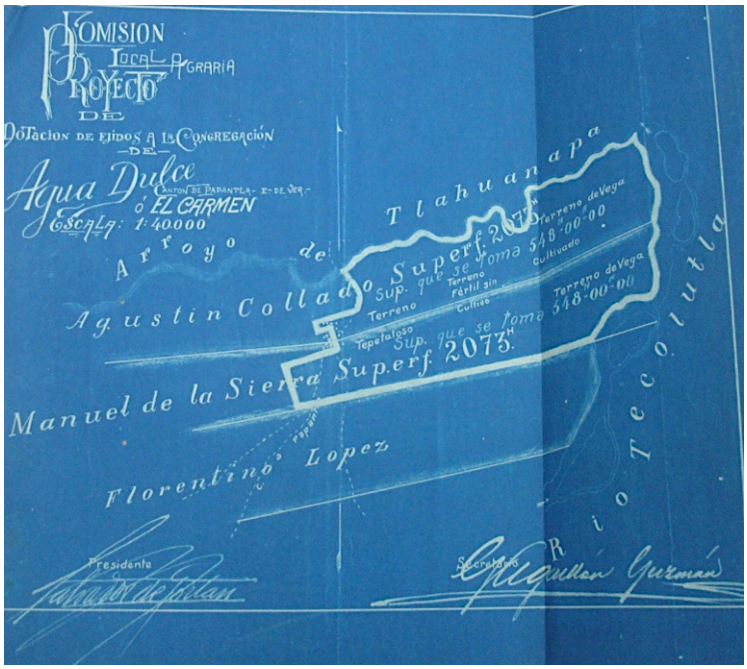

Figure 4.4. "Definitive Map" of the Ejido in Agua Dulce. Comisión Agraria Mixta, expediente 71, 1920, Municipio de Papantla, poblado Agua Dulce, Dotación de Ejidos. Foja 318.

Remobilizing Agrarian Claims 1954-1970

In May 1954, 27 members of the community of Agua Dulce, mostly *jornaleros* or sons of *ejidatarios*, embraced post-revolutionary rhetoric and law in order to solicit an enlargement of the current *ejido* land grant.[152] Eutimio Cruz, Melchor Rocha, and Francisco Muñoz, as elected

[150] Comision Agrarian Mixta, expediente 71, 1917, Municipaio de Papantla, poblado Agua Dulce, dotacion de Ejidos. Foja 109.
[151] See Gómez, *Historia de la Comisión Nacional Agraria*, cited on Craib (2004, 63).
[152] Comisión Agraria Mixta, exp. 4494, municpio Papantla, Agua Dulce

members of the agrarian committee, forwarded a land petition to the state governor of Veracruz Marco Antonio Muñoz Trumbull.

"Our needs are huge," they concluded signing their letter with their names and fingerprints.[153] Two years later, as the first step stipulated in the process of *ampliación*, the Comisión Agraria Mixta (CAM) commissioned Miguel García to visit the community in order to evaluate the productivity and use of the *ejido* land grant. Once it was confirmed that *campesinos* were using the *ejido* land effectively, the process could continue. So Alfonso Veronica arrived at Agua Dulce on 9 October 1956 to conduct an agrarian census. Veronica's survey uncovered the existence of 40 residents with the capacity to request *ejido* land, which meant that approximately 900 hectares would have to be expropriated in order to procure enough land for these solicitants.[154] It would be the task of the next surveyor to conduct the necessary interviews, surveys, and the thorough examination of cadastral records, property archives, and tax offices to identify the properties that could be subject to expropriation.

During the 1950s, the process of land redistribution in Veracruz slowed down considerably as the agrarian bureaucracy "had accumulated an administrative backlog so severe that it became impossible to resolve" (Baitenmann 1997, 180). This problem became even more acute during the government of Ruiz Cortines (1952-58) who fortified private property rights by promoting cattle ranching as part of his "march to the sea," a program seeking the colonization and development of coastal land.[155] These factors might explain why this new group of potential

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[153] Comisión Agraria Mixta, exp. 4494, municpio Papantla, Agua Dulce
[154] Comisión Agraria Mixta, exp. 4494, municpio Papantla, Agua Dulce
[155] In the 1940s, Mexico entered into an era of stable and long-term economic growth. There were external factors that contributed to it, such as U.S. involvement in World War II, yet the role played by the state in the creation of new industries in accordance with the import-substituting-industrialisation model was central. While export agriculture was encouraged, subsistence agriculture continued to struggle as the population exploded and the government kept *ejidos* undercapitalized and undersupplied. See Gilbert Joseph and Jurgen Büchenau, *Mexico's Once and Future Revolution: Social Upheaval and*

ejidatarios in Agua Dulce, unlike the original solicitants, had to wait for nine years for the next visit of a member of the agrarian bureaucracy.[156]

Yet, during this waiting period, the Agrarian Committee of Agua Dulce produced a significant number of letters not only to the state officials of National Agrarian Commission but also to several local and national peasant organizations and to the executive branch of the state and federal governments. The document sent to president Adolfo López Mateos in 1964 is a case in point. In this letter, members of the *Comite Ejecutivo Agrario* described "their precarious situation" stemming from a shortage of land. Due to this condition, they crafted and forwarded a land petition to the state governor of Veracruz but despite expressing their needs and grievances their case was still pending.[157] Land solicitants, therefore, asked president López Mateos to intercede for them as "he had demonstrated a true commitment with the peasantry." Residents of Agua Dulce thus hoped that the president "could instruct the agrarian authorities to solve the case in their favor in the shortest amount of time." The letter proved to be effective. On 9 October 1965, topographer Roberto Landa was sent to Agua Dulce.[158]

During his *visita de inspección*, Landa looked at cadastral records to build an inventory of properties in the area. He also conducted interviews, completed censuses, and compiled

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the Challenge of Rule since the Late Nineteenth Century (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013,142-166); Alan Knight, 'The end of the Mexican Revolution? From Cárdenas to Avila Camacho, 1937-1941', in Paul Gillingham and Benjamin Smith (eds.), *Dictablanda: Soft Authoritarianism in Mexico, 1938-1968* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), pp. 47-69. Donald C. Hodges and Daniel Ross Gandy, Mexico: The End of the Revolution (Westport, CONN: Greenwood Press, 2002); John W. Sherman, 'The Mexican Miracle and Its Collapse', in Michael C. Meyer and William H. Beezley (eds.), *The Oxford History of Mexico* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 575-98; Leonardo, Lomelí Venegas, 'La construcción del sistema político mexicano: el período de Adolfo Ruiz Cortines' in Miguel González Compeán and Leonardo Lomelí (eds.), *El partído de la revolución: institución y conflicto, 1920-1999* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultural Económica, 2000), pp. 239-84.

[156] Comision Agraria Mixta, exp. 4494, municpio Papantla, Agua Dulce

[157] Comision Agraria Mixta, exp. 4494, municpio Papantla, Agua Dulce

[158] Comision Agraria Mixta, exp. 4494, municpio Papantla, Agua Dulce

descriptions of local cultivations, wages, roads, and irrigation works.[159] This information helped him assess the commercial value of landholdings, which played a key role in determining the ruling on whether or not to pursue a land grant. His survey, however, revealed that there was no land to redistribute as Agua Dulce was surrounded, on the one hand, by *predios* (Agua Dulce, Predio Texquitipan, Predio el Carmen, Chote y Mesillas, among others) with *certificados de inafectabilidad agraria*[160]—which exempted these properties from being expropriated—and, on the other hand, by *ejidos* (Remolino, La Isla, Paso del Correo, 1ero de Mayo, San Gotardo, Alamo, Rio Claro La Colmena, el Chote, Cerro Grande, Arroyo del Arco, Francisco Villa, Serafín Olarte).[161]

Land solicitants, in turn, challenged Landa's assessment and requested a new inspection of the properties surrounding the *ejido*. They argued that his examination did not cover the radius of seven kilometers that the law required to be inspected. Three years after Landa's report was submitted, the Agrarian Committee mailed a letter to the state governor Rafael Murillo Vidal.

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[159] On the work of surveyors, see Craib, *Cartographic Mexico;* Craib, 'The Archive in the Field'. Also relevant is the work of Michael A. Ervin, 'The 1930 Agrarian Census in Mexico: Agronomist, Middle Politics, and the Negotiation of Data Collection', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 87: 3 (2007), pp. 537-70. In this article, Ervin demonstrates how the activities of agricultural experts—not unlike those of surveyors—were central for the implementation of agrarian policies, mainly due to their ability to negotiate with both political elites and rural Mexicans. See also Joseph Cotter, *Troubled Harvest. Agronomy and Revolution in Mexico, 1880-2002* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2003).

[160] The implementation of the agrarian reform in Veracruz became difficult despite the legacy of Tejeda's radical agrarianism, as future federal governments started to introduce new amendments to the federal agrarian law. In 1936, for instance, president Cárdenas established the '*Ley de Asociaciones Ganaderas*'; a year later, he modified article 52 of the Federal Agrarian Law to allow cattle-ranchers to obtain '*certificados de inafectabilidad agraria*.' Both decrees acted as a stimulus to livestock production and served to protect the interests of this rural sector. Thus, in post-revolutionary Veracruz, post-revolutionary agrarian law intersected in complex and contradictory ways as rural actors started to use competing legal categories and decrees to alter and maintain, respectively, the course of their lives. This complex legal framework—developed to manage competing goals and interests in the countryside—led to serious conflicts as legal categories and regulation became engaged in the fight for the control over local resources. On the one hand, the agrarian reform became an avenue through which rural folk in Veracruz could engage in collective action to claim land, while on the other it strengthened the local economies and social ties of coastal *rancheros*. Pedro Saucedo, *Historia de la Ganadería en México* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1984), p. 67.

[161] Comision Agraria Mixta, exp. 4494, municpio Papantla, Agua Dulce.

Unlike previous years, their letter, received in January 1969, had few repercussions, which is understandable if we consider that *ejidos* began to lose state support again as the short period of agrarian revival ignited by president Gustavo Diaz Ordáz (1964-1970) came to an end—this time for good. Residents of Agua Dulce decided 6 years later to reopen their case by starting a new land request. Despite having reached out to national peasant organizations (such as the *El Movimiento Nacional de los 400 pueblos*[162] as well as to the Socialist Party) to buttress their demands for land and rights, a surveyor would never visit the community again.

Fig. 4.5. "There is no land to be granted" Comisión Agraria Mixta, exp. 4494, municpio Papantla, Agua Dulce.

[162] After the Cárdenas period of political consolidation there were repeated waves of peasant mobilisation in pursuit of both agrarian demands and—particularly during the 1960s and 1970s—a certain degree of freedom from the system of political control embodied in the official organs of popular representation like the Confederación Campesina (CNC). See: Clarisa Hardy, *El estado y los campesinos: La Confederación Nacional Campesina* (Mexico City: Nueva Imagen, 1984). The CNC was created in 1938 and constituted an important base of political support for the Revolutionary Party (the PRM) and the succeeding Partido Revolucionario Institutcional (PRI). The CNC's continuing ties with the PRI regime have generally been interpreted as the product of political coercion, corruption, and manipulation. This close alliance generated the establishment of independent peasant organisations. Often, the state managed to defuse the militancy by either co-opting the leadership or making selective concessions that did not threaten the fundamental interests of the PRI regime.

Conclusion

In spite of their inefficacy, these written records, not unlike the previous ones discussed above, illustrate the central role that papers had in the making of political realities in Agua Dulce.[163] The agrarian law, in this context, provided the categories, the necessary framework, and discourse that allowed Aguadulceños to advance their local political objectives through a series of documentary transactions. It is precisely the effectivity that documents (and the law) once provided what Don Victorino and many other *ejidatarios* yearned for, particularly in light of their current confrontations with Pemex and its contracting companies.

Today, as the residues of the Agrarian Law and bureaucracy vanish, protests in Agua Dulce are as common as the imminent sense of loss regarding the *ejido* land—a solid, visible object of a progress that seemed to have arrived for good but that nevertheless could, in a sense, disappear. Once the land is left "*lastimada*" (hurt) and "*estropeada*" (ruined), Don Victorino told me, "there would no point in keeping the *ejido* land." "The damages that we see today, he added, are really insignificant if we compare them with the degradation that will come in 25 years. Nothing would remain." Once a crucial space of the post-revolutionary period, the *ejido,* in his view, would eventually fall into complete decay and would blend with the distinct forms of "rubble" (Gordillo 2014) constituting the field of ruins that the post-revolution has enabled and that I have examined throughout this dissertation. Until this happens, *ejidatarios*, not unlike other inhabitants of this region, would continue to dwell in this space and affirm it also as a space of life and endurance.

[163] See Yael Navaro-Yashin, 'Make-believe Papers, Legal Forms and the Counterfeit. Affective Interactions between Documents and People in Britain and Cyprus', *Anthropological Theory* 7: 1 (2007), pp. 79-98.

CONCLUSION

A Field of Ruins

The Mexican Revolution reverberated for decades in the lowlands of northern Veracruz as post-revolutionary governments began to carry out social and economic experiments seeking to achieve social reform and economic and cultural integration. Certainly the region had already experienced "its own long revolution" (Kourí 2006, 3) during the *Porfiriato.* According to historians (Kourí 2006; Koth 2009), the region's socio-economic relations were transformed both by the vanilla industry and by land disentailment during the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s. Yet, any visitor to the lowlands during the high point of post-revolutionary social reform in the 1930s and 1940s, a period that roughly coincides with the Cárdenas *sexenio*, or even during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, when the revolution increasingly changed tenor by moving to the right, would have noticed that the lowlands of northern Veracruz had become exemplary of some the most important revolutionary policies. At the outset, the oil fields of Poza Rica were nationalized in 1938 and turned not only into the engine of national economic growth and development but also the apotheosis of revolutionary nationalism. Almost ten years later, *indigenistas* in 1947 utilized cameras to begin a process of ethnicization in the region by presenting the living Totonac populations as a key component of national identity. At the same time, the ruins of the old city of Tajín, which embodied elite notions of nationhood and territoriality, were still covered with the debris left by almost twenty years of continuous exploration, clearance, and reconstruction. Land, furthermore, continued to be redistributed, following the agrarian body of law created by government legislator and jurists in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution in the form of *ejidos.* This dissertation considers the implementation of these state-initiatives by focusing on the afterlife of the concrete traces that these mechanisms left behind.

Chapter One focuses on the aftermath of oil nationalization, which is to say the crude residues that continue to affect everyday life in Poza Rica. The failing structures left by this dramatic period of transformation and subsequent decay are simultaneously monuments of bad deals and patriotic union, objects of devotion, fraud, and neglect, as well as carriers of toxicity and a troubled optimism. I have demonstrated how different residents of Poza Rica are able to render visible and invisible the harmful presence of oil and its infrastructure through their negotiations with corporate practices, toxic encounters, various technologies, and affective attachments. Practices and performances of risk avoidance and safety in Pemex regional offices, for example, are often perceived by residents as comical attempts to conceal the actual dangers of living in this industrial town. The sudden presence of the effects of failing infrastructures: the appearance of oil spills, broken ducts, a red sky, or gas leaks made Pemex's efforts to render infrastructure invisible disquietingly unsuccessful. Yet the constant work done in the name of oil disentanglement is not exclusive to corporate actors. Several residents living next to the gas complex are also deeply invested in distancing themselves from the material and sensuous particularities of this urban landscape. It is precisely by disregarding their immediate surroundings that residents downplay the impact that oil and gas can have on their bodies and senses. However, their everyday encounters with toxic smells and underground vibrating pipes, demonstrate how their efforts to render infrastructure invisible are often disrupted. But efforts to render the effects of pollution and toxics visible are also being conducted in this industrial town. Local scientists are mobilizing technology as well as producing data in order to substantiate the risks of crude residues so as to make claims regarding corporate liability. Ironically, interest in science for many actors was developed through their affective encounters with the oil fields. "Oil," as I was told, is for many residents "much more than harmful hydrocarbons." In fact, it is

among the oil workers where I found the potency of such crude affective attachments to be particularly visible. Among a group of retired workers, decaying oilfields were inextricably intertwined with a troubled optimism for the past. It is through this affective attachment that infrastructure's visibility is not only achieved but also deployed to endure the precarious circumstances affecting workers' bodies and minds. Overall, this chapter demonstrates how people endure risk, precariousness, and suffering through different contours of perception and imperceptions. For it is through them that people transform their ruined environments into livable, inhabitable, and claimable spaces.

If *Chapter One* analyzes the crude residues left by oil nationalization and the subsequent period of deep economic crisis (aggravated by the populist and corrupt measures of Echeverría and his successor López Portillo) and rapid industrialization (sustained by a renewed faith in oil extraction), *Chapter Two* looks at the visual remnants of *indigenismo* in the area. During the post-revolution, the Mexican intelligentsia began to develop its own scientific construction of society in an effort to facilitate national integration. In order to fulfill this mission they re-articulated old notions such as *mestizaje* and developed new ones like *indigenismo*, which exalted Mexico's great indigenous past and present and recognized their artistic and social achievements. Post-revolutionary intellectuals attributed a significant degree of novelty to this political project. Whether the intelligentsia embraced the new ideologies of *indigenismo*, which linked Mexico's essence to indigenous culture, or *mestizaje*, which celebrated racial and cultural mixing, the issue is that miscegenation and social improvement remained the basic goals of the Mexican post-revolutionary intellectual elite. The medium of photography, I argue, allowed the *displacement* of old racial notions—of past ghosts—and rendered them *visible* in what was considered a new discourse and a new visual aesthetic. In order to examine these processes of

ghostly replication and the ways in which they have affected everyday life in post-revolutionary Mexico, I focused on Isabel Kelly's collection of ethnic photographs from Tajín and the personal correspondence associated with it. I conceive of these iterative image-objects—and the desires, fears and expectations, they generate—as capable of shaping the experience of those who engage with and reproduce them in the everyday rather than as passive visual records. Drawing on my ethnographic work in Papantla and Tajín, I bring into view the generative qualities of these photographs. After all, they sustain today an emerging tourism industry that gives meaning to those involved in it. Yet the pervasive, if often unacknowledged, presence of past racial notions limits the transforming potential of such projects. The reality is that violence continues to linger and have devastating effects on the lives of those "ethnic subjects" who were once considered racially inferior and continue to be disregarded today despite their being culturally valued.

The third chapter of this dissertation brings the (in)visibility of state residues to the forefront of the analysis as I discuss the broken traces, inherent silences, and exclusions that the construction and destruction of the archaeological site in Tajín during the post-revolution have generated in this area. By focusing on selected fragments of the long process of ruin making in Tajín, I sought to juxtapose the visible care that state archaeologists exhibited towards the physical remnants of the pre-Hispanic past with the obscured disregard towards the living population best illustrated by the intrusion into the physical and personal space of those inhabiting this region. An intrusion best illustrated not only by bad salaries or futile somatometric photographs taken of the workers, but also by the "ecology of remains" (Rao 2014, 316) product of the displacement of the local populations and the establishment of a new regulation regarding land tenure and use. In order to delineate this geography of despair, I looked at current conflicts among residents of Tajín and the INAH over the control of a plot of land

located at the borders of the archaeological site. By pointing to the existence of broken fragments (not ruins), residents question the alleged positivity of the site by rendering visible the destruction that its *creation* has involved. Through an eco-tourism project attempting to render that which lies beyond the ruins of Tajín visible, the residents of San Antonio Ojital also seek to recreate wholeness and meaning in the aftermath of displacement. Yet the future expectations of the members of San Antonio for change and success—for achieving visibility—seemed often frustrated and conditioned by the same disregard that contributed to their relocation.

Finally, in *Chapter Four* I examined the temporality of post-revolutionary legal spaces, by looking at the gradual emergence, decline, and finally fall of the Mexican *ejido*. In order to grasp the way in which this process of decay was and is experienced by the rural inhabitants of northern lowlands of Veracruz, I looked at the circulation (or lack thereof) of paper artifacts among rural dwellers, agrarian bureaucrats, and politicians as well as their repercussions or inconsequence. By attending to the perceived effectivity or rather inconsequence of documents, I sought to grasp how residents today experience a vanishing *ejido*—what I conceive to be a legal residue of sorts.

Grounded in detailed analysis of Mexican state-formation this dissertation is conceived as an analysis of the ongoing and ordinary processes of ruination—those active forces of disruption, degradation and disregard embodied in particular objects (and spaces) *rarely* defined as violent. In this regard, this dissertation only partially follows recent interpretative trends in Mexican post-revolutionary studies that build on the work of the first wave of state-centered revisionists by underscoring the centrality of violence in political rule. Through extensive work in the archives, or through an analysis of contemporary forms of violence and coercion, these scholars have shown how the Mexican government came to systematically and repeatedly plan and quash

opposition and illegality. Yet, unlike this body of literature, I do not turn to those explicit moments of repression exerted by the consolidated post-revolutionary state. Rather, my project is part of an emerging scholarly effort to counter the reduction of state violence to its manifestations in war and conflict by designing a theoretical and methodological approach attentive to its ordinary *material* manifestations and *residual* forms (Gordillo 2014; Navaro-Yashin 2011; Stoler 2012; Benjamin 1968; 1998). On this basis, post-revolutionary violence and dislocation is manifested in the workings of failing infrastructure, in the iterations set of *indigenista* photographs, in the fragments of a monumental archaeological site and in the circulation of affective agrarian documents. By attending to the (in)visibility of these state remnants—to the ways in which people overlook, cherish, suppress, or revile them—this object-oriented project contributes to debates around processes of rule and governance in Mexico: their violent accumulation and pervasiveness as well as their ordinary effects in people's everyday lives and imagined futures.

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